



St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata



YOUNG *Sociologist*



Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology
2025

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Young Sociologist



Xavier's Sociological Society

Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)

Kolkata

2025

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From the Principal's Desk

It is a matter of pride to witness the dedication of the faculty members and the students of the Department of Sociology in exploring the dynamics of today's world and generating invaluable knowledge of the social landscapes that shape our lives. I would like to congratulate the Department of Sociology for successfully publishing the thirteenth edition of the Departmental Journal - 'Young Sociologist', which is a testament of the legacy of the department and a reflection of diverse thoughts and ideas that vouch for inclusivity in the contemporary world. It offers a convergence of various perspectives, an opportunity to explore sociological understandings of the world that urges us to think critically.

This journal is going to be launched at the annual departmental event of the Department of Sociology, 'Verstehen', the very meaning of which is 'empathetic understanding of human behaviour'. In today's rapidly changing world, coherence and disruption exist hand in hand. In this scenario, it is important to realise that it is our responsibility to appreciate human talent with empathy and devotion. With genuine dedication in our actions and truthfulness in our intentions we can ensure a peaceful co-existence where we learn and take inspiration from each other.

Empathy has the potential to solve the chaos that has been prevalent in the contemporary world. It is a quality that ensures we think beyond our self interests and consider the welfare of others, as a compassionate understanding of the society eventually sets up the foundation of building a just and inclusive world for everyone.

I extend my best wishes to the faculty members and students of the department of Sociology, encouraging them to approach their future pursuits with enthusiasm and commitment. I firmly believe this journal will play a significant role in inspiring the students and encouraging them to engage with different sociological standpoints. I sincerely hope that 'Young Sociologist' would motivate and lead the students towards success in their future academic endeavors.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. Savio'.

Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ
Principal



From the Vice-Principal's Desk

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
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From the Vice Principal's Desk

I would like to congratulate the Department of Sociology for the launch of their Journal “Young Sociologist”.

The Department’s fervour and commitment towards the field of research and publication is truly remarkable. Over the years, the department has proven its academic excellence through heightened participation in innovative research works. The Department is known for its intersectional approach and spirit of enquiry.

The Journal “Young Sociologist” is a reflection of the department’s enthusiasm towards making key contributions to the field of research. It will inspire young minds to pursue further research by providing them a platform where they can exhibit their sociological imagination.

Prof. Bertram Da' Silva
Vice-Principal



From the Dean of Science

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
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From the Dean of Science

It is an occasion of immense pleasure to congratulate the Postgraduate Department of Sociology as they publish their departmental journal "Young Sociologist" in their annual event "Verstehen".

Throughout the years, the journal has continued to uphold the rich academic acumen which the department imparts to their students. The praiseworthy enthusiasm and commitment which the students and the faculty members show towards their quest to rethink, question, conceptualise and reconceptualize the society and ideas in their works, becomes evident yet again in this new edition of the journal.

The immense potential which the department holds to contribute to the growing areas of academia is praiseworthy. I send in all my wishes not only for this journal, but also for their academic endeavours in the years to come, both in and outside the pages of academic works.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Indranath Chaudhuri".

Dr. Indranath Chaudhuri

Dean of Science



From the Dean of Arts

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From the Dean of Arts

I express my sincere appreciation to the Postgraduate Department of Sociology on the publication of their departmental journal Young Sociologist. I am confident that akin to the preceding editions, this issue will continue to foster the spirit of rigorous academic inquiry among the students of the department.

I congratulate the department in their continued efforts in nurturing young minds and in cultivating a thriving culture of research. I wish them continued success in the years to come.

Farhat Bano.

Dr. Farhat Bano

Dean of Arts



From the Head of the Department's Desk

Department of Sociology
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)
30, Mother Teresa Sarani
Kolkata - 700 016

It gives me immense pleasure to present before you the thirteenth edition of the journal of the Postgraduate Department of Sociology-Young Sociologist. Like every year, students have undertaken social research on a wide range of topics that highlight contemporary issues and theoretical debates in the social sciences.

I would like to thank the editorial team led by Dr. Sohini Saha for their dedicated efforts towards the publication of the journal. I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Department of Sociology for successfully guiding students to write these essays based on their BA dissertation. I am grateful to Prof. Bertram Da'Silva, Vice-Principal, Arts and Science, Dr Farhat Bano, Dean of Arts and Dr Indranath Chaudhuri, Dean of Science for their constant support and encouragement. I extend my gratitude to our Principal, Rev. Dr Dominic Savio, SJ for his unwavering commitment to a research-centric pedagogy at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zaid Al Baset'.

Dr. Zaid Al Baset

Head of the Department

Postgraduate Department of Sociology

SECTION - I

Reports

Report on the Activities of The Postgraduate Department of Sociology, 2023-2024

The Department of Sociology was established in 2001. The post-graduate program in Sociology was introduced in 2020. The UG and PG Programs of the department are designed to offer an engaged pedagogy that cultivates the creative and critical faculties of students. Our courses adopt an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach to sociological concerns. The department has been committed to continuous revision of syllabus, innovative methods of teaching and research. This year, we continued to invest our intellectual efforts and creative energies in designing and fine tuning the BA 4-year program in Sociology. While aligning ourselves with the NEP 2020 goals of inclusivity, multi-disciplinarity and experiential learning, we have retained our commitment to a critical pedagogy. We have also made efforts to secure internships for our students which constitute an integral part of the NEP curriculum. The Department is working towards the establishment of the Doctoral Programme in Sociology in the near future.

All members of the department are actively engaged in research and encourage students to participate in academic activities beyond the curriculum.

The success of the department can be accessed by the presence of our alumni in esteemed national and international universities as research scholars and faculty members.

Departmental events

Date	Nature of Event	Theme	Speakers
9th April, 2024	Monthly Research Colloquium	On Field, Fieldwork and Writing: Reflections from Urban Ethnography	Dr. Anasua Chatterjee Assistant Professor, RKSMVV, West Bengal State University
6th February, 2024	Monthly Research Colloquium	Disasters and the “Other Gender”: Experiences of the Hijra Community in Disasters in India	Ms. Aditi Sharan Researcher, University of Auckland
18th September, 2023	Monthly Research Colloquium	Tour Packages in Contemporary West Bengal: Practices, Entanglements, and Paradoxes	Ms. Shamayeeta Ghosh Assistant Professor, Sociology, Jhargram Raj College.
20th July, 2023	Monthly Research Colloquium	In Pursuit of Happiness : Queer Movements in Kolkata, India (1980-2000)	Mr. Pawan Dhall Queer Activist and Writer

Academic Achievements of faculty members of the Department, July 2023-June 2024

Name	Publications in Journals	Book Chapters	Conferences Attended	Invited lectures
Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay		1	1	

Name	Publications in Journals	Book Chapters	Conferences Attended	Invited lectures
Dr. Shoma Chaudhury Lahiri		2	1	3
Dr. Zaid Al Baset		2	1	1
Dr. Shaoni Shabnam			1	
Dr. Anushyama Mukherjee	1	2	1	
Dr. Sohini Saha	2		5	3

Dr. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay has received an Intra Mural Grant (IMSXC2024-25/001) 2024-2026 given as a one-time grant. The Committee granted a sum of 1.75 lakh for a period of two years to fund research titled “After Reservations: A Qualitative Study of intergenerational mobility of Scheduled Caste and Backward Class Communities of West Bengal”

Student Achievements during the academic year

NAME	ACHIEVEMENT
Mukti Mishra UG semester 1	Achieved the first rank and won the first prize in the Art Competition organised by the Times Group in collaboration with The Times of India and Ei Samay.
Pratisruti Guha UG semester 5	Two of her poems were published in the poetry collection titled <i>Stardust</i> , with Writer's Pocket as the publisher, in July 2023.

NAME	ACHIEVEMENT
Ritwik Bhaumik UG semester 5	Secured second place in the Fusion Band event at <i>Goonj 2023</i> , organised by the Xaverian Academy of Dance and Music. Secured second place in the event " <i>Whispers of the Past</i> " at <i>Samagam 2023</i> , organised by Loreto College, Kolkata. Secured third place in the Fusion Band event at <i>Xavotsav 2024</i> , organised by the St. Xavier's College Student Council. Secured third place in the Western Band event at <i>Kalopsia 2024</i> , organised by the Fine Arts Society. Secured second place in the Eastern Band event at <i>FETSU Sanskriti 2024</i> , organised by Jadavpur University.
Kohana Chakraborty UG semester 3	3rd Place in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Literaria 2023.
Raina Talukder UG semester 5	First position in Xavotsav 2024 Theme Walk.
Tannistha Dasgupta UG semester 3	ISI Dance Group Competition, February 2024 – 1st Position by Team Anubhooti Jadavpur University Group Dance Competition, INDAK on Body Politics in Dance, April 2024 – 2nd Position by Team Anubhooti Sociology Fest, XSS at St. Xavier's College, March 2024 – 2nd Prize by Team Inanna on Gender Intersectionality
Renee Bharadwaj UG semester 3	Secured 2nd position as Team INANNA in 'Sui Generis' at Verstehen 2024.
Vaishali Sarah Mundle UG semester 3	1st Runners-Up as part of Team INANNA for 'Sui Generis' Verstehen'24.
Teresa Biswas UG semester 3	Participated in throwball and tug of war at the inter-parish tournament held at Church of Our Lady of Vailankanni, Howrah

NAME	ACHIEVEMENT
	securing 1st position in tug of war in both September 2023 and September 2024, and was the runner-up in throwball in 2023.
Sayan Sahoo UG semester 5	Biology Quiz by the Microbiology Department (1st) - Inter-College Indian Politics Quiz by the Political Science Department (3rd) Bangaliyana Quiz by the Bengali Literary Society (3rd) Mela Quiz by the Fine Arts Society (3rd) - Inter-College General Quiz by the Education Department (2nd) - Inter-College Sports Quiz by IEM (3rd) - Inter-College U-25 Level General Quiz by the Calcutta University Technology Campus (2nd) - Inter-College U-25 India Quiz by the Calcutta University Law Campus (2nd) - Inter-College Mela Quiz by the Mathematics Department (1st) - Inter-College.
Sanskriti Bajaj UG semester 3	Finalist for Enthusia'23 (organised by Enactus, SXC) – Was one of the 8 finalist teams in the PR, HR, and Crisis Management categories of the competition, along with my teammate, beating approximately 90 other teams.
Mayurakshi Gupta UG semester 3	2nd place in Creative Writing (Prose) at Literaria.
Maniparna Sen UG semester 3	1st Runner-Up in the Collective Conscience (Sociology Quiz) at Verstehen 2024, the Annual Sociology Fest organised by the Department of Sociology, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata.
Mohd Irfan UG semester 3	SHAURYA IIT Kharagpur won gold in cricket (13-10-2023). Inter-College State Sports and Games

NAME	ACHIEVEMENT
Afreen Ali UG semester 5	Championship: Won gold in shot put (04-03-2024). Annual Sports Day at SXC 2023-24: a. Gold in shot put (Men) b. Silver in 110m hurdles She has presented a paper titled " <i>Social Exclusion of Dalits: A Challenge to Viksit Bharat</i> " at an ICSSR-ERC-sponsored national seminar held at Prabhu Jagatbandhu College, Howrah, West Bengal
Disha Mukhopadhyay UG semester 5	Secured 2nd place in Microfiction at Xavotsav '24.
Yashodhara Chatterjee UG semester 5	2nd Runner-Up in the 100m Hurdles at the SXC Annual Sports 2024.
Muskan Mansur UG semester 5	First Place - Xavotsav 2024 (Group Dance Event – TeamBeatroupe) First Place - Goonj 2024 (Group Dance Event - Team Beatroupe)
Christle Rebeca Das UG semester 5	1. Best youth award of the Infant Jesus Church, Behala. 2. 2nd prize in Photography in DYC'24 3. Three articles published for the Infant Jesus Church youth in the Herald Archdiocese of Calcutta.

Xavier's Sociological Society (XSS)

Verstehen '24 organized on 5th and 6th of March 2024 offered a vibrant platform for scholars and students from over 35 academic institutions, including international participants. Centered on the theme of Gender Politics in Postcolonial India, the fest showcased a range of events including a keynote lecture by Dr. Achyut Chetan, Dean of Arts, St Xavier's University, Kolkata, student academic paper presentations, and creative competitions. The Departmental journal, 'Young Sociologist', was also launched by Father Principal at the inaugural event.

SECTION - II

Selected Dissertation Articles

Click, Connect, Commit: A Study of Online Matchmaking

Ankita Sinha

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has tried to explore matchmaking in the digital era. It has made an effort to understand how online technology has penetrated into our daily lives and has also become a significant part of the mate selection process. Online matrimonial websites have become an inherent part of our lives. However, this phenomenon is not accompanied by a total negation of traditional values or methods. Technology allows users to cut across the boundaries created by distance and social networks, thus creating a large pool of potential candidates (Patnayakuni and Seth, 2011, p.345). Online matrimonial websites allow greater space for personal choices and provide various options and filters to select from. Yet these filters also reinforce social hierarchies by enabling users to create profiles which correspond to specific religious, regional, community and caste groups.

Mate selection through online matrimonial websites became an interesting topic of research for me, owing to an increase in its relevance in contemporary society, in terms of its dynamics and implications. In recent times, there has been an increase in the trend of choosing matrimonial websites to tie the knot. I am thus interested in studying this trend and knowing the reason behind this particular preference. It also offers an insight into the amalgamation of the impact of technology, human psychology and sociology in terms of caste, class and other social factors. I am interested in knowing if this new form of mate selection process signifies a moving away from the 'traditional' practices or reproducing the same even in current times. The vast amount of data

on user preferences and attitudes generated by matrimonial websites can give access to rich datasets for analysis.

There have been several works in the field of marriage and online matchmaking. Mate selection is generally understood as a term working in society under a social framework. Mate selection can be choice-based or consent-based. It is also a complex process governed by various factors like rules, practices and religious persuasions (Nongkynrih, 2016). The advertisements of various matrimonial websites like JeevanSaathi.com, Shaadi.com and BharatMatrimony.com have targeted females and revolve around the existing fear related to marriages and finding a suitable partner. Malpani (as cited in Kaushik and Pingle, 2020) argues that these marketing strategies are centred on a stereotypical representation of marriages. With the emergence of online dating applications, one can sit at home and chat or even form a relationship with someone they like. Thus, they are no longer reliant upon geographical proximity. Additionally, it may be surmised that most of the women who post their own advertisements on the Internet are more independent and less willing to judge themselves according to the standard social norms and consequently put a greater emphasis on individual traits and aspirations about the desired partner (Dasgupta, 2013). Another study shows that most of the matrimonial portals include search filters that require the user to specify linguistic community (as was the case for all the four portals accessed) and sometimes religious affiliation too (as was the case for Yahoo and Rediff sites).

The objective of the thesis is to observe the changing pattern of mate selection with the advent of technology and to also understand the change in decision making in the process of mate selection. This is because the internet is gradually taking over the world. Secondly, my objective is to see how far the online matrimonial sites provide a safe and secure place for the mate selection. My third objective is also to understand whether the process of matchmaking has altered and moved away from the earlier means or whether it is reproducing the same ideas and methods. The research also attempts to understand the place of technology in the lives of those who have used it for their

matchmaking. It seeks to understand if this use of technology benefits marriages and whether there is a vulnerable side to the same.

The importance of the research methodology lies in its ability to explain the selection of research methods, procedures and approaches with justification from researchers for their selection. Research Methodology is a structured procedure for achieving certain goals. The methodology this research paper follows is a qualitative one, owing to its usefulness in gaining insights into the perspectives of married couples on their chosen method of online matchmaking. Their perspective will again be different from the perspectives of those who have not chosen this particular method. A qualitative research methodology is also helpful in observing the participant's feelings and opinions. I have chosen a semi-structured interview - both face-to-face and via telephone. The sample of the interview constitutes couples aged between 30 to 45 years, living in Kolkata and who got married through matrimonial websites. Three themes that have come up from my in-depth analysis of the findings are:-

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET: CONVENIENCE & VULNERABILITY

The first thematic analysis is based on understanding the role of technology and its conveniences and vulnerabilities i.e. whether technology is a boon or curse to people today. With time, technology has become an inherent part of our everyday lives. Matrimonial websites offer a variety of services that cater to the needs of various clients. For instance, some cater to the widowed or divorced, while others are broad-based. Technology has also aided them by allowing them greater control on how they engage, talk or come in contact with the concerned person, thus allowing them to also block people as and when they feel like. There is also a belief that marriages made through these websites are unbiased, unlike arranged marriages where relatives are also involved. There exist varying perspectives on the usefulness of technology. On one hand, it is believed that technology creates hindrances in the

registration process. On the other hand, it facilitates the users in getting to know people in a more intimate manner by knowing their personal details, thus allowing better exposure.

Marriages are said to be made in heaven. For many, they are now increasingly being made on the Internet through matrimonial platforms. People have become proficient in the use of modern technology and have moved away from traditional methods. However, as much as the ease of using online matrimonial sites has been mentioned, its vulnerability has been highlighted too.

