Emergence of Subjectivity Formations

Social-Anthropological Discourses from India

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An Introductory Reader

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We had many thoughts and discussions as to why we should have a book on understanding the social-anthropological discourses on subjectivity formations in India. In our previous edited publication (Guenther and Kasi 2015), the term subjectivity formations was one which seemed to be an unintended, and at the end undiscussed, topic. We emphasised on issues related to subjectivity formations without actually referring to the terminology. Without a doubt, the term 'subjectivity/subjectivities' has occupied an important niche in contemporary discourses of anthropology, sociology, gender, development and postcolonial studies. Though their foci on this term derive from different standpoints, their aim in putting 'subjectivity/subjectivities' in a societal context is similar. We could witness the same when we edited 'Globalisation and People at the Margins: Experiences from the Global South' (2015). Thus, we realised that a book on subjectivity formations would be fruitful to add to the ongoing debate. As our aim is to strengthen gender awareness, the papers in this book have an inherent gender perspective.

India, in particular, has witnessed numerous movements and academic discussions on subjectivity formations, such as the book by Ganesh and Thakkar (2005), where they reflect, analyse and argue on subjectivities from a theoretical as well as empirical angle. But, this book presents subjectivities in the form of social categories, such as caste and subalternity, and in groups within these categories, such as labourers and scavengers. This book analyses contemporary India in both theoretical and empirical way.

India's independence movement – as well as its subsequent decades – is one of the most documented events, in which questions of identity and subjectivity were pillar of the movement. Those questions are still relevant in contemporary India as the introduction of neo-liberal policies in the 1990s have changed the position of India globally and has altered the working and living conditions of Indians.

In today´s identity and subjectivity discourses, Dalits, Other Backward Castes, Adivasi and indigenous groups, religious minorities, LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) and differently abled people are the main actors. Identity and subjectivity formations revolve around sex, gender, caste, class, spaces, rights,

embodiment, working and living conditions which have percolated into India´s social, cultural, economic, political and religious landscapes. From a social studies´ perspective, the identity and subjectivity formation processes have paved way for epistemological engagements which the present issue aims to present to a larger audience.

As the papers in this volume indicate, gender is an essential cross-cutting issue when discussing subjectivity formation processes. Which subjectivity a person forms has a lot to do with one´s gender. Subsequently, academic discourses around subjectivity and gender are voluminous such as Hooks (1984 and 2000), Weed (1989), Lionnet (1995), McGee (2000), Rege (2003), Loomba et al. (2005), Bose and Bhattacharyya (2007), Thapan (2009), Kasi (2013) and Guenther (2015). Even though we do not have the necessary space to give a complete account on the most relevant discussions on subjectivity formations in India in recent years, we aim to emphasise on a few important aspects. Thus, the following discussion highlights subjectivity formations in relation to embodiment, caste system, Adivasis and their identity movements, suberalternity, workplace, empowerment and development.

Embodiment being an inherent part of our life, we start our discussion with this – at times underrepresented – discourse. Thapan (2004) argues that the identity of the 'new' Indian woman in the rapidly altering cultural and social imaginary of India is constructed, shaped and redefined in the everyday experiences of women as they both contest and submit to the images and constructs that impinge on their bodies, senses, emotions, material and social conditions. Embodiment is therefore an innate aspect when discussing subjectivity formations. Thapan (2009: xiii), therefore, argues that 'physical and psychological space' are as much part of a person´s embodiment as much as 'the cultural and social domain'. It is thus a social as well as relational context in which one has to view embodiment (Thapan 2009). It is the intersection of 'multiple subjectivities' that create our experience as 'an embodied and gendered self' (Thapan, 2009: 6). Another study by Taparia (2011) gives an insight on the embodiment of hijras in connection to their subjectivity formations. Doing so, Taparia examines through a historical lens, how the emasculated body of hijras takes on different and often contrasting meanings embodied in social roles, statuses and identities. It follows the trajectory of the historical space occupied by hijras and traces the roles and identities

of hijras that have continuously been in a state of dynamism through their construction, reconstruction and reinvention in time and space. Taparia argues that the corporeal act of emasculation performed on the body of hijras is a medium through which subjectivities have been imposed, resisted and negotiated.

Development strategies have been influenced by the spirit of neo-liberal economy since the 1990s, when India changed it´s economic and financial policies. As Kumar (2003:74) argues, 'economic relationships are defined by individual and collective identities informed by institutions and networks in the social sphere, foremost among them those structures that shape power relations in society.'. The author mentions the state as one of such institution which defines development strategies. Where and how the capitalistic market gets a slice of it depends on the state´s decision (Kumar, 2003). Discussing women on the recipient end of development as well as development agents – as Arundhati Bhattacharyya does in this volume on rural women in West Bengal - Kumar (2003: 75) argues that 'the construction of women as a development constituency is influenced by the wider political structures in society.' Thus, she concludes 'that the state and the market are linked inextricably in locating women within the discourse of development.'

The development agenda since the 1990s has had a serious impact on the lives of the Dalits and Adivasis pushing them further into the margins. In order to show their antagonism to these policies, they have represented or initiated identity movements, which have given them a space to raise their issues in a platform of which their own people are subjects. Further these identity-subjectivity formations have taken a different shape in the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, 21st century India witnessed hegemonic and feudalistic behaviour of Khaf Panchayats which have resulted in large scale movements and struggles against the Khaf Panchayats and their hegemonic attitudes in India. These developments have also strengthened the identity and subjectivity formations among the Dalits, Adivasis and marginal women of contemporary India. Further, there are also reports of 'Ghar Wapsi' movements initiated by Hindutva forces in order to attract the poor and marginalised sections of the society into their fold. Poor people who are attracted towards these developments are bearing the brunt of 'neither there nor here' hypothesis in their own mohallas or settlements. Bringing all these identity formations into a theoretical or epistemological discourse is

evident in the sense that marginal people are the subjects in the whole discourse of such developments. Thus, in order to bring holistic dimension to these identity and subjectivity formations, our effort here is to highlight these issues with existing literature and further map out the developments in an anthropological and sociological engagement of and in India and elsewhere.

As Sundar (2000) observes, the inclusion of ascriptive categories like race, ethnicity or caste in national censuses have become a matter of considerable debate. In her article, she focuses on the Indian debate over the inclusion of caste in 2001 census, in the light of three broad questions: whether official classifications merely reflect or actively transform social identities; who benefits from certain classifications; and the implications of such official classifications for sociology. Supporters of caste enumeration argue that census categories merely reflect existing divisions and that it is necessary to link caste identity with inequality. Opponents point to the past experience of mobilisation around officially recognised identities and the consequent dangers of both distorted data and increased social tensions.

In India, the sociological category of 'tribals' as a concretely identifiable separate group existing discontinuously with the rural poor is largely inaccurate, but the idea of 'tribe' has retained its value to the extent that it has sustained the field of Indian anthropology (Sundar, 2000). The idea of 'tribe' has provided for the production of images of organic cultures and identities, detached from the more differentiated and modern set of political, economic and social relations typified by caste, religion and commerce. Such theorising, predicated as it is on an image rather than on actually existing situations, has allowed both for a romance with, and a rejection of, tribals. The modern subject's nostalgia for a 'lost' state of freedom on the one hand, and its censure of the non-modern on the other, coalesce around this image. Thus, debates among Indian anthropologists have tended to operate within the dualism of tribal as 'noble savage' who must be protected from the ravages of modernity and tribal as 'primitive' needing to be urgently assimilated into the state processes of a developing society (Deliege 1985). As such the binary represents the continuation of colonial thinking in a postcolonial context, where the 'colonial/national self' battles over the fate of the 'exotic other'.

Anthropology then has always been implicated in the colonialist/modernist project of saving or erasing the 'Other'. The duality represents the romantic and modernist wings of anthropology (Kearney, 1996). Development anthropology, a subfield of anthropology which is well-integrated with the bureaucratic apparatus of development, combines both the romantic and the modernist aspirations of anthropology (Escobar 1991; 1997). Development anthropologists are seen as uniquely positioned both to protect poor communities from being too negatively impacted by development projects and to help them assimilate and participate in development projects. Resettlement of large numbers who have been displaced from controversial dam projects is an instance of the former, and using indigenous knowledge systems for the effective management of afforestation programmes is an instance of the latter – as Joshi discusses in her article in this volume. Hardiman (1994) has observed that, prior to the British invasion of forest and common lands, tribals had complex relations with local plains communities and their rulers. These relations were not based uniformly on subordination to plains communities, but rather incorporated varying degrees of power and authority over, and autonomy from, plains communities. He also shows that between and within tribal communities there were important social, political, and economic differences that were exacerbated and given new meaning by the British administration.

Equally, the reification of 'tribe' as a discrete and disconnected social entity is reflected in official anthropological tracts that comprise of endless 'pure description', 'repetitive and often boring' (Deliege 1985: 13–14). A good example of this is the Anthropological Survey of India of 1987, which, despite the best intention of its editor, K.S. Singh, suffers from the colonial legacy of 'descriptive ethnography' where the 'people of India' are enumerated into discrete and separate categories of hundreds of 'tribes and castes' in a neat alphabetical order (Anand, 1995: 50). The same remains true of the recently completed 1999 edition of the Survey. In both cases, the reader gains no insights into the historical or contemporary linkages between these presumably discrete communities; there are no clues to what makes for the differences between the various tribes and castes, nor to understanding the basis for a common nationality.

In postcolonial India, the classification of Scheduled Tribes has been haphazard, and has served to exclude rather than include the legitimate demands of marginalised people. For instance, many

communities that historically have been recognised as 'tribes' have been excluded from the Scheduled Tribes list of the Government of India (NFTSR 1995; Kamat 2001; Kasi 2011; Pathy 1984; Sengupta 1988). Similarly, many communities who live within Scheduled Tribe Areas do not consider themselves to be 'tribes' nor are they considered as such by others. Yet they share a history of being exploited and confront economic, ecological and political issues similar to those of the tribes.

The official construction of the individual thus contains these multiple identities within the unitary category. To the degree that anthropological thought participates in this reification of the individual and the suppression of multiple identities within it, it is an (usually unwitting) accomplice in the state's more general policies and practices of containment (Kearney 1996: 63).

The theory of containment as proposed by Jameson (1981), and developed by Kearney (1996), is appropriate to consider in relation to Adivasis, especially given that official (and anthropological) narratives on tribes commonly refer to the violent tendencies of tribes, their inclination towards spontaneous rebellion, and their general unpredictable and unlawful nature. The intellectual containment effected through essentializing seamlessly translates into an ideological and political containment of the issues of tribal/landless/displaced/migrant/ undeveloped peoples. The explosion of struggles for autonomy by tribal peoples in India (and elsewhere) based explicitly on recrafting an ethnic identity, rather than on a common political/ ecological history, is reflective of the strategy of containment. Given that tribal and peasant overlap considerably, and development projects have eroded the natural and cultural resource base for these communities, the intellectual and administrative category of 'tribal' serves to circumscribe the complex and fractured realities of tribal/peasant communities in India and reconstitutes identity that is empty of history.

Another example of how subjectivity formations are performed is shown by Jassal (2001) in which she examines the process of caste identity formation, with a focus on the fishing and river based group of castes, the Mallah or Nishad. The process is analysed with reference to different sources of information, both colonial and post-colonial, which include the census, the system of scheduling whereby the Mallah/Nishad was labelled as both a criminal tribe and a backward

caste, and finally, through voices from within the community. Thus, the essay is concerned with both the emergence of the Nishad identity as a result of and in reaction to the interventions of the colonial state and with the effects of the latter on identity formation in the post-colonial era.

Arun (2007) in his article examines the process by which the Paraiyars, one of the Dalit communities of Tamil Nadu, attempt to reconstruct their identity by re-valorising the symbols of pollution that defined them as low and defiled into positive symbols of their culture. It argues that conflict, confrontation and radical rupture from the dominant community were essential for the formation of a new collective consciousness. Jaspal (2011) on the other hand, explores the possible functions performed by caste-based stigma both for the higher caste groups (HCGs) and the 'Scheduled Caste' (SC) groups. It examines how the maintenance of social hierarchy implicated in caste system, the spatial and endogamous separation of caste groups and the historical division of labour in accordance with caste group affiliation, may impinge upon identity processes among both groups. Further, Suan (2011) examines, how the state's practice of recognising 'tribes' legitimises fixed and legible 'locational dialectal identities' among the 'Zo' in India's northeast and successfully transforms them into receivers of the state's largesse. At the same time, these practices also reveal the unsettled nature and fuzziness of 'tribe' identities as clans, dialects, and languages overlap and cross-cut each other. Later, Ram (2012) in his study on Dalits, critically explored how the neoliberal market economy impacts social democracy in globalising India and examines its implications for the millions of Dalits in contemporary India. He argues that the institution of social democracy, which flourished in India during the Nehruvian era of mixed economy and the welfare state, seems to be fast approaching its demise under the ongoing process of neoliberalism. Further, Ram, argues that the fast-expanding domain of the corporate sector and the free flow of global capital, in conjunction with the gradual withdrawal of the welfare state, will not only widen inequalities among the haves and have nots and rich the poor, but also stifle the growth of social democracy in India.

Closely linked to the social category of caste, Torri and Martinez (2014) critically discuss empowerment of women through micro-entrepreneurship in India. They argue that the purpose is to advance discussion on women's narratives of empowerment by exploring the

case of Gram Mooligai Company Limited (GMCL). GMCL is the first female community enterprise in India active in the herbal sector, entirely formed and managed by Dalits. The findings show that GMCL enhances women's productive capabilities, leadership skills and to some extent social learning abilities, but falls short to confronting marginalisation resulting from issues of caste embedded in established patriarchal norms and practices.

As Thapan (2009: xvi) wrote, 'subjective experience is crucial to our understanding of the complexities characteristic of everyday life.' Therefore, the papers in the volume give an insight of these complexities as well as experiences in forming one´s subjectivities.

Brief Overview of Papers

Anamika Singh´s paper analyses a long lasting discussion on the gender-centric sanitation discourse, which has revolved around the so-called cultural conceptions of women's dignity from a gender and caste-based violence perspective. She questions the ongoing debate by highlighting the problem of women's open defecation and menstrual health and hygiene as well as prenatal and antenatal care. Her main focus is on gender-based violence during open defecation in terms of caste and caste-linked gender vulnerability of Dalit and tribal women. The paper critically explores the gender and the dignity discourse in the larger canvas of open defecation and sanitation discourse in India. Further, she advocates for a framework based on gender-caste identity and vulnerability to inform the open defecation problem, toilet construction rationale, and the evidence-based conceptualisation of women's dignity that reflects the caste-based identities and vulnerabilities of Indian women.

Subrata Kumar Das argues that postcolonial Indian literature is an expression of itself as they are marked by struggles, resistance and protests for identity, societal and familial relationships, class/caste conflicts, gender(ed) representation, political engagements, unemployment and other topical-concerned realistic issues. He analysis Rohinton Mistry's 'A Fine Balance' (1995) which is narrated almost entirely from the point of views of subaltern and petty-bourgeois characters and hence is quintessentially a subaltern novel. The novel includes subalterns' struggles, resistance and protests to change their social 'space' from 'periphery' to 'centre' and to create their identity; the cruel atrocities meted out over them by the upper

caste people; patterns of social pattern, such as patriarchy and caste hierarchies.

Asmita Bhattacharyya´s paper explores the extent to which new identities by women software professionals are able to question and negotiate their primordial gender identities. By means of anthropological mode of inquiry of around 250 women software professionals working in software firms located in Kolkata, who were interviewed in 2010-2011 for a comparative study of their positions vis-a-vis those of their mothers, is the empirical basis of this interesting research. Its outcome reveals that women´s gender identities are in transitional stages comparing to those of their mothers. Embedded in a neo-globalised framework, the paper discusses how individualisation and work place form a different gendered subjectivity of (younger) women.

Kasi Eswarappa argues that for any development forum or agency, there is a great need to look at the ground reality of 'organisations, especially in the context of a post-globalisation scenario. Thus, it is here that the notion of 'community' arises from the view point of the donors. The donor participation in the daily activities of the people, with specific reference to women to make them earn their livelihoods, poses critical questions. Kasi´s article engages with them theoretically and empirically by focusing on how far Community Based Organisations (CBOs) play a role in the implementation of development programmes in rural India. The case of sericulture enterprise, where a large number of women are engaged on all activity levels, proves to be one of the important crop enterprise prevailed in rural India. Thus, the paper intends to understand how the CBOs supports women to empower themselves and spread their cause by actively participating in the development process in the village. Such an understanding would definitely help the policy makers, government and other agencies to engage in development activities which are useful for the community and people at large (Kasi 2013; 2015). Kasi draws his analysis and inferences from a fieldwork carried out among the sericulturists in a village of Chittoor District in Andhra Pradesh.

Vitsou Yano´s article discusses the tradition of handloom weaving in Nagaland, North East India. Handloom weaving has always been a monopoly work and art for women in Naga society compared to the rest of India. Since traditional to modern period, women in Naga

society have been making, carrying, and giving an identity to the whole of society through handloom weaving. Yano explored that the identification of a person based on sex, rank, status, and age, among other, in Naga society can be seen from the cloth they wear since traditional period. Women have been contributors to the civilisation process, but their history and works seem unavailable and ignored while writing the history of Nagas society. History from the margins, including women, has been an ignored topic in mainstream society for a long time. Yano fills these gaps by highlighting the history of female handloom weavers. Her article critically analyses the history writing of the Naga and placing women at the centre of the argument. Thereby it discusses the way in which women have been carrying their identity of handloom weavers from one generation to the other.

Hemangi Kadlak explores the complex relationship of scavenging work with caste and its impact on identity in the context of social structure of India. She argues that the occupational identity of scavengers is socially constructed and affects them negatively. Traditionally in India, caste has been the deciding criteria for choosing or even forcing people to take up an occupation. The identity of a scavenger thus emanates from his or her positioning in the caste system, the nexus which even government has failed to break. The paper argues that caste remains an entry point in scavenging work and is therefore also a deciding factor in shaping the demeaning identity of the scavenger. The paper concludes that unless this nexus between work, caste and identity is broken, scavengers cannot be liberated from the age old work of scavenging.

Saakshi Joshi discusses the effects of so-called development work on people. Conceived in 1949, the Tehri dam of Garhwal region in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, has affected close to one hundred thousand women and men. Work on the actual structure began in 1972 and the dam tunnels were finally shut down in 2005. The town of Tehri and thirty-five villages were completely submerged while seventy-four villages were partially submerged, leading to re-settlement across the state. This led to the usage of visthapit (Hindi word variously translated as displaced/uprooted/resettled) as a category of identity and marginalisation. The term became a prolonged label rather than a description of a particular moment of uprooting. Various narratives give insights into different dimensions of being a visthapit – which can mean simultaneously an externally imposed identity, an internalised identity, a means to make claims

about relative marginalisation, and a means to organise for action against the state. She explores how visthapit has been used in a range of contexts, beginning from the inception of the dam to present day.

Arundhati Bhattacharyya explores the condition of rural women after the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS), its impact on the lives of innumerable women beneficiaries and identity formation. She tried to portray the implications of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as a premier social sector legislation that creates economic entitlements and guarantee wage employment.

Concluding Remarks

This book highlights subjectivities by analysing the variety of subjectivity discourses in the Indian subcontinent. It discusses how important are the discourses around subjectivity formations and concludes that they are inherent in social science research. Empirically and theoretically, subjectivity formation processes have become essential when discussing societal developments, changes, movements and resistances. This book presents the multiple yet complex discourses of subjectivity formations in India. We hope that it would contribute to the ongoing discussions on subjectivity formations and further open new spaces for debates in India and beyond.

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Inverse friction of gender homogeneity and caste-based vulnerability of women: Fracture of identity in sanitation discourse

Anamika Dhaske

Abstract

The struggle for gender-centric sanitation discourse has revolved around the so-called cultural conceptions of dignity of women. In Indian context, open defecation has been seen as the most challenging among the plethora of sanitation problems. To overcome the problem of open defecation, toilet construction has been advocated and is portrayed as an act of respect shows towards women's dignity. After witnessing notable cases of gender-based violence during open defecation, the 'gender dignity' discourse surrounding open defecation received new interpretive dimensions. However, the problem of women's open defecation, menstrual health and hygiene, as well pre-natal and antenatal care is less discussed. In fact, there is selective utilisation of gender aspects of open defecation in the policy level sanitation discourse in the name of gender dignity. Furthermore, the issue of gender-based violence during open defecation is not considered in terms of caste and caste-linked gender vulnerability of Dalit and tribal women. The paper critically explores the 'gender and dignity' discourse in the larger context of open defecation and sanitation debate in India. Further, the paper advocates for a framework based on gender-caste identity and vulnerability to inform the open defecation problem, rationale for toilet construction, and the evidence-based conceptualisation of women's dignity that reflects the caste-based identities and vulnerabilities of Indian women.

Introduction

The elected representatives as well as the bureaucratic executives in India have used the gender-centric problematisation of open defecation and therefore the political advocacy for toilet construction. The public discourse surrounding toilet construction has been evolved strikingly to incorporate gender dimensions attached with the toilet construction program. While the gender-centric portrayal of government agenda has been largely used for the rural sanitation program, there is adverse incorporation of the actual gender issues surrounding sanitation problems; open defecation in particular. The

nature of such gender-centric sanitation discourse has to be problematised for its exclusion of gender intersectionality that exists among the caste-class based diverse society. In majority of the state promoted campaigns, maintaining women's dignity has been put forth as the reason for toilet construction. In other words, tolerating women's open defecation is put forth as a shameful act and, further, a feeling of guilt is induced among the rural populace to motivate them to build toilets. As a generalised notion, to promote the quantitative output in terms of toilet construction, government sanitation reform machinery has been actively working on the use of selective community beliefs about prestige factors such as women's dignity. In such a process, less consideration is given to public level discourse and manifestation of women's dignity and open defecation.

Selective utilization of gender discourse and toilet construction

Being age-old patriarchy with supportive normative religious-based guidelines, India has predominantly remained as a caste-based gendered society. Constructions such as dignity do not remain isolated from those practices of patriarchy and, thus, operational within the toilet construction program. Government sanitation programs have shown a very high tendency and inclination for utilizing cultural beliefs and norms associated with women's dignity as a medium to design campaigns for the eradication of open defecation. Use of cultural constructs has been mostly irrespective of any evidence-based and comprehensive consideration for gender issues attached with the pertinent problem of open defecation. The caste-based gender violence, possibilities of atrocities, open defecation places around certain caste neighbourhoods, menstrual health awareness, access to resources, water availability and many such issues have patriarchal angles attached to it. However, the toilet construction program has focused on women's dignity related campaigns and made it the prestige issue of rural societies. In a typical caste and class based rural society, such agenda is manifested in hierarchal manner based on the traditional structural views and systems. The so-called women's dignity construct about household toilet necessity is split for various reasons to be discussed in detail further. In any case, the fractured gender-centric discourse on sanitation raises finger towards the implicitly patriarchal nature of the state run program on open defecation and toilet construction. When gender is not viewed as a multifarious sociological construct and its social manifestation is not

incorporated, toilet construction and sustainable use of it in the diverse cultural habitats in India becomes immensely challenging.

Open defecation, gender, and dignity

Caste linked dignity is trivialised in the context of open defecation. Dignity is the right of the entire citizenry irrespective of their caste, class, gender, and creed. When it is put forth as a special component for women, it clearly reflects the patriarchal notion whereby women and their dignity are made a matter of social and familial status. While the association of religious-based status of women and familial as well as social status are intricate it has been argued that the status of women in the religion is a reflection of their status in the society, further effectively shaping and mediating women's status (Bayes and Tohidi, 2001). The projection of caste and hierarchical status on women's dignity in the problem of open defecation shows the typical patriarchal tendencies as seen within the politico-religious systems in India. Particularly, when there is caste-based hierarchy, it implies similar considerations in the social status and dignity when it comes to the eradication of open defecation through toilet construction. So far, there are no concrete studies about how the dignity of women has motivated people to build toilets and led to a gender-based discourse in sanitation. Nevertheless, government actions are insisting on gender-centric campaigns for toilet construction without incorporating the gender aspects comprehensively.

Except few instances of media debates, there is no detailed discussion on the issue of gender-based violence during open defecation in terms of the caste and caste-linked gender vulnerability of Dalit and tribal women. So far, the gender-based violence reported during the incidence of open defecation has showed victimisation of women from the so-called lower castes. Most of the reports appeared in media has not given an aggregate estimation on the prevalence of violence; neither there are attempts to quantify the scale of such forms of violence. The existing scenario of gender-based violence is largely interpreted in terms of acts such as eve teasing and attempts of molestation which derails the original arguments attached to caste-based dignity and vulnerability of victims.

The different forms of gender-based violence during open defecation are still not explored in a detailed manner. In the event of gender-based violence during open defecation, the interplay of caste leads to the formation of intersectional identities and vulnerability to violence

based on it. However, the predominant policy-induced women's dignity paradigm in sanitation has hardly presented it as a matter of social justice for women coming from oppressed castes. Thus, the prevalent conception of dignity of women, as used in the sanitation sector, specifies a superficial, inauthentic, and politically beneficial interpretation based on pragmatic expectations from community for irrational targets such as construction of toilets. Furthermore, such quantitative outcome in the form of toilet construction is viewed as behaviour change which is all the more challenging to accept on scientific grounds.

Visibility of open defection and intersectional coercion

The problem of open defecation is largely discussed around the visibility of open defecation and the places used for it by the village communities. However, the visibility phenomenon has a gender angle attached to it. In a typical gendered society, women are compelled to go for open defecation when it is dark to maintain the invisibility of the act. It has been seen that delaying defecation despite the drive leads to several health problems for women. Further, women feel shy about going for open defecation during day time and treat it as a private act among the plethora of gendered acts assigned to them in a typical normative society. In such context, women's coercion takes place when they try to maintain invisibility of open defecation in the context of unavailability of toilets. The vulnerability derived from the visibility of women's open defecation makes them too conscious about gendered norms regardless of its health implications. In this context, it is more of a health concern which should have been made prominent than the structural caste-based dignity considerations. However, the ways in which women from different castes maintain privacy of open defecation and their menstrual health management is still fully not known. Nevertheless, in a typical caste based society; the status is determined and discussed based on caste and gender with its situational appropriation.[1]

Another visible event attached to open defecation is linked to women's mobility and her everyday life based on social constructs. Socially it is assumed, hence imposed widely, that women are not supposed to cross the path where men are defecating in open. In such implicit

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[1] Based on a personal communication with Dr. Govind Dhaske on May 15, 2014

normative context for women's mobility, the act of open defecation by men has a gender-based violence value and trigger attached to it. When open defecation places are located close to certain caste neighbourhoods, the act of male open defecation is in fact a caste and gender based violence, which invariably generates coercion of women from certain vulnerable caste groups;these forms of violence are not documented substantially in order to outline its contextual manifestation, women's dignity attached to toilet construction can be explored further to understand the possible social formation of dignity issues induced motivation to build toilet.

Open defecation portrays a picture catching more attention towards the violation of dignity of women. On the other hand, the toilet construction program has fractured the gender and dignity considerations due to less or no consideration given for caste and other intersections. What remains ignored and neglected is the caste-based discrimination where we talk about dignity of upper caste women and ignore issues of other women with generalised concepts of dignity. India being a democratic country cannot afford such discrimination as Article 14 of the Indian Constitution strictly restricts any such act. It is not only the fracture of identity but also an indirect attack on one's fundamental rights. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights says that all are born free and equal in dignity and rights, but the fact reveals a different picture, particularly in the sanitation policy in India. Therefore, it is essential to establish and understand the relationship among factors such as gender-caste intersection, identity and dignity in sanitation interventions, and programmatic communication in sanitation programs.

Gender-caste intersection, identity, and dignity

In Indian society, where caste appears to be a major construct of intersection (Nash-, 2008), it determines women's social status. There is need of exploration on how caste forms the identity and how status is derived from such identities. There is a need to conduct research on how caste determines status and identity and further affect the health and dignity of women from Dalit and so-called lower castes groups, particularly in the context of ongoing sanitation reforms. The reasons for varied status of women can be multifarious and hence it is likely to have a complex manifestation when it comes to the dignity of women in the context of toilet construction programs. A policy understanding

of 'status' provided by the Government of India says, "status refers to a position in a social system or sub-system which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other positions through its designated rights and obligations"(MESW, 1974: 6).

Quite vividly, the *varna*[2] and caste system implies graded hierarchal status, which legitimises the interpretation of one's' dignity conceptualisation and social position. The caste-based stratification of Indian society has given a twofold drudgery to women from the formerly untouchable castes as they face gender and caste based domination (Omvedt, 1977) while they remain oppressed within the rigid caste structures (Leonard, 1979). The social status is determined based on the caste hierarchy where Brahmins enjoy the highest privileges while the untouchables remain deprived and marginalised. In this way, gender identity is not uniform in its operational form.

In May 2014, two teenage girls while going for nature's call were raped, murdered, and strung up from a tree. This was a very heinous crime, however incidence of sexual harassment, rape and attack by animals are quite common with those women attending nature's call in open. When dignity of women is not identical across all households in any society, how can women's dignity-centric toilet construction discourse is uniform and presumably motivates community members in the same manner? What quantitative outcome could be expected under these circumstances? In Indian context, the effective status is largely seen in the form of a composite derived from complex factors like education, employment, class, caste, kinship, religion, rituals and customs.

Hyman (1942) mentioned the general status is likely to be a composite of specific statuses. Status is manifold and tends to be a contextual phenomenon. Each status aspect is likely to have structural roots in the caste and class stratified Indian society. The factors that determine women's status in rural society are complex and can be seen in the form of autonomy, power, property, knowledge, authority, cultural position, religious affirmation, ritual significance and so on. Smith al. (2001) has seen women's status as their power relative to men's power in the families, communities, and nations. Bradley and Khor (1993) conceptualised women's status on three major dimensions as

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[2] *Varna* is broad categorisation of various castes

economic, political, and social. Thus, caste and gender based status is determined through a prevalent structural system and it is maintained through the identities of women. Identities get the instrumental form in Indian societies and provide a rubric for operationalisation of structural systems such as caste and class. The manifestation of such identities in the context of sanitation issues is challenging to explore; however, there is possibility to have theoretical understanding based on existing evidence and frameworks.

The struggle for the incorporation of caste based gender identities in sanitation program

The caste-based gender identity of Dalit women, while forming vulnerability to the gender and caste based violence, outlines a social justice agenda. However, the ways through which the caste-gender identity is manifested in the sanitation discourse needs to be documented evidently. Notably, most of the sanitation workers come from former untouchable castes in India. Kumar's (2010: 64) presents intersectionality as a "sociological approach which suggests and seeks to examine how various social and cultural categories of discrimination interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels in the making of systems of power, contributing to systemic inequalities" (p.64), where the matter of women's dignity and resultant sanitation actions becomes a struggle for equity and social justice.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) have shown that women invest in women centered infrastructure based on the needs of rural women; however, there is no evidentiary gender-centric discourse and leadership in sanitation sector yet. When caste-based status is determinant of identity and privileges for women, it is difficult to assume that women from upper caste will consider the particular issues of Dalit and other oppressed caste women. Along the same lines, P.Vyasulu and V. Vyasulu (1999) note that functionally it is very challenging for the upper caste women to serve the interest of so-called lower castes.

It is essential to understand how women's dignity and caste-based issues can be better incorporated in the mainstream sanitation agenda. Kumar (2010:64) argues that "forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination". The instrumental role of identity of women and its intersectionality with caste and gender leads to the question of 'dignity' politics. Such struggles for

dignity are associated with the age-old untouchability and discrimination patterns and therefore, social justice is needed for its removal.

Notably, Crenshaw (1991:1296) viewed intersectionality as a way of "mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics". In such context, the government agenda and campaigns that generalise women's dignity as a uniform concept to appeal the public psyche stand as irrational and non-evidentiary construct. Kudva (2003:447) has emphasised that, "the intersection of gender with class, caste, and ethnicity determines the manner and impact of women's political participation, mirroring a process of exclusion experienced by other marginalised groups" .Therefore, the participatory sanitation reform process implies incorporation of various forms of intersectionality. The gaps in administrative understanding of women's dignity should be rewritten sensitively to administer sanitation schemes in appropriate manner. Such consideration of dignity implies understanding of identities as static as well as dynamic phenomenon having a determinative role in the policy based reforms in sanitation and other welfare actions.

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Struggle for Creating Subaltern's Identity in Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance

Subrata Kumar Das

[S]till, it was uncertain if centuries of tradition could be overturned as easily. (p. 132)

But no one could predict how two chamaar-turned-tailors would fare in the village.(p.161)

Among the upper castes, there was still anger and resentment because of what a Chamaar had accomplished.(p. 135)

'There is a dead cow waiting for you', he [Thakur] notified Narayan through a servant'. (p. 169)

'We are not going to deal with such low-caste people! How can you even think of measuring someone who carts the shit from people's houses?'(p. 133)

Excerpts from Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995)

Abstract

As 'literature is an expression of society' (De Bonald), so, perhaps post-colonial Indian novels follow the same trend. These novels are marked by struggles, resistance and protests for identity; societal and familial relationship: class/caste conflicts, gender(ed) representation, political engagements, unemployment and other topical-concerned realistic issues. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) is narrated almost entirely from the point of views of subaltern and petty-bourgeois characters and hence quintessentially a subaltern novel. These subalterns are *Chamaar* (cobbler) caste, women in general and Parsi woman in particular. Like any other subaltern novel, it includes subalterns' struggles, resistance and protests to change their social 'space' from 'periphery' to 'centre' and to create their identity; the cruel atrocities meted out over them (*dalits*) by the upper caste people; patterns of social pattern: patriarchy and caste hierarchies. This paper explores the aforementioned issues.

Introduction

The term 'Subaltern', meaning 'of inferior rank', is adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are on the periphery

from the hegemonic power structure of the ruling classes. In describing 'history told from below', the term 'Subaltern' identifies the social groups who are excluded from a society's established structures for political representation, the means by which people have a 'voice' in their society.

The Subaltern Studies began in the beginning of the 1980s. Ranajit Guha is the most famous name among the Subaltern Historians. In the Preface to the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*, Guha (1982: vii) explained that the term 'Subaltern' would be used by authors in the series as a 'general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.' A subaltern is a person rendered *without human agency (emphasis added),* by his or her social status. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic' power. In India, *Dalit*(s), rural, tribal, immigrant labourers and women are part of subaltern.

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) is the story of the heroic struggle of two tailors - Ishvar Darji and Omprakash Darji whose attempts at survival become the microcosm for the suffering of poor in India. The female protagonist Dina Dalal, a middle class Parsi widow of 40's is also another subaltern in this novel whose constant and indomitable spirit for independent life shows us the need of 'voice' in general woman's daily life in India. About Mistry's novels, Nayar (2004: ix) commented in the Foreword to *The Novels of Rohinton Mistry: A Critical Study* by Dodiya: Mistry's fiction is concerned with the great inequalities of the world; between the classes, genders, castes and official hierarchies.

Subaltern Female 'Voice' in A Fine Balance

The female representative of subaltern 'voices' in *A Fine Balance* is Dina Shroff (later, Dina Dalal when married to Rustom Dalal). Other minor female characters who have no 'space' in Indian patriarchal society are Avinash's three unmarried sisters; Shanti, a girl in the slum and few others. Although these minor female characters do not have roles and any agency in the patriarchal society to get any 'space' for their identity, Dina Dalal shows vital role to raise 'voice' against the patriarchal society and the other social stereotypes against women.

Dina, a Parsi middle class girl, possesses a sharp, shrewd kind of intelligence. She is, in Mistry's words, 'a smart little girl (who) knows how to get what she wants…' (16). She had long-cherished dream of becoming a doctor. But when she was barely seven, her dream was shattered after the sudden demise of her father. All their familial charges relating to the finance, domestic chores and other activities were then on under Nusswan, Dina's brother, a true representative of patriarchal epitome. At the beginning, he made Dina an almost servant or domestic worker by cutting the hired help, cook and others from his family, arguing she is a young girl, full of energy. It will be good for her, teach her how to look after a home (18). Nusswan started regulating Dina's money, dresses, education and even friendship. As Dina was stubborn from the beginning, she showed her resistance against the imposition of her brother's strict regulation upon her. When Nusswan, after having meal ordered her to wash his plates, she denied his order saying I'm not your servant! Wash your own dirty plates (19). Nusswan restricts her movements, communication and mixing with her female friends:

> Dina was no longer allowed to spend time at her friends' houses during the holidays. 'There is no need to,' said Nusswan. 'You see them every day in school' (21).

When she defied his order, he slapped her, cut her hair, and restricted her movement to go outside of home. To keep her short hair like all her classmates, she even agreed to polish his shoes every night. Once he even slightly assaulted her sexually for keeping bob cut hair. Her resources for her outings were limited to what she could squeeze from the shopping money (29). After the first month's prayer ceremonies for Mrs. Shroff (her mother) were completed, Nusswan decided there was no point in Dina matriculating (26). Actually her result was not satisfactory for him. When she defended herself by saying that it was for her busying herself in cleaning and scrubbing all the time, he argued:

> 'A strong young girl, doing a little housework – what's that got to do with studying? Do you know how fortunate you are? There are thousand poor children in the city, doing boot-polishing at railway stations, collecting papers, bottles, plastic – plus going to school at night. And you are complaining? What's lacking in you is the desire for education. This is it, enough schooling for you' (27).

She also faced much trouble from her brother in selecting her would be groom. Though she succeeded to marry her chosen chemist Rustom Dalal, but on the third anniversary of their marriage, she lost her husband in a road accident. She showed then on the historic struggle of an independent Parsi widow. Dina's rebellion against the tyranny of her autocratic brother and traditionally accepted norms of her 'orthodox' Parsi community reflects the change from old to the new ways of thinking in Bombay and India. Like a social historian, Mistry not only details the Parsi rites and rituals, and family relationships as a world of authentic ethnic revelations but also he provides these elements as the sauce to his main dish of India under Indira Gandhi's Emergency of 1975-77.

After her husband's death, though her brother persuaded her to marry again, she refused. She also did not lose her freedom and self-reliance staying at her brother's house. She started living in a rented room. Though she went to her brother few times for rent money, but she used to avoid it as much as possible. She again got the chance to preserve 'her fragile independence' (11) when Maneck, her school friend Zenobia's son started staying in her rented house as a paying guest.

After her husband's death when she was struggling for survival, she realised the need of education which she was denied during her teenage. When she was sharing her rented flat with Ishvar and Omprakash, she said to Omprakash that study for your own sake (427) and '[w]hen you have children, make sure you send them to school and college' (427). She cited her deprivation of education saying Look how I have to slave now because I was denied education. Nothing is more important than learning (427). She also argued that all the happening in her past were against her will, lots of people predict her bright future when she was at her school life, but all these were shuttered for the lack of her education.

She was also one of the victims of Indian Emergency. During the Emergency, she was harassed by the landlord's rent collector Ibrahim. Though she knew very well that she would get trouble in her life to allow the two tailors giving accommodation on the back side of her rented house, she tried to manage it on humanitarian ground. Again for her such kind gestures, she was harassed, blackmailed and threatened by the landlord's henchman. Still she did not approach her

brother for help despite knowing the fact that her brother could solve not only her problems but also of the two tailors.

She also gave voice of resistance for other women. When Ishvar suggested to Dina that Omprakash's would be wife would be helpful to everybody regarding cleaning, marketing, cooking, she got angry and rebuked him. In disgust she complained, Are you getting a wife for Om, or a servant? (474). The novelist also gives space to build awareness among masses by depicting Avinash's three sisters who hung themselves as their father was unable to afford the dowries.

Even the upper caste women are not exempted from the oppression of patriarchal rule. The upper caste men resented the birth of two sons to Dukhi Mochi:

> It was hard for them to be resentful – the birth of daughters often brought them beating from their husbands and their husbands' families. Sometimes they were ordered to discreetly get rid of the new-born. Then they had no choice but to strangle the infant with her swaddling clothes, poison her, or let her starved to death. (99-100)

As we notice her brother always wanted to make a servant out of her and break her free-living, at the end of the novel Dina Dalal has lost her self-acquired independence and has to seek shelter again in the patriarchal protection of her brother. Thus, Dina's heroic struggle was completed / balanced in pessimistic ways after trapping her again into the patriarchal power structure of Nusswan.

Struggle for Creating Dalit(s) Identity in A Fine Balance

The *Dalit*(s) in *A Fine Balance* are *Chamaar* (cobbler) families and other lower castes like *Bhunghi*. The novel winds and unwinds to envelop strands from the tailors' present, past and future. It depicts the present picture where the two *Dalit*(s) Ishvar Mochi and Omprakash Mochi have come to town and are going to Dina Dalal's house for searching job (1-91; the narration then moves back to the past incidents where these two tailors' family members are victim of cast atrocities by the upper class people (93-163); again the novelist shifts his description of the two tailors' future life stories at town where they are the victim of class hierarchy and Indira Gandhi's autocratic Emergency (165-614)

After arriving in town, Ishvar Mochi and his nephew Omprakash Mochi change their surname from Mochi to Darji. These two tailors' family used to be cobblers …their family belonged to the Chamaar caste of tanners and leather-workers (95). The [c]hamaars would be summoned to remove the carcass. Sometimes the carcass was given (to them) free, sometimes they had to pay, depending on whether or not the animal's upper-caste owner had been able to extract enough free labour from the Chamaars during the year. The Chamaars skinned the carcass, ate the meat, and tanned the hide, which was turned into sandals, whips, harnesses, and waterskins (95). These *Dalit*(s) are permitted to live in a section downstream of from the Brahmins and landowners (96). Thus, they are on periphery from the main stream societal affairs. They are controlled by the upper caste *Brahminrahmin* community, basically by Thakur Dharamsi, his henchmen, and landlords.

The *Brahminrahmin* practises their cruel atrocities over the *Dalit*: they control their livelihood, movements, gestures, social (dis) placements and other aspects related to their poor lives. Regarding the cast atrocities in the novel, Tharoor (1996 97)) argued, [t]he novel unfolds the story of [their] troubles, [...] Mistry brings us into their lives with empathy and insight, writing with equal felicity about the mindless cruelty of caste exploitation. These *Dalit*(s) are unable to feed themselves twice in a day. Still they have to work at upper caste's houses on little payments. They don't have any courage to fix their wages before starting work in *Brahmin's* houses or landlords' lands. If they ask, some parts of their bodies like fingers or hands would be chopped off. Sometimes are forced to eat excreta for the same reason. Their wives, sisters and daughters are harassed, beaten and raped for trivial reason; sometimes there are forced to walk naked through the square'. Tharoor (1996: 97). They accuse the *Dalit*(s) unnecessarily and serve severe punishment. Their every movements and gestures are examined by the upper cast people:

> The crime were varied and imaginative: a Bhunghi had dared to let his unclean eyes meet Brahmin eyes; a Chamaar had walked on the wrong side of the temple road and defiled it; another had strayed near a puja that was in progress and allowed his undeserving ears to overhear the sacred shlokas; a Bhunghi child had not erased her footprints cleanly from the dust in a Thakur's courtyard after finishing her duties there-her plea that her broom was worn thin was unacceptable (101).

In another instance:

> For walking on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was
> stoned…the stones had ceased at first blood. Gambhir…had
> molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within
> hearing range of the temple while prayers were in progress.
> Dayaram, reneging on an agreement to plough a landlord's
> field, had been forced to eat the landlord's excrement in the
> village square. Dhiraj tried to negotiate in advanced with Pandit
> Ghanshyam the wages for chopping wood…the Pandit got
> upset, accused Dhiraj of poisoning his cows, and had him
> hanged (108-09).

They are accused by upper caste people with abusive terms and
phrases like 'donkey' (104), 'stinking dog' (105), 'shameless little
donkey' (109 'Chamaar rascals' (110) etc.. They are not allowed to peep
at the houses or school where upper caste children study. If
accidentally they do, their gestures are considered as 'blasphemy'.
Once Narayan and Ishvar were listening to the voices of upper caste
children reading in school room. Therefore, Pandit Lalluram accused
them for defiling the tools of learning and knowledge (110) with the
following words:

> Your children entered the classroom. They polluted the place.
> They touched instruments of learning. They defiled slates and
> chalks, which upper-caste children would touch. You are lucky
> there wasn't a holy book like the Bhagavad Gita in that
> cupboard, no sacred texts. Or the punishment would have
> been more final (113-14).

Pandit Lalluram defends his punishment for the two brothers saying it
is the path to happiness. Otherwise, there would be chaos in the
universe (113).

The Indian Constitution was adopted in 1950 and had declared that all
Indian citizens would be equal under the law and no discrimination be
made on grounds of caste or gender. But even after twenty five years,
Government did nothing for such poor situation of these people.
Several times they made promises, but those were proved as hollow at
core. After the election result, they forgot all about the *Dalit*. The lip
service of the Congress politician is as follows:

> What is disease? … This disease, brothers and sisters, is the
> notion of untouchability, ravaging us for centuries, denying

> dignity to our fellow human beings. This disease must be purged from our society, from our heart, and from our minds. No one is untouchable, for we are all children of the same God. Remember what Gandhiji says, that untouchability poisons Hinduism as a drop of arsenic poisons milk (107).

But these subalterns don't keep their mouths mute all the times. Sometimes they protest silently, sometimes even openly. When Dukhi accidently breaks Thakur's mortar while working with it, he is hit by Thakur and Thakur severely rebukes Dukhi with abusive term. Dukhi is so angry that he concludes, I could kill that Thakur. Nothing but a lowly thief. And they are all like that. They treat us like animals. Always have, from the days of our forefathers (105). He also reacts saying, I spit in their upper-caste faces. I don't need their miserable jobs from now on (105). He, therefore, decides not to allow his two sons Narayan and Ishvar to do their low-caste based job. He decides to send them town to train them tailoring. From the beginning, his elder son Narayan was rebellious against upper caste people. Regarding the ill-treatment of upper caste against them, Narayan bitterly says, More than twenty years have passed since independence. How much longer? I want to be able to drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like (142). He also accuses government for their poor and compromising situation saying, Government passes new laws, says no more untouchability, yet everything is the same. The upper-caste bastards still treat us worse than animals (142).

There is mal-practice of voting system manipulated by Thakur Dharamsi. On election day, the ballots are filled by landlords' men. The *Dalit*(s) are not allowed to cast their own votes. Rebellious Narayan promises, Next time there is an election, I want to mark my own ballot, said Narayan. [...] It is still my right. And I will exercise in the next election, I promise you (144). For him, Life is worthless without dignity (144). Thus, according to his promise, he attempts to cast his vote. Though Thakur Dharamsi's men ask him to give thumbprint and leave the vote venue, he insists to cast his ballot. He firmly says, It is our right as voters (145). Thus, the aftermath of Narayan's demand for right is horrid, inhuman and beyond description:

> Throughout the day, at intervals, they were flogged as they hung naked by their ankles from the branches of a banyan tree.

> […] his men urinated on the three inverted faces. […] burning
> coals were held to the three men's genitals, then stuffed into
> their mouths. Their screams were heard through the village
> until their lips and tongues melted away. […] They beat up
> individuals at random in the streets, stripped some women,
> raped others, burned a few huts. […] 'He (Narayan) doesn't
> deserve a proper cremation,' said Thakur Dharamsi.'[…] What
> the ages had put together, Dukhi had dared to break asunder;
> he had turned cobblers into tailors, distorting society's timeless
> balance. Crossing the line of caste had to be punished with the
> utmost severity, said the Thakur (146-47).

Even a little sensitive reader may feel traumatic empathy after reading these passages. We may assume that while Thomas Hardy's protagonists are victims at the hands of Fate, Mistry's subalterns in this novel are victims at the hands of upper caste people. Mistry's novel projects the atrocities committed on the poor *Dalit* during the Emergency. Regarding this, Takhar (2002) has argued:

> Mistry's own brand of verism attacks and revises institutional
> history which has for far too long shamelessly neglected the
> lives of the poor common man. He serves to provide a
> corrective for the factual lacunae of institutional history. *A Fine
> Balance* concentrates its attention on the terror experienced
> during the Emergency which historical texts have only
> superficially covered.

Narayan's son Omprakash is also rebellious like his father. Though he is sent to Ashraf *chacha's* (uncle's) tailor shop, he does not forget the cruel atrocities meted out upon his family by Thakur Dharamsi and his henchmen. He therefore thinks to attack the upper-caste people like a *naxal*:

> I will gather a small army of Chamaars, provide them with
> weapons, then march to the landlords' houses…It will be easy
> to find enough men. We'll do it like the Naxalites. […] At the
> end of it we'll cut off their heads and put them on spikes in the
> marketplace. Their kind will never dare to oppress our
> community again (149).

In the novel while we have seen the caste hierarchy in village, we can see the class hierarchy in town. Dina Dalal gives accommodation to the two tailors in her rented house. She is from a middle class Parsi family. To her, the tailors are from lower class in social hierarchy. She

tries to resist their approaches to her, their attempt to be frank to her and other daily activities related to her professional work with them. When Ishvar proposes that his nephew Omprakah needs to get married, she tries to intervene in it and rebukes him for his proposal. The two tailors don't like her guardian like approaches to them. Ishvar protests her approaches firmly, saying *"We are not your slave. We only work for you"* (469)

When Ishvar and Omprakash return to Ashraf *chacha*'s house to go to their native place for choosing bride, they accidently meet Thakur Dharamsi at Family Planning Centre (518). When Omprakash sees Thakur Dharamsi, he reacts to him saying, I think our people should get together and kill that dog (520). He also confirms, Killing swine would be the most sensible way to end Kaliyug (520). When Ishvar tries to control his approaches to Thakur Dharamsi, he boldly rebukes his uncle saying, What are you running for? ... We don't have to be scared of that dog (522). He further says, If f you hadn't stopped me, I could have spat over him. Exactly in his face. [...] I'm not scared of him (523).

Conclusion

Indian caste hierarchies are more complicated. We have seen that the cobbler family gets the inhuman treatment from the upper castes *brahmin* and landlord. There are sub-caste hierarchies even among lower castes. In *A Fine Balance,* we get two types lower castes-*chamaar* and *bhunghi*. In Indian caste hierarchies, the *chamaar* is placed at higher order among low castes like *bhunghi*. Mistry shows us the basics of caste hierarchies in India. What Dr. Ambedkar calls 'graded inequality' is texturised in his novel. This is also seen in one instance. When a *bhunghi* comes to Narayan for sewing a dress, his mother shouts at him and concludes, 'We are not going to deal with such low-caste people! How can you even think of measuring someone who carts the shit from people's houses?' (133). Even the *chamaar* caste mimicries the dowry system existed among the upper castes. During Narayan's marriage, Dukhi suggests for dowry and claims that it is their right to have dowry. Narayan gets surprised and reacts saying 'Sinceince when has our community practised dowry' (138). On hearing this, Dukhi replies, 'If f it's okay for the uppers to do it, so can we' (138).

Mistry's novel is criticised by many on authentic ground. Some critics critique that Mistry takes a deliberate attempt to satisfy the Western

readers by portraying the seamy sides of Indian caste and class hierarchies during the fascist regime of the then Prime Minister. Talking to Veona Gokhale in an interview, Mistry (1996) agreed and stated:

> My novels are not 'researched' in the formal sense of the word. Newspaper, magazines, chats with visitors from India – these are things I rely on. Having said that, I will add that all these would be worthless without the two main ingredients: Memory and Imagination.

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is narrated almost entirely from the point of views of 'subaltern' and therefore quintessentially gives 'subaltern' voices. Like any other subaltern novel, it includes subalterns' heroic struggles, resistance and protests to change their social 'space' from 'periphery' to 'centre', and thus create their identity. Thus, Mistry's novel gives us a kaleidoscopic social articulation of 'subaltern' from a minority perspective, focusing on the world of the deprived classes with their aspirations and assertions. This novel tries to narrate the alternative histories, 'history told from below', to uncover the suppressed or neglected or misrepresented chapters of Indian history.

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Negotiating Gender Identity in the Neo-Globalised Workplace

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Abstract

The post 1990 era, termed as the liberalised phase, is distinctly marked by the 'information revolution' pervading every aspect of life. It has redefined conventional notions of state, nation, polity, technology, culture, economy, workplace and workers' lives. In fact, this new phase of globalisation is a multidimensional process that has restructured the way we live in. This globalised world is more individualised, as there is a constant surge towards self-identity or the search for the conscious 'I'. Thus, the identity based towards 'I', indicates a shift from primordial identity of gender. Traditionally, it is the patriarchal structure that justifies the subjugated status of women in the society as dependent members, having their identity derived from men. The self-identity of women culminates with their participation and contest with men in the spheres of education, training and employment. The emergence of neo-liberalised workplace, such as the Information Technology sector, which is highly individualised, has provided substantive employment for women workforce. This workforce has ample scope for exercising its agencies towards their physical, professional and social mobility. The objective of the study is, therefore, to explore the extent to which the new identity especially donned by women software professionals is able to question and negotiate their primordial gender identity. By means of anthropological mode of inquiry of around 250 women software professionals from the sundry software firms located in Kolkata quizzed in 2010-2011 for comparative study of their positions vis-a-vis those of their mothers is the empirical ground the study is based on. The outcome of the research revealed that their gender identities are in transitional stages.

Introduction

The end of the twentieth century is marked by a new phase of globalisation that has changed the socio-economic fervour of the society. The increased global inter-connectivity between people and places results in the creation of 'one world'. The transformation towards 'one world' consists in having a global reach acting as a

homogeniser to every part of the world within a single developmental ambit. Global transformation has generated a whole new vision of economy, culture, nation, state, polity, technology, work patterns and lifestyle trends distinctively different from the preceding era. The distinctiveness of this globalisation has unmoored individuals from their traditional ties and identities, sourced from the nation, community, village and caste turning them more individualised which, in turn, has thrown them to face the challenge of an uncertain future full of risks and probabilities. The characteristic feature of this globalised phase is that it has emancipated every nation of the world to be global by empowering individuals to think and act globally.

The context of the study demands a special mention of post traditional economy and its related features. Friedman viewed the present phase – 2000 onwards – as globalisation 3.0 accompanied by the advent of information technology. The world, in consequence, became digitised, miniaturised, virtualised, personalised and wireless-enabled. It is the information that connects both the individual and businesses across the globe having flattened the world by empowering the individuals both from the developed as well as developing nations (Friedman 2006: 9-11). The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the growth of internet industry or dot.com firms powered by information technology. The state of such economy has been termed as the 'New Economy'. The drivers of such economy are the technological innovation, financial market valuations and the critical role played by self-programmable labour (Castells 2001: 5, 103). Castells characterises the 'New Economy' as *informational*, where productivity depends on information processing and generation, and is *global* in its core activities; i.e. production, consumption, circulation of capital, labour etc. are organised on a worldwide scale by transcending national and geographic boundaries. The new economy transformed the old economy through its reach across the entire planet through its capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale (Castells 1997: 66-67). This informational capitalist mode of production process got restructured by bringing in more flexibility and networked management that empowers the workforce to accelerate productivity through innovation (Castells 1997: 18-19). The actual operating unit in this new work arena is the business project. It is enacted through network by working online with the network units in real time while the workforce can never remain offline (Castells 1997: 171). These empowered individuals and the workforce of this new economy are

able to assert their self-identity strand in contravention of the traditional identities and subjugated position.