THE VULNERABLE SIDE TO MATRIMONIAL WEBSITES: SECURITY AND PRIVACY

With the advent of technology, maintaining security and privacy has become a priority. One needs to be careful while using matrimonial websites as there are many scams happening. One of the interlocutors spoke about the increase in fraudsters and the consequent difficulty in trusting people on an online platform. Another one has pointed to the failure of the technological means as one cannot connect emotionally through online platforms, due to invisibility and anonymity. Trust issues thereby become a major concern. On the other hand, some users have also mentioned that these matrimonial websites are very prompt in case of security and privacy and they also serve an option of deleting the profile after getting a match. Thus, these positive aspects of matrimonial websites have attracted many users. Security and privacy is a matter of concern. However, despite the risk, people have gone forward to build a relationship through matrimonial websites.

THE JOURNEY THROUGH MATRIMONIAL WEBSITES: AGENCY OR COMPULSION

This theme deals with the journey and the process that users have gone through while using different online matrimonial websites. In this journey, there are two narratives that have come up - one from those

who themselves became “agents” and navigated their choices and from those whose journey was mediated by their family. One of the users shared the process by saying that it was 2012 when his sister and brother-in-law made his profile on a website and he himself was not totally into it but checked what was happening. His journey was mediated by his family. Another user mentioned that her profile was made from her parent’s point of view, where her father wrote about his daughter’s academic qualifications and interests. Thus, these narratives reveal how most of the users do not search for their partners on their own. It is their parents or family members who make a profile or help them have a profile on these matrimonial websites. By emphasising on their career-oriented nature or the fact of being far away from their home, they justify their choice of not becoming the active agents of this process of mate selection. The means of mate selection have changed. Yet, through family involvement, the nature of mate selection has not transformed. A user said that as she was busy with her work, her family made her profile, showed her the pictures of potential grooms and after considering her decision, they proceeded further. This shows how someone’s busy schedule makes them play a secondary role in their mate selection process. It is the family that mediates the process, while paying heed to the choices of the person concerned.

FILTERS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF EXCLUSION

Filters also play a significant role in navigating through these matrimonial websites. Some such filters through which choices and selections are commonly made include, religion, caste, class, income, educational qualifications and individual likes and dislikes. Thus, societal norms are seen playing an active role here. For instance, it is believed that a boy should be taller than a girl to look perfect as a couple. It is considered that tall boys have more physical strength and are more physically attractive and only tall boys can be masculine. Getting options or choices were a recurring response from the interlocutors, thus highlighting the choice factor to be significant in comparison to other traditional means of selecting a partner. The criteria and filters are the measures through which users can actually find their potential

match. One also needs to choose a subscription package for a required period, thus highlighting the importance of financial capital. Matrimonial websites, with their filters, cater to a wide range of users seeking various types of relationships including love marriage, arranged marriage, or just companionship. Filters as analysed just enhance the search of a user but do not change these websites inherently from an arranged marriage setup.

These platforms may inadvertently reinforce existing social prejudices and hinder efforts towards social equality. For instance, when a user chooses filters like caste or class, there is a tendency of preferring an upper caste or upper class person. Filters lead to exclusion and make people judge others who do not belong from an upper caste or class or any other factor which is beyond their control. They also limit the potential of genuine connection. Filters underscore the complex interplay between technology, culture and social norms in the realm of online matchmaking. Matrimonial websites have revolutionised the way people find life partners, offering a convenient platform to connect. Searching for a life partner on matrimonial sites has become hi-tech now, as the marriage portals are taking the help of artificial intelligence to recommend a life partner to their users. Artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm is helping the users on matrimonial sites to find a match not only based on their preferences but also by observing and understanding the user's behaviour and suggesting real-time appropriate profiles (Kharde et al, 2020). From a sociological lens, caste plays a significant role in matrimonial websites due to its historical and cultural significance in many societies. An emerging change in recent marriage market is a deviation from caste endogamous marriages. Both men and women of the present generation are approaching to cross the barrier of caste and religion (to some extent) and are willing to adopt the new cultures and customs of different castes and religions (Prakash and Singh, 2013). However, my work differs from these researchers' work because marriage within the same caste still prevails as it brings social cohesion and preserves cultural traditions. Caste-based preferences also show that families do not want inter-caste marriages, which reflects broader power dynamics, reinforcing inequalities and hierarchies. Also,

it is seen that the criteria of religion was already provided, so there was no question of choice here. It was also preselected mentally by these people as no one in the interviews mentioned it. The silence is thus suggestive of how faith is taken for granted. The paper thereby argues that the filters become a new-age exclusionary medium to not only select but to also not select what is deemed to be ‘unfit’.

CONCLUSION

Marriage refers to a union of individuals, be it arranged or through matrimonial websites. Matrimonial websites may empower individuals to make their own decision while searching for a partner, whereas it also does not deviate completely from traditional arranged marriage setup that places familial and societal expectations above individual decision. The process of filtering still exists in recent times, on both the matrimonial websites and in traditional arranged marriage setups. Ghataks also played a huge role in those times. Similarly today, those seeking partners with the same family background or any other specific attributes find it easy to choose from their area of interest through these online platforms. User engagement is encouraged by fostering a sense of agency in the search process but does not necessarily alter the emphasis on socio-religious locations. These platforms also serve diverse demographics, catering to specific religious, cultural, and regional preferences. Although the popularity of matrimonial websites means more freedom for a user to decide on their own, it can also imply compulsion from the family. The role played by family members is also changing with the advent of technology. The use of these matrimonial websites is nothing but a form of present-day arranged marriage. The use of matrimonial websites also complicates the love versus arranged debates on marriage. Much like dating applications which allow people to use filters in selecting dating partners, matrimonial sites also offer similar interface but to select partners for marriages. Thus, matrimonial websites attract people for the agentive role they give to individuals in marriage but at the same time they also show that the question of choice

or agency is already conditioned.

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Emerging Concerns of the Tea Gardens in Darjeeling: A Sociological Study

Anusha Singhal

INTRODUCTION

Darjeeling, nestled in the Himalayan foothills, emerged as a haven for the British seeking respite from the sweltering lowlands. Darjeeling has been synonymous with the pinnacle of tea excellence for over a century and a half. Its unique blend of geo-environmental factors and agro-climatic conditions imparts the tea's distinct quality and flavor, garnering global acclaim as 'Darjeeling Tea'.

The tea industry in Darjeeling, India, holds a distinct cultural, economic, and environmental significance. However, this iconic sector is currently navigating myriad challenges, ranging from climate change and socio-economic shifts to worker health concerns and gender dynamics. This dissertation examines these critical issues, offering a sociological perspective to understand their implications for the sustainability of Darjeeling's tea gardens.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The dissertation seeks to address the following questions:

1. What knowledge exists within tea garden communities about organic farming? 2. How does climate change affect tea production in Darjeeling? 3. What is the perception of work satisfaction and conditions among tea garden workers? 4. Are tea plantations in Darjeeling gendered spaces? 5. Is the tea industry sustainable in light of current socio-economic and environmental shifts?

METHODOLOGY

The research employs qualitative methods, including open-ended interviews with 20 tea garden workers (10 men and 10 women) and management representatives from two prominent estates: ST Estate and PST Estate in Darjeeling. Participants were selected to ensure diverse perspectives, with workers representing a range of ages (28-45) and a minimum of five years' experience.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions of tea production.
- Understand the role and challenges of organic farming within Darjeeling's tea gardens.
- Assess the impact of climate change on tea production cycles and quality.
- Investigate gender roles, pay parity, and opportunities for women in tea gardens.
- Explore the generational dynamics shaping workforce continuity and the future of the tea industry.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on important social and environmental issues in Darjeeling's tea industry. It highlights the stigma women face when working in tea gardens, as traditional norms often judge their roles outside the home. This can lead to criticism and exclusion, making it essential to address these biases and create supportive workplaces where women can thrive.

The research also looks at how climate change affects tea production, with unpredictable weather disrupting harvest cycles like the first and second flushes. These challenges show the need for better strategies to protect tea farming and ensure its sustainability. The study aims to promote equality and long-term solutions for the tea industry.

NURTURING SUSTAINABILITY – ORGANIC FARMING IN TEA GARDENS

Organic farming is an example of agriculture that promises to preserve tradition while facing today's challenges. The shift to organic farming in Darjeeling tea gardens has brought benefits like improved soil health and reduced chemical use, creating a healthier environment for workers and the ecosystem. Workers feel proud of the transition, but challenges like higher labor demands and certification costs make it difficult for small farmers. Management and workers both recognize the need for financial support and better awareness of organic practices to ensure long-term sustainability.

BREWING TROUBLE – CLIMATE CRISIS AND ITS THREAT TO TEA GARDENS

Climate change is a serious threat to Darjeeling's tea gardens. Irregular rainfall, rising temperatures, and extreme weather are disrupting harvest cycles, reducing yields, and affecting the quality of tea. Tea, a crop dependent on rainfall, thrives within a specific temperature between 15°C to 23°C. It requires a delicate balance of humidity, rainfall, and sunshine to flourish and yield the aromatic leaves so beloved by experts worldwide. Amid these challenges, however, organic agriculture is a beacon of hope, offering a viable solution to mitigate the effects of climate change while promoting environmental protection and sustainability.

PRIORITIZING WORKER HEALTH – INSIGHTS FROM MANAGEMENT AND WORKERS

This chapter examines the efforts made by tea garden management to improve workers' health. Initiatives like protective gear, healthcare facilities, and reducing chemical exposure through organic farming have significantly helped workers. However, cultural challenges like alcohol related health problems remain, showing the need for

community-focused solutions. The relationship between management and workers has improved, fostering trust and better working conditions. In the peaceful embrace of the tea gardens, where the rhythm of life ebbs and flows with the seasons, a legacy of care lives on - a testament to the enduring bond between management and labor and the promise of health and happiness for generations to come.

BEYOND TRADITION – GENDER DYNAMICS AND GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

As societal norms evolve and awareness of gender equality grows, tea gardens have become an arena of change. Darjeeling's tea gardens have traditionally relied heavily on women, especially for plucking tea leaves. Over time, women have taken on leadership roles, breaking traditional barriers. The study also highlights generational challenges, as younger workers are seeking education and alternative careers. This creates uncertainty for the future workforce, emphasizing the need for innovation and new opportunities within the tea industry.

CONCLUSION

Darjeeling's tea industry holds immense cultural and economic significance, and its future depends on embracing sustainability and inclusivity. The transition to organic farming, though demanding, has shown promising results in improving environmental and worker health outcomes. Empowering women through fair opportunities and leadership roles has further strengthened the social fabric of tea gardens. Generational shifts present an opportunity to modernize the industry, ensuring its relevance to younger workers while preserving its heritage.

Looking ahead, the tea gardens can thrive by focusing on climate-resilient practices, fostering innovation, and diversifying income sources such as tea tourism and value-added products. With collective effort from all stakeholders, Darjeeling's tea gardens can sustain their

global reputation while adapting to modern demands, ensuring their legacy endures for generations to come.

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Migration and Citizenship: A Case of Jorhat in Assam

Aparup Dey

Migration from present-day Bangladesh to Assam has occurred in several phases. The first phase of migration to Assam was initiated when British colonialists invited Bengali peasants to settle in the Goalpara district of Assam to supplement the agricultural production there. The second phase consisted primarily of Bengali Hindus who came to Assam during the time of the British Raj as bankers, railroad employees, and bureaucrats. The third phase was during the partition as many people had to migrate from the newly founded East Pakistan to Assam. Another wave of migration occurred due to the 1971 Indo-Bangladesh War. This large-scale migration to Assam from present-day Bangladesh had a significant impact on the language, festivals, and culture of both the Bengali and Assamese communities in Assam. This migration process also had an impact on the citizenship laws and the people's perspective of citizenship in Assam. There appears to be a significant distinction between the state's perspective of citizenship and that of the locals. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019 currently represents the state's viewpoint on citizenship and provides an accelerated pathway to Indian citizenship for persecuted minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India before 2014. The people in Assam have mixed opinions on who should be considered a citizen. While some people support the CAA, many have stressed that all those who came after 1971 to Assam should be considered as illegal migrants, irrespective of their religion.

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 respondents composed of seven male and seven female residents of Jorhat. the respondents belong to the age group of 18-75. Respondents from both the Assamese and Bengali communities were interviewed. Additionally,

secondary sources of data like books, journals and newspaper articles have been referenced.

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity (1994) was used to understand the changes that have come in the festivals and language of Assam. Yinger (2010) noted that hybridization in Bhabha's theory meant that a new cultural identity is formed by the mixing of two cultural identities. In Assam, the Bengali Muslim population deliberately adopted the Assamese language as their own to facilitate their integration with the Assamese society and avoid any potential conflicts. This led to the formation of the Neo-Assamese Muslim community in Assam. Heater (2013) in his book examines the liberal theory of citizenship in contemporary times. The liberal theory of citizenship places emphasis on the rights of the people, especially the right to vote and the right to property.

This study examines the transformations in the festivals and language of both communities in Assam, exploring how migration from Bangladesh has influenced perspectives on citizenship and the concept of belonging. It also investigates whether citizenship laws in Assam have successfully translated the liberal ideals of citizenship into practical reality.

First, this study analyzed the language predicament in Assam. Migration from Bangladesh to Assam has sparked fears of cultural dominance among the Assamese community. On the other hand, the Bengali community in Assam also want to preserve their linguistic identity. The language problem in Assam has emerged out of the anxieties of the Assamese community that their language and culture will be overshadowed by the Bengali culture. Efforts towards the preservation of the Assamese language can contribute towards resolving the problem. Similarly, the linguistic and cultural demands of the Bengali community should also be given due consideration.

Secondly, the study analyses the formation of a Neo-Assamese community in Assam. The Bengali Muslim population and the immigrants deliberately adopted the Assamese language as their own to facilitate their integration with the Assamese society and avoid any potential conflicts. This led to the formation of the Neo-Assamese Muslim community in Assam.

The third notable change comes in the form of an evolving vocabulary in Assam. The coexistence of both the Bengali and Assamese communities in Assam lead to changes in both their languages. There has been an exchange of words and vocabularies between both languages over time. Though this linguistic exchange did not create a new culture or language, both languages have lost some of their originality or uniqueness. These changes can be seen as the result of the increasing interaction and assimilation between both communities.

Beyond the evolution of language, this study seeks to analyze the impact that this long period of migration from present-day Bangladesh has brought in the festivals of Assam. The coexistence of both communities with each other for such a long time has led to the adoption of festivals which subsequently led to changes in the ways the festivals were originally celebrated. Both the Bengali community and the Assamese community have brought some minor modifications in the way these festivals were celebrated. These minor modifications have now become a part of the way in which Bihu and Durga Puja are celebrated in Assam.

Indeed, festivals have played an important role in the integration process of the migrant Bengali community in Assam. The Bengali community by participating in festivals like Bihu have helped in facilitating the process of assimilation with the society of Assam. The Assamese community also readily participates with the Bengali community in their festivals and cultural occasions. They also go on pandal hopping and offer worship during Durga Puja. All this has contributed to the peaceful coexistence between both the Bengali and Assamese communities in Assam. The Bengali community participates in Bihu as enthusiastically as the Assamese community. They prepare Pithas, go to Bihu functions, and participate in Bihu committees. Similarly, the Assamese community also participates in the Durga Puja.

Finally, the study seeks to understand the conception of the liberal brand of citizenship in the context of different citizenship laws implemented in Assam. In social sciences, citizenship is a very complex issue. Human migrations all over the world and the politicized awareness of ethnic differences have served to complicate it further. To understand the citizenship debate in Assam, we need to thoroughly analyze the liberal concept of citizenship.

The liberal perspective of citizenship emphasizes the rights of the people in a nation. In Assam, citizenship is seen by the people as protecting the rights of the people. This resonates with the liberal perspective of citizenship. Thus, the government should make a law that protects the rights of the people of Assam and ensure that the human rights of the migrants are not violated.

The Assam Accords were central to building and upholding this liberal perspective of citizenship. The Assam Accords was a Memorandum of Settlement signed by the Government of India and Assam, and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) in New Delhi on August 15, 1985. It outlined procedures to detect and deport undocumented migrants, thus influencing policies to protect people's rights and Assam's integrity. The Assam Accords was seen as a good initiative that had the potential to realize the ideals of liberal citizenship in Assam. It protected the rights of all the people of Assam and addressed the worries of the refugees who came from Bangladesh. However, the Assam Accords were never implemented. Thus, it failed to address the needs of the people of Assam.

The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 was another pivotal act that shaped the concept of citizenship in Assam. The study tried to understand the extent to which the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 realized the ideals of the liberal theory of citizenship. The NRC is meant to be a register of Indian citizens whose purpose is to document all the legal citizens of India so that illegal immigrants can be identified and deported. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 provides an accelerated pathway to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who arrived in India by 2014. The combination of CAA and NRC led to concerns about potential discrimination and exclusion, particularly affecting marginalized communities. The NRC had the potential to be abused by authorities, which could have resulted in the final draft's exclusion of long-term residents in Assam. While the CAA grants citizenship to people from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who are in immediate danger of being persecuted, it neglects the concerns and rights of the indigenous people of Assam. The CAA also went against the

secular ideals of the Indian constitution by excluding Muslim migrants to India from the process of citizenship in India. It did not take the rights of the Muslim migrants into concern in India. Thus, both the CAA and NRC departed from the ideals of a liberal citizenship framework.