Traditionally, it is the patriarchal structure that justifies the subjugated status of women in the society. They are treated as dependent members with their identity deriving from men. To do away with their derived identity and for being liberated from subjection, women assert their self-identity. The new world is more individualised, emancipatory and lopsided towards a conscious surge of 'I' identification. Thus, the issue of gender identity holds a special relevance in this globalised world, where the identity is based on 'I' factor indicating abandonment of primordial identities of kinship, caste and gender. The surge for self-identity occurs upon one's participation in the spheres of employment, training and education at par with men. The neo-globalised world is accompanied by emergence of neo-liberalised workplace which is highly individualised and having ample scope to exercise one's agencies to exert one's career progression at the workplace.

This background raises the research question of 'how do the transnational professionals, donning new identity, negotiate with the primordial or traditional gender identities?' The objective of this study is to explore the extent to which women software professionals in this individualised neo-liberalised workplace are able to question the primordial gender identity. By means of anthropological mode of enquiring interviews of around 250 women software professionals of Kolkata's software firms during the period of 2010-11 were analysed. In their narratives, women's empowered position is compared with those of their mothers. By means of pattern analysis of the major traits of their open-ended responses are decoded so as to explore their position in relation to that of their mothers. The thematic discussions on the researched area are duly underlined.

At first this paper engages with the theoretical perspective on 'self-identity' along with emergence of individualism as a phenomenon in this neo-globalised workplace opposes primordial gender identity. This is followed by review of literature indicating the issue of women professionals' scope of exercising agencies or identity in the neo-globalised workplace. The field view finally shows the link between partial displacements of gender identity by the assertion of individual identity among women software professionals in Kolkata.

'*Self-identity' in the Neo-globalised Age: Theoretical Perspectives*

Classical sociologists, like Weber and Durkheim, aligned modernity with market economy. Socio-cultural heterogeneity, geographic and social mobility have given rise to individualism. Rise of individualism is due to the increased assertion of one's achieved status such as individual freedom, rights and autonomy (Hattery 2001: 6). Shills (1981: 17-18) further asserts that the search for individuality in modern society grew out of the fact that humans believe in their potentiality and rational action without being held back by traditional rules, beliefs and roles. Search for individuality would result in breaking away from the tradition and movement towards traditionlessness. Tradition stands for binary opposition to modernity in terms of hierarchical authority versus dispersed authority and inequality versus equality.

Giddens (2000: 60-61) holds out that global modernised phases are becoming de-traditionalised both in the West and non-West. De-traditionalisation refers to emancipation of individuals from the constraints of the past to provide more freedom of action. It calls for reflexivity and self-decision-making agenda in every aspect of life including substantial risks taking. Giddens (1991: 52) earmarked modernity as the conscious surge for 'I' segment, where self-identity frees itself from the clutches of traditional identities having moved away from the grip of the past. This autonomous self is vulnerable to suffering from the risk of a fractured identity, coupled with anxiety and insecurity leading towards a problematic unpredictable future.

Castells (1997: 3) identifies individual identity in this age increasingly revolves not around 'what they do' but on the basis of 'what they are' or 'believe they are'. Individuals, in pursuit of fulfilling their goals, selectively switch 'on and off' between individuals, groups, regions or even countries. Individual identities are increasingly structured around bipolar opposition between the internet and the self. The risks involved in forming specific identity or the 'ME' centred relation, where social relationships are centred round the individual that become increasingly difficult to share. This leads to alienation. If the communication breaks down, social fragmentation takes place.

The new type of relationship represents the privatisation of sociability, rooted in individualised relation between capital and labour or between workers and work process in the networked enterprise. This leads to the crisis of patriarchy and subsequent disintegration of

traditional nuclear family (Castells 2001: 128). Beck (1998: 87) termed the new society as the 'risk society' or the 'radicalised modern society' where individuals become increasingly dependent on the labour market and subsequently make them de-traditionalised individualised beings.

Invidualisation in the New-globalised Workplace

Individualisation is the major outcome of post-industrial economy and is considered a significant social force in the 'Informational Technology Sector'. The economy consists of an individualised but highly flexible labour force. Individualisation sprouts from the nature of work in the Information Technology (IT) industry (Castells 1997: 265 Beck 1998: 111). The new workplace calls for fundamental transformation of work, which is the individualisation of labour in labour process. Labour is disaggregated in its performance, fragmented in its organisation, diversified in its existence and divided in its collective action. Labour loses its collective identity, becomes increasingly individualised in its capacities, in its working conditions and in their own projects.

Work demands flexibility and mobility of labour force as the firms may choose to locate them worldwide in terms of skills and costs or firms may seek highly skilled labour from anywhere by offering the right remuneration and compatible working conditions (Castells 1997: 475). Individualisation is defined as an orientation in which people centre their planning and actions around themselves based on an ideology of self-interest, as opposed to collectivities of various kinds. Manifestation of individualisation is the absence of collective identity among knowledge workers (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006: 48). This workforce prioritises their self-career goals by building their career through job hopping and skill up-gradation. They negotiate their promotions and higher salaries in their individual capacities. They can, however, self-register their complaint/s as there is absence of collective unionisation at the workplace (Rothboeck *et al.* 2001: 43, 59; Upadhya and Vasavi 2006: 49).

The consequences of individualisation in the new workplace are duly noted. This new genre of workforce is over-dependent on labour market and makes them proceed to join new communities consisting of peer groups, self-help groups, or interest groups by retreating from the traditional communities (family and neighbourhood). The new community yearns for personal freedom, independence for adventure

and fun, fashion and consumerism (Gebhardt 2001: 117, 119). Mukherjee (2008: 57-60) further adds that the new workplace generates both individualisation and alienation among the workforce. Alienation is caused due to fragmented nature of work process, work control through electronic surveillance, extreme competitiveness at the workplace and nature of work content delving into long working hours.

'Gender identity' versus 'Self-identity'

The feminist, J.S. Mills in his book *The Subjection of Women* critically points out that women's identity derived from men. The patriarchal structure justifies holding women in subjugated status and as a dependent member of the family. If women were socialised at par with men in all available spheres such as employment, training and education, and had they resisted prejudices labelled against them, then only, they can be liberated from subjection by asserting themselves for self-identity and free choice (Mills 1973:234-35).

In India, during the pre-independence era social space was separated into *ghar* (home) – a spiritual domain for the female and a *bahir* (outside) – the external or material sphere meant for men. These dichotomous social spaces correspond to gendered social roles, validated by traditional patriarchy. The position got relaxed from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards among the modern middle class women on account of their roles outside the home (Chatterjee 2001: 119-21). During this phase, Poggendorf and Kakar (2001: 126-27, 131) assert that 'gender identity' for Indian middle class women are aligned to roles at home such as being a 'powerful mother' and a 'perfect ideal wife'. The cultural conditioning was such that the women should never be independent and should remain subordinated firstly to her father, later to her husband and lastly to her son. They may look forward to education, occupation and income but without compromising the traditional feminine role assignments. Women are socialised to follow 'feminine virtues' and role-set that confines them to household domain making them feel socially inferior to or dependent upon men. They lacked separate space or distinct identity of their own. Hierarchal principle opposes the idea of autonomy and 'individuation' (Kakar 1978: 117, 120).

The situation began to change for women belonging to middle class in the post independent period of India as is evident from empirical studies. Participation of women in the labour market has partially

challenged the gender norms by breaking the dominant family ideologies of inside-outside dichotomy. The process emancipated them from economic dependency and nullified the 'male breadwinner model' (Standing 1991). The first landmark report of Government of India in 1974 was based on macro level empirical investigation on women's status in India. It was highlighted therein that women's participation in economic activities had diluted the traditional prejudices and norms but has not changed their gendered position at the workplace especially among the educated middle-class group (GOI 1974: 209-10).

Post-Liberalised Global Software Industry – Review of Literature

Globalisation or post-liberalised economy has made way for participation of women in the science and technology sector whose consequences are amply reflected in the contemporary literatures. Rowbotham (1995: 43) notes women's entry in science and technology has 'emancipated' them by allowing them to break into male dominated fields and redefined the usual 'male culture' of justifying subordination of women.

If we look into women's position in the Indian scenario for neo-globalised workplace or the information technology sector documented by empirical studies, we find that the new sector of Information Technology/ Information Technology Enabled Sector (IT/ITES) has given substantial employment to women. This sector is now considered a 'de-gendered workplace' which follows equal opportunity policy but gives primacy to professional achievements and individual skills for career progression. It does away with the ascriptive criteria of caste, gender or region. Furthermore, availability of a good pay package coupled with scope for going abroad creates social and spatial mobility for the employees including women (Rothboeck *et al.* 2001: 1, 9-10; Van der Veer 2008: 371).

Kelkar *et al.* (2002: 65, 76, 81) studied IT/ITES industries located in Bangalore and Delhi. They observe that IT work demands employees to make their own decisions, to be conversant with networking capability for enhancing their agency within the limited terms of socially sanctioned structural inequalities. Employees, especially women get mobile and stay alone in different cities without their male relatives. A study on Bangalore highlights the fact that software professionals have redefined the arena of empowerment. The young career-oriented urban women have made substantive stride and

money by working in the IT global market, which has empowered them in a unique and demonstrative way. Conventionally, empowerment is measured in terms of participation in public domain, exerting control over self-earnings/finance and decision making for expenditure thereof, undergoing greater mobility and establishing easy accessibility in male dominated technical areas. From the given context, female empowerment is redefined as an active transformative change in tune with the circumstantial surroundings. Renegotiating family relationships by handling diplomatically with in-laws at home, careers on the work front and reversal of women's devaluated status are some of the demonstrative effects of women empowerment (Clark and Sekher 2007: 288, 315). Kelkar and Nathan (2002: 430) sum up, that the nature of work in IT industry has enhanced women's agency by increasing their household income and mobility and has enabled them to exert more say in household matters. In a nutshell, women in the IT sector, though sufficiently empowered, have not yet been able to challenge the structural inequalities and gender relations because of their need to handle multiple dual roles .

A study based on IT/ITES sectors in Kolkata, located in eastern part of India, during the period 2008 showed that individualisation at the workplace has empowered women techies in enhancing their decision making capacity in the family thereby causing a jolt in the patriarchal foundation of Indian family system (Dutta and Hussain 2010: 3, 11). The qualitative study done in 2003-2005 revealed that women software professionals in Chennai feel empowered by acquiring social skills in having diverse social contacts, self-exploration of various sources of career opportunities and opportunity of earning high salary have given them a new sense of independence. They also feel themselves empowered, unlike their mothers, through their enhanced negotiating ability in reconfiguring gender relations in their respective family domains (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008: 197-98,202-03).

Exposure to the workplace has given them physical, professional and social mobility including the opportunity for going abroad, enjoying career growth, accomplishing affluent lifestyles, luxurious consumption patterns and, above all, new-found confidence. Assertion of women's merit in recruitment and promotion coupled with constant urge for up-gradation of knowledge to stay ahead in competition enhance individual agencies. Enhanced individual identity has partially challenged the traditional identities like caste, however, remain unaffected in them. The negative aspect of workplace

exposure is that the new individualised identity creates an unstable identity and destabilises workers' sense of social root (D'Mello and Sahay 2008: 87).

The study on software professionals with urban middle class backgrounds in Bangalore reassert that they have rapid upward socio-economic mobility in form of change in lifestyles, social living and family structure by donning a new self-identity. They have gained transnational experience by traveling and settling abroad but at the same time they have retained their 'traditional' social and cultural values. The fact shows a new blend of modernity and tradition in the realm of family reconstitution, gender relations and in articulation of new consumerist culture. It is undeniable that they face internal tensions and conflicts in sustaining both the modern and traditional values (Upadhya and Vasavi 2006: 107-19). A study on Kolkata IT sector has clearly depicted a positive trend towards intergenerational mobility in respect of women software professionals with those of their mothers (Bhattacharya and Ghosh 2014).

In keeping with the earlier background studies, this study reflects on the question of development of self-identity among women software professionals vis-a-vis their primordial gender identity. In the process of asserting self-identity, the issue of negotiating with the traditional gender norms comes into play. The relevant analysis has amply shown the empowered position of women techies in contrast to the generation of their mothers.

Quest for Self-Identity vs Gender Identity: Emic View

This section deals with the field that gives a succinct view on how the employment in this new sector of software industry has changed the identity of women software professionals in Kolkata. The field views are derived from anthropological mode of inquiry from the perceived view of respondents' self-identity in contrast with those of their mothers, depicting an intergenerational scenario.

Surge of Self-Identity at Neo-Globalised Workplace

The work context in this new industry provides ample scope for development of workforce's self-identity. The nature of work propel them to make work related on-spot decisions which is quite often instantaneous and spontaneous. These professionals connect themselves with wide social circles or networks constituting mainly of friends, colleagues, ex-employees and bosses within or outside their

firms. Establishing social connections is important in this industry for furthering their career prospects in different companies or preferred locations or for seeking jobs. Nature of work also demands interaction with the clients pertaining to multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and cross-cultural locations across the globe.

Renegotiating Gender Identity

The anthropological mode of inquiry to field respondents suggests a change in re-negotiating gender norms in relation to intergenerational perspective. In education and employment, a substantive number of women are now in technical and professional arenas like their male counterpart. Their participation in this new IT workplace has debunked the conventional gender norms in terms of long working hours, odd hour duties, night work schedules and embarking upon a wide mobility. Many women, in this sector, have proved their worth by holding prime positions and by taking the career seriously. For a woman, on the one hand a job has become a source of financial independence, a tool for individual identity, personal independence, self-confidence and support for fulfilling consumerist lifestyle, while on the other it strengthens more voice in family matters leading to dilution of patriarchal voice as the sole opinion.

Landing in a job has empowered them to exercise their self-choice in choosing careers, spouses and own reproductive preferences. Financial independence has freed them from economic dependency on the male members of family i.e. father or husband. Dual income model in the family, thus, gets generated by replacing the single income model. Financial independence, most women feel, has rendered them a greater respect in the society. Considering their comparative position with that of their mothers, they have become more independent, more vocal in their thought and action. But their greatest challenge lies in maintaining a balance between work and life. Career orientation never relieved them from family responsibilities. They are to tussle between works and domestic duties in a spirit to maintain both with equal importance. Their concern is rooted to their affiliation to gender identity/gender ideology, which acts as the determinant for strategising dual roles.

Undernoted Table-1 shows relation between prioritising family and career with that of marital status. In the table, first group represents those who prioritise family only, the second group values career and

the third group includes women who are bent upon balancing family and career both.

Table 1: Orientation of respondent by marital status.

Orientation of Professional	Marital Status		Total No. (%)
	Unmarried No. (%)	Ever Married No. (%)	
Pro-family oriented	9 (9.8)	36 (22.8)	45 (18.0)
Pro-Career oriented	38 (41.3)	25 (15.8)	63 (25.2)
Transitional oriented	45 (48.9)	97 (61.4)	142 (56.8)
Total	92 (100.0)	158 (100.0)	250 (100.0)
Chi-Square Value: 22.037; df=2; p<.001			

The relation between gender identity and marital status are significantly related as per Table-1. In percentage terms, ever married ones mostly (61 percent approx.) belong to the third group who opts for balancing family and career. The second group, constituting 41 percent of the unmarried professionals, wants to prioritise career. Usually, the first and the third group of women workers, have strong inclination to family and children while career focus gets depreciated. Only the second group, forming a minority, focuses on career possessing the ability to break the glass ceiling.

Based on gender identity, orientation of women techies towards work and family gets determined. They are classified as per Table-1 as under:

a) Pro-family orientated group: Having a long term commitment towards the family. Family remains priority for them.

b) Pro-Careerist orientated group: Women having commitment towards their careers than over their family.

c) Transitional oriented group: They give priority to both career and family. They emphasise on work-life balance.

The third group forms the majority. In tune with the traditional expectation of the married, family is prioritised. The traditional expectation for family remains primal responsibilities to them. The

married women respondents are emancipated in a limited sense compared to unmarried ones. Despite this, the traditional patriarchal values remain the same. Till now, women are primarily responsible for taking care and welfare of the family members. The said duty can be taken care of by self or from hired sources or through extended family members.

Interpretative analysis: Etic view

The individual identity of a person is basically shaped by the tradition and individual biography such as background of the family coupled with educational and workplace exposure. Nexus between tradition and individual biography evolves from both rootednesses to primordial identities of caste, region, nation, ethnicity and gender on one hand, and egalitarian, equalitarian and individual identities prevailing in the public sphere on the other.

The newly emerged IT workplace follows non-traditionalised norms with referral system for recruitment and career prospects, wider scope for mobility and unstandardised working hours including late night work schedules. The workplace has enabled women workforce to renegotiate with traditional gender norms in workplace with standardised working hours without hassles of any late night work schedules and almost nil or with very restricted mobility. The new workplace setting showcases a multi-cultural environment in which professionals constantly interact, communicate, and meet clients, belonging to different nations, cultures and religion, on regular intervals. Their association with the workplace surroundings give them leverage to broaden their outlook, and in tune with global workplace they are working. They appear to bear a 'global identity' and consider themselves as 'global citizens' by moving away from primordial identities. These traits often create a dilemma between traditional and liberal values in the minds of educated middle class software professionals.

Because of their educational and professional attainments, women professionals often assert their 'selves' both in private and public lives. They dare to question traditional gender identity by breaking into non-science and non-technical disciplines which were traditionally identified for men. Career opportunities outside home for women tend to revoke the earlier gender identity meant for them in the home domain exclusively. Gendered space that relegates women to

homestead or private domain and men for public sphere now stands almost erased out.

In nutshell, empowerment of women is evident from their frequent raising voices in family matters and in overcoming many of the conventional patriarchal injunctions like earmarking domesticity solely meant for them. Less mobility, restriction for intermingling with the opposite sex, and lesser access to mobility etc. were expected from them. Patriarch, as the decision maker, is no more writ large like their mothers' era. Irrespective of all these rosy pictures, the real challenge lurks in maintaining work and life balance for the women work force. The identity of these new middle class women professionals is governed by both tradition and modern identities or, in short, their gender identities are in transition between domesticity and public sphere or oscillates between primordial gender identity and egalitarian or progressive outlook.

Conclusion

In this paper, I begun with the argument that the neo-globalised era premised that the 'one world' access to information empowered individuals and that over-dependence on the labour-market made them more individualised. Therefore, the objective was to explore the extent to which women software professionals in Kolkata IT sector are individualised by outgrowing their primordial gender identity. Before deriving from the fieldwork, we have theoretically outlined the concept of 'self-identity', leading to individualism which stands opposed to primordial identity or gender identity.

The findings reveal that the change is in motion with substantive number of women employees in IT industry having trans-national work experience have altered their lifestyles, form of sociality, family structure and self-identity. Moreover, their inclusion in considerable numbers in men-dominated software sector has, obviously, redefined the traditional gender norms in terms of mobility and career aspirations in technological field. Working at odd and extended hours is not now a problem for them. The nature of work in IT sector has immensely enhanced women's scope for increasing their agencies. This, in turn, leads to concomitant change in their status by developing an increased sense of autonomy and empowerment in negotiating with the traditional gender norms.

In traditional gender norms, identity and subjectivities of women is kept confined to private realm under subjection and dependency to male members - be it a father, a husband or a son. Modernising factors like education, employment and mobility has potentially helped them to redefine gender identity and to assert their self-identity. They exercise their autonomy to challenge certain areas of public-private dichotomy by making their way out of structural constraints. The globalising influence at the workplace has undoubtedly contributed a lot towards enhancement of autonomy of women professionals. They, however, prefer to stick to their traditional roles and identities. As a result, balancing of work and life still remains a concern for them.

The traditional hierarchal values and institutionalised inequality have continuous presence in women's lives in Indian society as opposed to the egalitarian global values prevailing in the workplace domain. The modernised work culture under the global multi-cultural environment infuse western values and culture within the workforce to get them socialised consequently in demanding their rightful place in the domains of equality, autonomy and individualisation. The western philosophy of egalitarianism or equality agenda comes in conflict with the traditional principle of hierarchy and gender inequality being ingrained in the psyche of the workforce . The resultant effect is the constant conflict concerning the values between the two opposing forces of tradition and modernity. The struggle poses the professionals dilemma between the 'push and pull'/ 'rootedness or up-rootedness' in the minds and behaviours of the new genre of middle class IT professionals. The individual identity of these upwardly mobile middle class women professionals are in transition as they are torn between the internal urge of adhering to Indian culture and traditional values and the unflinching spell of global identity at the workplace. On the whole, the gender identity of women software professionals in India appears to be somewhat paradoxical.

The net effect, as derived from the study, is that the professionals are partially emancipated from the structural rigidities being somewhat relaxed. But this does not liberate them to eschew the structure. Thus the phenomenon is aptly termed as the 'structured individuation' – an offshoot of the new globalised era rather than the widely known 'individualisation' thesis. Individuals have the potential to bring about social change. With their power for introspection and reflexivity they are quite at ease to question the traditional practices and norms. A

contemporary perspective of social change occurs out of the inter-relation between social structural conditions and that of agencies.

Contrasting values of tradition and modernity working, in a synchronised fashion, are embedded in the employees' psyche. This is increasingly ingrained in situational and historical context. The professionals are, thus, sandwiched between the progressive ideology and traditional values or between empowering (opportunities) and disempowering (constrains) aspects. The present picture is in consonance with Betteille (2001: 81) assertion that Indian middle class bear dual identity distinctly differentiated on two axes: firstly on the axis of occupation, education and income and secondly, on the axis of language, religion and caste. This co-existence of two sets of social values – new and old values – give the Indian middle class its distinctive character. They are always at the juncture of two value sets of 'to be or not to be' in following modern or traditional value brackets, characterising the class. Their empowerment potentiality lies in the realisation of either acceptance or rejection of the traditional values – the context of which is shaped by the socialised historical tradition – against the background of individual biography.

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Significance of Community Based Organisations in the Empowerment of Women
A Case Study from Chittoor of Andhra Pradesh

Kasi Eswarappa

Abstract

In a development forum, there is a great need to look at the ground realities of organisations, especially in the context of the post-globalisation scenario. Thereby comes the notion of 'community' from the donor's point of view. The donors' participation in the daily activities of the people, especially women, to make them earn their means of livelihoods poses questions which are of prime importance to have an academic engagement theoretically, empirically and otherwise.

This study discusses the role of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in implementing developmental programmes in rural areas across the country. It is noteworthy in the case of sericulture enterprise a large number of women are active at various levels, which further proved to be one of the important crop enterprise prevailing in the locality. This paper attempts to interrogate how women empowered themselves as a part of the CBOs. This could eventually lead to policy makers, government and other agencies to advise development programmes. The chapter draws its analysis and inferences from a fieldwork carried out with the sericulturists of a village in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh in India.

Introduction

Brown and Kalegaonkar (2002) rightly pointed out that the civil society in general and development Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in particular are increasingly recognised as important actors in social, political, and economic development. Increased interest in NGOs is in part a response to growing awareness of the limitations of the state as an agent of development. This trend also reflects an increased awareness of local civic activism as a critical ingredient for political and economic change. Attention to the sector is also a consequence of the dramatic successes of some development NGOs in improving the quality of life of grassroots populations.

Thus, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) have a greater role to play in the development of marginal communities in India. Their presence and participation in the development process could help to minimise the problems of unemployment, poverty, backwardness[1], illiteracy, and superstitious beliefs. To articulate their grievances and put forth their problems, community level agencies, such as CBOs, must actively participate in the day to day activities of these communities and create awareness and strengthen their economic capital, social capital and resource capitals in the vicinities. Gupta (2011) views that India is still struggling with poverty, especially rural poverty, which is most widespread among the socially disadvantaged groups.

Following a global shift in the poverty debate from top–down to bottom–up approaches, there seems to be a greater need for engagement at the local level to tackle with the problem of poverty. NGOs have an important role to play in this context. NGOs working across borders face increased accountability demands. Although many have proposed ways of changing accountability practices, the debate is rarely informed by leaders' perspectives of how accountability is perceived and practised across different organisational settings (Schmitz et al. 2012).

Sooryamoorthy (2008) posits that the programmes on microfinance are designed to support poor and marginalised women in particular and are mostly intended to help them escape from the tangles of poverty by supporting them make a sustainable source of income. Women involved in these programmes, earn and manage their own income and find themselves independent to the male members. Thus, as Naila Kabeer (1998) observes, microfinance has been the force behind the increasing income and the assets. Further, it is now accepted as a valid means and a mechanism for increasing the productivity of the poor by addressing market failure in credit markets and harnessing the market incentives (McGuire and Conroy 2000).

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[1] Sundaram (2006) in his paper examined the criteria of backwardness among the different social groups in India. For related studies and information, see Baru 2002; Barua, 2010; Dahiwale, 2000; Govinda, 2009; Gudavarthy and Gudavarthy, 2004; Jodhka, 2002; Kasi, 2011; Kathuria & Khan, 2007; Pai et al, 2005; Seth, 2009; Srinivasan & Kumar, 1999 and Stewart, 2005.

One of the key assumptions of microfinance in developing countries is that loans are the only financing system that can provide sufficient capital to meet the need for microenterprise finance (Pretes 2002).

Under microfinance programmes, credit remains open for a variety of purposes, ranging from immediate consumption needs to the accumulation of assets. However, the credit users in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh are using the credit loans to repay the already taken loans from the money lenders, cooperative societies and the rural banks. It is also reported that some credit users perform their children's weddings by paying huge amount of dowry. This is vividly explained by Selim (1995) in his study where he notes that though loans are provided for specific purposes, women use them for several other, defeating the very purpose.

Other studies have proven that microcredit loans result in increasing the household consumption levels. Pitt and Khandekar's (1998) study of female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh reports that access to credit results in an increase in household level consumption. Jiggins (1999) finds that the primary aim of the women borrowers, even though entrepreneurs, is to ensure the subsistence consumption for the family members. Khan (1999) in his study in Bangladesh found that married women members spent their income on household goods, food, children's education and clothing. Self-employment activities definitely bring in an income, increase consumption levels, enhance the level of education, and increase the leisure (Morduch 1999).

Is Microfinance Empowering the underprivileged women?

There are innumerable studies which intensely explain the importance of microfinance in the lives of underprivileged women[2] in India and elsewhere. There are also studies which depict the sad stories of microfinance[3] and its deadly effects on microfinance programmes.

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[2] For detailed discussion and explanation, see the works of Amudha and Banu 2009; Banerjee and Ghosh 2012; Chirayath and Chirayath, 2010; Desouza, 2012; Geetha and Indira, 2010; Guenther, 2015; Guenther and Kasi, 2015; Kasi, 2013; Mukherjee and Kundu, 2012; Panda, 2009; Sengupta, 2013; Sen and Majumdar, 2015.

[3] For instance, see the works of Ahmed et al, 2013; Baruah, 2009; Jung, 2008; Mohanty, 2013; Ofreneo, 2005; Pyle and Ward, 2003; Schwittary, 2011; and Torri and Martinez, 2014.

Nawaz's (2010) study in Bangladesh explores that microfinance has resulted in a moderate reduction in the poverty of borrowers, according to socio-economic indicators, yet has not benefitted the poorest in the village. To make microfinance a more effective means for poverty reduction, services such as skills training, technological support, education and health related strategies should be included with microfinance.

Perilleux et al. (2012) argue that microfinance institutions allocate their surplus to stakeholders. This process varies depending upon the ownership structure of microfinance institutions. Beisland and Mersland (2012) argue that rating assessment of microfinance institutions is mainly driven by size, profitability and risk. Further, they suggest that these ratings convey information similar to that communicated by traditional credit ratings. Sanyal (2006) highlights the importance of partnership and capacity building strategies among intermediary NGOs. The partnership is viewed as a cure for centrally managed bureaucratic NGOs and capacity building as a measure for strengthening local NGOs.

Greenspan (2014) offers a Bourdieu-inspired organisational analysis of advocacy NGOs. Pierre Bourdieu's writings provide valuable propositions for understanding non-profit advocacy resources that go beyond commonly analysed economic, human, or social resources. He describes the relational, accumulative, and transferable nature of Bourdieu's forms of capital, and connects them to advocacy NGOs. Similarly, Schneider (2009) observes that social capital has become a popular concept in non-profit studies, but, given the confusion over its definition, it is not as widely used as it could be in organisational analysis. In addition, much of the social capital research in non-profit studies focuses either on the role of non-profits in fostering civic engagement or on the ways that non-profits build social capital for individuals associated with the organisation.

Haq (2004) briefly introduces the current debate on governance based on partnership between the state and NGOs; explains the forms and dimensions of such partnership in the case of Bangladesh, and evaluates this partnership experience in terms of whether it has achieved the stipulated objectives of development and empowerment. He explores major factors and interests (internal and external) behind this partnership and offers some suggestions to rethink partnership and overcome its drawbacks in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

Additionally, Ahmed et al. (2006), Coleman (2006), Hiatt and Woodworth (2006), Park and Ren (2001) and Shaw (2004) have shown that underprivileged women are credit worthy and capable to engage in meaningful investment. Microfinance is a potent tool towards inclusion into productive economic activity and women's empowerment. It provides a means to finance for the underprivileged of a homogenous socioeconomic background and arrange themselves into Self-Help Groups (SHG)[4].

Women Empowerment[5] in India

Lyngdoh and Pati (2013) evaluated the impact of microfinance on women empowerment in a matrilineal tribal society of northeast region. The study highlights that microfinance has a positive impact on income, expenditure and savings. It led to an improvement in asset structure, increased access to livestock, micro machines, family wealth and family savings, education decision-making, improved mobility, communication skills, voicing of concerns, self-confidence, increased

[4] SHG movement became very popular among the rural and tribal people of India in post 2000 era. An SHG is a group of 10 to 20 people from a homogeneous class who come together for addressing their common problems. They make voluntary thrift on a regular basis and use this pooled resource (warm money) to make small interest bearing loans to the members. On regular practice, it creates financial discipline and credit history. The group is then linked with the banks where loans (cold money) are made to the SHG without any collateral at market interest rates in certain multiples of their accumulated savings. Here 'warm money' add up to 'cold money' and peer pressure replaces the 'collateral' for the loans. For further reading and analysis see Dasgupta, 2005; Galab and Rao, 2003; Harper et al, 2005; Jakimow and Kilby, 2006; Kannabiran, 2005; Kannabiran, 2005; Kasi, 2009 and 2013; Kropp and Suran, 2002; Mishra, 1999; Rao, 2007; Varman, 2005; Vasimalai & Narender, 2007; Vatta, 2003.

[5] Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. It fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important, for more detailed discussion and analysis, see Banerjee and Ghosh, 2012; Geetha and Indira, 2011; Grown et al., 2003; Jakimow, 2012; Kasi, 2013; Kay, 2002/03 (clarify the year); Krishna, 2003; Moyle et al, 2006; Patnaik, 2013; Sarin, 2001; Subramaniam, 2012; Swain, 2006; Torri and Martinez, 2014.

political participation to promote gender equality, among other. In a recent study Geeta (2014) examines the impact of livelihood oriented sericulture service provision for small and medium holding farmers on gender relationships and socio-economic empowerment. Women have gained many entitlements including asset possession, work participation, decision-making, access to resources such as credit, land and market and participation in local civic bodies.

Earlier, Jonsson (2010) critically analyses empowerment projects in a local community in southern India and explores the shortcomings of development projects aimed at changing the living conditions of marginalised people. Aziz et al. (2011) vividly discussed that women's empowerment is recognised as an imperative for achieving women's rights, health and development. The achievement of women's empowerment as an end goal or even initiation of the process necessitates the usage of approaches that promote participation and incite action.

As Banerjee and Ghosh (2012) rightly observe, self-employment holds the key to the continuity of employment, where the women fare better than their wage-earning counterparts when it comes to continuity of employment. Their study dwelt on the factors influencing the different indicators of women empowerment among the members of 26 matured all-woman SHGs. It also isolated the socio-economic, demographic factors influencing the joint probability of a group member being both empowered and employed. The study concluded that training significantly influences various dimensions of empowerment, and the trained group members are more likely to be both empowered as well as employed.

Women constitute 48.1 percent of the country's population. They play an important role in fields such as agriculture, sericulture, dairy farming, handicraft, among other, yet their contribution in these fields has not been considered an economic activity. A large number of them work in the primary sector as unskilled workforce and get wages lower than men. A large number of women are illiterate; hence most of them suffer from economic subjugation, powerlessness, isolation, vulnerability, and poverty.

The issues of economic uplift of women and their empowerment have been the prime concern of the government in various schemes[6]. And so it comes to the NGO's endeavour, the implementation of the programmes such as Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) by organising SHGs. It is noteworthy that the organisation, Development of Human Action (DHAN) working in the area has been focusing mainly on the economic development of the schemes, involving the youth, in particular, women and poor farmers which belong to Dalit and marginal groups.

As there are functionaries operating at the grass root levels, organising the local communities in the village, there exists a possibility of effective implementation of the schemes. Moreover, it deals with the primary concerns of the people – food and clothing. To make people self-reliant and as the NGO plans to slowly withdraw, so that the dependency of the people on external agencies may be minimised which is a sound objective for the real development of the local communities.

There are eight SHGs functioning in Chittoor. The women were attracted to the benefits such as savings, availability of loans for the purchase of sheep, buffalos and cattle. People realised the importance of such groups post the formation of one and slowly new groups emerged. The group members meet regularly and decide the future course of action. In these meetings, the DHAN and SEDS functionaries educate them in savings, health, among others. With regular group meetings in the village and outside conducted by DHAN, the awareness level has increased enormously about their health, child education and savings. With the savings, women are now able to withdraw money at the time of emergencies. According to Radha Bai, aged 42, prior to the formation of the groups, if anybody was ill in the family, they had to rush to moneylender for help. Whereas now, SHGs serve the purpose. They borrow money from the

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[6] Women empowerment is the primary focus of the government in majority of the schemes, for instance, Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP). In order to improve the present status of women in agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities for her empowerment, Governemnt of India has started MKSP, as a sub-component of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

group. The lending of money to an individual depends on the severity of the demand or the necessity of the person.

Until now, lack of work and consequently no wages kept them sleepless at nights. They used to migrate to other areas as wage labourers. Wages were very less compared to the working hours. They were not aware of their health, children's education, sanitation, savings, among others. Earlier they also felt that for women there was no role to play in the family or household decision-making process except to nod their head to the mothers-in-law and their husband's opinions.

The women kept oblivious to the programmes like *Balika Samriddi Yojana* (Girl Child Development Programme), mother and children protection, among others. After the entry of DHAN, works such as pebble bunding and contour bundings have become regular. Another important feature is the equal wage rates for men and women both. Women felt very happy that there is no gender inequality in the rates of wages. Their saving levels, according to them, have improved enormously due to the efforts of the DHAN. The majority of the women are sending their children to schools as they have realised the importance of education. Also, they have plans to contest elections in the village and thus participate in the village administration and policymaking process.

Many people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. However, the productivity levels in the agriculture sector are low. This is not only because of the pressure on land, but agriculture in India is also often characterised by poor organisation, limited capital and investment. Hence, India is directing all their development strategies on the productivity levels in rural areas.

In India, nearly 76.3 percent of the population lives in rural areas and 68.8 percent of it constitutes the agricultural population (Sandhya Rani-1988 and Kasi 2011; 2013). Indian agriculture is mainly classified into two categories on the basis of availability of water resources, namely 1) Rain fed or dry land farming and 2) Irrigated farming. India has a net sown area of over 140 million hectares, of which only 41.2 million hectares are under irrigation (Kasi, 2009, 2011 & 2013). Irrigation facilities are inadequate in India. Therefore, agriculture is still a gamble and at the mercy of monsoons.

The government of India has given high priority to major irrigation projects in the five-year plan keeping in view the drought conditions and the plight of the farmers. Hence, such projects have been designed to accelerate economic development, rural enhancement, eradication of poverty and unemployment. The incidence of poverty and unemployment in rural areas is very high with 33.4 percent of the people living below the poverty line, compared to 20.1 percent of their urban counterparts (Narsaiah and Jayaraju 1999; Kasi 2011 & 2015).

The policy makers in India have taken an attempt to reduce unemployment and poverty. Moreover, they have realised that the employment opportunities can be created ensuring minimum income and to improve the standard of living conditions of the poor. In order to achieve the goal, the government focused on integrated rural development programmes. Indian agriculture sector is not only confined to the cultivation of traditional crops alone. Farmers are encouraged to involve other farm sector activities such as animal husbandry, poultry rearing, fishing, social forestry, sericulture, among others (Ghosh 1988; Kasi 2013).

As of now, sericulture has become the most promising rural activity pertaining to its minimum gestation period, less investment, maximum employment potential and quick turnover for the investment. It generates direct and indirect employment in various ways. Firstly, mulberry cultivation creates employment on the farm and secondly, cocoon production which uses mulberry leaves as an input, creates large-scale employment for the family labour of the mulberry growers. There are instances of non-mulberry growers taking up cocoon production alone as a full-time occupation. They buy leaves from mulberry growers and use them as raw material for cocoon production. Further, reeling is done in rural areas or semi-urban areas. The employment generated by this activity helps reduce the rural unemployment.

Sericulture in India has experienced many ups and downs in the past. It is noteworthy that the non-progress in this activity was the result of the gap between the villagers and the government in terms of knowledge and resources. India has made tremendous progress in the production of mulberry silk when the intervention was carried by the Community-Based Organisations (CBO). As a result, an increasing progress in sericulture has been marked. There is a tremendous scope for the expansion of its production in the country if the community

based organisations take an active role. Sericulture can be regarded as a strategy for development of the backward regions of the state. The status of sericulture in the given area also depends on various schemes and projects implemented by the government.

National Sericulture Project (NSP), implemented in the 1980s with the aid of the World Bank, aimed to generate additional employment to about 1.62 lakh people. It envisaged providing full time employment and income to those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections.

A project with the help from the Swiss government through the Swiss Development Cooperation with Rs.242.47 lakhs was sanctioned in 1987-88 in Andhra Pradesh. The main objective of the project was to improve the status of the small and marginal farmers engaged in sericulture. The project also envisioned to bridge some of the missing linkages within the sericulture industry and to provide direct benefit to the sericulturists. The programme included the construction of Chawki Rearing Centres (CRCs), mobile disinfection units, and infrastructure facilities for silk reeling and providing training to the silk reelers. In addition to the above, it also included the provision of facilitating the cocoon marketing, establishment of dupion silk units and production of bivoltine yarn.

Under Indo-Swiss project (Seri-2000) nurseries were raised to establish tree plantations and drip irrigation system was provided. Central government released 98.44 lakhs. The main objective was the formation of productivity clubs, training bivoltine seed farmers, and strengthening existing computerised management information system besides assistance to the Research Institute at Hindupur (GOAP, 2000). In addition to the externally aided projects, there were a number of other governmental programmes to which the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) contributed for the development of sericulture in Kotha Indlu, in particular, and Chittoor District, in general.

The DPAP was started on the basis of the mid-term appraisal of the fourth plan. It was kept confined to those areas, which had been originally covered under the Rural Works Programme in 1970-71.

Taking from the development strategy adopted by the state, Department of Sericulture undertook a few development programmes

in Chittoor district in order to improve the conditions of the poorer sections in the district. However, there is a high variation in opting for sericulture practice as a livelihood means by and large. Many sericulturists have withdrawn from the practice pertaining to the heavy losses due to a number of reasons. So, there exists a need to understand the causes behind it and its promotion strategies with the help of Community Based Organisations.

There are many studies made on the technical aspects of the sericulture practice. A few are also available on the economic aspect of the sericulture. Hardly any study has been conducted on the role of community based organisations in implementing developmental programmes with reference to sericulture practice. In this context, the present study probes the role of community-based organisations in implementing development programmes, which directly or indirectly affect the sericulture activity in Kotha Indlu village of Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh.

Methodology

In Andhra Pradesh, after Anantapur, mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing and cocoon production is mostly concentrated in Chittoor district, which accounts for nearly 23 percent of the land area and hence Chittoor district has been chosen for the present study. Based on the secondary data and after discussions with the sericulture officials, a pilot study was conducted in three villages. Kotha Indlu village of Kuppam Mandal was found to be more suitable for the purpose. The data for the study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. For the purpose of collection of primary data fieldwork was carried out in Kotha Indlu village. This study is a qualitative micro-level study of a sericulture village.

The primary data was collected through a structured household schedule, informal interviews using detailed checklists, key informant interviews, case studies and observation from all respondents in the village. In accordance with the nature of the study, greater importance was attached throughout the fieldwork for an understanding on the role of CBO's in implementing developmental programmes with reference to sericulture, that are emphasised among the people of the village in their activities relating to sericulture. Secondary data and information are collected from the annual reports of the Department of Sericulture, Andhra Pradesh, the studies and reports brought out by the Central Silk Board, Bangalore, Institute of Social and Economic

Change (ISEC), Bangalore, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, and Central Sericulture Research and Training Institute, Mysore.

A household census schedule was used for collecting socio-economic data from each household in the village by administrating it to the head of the household. The schedule was aimed at obtaining information relating to members in the household; family composition; type of family; economic, social, political and religious status; and educational attainments of members of household, etc. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather information on beliefs, attitudes and customs. Interviews were also conducted with sericulture officials and members of the farmers club and the members of Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) groups of the village. Interviews were held with the senior and the young people of the village as well to elicit information on the practice of sericulture and silkworm rearing. Informal interviews were conducted with the key-informants and many other respondents to gather information required to satisfy the study objectives. Discussions were also held with the members of the Farmers' Club, Chief Ministers Empowerment of Youth (CMEY), Nehru Yuva Sangam (Youth Group), DWCRA, DHAN Foundation (NGO) members and sericulture officials in order to understand role of CBOs in implementing sericulture as a developmental strategy.

Case study technique was particularly employed to gather information with regards to the role of the people engaged in sericulture. Case studies proved to be a helpful tool so as to substantiate the data collected from other sources. Throughout the fieldwork the researcher resorted to observation, both participant and non-participant, for finer details and verification of data collected through the use of several techniques of data collection. Further, through observation, it was possible to check the disparity between what people say and what people do.

Findings and Discussion

In Kotha Indlu village, agriculture is based on seasonal rainfall. An uneven rainfall makes them seek help from the government. The government suggested them to change the crop patterns and find alternative crops. In this context, it is important to note that the governmental programmes played a key-role in promoting sericulture.

Sericulturists in Kotha Indlu are happy about the returns they are drawing. They felt that due to the developmental programmes their returns have slightly improved. This prompted more people to practice sericulture in the village. Sericulturists in Kotha Indlu have availed Bivoltine programme, Adarana Scheme, CMEY, DWCRA and Catalytic Special Area Development programme and other development programmes.

Under Bivoltine programme in the village Kotha Indlu, two sericulturists were selected and were given assistance to raise mulberry plantation and to construct rearing house. Succeedingly they started with practising bivoltine silkworm rearing.

Under Adarana Programme, the department of sericulture provided chandrikas to the sericulturists who had come under this scheme. Four sericulture farmers got pesticides under Adarana Scheme in Kotha Indlu. The scheme resulted in minimising their losses and helped in an improved yield. However, they complained of sericulture officials not properly distributing the pesticides to the needy sericulturists.

Under CMEY scheme, four to five people form an association and register their name as youth organisation (Yuva Sangham). In Kuppam, Nehru Yuva Sangham gets the loan under CMEY. Under this, they bought chandrikas[7] and constructed a shed to keep the chandrikas. In Kotha Indlu, Nehru Yuva Kendra also made an attempt to the CMEY scheme and is awaiting its award.

Initially, DWCRA was launched as a pilot programme in 50 selected districts with UNICEF co-operation to strengthen the women component of poverty alleviation programmes. In selecting these districts, priority was given to those with low female literacy and high infant mortality rate so that the most backward sections of the rural population could derive the benefits first. The primary thrust was providing self-employment through formation of groups of 10-15 women from poor households at the village level for delivery of services like credit, skill training and infrastructural support (in the form of chandrikas). Groups of poor women assisted through a

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[7] Chandrika or cocoonage which is a circular basket with a spiral wall about five cm width to facilitate the worms to attach their cocoons to them.

package including subsidies, training for skill up-gradation, group revolving fund, group work centres and special extension staff. Each group is given a one-time grant of Rs. 15000 as revolving fund contributed equally by the Government of India, the State Government and the UNICEF, for infrastructure, purchase of raw materials (Chandrikas, Nets, *Thattalu*) and other activities.

In Kotha Indlu, DWCRA group plays an important role in assisting the sericulture farmers. Here there are 9 DWCRA groups participating in the development of sericulture. DWCRA groups made people more coherent towards their work and further helped them to cultivate sericulture. Salla Krishnaveni, 28, lives with her husband, three children and mother-in-law. She studied till class 10 in Kotha Indlu, got married to her father's sister's son, Subramaniam, a Vidya Volunteer (academic instructor) in Chandam Village, near Kotha Indlu. Krishnaveni has been practising sericulture for seven years. She is the leader of DWCRA group Bharatha Matha started in the year 1998. They meet once in a month and each one of them pays Rs 30/- or more. After the meeting, one person would go to the bank and deposit the money.

Case Study I

Krishnaveni says that sometimes they go to private grainages like Purnima Grainage in Krishnagiri and Gopikrishna grainage in Bangalore. They also go to the government grainages in Kuppam. Women participate in the programmes like Janmabhoomi[8] Shramadanam, as members of a particular DWCRA group. In one of the Janmabhoomi programme, they constructed a school building in the Kotha Indlu village with the amount collected from each DWCRA group.

Under Catalytic Special Area Development Programme proposed by the Central Silk Board (Bangalore), the following programmes are undertaken by the Department of Sericulture, Kuppam:

Drip Irrigation: By using drip irrigation system one can cultivate mulberry with less water in regions of water in scarce.   The

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[8] Janmabhoomi programme initiated by Nara Chandrababu Naidu has broadly three objectives, 'Prajala Vaddaku Palana' (administration to the doorsteps of the people), 'Shramadanam' (donation of labour) and 'Micro-level planning'.

government is lending subsidy to sericulturists to follow drip irrigation system. Subsidy is 40 per cent of the total cost of the project. In the study village, one   sericulturist by name Venkatalakshmi was selected under the Drip Irrigation scheme and he has availed this facility and adopted bivoltine sericulture. The criterion for selection of the sericulturist is suitable land in one particular area.

Case Study II

Lakshmi, 44, is a sericulturist in Kotha Indlu. She has her mother, husband and two son's living with him. Her eldest son, 14, studies the Class 8 in Tirupati. Lakshmi studied up to Class 6. According to the convenor of the Farmers' Club, Lakshmi is a very hard working person, who plays an important role in the village politics and other activities. She keeps herself always busy.

Lakshmi has two acres of wetland and five acres of dry land. In dry land she cultivates groundnut, Ragulu and Jowar, that are mostly rainfed crops. In the irrigated land, she cultivates mulberry, flowers and paddy. She has an acre of mulberry garden, where she follows drip irrigation system. This has added to saving water sufficient for another crop. Because of this, she says, she is saving water, which is sufficient for another crop. Also, in the past while bringing cross breed Disease Free Layings (DFLs), she faced the scarcity in water for the mulberry garden. Repeated attempts of thinking brought her to the Department of Sericulture, where she was given the idea of drip irrigation.

The department of sericulture officials explained her the benefits of drip irrigation method. The drip-irrigation could save water that eventually led to the dual cultivation of the flowers and sericulture. Post the system of irrigation was installed, sericulture officials from Chittoor paid a visit and selected her as one of the bivoltine mulberry rearers in Kuppam region. Under bivoltine programme, 'Swarnandhra' seed was awarded to him, which is a new bivoltine seed developed by the Andhra Pradesh Sericulture Research Training Centre in Hindupur.

Swarnandhra gives good yield to farmers and the duration of crop also is less, ranging from 18-20 days. Scientists from Central Silk Board, Bangalore, visited these farmers in the past and the cocoons are taken to Mysore for further research. She informed saying the returns are

very high, as one kilograms of cocoons fetch Rs. 250/- and 100 DFLs would yield 70-85 kgs of cocoons. However, he got 65 kgs for the first crop and 68 kgs for the second.

Construction of rearing sheds: Under Catalytic Special Area Development Programme (CADP) the Government has constructed rearing shed for some beneficiaries. The following case study of Chandrakala gives an account of benefits enjoyed by a beneficiary under CADP.

Case Study III

Chandrika, 36, studied till intermediate. Her two children study in Class 2 at Kuppam. Her parents, brother and her family live with her. Her brother is doing some cloth business in Bangalore. She has seven acres of wetland and two acres of dry land. In the wetland besides mulberry, she is cultivating paddy, flowers and potato, whereas in dry land she cultivates groundnuts and Ragulu. According to the Convenor of Farmers' club, Chandrika is one of the progressive sericulturists in the village and she is one of the Swarnandhra seed rearers in the village.

Chandrika has two acres of mulberry garden and Department of Sericulture selected her under CADP for constructing a rearing shed. They sanctioned her an amount of Rs. 50000/- for reinforced concrete roof (pai kappu) construction through a commercial bank. Before construction of rearing shed, she was rearing in her dwelling house and was getting reasonable yields. After construction of rearing shed, the yield was even better.

Productivity Club, the most recent offshoot of the extension methods, is very much in consonance with the organisation of quality circles in Japan and some European countries. Each Productivity club consists of 10-15 members. Andhra Pradesh, the second largest producer of silk, has established Productivity Clubs in the area of sericulture and Chittoor district is no exception in this regard. The main objective of the Productivity Clubs is to establish a Voluntary Association of local reelers, twisters and weavers so as to establish business links within themselves and reduce dependence on silk yarn traders of selected areas. Productivity Clubs are expected to increase the awareness of productivity and quality parameters in relation to their profitability. It aims at assisting people in the upgradation and introduction of new technologies and sort out the problems with the banks, the

government departments and sericulture farmers. Sericulturists in Kotha Indlu are planning to start their own Productivity Club.

Productivity Club acts as a gateway for introducing new technology among the sericulturists and members of the club act as models for others. Participation in the Club is voluntary and club works on democratic principles. The clubs are already in operation in the nearby villages.

Inspite of all these programmes, the sericulturists in Kuppam, and Kotha Indlu in particular, are still facing the problems of rearing sheds, lack of awareness, low female literacy and absence of non-governmental organisations in the area.

Concluding Remarks

Sericulture in Andhra Pradesh is broadly classified into two distinct sectors, namely mulberry and non-mulberry; although Andhra Pradesh has the distinction of being one of the states in India which produces all the four commercially known varieties of silk. The promotional agencies have played an essential and dynamic role in the development of sericulture. The Directorate of Sericulture, Hyderabad, and the State Sericultural Research and Training Institute, Hindupur, have been helping by providing suitable technologies, evolving new varieties of mulberry and silkworms. Further, the biggest impetus in recent times to the development of sericulture is the implementation of National Sericulture Project (NSP) with an assistance of Rs. 555/- crores from the World Bank and the Swiss Development Cooperation. With increased financial and technical assistance, sericulture has been extended to new areas and non-sericulture states as well.

The study village, which is in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, is adjacent to Kolar, and given that both are drought prone districts. They have the unique distinction of raising mulberry under irrigated conditions. In spite of recurring droughts, there is enormous growth of mulberry during the last 15 years, as mulberry is drought resistant. The infrastructural facilities available in the district have also helped the fast growth of sericulture. However, there is a need to improve the infrastructural facilities in Chittoor to meet the growing demand of sericulture.

Employment opportunities in sericulture can be categorised under two heads. Those opportunities relating to mulberry cultivation and

silkworm rearing are agricultural in nature, undertaken in rural areas whereas those relating to silk reeling, twisting, weaving and marketing are mostly undertaken in semi-urban and urban areas.

The developmental programmes of the government have a significant role in adding to the growth of Kotha Indlu. They emphasised on developmental programmes resulting in better returns. This engaged more people, especially women, to practice sericulture in the village. In Kotha Indlu, Farmers Club and DWCRA groups play an important role in assisting the sericulture farmers. These groups make people more coherent towards their work and further help them to practice sericulture.

In a growing enterprise like sericulture, problems are bound to be many and at times unavoidable. The problems faced by sericulturists mainly relate to the insufficient financial support from the government agencies, climatic hazards, wide fluctuations in cocoon prices, and also the inadequacy of extension services.

To overcome these problems and to make this enterprise more attractive, the following suggestions have been designed. There is a need to introduce new varieties of mulberry, which have been found viable with regard to the quality and quantity of leaf by the research institutes. The sericulturists must be encouraged to rear bivoltine variety of silkworm rather than multivoltine silk worms to obtain better income. More farmers may be motivated to take up sericulture on a large scale through co-operative farming. Irrigation facilities have to be developed better and enhanced by encouraging farmers to adopt drip irrigation. To meet the growing demand for DFLs more grainages should be opened and care must be taken to supply good quality layings through them.

Stifling units can be established both by the government and private entrepreneurs to preserve the cocoons for a long to overcome the problem of fluctuations in cocoons prices.

The required equipments for rearing silkworms may be supplied to the sericulturists at a subsidised rate. Improvement and enhancement of infrastructural facilities will definitely promote the growth of sericulture.

Extension services play a key role in the expansion of the sericulture industry. As such, there is a need to extend these services much further, particularly to the remote and inaccessible areas.

Crop insurance may be considered with subsidised premium rates, to give the sericulturists a sense of security. In Andhra Pradesh the scope for the development of sericulture is developing in dual directions; one relating to expanding the sericulture in new areas and the other to modernising it in the existing areas.

Sericulture activity is basically individual farmer oriented. Hence, a comprehensive programme to cover the entire area in the districts with new practices should be drawn up. Qualified and experienced staff should be deployed for extension work. Subsidies and incentives should be given to motivate the farmers.

In the methods of silkworm rearing, the most advantageous is the system of institutional rearing of young age silkworms (Chawki). In places where there are large groups of rearers, there is scope for organisation of co-operative chawki rearing cum reeling units. Apart from having separate rearing buildings and proper equipment for the maintenance of humidity and temperature, the farmers should be motivated to maintain hygienic conditions in and around the rearing areas.

Training and extension centres have to be established at mandal levels to educate the farmers, especially women sericulrists, in reducing the incidence of diseases and to get higher cocoon crops. In sericulture enterprise, stability is the key as a prominent sector in rural development. Hence, this labour intensive activity needs intensive efforts to enhance the scope on sound lines by establishing regional organisations for stabilising the silk prices. The definitely would ensure a fair price to the primary producer such as the silkworm rearer at a level that would ensure stability and further promotion of mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing.

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Angami Women in Handloom Weaving: An Identity to the Naga Society

Vitsou Yano

Abstract

Handloom weaving has always been a monopoly work and art for women in Naga society unlike many societies in India. Since the traditional to the modern period, women in Naga society have been making, carrying, and giving an identity to the whole of society through handloom weaving. The identification of a person based on sex, rank, status, and age, among others, in Naga society can be seen from the cloth they wear since the traditional period. Women have been contributors to the civilisation process, but their history and works seem unavailable and ignored while writing the history of Nagas society. History from the margins, including women, has been an ignored topic in mainstream society for a long time. The reconstruction and critical analyses of looking at societies and people from margins need to be given space while writing history. The silence and selectivity of history from one margin to yet another margin seem common while writing history of Nagas. This paper critically analyses the history writing of the Naga and placing women at the centre of the argument. It will also look at the way in which women have been carrying their identity of handloom weavers from one generation to the other.

Introduction

Handloom weaving in Naga society is a monopoly art of women. Unlike many other regions and places, the Nagas do not let the men weave cloths but consider it taboo for men to weave cloths. Weaving in every Naga community and Tribe remains a very important art for a woman, which in return carries the Naga identity throughout the world. Out of many Naga tribes, this paper will focus particularly on the Angami Naga Tribe. Though situated in a small region, the different Naga tribes have their own varied cultures and values from each other. The paper will firstly look at the way in which the women's history has been denied while writing Naga history. It will study the monopoly art of women in weaving and their contribution to the society in general. The casteless Naga society witnesses the difference in economic status, which can be identified from their clothes. The

traditional Naga society differentiates people from their rank, age, sex, among others, through the clothes they wear which were woven by women. The periodisation of Naga society has always been a problem while periodising history of the Nagas. Thus, in this paper, the period is categorised into traditional (i.e before the coming of foreigners into Naga society) and modern (after the coming of foreigners).