In conclusion, migration from present-day Bangladesh to Assam has continued since colonial times. The coexistence of the Bengali and Assamese communities in Assam has led to several cultural exchanges between both communities. While there have been concerns among the Assamese community regarding the preservation of the Assamese language, language has also acted as a bridge between both communities. The Bengali community in Assam has accepted Assamese as their second language while retaining their mother tongue leading to their acceptance in the Assamese community. Both languages have heavily influenced each other over time. This led to an exchange of words and vocabulary between both languages.

Festivals then also acted as a major factor which helped in accelerating the process of integration between both cultures. Both communities celebrate each other's festivals. This exchange of festivals has also brought some change in the festivals of both communities. For example, in temples managed by the Assamese community, Harai is offered during Durga Puja to the goddess. Harai is a prasad offering given by the Assamese community in Namghars, which are places of worship associated with the Assamese community. The migration of people from Bangladesh to Assam has also heavily influenced the citizenship laws and people's perspective of citizens in Assam.

The people in Assam have an idea of citizenship which resonates with the ideals of the liberal theory of citizenship. The government of India and Assam has implemented several provisions related to citizenship in Assam. There is a need in Assam for the implementation of a proper citizenship law that takes into consideration the rights of both the people of Assam. While doing so, it should also make sure that the human rights of the migrants are not violated and that they are properly rehabilitated.

It is important to understand that migration from Bangladesh to Assam has profoundly influenced the culture and politics of Assam. While

there have been concerns among the Assamese community over the preservation of their culture, a trend towards assimilation of the Bengali community has been noticed in Assam.

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Genocide and Gendercide: A case of the Srebrenica Massacre

Britney Abigail Whites

INTRODUCTION

The Bosnian War, from 1992 to 1995, emerged after Yugoslavia's dissolution. It involved factions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Herzeg-Bosnia, and Republika Srpska, with support from Croatia and Serbia. Triggered by Bosnia's independence referendum and subsequent ethnic tensions, the conflict saw widespread violence, including the siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre. The ethnically driven tension led to the rise of Serbian irredentism and Ethnic cleansing.

Serbian irredentism aims to reclaim territories seen as historically or culturally Serbian, fueling the nationalist ideology of "Great Serbia" or "Greater Serbia" driven by Pan-Serbism. Ethnic cleansing involves forcibly removing or exterminating specific ethnic, religious, or racial groups from an area to create a homogenous population, often through violence and atrocities like mass killings and rape. The term gained prominence during conflicts like the Bosnian War, where widespread violence and ethnic cleansing occurred. The conflict resulted in over 100,000 deaths displacing over 2.2 million people, making it Europe's most violent conflict since World War II.

Women played pivotal roles in organizing against divisive politics and wartime violence in Serbia and the former Yugoslav states, with groups like "Women in Black" leading anti-war protests and advocating for peace. Despite facing challenges in a patriarchal society, women provided safer environments for activism and were instrumental in initiating peace efforts. However, women also endured significant hardships during the Bosnian war, facing systematic rape and violence, including being subjected to rape camps aimed at altering ethnic

identities through forced pregnancies. This brutal tactic reinforced a gendered perception of nation-building, where women were seen as the creators of the nation, subjected to manipulation and violence to shape desired ethnic identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine the history of the Bosnian War and the underlying ideological framework behind the Srebrenica Massacre, analyzing Swanee Hunt's book "This Was Not Our War," published in 2001, provided information on pre-partition Bosnia, which delves into the Serbian ideology of "Greater Serbia" and subsequent ethnic conflict. Adam Jones's edited volume, "Gender and Ethnic Conflict in Ex-Yugoslavia," highlighted ethnic and gender prejudices' roles, focusing on women's plight during the Bosnian War. It discussed rape camps established by Serbian forces and the resultant trauma, including infanticide and abandonment of children labeled as "Children of hate" or "Children of war."

The Srebrenica massacre in 1995 stands out as one of the most brutal events since World War II, with thousands of Bosnian Muslims brutally killed, later recognized as genocide by the international community. However, some Serbians still avoid taking responsibility for the massacre. Some experts argue that the organized mass violence by Serb authorities constituted genocide. Scholars like Eric D. Weitz, Norman M. Naimark, Adam Jones, and Martin Shaw support this view, while others challenge it. Nevertheless, detailed studies by scholars like Smail Cëvić, Edina Bećirević, and Norman Cigar have supported the view that it was genocide.

METHODOLOGY

To gather data for this dissertation, I have conducted qualitative research incorporating primary and secondary forms of data collection. For my primary data, I interviewed a close friend of mine, Teuta Koljatahi and her mother Osmana Uzunovic residing in Novi Pazar, a

city located in the Raška District of southwestern Serbia. Teuta and Osmana are both Muslim or as they call themselves “Bosniaks” living in the country that killed “their people”. Teuta is a 23 year old University student. She was born after the Srebrenica Massacre in Novi Pazar, Serbia. My aim behind interviewing her was to gather information and a point of view of the Muslim people living in Serbia well after the massacre. Osmana is a 59 year old stay-at-home mother. She was born in Rudo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. She moved away from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Novi Pazar (city in Serbia) in 1999, this was 4 years after The Bosnian War and the Srebrenica Massacre. My motive behind interviewing Osmana was to understand the point of view of the people, especially Muslim women, during the time of the Bosnian War and the infamous Srebrenica Massacre. For my secondary data analysis, I was advised to search up articles and books written by Non-Serbs. This was mainly because the Serbs had either burned all records, kept no tangible records or blatantly manipulated the records regarding the war, the massacre and the entire time period. The data collected both by means of primary and secondary forms of analysis was to retrieve information on the role of Muslim women in the war, how the term “Balkanization” affected the Balkans in an economic or political way, how the Muslim women were treated by the Serbs and if the same dynamics prevail in the present day and age, since the Srebrenica Massacre was considered the biggest event in Europe since the World War II – how does one who lives in the region but did not face the atrocities view this event.

WAR AND GENOCIDE IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The conflict in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 resulted in approximately 200,000 deaths, primarily Muslims, and displaced over a million more, culminating in the Srebrenica massacre of over 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys by Serb forces. The genocide in Bosnia showed a gender-selective approach, evident from the onset. The gendercidal massacres leading up to the mass killing at Srebrenica in July 1995, including the significant one at Ugar Gorge in 1992, foreshadowed the tragic events. “Gendercidal massacres” refer to mass violence targeting individuals based on their gender, often involving systematic killings, sexual

violence, and forced sterilization. In this case, it specifically refers to the mass rape of Bosniak women to give birth to Serbian children. During the takeover of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces, thousands of Bosnian Muslim men and boys were systematically separated, hunted down, and slaughtered. Srebrenica symbolizes modern gendercide, acknowledged in mainstream discourse as a massacre of Bosnian “men and boys.”

Indiscriminate massacres of civilians occurred, particularly in urban areas like Sarajevo and Vukovar, with genocidal tactics utilized as per the UN Convention definition. However, the primary focus of mass killings was on “battle-age” males from outgroup populations. “Battle-age” men faced extermination or sadistic incarceration akin to Nazi concentration camps, while very old men, young boys, and women were largely spared, except for community leaders and professionals targeted for their prominence. Gendercidal and eliticidal strategies intertwined seamlessly, aiming to remove ruling elites and eliminate perceived threats.

GENOCIDE AND GENDERCIDE

In late 1992 and early 1993, media reports highlighted the issue of women rape victims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with estimates ranging from 20,000 to 50,000 victims (Drakuli, 1993, p. 270) Supported by an Amnesty International Inquiry, these reports noted widespread abuse against women, primarily by the Serbian armed forces. The Amnesty Investigation aimed to identify circumstances where women were vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse, highlighting scenarios where those in authority exploited their power. Discussions on rape in conflict often reference Susan Brownmiller’s work, highlighting its use as a weapon of war and revenge.

Massacres targeting women in the Balkan conflict differ from those targeting men, as they are generally not gender-selective. Instead, women are often victims when they belong to a group targeted for reasons closely linked to gender, such as being part of a refugee convoy with a predominance of females due to the gender disparity among refugees. Estimates suggest that between 20,000 to 50,000 women were

raped during the Bosnian war, subjected to brutal assaults using various objects as part of the Bosnian Serb strategy of ethnic cleansing. These genocidal rapes aimed to implant Serbs in Bosnia, prevent captives and their families from returning, and were often carried out to fulfill official orders.

The trauma experienced by mothers during pregnancy led to an increase in disabled children and infanticide rates. Despite efforts to discourage adoptions, many babies were abandoned in hospitals and orphanages, labeled as “children of hate.” Debate among genocide scholars continues regarding whether the organized mass violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995 constitutes genocide. While some strongly support this claim, others contest it. However, the Srebrenica massacre of July 1995 has been unanimously declared as a genocide by international courts.

TRIUMPHALISM

While Bosnians mourned their losses, Serbians celebrated through popular music, journalism, erasing history, and glorifying “ethnic cleansing.” In 2010, convicted war criminal Mitar Vasiljević received a hero’s welcome upon early release by the ICTY, showcasing the glorification of mass atrocities and rehabilitation of war criminals. The Republika Srpska, established through genocide, celebrates its ‘triumph’. Leading scholar Hariz Halilovich terms this phenomenon ‘triumphalism’.

During the conflict, Serb nationalists weaponized popular music, with folk singers like Baja Mali Knindže, Miro Semberac, and Lepi Momčilo gaining popularity for their anti-Muslim nationalist songs. Derogatory terms like “Balija” for Bosniaks became mainstream in Serb media and were used by political and military leaders. For example, Miro Semberac’s hit song “Jadna Bosna suverena” (poor independent Bosnia) mocked Bosnia and Herzegovina, ridiculing its president and advocating for Serbian revenge and the destruction of mosques.

The deliberate targeting of archives and cultural heritage by the Serbian military during and after the war, including incidents like the burning of

Bosnia's National Library and the destruction of museums, has been termed 'memoricide'. Retrieving documents related to crimes committed during the war poses significant challenges, as those responsible often did not leave behind substantial evidence. Exceptional discoveries, like General Mladic's wartime diaries unearthed in 2010, offer rare insights into the operational aspects of crimes. However, expecting perpetrators to willingly leave behind such incriminating evidence was unrealistic.

LETTERS FROM SERBIA

The Srebrenica massacre profoundly impacted women in the region. They face ongoing challenges in accessing justice and receiving reparations for the crimes committed against them and their families. Despite these challenges, women have been instrumental in preserving the memory of the massacre through organizing events, sharing their stories, and advocating for awareness. Additionally, insights from my friend Teuta and her mother Osmana living in Serbia provided unique perspectives on the aftermath of the Bosnian War.

During the Bosnian War, patriarchal violence inflicted deep wounds on women, with sexual violence used as a means of control and domination. The brutality, including the murder of innocent children, underscored a callous disregard for human life, although religion wasn't the sole motivator behind these atrocities. In response to the violence, women reacted diversely, with some tragically influenced by propaganda and others resisting their fate by fleeing or forming activist groups. Today, while prejudice based on religion persists, it's not as severe as during the war. The negative portrayal of the Balkans reinforced gender stereotypes and limited opportunities, fueling tensions that led to war. The derogatory use of the term "Balkan" stemmed from religious and ethnic biases, serving as a tool of mental abuse during the conflict. Ethnic prejudices and political motives, like Serbianization, laid the groundwork for the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica.

The sense of "otherness" in the Balkans exacerbated division and violence, with Serbians viewing Bosnians as inferior, leading to

atrocities justified by ethnicity. This historic animosity toward Muslims hindered progress and fueled nationalism, leaving a lasting impact on the region's development. Today, Muslim women in Serbia still face discrimination, particularly in non-Muslim majority areas, where patriarchy remains dominant, marginalizing them based on gender and development. Despite ongoing challenges, feminism is often disregarded, and women's voices are sidelined in decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION

The Bosnian conflict and genocide saw deliberate targeting of “battle-age” males by Bosnian Serb forces, sparing women, children, and elderly men. This gender-selective approach, fueled by toxic nationalism, included persecution of community leaders and professionals, evident in the notably high percentage of missing males. Collaborative research highlights gendered atrocities like widespread rape targeting Muslim women, forming part of a broader ethnic cleansing strategy. Despite debates over genocide classification, the Srebrenica massacre is unanimously recognized as such.

Post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina grapples with enduring effects of triumphalism, cultural destruction, and archival manipulation, hindering reconciliation. Triumphalism, expressed through music and war criminal celebration, underscores ethnic tensions. Destruction of cultural heritage, like Bosnia's National Library, erases collective memory. Manipulation of archival material obstructs truth and justice, impeding reconciliation. Women in Srebrenica endured violence but advocated for justice, contributing to accountability efforts despite ongoing challenges in accessing justice and reparations.

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The Cultural Integration of Malayalees in Kolkata: A Sociological Study

Crystal Kollannur

Kolkata, historically known as Calcutta, is a city celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and pivotal role in India's history. As the capital of West Bengal, it has long been an important hub of commerce, education, and culture. During British colonial rule, Kolkata served as the capital of British India until 1911, a status that left a lasting influence on its architecture, social structure, and cultural fabric. Today, Kolkata thrives as a vibrant metropolis where traditional values coexist with modern influences, making it a quintessential cosmopolitan center. The city's multicultural ethos is evident in its festivals, cuisine, art, and literature, which reflect the harmonious blend of diverse communities contributing to its identity.

Among the many communities that have enriched Kolkata's cultural mosaic is the Malayalee community. Originating from Kerala, a state in southwestern India renowned for its distinct culture, language (Malayalam), and traditions, Malayalees have brought a unique flavor to Kolkata's multicultural environment. The migration of Malayalees to Kolkata can be traced back to various economic and social factors. As Kolkata grew into a major urban and economic hub, it attracted skilled professionals, businessmen, and students from across India, including Kerala. Seeking opportunities in fields such as education, healthcare, business, and corporate sectors, Malayalees established themselves as an integral part of Kolkata's socio-economic landscape.

The community has actively contributed to the city's cultural diversity through its vibrant celebrations of festivals like Onam and Vishu and cultural performances showcasing traditional Kerala art forms such as Kathakali and Mohiniyattam. Malayalee cuisine, with its distinctive

flavors and ingredients, has become a cherished addition to Kolkata's culinary repertoire. Furthermore, the Malayalee community's strong emphasis on education has enabled its members to excel in professions such as medicine, academia, and entrepreneurship, further shaping the intellectual and professional development of the city.

This research addresses the questions of: How does the Malayalee community maintain its distinct cultural identity while adapting to Bengali culture? What strategies do community members employ to achieve integration? And what are the implications of these processes for understanding multiculturalism, migration, and identity formation in urban India?

Theoretical perspectives on cultural identity and adaptation, such as Stuart Hall's (1996) conceptualization of identity as dynamic and context-dependent, Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of "hybridity" and the "third space," and John Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, offer critical insights for analyzing the experiences of the Malayalee community. These frameworks underscore the interplay between preservation of cultural heritage and adaptation to new cultural environments, highlighting the creative and contested processes of identity construction.

By exploring the lived experiences of the Malayalee community in Kolkata, this research not only contributes to understanding their specific integration journey but also sheds light on the broader dynamics of multiculturalism and identity formation in urban India. It offers a lens to examine how cultural diversity can thrive within a shared space while negotiating differences and fostering coexistence.

This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of several key concepts in the context of the Malayalee community in Kolkata. It seeks to explore cultural identity, examining how the community perceives and articulates its identity within a predominantly Bengali cultural environment, focusing on the aspects of language, traditions, and practices that are maintained, adapted, or transformed. Additionally, it investigates the integration processes, identifying the degrees and dynamics of cultural integration experienced by the community, as well

as the factors that facilitate or hinder their integration into the broader Bengali society. The study also evaluates the role of community support systems, such as Malayalee organizations, social networks, and cultural events, in preserving cultural heritage, fostering integration, and enhancing community well-being. Furthermore, it examines generational perspectives, comparing attitudes toward cultural preservation and integration across different generations within the Malayalee community. Lastly, the research delves into the impact of Kolkata's multicultural environment on the integration process of Malayalees, shedding light on how the city's diversity influences their experience of coexistence and adaptation.

A qualitative research methodology, including personal interviews and archival research, was employed to gather in-depth insights from participants and historical records. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for an exploration of subjective experiences and perspectives. Archival research provided historical context regarding the Malayalee community's migration to Kolkata, highlighting their contributions and challenges over time.

The research into cultural identity and integration within the Malayalee and Bengali cultures in Kolkata offers critical insights into broader sociological themes such as multiculturalism and identity formation. It examines multiculturalism in practice by exploring how Malayalee and Bengali cultures interact, coexist, and influence each other, shedding light on the preservation, adaptation, and blending of cultural practices. Additionally, it investigates the complexities of identity formation, focusing on how Malayalees maintain, adopt, or create hybrid identities within a multicultural context, emphasizing the roles of language, religion, customs, and social networks. Finally, the study analyzes intergenerational differences within the Malayalee community, highlighting how younger generations navigate the balance between tradition and modernity, ensuring the continuity and adaptation of cultural heritage over time.