Situated in the North-East of India, the different Naga tribes inhabit the Naga Hills, some neighbouring regions in the North-East part of India and in the neighbouring country Burma (Myanmar). The history of Naga is a fusion of blood and ethnicities among various tribes. The Nagas, thus, are believed to have certain unique customs, unique ways of living and unique ideas, which no other tribe exhibits. Until the arrival of the Christian missionaries and the British administrators, the Nagas do not have a written record, thus rely on oral traditions for its history.

Some anthropological work came up on Nagas with the arrivals of the British administrators, but these few works excluded many areas of the society. These few works portray the political space of the society rather than the whole of the society and its history. The history of women and their contribution to the womenfolk were excluded by and large. Their works were an excluded topic and is silenced in the history of the Nagas in general. This exclusion and selectivity of history writings in Naga history needs to be questioned. As mentioned above, writing Naga´s history relied on oral traditions of the people in order to reconstruct the history of women.

From the traditional period, the Naga society has been a patriarchal society. Thus, in the patriarchal Naga society, the history of the people has always been a male centric one, where men are always considered as the active agent. For instants, the traditional Naga society denies a political place for women and so their story becomes invisible in the political history. Women have been an active agent since traditional time, but the historians do not consider it. In general, the story of women does not emerge so suddenly but has been an ignored area and alien to historians and historiography.

The discourse of weaving in Angami Naga society clearly demarcates the line between men and women. Weaving is indeed a symbol of gender. Though women have the monopoly in weaving, patriarchy leaves women in a subsidiary role where many of the shawls woven by women themselves are taboo for women to wear. Handloom weaving

in the Naga society witnesses the exclusion of men in its discourse. The discourse of weaving has usually been a women's craft in many cultures and times. From the traditional time till today, weaving is a popular handicraft and art of Naga women. Women from a high status to the lowest know how to weave both for the family and for commercial purposes. As a marginalised member of Naga society, through the art and skilled weaving, women have been remarkably carrying the identity, in spite of many people and most writers failing to notice and recognise the distinctive nature of their work. Many failed to recognise the work of women in the art of weaving as praxis. Naga women have been a carrier of identity through the ages, which remain unnoticed till today. The traditional Naga society witnesses all women folk actively being involved in weaving clothes apart from doing all the household chores as well.

From the time of Homeric society, the queens, princesses and goddesses know how to weave. Like many tribal societies, weaving has been a very important art in Naga society. Credits go to women in general for the weaving activities and skills of weaving different style and forms. Angami Naga women have been a carrier of identity and a contributor to economy through the art of weaving. The industrial revolution began, in large part, as a mechanisation of the production, especially in textiles, and so changes in weaving and cloth-making production meant immense changes in women's lives, which gave rise to the movements for women's rights.

When we look into the different parts of the world, we find that weaving has been a very important and most essential activity of the society as well as of the economy. Looking at the time of ancient Egypt, weaving linen and spinning thread were important activities of the household economy. Weaving is a women's craft and it is another instant of the simplicity of Homeric society that goddesses, queens, and princesses were all skilled weavers (Wace 1985: 51-55). Way back in 2700 BC, China credits Si-ling-chi, wife of the prince Hoang-ti, with the discovery of the usefulness of silkworm thread and the methods of weaving silk thread and of raising silkworms, which became one of the most essential commodity in China and also in rest of the world.

Vietnamese history also gives credit to several women with the introduction of silkworm breeding and weaving and even has a legend crediting a Vietnamese princess with the discovery of the use of silkworm. In Persia too, women and children under the women´s

guidance, were central to the production of this practical and artistic creation, crucial to the economy as well as the arts in early and modern Iran. Carpet weaving and, earlier, carpet tying have often been the province of women in Turkish and Anatolian culture. Navaho or Navajo Indians in the Southwest of the United States tell how Spider Woman taught women the skills of loom weaving. Navajo rugs are still popular for their beauty and practicality. Boycott of British goods, including inexpensive manufactured cloth, meant that more women went back to home production of cloth by the revolutionary era in America. Spinning wheels were a symbol of independence and freedom.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the invention of the power loom helped speed the industrial revolution in Europe and America. Women, especially young unmarried women, soon began leaving home to work in the new textile production factories using this technology. But by the twentieth century, women have reclaimed weaving as an art. In the Bauhaus movement, women were virtually relegated to the loom, as sexual stereotyping shaped assumptions about 'women's art'. Though 'women's work' and women's role in the economy has been defined differently through the ages, the slogan, 'every woman is a working woman' is true in itself. An old Engish saying, 'men work from sun to sun, women's work is never done' expresses the reality that for almost all women through history, they have worked in the home at domestic chores and sometimes in the open world too.

In Indian industrialisation, handloom weaving occupies a very important place. Except in some parts of India, both men and women are engaged in and it is not an exclusive women's job. Traces of weaving and textiles are found in the Indus valley civilisation, where they used homespun for weaving. Trade link with the outside world was witnessed in the ancient times due to Indian rich textiles. Several references from the text show that spinning of yarn was mainly the occupation of Indian widows (Bhatttacharya 1989: 85-86). There are also evidences of ancient texts referring to the production and technology of textile along with the trade in cloth. Weaving has been primarily an artisan as well as a non-agricultural based activity in India.

Cotton is woven all over India since the early period with its own distinctive character. The traditional weaving industry in the

mainland India, often generalised most of the time for the whole of Indian society cannot be agreed upon as the common weaving pattern and style. This is because of the fact that Indian society itself has its differences and many scholars have disagreed to this generic view. Unlike the rest of India, some North-Eastern states used back strap loin loom whereas others used frame looms. Here from traditional time, weaving has been an important home and cottage industry for the people. Women in these states take up weaving as a part of domestic chores adding to the economy of the family and society alike. The traditional Indian society witnesses the pattern of weaving by men and spinning by women in the cottage industry.

According to the Handloom Census of India 2009-2010 (GoI 2010: 26), nearly 27.83 lakh handloom households are engaged in weaving and other allied activities, out of which 87 percent are rural and 13 percent from urban. The majority of the handloom-working households are weaver households, which means at least one member of every such household is engaged in weaving activities. In North-East India, 90 percent of handloom workers household are weavers' households. It also pointed out that here nearly 28 percent of the handloom production are domestic (GoI 2010: 27).

The traditional handloom was overtaken by the power loom with its modern techniques in most of the regions of India but the traditional weaving in Naga society still continues with its own styles and patterns. Women in Naga society still weave for the entire family and society unlike many societies where the men weave while the women engage in spinning. Modernisation and westernisation have a lot of impact in Naga society, yet it did not substitute the traditional institution of weaving and women's role in it. The money that a woman earns from weaving is an important contribution to the family's economy.

There is no clear date as to when wool came into the Naga society. Traditional people made their own wool out of cotton plantation and weaving. In the later period of the nineteenth century with the arrival of colonialists, slowly different foreign items began to pour in. It was believed that the grandfather of A.Z.Phizo (also known as the Father of the Nagas) was one of the first travellers among the Nagas who brought wool into the Angami villages for weaving and selling (Sekhose 2000: 9).

Angami women and handloom weaving in traditional society

The Angami Naga women had their traditional ways of making and producing different kind of clothes differing from other Naga tribes. As mentioned earlier, there is no evidence referring to men's involvement in cotton or loom weaving. But men were engaged in basket weaving with cane and bamboo. Basket weaving among the Angami men was not an uncommon work in the society. These baskets are woven with bamboo or cane. Weaving baskets were not restricted to men alone, but anyone could weave them. Nagas have been independent weavers from the very beginning.

Handloom weaving before the arrival of Christian missionaries was a 'pure traditional handloom' weaving. Among the different tribes of Nagas, handloom weaving is of different designs and styles. Some of the woven cloths were embellished with beads, cowrie shells and goats' hair to denote the wealth and status of the weaver. Though there are different types of weaving, handloom weaving among Angamis is the focus of this paper.

Handloom weaving in its discourse has played a pivotal role in the patriarchal Angami society. Clothes, along with food, being the main requirements of humans in every society, weaving has been an important part of every Naga member. March (1983: 729) rightly pointed out that weaving is a symbol of gender. Weaving separates the role of both male and female and also transpires between the sexes as each defines the other. In Angami society, weaving can be called as a symbol of female gender where it brings out the differences about the male member of the society. This symbol marks a very important identity, which Angami women carry from generation down the line. This symbol can be seen in terms of looks and work.

Weavings among the Naga tribes have different design, colours, and style from each other. They weave their clothes indicating their own beliefs and traditional ways of lifestyle. The Naga weaving design also contains both living and non-living images. Women use the loin-looms for traditional shawl weaving while the narrow fly shuttle is used to weave other fabrics. Women in the Naga society perform spinning, like dyeing and weaving. Versatile artisans can refer to the Naga women as they leave an impression of ethnicity on most of their objects of everyday use. Decorations were even made on their deadly weapons, which is evident on their *daos* (big knife) and spears. Their bamboo drinking pots are embossed beautifully with various cultural

motifs. Dress materials for everyday use produced on the traditional looms are a visual delight.

The Angamis use different tools for weaving were such as '*Dzüba, Dzübo, dzükri, dzüpa, dzünyi, dzübe, dzüpou, dzüli, dzürie, dzürüsi, khuthu dzükrie, khuthu sicha, chiepfü*', among others. All these weaving tools were mostly made from Bamboo and some from wood. Sometimes men make these tools. The different colours were taken from the colour of the tree leaves, flowers, cover, and roots, which undergo several stages. The colour of the cotton is dyed into different colours to weave different clothes. Sekhose (2000) gives a very clear and unique introduction on how the traditional Angami women dye the cotton into different colours. The major colours of weaving for the Angamis are red, black, green, white, and yellow. Some of the trees and plants are used to extract the colours.

Weaving or '*Therhi*' is one of the important things that every Angami girl traditionally ought to know. Apart from the domestic duties, women weave shawls and loin cloths on the loom. A girl from her childhood onwards is trained to weave as part of her daily duty. The girl starts learning by making belts for her grandparents and other older people. Every girl child starts weaving by making belts and belt size cloths to practice and learn. Such teenage girls start to weave cloths for themselves and for their family. Mothers, sisters and grandmothers assist this learning process. The practices of spinning and weaving in the traditional period witness all female members of the family being involved in weaving one or the other cloth. By the time they reach the age of 15 or 16, they would start to weave shawls without or with designs according to their capability.

As mentioned above, unlike in the other parts of India, Nagas do not let the men folk weave cloths. It is believed, that if men weave clothes and follow this effeminate craft, they would lose their virility.

The traditional society witnesses the high weaving skill among women and the competition between them before marriage. She weaves the clothes for her family members and also weaves before her marriage to give it to her future husband. Before her marriage, she should weave a number of shawls, for her would be husband and his family members as a sign of capability and respect. Whenever there is a search for a good and capable wife in a village, girls who had very good weaving skills were appreciated for the most.

In villages a potential bride is given respect by her weaving skills. Her weaving skills determine her popularity amongst eligible bachelors to a great extent. In public places and occasions, weaved clothes holds a very important place in a person's image. Handloom weaving in traditional Naga society witnesses the competitive spirit among the women. But the modern Naga society witnesses the commercialisation of weaving rather than a competition.

Identification of rank, sex, and age through weaving

The traditional Naga society witnesses the identification of rank through different weaving style. Though there was no caste system as such, people wore their dresses according to their economic status and one cannot say that one can wear whatever they want. The colour, style and design matter with ones' status in the society. Though the village is liberal in many ways, yet a lot of restrictions and taboos surround the lives of the people. For instant, among the Angamis a man wears four lines of cowries in his kilt (like wrap around) only if he has more than one or two wives. It was taboo for any common man to wear four lines of cowries in his kilt if he had only one wife. In traditional period the Angami society witnessed men with more than one wife, that is, it was not uncommon for any men to have more than one wife. Though there was a unique kilt for those who marry more than one wife, there is no particular wrap around/ *checha* for women who marry more than one man. The question of not having a different wrap around/ *checha* for women does not arise here in a traditional patriarchal society.

Traditional Angami society witnesses the different designs and colours than the present weaving designs. There are some *Pfhe* (shawls) and wrap around *(Meni or Checha* or mekhela)*, which are used during traditional period. Several weaving styles and design stopped due to different reasons. Some of the shawls and wrap around are still used today, even after a lot of modernisation. During the traditional period, weaving and using of woven clothes signified the hierarchy in the society in terms of agricultural wealth. Every member of the society had their own shawls to use depending on their capabilities. But there are also some particular shawls, which were made for a particular person or section of people.

The marker of differentiation among the gender, wealthy, people of different age groups, spinster, widower, orphans, leaders, and warriors is the woven shawl one uses. The symbol of cloth and

weaving plays a very important role here. Women alone make all these shawls and wrap-arounds. There are also some clothes that were made exclusively for men and not for women. It has always been the work of the women demarking the gender difference in the society. As mentioned before, the Angami Nagas do not have the caste system, yet there was a clear gap between the people in villages in terms of economic status. Weaving clearly shows the hierarchical system in society where there are clothes that are to be worn only by the rich class or only by people who can achieve a certain position in the village or community. The old aged people are given some particular woven clothes to wear, which young people cannot wear even if they want to. But there are also some clothes, which are common which everyone can wear.

The clothes are worn accordingly by their age and status such as being a girl, boy, unmarried women, unmarried men, married men, married women, old men or women. Anyone can be identified by the clothes he or she wears. Every tribe wears a different pattern of design, style, colour to identify himself or herself from the other tribe according to age. This weaving skill of women has made a remarkable imprint in the Naga society. The identity that a man carries with him through his dress comes from women.

Age determined the colours, designs and differences in wearing the woven shawls and wrap around (*mekhala and Checha)* by the people of every Angami community. According to age, the Angamis wear different and varieties of woven clothes on different occasions. We can broadly divide people into five different groups by the different ways of clothes they used in the traditional society.

Boys and girls: The first group of the people are below 15 years of age. In Angami society, there are different clothes worn by both boys and girls. *A girl wears Phizhoni or nikhro or skirt and a phfemhu as a shawl* as her first clothes. A boy wears a white kilt or short wrap around like a skirt. The kilt is usually white in colour. These are the first clothes worn by any child once he or she starts wearing clothes in Angami Naga society. *Chùrupfhe* is known as a sacred shawl, which is considered as a respected shawl among the shawls in society. Only rich man's daughter can own this shawl. A man who has given the feast of merit can only give this shawl to his daughter. When a girl reaches a certain age she starts using a wraparound called as *neikhronei.* Once she starts using this cloth she is consider as a

women and not a little girl anymore. This *neikhronei* is used under the wraparound (*meni*) of a woman.

Spinsters: Teipiepfhe is known as a women's shawl. It's a taboo to carry a baby boy and use this shawl as this is exclusively for women. Though old women also use this shawl, mostly it is worn by the spinsters. Peüpfhe is a shawl for the unmarried women. The unmarried people have different designs and colours from the children's shawls and kilt. A teenage girl or an unmarried woman wears a white top called as '*bache*'. Along with the white tops, they also use a shawl known as '*phfemhu'* and wear a kilt or *checha* known as '*lora mhhusü*'. The teenage boys and unmarried men wear a black colour kilt. Another shawl *Nuokhriepfhe* is worn only by the rich brothers of a sister, who could afford to weave this kind of shawls.

Married women: Tsuoüruopfhe is a rich women's cloth and not an ordinary cloth for every women. The married people wear a different pattern from other groups. Married women wear a black top called as '*bache keti'* and a shawl known as *phfemhu*. When a woman gets married she has the liberty to wear any colour of *Checha* unlike the other two groups mentioned earlier.

Married men: Rich people usually have a number of woven clothes, yet there are some clothes considered as higher and better than others. *Rhiedi* shawl is exclusively worn by the richest men and not by anyone else. Women are not allowed to wear this shawl. *Dozo* shawl is worn by married men alone who can afford it. A man can earn this shawl by working in a rich men's house and earn this shawl in term of kind as his reward. *Rourü* shawl is called a rich man's shawls where everyone has a desire for this shawl. Only rich men and their sons wore this shawl. *Lalapfhe* is another rich man's shawl. This shawl is worn by the rich men and his sons to signify that they are equally well to do and have respect for each other. *Pfhethopfheü* is also a shawl of wealth. *Ketsukehiepfhe* is a shawl for those rich men who had achieved a certain status such as feast of merit. *Pfheva* is an expensive shawl worn by married men who can afford it. Married men on the other hand wear some special woven clothes unlike the others. The married men use a kilt known as '*keshüni*' with a special belt having three designs at the back. Once a man gets married he can use a shawl known as '*phfe she'* which is a shawl of respect in society. This *phfeshe* consists of two shawls namely, *lohe* and *lora mhusü*.

Old people: The elderly group of the people in the society usually avoids wearing bright colours. They use shawls and *checha* without much design. Elderly men wear shawl which is known as *'theva phfe'*, which is white in colour with black stripped. Elderly women wear black and faded pink colour *checha* known as '*keca ni*'. Elderly women usually avoid red and blue colour *checha* as these colours are considered as colours of young people. Normally the shawls for older people are of dark colours and not bright colours. *Pfheva* is a shawl worn by old aged people who can afford it and those who have self-sufficient food daily. Poor old aged men usually do not owe this shawl even though they want to. *Lorü, Mekhrüpfhe* and *Rhievi* shawls are worn exclusively by old people both men and women. *Both men and women wear Pfhemhou, Lohe and Loramhoushü*. These shawls have different design according to their gender. *Lohe* are of different colours depending on gender.

Pfhelhipfhe is a shawl, which is worn by poor people in villages. Old shawls are brought together and stitched together for a new shawl for poor people who cannot afford a new shawl.

Widow: Loshü shawl is a female shawl used by widows and old women alone. This shawl is a taboo for young girls and young mothers. It's a taboo for men to use this shawl. Another shawl *Lopapfhe* is made especially for those men who are widowers. This shawl signifies widower status in society.

Orphan: Samerünuopfhe is a shawl exclusively for the orphans. This is given to the orphans to brighten their lives, make them happy in their orphanage days. Women with similar weaving skills in villages sit together and weave this shawl for the orphans to brighten them up from being felt as an outcast in society.

There are some clothes that indicate sad occasions. *Siaziepfhe* is the most popular among such shawl worn by wealthy men and women on the funeral day of beloved ones. There is a taboo that it should not be worn on any other occasion except the funeral day. Similarly, the *Movapfhe* can also be called as a funeral shawl or shawl to be presented to the dead person. This is prepared in advance by rich and wealthy men especially for funerals. People mourn and put the shawl on the dead person. Yet another funeral shawl is *Gakhropfhe* made out of a plant called *gakhro*. Mostly poor people unable to afford expensive shawls weave this.

Other clothes

Women and men have separate clothing since traditional times. There was always a clear demarcation of various aspects in Angami society based on shawls. If women use the shawls supposedly meant for men, the family or community elders would immediately shout and scold them. There has been always a term '*thepfumia sü thepfumia zo*' means 'men are men' especially in these contexts. Like any other patriarchal society, the Angami society with its rigid system denies equality between men and women. Women are never equal to men in such rigid patriarchal society.

The society in the traditional set-up can be understood in different ways. In terms of attires of the people in a particular village, they can be distinguished clearly between different classes of people based on their economic status. A man can achieve a particular status and earn a 'respectable shawl' by his act of bravery in head hunting. The number of heads taken in the headhunting war determines a person's status in the society and village. Those brave people to show that they have chopped many heads and are the protector of the village wear a special shawl with unique pattern. The shawl indicates the status of the person to whom people from his village and other villages will look up to as a hero. In this case, even though a rich man desires to wear the shawl of a hero for he too had chopped off many enemy heads, he cannot do that. He is not entitled to wear for he is rich and can afford an expensive shawl.

The person who gives the 'Feast of Merit' wears another special shawl. This type of a feast is given by those who are rich in agricultural production and have an interest to share with others. Thus, he attains a certain higher status in the society. Once the feast is given to the villagers, the status is given to the man and from then on he wears the shawl to indicate his generosity and wealth. Only those who give the feast and identify differently from the rest of the villagers earn the right to use this special shawl. Thus, he wears a special shawl different from other people.

Taboo and weaving

Taboo among Angami Nagas is traditional and permanently associated with the community customs, rites and rituals. In every aspect in life, people are bound by taboos, which effect women more. In Angami society from morning till night, from being a girl to an old

woman, uncountable taboos surrounding her. Despite weaving being a monopoly of women, one could observe several, taboos on women while weaving. The patriarchal taboos in Angami society have not left women alone even in her work in weaving. In the patriarchal society, it was the men who make rules and laws, not women. Thus, men enforced these taboos upon women.

In the process of making the clothes there is a taboo for men to touch the articles used for weaving. Men do not touch them considering women to be the weaker sex in the society. The so called 'women's things' or weaving articles as a symbol of female should not be touched by the men, as they fear that men might turn weak (or even counted as weaker or at par with women) especially in their legs and body as a whole. A woman or a girl was not supposed to walk over the lying man or over his leg as she weaves clothes and do 'women's work'.

Warfare or the so-called 'head hunting' being one of the most important activity in men's lives, it is a taboo to weave clothes on some of these particular days during the hunting period. It is believed that by touching those weaving articles or tools, men become weak to chase their enemies or to go for hunting. Women being considered as a weaker being than men, all the 'women's work or thing' are restricted for men. The Angami men are not even allowed to walk over weaving articles, and even if they do so they have to go backward to rewind their walk. This walk over is believed to weaken their knee and legs while competing with other men folks.

Though weaving has been an important activity and a very necessary activity in women's lives, sometimes weaving is banned on some particular occasions and festivals, such as on 'wrestling day'. This is the day when the men compete their strength in wrestling. Weaving is strictly banned on the day of wrestling since there is a belief and fear that the players might get injuries or their legs may get weaker if women weave clothes on that very day. All the women in the village make sure that they do not weave clothes on the wrestling day to avoid any unwanted injury on the wrestlers. The use of woven clothes is not banned on these days, but weaving is not allowed. The Angami village witnesses the traditional clothes worn by everyone on the wrestling day as a symbol of respect.

Taboos surround the lives of every Angami Naga women in one way or other. These restrictions and taboos levied on women are the direct reflection of the patriarchal fabric of the society. Women are

hardworking weavers and dedicated to their families and society, but these 'women's art and women's work' push them aside for the superiority of the male members of the society. The cloths woven by women has helped men to identify themselves in society and friends, but these work processes and the person in work has been denied freedom to work anytime.

Conclusion

The traditional weaving art of the Nagas, which is exclusively a monopoly activity of women, continues to hold a very high prestige not only among the Nagas but to outsiders as well. The age-old style and practice of shawl weaving has been traditionally handed over from generation to generation by women and the usage of shawls is literally there from the 'cradle to the grave'.

Women have been a carrier of identity through the art of weaving skill and their enormous work. With their monopoly art in weaving, the Naga women have been an identity carrier for the whole of society from traditional period. Women and their weaving work give identity that every individual carries with herself or himself . With the change of time and civilisation taking its own ways, weaving in Angami society has undergone many changes. Yet, women's effort in weaving remains remarkable, which needs to be acknowledged, recognised and remembered. Naga cultural have been challenged by different foreign invasion, intrusion and encounters throughout the different periods but Angami women remained strong as the 'identity carriers' of the society through weaving. Though women have been actively contributing to the history and carrying the identity of the Nagas, their works has been excluded while writing history. The excluded and the silent history of women need to be mentioned and included while writing history to get a complete and true picture.

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Scavenging in India: Occupation, Identity and Caste

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explore the complex relationship of scavenging work with caste and its impact on identity in the context of social structure of India characterised by the caste system. It argues that the occupational identity of scavenger is socially constructed and affects them negatively. Traditionally in India, caste has been the deciding criteria for choosing or even forcing people to take up an occupation. The identity of the scavenger thus emanates from his or her positioning in the caste system, the nexus which even government has failed to break. Based on the literature review and observations of fieldwork in Kalyan (a suburb in Mumbai, India), this paper argues that caste remains an entry point in scavenging work and is therefore also a deciding factor in shaping the demeaning identity of the scavenger. This paper concludes that unless this nexus between work, caste and identity is broken, scavengers cannot be liberated from the age-old work of scavenging.

Introduction

Scavenging in India is considered as a traditional work of particular castes that are accorded the lowest ranking in the caste hierarchy. According to the Hindu social order,[1] the highest position is occupied by the Brahmin followed by the *Kshtriya*. Third comes the *Vaishya*, fourth the Shudra and last are the untouchables who have no rights and opportunities but obligation to serve all the above *Varna* people.

Scavenging broadly refers to work that deals with human and animal filth and engagement of concerned people with related abhorrent work. Scavenging is a caste-based work where one engages with

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[1] Hindu social order is characterised by Varna system wherein Hindu society is divided into four varnas with corresponding roles:The Brahmins: priests, teachers and preachers. The Kshatriyas: kings, governors, warriors and soldiers. The Vaishyas: cattle herders, agriculturists, businessmen, artisans and merchants. The Shudras: labourers and service providers. Avarna (out of varna): Untouchables

cleaning, animal and human waste from toilets, manholes, gutters, and roads. Most of the people who are engaged in scavenging are Scheduled Castes (SCs who were called and treated as untouchables). For generations, SCs are involved in scavenging activity. 'Scavenging is that hereditary occupation which is regarded as inferior at every place in India and scavengers are lowest among the low social category in the traditional Indian society' (Chaudhary and Chaudhary 2004: 264-265). Relationship of scavenging with caste is old as caste system itself. 'According to the contents of sacred scriptures and other literature, scavenging, especially the disposal of night-soil by a particular caste or castes of Indian society has been in existence since the beginning of civilisation' (Pathak 1995: 37).

Traditionally, lower caste people conducted scavenging and it was passed from generation to generation. The nature of work is so unbearable that it compels the scavengers to drink alcohol on duty. Eventually, some get addicted to alcohol, drugs, tobacco and other debilitating habits. 'They buy liquor from the local market' (Nagla 2004: 218). This puts pressure on their already meagre salary. Minimum or no education, large family size, low socio-cultural status and less political clout only worsens their life. This keeps the entire sections of society unnamed, unheard and unsupported or unable to speak up for their rights as a citizen of a democratic nation. They 'complaint that they do not have facilities which general population enjoys except reservation in jobs' (Nagla 2004: 218). Due to the caste system, scavenging work, and the lack of cultural capital (which upper castes have been enjoying over generations), scavenger's descendants are highly likely to land up in scavenging jobs or other manual work.

However, the most intriguing dimension of the impact of scavenging work on scavengers is the way it affects or shapes their 'occupational' identity. Assumedly, in modern societies work provides a respectable and positive identity to the worker and is supposed to delink them from or go beyond their traditional identities. However, what we find in the case of scavenging is the way it degrades their identity and dismissed their dignity. Rather than giving them a respectful occupational identity, it takes away even their human identity and makes society to treat the scavengers as if they are not human.

Scavengers plight reflects a blot on India's record of human rights and its democracy. There is also a need to see this issue through the perspective of 'decent work'. Decent work has been defined by the ILO

and endorsed by the international community as being 'productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity'. Decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income; provides security in the workplace and social protection for workers and their families; offers better prospects for personal development and encourages social integration; gives people the freedom to express their concerns, to organise and to participate in decisions that affect their lives; and guarantees equal opportunities and equal treatment for all. If assessed on this criteria of decent work by ILO, scavenging falls way behind (ILO 2007).

It is in this background my attempt is to critically analyse the nexus between scavenging occupation, caste and emergence of scavenger's identity. In this paper, I discuss the social context of identity, the impact of denial of choice of occupation on the identity formation, and how the process of scavenging becoming an 'occupation'. I further critically attempt to look at the efforts of the governments in ameliorating the deplorable condition of scavengers and tried to capture lived realities of scavengers based on my observations from the field during my dissertation work. In the last section, I make some recommendations to break the nexus of scavenging, caste and identity to liberate scavengers from this stigmatised occupation and to make government initiatives in that direction effective.

Social Context of an Identity

The formation of identity is an abstract phenomenon and it is seen as social construction that is context driven and has remained fixed in a place by the caste system. Identity reveals construction as per circumstances and situations. Identity can be of an individual, group, community or nation. In the context of personal identity, it differs from person to situation. In some situations, gender plays a major role and in other situations geographical location plays a complex part. 'Consulting the Oxford English Dictionary yields a Latin root (*identitas*, from *idem*, "the same") and two basic meanings. The first is a concept of absolute sameness: this is identical to that. The second is a concept of distinctiveness which presumes consistency or continuity over time' (Jenkins 1996).

The concept of identity concurrently institutes two possible associations of assessment between persons or things: similarity, on the one hand, and difference, on the other. Identity has to be

established when one wants to classify things or persons or when one wants to associate oneself with something, such as relationship, celebration or profession. Identity can be defined as a process and is not cemented in time and place. It is always defined and redefined. Socialisation plays a major role in identity formation. Selfhood, gender, religion, kinship, parent's education and – in the context of India – caste play a major role in the early stages of life in defining identity. By birth, child is categorised as belonging to particular caste to which the child's parent belongs.

Identity is seen as a fluid process and is always in some form of a metamorphosis. There are two forms of identity, one is what the person has defined about himself and the other form of identity is what society has defined. A person carries both identities simultaneously. This raises the question as to what is a social identity? The individual endeavour or the placing and perpetuation of what the person is seen to be by society. What identity the individual carries in society? What do the other people perceive about that person? I would argue that power relations between individual and society would guide the answer. 'Social identity is a characteristic or property of humans as social beings' (Jenkins 1996).

As we discussed above, the problem arises because identity is socially constructed; we cannot talk about identity in isolation. It is a constant interaction between individual self and society. 'Individual self' is unique and it is getting defined in the social world by questioning who am I? What are my interactions with other people? In this process, the individuals define themselves. What is my position in society? 'Social identity' and 'identity' are interchangeable, meaning the former. All human identities are in some sense – and usually a stronger rather than a weaker sense – social identity. It cannot be otherwise (Jenkins 1996). Under the umbrella of a social identity, a person acts according to certain norms, values, rules and principles of society; and by these acts s/he satisfies his/her own feeling of being accepted in society.

Impact of Denial of Freedom of Occupation on Identity Formation

As discussed, scavengers belong to the lowest caste in the caste hierarchy. As per rule of the caste system, the 'duty' of the members of the lower castes is to serve the members of higher castes. This denial of freedom of occupation, which is still scared in modern societies, is a hallmark of the work allocation process and consequently forms the identity. It appears scavenging is a result of punishment or 'assigned

duty' given to a particular caste group. Oommen (2004) argues that scavengers were Buddhist in the past, that they were of upper caste origin and that they were captured as war prisoners and forced to become scavengers. This means it was a punishment given to them. We get some more evidence to support this assumption. 'Scavengers are the dregs of Hindu society; they are an admixture of outcastes, who have fallen to this level owing to offences against the social codes of higher castes' (Enthoven 1920). Stanley Rice writes 'not only Kshtriyas, but also those who were engaged in cleaning night soil since ancient time and also those, who were made captives in wars in India, are *Bhangis* and *Mehtars* of today' **(**Shyamlal 1997: 37-38).

There are a number of evidences, which find a denial of freedom of occupation to the scavengers, among them: Ramaswamy (2005) argues that, 'scavenging in India has had a mixed lineage. Excavations in Lothal (62 km from Ahmedabad, Gujarat) show that in the Harappan civilisation in 2500 BCE, people had waterborne toilets in each house, which were linked by drains covered by burnt clay bricks. To facilitate operations and maintenance, this drainage system had manholes and chambers. With the decline of the Indus Valley civilisation, the science of sanitary engineering suffered a setback. In a later period, 'one of the fifteen duties for slaves enumerated in the Narada Samhita was the disposal of human excreta.' Similarly, 'in Vajasaneyi Samhita, Chandalas were referred to as slaves engaged in the disposal of human excreta' (Srivastava 1997). 'The Muslims had brought with them some women who used the Burqua (veils) to cover their faces and they did not like to defecate in the open. The bucket privies were, therefore, designed and constructed for their defecation in purdah. Those made captives were forced to clean latrines like bucket privies and throw the night-soil at distant places. After those captives were released, they were not accepted by their caste men and, hence, they formed a separate caste of Bhangis who were re-named as Mehtar by Emperor Akbar' (Pathak 1995: 38).

Scavenging as an Occupation

We find that, though, at different point of time, scavengers are referred to by different names. The common thread is that they all belonged to 'lower' castes and were forced into this occupation. After that, it became an occupation for them. 'The punishment, assigned duty to particular castes became an occupation during the British period when perhaps the setting up of army cantonments and

municipalities required, a large number of people to do these services on a regular basis' (Srivastava 1997: 16-17). The process of institutionalisation of scavenging during British period is captured as 'the practice of manual scavenging expanded phenomenally under British rule. The British both legitimised and systematised it, while setting up army cantonments and municipalities. They created official posts of manual scavengers. All British institutions – the army, railways, courts, industries and major towns were equipped with dry toilets instead of water-borne sewerage. The upheavals caused by commercialisation of land, destruction of artisan trades and agriculture-related activities led to sweeping and scavenging. This is not to say that the British invented caste or manual scavengers; rather they intervened specifically to institutionalise it' (Ramaswamy 2005: 6). Thus we find that under British rule due to urbanisation and industrialisation, scavenging work became an integral part of government system.

Thus scavenging – which became formal occupation during British period – continued unabated in post-independent India also. It can be argued that, since cheap caste based labour is readily available, the incentive to mechanise the work such as manual scavenging through mechanised sewer systems is minimal. This also suited well into social structure wherein dignified occupations were reserved for higher castes and undignified for lower castes. This ensured continuity of the nexus between scavenging, caste and occupation. We can see these phenomena still in practice, wherein the recently enacted contract labour system in local governments most of the dirty jobs are done by contract labours from lower caste.

This occupational trend does not get disturbed because contemporary India's politics, economy, culture and professions are still driven by caste. Scavenging – one of India's most undignified, castes based, forced and underpaid occupation – has not yet shown any sign of change. Here the question arises as to why particular group of castes have been forced to do this inhuman work? Obviously none perform this work willingly. The answer lies in the way the caste system is designed.

The mindset of the scavengers has been influenced in such a way that scavengers identify themselves with this work, which leaves no possibility to move out of this state. The caste system is a direct assault on the dignity and human rights of a community leaving one's

imagination void of ideas of invention, possibilities of movement of the self and ones' means to a life of dignity and right – the right that the Constitution of India promises every citizen.

Attempts by Indian State to ameliorate Scavengers' working conditions

Fundamental rights under the Constitution of India ensure justice, equal rights and dignity to all the citizens. Under Article 17, untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. Wider interpretation of this article includes abolition of manual scavenging as it promotes and continues the practice of untouchability. Thus manual scavenging is prohibited under the Constitution of India. To implement this Article, an act known as 'Civil Liberties Act' was passed by the parliament in 1955. Article 15 (2) also declares that 'no citizen shall be subject to any disability, liability or restriction', meaning scavenging cannot be the liability of any particular caste and nobody can be forced to do scavenging. Article 21, guarantees 'right to life with human dignity', meaning that scavengers' dignity would be respected. Article 25 (Right against Exploitation) declares that 'beggar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law' (Gayathridevi 2005). Therefore, this article clearly prohibits scavenging work as forced labour.

Some of the laws are formed for them to ameliorate their living and working condition and accordingly the government started looking at them seriously. Nevertheless, a lot remains to be done on the legal front and to change people's mindsets. All these goes hand in hand with the Indian social and economic system. Some programmes, laws and schemes are as follows. 'Scavengers' Living Conditions Enquiry Committee, also known as Barve Committee; Schemes for the supply of wheel-barrows and improved implements to scavengers; Backward Classes Commission, also known as Kaka Kalelkar Commission; Central Advisory Board for Harijan Welfare; Scavenging Conditions Inquiry Committee also known as Malkani Committee (formed in 1957); Committee on Customary Rights; Pandya committee; Gandhi centenary year (1969); Centrally sponsored scheme of ministry of works and housing; National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC); National Commission for Safai Karamcharis; Pre-matric scholarships for the children of those engaged in unclean occupations such as sweepers, scavengers, tanners and flayers; The National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of

Scavengers and their Dependents (NSLRS); The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry latrines (prohibition) Act, 1993, (No. 46 of 1993) [5th June, 1993] (Srivastava 1997; Shrivastava 2004) and Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2013.' The programmes schemes through these have loopholes and have not brought much change in the lives of the scavengers.

To protect the rights of every individual, the United Nations (UN) has listed some rights. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), manual scavenging is strongly argued to be a violation of human rights. Article 1 of this declaration, declares that all human beings are born equal and have human dignity and rights. Article 4 bans slavery or servitude. Article 5 says that no one shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Article 23 stands for equal pay for equal work (Gayathridevi, 2005). As we can see, scavenging is against these provisions. These provisions are meant for the protection of scavengers in order to enjoy their human rights.

Though the philosophy of the Constitution and the UDHR discourage scavenging practice, Indian State through its various Departments such as Railways and Municipal Corporations go against that philosophy by employing scavengers and tolerating scavenging.

Irrespective of these safeguards, scavengers are employed on the basis of their caste. There are many initiatives undertaken by Governments for improvement of working and living conditions of scavengers by forming numerous Committees and starting schemes based on their recommendations or enacting relevant laws. However, from my personal experience and interaction with the subject, I could say that scavengers do not have any idea of these committees, schemes and laws meant to improve their existing working and living conditions; most of these initiatives have failed on the ground. With the existing patterns of solid waste disposal, only a few initiatives have focused on liberation of scavengers or ensured eradication of scavenging, thereby bringing a paradigm shift in solid waste management. The failure of these initiatives could be assessed from continuation of scavenging work by the next generation. They have ignored the idea of education as a tool, which the scavengers' children could have used to liberate their parents and community from this kind of work.

'Scavenger'- An Emerging Identity from the Scavenging Work

Identity is socially constructed and forces work on to lower caste people in India. Scavengers do scavenging work to fulfil their basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. The basic wage of a scavenger is very meagre that he/she and his/her family cannot survive on it. Caste is the main and basic factor for the emergence of their identity as scavengers. 'Social identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations. Identity is something over which struggles take place and with which stratagems are advanced: it is means and end in politics' (Jenkins 1996).

Identity of scavenger has emerged out of scavenging work and it has continued because of continuation of the occupation for generations. This identity served to identify and characterise these people as Tripathi observes, 'they are a class of persons united in their suffocating miseries were traditionally ordained in Indian society to clean and carry human waste which majority of them have been doing till quite recently' (Tripathy 2004: 167). A scavenger is someone who does scavenging work usually as a private municipality, state or central government employee. There is some controversy on the definition of 'scavenger'. The term scavenger is used throughout government records and has gained official legitimacy. One definition of scavenger is 'a person engaged in or employed for manually carrying human excreta or any sanitation work' (D'Souza 2004: 179). Other definition calls scavenger as someone who is partially or wholly engaged in the obnoxious work of manually removing night soil and filth (Nagla 2004: 212). Government of India specifically defines scavengers as 'one who is partially or wholly engaged in the obnoxious and inhuman occupation of manually removing night soil and filth' (Verma 2003: 336).

Specific version of the identity of scavenger depends upon the geographical location. In India, scavengers reside in different parts of the country and accordingly they are identify by different castes. Some of these names are: Dhanuk (Uttar Pradesh), Han, Hadi (Bengal), Methar, Bhangi (Assam), Methar (Hyderabad), Paki (Coastal Andhra Pradesh), Thotti (Tamil Nadu), Mira, Lalbegi, Chuhra, Balashahi (Punjab), Bhangi, Balmiki, Methar, Chuhra (Delhi). The Bhangis are the descendants of the Chandala, who is said to have begotten by Shudra and born to a Brahmin mother. However, the most common name for them is Mehtar, which literary means 'Prince' or 'leader'

(Ramaswamy 2005: 3). Some other names are Hela, Hari, Bhumali, Halalkhor, Doms, Dumras, Bansphor, Mazhabi, Chachati, Pakay, Relli, Ghasi, Olgana, Zadmalli, Jamphoda, Metariya, Arunthatiyar and Chakkaliyar. Colonel Tod calls scavengers as 'the refuse of mankind' (Tripathy 2004: 169). There have been attempts to get out of demeaning identities by some communities. Zelliot calls 'the decision of two Untouchable communities to change their names from Bhangi to Balmiki and *Chamar* to Ravidas (after a sixteenth century saint poet) is not a sign of revolt, but only an affirmation of their pride in their identity and a reaction to the humiliation heaped on them by the upper castes' (Zelliot 1992). The scavengers from Gujarat state have been called Bhangi or Harijan but in the present situation are called Rukhi. Whatever may be the name, all scavengers are at the bottom of the Indian social hierarchy. Poverty and illiteracy help to maintain continuity of lifestyle and conformation to carry this job.

Lived Realities of Scavengers – Observations from the Field

Here I bring in my experience and observations of engagement with the scavengers of Kalyan where I did the fieldwork for my doctoral research. Kalyan one of the suburbs of Mumbai in Maharashtra of India is the field based on which I place my critical observations.

Table 1: Social Profile of the Scavengers

Name of the Slum	Social (caste) profile of the Scavengers	State of Origin
Bhavani niwas	Rukhi	Gujarat
Ambe niwas	Rukhi	Gujarat
Shankar rao chowk	Rukhi	Gujarat
Bapa Sitaram mandir vasti	Rukhi	Gujarat
Tawari Pada	Mix of Valmiki, Rukhi, lower caste Muslims and Buddhist	Delhi, Gujarat, other parts of Maharashtra
Indira Nagar	Mix of lower caste Muslim and Buddhist	Other parts of Maharashtra
Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar	Buddhist	Maharashtra (native village)
Pandhara Kholi,	Valmiki	Delhi
Siddharth Nagar	Buddhist	Other parts of Maharashtra

As in the table, there are nine communities where scavengers live in. Two communities live in railway colonies. In all, there are eleven communities. Some scavengers' families live outside the community/slum in a better area.

These slums provide a typical example of segregation of the population on the basis of similarity of caste and occupation in the urban spaces. One can say that it is a modern, yet invisible form of untouchability and discrimination. Some relatives of these scavengers' live outside the slums but frequently visit and interact with them during festivals and social functions.

These communities also show similarities in terms of language, religion and place of origin. Most of the people in these slums have migrated from distant places and both push and pull factors seem to have played a role in this migration process. Tragically though many of them migrated to Mumbai in search of stability, dignified jobs and protection from caste based oppression in their villages, they face a different kind of reality.

For example, in seven slums the communities migrated from the same geographical origin and speak the same language. People in the first four slums listed migrated from Gujarat around 150 years ago. They belong to the Rukhi caste; earlier they used to be called Bhangi or Hindu-Harijan. Two slums have Marathi speaking people migrated from different rural parts of Maharashtra, more than 100 years back. In one slum Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar, the people are the original inhabitants of the same place. They say that it is their native place (village), which has now become a slum. Due to urbanisation, cities expanded, and in that process, villages have been transformed into the cities. It must have been a Mahar Vada that became a slum over time. Here it shows the continuation of the traditional caste system in a modern urbanised space. In these slums, I found people who identify themselves as Buddhists converted from erstwhile Hindu-Mahar caste. People from Valmiki caste inhibit the Pandhara Kholi slum. They migrated from parts of Delhi and Haryana some 150 years ago.

Interestingly two communities live in 'Railway colonies' with housing facilities for scavengers and other working class labourers of India Railways – a Government of India enterprise. The people here are of mixed geographical, linguistic, occupational and caste background. Tawari Pada has a mixed population speaking Hindi or Marathi. In this community, people are from Buddhist, Matang, Valmiki and

lower caste Muslims. In Indira Nagar, people speak Marathi and Urdu/Hindi and belong to Matang and lower caste Muslims.

As shown in Table 1, Rukhi, Mahar, Matang, Valmiki and Chamars are ex-untouchables and come under SC category. Even Muslims scavengers are those people who are converted from untouchable or other lower castes to Islam. Most of these scavengers work with Kalyan Dombivali Municipal Corporation (KDMC). Some work in railways, some in main Mumbai city (Brahmumbai Municipal Corporation) and some work in private spaces such as residential buildings, shops, schools and malls. Though they differ in caste names, languages, dress styles, food habits, customs, rituals and geographical origin what connects them is their stigmatising work, demeaning identity and lower position in the society. And they are all called 'lower caste' and looked down by the upper castes.

Table 2: Scavengers according to Caste Background

Sr. No.	Caste Category	No. of Scavengers	Generations involved in this work
1.	Scheduled Caste (SC)	2337	6 to 7
2.	Scheduled Tribe (ST)	32	1
3.	Other Backward Caste (OBC)	315	1
4.	Open	87	1
5.	Brahmin	3	1
	Total Scavengers	2774	-

Table 2 shows the caste background of the scavengers who are working at KDMC a suburban municipal corporation of Mumbai and at a commuting distance from the communities visited. Of the total 2774 scavengers I visited, the highest number of them 2337 (84%) belongs to SC category, an erstwhile untouchable caste. Next share is of OBCs 315 (11%), which are sections of people lower in caste hierarchy. STs the tribals who are other marginalised section of Indian society constitute 32 (1%). Brahmins and other 'higher' castes constitute 3 percent of the total scavenger population. Open 87 they come under higher category than SC, ST, OBC. Brahmins are only three employees of the total scavenger population. Although 16 percent of the scavengers come from non-SC background, I was told that only the SCs do the actual work of scavenging. Very few non-SC

designated 'scavengers' clean the dirt associated with stigma. Most of the non-SC designated scavengers work in the offices doing some other menial work than doing actual scavenging work.

One more dimension of a lived reality, which I found, was the number of generations for which families in these communities were engaged in scavenging work indicating the resilience of the occupation and difficulty in escaping from it. Among SCs, the Rukhis, for example, which is numerically higher in number, has been involved in scavenging work for six to seven generations. Buddhists were found to be in this work for four to five generations, Matangs for two to three generations, Valmikis five to six generations. Thus, it is not very surprising that non-SC castes were found to be associated with this occupation only for the first generation.

The complexity of interstate migration of scavengers is also one of the mechanisms, which sustain this work among them. The reason is that they are not considered as SC when they migrate to another state and therefore they do not get the SC caste certificate from the new state. If they have the certificate of their original state, it is not valid in the state to which they migrated. Therefore, their children do not get the same benefits that the native SC children get in education, even in white collar occupation. This rule adds to the vulnerability of their condition as children face a lot of problems in continuing education. They have to compete with other children who have already benefitted from the system. In the current sample, I found that a number of scavengers were classified in 'open' category.

An intriguing question comes, if scavenging has demeaning identity, why some non-SCs have entered the scavenging job? According to people from Rukhi caste most of the non-SCs scavengers started joining this job because the government started giving employment security, some perks, job flexibility and most importantly due to technological development the chances of contact with human excreta or dirt gets minimal. However, the mindset of the non-SC people remains that this is a SC job. Some non-SCs joined this job only after the assurance that they will not be the shit cleaners. Though the non-SCs join as a scavenger, they lobby with their supervisors using their socio-cultural privilege and thus get avoided from the actual work of shit cleaning.

Repugnant work ultimately goes to the share of SC scavenger. These SC scavengers have been living in their respective areas from

generations. Their ancestors also worked as scavengers. According to them, the work nature has not been changed but the mode to carry the 'dirt' has changed. The social milieu of the area where they are living and their caste made them realised that they are born in particular untouchable caste and their occupation is scavenging. As discussed above, an identity is socially constructed and a person tries to act according to the prevailed social norms to get accepted by society in general. These scavengers also behave in a way other expect them to behave. From childhood they had known that they are destined to work only as scavengers.

I got a mixed response from the community about their work. Some of them do not find it a problem even if their children do the same work, whereas some are more particular that they do not want their children to indulge in this demeaning work. They feel that other people in the society have neglected and isolated them because of their occupation and caste. Hence they want to get away from this work to integrate their future generation with rest of the society. They also realised that education and culture of the family can help their next generation away from this work.

Ideally, education was supposed to reprieve them to escape from de facto ban on freedom of occupation. However, due to huge inequality in education – where lower castes are forced to go for substandard schools and colleges as they cannot afford costly private education – freedom of choice of occupation is greatly limited. When jobs are limited, lower castes are forced to enter stigmatising jobs mostly due to 'substandard' education. While doing the fieldwork, I came across a few graduate and post-graduate scavengers from SC community. Here the question arises whether the importance of the scavenging work has increased or the importance of education has decreased? Why are the upper castes, mostly Brahmins, not in a competition to do this work? And if they join, why are they not interested in doing this work? Some scavengers argued that they found 'some changes' in the work when upper caste started doing this job. But they added that their problems will not be solved unless more and more upper castes people get involved in this work breaking the deadly nexus of scavenging with caste and restoring the dignity of labour and positive identity of otherwise normal cleaning occupation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The identity of scavengers is socially constructed by the caste system and got degrading because of its association with stigmatising nature of the work. As the scavenging work involves dealing with human waste and dirt, it has been forced on the lower caste people. Despite the plethora of laws and policies, there is not much improvement in the condition of the scavengers, leave alone permanent escape from this demeaning occupation by breaking the association between caste and scavenging.

Based on my study, I find that there are two aspects involved in the liberation of scavengers. One is long term, which is to break the nexus between scavenging and caste and associated identity. However, since this process is going to take time, there is an urgent need to ameliorate life and working conditions of scavengers. These workers do not have proper safety equipment when they do risky work such as cleaning of manholes – a term for the entrance of a man in severe pipeline. Frequently people get killed while cleaning these pipelines through manholes. As done in developed countries, technology can be employed for improving the working condition and de-stigmatising the occupation. India, which has made huge technological progress in space and information technology to compete with the developed world, still employs primitive methods for cleaning human excreta and other waste. And this may be because those who are involved in scavenging have no say in the policymaking and those who make policy have no stakes. In fact the survival of the caste system to a great extent can be ascribed to the exclusion of lower castes from representation in the strategic decision-making and it's implementation process. The key argument of leaders of anti-caste social movement has been to provide adequate representation of marginalised communities in governance. It can be argued that representation of the voice of the scavengers in policymaking is necessary condition for their liberation.

The change in the situation of the scavenger is also imperative from the perspective of a larger global awareness on human rights. As India claims its place in the global power structure, it cannot allow gross violation of basic human rights on its own soil.

Survival of caste ensures the survival of scavenging occupation's linkage with caste and demeaning social identity. The Indian state still operates in the socio-cultural context of caste, has not yet proved the

option to overcome the power of caste over freedom of choice of occupation. Therefore, this keeps complicating the issue of scavengers' identity, making it difficult for non-SCs to associate with this occupation. Spread of modernity has not brought any good news for scavengers. It appears that the current socio-governmental system neither wants to liberate the scavengers from misery nor allows them to die. Here I would like to mention one of the scavenger's comment on this system, Nitin (name changed), from Bapa Sitapara Mandir Vasti exclaimed in Marathi, *'gadi majala hi nahi pahije aani gadi mela hi nahi pahije'* (labourer should neither be overfed nor be allowed to die). This is how the system continues.

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We are *Visthapit*: Forced re-settlement as a Long Term Identity

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Abstract

Conceived in 1949, the Tehri dam in the Garhwal region of the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in India has affected close to one hundred thousand people. Work on the actual structure began in 1972 and the dam tunnels were finally shut down in 2005. The town of Tehri and thirty-five villages were completely submerged while seventy-four villages were partially submerged, leading to re-settlement across the state. This led to the usage of *visthapit* (Hindi word variously translated as re-settlement/uprooting/displacement) as a category of identity and marginalisation. The term became a prolonged label rather than a description of a particular moment of uprooting. Many people moved to their new physical and social locations bearing the tag of *visthapit*, belonging to a *visthapit* group, and inhabiting a *visthapit* colony. Various narratives give insights into different dimensions of being a *visthapit* - which can mean simultaneously an externally imposed identity, an internalised identity, a means to make claims about relative marginalisation, and a means to 'organise for action from the state. Based on my ethnographic doctoral research during 2013-14 in Uttarakhand, this paper explores how *visthapit* has been used in a range of contexts, beginning from the inception of the dam to the present day.

The idea of a dam in the Bhagirathi-Bhilangna[1] valley, tributaries of the Ganges, was conceived in 1949, when dams were starting to be the temples of modern India. The location was the Tehri-Garhwal region of the Himalayas in India. Actual work on the dam began in 1978 when the region was still part of the Uttar Pradesh state. But the demand for a separate statehood arising from a history of political and economic marginalisation led to the formation of a separate mountain state of Uttarakhand in 2000.

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[1] Bhagirathi is one of the headstreams of the river Ganga in India while Bhilangna is a major tributary of the Bhagirathi.

In 2006, the first phase of the Tehri hydroelectric dam project[2] began operating in Tehri Garhwal region of the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, India. The dam submerged the Tehri town, locally considered a cultural centre, and thirty- five villages completely, while seventy- four villages faced partial submergence (Sharma, Sarwal and Arora 2007). Additionally, thirteen villages were fully affected due to acquisition of land for the project purpose and to establish new colonies.

The rehabilitation and resettlement pushed people into urban and rural colonies based on the previous place of stay (Tehri town or a village). Affected families under Rural Rehabilitation were categorised as fully or partially affected. Families with fifty percent or more land acquired were 'Fully Affected' while those with less than fifty percent land under submergence were deemed 'Partially Affected' (Sharma, Sarwal and Arora 2007.). An almost exclusively mountain life was to be replaced by options between a valley (Dehradun, also the capital city of Uttarakhand), the plains (Haridwar), or the semi-hilly areas (Rishikesh). People from the old town of Tehri used to an elevation of 770m, were moved to the New Tehri Town at an altitude of 1350-1850 m.

Claims and counter-claims involving corruption and embezzlement of the resettlement funds, land appropriation, cost of the dam and its safety and viability have been a common thread in narratives, local writings, and non- governmental reports (Bandyopadhyay 1990; Economic and Political Weekly 2004; International Rivers Network 2002; Kedia 2009; Singh 1990). Close to a hundred thousand people were displaced from their home region. And this entire period led to the usage of the Hindi word *visthapit* as a category of identity and marginalisation for the dam oustees.

This paper is an attempt to explore visthapit as a long term identity following forced resettlement in context of the Tehri dam in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, India. Based on initial research during 2013-14, I am attempting to show the varied usages of visthapit, how it is both external and internal, an action as well as a reaction. Additionally, it is also a potential tool for resistance and

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[2] The project includes the Tehri dam and hydro power plant (1000MW), and Koteshwar Hydro Electric Project (400MW).

mobilisation to negotiate with the state. I begin the paper by unpacking visthapit based on narratives and observation. Then I briefly introduce the region of Tehri, outlining its history and the demand for a separate state. This section also explores creation and continuation of marginalised identity formations as prevalent among the people in the Garhwal Himalayas. From there I proceed to discuss the dam chronology before returning to the discussion of visthapit as a category of identity.

Cernea's impoverishment risks and reconstruction framework for Development Forced Displacement and Resettlement (DFDR) includes marginalisation involving social, psychological, and economic downward mobility as one of the eight risks (Scudder 2009). Victims of forced removal are often stigmatised in the new locations they have to inhabit (Button 2009: 264). As an example Button (2009) cites the children living in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer camps being stigmatised as 'FEMA kids' after hurricanes Andrew and Charley hit parts of the US.