The analysis of the Malayalee community in Kolkata provides valuable insights into the nuanced process of cultural integration, adaptation, and identity formation in a multicultural urban environment. The

findings shed light on the experiences of different generations, their strategies for navigating the complexities of cultural preservation, and the challenges they face as part of a minority community in a diverse city.

For the first generation of Malayalee migrants, cultural integration was primarily driven by practical needs—economic stability and professional success in an unfamiliar environment. As these individuals settled in Kolkata, their interactions with Bengali culture were often minimal and event-based, mostly limited to participating in public festivals or workplace engagements. They viewed themselves as outsiders in the larger social fabric of the city, which led them to hold on strongly to their Malayalee identity. Their primary focus was on maintaining their cultural roots, and they often relied on tight-knit, Malayalee-centric social networks to navigate their new lives. This reliance on ethnic networks allowed them to find a sense of comfort and security in an alien environment, while simultaneously reinforcing their cultural distinctiveness.

In contrast, the second generation of Malayalee migrants experienced a deeper and more sustained engagement with Bengali culture. This generation, while still rooted in their Malayalee heritage, began to find ways to balance their dual identities—embracing both their ancestral culture and their integration into the Bengali social and cultural landscape. They participated in Bengali festivals like Durga Puja and Saraswati Puja, while also continuing to celebrate Onam and other Malayalee traditions. The second generation found themselves at a crossroads, actively working to navigate the tensions between cultural preservation and adaptation. One key aspect of their experience was their role as cultural brokers, transmitting both Malayalee and Bengali customs to their children, ensuring that the next generation would carry forward elements of both cultures. This generation began to see themselves not merely as Malayalees in Kolkata but as individuals who could navigate multiple cultural contexts with ease.

The third generation of Malayalees in Kolkata exhibits a more seamless blending of both cultures. For them, the experience of growing up in Kolkata has led to the formation of a hybrid identity. They are as familiar

with Bengali cultural practices as they are with their Malayalee heritage. Their daily lives reflect a comfortable intertwining of both traditions—whether through food, language, fashion, or social practices. However, this generation also faces its own set of challenges. Despite being fluent in both Malayalam and Bengali, they often find themselves grappling with a sense of not fully belonging to either community. They are sometimes caught between the expectations of their parents, who hold on to traditional Malayalee values, and the broader Bengali society that they interact with on a daily basis. This sense of being "in-between" can lead to feelings of marginalization, as they try to carve out a space where they can assert their unique hybrid identity.

The role of community organizations has also evolved over the years. Initially, these organizations were crucial for preserving Malayalee traditions and providing support to the first-generation migrants. They served as essential lifelines for individuals navigating the challenges of being in a new and often unfriendly environment. Over time, however, these organizations have expanded their scope to not only preserve Malayalee culture but also promote multiculturalism. They have become platforms for fostering integration, creating spaces where individuals from different cultural backgrounds can come together and share their traditions, thus facilitating a broader sense of community beyond the confines of ethnic lines.

Gender dynamics play a significant role in the cultural integration process. For men, integration has largely been centered around professional and economic identities. Their engagement with Bengali culture has often been through their work, social interactions in professional settings, and the need to adapt to new work environments. In contrast, women have played a central role in preserving cultural traditions within the family and community. They are often the primary custodians of cultural practices, ensuring that younger generations continue to participate in Malayalee festivals, speak the language, and learn about their heritage. At the same time, women face the dual pressures of maintaining traditional customs while also adapting to contemporary societal expectations. This balancing act can be

particularly challenging as they navigate changing gender roles within both the family and the wider society.

Cultural retention and adaptation are key themes in the experiences of the Malayalee community. While practices such as food, language, and festivals are maintained, the intensity with which these traditions are adhered to diminishes over time. This is especially true for younger generations, who may feel disconnected from the cultural practices of their forebears. However, the emergence of hybrid practices—such as the blending of Malayalee and Bengali culinary traditions or the celebration of both Onam and Durga Puja—shows that adaptation does not necessarily mean the abandonment of cultural identity. Instead, it reflects a flexible and fluid approach to identity, where individuals actively engage with and incorporate elements from both cultures into their lives.

Despite these efforts at integration and adaptation, challenges remain. For the first-generation migrants, language barriers were a significant obstacle. Learning Bengali was essential not only for social interactions but also for professional success. For younger generations, identity struggles have emerged as they try to reconcile their dual cultural heritage. The sense of being caught between two worlds—neither fully Malayalee nor fully Bengali—can lead to feelings of alienation and confusion, particularly in social or professional contexts where expectations about identity and belonging are not always clear.

While the study provides a comprehensive exploration of the Malayalee community's experiences, it acknowledges the limitations of focusing on a single community in a specific urban context. The findings may not be directly applicable to other migrant communities, and there is a need for broader comparative studies. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research, with its reliance on personal narratives, may lack the quantitative data needed to measure the full extent of cultural integration and the effectiveness of adaptation strategies. Despite these limitations, the study offers a valuable foundation for future research in multicultural studies, particularly in understanding the processes of cultural adaptation and the role of community networks.

In conclusion, the experiences of the Malayalee community in Kolkata serve as a powerful example of how minority communities can navigate the complexities of cultural integration in a multicultural society. The study highlights the evolving nature of identity formation, where cultural preservation and adaptation coexist, ultimately fostering inclusivity, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding. The Malayalee community's journey in Kolkata offers an insightful perspective on how cultural identity can be both preserved and innovated within the context of multicultural urban life.

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What is it like to be a Bengali Hindu in Assam? Uncovering linguistic and ethnic identity debate between Assamese and Bengalis

Mayuraksha Dey

INTRODUCTION

The study traces the peculiar ethnic dynamics of the state of Assam wherein, since independence, a large proportion of Bengali Hindus, especially in the post-partition phase and during and post The Bangladesh Liberation War, sought refuge and within years considered the state as their homeland. The paper seeks to discuss the immigration pattern that has existed since colonial times in phases and how it has affected the citizenship discourse of the state.

The research paper questions the peculiar ethnic identity dilemma that encompasses the state's language and cultural identity debate. The rhetoric of Assamese-Bengali in Assam was considerably brought into the picture by the epoch of the Assam Movement through linguistic dynamics and the political furor in the state. The question of Native "*Khilonjia*" versus Immigrant "Bongal" brings in the concealed realities, less investigated facts and trajectory of events since the post-colonial times. The events of the Assam Movement, the formation of the Assam Accord, and the epoch of the All Assam Students' Union will be plausibly traced in this paper. The suppressed voice of the communist party and its role in the peculiar ethnic dynamics will be traced. The research further discusses contemporary standpoints of the Bengalis' political, social, and cultural understanding while contextualizing it with the events throughout history.

Dwelling through the contentious conditions, and aspects of the entire Bengali-Assamese dynamics in Assam, the research tries to bring to ground the unheard and lost histories of the state of Assam through peoples' experiences. It tries to weave a tapestry of the past through the voices of the people. The quest for a home within a homeland, wherein the Bengali Hindus have settled for centuries, unfurls a state of resentment and dilemma of identity crisis within a land that remains unknown to them even after centuries of knowing it. The work primarily traces the ethnic migration history of Assam since colonial times, wherein the realities of the migration pattern will be traced through the lens of the citizenship question. Apart from that, the Hindu Bengali question will be dealt with specifically through the personal anecdotes of both the communities and their memories of the Assam movement. Lastly, the Assam movement will be traced particularly through a multi-dimensional ethnic discourse to look beyond the area usually dealt with to understand the underlying persistent citizenship crisis and insider-outsider question.

The study poses the following questions:

1. What is the contemporary relationship between the Assamese and Bengalis of Assam?
2. What do the Hindu Bengalis and the Assamese in contemporary Assam feel about the Assam Andolan (movement) and its effect on present-day socio-politico dynamics of the state?
3. Are Hindu Bengalis second-class citizens in Assam? Do they consider themselves as foreigners in the land they have been living in for generations?
4. What do the Assamese civilians think about their Bengali counterparts?
5. What is the Insider (Khilonjia)-Outsider (Bongal) divide in Assam along the ethnic dimension? What do both sections feel about this demarcation in contemporary times?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied to investigate the research question is qualitative in-depth interviews. I have interviewed 15 people of two different ethnic groups, Hindu Bengalis and Hindu Assamese for a deep understanding of the research question posed. The interview was unstructured and informal. Out of the 15 interviewees, few of them were an active part of the Assam Movement discussed elaborately in the research work. The age group of the interviewees varied within the range of 50-80 years which has helped me in tracing the history of the movement and its consequences in Assam's citizenship discourse. The interviewees, at several points, have elucidated on their personal life experiences and shared anecdotes based on their personal political choices and opinions.

Apart from the primary data collection I have also used secondary sources such as books, newspaper articles, published papers, documentaries, and personal memoirs to complete my research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hussain (1993) delves into the historical context, causes, and consequences of the Assam movement, presenting a comprehensive overview of the socio-political landscape that led to the emergence of the movement. Gohain (1980) illustrates the need and awakening of social science discourse to penetrate the fog of ideology. He further examines the Assam movement that has led to the displacement of thousands who were living as peaceful neighbors together in the state, sowing seeds of mistrust and suspicion among ethnic groups. In the book "Assam: A Burning Question", he claimed that the Assam Movement was a revolt of destitute peasants and hard-pressed petit bourgeoisie youth against intolerable circumstances. His work traces the roots of the movement from the past. Bhattacharjee (2020) traces the ethnic dimension and the feeling of being ostracized in the land where he was born. His article gives vivid examples of the discrimination faced by the Bengalis wherein slurs were commonly used to depict the "other" as the infringer of the native people's rights over their territory.

FINDINGS

Three phases of migration can be stressed while understanding the ethnic dimension of the state of Assam - pre-independence, partition, and the 1971 liberation period. Migration between the period of 1947 and 1979 had an enormous impact on the regional politics and ethnic debates of the state of Assam. As a result of each migration, the area experienced a demographic shift which has led to cultural exchanges and discourses around ethnic lines. Sandeep Dey commented, while discussing pre-independence immigration to Assam, *“The debate of Bengali-Assamese has its root here. This is the time frame from where it all begins - the fear among the Assamese that intruders would take away the authenticity of their land by creating a cross-culture, their language and culture would get polluted and they will be left with nothing but a meager minority status in their land due to such a horrendous influx of immigrants from East Bengal.”*

The identity of the partition-displaced Bengali refugees suffered from inconsistency. The center used terms like “refugee”, “displaced people”, “evacuees”, and “migrants” according to their administrative convenience. At the regional level, Bengali refugees were described as “others”, the “sons of the soil”. The domicile Assamese first referred to the post-partition Bengali refugees as *Bhogonia* (someone who was forced to flee from their place of origin), then simply as *Bongals* or *Bongali* (who were not domicile Assamese and were not willing to adopt Assamese manners and habits). The term *Bhogonia* shifted to the term *Bohiragato* (outsider) which soon turned into the term *Bideshi* (foreigner) who hailed from Bangladesh (Ghoshal, 2020). These classifications highlight the complexity of the identity of the Bengali refugees in Assam; they were seen as a group not matching the traditional Assamese society.

Kamalesh Gupta stated, *“the ethnic debate over immigration had its basis in the rising Bengali population in the state and the fear of the Assamese that they would no longer be the majority in their land. It was in this conjecture that the ethnic discourse took shape. This was the highlight of the Insider-Outsider debate.”*

The decade of the 70s saw a huge shift in the understanding of Assam's political and demographic climate. There were a range of issues that affected the region. Assam witnessed a language movement in the 1970s, which was known as the movement for Medium of Instruction. During the year 1977, the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad (PLP), under the leadership of Nibaran Bora, and Assam Jatiyatabadi Dol, under the leadership of Nagen Hazarika, was at its height. In March 1979, the All Assam Students Union held a conference in Sivasagar, where Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was elected its president and Brigu Phukan the general secretary. They adopted 21 resolutions, one of which spoke about the menace posed to the existence of the Assamese by the outsiders who controlled Assam's economy. It was at this juncture, Kamalesh Gupta pointed out, "the idea of Bangladeshi immigrant threatening the state's cultural identity formulated." In 1979, the death of Hiralal Patowari, MP from the Mangaldoi constituency, died necessitating a bye-election. The two police officers, Mahanta and Bhattacharya took this as an opportunity to strike off the names of the illegal immigrants from the electoral rolls. The uproar was out of control as the student union's war cry was now "three Ds"- detection of Bangladeshi immigrants, deletion of their names from voter lists, and their deportation.

Assam went into a shutdown for a year. The Assam Gana Sangram Parishad was formed, which was the coalition of PLP and AASU. As a result of the movement, we witnessed one-sided media viewpoints which aggravated the movement's tension. The movement reached momentum by affecting the psycho-social aspect of people, where a large mass of people were motivated to be a part of the protest, without knowing what they were engaging in and what could its consequences be. The terror that their identity, culture, and language were under threat was enough for a protest's stimulation." The protests were grounded on symbolism that was directed towards a certain community as explained by Mr. Gupta, "Arousing linguistic sentiments was the heightened symbolism of the protest, slogans included - GO BACK INDIANS, BOYCOTT NON-ASSAMESE SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY, ARM YOURSELF, WE WANT SOVEREIGNITY, BOHIRAGATA KHEDAO, which instigated the furor." Graffiti became a common hate-spreading mechanism for the rioters. "If you see a snake

and a Bengali, kill the Bengali first, Assam for Assamese.” - The Bengali localities came under such systematic and repeated attacks. Meanwhile, the role of the Left Front in the evolution of a popular discourse against the Bengalis emerged. The rise of the Student Federation of India (SFI), Youth League of the Communist Party of India, in the student arena in Assam, and its continuous winning position in the university-level elections, led to a statement becoming prevalent amongst the All Assam Student’s Union, wherein the communist party was considered as – Brihatara Bangalider agent (the agent of Bengalis).

The Assam Movement has chauvinism instilled in it which has, since Independence, been the deadly enemy of all radical and genuinely democratic forces in Assam. The Assamese ruling elite lacked both the economic resources and cultural strength to be able to integrate non-Assamese groups into Assamese society. Yet it has not abandoned its dream of a national resurgence in a capitalist setup. Hence, it uses from time to time the cudgel of chauvinism to beat into submission non-Assamese groups who might resist the domination. Chauvinism is by nature authoritarian and fascist, and an ally of the Indian ruling class as a whole. This is the reason why eminent Indian intellectuals from outside the state have blessed the movement which has been a nightmare for thousands of innocent people (Gohain, 1980).

During the last part of 1983, the movement slowly began to disintegrate with the intervention of the state and the central government. The Assam Accord was signed on 15th August, 1985 between the central and the state government. As per the accord, illegal foreigners who had entered the state between January 1966 and March 1971 would be disenfranchised for 10 years and those who came after March 1971 would be expelled from the state. This accord also assured that constitutional, legislative, and administrative safeguards as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve, and promote the cultural, social, and linguistic identity of the Assamese as per Clause 6 of the Assam accord. Meanwhile, the failure of AGP as a government and the political climate of the state led the Hindu Bengalis to rethink their identity in the state of Assam. The Bengalis were questioning their status in the place they had been living for generations. There was this

constant dilemma and fight to belong to a place, to consider the nativity of Bengali Hindus to the place. Their identity as citizens, travels through a mirage of uncertainty wherein they find themselves questioning if they belong to this land.

CONCLUSION

The plight of more than 20,000 displaced Bengali Hindus as the outcome of the Assam movement is something that cannot be overlooked. These people carry with them the baggage of a lost home and lost identity. Starting new in a land far away from what they call home had a feeling of rootlessness attached to it. They often attached the term “Utbastu” (homeless) to them. The ones who stayed back in Assam had the fear of being termed as “outsiders”. The insider-outsider debate continues to create a dilemma amongst the Hindu Bengalis wherein they question their belonging to the state of Assam even after centuries of staying in the land. Their identity is divided between being a Bengali Hindu and asserting citizenship as natives of Assam.

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Negotiating Identities: A Veteran's Walk on the Civvy Street

Prakriti Chaudhuri

The Indian Armed Forces is the backbone of India. They are known for their commitment towards the nation but there comes a time when they must step out of the battlefield, and this marks the beginning of another battle. A veteran's walk on the civvy street is highly under-noticed and a taken-for-granted phenomenon. When an Army Personnel retires, they go through a metamorphosis. Coming back to civilian life and living life on their terms involves reversing the mission statement and losing pieces of self. There is a 'reverse' culture shock that separates service members' experience. The 'first' cultural shock being the one experienced when joining the military (Bergman, Burdett & Greenberg, 2014, as cited in Castro & Dursun, 2019). In India, every year 60,000 Soldiers retire in the age range from 35 to 60 and it will be an overestimation to assume that all of them are placed effectively in the society (Das, 2022).

Although, the appropriateness of the word for describing this process is required in the Indian context based on the unique experiences of the veterans. The use of the term 'transition' was common and unlike reintegration, the term 'readjustment' has been used in scientific literature, but its use decreased over time (Elnitsky et al., 2017). The term "immigrant" is used as a metaphor for elucidating the many challenges that all veterans are confronted with as they leave the military and re-join their civilian communities. Military veterans are not immigrants, yet having to deal with many of the challenges that all immigrants must deal with (Castro & Dursun, 2019, p. 14). The definition of a veteran depends on the tenure of the service and its nature, the definition is likely to be different in different socio-cultural contexts based on the dominant ideas about the subject (Dandeker et

al, 2006, as cited in Castro & Dursun, 2019). If we were to look at the family and community as a sphere of life then throughout the course of service in the Armed forces, the Army personnel are likely to feel like a guest in their own home (Schutz, 1945, as cited in Cooper et al, 2017, p. 15).

In my research, I have analysed the post- retirement life of the veterans primarily in the spheres of family and community, work and their general state of well-being. My focus on these dimensions of civilian life will be guided by the Chetwode Motto of the Indian Armed Forces and the intensive training of the Indian Armed forces. The Indian soldier has always followed the motto stated by Field Marshal Philip Chetwode which states that the honour, safety and welfare of the country comes first always, and every time, the honour, safety and welfare of the men you command comes next; and your own comforts come last, always and every time (Chakrovorty, 2018). This motto gets reversed in civilian life.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My work is guided by the concepts put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and the Military Transition Theory proposed by Carl Andrew Castro and Sara Kintzle. I have also referred to the Battlemind Homemind (BMHM) framework. Pierre Bourdieu examines the notion of “transition” from military to civilian life; concepts of habitus, capital, and field are used to comprehend the key differences between military and civilian life. Habitus refers to a system of unconscious dispositions formed through regular social encounters and experiences, which generates perceptions and actions within cultural settings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, as cited in Maguire et al., 2017). Habitus takes shape within fields, conceptualised as the social spaces that people inhabit. Fields can exist at multiple levels, including on a macro- or metalevel (e.g., the military as an institution) and micro- or subfields nested within (e.g., the regiment, ship, or squadron). A field is understood as a distinct social microcosm, underpinned by its own rules. Becoming a competent social actor within a particular field enables one to accrue

capital, which is understood as the resources at stake in that field (Maguire et al., 2017).

The Military Transition Theory proposed by Carl Andrew Castro and Sara Kintzle defines three interacting components, namely, Approaching the Military Transition, which outlines the personal, cultural and transitional factors that create the base of the transition trajectory, it includes military cultural factors such as type of military discharge and combat history, health factors and personal preparedness. This is followed by Managing the Transition which refers to factors impacting the individual progression from service member to civilian, individual adjustment factors like coping-style attitudes and social support in varying forms such as family, friends, community and society may affect transition. Lastly, Assessing the Transition describes outcomes associated with transition, which are measured through the categories of work, family, general well-being and community, secured employment, re-acclimation to family ties and adjustment to new family roles, physical and psychological health and adaptation to new social networks (Castro et al, 2014). The Battlemind-Homemind (BMHM) framework assumes that in the warzone, the soldier relies on a battlemind, and their behaviour follows a highly reactive stimulus-response model. In the civilian environment, the veteran relies on a homemind, and they are expected to modify their behaviour through the adoption of a stimulus-reflection-response model and social navigation (Pedersen & Wieser, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

My research questions have focused on the different types of negotiations that a veteran must make in their transition process, whether the qualities of a Military Personnel are transferable to a veteran's new professional endeavour and how the idea of contentment is envisioned in a veteran's life.

I have conducted a qualitative study using structured in-depth interviews using purposive sampling. The field of my research was Kolkata, and 15 male veterans from the Indian Army, Indian Navy and

Indian Air Force were interviewed. The age group of the respondents was between 45 years to 80 years. I want to draw attention to the fact that my research has studied the transition of veterans who have undertaken superannuation and premature retirement. Secondary sources of data like newspaper articles and published works – journals and papers were referred.

My work has been divided into three chapters for the purpose of tracing the different stages of the Military to Civilian Transition. In the first chapter titled, 'Seva Paramo Dharma: A way of life', I have focused on the metamorphosis that a civilian goes through when they join the Indian Armed Forces. Their training drills into them qualities that set them apart from the civilians and I have discussed comradeship and types of retirement. In the second chapter titled, 'Hanging up the boots: Transition to the Civvy Street', I have mapped the post-retirement work life of military personnel which gives insight into the reintegration process. In the last chapter titled, 'Name, Loyalty, Ensign: Embraced till Eternity' analyses the types of transition experienced by the Military personnel and offers a unique insight into the mind of a veteran and his outlook about the Civvy Street.

FINDINGS

Based on my research, I have observed that the veteran tries to leave behind certain identity markers of a Military Personnel when they step out of the Indian Armed Forces, but the difficulty that arises and sets it apart from retirement in any other profession is the setting and way of life. In my research, Colonel Biren Mukherjee, 64, retired from the Indian Army stated, *"We are fiercely OG (olive Green) and the colour of our blood is olive green, this is something that would not change"*. The transition of a Military Personnel from the Military to the Civvy street is characterised by the extensive negotiations that are carried out in the spheres of family, community and work life to produce an identity which reintegrates itself in the new habitus and envisions the idea of general well-being of the self with the revised identity. The strong influence of the Chetwode Motto is observed in the veterans,

In the home and Community life, the majority of the veterans have expressed that although they do not feel like a guest, they have lost bonds, the nature of relationships changed, and for the purpose of reintegrating oneself back, they had to adjust to behavioural patterns uncommon to them. In my research, Brigadier. Gaurav Ghosh, 60, retired from Indian Army expressed, *“The idea of home and community in both civilian setting and Army setting is obviously different, but it was important for me to always be aware that I am a father, husband to my family and identity as a Force Commander was till the Army only. For me, the emotional transition was very difficult as I was a thorough soldier, this is something that I cannot forget overnight”*. Inability or expecting difficulty in reconciliation of this bond is also coped up by settling in veteran housing societies or near the cantonment post-retirement.

In the work front, they had to encounter a different operational style which was more compromising and individualistic in nature. The veterans pointed out that they needed to re-skill themselves and accept that the position one holds is not parallel to the skills they possess. Additionally, discipline and transparency had to be viewed differently in this new work set-up.

Wing Commander A. J Kumar, 67, an aviation consultant, retired from Indian Air Force shared his experience of dealing with the intricacies of new work life, “Most veterans find it difficult to adjust to the undisciplined attitude of the civilians. Sometimes, this becomes a point of competition for the civilian workers as they think we are taking away their possibilities of promotion from them as they have been in the company for a long time”. It has been observed that certain skills and values are transferable. Veterans are not resistant to learning, they just need the correct guidance.

An accomplished retired Army Personnel while describing contentment in their life throws light on three types of transition – physical, financial and emotional. Within these domains the veteran experiences the process of transition and respect, appreciation, sensitivity and honour work as catalysts. In accordance with my research, key institutions and agents which can aid in reducing the distance between veterans and

civilians are Government and Local Communities, Indian Education System, National Cadet Corps (NCC), Media and Private and Public Companies. Additionally, all veterans have showcased a strong desire and have responded positively to being asked whether they would like to go back to military life given an opportunity. In my research, Brigadier. Gaurav Ghosh, 60, retired from Indian Army expressed, “100 baar janam lenge, 100 baar fanah honge, lekin har bar isi roop me wapas ayenge. (I will take 100 births, die 100 times but everytime I will come back in this form). Indian Army is a junoon and nothing can match that. I would always love to go back to my family, and we always wear our boots on”. The veterans re-attire themselves and negotiate identities because they never truly retire!

CONCLUSION

The Indian Armed Forces is not simply a profession, but it presents itself as a way of life which is hard to give up. The limitation of my research lies in the gendered selection of respondents, where only male veterans were interviewed, this deprives my study of the perspectives of female veterans and their struggles, addressing which would be opening a Pandora box. The essence of this organisation is in its comradeship where no man is left behind irrespective of anything and everything, and I believe this is what made the veterans in my research express acceptance of any offer that comes their way to return to the military at the drop of a hat because Army is a way of life and the life it gives is unmatched. The veteran may successfully re-attire and negotiate identities in the Civvy street but a significant part of him will always be strongly attached and passionately devoted to the Indian Armed Forces.

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Urban Graffiti as Cultural Expression: Unveiling Socio-Cultural Narrative in Public Spaces

Ritika Dwivedi

Urban graffiti has emerged as a prominent feature of contemporary cityscapes, offering a canvas for vibrant visual expressions that reflect socio-cultural narratives. From its historical roots to its modern manifestations, graffiti has evolved into a dynamic form of cultural expression within society. This dissertation seeks to delve comprehensively into the world of urban graffiti, exploring its role in shaping identity formation and in the broader social dynamics in public spaces.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to address the question: “How does urban graffiti serve as a cultural expression, unveiling socio-cultural narratives in public spaces?”

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

To investigate urban graffiti as a cultural expression, a qualitative approach was employed, focusing primarily on in-depth unstructured interviews. This method was chosen for its ability to provide detailed insights into the socio-cultural narratives embedded within graffiti artwork. Direct engagement with graffiti artists facilitated a nuanced understanding of their perspectives, motivations, and experiences, thus shedding light on the complex interplay between graffiti and society.

Snowball sampling was utilized to select urban graffiti artists based in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, ensuring access to a diverse range of perspectives within the niche population. Participants from various neighborhoods and subcultures were intentionally selected to capture the breadth of Kolkata's urban graffiti scene. Three graffiti artists from different parts of Kolkata were interviewed to represent a spectrum of experiences and viewpoints.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Urban graffiti has long fascinated scholars and sparked debates as a mode of artistic expression embedded within complex social, cultural, and political contexts. Academic discussions on graffiti, particularly from social and cultural viewpoints, emphasize its profound influence on public spaces (Campos, 2013). Cultural studies have highlighted graffiti's dualistic contribution, showcasing its role in subcultural identity formation and resistance against mainstream societal norms (ibid.). Semiotics and visual culture theories have underscored the importance of analyzing the symbolic meanings embedded in graffiti works to reveal hidden messages and narratives (Alsherif, 2016; Maiyasa, 2023; Andron, 2018). Urban sociology and anthropology shed light on the socio-economic contexts in which graffiti emerges, often as a form of protest against urban marginalization and spatial inequality (Brighenti, 2010). Critical theory frameworks critique power structures within urban environments, allowing graffiti to challenge dominant discourses and reclaim public spaces.

The historical evolution of graffiti reflects a desire for self-expression as old as humankind, with early examples found in Pompeii (Lohmann, 2020). Graffiti's modern origins are traced to urban subcultures in the mid-20th century United States, evolving from clandestine rebellion to recognized artistic expression (Smith, 2020). Graffiti as an artistic expression reached its peak in the 1970s with the emergence of more intricate styles like 'throw-ups' and 'pieces' (Navitas; ed., 2008). This period also saw the legitimization of graffiti as art, particularly in Europe, leading to commercialization and widespread recognition (Navitas, 2003). In Asia, including India, graffiti gained recognition as a

legitimate form of art in recent years, promoting cultural identity and artistic expression (Li & Liu, 2023).

Graffiti is perceived as a reflection of the socio-cultural environment, breathing life into public spaces and provoking thought (Li & Liu, 2023). It serves as a platform for self-expression, storytelling, social critique, and protesting against social injustices and cultural dominance (Zieleniec, 2018). Visual analysis reveals a diverse array of colors, styles, and symbols in graffiti artworks, reflecting local culture, history, and identity (Kizilkan & Ocakci, 2020). Public perceptions of graffiti vary, influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, race, and political ideology (Douglas, 2014). While some celebrate graffiti's transformation of urban spaces, others view it as vandalism, underscoring its contested nature in public discourse (Bartzokas- Tsompras & Konstantinidou, 2023). Despite valuable insights provided by existing literature, notable gaps persist. Studies often overlook the perspectives of graffiti viewers and the cultural diversity of countries like India. Research gaps include a scarcity of studies examining lesser-known graffiti festivals and events within the Indian context, presenting opportunities for further exploration (Flow City, 2024).

URBAN GRAFFITI ARTISTS

Graffiti in India has a rich historical context, with its roots stretching back to ancient times, yet its modern resurgence took shape in the late 20th century. Kolkata, known for its politically charged environment, has become a breeding ground for graffiti artists aiming to revitalize the urban landscape. Employing a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, three urban graffiti artists from Kolkata were profiled, shedding light on their transformative journeys and socio-cultural impact.

Deep Adhikary (DEEP): Deep's journey into graffiti art was marked by resilience and creativity. Inspired by hip-hop culture and a chance encounter with a foreign graffiti artist's Instagram stories during the COVID-19 pandemic, Deep found solace and inspiration in graffiti. Despite facing vandalism and other challenges, his artwork, notably "Durga" and "Durga 2.0," transformed neglected streets into vibrant

cultural hubs, challenging societal norms and reshaping public spaces.

Rishav Nandan (Akai.oner): Rishav's passion for art and self-expression led him to embrace graffiti as a powerful medium for restructuring his identity within society. Inspired by the expressive nature of graffiti, Rishav embarked on a transformative journey driven by his desire to inspire others and showcase the transformative potential of graffiti as a form of cultural expression. Through his artwork, he challenges societal norms, fosters dialogue, and inspires others to embrace their creativity.

Sayam Porey (Dirty Phoenix [SAM 808]): Sayam's artistic journey began early in his school days, driven by a passion for scribbling. Supported by his mother, Sayam found confidence and inspiration in transforming his own home into a canvas. His innovative approach to merging traditional Indian motifs with modern graffiti culminated in unique artworks that reflect his deep connection to nature and the environment. Sayam's journey exemplifies how graffiti art transcends mere vandalism to become a platform for self-expression, cultural fusion, and community solidarity. Through their diverse experiences and artistic visions, these urban graffiti artists challenge societal norms, foster dialogue, and reshape public spaces, highlighting the transformative potential of graffiti in shaping societal narratives and cultural identities in contemporary Kolkata.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND REACTIONS

Public perception of urban graffiti varies widely, influenced by cultural norms, socio-economic status, and political ideologies. Studies have shown that individuals' opinions on graffiti as vandalism can shape broader societal perceptions, contributing to narratives of urban blight and decay (Ross & Wright, 2014; Gibbons, 2004). Despite increasing recognition of graffiti as a legitimate career path, particularly in cities like Kolkata, societal stigma persists, creating barriers for aspiring graffiti artists (Stapleton, 2019). During interviews, participants recounted facing resistance from family members who were opposed to their involvement in graffiti art, thus reflecting the pervasive stigma surrounding graffiti and hip-hop culture (ibid.).

While graffiti art is often associated with vandalism, scholars have highlighted its positive effects on urban landscapes, culture, and heritage (Cercloux, 2022). In spite of the resistance and criticism, graffiti artists have encountered instances of genuine appreciation from the public, demonstrating the diverse perceptions surrounding graffiti. For example, Dirty Phoenix (SAM 808) and Akai.ner shared experiences where locals admired and even worshipped their artwork. This highlights the contrast between traditional and graffiti art perceptions (ibid.).

However, negative perceptions persist, particularly in areas with historical ties to political graffiti. Deep Adhikary (DEEP) and Rishav Nandan (Akai.ner) encountered criticism and opposition while creating artwork in Kolkata, reflecting lingering stereotypes and misconceptions associated with graffiti (Silver & Miller 2004; Skogan, 2015). Despite adversities, graffiti artists continue to challenge socio-spatial norms, enrich public spaces, and foster creativity, contributing to ongoing debates surrounding urban aesthetics and cultural expression.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Graffiti artists play a significant role in shaping the cultural identity of public spaces by drawing inspiration from cultural heritage and local traditions (McAuliffe, 2012). By incorporating symbols and themes rooted in their cultural backgrounds, graffiti artists assert their identities and reclaim public spaces as sites of cultural expression (Dovey et al., 2012). For example, the transformation of the Lake Garden Warehouse into a renowned graffiti destination illustrates how graffiti cultivates cultural identities and influences global content creation.

Graffiti fosters community bonds and positive change, as seen in Deep's transformation of a once-dilapidated area into a hub for creativity and social gatherings (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011). Graffiti artists often form tight-knit communities, or crews, collaborating on projects and defending against external challenges (ibid.). Street art festivals like Flow City and Unicorn Street Art Festival unite artists globally,

promoting cultural exchange and community building (Furtado & Payne, 2022).

Graffiti empowers individuals to express themselves authentically and communicate their narratives to a wider audience (Taylor, 2010). Artists like Deep and Akai.oner view graffiti as a form of self-expression, asserting their identities through their artwork (Vogel et al., 2020). Despite societal stigma, artists like Dirty Phoenix (SAM 808) seek recognition for their art, expressing themselves through unique styles and symbols (ibid.). Their graffiti endeavors challenge biases against their medium and demonstrate the transformative potential of art in reclaiming public spaces and asserting cultural identities.

STATE AND GRAFFITI: INTERACTIONS AND POLITICS

The relationship between the state and graffiti art is complex and multifaceted, characterized by varying perceptions and treatment of graffiti as either rebellion or property defacement (D'Amico, 2007; Taylor, 2015). The "broken window theory", introduced in 1982 by Wilson and Kelling, influenced global graffiti policies, although its impact in India is limited (Radosevic, 2013). Legal walls in some cities indicate a growing acceptance of graffiti as an art form (Punkenhofer, 2018). Although there is an absence of direct laws in India governing graffiti, it can sometimes be addressed under property damage laws (ibid.).