In July 2013, I made my first trip to one of the rural 'resettlement colonies' ('visthapit colony' used more commonly) located in Haridwar, about 105 km away from the Tehri dam site. It was hard to reach the area, far removed from the more popular Haridwar city. The long lines of hotels and *dharamsalas* (a kind of rest house) on both sides of the road gave way to vendors who were asked for further directions. The name of the place itself did not get replies as promptly as when 'visthapit colony' was used. Some narrow, crowded, 'can-definitely-use-maintenance' roads finally opened to large tracts of fields. That is where I met R, a man in his 30s, one of the oustees actively involved with issues of dams and displacement(s).

Echoes of Hindi alphabets being recited by the students provided the background setting in the school room where we finally sat. Over the course of our conversation that afternoon, R urged, 'Please definitely note this point that a huge rumour has spread outside … about us getting huge "claims" for resettlement'.

As R and I continued our talk, J entered the room. He listened to us before starting to give his own opinions on the matter, nudged subtly by me. 'First and foremost, we people are visthapit. This label given by the government is a huge mark on us! Now, this tag of visthapit will be carried forward from generation to generation.'

R interjected, 'And outsiders feel by outsiders I mean the locals here, they feel that we have received a lot of money'.

'Do you encounter any problems because of this label'? I asked aloud to the room.

R gave his reply in the negative. But J continued where R stopped,'The village where we lived, it had a name. Now we are simply visthapit from there to here. The locals here think of us only as the Tehri dam visthapit.

Till then R had not used the word visthapit between just the two of us. But once J used it, the word somehow found a home in R's vocabulary too. And soon he used it to refer to another displaced group inhabiting that area – the displaced from the India-Pakistan partition.

Several weeks later, I was sitting with a local family which lives close to one of the urban resettlement colonies in the capital city of Uttarakhand, Dehradun. While discussing my research, one of them remarked about the uprooted: 'In the evenings they get drunk and abuse the government. That is all they do'.

I still struggle to find a single English word which might do justice to the Hindi word *visthapit*. I went through reports and official records, tried Google translator. Highly confused, I even sought refuge in my mother, an MA in Hindi literature. Words like ousted, uprooted, resettled/resettlement, displaced/displacement were used interchangeably. There was no single interpretation which could unpack the myriad meanings the word contained for the varied people who use it. There was a story behind each story revolving around 'visthapit'.

My own use of the word probably had its inception in the casual banters over the years about the Tehri dam by people I knew. By the time I began my research, it had slipped into my own practice.

And the more it was used, the more I saw *how* it was invoked. As I continue with my research, greater and subtler nuances came my way. This paper is an initial attempt at exploring all that visthapit can be, for the people who use it within the context of the Tehri dam.

In her book Hiroshima Traces, Lisa Yoneyama (1999: 97) explores the *hibakusha* (those subjected to the atomic bomb or radiation) identity, how the hibakusha resisted representations which tried confining this

notion to a single category – 'all remembering, thinking, feeling, and acting consistently, without contradictions'.

If visthapit is a verb to denote the physical movement, it is also a noun and adjective to identify a person, a group, or a certain territory. The term is a prolonged label rather than a description of a particular moment of uprooting. Many people moved to their new physical and social locations bearing the tag of *visthapit*, belonging to a *visthapit* group, and inhabiting a *visthapit* colony. To some it is a badge for the sacrifice they made. Then there are those who have 'visthapit colony' engraved on the address plates outside their doors and houses. They do not want to forget or want others to forget. But there are also people who are unsure about it or think it is a negative presence since they view it as a deterrent in assimilating with the new surroundings. People carry visthapit as a collective and individual label simultaneously, imposed from and consumed both within and without. They contest the subjectivities of the term as well as the notion of visthapit itself.

If it has an external imposition through the government, the media, and the 'outsiders' (locals in the areas where the displaced moved to or the larger populace), then there is also an internal circulation. Visthapit as a form of identity within the external and internal circles is similar to what Castells (1997) calls 'legitimising identity' and 'resistance identity' within the discursive politics of domination and resistance (Peña 2003: 148). While the former is produced by dominant institutions to extend and rationalise domination by certain individuals, the latter is created by the marginalised or the dominated to revalue their fringe positions (Peña 2003).

When introduced into the narrative externally, visthapit can be a source of othering, a physical and social boundary. This word contains displacement within it, the actual event where people were removed for, in this case, Tehri dam to be built. This particular context also evokes the development and modernity discourse where sacrifices have to be made for 'national interest', where, as Barutciski (2002) points out, the government responsible for the displacement is also responsible for ensuring the protection of the affected (Clark 2009: 181). When reports mention visthapit, it can either be about the successful and well-planned rehabilitation and resettlement carried out (government records) or the opposite (non-governmental records).

Yet, visthapit is also a potent tool for the affected group to highlight their position and to achieve or attempt to achieve promises that were made to them. Unfortunately, displaced communities have to bear the brunt of documenting and proving their victimisation (Johnston 2009: 207). Thus, being a visthapit becomes a possible way for the affected people to exercise their agency and engage the authorities and larger society with their continued attempts to overcome struggles which can be as little (or as big) as paying the gas bill.

Visthapit is an emotional baggage, a remembrance of a place once lived in and completely lost; it is an acknowledgement of the loss of a known way of life. It is a reminder of the sense of othering that has been done to them, that continues to exist.

So where J found it a mark imposed by the government, his lament that it is a tag that will follow them, hints at the continued existence of the term in their lives. The ease, with which I got the directions once I asked where the visthapit colony was, shows how visthapit has also become a convenient marker of spatiality. R's referring to the locals as outsiders gives a sense of othering that is at work.

Visthapit is the physical uprooting that happened, and somewhere it is a hope for future possibilities in return for the past that was put at stake and eventually let go. Where the past, present, and future keep over – lapping, that constructs a visthapit.

Introducing Tehri

Tehri and its surrounding areas find the earliest mention as 'Ganesh Prayag' in the Kedarkhand section of the ancient Hindu text Skanda Purana[3] (Dangwal 2013; Mahila Samakhya 2012; Rawat 2002). Later it became the capital of the Shah dynasty of Garhwal in 1815, before being annexed to the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 1949, post independence.

Along with Pauri Garhwal, Kumaon, and Uttarkashi, Tehri Garhwal formed the mountainous, peripheral terrain of the majorly plains state of UP, bordering Tibet in the north and Nepal in the east. The Himalayas, for years, have maintained an imposing image of physical barriers, geographically speaking. But their grandeur and the difficult

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[3] Named after Kartikeya (Skanda), son of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati. It has references to Shiva and places associated with him.

terrain coupled with a meek existing infrastructure let the region retain a shroud of intrigue for long. A greater interaction between the plains and mountains was successful once the mountain areas too became a part of the Indian nation. With increased physical, administrative, and economic integration of the region into wider socio-economic systems, the mountains began to be transformed (Dutta and Pant 2003).

In an interview with The Illustrated Weekly of India (January 21, 1990) Sunder Lal Bahuguna, who was actively involved with the Tehri dam protests had this to say: 'All such projects are being implemented in *Adivasi*[4] and mountainous areas. That is because our population is scanty. The population in Tehri must be barely 4 lakhs. In U.P. our voice is hardly heard because it is such a big state. It has 435 legislators, of whom only 18 are from the mountains'.

Demand for a separate state stemmed from absence of popular participation in development planning and implementation, and the low regard with which local people's skills and knowledge were held by many development experts, scientists, and planners (Mawdsley 1999).

According to Gadgil and Guha (2013/1993), the extraction of natural resources, pushed the inhabitants of these areas into a corner, creating populations at the 'margins'. To the local people in the mountain region the resources were being exploited by the rest of the State without adequate recompense or balanced development in return (Mawdsley 1999). Already bordered due to their geography, this unequal consumption of resources created a further sense of fringe.

Linkenbach (2012) and Sachs (2011) point out that the movement of statehood in Uttarakhand was more about 'economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement' than language and cultural unity, the main reasons for the creation of new states in India. The population of Uttarakhand was much less compared to UP so that people felt politically under-represented.

It was also set in a much longer history of discontent over development (or the lack of it), and over the long line of state

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[4] One of the Hindi words for tribe/indigenous groups

governments which were widely believed to have misunderstood, ignored, or abused this politically insignificant part of U.P. (Mawdsley 1999).

A movement for separate statehood led to the formation of the Himalayan state of Uttaranchal in 2000 (re-named Uttarakhand in 2006). This young state has thirteen districts of which nine are fully hilly regions (Gairola and Negi 2011: 33). *Devbhoomi* (an abode of gods); a breathtaking landscape of mountains, rivers and forests; a land seeped in myths and legends; a region rich in natural resources; one of the most wanting areas in the country. There are several ways of experiencing Uttarakhand.

The creation of the state resulted in a spawning of multiple developmental and planning activities including the construction of large dams (Dobhal, Kumar, and Rawat 2011), welcoming many 'outsiders' (plains-based corporates and developers). Uttarakhand, part of the diverse Himalayan ecosystem, is home to 22 dams in total (NRLD 2014). Expanding commercial activity due to market forces coupled with a growing population has gradually led to an increased pressure on the existing natural resources in the mountains of the state (Guha 2005/1989).

An expansion also led to the entry of new variants – of knowledge, living, market, communication, resource management, and politics. It resulted in the formation of informal categories of 'us' and 'them', 'ours' and 'theirs' with identities of hill residents oscillating between difference and belonging (Linkenbach 2012) as these are politically manoeuvred and culturally shaped.

Popular and academic writings discuss Uttarakhand either using nature as a referral point, in terms of national economics and development where its vast resources are emphasised, or through its marginalisation and remoteness due to the Himalayas as natural barriers (Linkenbach 2012). This particular portrayal talks about a 'remote' land which is 'marginal', inhabited by a largely backward population following a simple subsistence-oriented way of life. While the authorities talk about the region as a trove of natural resources waiting to be harnessed, the locals give government statistics to show their dismal growth story – unemployment, per capita income, or poverty leading to the marginalisation of the area. Here we see how the same resource rich region is used to highlight contrasting aspects by the state and the locals.

Linkenbach (2012) links the evolution of a political awareness in the people of Uttarakhand with the imposed forest policies, and natural as well as human-caused hazards and disasters. Phenomena which resulted in distancing the people from the known land they had inhabited for generations. As they saw resources being usurped by 'outsiders' in the form of people from the plains, an 'insider' identity became visibly active. The villagers had to think about taking a stand, and about the state's role in their region and life. Successive local movements like Chipko, alcohol prohibition and separate statehood led to a continued growth of this awareness.

Movements surrounding the Tehri dam too should be treated as a part of the larger culture of protest resulting from the history and ecology of the region ((Guha 2005/1989). Hiring outside contractors for mega-projects like the Tehri dam led to external interventions to extract natural wealth from mountains (Dutta and Pant 2003). A move towards integrating to form a larger whole with the plains has been accompanied by a sense of disruption of the traditional social fabric and anger at the comparative state of the hills (Guha 2005/1989). Central issues still pertained to the authorities' role – what they had done, what they had not done, what was being done or neglected, and what the future entailed. Concerns regarding the Tehri dam oscillated between national interests popularised as a 'greater common good' and local worries over giving up living the only way people had known.

The altering geopolitics intensified the sense of marginalisation in many people who had thought that their fight for a separate state would give them more autonomy in decision-making about their region's resources. Sections from these people were removed and affected for a project aimed at the plains rather than at the local area. This national focus furthered their marginalisation as these people became new arrivals in other already settled regions.

Here comes another dam(n)[5]

Tehri Garhwal has long been one of the most underdeveloped districts in Uttarakhand, the poorest of India according to the first Inter-State and Inter-District Income Differential (Bahuguna 1995; Dutta and Pant 2003). Previous evaluation of nutritional status of the Garhwal

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[5] Where (n) denotes the number of dams.

hills population indicates that the overall health is inferior to that of people elsewhere in the country, as well as in other developing nations (Dutta and Pant 2003: 278). Out-migration to urban centres has been an important feature of Garhwali societies owing to scarce livelihood options, later restrictions on forest use and limited arable land for subsistence agriculture (Bisht 2008; Dobhal, Kumar, and Rawat 2011; Grunawalt 2005).

In the nineteenth century, people in this region derived 'some income from employment as wood-cutters, and bearers of litters for the European visitors to the health resorts, and from the adventurous Hindu pilgrims who throng to the famous shrines along the upper course of the Ganges and its tributaries' (Crooke 1998/1897). Even after a century and more, the livelihood options of the local population – after independence, after annexation, after a separate state, after 'developmental' projects, remain almost the same.

In a region with some of the lowest indicators and very high rates of out-migration due to numerous push and pull factors, the Tehri dam had initially offered hopes of industrialisation and generation of local employment. That is why the people might have been wary of the dam, but not all were always against it. When people calculated more risks than benefits and as their voices got relegated to the background with the dam gradually being debated almost exclusively within the environmental discourse (local writings; newspaper reports during the 1990s; Ishizaka 2006[6]), things took a turn. In his dissertation on displacement due to Tehri dam, Bisht (2008) writes how the affected people were in active engagement with their situation and tried making the best possible choices – like opting for a resettlement colony suited to their interests. Eventually, as Usha Ramanathan notes (1996), the rightness of the displacement was no longer in challenge: it was the enhancement of compensation that was sought.

'What have we received?! Nothing. The kind of pain there is, only the one above knows best', a woman in her late 50s had commented, as the two of us sat in a barber's shop in the New Tehri district.

In the larger discourse, compensation or claim usually gets restricted to money and the land allotted by the government, turning communities into a cost (Ramanathan 1996). But for the oustees,

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[6] Sincere thanks to Shinya Ishizaka, Kyoto University, for providing this paper.

'receiving compensation' contains a bitter mockery towards all that is lost; it is not as linear as some money or building houses.

By 1960s, site selection for Tehri dam and inspections had begun. Some of the older locals tell me how they had first heard news about a possible dam in their area through the radio, and how nobody took it seriously at that time. None perceived any threat. And there were those who believed that something like this would never happen.[7] A middle-aged man, whose village submerged completely, recalls the reactions of the elders – 'people in the village were illiterate and lacked awareness. They refused to believe that they would be moved out. For them even if the dam was to be built, the waters would not reach them. That is what they thought. They would mock the government saying it had lost its mind (about the waters drowning the villages)'.

N, a retired geologist, lived across the river from the town of Tehri during his student days. Originally a resident of Dehradun, he describes the atmosphere during the 1960s thus – 'blasting and soil testing were being conducted at that time, causing a lot of dust. People were mostly unaware about the dam. Excessive blasting started the opposition (to the dam)'. He continues: 'when people started getting ill because of the dust, they realised it was all being done at their cost, that they would have to move out'.

After approval from the Planning Commission in 1972 and the Government of Uttar Pradesh (GOUP)[8] in 1976, the work finally started in 1978, reviewed and revised a year later (Sharma, Sarwal and Arora 2007[9]). Tests to ensure safety were conducted between December 1979 and August 1986. Surrounded by debates centring on

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[7] In their work cited in Downing and Garcia-Downing (2009:231), Scudder (2005) and Scudder and Colson (1982) found a similar disbelief among those who were to be displaced by the Kariba dam located between Zambia and Zimbabwe.

[8] Initially under the GoUP state plan, the project became a joint venture between the Government of India (GoI) and GoUP due to paucity of state funds (Jatana, 2007: 20), before finally being given to the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Ltd. (THDC) in 1989.

[9] Sharma, S.C. n.d. *Rehabilitation of Tehri Dam And Lessons Learnt.* 2014.

safety issues and hazards, the Tehri project was unsuccessfully challenged in the Supreme Court in a writ petition filed by the Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangarash Samiti (TBVSS) in 1985.

In 1987, a committee appointed by the Ministry of Environment unanimously ruled against the project citing safety and environmental issues along with its social impact.

The later 1980s were the time when protests against the dam gathered steam and people started participating pro-actively. The work on the dam would be halted, only to be re-started. This cycle greatly impacted people's decision about their present and future.

Then, on 20th October 1991, Uttarkashi region in the Himalayas was hit by an earthquake. Located in a seismically sensitive mountain zone, many locals blamed the nearby Maneri dam[10] as the precursor to the devastating calamity which caused close to 800 human deaths and a loss of more than 10,000 livestock heads (Rawat, Barakoti and Negi 2001). 80 km away, this incident accelerated panic and protest against the on-going dam in Tehri. In May 1992, a few months after the Uttarkashi earthquake, then Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao, held review meetings with 'experts' and two years later, in March 1994, the first stage of the Tehri Hydro-electric dam project – the Tehri dam, was given the final approval by the Government Of India (Sinha and Pokhriyal 2001).

The dam and its surrounding uncertainty pushed the people in limbo, wherein they could not decide their present since the prospects remained undecided. If certain tidings would lead them to start something new, a sudden turn of events would bring a halt to it. '40 years; an entire generation was over', remarked an elderly person. With one foot on the land there and another in the air, they had already become visthapit.

The dam tunnels were finally shut down in 2005 for the waters to completely submerge the surrounding land. The reservoir or more popular 'Tehri lake' created as an outcome is spread over 55 sq. km (Sinha and Pokhriyal 2001) of the fertile lands of Bhagirathi and

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[10] A 39 metre high dam on the Bhagirathi river. Dynamite blasting of mountains for tunnels as a reason for the earthquake was given by most locals of one of the most affected villages in 2009 during my stay there.

Bhilangana valleys. A total of 2400 MW[11] power is to be generated by this multi-purpose dam project. The drinking water from the Tehri reservoir is estimated to meet the requirement of '40 lacs people of Delhi and 30 lacs people in various towns and villages of U.P.' (Maan, Aggarwal and Pant 2007: 438).

A local in New Tehri had once surprised me by asking my sleeping time in Delhi. Although confused, I had answered – around midnight.

'A lot of you do not sleep before 2-3 in the morning, right? It is our electricity you consume. But we are the ones who have paid for it. And are still paying'.

Similar comments have been thrown at me time and again, in reference to the fact that the electricity generated by the dam is used in Delhi, the capital of the country located roughly 320 km away. This comment contained within it the collective irritation of a group which gradually (and some might say dejectedly) agreed to the displacement hoping for the benefit of the local region once the deal was sealed. But that never happened.

A similar sentiment is re-iterated by R, from Haridwar: 'Who needs the electricity? Me? People of Tehri? People of Delhi. You. What do you need it for? For your industries, televisions, air-conditioners, refrigerators, shopping malls. Give us our portion too!'

India ranks after China, USA, and Russia in the world in terms of number of dams (National Register of Large Dams 2009). The NRLD (2014) shows that up till 1900, there were 67 large dams[12] in the country, numbers rising to 3912 during 1951 to 2000. The Tehri dam is amongst the 59 completed dams listed in the national register as 'dams of national importance'[13]. World's fifth tallest dam, 260.5 m high, it is a point in a series of examples where a nation is attempting

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[11] 1.61% of the total hydel energy produced in the country (figures from http://www.ecoworld.com/atmosphere/effects/indias-hydro-power.html).

[12] A large dam is classified as one with a maximum height of more than 15 metres from its deepest foundation to the crest (NRLD 2014).

[13] These are dams with a height of 100 metres and above or those with a storage capacity of 1km^3 and above and which have been completed.

to be defined and recognised through 'massive projects of landscape and social engineering' (Cederlöf and Sivaramakrishnan 2012).

What do you mean when you say 'visthapit'?

Garhwal and I are no strangers to each other. My grandparents came to Delhi from their villages in the mountains and the place has been kept alive within the family through stories and annual trips to the region. My initial interest in Tehri dam and the concerned people arose when I heard, more than once, passing comments regarding the 'extravagant' compensation packages received by the oustees, followed by discussions on how content they were now, living current realities which were no more than dreams back in the mountains for them.

Most of these opinions emanate from assumptions about these 'people from the mountains' receiving huge amounts of money they had never required in the mountains due to a more sustained way of life. Bandyopadhyay (1990) calls cash compensation a cruel joke since a productive asset like land is snatched away, and cash gets consumed swiftly. The sizes of houses in some of the colonies, especially in Dehradun, have also added to the perception of a comfortable life following displacement.

As I kept meeting more and more people, a greater world kept opening up to me. Till now I had mostly heard about the visthapit from the outsiders – locals who had not been through the experience themselves.

Tired of talks about displacement and the subsequent money, G, an old vendor in New Tehri did not hide her sarcasm. 'Give her your interview, you will get 2.5 lacs[14], she nudged a young man standing near her *redi* (cart). 'Give her your interview; she will return to us our Tehri from the waters'. Much later she would tell me how life is as bitter as before. She does not see those spoken promises. Rather, now she has to walk uphill daily for over 2 km to set up her cart which has given her income since 1975. 'Sometimes I manage to earn Rs.100-120

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[14] Compensation money

in a day. And there are days I go back without any earnings'. Her reality belies the claim of the Tehri dam R & R which mentions that the 'project has immensely contributed to the economic and social development of the region as well as Uttarakhand State by way of direct and indirect employment/economic opportunities'.

'The government got the forest land for free and simply dumped the people there, not considering whether they have any water to drink. People are drinking that stagnant water from the reservoir. How can they remain healthy? Let us not forget the economic impact either. The hospital there was just a km away, we could go walking. Here we have to pay to and fro. We were promised ration, schooling facilities, they simply built one marriage hall. Will we only ever celebrate weddings, not fall ill? Or do our children not need go to school? We cannot even afford the children's fees because we were not given any new source of livelihood', lamented S, a former journalist who had shifted to Dehradun from New Tehri after his health started failing in the resettlement colony situated steeply on a slope.

Visthapit unfolds, depending on who talks and what is being discussed. The affected people have mixed views. Their views about the notion and the dam derive, not only from their current location of resettlement, but also from their migration experiences and position in the past and present society (age, gender, religion, caste, class, employment, political participation). Visthapit grants them a certain position in the larger social and physical area they are now a part of.

In the summer of 2014, a day after the local elections in her area, H, living in one of the colonies in Dehradun said to me over tea: 'This "visthapit" is not going to last for long. It will linger on simply, as a tag. Five more years and they'll come under the municipal development authority. That is why I am trying to spread awareness. These big houses are elephant's tusks – only for show. If they come under the development authority, they'll have to pay road tax, income tax, civil tax. They have made these homes by selling their land. But what will they do from now on? They have nothing left. On top of that their kids are also not posted in any good place'. Her frustration hinted at the potent power visthapit has as a means to an end, the loss of possibilities to challenge the authorities that would end with people's absorption into the larger civil and administrative society. This also suggested the presence of visthapit as a tag which will

continue being used symbolically long after it would lose its role in resistance.

The struggle for access to subsidised resources continues in the form of being minced between the private corporation, THDC (Tehri Hydro Development Corporation), and the government departments.

'THDC is giving money to the government. But all that is going away in bribes. Now who should we fight? We approach the THDC, they direct us to the government department. We go there, they tell us that THDC is not giving us anything', exclaims an irritated R. Some people have expressed their frustration at the fact that nobody wants to take responsibility for them – the corporation maintains that the dam is built and their work is done, while the government department redirects them to THDC saying that they are not in charge of the visthapit.

Such instances are re-counted when questions about the nation-state and development surface, as people struggle to make sense of their positions in the society.

I remember a junior government official discussing the problem of seepage in her building in New Tehri with a local leader. She had written to the authorities many times but apparently still no action had been taken. The local leader, after listening to her, had calmly asked her whether she had written in her letter that she was a visthapit, indicating that it would speed up the process.

Being a visthapit can give the oustees access to avenues which they can channelise to be heard. People are active agents and no longer take their displacement and resettlement or a lack thereof, for granted. A connection to the world outside the region, and various forms of media help people use this tag as a political leverage to demand for the promises that were made to them but not successfully pursued. Many of them are aware that they are not isolated, that similar events are occurring nationally and globally, and that they can be active agents of change through not being passive, even if there are no immediate results. As R says with a chuckle: 'we know that nothing will happen. But we need to grab them (authorities) by the collar and shake them up from time to time to remind them that we are here'.

Heart of the matter

Knowing what goes into the making of a visthapit is significant. But also pertinent is asking the question: why is a visthapit created? When I am told, subtly or overtly, that they were removed for me and the likes of me, for the water in my tap, the electricity in my house, for my entertainment and leisure shopping, for my nation which does not have a place for them, I can only respond in silence. And I know that their hurt is not misplaced.

Treating some people as ends in themselves seems possible only if other people are treated as a means to achieve that first goal (De Wet 2009: 78). Discourses contesting the otherness of people treated as a means have been around for long. It is a humble hope on my part that there will be a broader understanding of the multiple meanings embedded in visthapit; that the angst of displacement felt by those who have lived it, is not simplified through a lens of compensation, land, or housing, howsoever sufficient or insufficient it is made out to be.

Whereas I discuss this Hindi word in the particular narrative of the Tehri dam, there can be many more visthapit with their own socio-historical backgrounds and struggles. My time with the Tehri dam affected people has opened up to me the complexity of occupying the visthapit position. Through their narratives I have been educated about the paradox that it is in the lives of the affected.

Visthapit is that introduction which describes their stories of the last few decades, even before they begin talking. If it is a term for othering, it is also what can give them an access to make demands in the marginalised positions they hold. It is both a stigmatising label of marginalisation and the path to fight it.

The category of visthapit, as an identity used by the affected coupled with a means of marginalisation imposed from the outside, is significant. Through this text I have tried to discuss visthapit as those multiple voices of a people whose life choices were forcefully altered for what was argued by the state to be an encompassing/inclusive public good.

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Identity and Rural Women in India: The Impact of MGNREGS in a District in West Bengal

Arundhati Bhattacharyya

Abstract

The paper is based on a study undertaken in the district of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. The project was sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research. The paper tries to reveal the condition of rural women after the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), its impact on the lives of innumerable women beneficiaries and its impact on identity formation. It has tried to portray the implications of MGNREGA as premier social sector legislation in the world that creates economic entitlements and guarantee wage employment. All previous employment programmes provided work when governments decided to provide work, not when people demanded work. The study has looked into the levels of social awareness, capacity building of the women workers and identity development among the women beneficiaries in the district of 24 Parganas (North) in West Bengal.

Introduction

India is a developing country which is fast moving towards greater presence in the international scenario. The population, geographical size and the large market have pushed India to make its voice heard to the outside world. However, the gap between India and Bharat has always been there and is slowly increasing. The number of known billionaires in India increased from two in the 1990s, to sixty five in early 2014. The gap between the rich and the poor is increasing. According to Oxfam report, rapid rise of extreme economic inequality is significantly hindering the fight against poverty (Bahree 2014).

The complex economic situation is aggravated by social cleavages in the Indian society. Tradition and modernity are interlocked in every social event. Social structures and power relations which have been inherited from the past have its impact on the rural societal relations. In rural India, social change comes long after economic change takes place and it takes time for the individual and the community to adapt to this transition (Basile and Mukhopadhyay 2009).

Gandhi, stressed on reconstruction of villages, which could ultimately rebuild the nation. He wanted to develop self-reliant villages with a decentralised system. Village swaraj was the aim of Gandhi. He had also mentioned that the true Indian civilisation is in Indian villages. In a letter to Nehru, he wrote that there should be equality between villages and cities (Joshi 2002). In *Harijan* dated 29th August, 1936, Gandhi clearly stated, '...I would say if the village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India....' In this statement, he emphasised the importance of quality of life of the rural Indians. India has introduced a number of programmes to raise the standard of rural life (Hazra 2013).

Identity

Identity can be distinguished into actual full identity and self-represented identity. Actual full identity is the result of the past and the present beliefs, wishes, temperament, roles, actions and self-understanding. Self-represented identity is the narratively constructed picture a person has of oneself (Flanagan 1991). It is very subjective in nature. Inspired by psychological studies, the concept of identity has been defined as a person's sense of self. It influences about the way one perceives oneself and the manner in which the person is perceived by others. Identity is developed through continuous interaction between the individual and others in the society. Social norms and conditioning play an important role in formation of identity of a person.