In West Bengal, graffiti has historical ties to political expression, leading to distinct perspectives on political graffiti versus urban graffiti (ibid.). Artists like Deep and Akai.oner have faced surveillance and unfair treatment by law enforcement, highlighting a bias against urban graffiti artists. Conversely, political graffiti often goes untouched by authorities, illustrating a double standard in enforcement (ibid.).

Recent developments, such as the legalization of graffiti in Singapore, reflect the evolving government perspectives on creativity and legality (Chang, 2018). Instances of collaboration between graffiti artists and law enforcement, as recounted by Dirty Phoenix, suggest a potential

shift towards greater acceptance and recognition of graffiti as a legitimate artistic expression (ibid.).

The 'Colors of Kolkata' art campaign launched by the West Bengal Transport Corporation demonstrates the government's increasing recognition and support of graffiti as a legitimate art form (ibid.). However, the relationship between the state and graffiti artists is nuanced and defies simplistic classification, with historical oppression of graffiti contrasting with recent efforts to embrace it as a cultural phenomenon (ibid.). The recent revival of urban graffiti in Kolkata signals a turning point in the narrative, with graffiti gaining national recognition and acceptance (ibid.). However, graffiti's value should not be reduced to binary distinctions of "good" and "bad" art, but rather appreciated for its ability to inspire social change, community participation, and meaningful conversation (ibid.).

Understanding graffiti as a cultural phenomenon requires knowledge of its motivations, content, and social impact, highlighting its role in shaping the urban landscape and encouraging its interpretation and expansion (ibid.).

CONCLUSION

This dissertation embarked on a journey to explore urban graffiti as a cultural expression within public spaces, examining its sociocultural narratives and contributions to contemporary urban culture. The study delved into the historical development of graffiti, theoretical frameworks, and the socio-political contexts shaping its evolution, addressing gaps in existing research. By analyzing themes such as identity, community, activism, and public perception, the study revealed graffiti's significance in shaping societal discourse. Interviews with street artists provided firsthand perspectives, showcasing their experiences, motivations, and aspirations. Themes emerged highlighting graffiti's role in cultural expression, empowerment, and reclaiming public spaces. Graffiti acts as a catalyst for social change - challenging dominant narratives, and fostering unity within marginalized communities. Despite legal implications and traditional perceptions of vandalism, there is a gradual shift in societal and

governmental attitudes towards graffiti. Initiatives like the legalization of graffiti in Singapore demonstrate efforts to dispel myths and recognize it as a valid form of cultural expression.

In conclusion, urban graffiti embodies the hopes, struggles, and dreams of urban communities, hence transcending mere artistic expression. Embracing its diversity can aid in the reimagination of public spaces as hubs of cultural exchange and creativity.

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Capitalising on the Self: A Qualitative Study of the Working Self under Neoliberalism

Ronjinee Chattopadhyay

Paid work or employment is today conceived as part of a naturalised order that fulfils intrinsic human needs instead of a socially constructed convention whose normative functioning is a characteristic of only one kind of social organisation (Weeks, 2011). Today the centrality of work in our lives assumes a distinctive form, interacting with the individual in ways which alter both the individual and the institution (Foucault, 2008; Gerrard, 2014; Marttila, 2013; Weeks, 2011). This study aims to develop an understanding of the interaction of the institution of work with the individual self. It specifically investigates how the working self comes to be defined by the neoliberal organisation of work, and the implications of the same. For the purpose of this study, the term ‘work’ is used to refer specifically to paid employment, for that is the most socially rewarded form of work today, and thereby, also the form which is directly exposed to the forces of the market, the state, and public discourse.¹ It also subsumes references to unpaid forms of work, such as unpaid internships, which are expected to equip the individual to take up paid employment in the future. This study explores the elements of the neoliberal working self in the context of urban India, among the demographic of 18-25-year-old individuals, typically perceived as ‘young adults’. This specific demographic is one which undergoes a transitional phase in terms of work and identity formation. Moreover, it is viewed by the state as a potentially employable group, and is therefore made the target of a number of state policies and programmes (Nambiar, 2013).

1. These structures also function effectively as the archetypical institutions of neoliberalism, tasked with realising the neoliberal vision (Gilbert, 2013).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Harvey (2005) provides a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of neoliberalism as a system, while mentioning its cultural and psychological dimensions only in passing, focusing more on the genealogy of the system and how it is legitimised. The cultural aspects of neoliberalism can be understood by referring to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *doxa*, as shown by Chopra (2003). Chopra argues that the idea of neoliberalism becomes a *doxa*, or an unquestionable truth everyone believes in across social space. In the same vein, Kathi Weeks (2011) demonstrates how the neoliberal post-Fordist era has its work ethic, which among other things, places work at the centre of society, effecting the creation of what Weeks terms 'work society' (2011: 16).

Drawing from Weeks's conceptualization, David Farrugia (2021) explores the formation of youth subjectivities as workers, developing two ideal-typical categories – those of subjects of passion and subjects of achievement. Similar studies exploring the subjectivity of the worker in the Indian neoliberal order have been carried out in the past few years (Deuchar & Dyson, 2019; Gupta, 2021; Maithreyi, 2021; Ray, 2013; Srivastava, 2022; Upadhya & Roy Chowdhury, 2024). This study builds on the analyses of the formation of the self in consonance with neoliberalism in India, by focusing on the experiences of a specific demographic that remains relatively under-studied in this domain.

This study is hereafter organised into thematic chapters, each dealing with one of these characteristics and critically assessing their implications, as well as how they come together to give the working self a distinctive form. These characteristics cannot be separated into distinct categories, which is why one may observe a significant degree of overlap among the traits discussed. The last chapter discusses the role of the state in espousing the ideal of the neoliberal work ethic, which contributes to the creation of the neoliberal working self.

CAPITALISING ON CONNECTIONS: A STRATEGIZED EMOTIONALITY

Emotionality under neoliberalism is also modelled according to structural factors (Illouz, 2007). In order to be able to forge 'connections'

and ‘networks’ with others², one needs to be able to make a ‘strong impression’. The respondents of this study emphasised on consciously harnessing human connections and the potential of the ‘correct’ emotions in order to be perceived a certain way. In the sphere of work, this process takes the form of the strategized use of emotionality. Regardless of the flexible and impersonal work environment, the neoliberal workplace demands individuals to develop a personality that is optimally emotional – casual and informal enough to come across as flexible, but not ‘too’ much, to be able to retain a sense of professional formality.

A crucial way in which emotional strategization is manifested in the practices of networking and connection building. Networking, simply put, is strategic and intentional communication executed as the means to an end - the end being maximising one’s connections, social capital, and by extension, the chances of availing opportunities. All the respondents interviewed considered networking to be a necessary skill. They described how they looked for networking opportunities at all times, be it on professional networking platforms, at networking events, or simply on their school or college campuses. It is interesting to note how a skill considered to be professionally useful is carried out by individuals in spaces like educational institutions, and often over informal social media platforms such as Instagram, which are not their workplaces. Young adults come to perceive human interactions as resources, to be accumulated and utilised as per one’s requirements.

“YOU ARE WHAT MAKES YOU WHO YOU ARE”: INDIVIDUALISM AND AGENCY

The ethic of individualism works closely with the neoliberal work ethic to create the notion of a self that is responsible for its own reproduction. When speaking of the importance of “having one’s own back”, a

2. These connections and networks are seen as utilisable resources for one to land experience-building and employment opportunities. Several respondents spoke of connections as resources that need to be accumulated and maximised.

respondent quoted what their mentor told them – “you are what makes you who you are” – a statement they claimed to live by.³

Such individualism is reflected when workers view social structural problems, such as mental health or unemployment, individualistically, making it seem like the power of resolution lies with the individual. An instance of such individualism is contained in a LinkedIn post, the hook of which was: “Unpopular Opinion: Jobs are not scarce. You are not good enough”. Presenting systemic issues like job scarcity and unemployment as being caused by the incapacity of the individual places the onus on the individual self to match up to the idealised standards and constantly improve themselves, so as to not get left behind.

Similarly, when asked if their professional life had ever been impacted by their gender, respondents claimed to be working in environments where “your gender doesn’t really matter, what matters is how good you are at what you do”. When juxtaposed against the numerous studies which prove gender inequality in work to be a reality, these responses cannot be taken as counter-evidence. What they may hint to, however, is the invisibilisation of gendered experiences in a work culture that positions individual capability as the only metric that matters for success, regardless of one’s social identity.

The neoliberal ethic considers certain traits, which need to be inculcated into the individual as ‘skills’, to be the guarantors of professional success. These skills are, in effect, forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), while the ‘networks’ which enterprising individuals forge around themselves are but forms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The respondents of this study were exposed to the values and skills privileged and rewarded by neoliberal work society through their social networks, including friends, peers, seniors, mentors, and so on, all of which represent a form of social capital. Moreover, most of them

3. Nandini Gooptu describes the core of the Indian neoliberal ethic: “At the heart of the enterprise imaginary is the unfettered enterprising individual, characterised by the virtues of innovation, optimism, initiative, and creativity, as well as the capacity to turn adversity into opportunity through constant, energetic striving in quest of prosperity and success; this enterprising subject is also self-governed, self-reliant, self-responsible, and self-managed” (2013: 76).

were able to undertake their first entrepreneurial activity or first work experience as they had the financial backing provided by their family to fall back on.⁴ However, individuals hailing from humbler socio-economic backgrounds may not always be able to avail of the resources required to make appropriate use of their acquired skills⁵. The exclusionary nature of skill inculcation, thus, reinforces existing social hierarchies.

WORKING ON THE SELF: THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

The conventional conception of the entrepreneurial worker corresponds to an image of a self-motivated individual who is proactive, innovative, adaptive to change, and is constantly vigilant of any opportunity to improvise upon the given situation⁶. The ideal neoliberal self never ceases to acquire an opportunity for self-improvement, be it through completing a course, securing an internship or speaking to new people just to improve one's communication skills. Making oneself employable also entails visualizing oneself constantly, putting oneself 'out there' even if one is introverted by nature, so as to ensure that the right kind of opportunities come one's way. Thus, this culture is also one that thrives on visibility and advertising of the self. A concern with not letting oneself be 'replaceable' further necessitates the importance of an entrepreneurial attitude to prove one's worth and indispensability in order to demonstrate their enthusiasm consistently at the workplace.

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4. It is fitting here to contrast their case with that of Madhu, a factory worker belonging to the lower economic classes working in an SEZ, whose narrative was documented by Cross (2013). While Madhu was "appropriating, inhabiting, and making use of managerial languages and technologies", he was doing so "in ways shaped by but not always concordant with their resources." (Cross 2013: 139).
 5. Government-run skill training centres and programmes address this group through short-term training courses; however, as Upadhyay and Roy Chowdhury (2024) show in their study of service workers in Bengaluru, such training does not serve the purpose of guaranteeing true social mobility.
 6. This is what Jessica Gerrard describes as "a 'learning ethic', in which notions of lifelong learning capture the contemporary requirement to continually work on the self and accumulate new capacities in order to become economically productive in a rapidly changing labour market." (Gerrard 2014: 871, cited in Farrugia 2021: 35).
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The centrality of work in social life today, and the universalisation of the entrepreneurial ideal (Marttila, 2013) together produce a condition where individuals apply the principle of entrepreneurial self-improvement to all spheres of life, and justify the utility of these activities in terms of the benefits they reap for the working self. For instance, a LinkedIn post made by a young employee working with a start-up explains why “everyone should date in their 20s”, even if they do not seek to be in a committed relationship, because dating happens to be a good way to improve one’s communication skills and develop confidence, helping one land better employment opportunities. Romantic interests and endeavours, otherwise considered to be a non-professional part of life, come to be evaluated in terms of the benefits it may offer for one’s own personality to be considered more employable.

The hyper-independent terms in which the neoliberal self is articulated plays into the ideal narrative of the individual as a self-sufficient, enterprising entity. This is, however, ignorant of the reality of the individual as embedded into the social institutions they claim to be independent of. The self that is formed and operates in accordance with the neoliberal ethic also exists within a network of power relations. Studies of worker identity carried out in India have questioned the argument that the Indian working self is formed entirely by the neoliberal system. Deuchar, Srivastava and others have spoken of the agency of the neoliberal subject; however, one needs to ask how far such ‘agency’ is yet another form of socialised action. The agency spoken about in studies appears to merely be an allowance necessary for the self to meaningfully establish conformity with the system. Even when individuals refashion their selves as per their interpretation of what the ethic demands of them, they are not liberated from the system, although they are in interaction with it, and may be resisting it. Thus, the individual self remains subjected to, and governed by the broader system at all times. The neoliberal structure of governmentality does not prohibit or directly denigrate forms of selfhood that do not conform to the ideal upheld by it, but encourages and persuades individuals to follow the ideal form of prescribed conduct and self-formation which becomes a shaping force, thus indirectly exercising decisive influence in its making (Foucault, 1977; Han, 2017).

“FROM SEEKERS TO CREATORS”: THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Globally, a shift has taken place in governmental policies with respect to working under neoliberalism. One element of this shift is in the heightened emphasis on the importance of skill development, vocational skills and the encouraged development of an entrepreneurial ethic. This is legitimised by the narrative of the self-sufficient citizen who has the drive to take initiative and create opportunities. Thus, as the Minister for Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship proclaimed in a recent interview, and as the Prime Minister has declared on a number of occasions, the aim of the state is to make job-creators, and not job-seekers.

The past decade and a half have seen these values being put into practice through steps such as the inclusion of skill development in the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012), the establishment of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in 2014, and the setting up of Skill Development Centres and Entrepreneurship Development Institutes. A number of programs have also been launched by the government, such as the Skill India Program, Make in India program, the Start-Up India initiative, the ATAL Innovation Mission – all with the rationale of achieving a ‘Skilled India’ by facilitating ‘aspirational employment’ and ‘entrepreneurship generation’. Notably, a number of start-up fairs are also being organised by the government, such as the ‘Start-up Mahakumbh’, ‘Bharatiya Udyamita Utsav’, and so on⁷. Most notably, the recently introduced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 upholds the very same priorities of self-reliance through skill development, and proclaims as one of its focal aims the creation of an adequately skilled workforce to propel the country’s economic growth.

Analysing the official narrative furthered by the Indian government, one finds the statement of the objectives of national development articulated in entrepreneurial terms. Initiatives such as the Swavalambi Bharat

7. Note the nomenclature of these fairs. The choice of language and the reference to a religious fair demonstrates how nationalist sentiments are embedded into the Indian entrepreneurial ethic today.

Abhiyan⁸ and the Viksit Bharat Ambassador movement, are fitting examples. The Indian state, thus, works to aid and often direct the formation of the neoliberal working self, by determining the neoliberal ethic in which work and employment is understood. By creating a climate that encourages skill development and entrepreneurship, which are perceived as the stepping stones towards nationalist transformation, the Indian state works cohesively with neoliberalism to further the interests of both.

CONCLUSION

As this study has sought to establish, young adults at the cusp of paid employment and education experience and perceive work in ways directly concordant with neoliberalism. Even if they do not embody all the requisite traits, they revere and acknowledge the traits of the ideal employee as characteristics of a role model to be emulated and inculcated as swiftly as possible. The young adults studied as part of this research belong to a socio-economically privileged strata; thus, it may be suggested that similar studies be undertaken of youth belonging to other socio-economic groups to understand the varied manifestations of neoliberalism across society. In India, the role of the state has been crucial in sustaining the neoliberal turn in the organisation of social life and private experiences, as has been demonstrated. It is also noteworthy how neoliberalisation in this context is merged with nationalist sentiment, thus exemplifying yet another form of strategised emotionality, but also effectively combining what may be seen as distinct yet interconnected tools of nation-building and reimagining – a project with significant political connotations. It may also be argued that the hyper-individualism that neoliberal culture perpetuates reinforces the spirit of competition across social groups, thus fueling divisive sentiments based on religion, caste, ethnicity, region, and so on. Given the overbearing climate of majoritarianism in

8. Notably, the Abhiyan claims to carry forward the vision of Dattopant Thengadi, the founder of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, and the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, and also a Hindu ideologue who believed that the 'Hindu economy' should operate on the basis of Hindu scriptural rules.

the nation, it is not difficult to see how neoliberal individualist culture serves as the ideal refuge for the social strata claiming to be actively engaged in modernising and transforming the nation, while apparently disregarding all parochialism and markers of institutional belonging. Moreover, the awareness of the possibility that it is the self that is governed by itself from within, through the narratives constructed by neoliberal institutions, is necessary if there is to be any struggle to free the human conscience from being impinged upon. However, even when speaking of change and alternatives, the possibility of true agency remains elusive, as the structures of power and governance find newer ways to thrive.