Traditionally, ideal woman was one who remained in the house to take care of the family members and engage in child rearing and bearing responsibilities. On the one hand, in the Indian society, the identity of a woman depended on the identity of the male members in the family, be it father, husband or son. On the other hand, the ideal man was a breadwinner, who was engaged in the public sphere and had an identity of his own. When a woman enters labour market, initially, she was considered an 'outsider'. She had to prove her worth at every step. Visible and invisible constraints rove in this market. Even in the twenty-first century, gender wage discrimination is a live issue in India as well as at the global level. A report of the United States observes, that women working full-time earn only 77 cents for each dollar earned by men per year (Hegewisch 2011). Even today, in many societies, including the Indian, the entrenched traditional patriarchal

socialisation gives power to the husband to decide on the wife's participation in the labour market (Chang 2011).

Task assignment in the family reinforces the social expectations and restraints. It is expected that a young girl who will take care of her siblings will be nurturing her social interactions (Condon and Stern 1993).

Gender identity is a role identity which is attached to positions in society. A role identity is the meaning attributed to the self while in a role. Gender identity is the meaning associated with being male or female. Gender identity is just one form of identity, but the most significant one, which is approved universally. Gender identity is a social construction which gets entangled with other socio-economic and cultural factors. In patriarchal societies, men enjoy elitism in the family. Women are always the backbenchers in enjoying the privileges in the family, including distribution of food. This position of power gets reinforced in the misogynist attitude towards the world. The society reinforces the feeling of superiority among men. Men's greater power in the public sphere gets reflected in more dominant behaviours in the private sphere. In Indian society, women's less powerful position in the public domain do get reflected in more submissive behaviours in interaction in private domain.

 Power is a multi-layered phenomenon, which needs to be understood from different aspects (Stets 1995). The interaction between power and identity is non-linear. Identity is constructed according to the interests of power. It is a complex phenomenon. Power and identity do not work in a parallel way. Power becomes meaningful only through identity. Power reconstructs identity according to its own interests. It picks and chooses identity traits it likes or it cannot ignore and imposes as well as defends them from others. Identity is not a static phenomenon (Morina 2012). In a way, power of authority organises and propels itself through notions of identity. The identity of the powerless in the society is controlled by the brokers of power in the society. According to Dahrendorf, social stratification leads to social control. In any stratified society, the powerful utilises the State and non-State agencies to subjugate the weaker lot. In India, the hegemony of men down the decades has pushed women to marginalised status. The patriarchal authority, in the Indian family and society, has been playing a formative role in the development of identity of an individual. The legitimacy of patriarchy in the Indian

society has actively constructed and imposed identity on individuals of different caste, gender, economic standard and status.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

According to socio-economic Caste Census 2011, the primary breadwinner in three to four households in rural India earns less than Rs 5000 a month. They find it difficult to run their kitchen. Around 275 million people in rural areas struggle for subsistence living (Kumar 2015). Such is the scenario of the Indian villages. The paper tries to provide a picture of the role of MGNREGS in alleviation of rural poverty. MGNREGS had been introduced as an antidote to poverty and lack of development in the rural areas. It tried to address the unemployment issues in the Indian villages during the slack season of agricultural production for 100 days, which has been extended to 150 days in tribal areas. The scheme also aims at anti-migration. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP:2010) in its report has appreciated India`s rural employment guarantee scheme of MGNREGA and its successful impact on addressing rural poverty.

The goals of MGNREGA include-

i) Social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India by providing employment opportunities

ii) Livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity

iii) Drought-proofing and flood management in rural India

iv) Empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Schedules Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation

v) Strengthening decentralised, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives

vi) Deepening democracy at the grass-roots by strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

vii) Effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance (GoI 2013).

The MGNREGA marks a paradigm shift from previous wage employment programmes either planned or implemented in India's history. MGNREGA is unlike any other in its scale, architecture and thrust. It has an integrated natural resource management and livelihoods generation perspective. The transparency and accountability mechanisms under MGNREGA create unprecedented accountability of performance, especially towards immediate stakeholders. Social audit, a new feature of MGNREGA, creates unprecedented accountability of performance, especially towards the immediate stakeholders (Shah,Mann and Pande 2012).

The Act guides government authorities to apply MGNREGA 'job plan'. Under popular MGNREGA scheme, the Indian government satisfies the price towards the transaction of salary, three-fourths of content price and some quantity of management price. State Governments fulfil the price of lack of career allocation, one-fourth of content price and management price of State authorities. Since the State Governments pay the lack of career allocation, there are intense incentives to provide career to employees. The main political background of MGNREGA has been decided by the UPA government. However, it is up to the State government to choose the quantity of lack of career allotment, great topic to the bad condition which need to be at least one-fourth of the lowest salary for the first one month, and not less than half of the lowest salary thereafter. 100 times of career (or lack of career allowance) per family must be offered to able and willing employees every economical season.

Provisions under MGNREGA during United Progressive Alliance regime

Adult associates of a non-urban family, willing to do inexperienced guide perform, are needed to make signing up in composing or by mouth to the regional Gram Panchayat

The Gram Panchayat after due confirmation will offer a job cards. The job cards will have the photograph of all mature associates of the family willing to perform under MGNREGA and is free.

The job cards must be released within 15 times of programme.

A job cards owner may publish an itemised programme for career to the Gram Panchayat, revealing the time and length for which perform is desired. The lowest times of career have to be at least 14 days.

The Gram Panchayat will problem an old invoice of the published programme for career, against which the assurance of offering career within 15 times operates.

Employment will be given within 15 times of programme for perform, if it is not then everyday lack of career allocation as per the Act, has to be compensated responsibility of transaction of lack of career allocation is of the declares.

Work should normally be offered within 5 km distance of the town. In situation perform is offered beyond 5 km, additional income of 10 per cent are due to fulfil additional transport and residing expenses.

Wages are to be compensated according to the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 for farming labourers in the State, unless the Centre is aware a salary quantity which will not be less than about Rs. 60 (around US$1.09) per day. Equivalent income will be offered to both men and women.

The unique edition of the Act was accepted with only Rs 155/ day as the lowest salary that needs to be compensated under MGNREGA scheme. However, many states in Indian already have salary rules with lowest income set at more than Rs. 100 (about US$1.81) per day. MGNREGA's lowest salary has since been modified to around Rs. 130 (about US$2.35) per day.

Wages are to be compensated according to item quantity or everyday quantity. Payment of income has to be done on every week base and not beyond a couple weeks in any situation.

At least one-third recipients shall be females who have authorised and asked for perform under the programme.

Work's main features such as crèche, water, resources have to be provided.

The display of venture for a town will be suggested by the local gram sabha as well as accepted by the particular zilla panchayat.

Minimum 50 percent of performs will be utilised by local Gram Panchayats for execution.

Permissible performs primarily consist of water and ground preservation, afforestation and area growth works.

A 60:40 around salary and content rate has to be operated. No contractor's 'organisation and technical apparatus is allowed.

The Government of India holds the 100 percent salary price of inexperienced guide labour and 75 percent of the content price such as the income of experienced and partial experienced workers.

Social Review has to be done by local Gram Sabha.

Grievance redressal systems have to be put in place for guaranteeing a sensitive performance process.

All information and information about the Scheme should be available for community scrutiny.1

The scheme has greatly helped in reducing the prevalent gender wage gap in casual work. The first step in attaining work through MGNREGS is that interested adult members of a rural household need to apply for a job card at the local Gram Panchayat. The legal enforcement of the right to work in the MGNREGS has been a pioneering initiative of the government. The job card is issued within 15 days of application, which includes photograph of all the adult members in the household. With job cards, workers can apply at any time but they cannot have priorities regarding choice of the proposed project (Azam 2012).

Political Background and MGNREGA

MGNREGA was introduced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) reinforced by J. Drèze at the Delhi University of Business Economics. This had a significant impact on the venture of MGNREGA. The Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act had showed the way for MGNREGA. A wide range of individual's and organisations definitely campaigned for this Act. The political background of MGNREGA is influenced by UPA government. The UPA government had reduced the allocation in the final years in their tenure. After the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in the Centre, there was unpaid wages of a monstrous amount of Rs 4,800 crore in 2013-14, according to the MGNREGA website. This created terrible financial hardship for crores of India's poorest households (Roy and Dey 2014). In spite of numerous roadblocks, the MGNREGA has achieved powerful results.

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[1]   http://www.mgnrega.co.in/political-background-and-the-plan.html , Accessed September 5, 2014

At a relatively small cost, which is only 0.3 percent of India's Gross Domestic Product, about 50 million households are getting some employment at MGNREGA worksites every year. The Act has provided livelihood to numerous women, Dalits or Adivasis. Despite the issue of corruption, a large body of research shows that the scheme has wide-ranging social benefits, including the creation of productive assets (Ghose 2014).

Overview of the Literature

There has been a treasure of knowledge in the form of reports, books, articles, newspaper articles regarding MGNREGS as a programme which has brought in a change in the rural scenario.

A Study titled 'Concurrent Evaluation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the State of Uttarkhand' by Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, conducted in the districts of Udham Singh Nagar and Chamoli founded that women's participation in decision making process has increased after the introduction of MGNREGS, mainly due to the increasing wage earnings. This study also emphasised that non-availability of male workers due to migration to plains became a reason for larger participation of women under the scheme.

A 'Research study on changing gender relations through MGNREGS' in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu done by National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad found that MGNREGS acted as social security measure as female dependency level has declined after the execution of MGNREGS.

A Study, 'Socio-Economic Impacts of Implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA' by Council for Social Development, 2010, has noted increase in the frequency of Gram Sabha meeting in most places in the post-MGNREGS situation. There has been a significant improvement in the participation of women in almost all the places, including the increase in the number of questions asked in the meeting by women workers.

A study on Balarampur block in Purulia in West Bengal by D.K.Dey emphasised that women's participation was high in areas of Schedule Tribe habitation. However, the loopholes, including lack of crèche facilities and absence of social audit, which can hamper in capacity building.

A case study by National Rural Employment Guarantee Act cell in the office of the District magistrate, Purulia and Block Development Officer, Para showed that a successful re-excavation of a pond led to overall empowerment of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe women in the area. This has added to the self-confidence of the women and has been able to influence the decision making in the family.

Another study was based on an exhaustive survey in three villages of Hansapahari, Sheolipahari and Dalpurin in Chhatna Block in Bankura district of West Bengal covering 100 households during 2011-12. Bankura is one of the most backward districts of India. The study probed the impact of MGNREGA focusing on employment security, income generation and its governance and future perspectives. The impact of caste and gender were also studied (Malangmeih, Bhattacharyya and Mitra 2014).

A study on the role of Gram sabha PRIs stated that the most distinguishing feature of MGNREGA is its approach towards empowering women citizen to play an active role in the implementation of the scheme, through gram sabha, PRI and participatory planning. It also highlighted on the problems in the MGNREGS such as, the lack of mobilisation of disadvantaged women, cultural non-acceptance of female participation in the labour force, non-parity of wages, non-availability of worksite facility, non-involvement of self help groups and civil society organisation and non-implementation of an indispensable tool like Right to Information Act 2005 (Rout 2013).

Another study in Maharashtra focussed on women empowerment through MGNREGA recorded MGNREGA is one of the most progressive legislations enacted after the independence and a unique experiment Indian State. It ensures equal wages for both men and women, with a reservation of the women workers. The contribution of women in the household income increased the level of their confidence. It counted the shortcoming such as women do not have direct access to MGNREGA earning as they have joint bank accounts with male member. There study recommends for a provision to have separate bank account in all the states as in Tamil Nadu, where men and women have separate job cards and separate bank accounts (Jain 2013).

The study of mango grafting activities under NREGA in Deganga Block, North 24 Parganas' was submitted to the District Magistrate in December 2009 focused. The study is very narrow in scope.

Research Gap

None of the studies have focused on 24 Parganas (N) of West Bengal, the universe of the study. Regarding the area, I have studied the district from the standpoints of women's worker status, before, during and after the advent of the Scheme. The women who are working under the MGNREGS come from a section of society and are economically vulnerable. Most of them have a bare hand-to-mouth existence. Many of them are also coming from the minority community. The study looked into the levels of social awareness, capacity building of the women workers and their identity formations development among the women beneficiaries due to the implementation of MGNREGS.

Since 1970, India implemented 17 major programmes with focus on employment or self-employment. Women's participation in MGNREGA brings forth some critical points. First of all, those states known for lesser women's participation in workforce have reported a high number of women joining the programme. In Kerala, women accounted for about 15 percent of the workforce. Under the Act they take up 79 percent of the employment created. Tamilnadu and Rajasthan with low share of women workforce, today have 82 and 69 percent women workers under MGNREGA, respectively. Secondly, poor states with greater casual labour potential, like Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, report low women participation (22-33%). This is contradictory to the assumption that poverty forces women to take up casual jobs. Thirdly, it is believed that states with labour-intensive farming like paddy cultivation pull more women into workforce. The MGNREGA data shows the opposite in paddy-intensive Odisha and West Bengal (Mahapatra 2010).

Research Methodology

The study examined the current conceptual background and thinking on the issue of MGNREGS. After thorough literature review relevant to this topic, the field survey has been undertaken in ten blocks of 24 Parganas (North). The study was based on both primary and secondary data, available from different sources. The questionnaire – translated into Bengali – consisted of both close-ended and open-

ended questions. Random sampling of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of MGNREGS was done in the Gram Panchayats of the district. Interviews were conducted for data collection to acquire an in-depth understanding of the issues affecting the MGNREGS workers in the district. A comparison of both male and female respondents were done. Regular interaction and conversation with the beneficiaries at the worksite and elsewhere helped the researcher to understand the issues of empowerment of women, social mobility and the sense of identity formation among the women in the field, after the introduction of MGNREGS. Regular contacts were kept with the government functionaries in the Department of Rural Development, both at the State level in Kolkata and district level in Barasat, the headquarter of 24 Parganas (North), district. This was to know the changes that were taking place in the basic framework and delivery system of MGNREGS. Interactions with both official and non-official functionaries at the Block and Panchayat levels were kept, in order to get a perspective of the implementation at the ground.

Coverage

The universe of the study is 24 Parganas (North) district of West Bengal. North 24 Parganas is adjacent to Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal. The study was conducted from March 2013 to September, 2014. Work sites of MGNREGS were visited to gather quantitative and qualitative data specifically on MGNREGA and its effects on rural livelihoods. In-depth interview of MGNREGS workers was conducted. The respondents hailed from Kashimpur, Paschim Khilkapur Gram Panchayats of Barasat I block, Rajarhat Bishnupur I, Mahisbatan II Gram Panchayats of Rajarhat block, Jadurhati Dakshin, Jadurhati Uttar in Baduria Block, Kumarjhol, Dhaturdaha Gram Panchayats of Minakha block, Gobindakati, Kalitala Gram Panchaysts of Hingalganj block, Nazhat I, Nazhat II Gram Panchayats of Sandeshkhali I block, Koniara I and Koniara II Gram Panchayats of Bagdah block, Chandpara and Dharampur I Gram Panchayats of Gaighata block, Machhlandapur I and II Gram panchayats of Habra I block and Dharampukuria and Tangra Gram Panchayats of Bongaon block.

Data Collection

An empirical study had been undertaken through field survey. A two stage stratified random sampling method has been adopted in the selection of the final sample. In the first stage, blocks have been

selected, while the sample villages were chosen in the second stage. The study includes structured, unstructured, written and oral interviews of a representative sample. The data has been collected from the above mentioned villages. While collecting data the researcher maintained the diversity of the district.

Development of Identity among Rural Women

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 has benefitted women by providing priority for women [Section II(6)], equal wages to both the genders [Section II(34)], creche facility [Section II(28)], work within 5 kms. radius from home, absence of contractor and the option to choose the time of employment. (Pankaj and Tankha 2010). It is the largest safety net in the world in terms of the number of beneficiaries. Several researches have shown that MGNREGS has been able to prove an antidote to poverty. The beneficiaries have been successful in increasing the nutritious food intake, monthly non-food consumption, hike in agricultural wage and an increasing food security (Ravi 2014). It has contributed to reducing poverty by putting upward pressure on agricultural wages. MGNREGA has reduced distress migration from states like Bihar and Odisha to Punjab and Haryana as Railway documents prove that there has been less passengers who had travelled between the two places (Shivakumar 2013). Pankaj and Tankha (2010) revealed that though the participation of women as MGNREGA workers has been quite high in some places, but, it has not been seen that women have active role in work selection, social audit, proper mobilisation of the civil society, share in control and management of assets. However, in some places, women have become vocal in Gram Sabha meetings or in vigilance committees or in management of community assets (Pankaj and Tankha, 2010).

There has been positive tangible and intangible impact of MGNREGA on empowerment of women beneficiaries. It has provided roads to empower rural women through greater access to labour market opportunities. Targetting of female labour has protected the rights of many vulnerable, disempowered women who would never be allowed by their husbands or male members in the family to take up the work if the targetting based on gender was unavailable. Participation of women in labour force has the potential to impact on individual and household behaviour on several aspects, including, marriage, fertility, and intra-household distribution of resources and decision making

(Afridi 2012). The beneficiaries have started taking baby steps towards taking minor decisions in the family. The decisions are mainly regarding future prospects of the children.

As the work acquired through MGNREGA is based on the principle of self-selection, women and men can take the liberty of the flexible option. In general it is found that women found the work easier than the farm work or any other work. One reason could be the MGNREGA work is flexible about the working hours as in many cases the work is based on piece rate basis. Just as in a study of ten selected semi-arid tropics (SAT) villages in India (Viswanathan, Mishra and Bhattarai: Undated) working in MGNREGA and earning money has definitely improved the status of the women in the family and the community across the states. This really helps the women who can take up the work close to their home as according to the act work has to be provided within 5 kms. from the applicant's residence. If work is provided beyond 5 kms., a travel allowance has to be paid. Getting an opportunity to earn close to home has made it easy for women to accept the option to work. Women can easily complete their household chores and simultaneously take up the MGNREGA work. The opportunity to earn in government schemes has added on to the self-esteem of the women beneficiaries. Many of them have discovered a new identity in themselves. Self-perception of women has changed and according to some the society's perception about the women beneficiaries have changed. Many women beneficiaries have observed that they would want to work more so that their increased earning capacity would benefit their family members, especially their children. Women beneficiaries stated that they feel very happy when their children demand sweets, toys etc from them. It creates a sense of self-pride and accomplishment.

Many women in the rural areas in North 24 Parganas district got the first taste of independence after the introduction of the MGNREGS. The family members allowed them to participate as it is a government scheme, which is considered as respectable in Indian societal culture. Some women respondents in the district from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds stated that they live in dire poverty, but the male members earlier did not allow them to enter public domain and support the family by earning as casual labourers or domestic helps, as they thought that it was not respectable for women to enter the employment market. But, this scheme was considered different as they will be working for the government and not for any individual or

private concern. So, the women beneficiaries got a chance to work to improve their living condition. MGNREGS has become a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India. It has its strong impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance. (Shah, Mann and Pande 2012) Inclusive growth has been the need of the hour for equitable distribution of wealth. Inclusive growth, as defined by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), is growth which ensures opportunities for all sections of the population, with a special emphasis on the poor, particularly women and young people, who are most likely to be marginalised. Women in the area have started getting interested in the well-being of the village. They are coming for the meetings of the Gram Sansad and listening to the discussions that are taking place. Very of the women beneficiaries are ready to speak or voice their protests in the Gram Sansad meetings. However, one or two women beneficiaries have become vocal and have enquired about the drinking water facilities or about the government schemes from which they can benefit.

The study has tried to find the position of women beneficiaries and locate their place in the family and the society in the villages of North 24 parganas district of West Bengal. It has tried to understand that whether self-perception and the society's perception regarding women have changed after the introduction of MGNREGA. Among the respondents 83 percent were married. Marrage provides a level of identity and status to many women in rural areas in India, including West Bengal. Their status improves in her in-laws family, if they are able to give birth to sons. Even after so many campaigns of the government to create awareness about the importance of the girl-child, the belief that the son can only carry forward the name of the family is still prevalent. In rural 24 Parganas (North), as in many other places, marriage brings in a lot of change in one's life. So, marriage is an important social custom, for which the parents of girls try to save in order to give dowry. One of the unmarried girls in her early twenties observed that the money earned from the '100 days' work will help her and her parents to save for her dowry. When asked about her identity, she stated that she will have identity only after marriage.

Among the single women, there were unmarried, separated, divorcees and widowed people.   As heads of households these women have to run the kitchen. The single respondents are mostly engaged in casual labour. For example, in Rajarhat block, they are engaged as

construction workers or as domestic helps. They have really benefitted from MGNREGA work. However, one of the respondents was a widow in her sixties who felt that she lost her identity after the death of her husband. Her sons do not take care of her, so, at this age she has to work.

Usually, gender inequalities intersecting with other forms of socio-economic inequality, including class, caste, race, ethnicity, location and so on, frequently exacerbating the injustices associated with them. The widely used distinction between women's practical gender needs and strategic gender interests partly helped to capture some of the differences and commonalities between women within a given context (Molyneux 1985). Women's practical gender needs reflected the roles and responsibilities associated with their position within the socio-economic hierarchy, and hence varied considerably across context, class, race and so on. Strategic gender interests, on the other hand, were based on a deductive analysis of the structures of women's subordination and held out the promise of a transformative feminist politics based on shared experiences of oppression. For the women beneficiaries, the practical gender needs has changed a little bit, but there has been no change in the strategic gender needs.

The conceptualisation of empowerment touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities (Kabeer 2008). In a way, some women beneficiaries have started negotiating and reshaping their lives. The respondents observed that they have started feeling important in their family as they are earning. The bargaining rights of women beneficiaries in the family have increased to a certain extent, after they have taken up work. Moroever, there are several other schemes, like mid-day meal which have helped the women respondents to come out to work as they are happy that the children will get food in the schools. The women respondents have also stated that the Kanyashree scheme in which the West Bengal government has really helped them as the girls are getting cash as well as other benefits from the unique scheme. 20.9 percent of the women beneficiaries take decisions by themselves. Some of them are widows

or some have husbands who have migrated to urban areas in search of better livelihood facilities. Establishing self-identity is a process (Carusu 2005). Consciously or sub-consciously, women beneficiaries have started moving on the path of sense of self-identity. In a study by the Asian Development Bank on greater role of woman's identity due to MGNREGS, it says that it would surely lead to greater role of women in decision making in the household and their growing contribution to household's livelihood and consumption needs, especially food, children's education, health and offsetting of debts. Women have started to be active in the rural public sphere. The MGNREGA has led to major increases in wages of rural workers with the fact thatmajority of MGNREGA workers are impoverished small and marginal farmers, especially in tribal areas. One could see the direct impact of MGNREGA through raising incomes of the small and marginal farmers.

However, 41.4 percent of the women beneficiaries stated that their husbands take important decisions of the family. To them, he is the earning member, so he has greater right to decide for the family. But, many of them observed that they do not actually have any strategic control over their own lives. They were fatalistic and felt that their life will never change for better.

Critical Analysis

Though there has been criticism of the scheme regarding rampant corruption, nepotism, lack of transparency, inadequate development of the rural infrastructure, lack of quality in the development of infrastructure for the community, siphoning of funds at several levels; but, it is widely accepted that MGNREGS has brought in a revolution in the Indian villages. Those who opt for this work do so out of distress and not out of choice. The MGNREGA sites show that the hard manual work is quite difficult to be engaged into. (Karat 2014).

There are several criticisms regarding the execution of the Act. Leakages need to be plugged. Proper monitoring is necessary. Online transfer of money has increased the transparency in payment of wages. According to Comptroller and Auditor General Report, with proper execution of MNREGS, the programme could have made a difference to the lives of the country's poorest people for whom it was actually planned and designed. (MGNREGA: India's Poorly Employed Anti-Poverty Scheme, 2013)

In spite of the criticisms from different quarters, the MGNREGA is the first social sector legislation in the world that creates economic entitlements and a guarantee of wage employment. According to several social workers, the main opposition to the MGNREGA has come from a powerful set of landowners, contractors and industrialists. They felt that the rich are reacting to the increased bargaining power of poor and landless labour ever since the act began to be implemented. They are finding difficulty in getting cheap labour. They added that if MGNREGA is discontinued, the traumatic exploitation will continue of the rural poor and they will lose their bargaining power, whatever little they had acquired after working in MGNREGA.   (Roy and Dey 2014) Dreze has mentioned that MGNREGA has empowered workers and reduced the dependence on private employers. The economic and the social returns of these MGNREGA work is very good.

Many critics state that the MGNREGA should be re-oriented towards skill formation instead of casual labour. These critics fail to notice that MGNREGA is already one the largest skill-building programmes of the Central government. Numerous women and men are learning technical, administrative and social skills as gram rozgar sevaks, programme officers, worksite mates, barefoot engineers, data entry operators and social auditors under the programme. Since MGNREGA functionaries are mainly contractual workers, many of them slowly move on to make use of these skills in the private sector. It is necessary that the skill-formation activities made an integral component of the MGNREGA it would result in an excellent way of making the programme more effective (Dreze 2015).

There has been inadequate devolution of funds and the consequent reduction in workdays. This can create a vicious cycle, as the low average workdays will in turn impact all subsequent allocations which are based on past performance. The critics have also feared that the decision to alter the material-labour ratio from the current 60:40 to 51:49 would have serious adverse impact. The increase in the ratio of materials will automatically lead to the entry of contractors and machines in much larger numbers into the MGNREGA projects. This will convert MGNREGA from a work guarantee Act into a contractor's commission guarantee Act. MGNREGA will show the way towards contractor raj, which till now was avoided. Moreover, the current expenditure on materials is just 23 percent, well below the permissible 40 percent. If expenditure on material is increased to 40 percent,

surely, the quality of the projects undertaken would improve. Even in the earlier level of 40 percent expenditure on materials, there is enough scope to increase the material component with an expanded list of permissible projects without changing the ratio.

Furthermore, works permissible should be more closely linked with livelihoods and work such as fodder and fuel collection, the working of Self-Help Groups and animal husbandry. Non-payment of minimum wages and delayed wage payments need to be urgently addressed. Compensation arrears should be paid along with unemployment allowances (Karat 2014). Otherwise, the poor beneficiaries who have hand-to-mouth existence get back to the vicious cycle of poverty and dependence on moneylenders and the landed class.

Conclusion

India, like some of the Latin American countries such as Mexico and Brazil, has initiated a transition towards large, universalistic anti-poverty programmes (Dasgupta 2014). There are several positive sides to MGNREGA. All previous employment programmes provided work when governments decided to provide work, not when people demanded work. The Right to Work as provided in Article 41 of the Indian Constitution has been implemented through MGNREGA. It creates work opportunities in rural India which directly increases the purchasing power of the rural poor. The village infrastructure created through MGNREGA helps the villages at the grassroots. There are innumerable studies which have proved that MGNREGA has led to strong economic and social returns in the village. MGNREGA has helped the vulnerable in the villages by preventing wages from coming down below the legal level. So, it has prevented gross exploitation of rural labour through payment of dismal wages by various sections of the rural elite. It is these rural elite who are influencing against carrying on with MGNREGA as they are finding difficulty in searching cheap farm labourers (Karat 2014).

Identity is a relative phenomenon, which may be an instrument to go ahead in life. It may be a win-win situation where the development of capacities of the women will help the family in the long run. Slowly, rural Indian families have realised that by pushing women to the posterior, would lead to preventing the whole family to progress. The State is coming up with several schemes for women beneficiaries only. If these opportunities are fully utilised by the rural women, they would automatically be successful in pulling up the family from the drudges

of poverty. This needs to be appreciated by other members of the rural families, many of them who still follow the patriarchal norms of not allowing girls or women equal rights in the family. Development of identity of the marginalised groups, including, women, should not lead to identity crisis of the powerful hegemonic groups in society. In democracy, every individual should have the right to develop one's capabilities to the fullest. The State can act as the support in this path of search for identity and self-confidence.

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