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Women, Priesthood & Traditions: A Sociological Enquiry of Hindu Women Priests in Bengal

Rudranil Chakraborty

Women priesthood in Hinduism is a relatively new concept in the patriarchal world with male priests dominating the realm of Hindu priesthood. Although one finds mention of influential, authoritarian, and educated women like *Moitrayee*, *Ghosh*, *Gargi*, and others, who not only recited Sanskrit hymns but also composed them. However with time, such insights are hardly recalled, and the status that was assigned to women stands suppressed (Majumdar, n.d.). Priesthood has largely been a Brahminical affair, and the term 'Brahmin' is commonly understood as a Brahmin-man. Obviously, there are female Brahmins, but despite the English translation's charitable inclusion of them in this category, in Hinduism, they are not regarded as priests. The common response is that unless one is born into a Brahmin household, one cannot become a Brahmin (Narayanan, 2005).

In Bengal, the influence of the caste system in people's everyday lives have been shaped by various forces such as the uprise of Brahminical Hinduism in the society and the influence of Buddhism, Jainism and other Hindu sects that weakened the strict orthodoxy of the caste system. However, it became more rigid in the medieval era of Muslim supremacy. When British rule was established in Bengal, 'caste mobility' as a concept was firmly established. Even in contemporary times, that caste has been absent from the realm of the public, is a fact which is clearly visible (Ghosh, 1981). Contrary to textual theorization on caste as a rigid stratification system, today caste exists as "a state of mind of an individual rather than continuing as an ideology, directing collective actions and practices" (Sharma, 2012:260). Therefore, it may

be argued that the hold of Brahminical Hinduism in strengthening the dominance of Brahmins as symbols of Hindu society, had gradually declined.

Traditionally, there have been instances of gender role reversals in Bengal as seen in the performances of Baul musicians who have attained worldwide fame and business. They are seen to be emulating female behaviour, cross-dressing, and symbolically becoming pregnant. On the other hand, women are thought to attain menopause even before they reach the appropriate age. This feminization of the male body is thought to be inspired from the reincarnation of Radha and Krishna in the same body as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who himself dressed as goddess Lakshmi in a stage play (Lorea, 2018). However, these traditional acts are seldom recalled when assessing the context of Hindu women priests in Bengal.

In the realm of *sadhana*, these unique performances reverse socio-culturally created gender roles, and by taking up a heterodox approach, a simple human self is created who transcends gender identities (Ibid.). Despite this being the traditional ideology, when a woman enters the public realm of priesthood, such reversal of roles as well as her agency over her own body is seldom applauded by the masses.

Narayanan (2005) notes that it is believed that by donning a sacred thread, men are granted permission to do some of the “priestly” duties performed by Brahmins, such as reciting and even instructing the Vedas. Over the ages, significant improvements have taken place in these areas. ISKCON members initiate a few male devotees and provide them with a sacred thread. However, it is uncommon for women to be initiated into “Brahmin-hood” even within ISKCON. But there are a few organisations in Pune that formally introduce women into donning the holy thread.

Despite many controversies, Hindu women priests belonging to all castes, have only been seen in the large Melmaruvathur Temple in Tamil Nadu, dedicated to the Goddess Para Shakti. Like the deity in this instance, this worship is new and modern. In this temple, there are no male Brahmin priests doing ceremonial worship. Instead, there are

many women, all of whom work as “priests”, rotating in and out around every three months and all belonging to spiritual fellowships or groups (‘manrams’ in Tamil) (Narayanan, 2005).

The paper attempts to explore how people in Kolkata are perceiving the changes brought about in the realm of priesthood, particularly those by women priests. I also investigate how the power dynamics that operate around the body of menstruating women shape people’s perceptions of the menstruating body of women priests. My aim in this paper is to explore the gap that exists between people’s traditional beliefs and the women priests’ arguments based on contemporary ideas in the society. Thereby the paper attempts to establish academic arguments on the same in order to add to the extremely limited research on Hindu women priests.

This research paper is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews of three women priests and ten other people. Among them there are eight non-priests, both men and women and two men priests. I have conducted exploratory research with a non-probability sampling technique using convenience sampling and snowball sampling to do these interviews. There was a difficulty in interviewing the required number of people as some male non-priest respondents had shied away from answering questions on menstrual pollution while some others did not agree to answer the questions because they felt that it was a controversial subject which could lead them to face troubles. I could interview only a small number of women priests, given the fact that many of whom I contacted were busy with their academic work. Those whom I interviewed were kind enough to give me detailed answers, over a stretch of 50 to 70 minutes.

While doing these interviews, both with Hindu women priests and non-priest people, I found that the main questions raised on the influx of women in priesthood are on her ability; her womanhood and anti-caste approach; various aspects of her performance, which include wearing ‘synchronised’ sarees, singing of Rabindra Sangeet, or translating Sanskrit hymns into other languages, and other ‘aesthetic experiences’; and finally, her purity which results from a constant fear among people if the performing priests are menstruating bodies.

CHANGING TRADITIONS AND COMING IN OF NEW MODERNITY

In India, historically, women and femininity have been revered, a manifestation of which can be seen in the popularity of *Durga Puja*, which is symbolic of the victory of women's power over evil. However, one also comes across instances where women have been ill-treated. It must be noted that even the picture of God has been imagined as '*Ardhnarishwar*', meaning partly a male and partly a female body. Nonetheless, patriarchy tactfully harnesses these sex-based differentiations to covertly undermine women and to prove their inferiority to the male sex. This is where the problem starts.

All my respondents knew about the fact that today, women priests are involved in performing *pujas*. However, only some, mostly the youth, have really supported them, and in sacerdotal roles, they do not see them as something that dissolves one's entire religious purity. Among all my respondents, women priests have argued that when women in the household make all necessary arrangements in the religious ceremonies, it is not opposed by these orthodox traditionalists. Perhaps then, only the labour that they provide matters as women do not intervene in the practical or the performative aspect of the rituals. However, concerns arise when women priests replace age-old conventional pre-requisites with logical, contemporarily relevant practices. For them, women are entitled to do everyday *puja*, but not priesthood. This can be seen as one of the many ways to restrict women to the domestic and prevent visibility in the public. "In the area of socialization--women perform lower-level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men" (Ortner, 1972, p. 20).

Respondents across all castes hold this view. It was in the 19th century itself that Hinduism came to be hegemonized under Savarna authoritarian leadership. Hinduism had become the majoritarian religion because colonial modernity led to the various religious sects being subsumed under Hinduism, creating a majority-minority binary, thus homogenising the religious diversities. This was accelerated more by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh post-independence (Patel, 2007). Preserving traditions (which could be equated with orthodoxy) and

protecting them from the clutches of modernity has become the desired necessity. Thus, the traditionalists believe that changes pertaining to priesthood are not at all desirable in society.

Few of my other respondents who have experienced women priests' performance personally, question the gendered nature of priesthood. According to them, when women are eligible to perform maximum roles in a household, why does the physical differences between the two sexes become the only determining factor in the prohibition of women in the realm of priesthood. Women priests are subjected to criticisms by traditionalists and the main criticism comes in the form of social media trolling. This is, according to Emma Jane, a feminist scholar, 'e-bile', that involves comments that not only objectify women but also reek of male chauvinism (Polak & Trottier, 2020).

Sanskrit hymns are not easy to understand as it requires extensive knowledge of vocabulary. It requires an intellectual and meditative mind to appreciate its beauty. Hence, the highly educated women priests use microphones to clearly pronounce the hymns and also use multiple languages to make the audience understand the significance of the hymns. Despite the popular opinion that this effort is unnecessary and also leads to a break in the connection between God and man, I argue that there is no significance in an enterprise whose meaning itself is not clear.

Nonetheless, in spite of their many shortcomings, a male Brahmin will always have an upper hand in priesthood -- a majorly male-dominated sphere of work. To them, priesthood is just an occupation, which does not require adequate knowledge for better performance.

It is interesting to note that the people who are against this culture of women priesthood have very little to absolutely no knowledge of what is written in Vedic texts or what the correct interpretation of it might be. The primary fact is that when a man is the performer, it gives people a 'real' feeling - an authentic feeling, a feeling of being a part of the traditional culture.

Ultimately, the divisive nature of opinions separates Bengalis into two cultural groups - one that upholds the conventional, thus being opaque

to newness, and the other, supportive of women priests, which is significantly the youth. This has been discussed above and will also be discussed further.

AESTHETICS: OVERLAPPING OR OVERPOWERING?

The dominant understanding of aesthetics in and out of academics is that it is “obsessed with beauty (natural and artificial), high culture, fine arts, collectors’ tastes, and other bourgeois interests” (Plate, 2005).

Although music adds to the aesthetic fabric and helps to sustain heritage, male priests have responded to it by arguing that they recite and chant a hymn in a soothing tune, but they never see the need to sing in a ritual performance as that would obstruct a smooth running of a ritual. Commercialization and commodification of the aesthetic experience seem to detract from what I previously called a real or authentic feeling, which comes from minimal emphasis on additional beautification of the rituals.

Not just music, but the pattern of dressing of women priests also adds to the entire aesthetic experience. Just as Corey (2006) mentions that Oakeshott saw the relationship between religion and poetry as comprising a “spiritual element” (Corey, 2006), the aesthetic performances of Rabindra Sangeet can be seen as having a form of spirituality because women priests select only relevant pieces. A paradigmatic shift can be traced since when women priests began to perform music in the public domain, for their music became a part of their profession. So, in a way what might just seem an aesthetic experience, was a strategy for quick attraction, a means to forge a strong ground to get professionalized.

T.N. Madan (2008), in interpreting Oakeshott, says that tradition should not become an obstruction to modernization because it is a condition of it. Thus, this overlapping aesthetic experience is not overpowering because it runs parallel to the rituals.

THE POLITICS OF BLOOD AND THE MENSTRUATING BODY OF THE WOMEN PRIESTS

The position of menstruating women is, across all cultures, stigmatized, and their regular routine and social exchanges are disrupted (Ortner, 1972). To think that menstruation is a sickness is an inherent belief among the respondents. This is a negative result of religious socialization. In most cases, even women themselves do not stand up for themselves. Ultimately, staunch conservatives see menstruation to be one of the main reasons to otherize women priests.

Women priests point out that there is no Vedic ban on menstruating women carrying out sacred duties, except the work of a misogynist Manu, who had formulated rules on women's hygiene and menstrual impurity.

There is an immense power play when women priests are shamed and embarrassed by those opposing them, which also displays their lack of awareness and knowledge about menstruation. This power play which has been strengthened by patriarchal forces, negatively impacts the emotional well-being of women priests and largely, leads to the subordination of women. The dominant belief is that "men are the "natural" proprietors of religion, ritual, politics, and other realms of cultural thought and action in which universalistic statements of spiritual and social synthesis are made" (Ortner, 1972, pp. 18-19). Thus, it became a joke for many people when I asked them if they would ever invite a woman priest to their ceremonies. To make more people across genders and sexes overcome these taboos, education and re-socialization becomes an immediate necessity. One needs to fashion oneself with the current ideas and ideologies. What the youth today sees as a form of *shakti*, helping in the birth of an individual, cannot be a reference point for obstructing women priests to exhibit their selfhood in carrying out rituals.

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Homemakers of Kolkata: A Sociological Study of Middle-Class Women

Homemakers

Simran Sharma

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, women continue to play a marginal role in Indian households. Although the question of gender equality has come a long way, traditional gender-specific roles and differentiation still continues to exist, which curbs the ability of women to make their own choices or to develop personally or professionally. The thesis focuses on how women homemakers continue to observe or uphold conventional gender norms and take on the roles of a caregiver. However, I have also made an attempt to understand how women 'bargain with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) whereby their everyday negotiations also come up challenging a straightforward oppressive/liberating understanding of women homemakers. The thesis also attempts to understand how their expressions of conforming to conventional norms can also question the normative assumption of housework as essentially 'unimportant'. The main aspect of my thesis throws light on the situation of middle-class housewives, primarily in Hindu households, and the roles and challenges placed on them. This depends a lot on their family, religious beliefs, and the command of elders. I also believe that it is the society at large which has shaped each and every individual and made it very obvious for everyone to believe that it is the women who are supposed to perform each and every task at home or household related activities - from physical labour for the family to giving emotional and psychological support to all.

I have chosen this topic because I find this particular area of study very compelling as it delves into the intersection of socio-economic status

and domestic responsibilities. Understanding these unique challenges faced by middle-class homemakers provides insights into the larger societal landscape, centred on factors such as gender roles. There have been many studies on how lower middle-class women get affected by the gender roles but there is a prevailing perception that the higher up we go in class and the more urban we go in geographical regions, gender roles cease to exist or their impact decreases in comparison to the impact felt by 'lower class' women. I was particularly intrigued about studying how gender roles have affected middle-class women, especially in the context of an urban city as opposed to a rural area.

In households across the world, women often find themselves navigating a complex web of gender norms and expectations that can significantly impact their daily lives and experiences. In this regard there has been a lot of research focusing on the roles played by women in households. Jessie Bernard (1972), an American Sociologist talks about the women in their early 20s, where most of them were full-time housewives and she talks about how different the realm of marriage was for the males and the females. Marriage, particularly for women, can pose significant mental and emotional challenges. Jessie Bernard's research highlights that many wives report unhappiness, anxiety, and depression within their marriages. This paradox arises from societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, where marriage is seen as an achievement. Women's domestic work allows men to work at home without disturbance and enjoy leisure activities at home. The extent of a woman's domestic labour depends on her husband's occupation and his desire to have her available for various tasks. The work that wives do is multifaceted and often goes unrecognized and undervalued. It encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, from providing direct support to husband's occupations to offering moral and emotional support, maintaining the home, and taking on a significant share of domestic tasks. This unpaid labour is a crucial but often overlooked part of women's roles as wives (Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Ann Oakley, in her book 'The forgotten wives', talks about how 'wives' have been ignored in history and how no attention is given to the domestic and emotional labour these wives have performed for their husbands, children and families. 'Almost no attention is given by biographers and historians to what the famous

husbands might have been able to achieve without this subterranean industry of wifely labour' (Oakley, 2021, p.4).

For my dissertation I have made use of qualitative research methods. Engaging in qualitative research provides a nuanced lens to comprehend human behaviour, experiences, and phenomena by delving into non-numerical data. This method involves collecting and scrutinising subjective information, such as interviews, observations, or open-ended surveys, with the aim of gaining profound insights into the intricacies of a specific subject (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006). My chosen method for this dissertation is interviewing, which can be conducted either one-on-one or via telephone. My interview questions were semi-structured. Interviewing is one of the most used qualitative methods in social research.

The objective of my research is to understand the unique challenges that are faced by middle-class homemakers and how they are affected by gender roles. My findings generated various themes like the societal expectations placed on women to prioritize their family's needs above their own desires and well-being. This expectation is deeply ingrained from a young age, as girls are often raised to believe that their primary role is to take care of the home and family. My thesis also talks about women in multigenerational families facing added pressure to their domestic responsibilities. Women in nuclear families are a little relieved on this aspect but despite differing dynamics, both settings underscore the undervaluation of homemakers' labour and perpetuation of patriarchal norms, with intergenerational transmission sustaining traditional gender roles and expectations. The emotional labour of women also plays an important role in maintaining the household, not just physical labour. Women are deeply invested in playing the nurturing and caring role for their family members. Lastly, my thesis also focuses on the impact of women's work on the larger economy and whether these women are aware of the contributions that they are making for the maintenance of the economy.

WOMEN, HOUSEWORK AND INTERNALIZED GENDER ROLES

Many women I spoke to enjoy doing housework because they've grown up believing it's their duty to take care of their family. They feel proud and happy when they're able to meet everyone's needs. This mindset starts when they're young and are taught that family comes first, even before their own wants. Some women said they'd feel lost without housework, as if they have nothing else to do. They feel fulfilled when they're looking after their family, thinking it's what they're supposed to do. But some women also mentioned they'd be happy to do whatever their family wants, even if it means giving up their own wishes. This shows that some women might not feel that they can make decisions for themselves. They prioritize their family's happiness over their own. This way of thinking keeps traditional gender roles alive, suggesting that a woman's value is based on how well she takes care of her family. It's important for women to have the freedom to pursue their own dreams, without feeling pressured to always put their family first.

FAMILY DYNAMICS AND HOMEMAKERS

In joint families where different generations live together, women often feel pressured to follow old-fashioned rules and please their in-laws. This makes their chores and worries even heavier. However, in smaller families where it's just the parents and kids, women have more freedom to do things their own way without being bothered by the extended family. Some women told me their husbands don't really have much say in how they do housework, which is similar to what happens in my own home. Even when women work super hard all day, there's always someone pointing out small mistakes. Women in smaller families feel relieved because they can make choices without others butting in. However, it's not that easy; they are still under the pressure to do the housework, even if it's not as much as in bigger families. This happens more now because most families are smaller due to more people working outside the home. Even though women do a lot of important work at home, like taking care of the kids and the house, they often don't get much credit for it. This can make them feel sad and invisible. In families, moms are usually expected to take care of the kids and the house, no matter what. This duty doesn't go away, whether it's a small family or a

big one. There's a big difference between how families are and how they should be, and we need to understand and respect the challenges women face in different family setups. Sometimes, women even pressurize each other to follow traditional rules. For example, one woman told me how her mother-in-law still criticizes her after 20 years of marriage, always finding something else for her to do. This just keeps old-fashioned beliefs alive and makes it harder for women to change things.

THE HIDDEN LABOUR: HOUSEWORK AS EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Women do a lot of emotional work alongside their household chores, which means they manage their feelings to keep the family happy. They show love, care, and humour to make everyone feel good and avoid arguments. However, they often have to hide their own feelings, like anger, to keep things peaceful. This emotional work is really important but often goes unnoticed. It makes women feel like their work isn't valued, which is unfair. During our talks, interruptions from family members showed how busy homemakers are, even during planned discussions. Some women seemed shy to share their struggles, maybe because they felt guilty or didn't want to seem negative. They'd rather focus on the good parts of their role in the family. However, one woman admitted that when she's having a hard time, no one comforts her. She's just expected to keep going as if everything's normal. This expectation is tough on women, who often put others' needs before their own. This emotional work isn't just for the family's benefit; it also helps husbands do well at work. Women are expected to create a happy home environment, which boosts their husband's mood and performance at work. Marriage is seen as a good thing for men's success and society's happiness.

FROM 'HOUSEWIVES' TO 'HOMEMAKERS': DOMESTIC LABOUR, PRODUCTIVITY AND THE ECONOMY

Women I talked to often didn't realize how much their work at home affects the economy. By taking care of their families, they help their spouses do well at work. This boosts the company's profits because their

spouses can focus better. Some women felt like they always had to be busy and productive, which can be tiring. They felt pressured to constantly work and take care of others, even if it meant ignoring their own needs. Some women said their work at home never ends, unlike their husbands' 9-5 jobs. They wished their work was recognized more because they do a lot to keep their families happy and healthy. Others felt like society didn't appreciate how hard it is to manage a household. They said being a homemaker is tough and deserves more respect. But many women seemed uncomfortable talking about their experiences, even when promised privacy. They may feel pressured to keep quiet about their struggles due to societal expectations or past criticism.

CONCLUSION

The findings shed light on how women perceive their roles as homemakers, challenging the notion of complete oppression. Early education emphasizes household management as fulfilling for women, shaping their acceptance of traditional gender roles. The research explores how societal beliefs influence homemakers' experiences, revealing the impact of different family structures on their roles. It underscores the undervalued emotional and domestic labor of homemakers and their economic contribution by enabling family members to work. The transformation of housewives to homemakers suggests a change in the conception of women and labour involved in housework. From being considered as oppressed and conformist to becoming “makers” of home suggests an agency and negotiation of women in the domain of housework.

The transformation from housewives to homemakers has not happened overnight; now housewives want to be referred to as homemakers or someone who actively makes a home in which they are responsible for all domestic and emotional duties and make micro-level decisions regarding the upkeep of the house. This transformation, according to me, has been just a change in the terminology as the term ‘homemaker’ implies a more active role in managing the household. For the women it provides a sense of empowerment and agency which would acknowledge the diverse responsibilities and the contributions of women in the household beyond traditional household duties. This then

raises a question of whether this transformation is a real transformation or is it just a transformation in name as women still function and carry on the tasks that they used to and also justify their housework.

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Beyond the Curtain: Navigating the Rise of Subaltern Movement in Bengali Theatre

Sneha Chakraborty

The history of Kolkata is laced with the development and consequent transition of theatres with the change in the political structure of the city. If one were to trace the origins of theatre in Kolkata, it would go back to the British Raj, which brought in the tradition of theatre in the city. Jatra – a popular folk-theatre form, where plays would be staged on the street and often accompanied by music and dance, had been in parlance for a long time. However, for the urban, English educated middle-class Bengalis, the proscenium stage metamorphosed into an ideal site for performance as the customs of the colonizers were accorded with the status of being ‘civilized.’ (Kundu, 2010).

Traditionally, from its very inception, Bengali theatre has been dominated by the Bengali elite and middle-class intelligentsia. Theatre, as Moloy Rakshit maintains, has been a bastion of a minority of educated Bengalis (Rakshit, 2013). The middle class’s dominance in theatre can also be understood as a manifestation of their cultural capital – their education, social connections, and aesthetic preferences.

With the rise of the Group Theatre movement, under the aegis of the Indian People’s Theatre Movement (IPTA), the reins of theatre were passed on to the middle-class intelligentsia. The Group Theatre movement, nurtured under the left regime, democratized Bengali theatre by emphasizing on collective action and socio-political critique. The identity politics of these group theatres was largely derived from the political ideology of the Left ruling party. The identity politics of these earlier group theatres can be viewed from a Neo-Marxist perspective, wherein they view class as the basic source of exploitation, aligning themselves with the left regime, which was in power in the state during

its inception. Despite the large promises of bringing the indigenous art forms to the mainstream and making theatre more accessible, theatre in Kolkata remained largely confined to the urban, educated 'bhadralok.' Thus, with the decline of the left regime in Bengal, these groups remained constricted within the urban space of Kolkata. They enacted plays which were mere adaptations of foreign texts and with the initiation of the audition system, theatre practitioners were drawn majorly from the middle class.

Under such a premise, in recent years, the cultural landscape of Kolkata has witnessed the rise of a subaltern movement in theatre. These newly formed theatre groups have a strong sense of identity politics, which emerge from a shared sense of lived experience. The two groups, Somporko and Birati Samuho Performers Collective, taken into consideration for this dissertation, make an active effort to create politically-charged performances and promote an egalitarian theatre practice. Somporko, a student-led theatre group and Samuho, a women and queer-centric theatre organization have a core belief in promoting a non-hierarchical theatre practice. The identity politics of these groups have been viewed from a post-modern approach, instead of looking at it from an essentialist perspective.

For this dissertation, I have reviewed existing literature delineating the history of theatre in Bengal from the colonial ages to the formation of group theatres. The literature has taken into consideration works relevant to the understanding of identity politics, social capital, and historical roots of the Bengali middle class, which has led them to dominate the theatrical landscape in Kolkata for so long. The dissertation intended to compare the identity politics of the established groups and the new groups with an effort to comprehend whether these new groups are heralding a subaltern movement in theatre. In order to study this I conducted in-depth unstructured interviews with respondents who were/are a part of Nandikar, Samuho, and Somporko. While Nandikar is a well-established group theatre, Samuho and Somporko are the newly emerging theatre groups. Their recruitment policies and the use of the proscenium are vividly different from that of the earlier groups, as they are trying to create an egalitarian space, providing the subaltern with a platform.

To substantiate my argument about the leftist inclinations of the group theatre movement, I have reviewed Sushil Mukherjee's (1982) *The Story of Calcutta Theatres -- 1753-1980*, and Rustom Bharucha's (1983) *Rehearsals of Revolution: The Political Theatre of Bengal*. The former delineates a transformative tale of the introduction of proscenium theatre under the British Raj, and the consequent rise and crystallization of public theatre, to the growth of group theatres under the aegis of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). The latter, on the other hand, highlights the emergence of IPTA and the solidification of personalities like Badal Sircar and Utpal Dutt on the stage.

In order to comprehend the identity politics of the established group theatres and the new ones, I have reviewed the following articles: Mary Bernstein's 'Identity Politics' published in 2005 that talks about three approaches, namely, the Neo-Marxist, New Social Movement and the post-modernist; Moloy Rakshit's essay 'Communication Through Public Stage: A Study in 19th Century' which deals largely with how the bastion of Bengali theatre has passed from the hands of the elite to the middle class; and Manujendra Kundu's article 'Bengali Theatre: An Edifice on the Ashes of People's Culture' published in 2010 that delves into how the proscenium is a hierarchical structure, which was replicated by the Bengali middle class from the British.

To substantiate my argument about the hegemony of the Bengali middle class, I have analyzed their power and authority through the lens of Bourdieu's social and cultural capital from his seminal work "The Forms of Capital" published in 1986.

AFTER THE THIRD BELL: EXPLORING IDENTITY POLITICS IN BENGALI THEATRE

The shift in identity politics of the group theatres of the 1960s to the recent groups that have emerged in the shadows of these established group theatres, has resulted in the ushering of a subaltern movement in Bengali theatre. Bernstein (2013) expands the notion of identity politics to the macro-level neo-Marxist approach. The neo-Marxist approach views power from a one-dimensional lens and holds two theoretical

assumptions as certain – class division is the most significant factor causing exploitation and activists attempting to break down such divisions are promoters of social change. Dinabandhu Mitra's radical play 'Nabanna' or the New Harvest heralded a major transformation on (in) the proscenium of Kolkata. Yet, even though lending a voice to the subaltern was the core political belief of these groups, most members were urban, upper-caste, male-bodied individuals. For instance, with the passage of time, the production of 'Nabanna' started to be shown only in Kolkata, with theatre practitioners such as Sombhu Mitra refusing to go to the villages to stage the performance. With the defeat of the Left in 2011 in West Bengal, the cultural renaissance which the regime wanted to bring about came to a halt.

While the production of plays by these established group theatres is now restricted to the stage, there has been a counter-culture in Kolkata with the emergence of groups with a strong sense of identity politics and a conscious decision to not restrict themselves to the proscenium. One such group is the Samuho, which is a queer and women-centric theatre group, aiming to create a non-hierarchical divisive process of theatre and is an advocate for greater cultural accessibility. The identity politics of groups like Samuho is vividly different from the politics of the earlier group theatres of the city. The performers in Samuho share a lived experience of having faced marginalization and discrimination; they explicitly want to tell stories which capture the essence of their segregation. For them, the performance reaching the subaltern is as important as the appropriate lensing of their story. The identity politics of Samuho is not informed by the political ideology they subscribe to but by their shared lived experience of sexual and gender segregation – even when they read the classical Sanskrit texts, they choose to view it through the lens of gender to contextualize the story better. The politics of such groups, as compared to Nandikar and Swapnasandhai, is not limited to the scripts they choose – while queer storytelling does remain at the center of their practice, the form, content and the consumers of their practice are equally important.

The evolution of identity politics within Bengali theatre, from the dominance of the leftist discourse to the emergence of one based on the lived experience of the theatre practitioners, depicts how the

multifaceted dynamics of power, representation, and resistance have shaped the theatrical sphere.

Curtain Calls and Stagecraft: Identity Politics in Bengali Theatre Recruitment and Proscenium Practices

The politics of the earlier group theatres and the newly formed groups informs their practice and outlook on theatre to a certain extent. I will be focusing on two aspects where their identity politics gets manifested – a) the recruitment policies and b) the use of the proscenium stage.

THE POLITICS OF RECRUITMENT

Initially, when group theatres were established, the recruitment policies were not as stringent as they are now. However, due to the commercialization of the craft and a demand for the production of regular shows for the groups to remain prominent, the erstwhile group theatres conduct rigorous recruitment programs. Nandikar, a prominent group theatre, conducts a six-month training program for actors ranging between eighteen and thirty-five years. When it comes to the new theatre groups which have emerged in Kolkata in the last six to seven years, their recruitment policies are starkly different from that of the established group theatres. Somporko, a student-based theatre group, does not employ a screening process or conduct auditions before inducting someone into the group. Aligning with the identity politics that Samuho believes in, the respondent elucidated that if their play is a satirical tale on the ill effects of discrimination and they chose to discriminate against the performers who had come to audition on the basis of their “access to training”, they would be doing an injustice to their practice. The recruitment practice of groups like Nandikar is conducive for individuals who have the agency and access to obtain training for artistic exploration. Individuals with enough economic, social, and cultural capital at their disposal are able to access such training, which allows them to excel better than others in the audition, thus creating a hierarchy between individuals who want to learn the art.

THE STAGE AS SITE

The concept of the proscenium was developed by the British, inspired from the Italian Renaissance. The initiation of the proscenium brought along with it the ticketing system. Thus, even though the doors of the private theatre were opened to the public, it still would serve only particular sections who could afford the tickets. Most group theatres now, whether it be Nandikar or Swapnasandhani prefer to restrict their plays to the proscenium halls, which in turn also influences the type of consumers they are choosing to attract.

In contrast, the newly formed groups such as Somporko and Samuho consciously chose to avoid the proscenium. Somporko gained recognition when one of their productions “Uro Chithi” was portrayed in a moving tram and later, one of their other productions “Judho Sheshe” was carried out on the terrace of the Trader’s Assembly Building in Gariahat. Somporko has now created a name for themselves for site-specific theatre, where a specific public place suited the taste of their play better than the other.

The politics behind Samuho to not conduct their plays in a proscenium is vividly different from that of Somporko. While highlighting how the proscenium as a concept was introduced in Kolkata by the British, the group believes that the proscenium is an extremely hierarchical site. The proscenium is designed in a way to let you know who holds the power – on whom the light is being projected, who gets to talk, and who gets to listen. Samuho’s belief in a non-hierarchical theatre is not just limited to the content of their plays but also on how they portray it. The group is concerned with who consumes their theatre. The respondent strongly reiterated their idea of creating a theatre-form for not just the urban, educated population but for the women in rural Bengal. If their practice is thus confined within the four-dimensional space of the proscenium, they will never reach their target audience. The group, hence, wants to create space-generic and not space-specific work. Focusing on three elements, namely, space, time, and people – Samuho intends to create an egalitarian theatre practice for their consumers as well.

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER STAGE: THE RISE OF THE SUBALTERN IN CONTEMPORARY BENGALI THEATRE

The etymological meaning of the term ‘bhadralok’ - the term associated with the Bengali elite - was a Sanskritized correspondent of the English term ‘gentleman.’ (Sinha & Bhattacharya, 1969). The word ‘bhadralok’ is synonymous with words such as sabhya, uttam, and bishishta.

It was used in opposition to ‘chotolokh’. Bengali theatre, which proliferated under the umbrella of the colonial government, remained “confined only to the educated middle-class people.” (Bhattacharya, 2013). The middle class, with their lofty leftist ideals, wanted to create an egalitarian theatre space. But, most of that remained unfulfilled and Bengali theatre continued functioning as an exercise of the bourgeoisie. A subtle example of this was when Nibaran Pandit, a sharecropper who had gained attention due to his songs, was not given permission to sing by the IPTA in an event as that would go against their “standards and aesthetics.” (Bhattacharya, 2013)

Against the shadows of such formidable group theatres, the new theatre groups like Samuho and Somporko have based their politics on lending a voice to the marginalized and subaltern through their practice. While Somporko does so through their productions and in a passive form, Samuho’s activism is very visible. Somporko’s belief in being a voice for the subaltern is reflected in the political content of their plays such as Saare Jahan se Acha, which was a political satire and received backlash from certain political parties. For Samuho, the inclusion of the subaltern in the form of the various gender and sexual identities, which have been kept away from the mainstream, forms the epicenter of their practice.

In essence, the subaltern movement in Bengali theatre represents a democratization of the art form, breaking down barriers and giving a platform for stories that have long been marginalized. As these narratives gain prominence and recognition, they revolt against the legitimized ideals of the middle class. By acknowledging the structural inequalities and power dynamics within the theatrical ecosystem – the performers and the audience, the accessibility of theatre, the kind of stories that are being shown and who are able to watch it, stakeholders

can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive space for diverse voices and narratives to thrive.

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Mapping Dalit Historiography in Bengal from the Writings of the Bengali Dalit Women

Somdatta Saha

“I measure the progress of a community with the degree of progress women have achieved.”- B R Ambedkar

This paper makes an attempt to point out the epistemic violence and reaffirm Dalit autonomy in the Dalit literature by mapping the popular refugee narrative in Bengal. Dalit women are the most underrepresented group in the mainstream “elite” Indian milieu of literature and knowledge building. They are vulnerable and sexualized in mainstream or popular forms of art, entertainment and media. This often results in rampant objectification and reification of Dalit emotions mainly constructed to satiate upper caste complexes. Celebrated Bengali cultural icons like Sunil Gangopadhyay and Satyajit Ray have portrayed Dalit and tribal women in a very distasteful way demeaning their identities into her physicality and taking over her agency from her own self. Contemporary Bengali authors like Ceaser Bagchi have authored short stories hampering the reputation of tribal women and degrading their identities into mere flesh used by savarna men, as if they have no agency of their own body.

There has been a reverse orientalism (Guru, 2002) and a dominant gaze on the part of the upper caste academicians in the construction of knowledge and pressuring theoretical fanaticism. Hence, an impasse has been created, where the top-down approach is still maintained due to the lack of empirical knowledge and standpoint theorization. The caste-question has always been kept unclear and oblivious in case of

West Bengal. “Bengali middle class society is seen as casteless because caste violence lacks visibility” (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). There is also a theoretical invisibilization of the SC/STs which makes it even tougher to map the Dalit discourse in Bengal by means of misappropriation and lack of first hand experience.

Caste in Bengal has never been an open forum debate due to the apparent highly elite and erudite image of the Bengali and for the Communist state government. The classist view of social stratification never made it easy for the caste question to penetrate among the Bengali intelligentsia. The castelessness of Bengal paradoxically made caste and intersectionality visible. “The political inclinations of the subaltern scholars and the bulk of their readership are certainly very different but some of their work nowadays seem to be wittingly feeding into the softer versions of not dissimilar mood” (Sarkar, 1997).

This research has been aimed to study how the unnecessary and inhumane eroticization of the Dalit woman’s body and criminalizing of Dalit men have been normalized in due course of the history of Bengali literary world. Bengali Dalit women authors have authored literature pieces with a sense of revolution. Their writings are meant towards a collective goal of achieving a socio-political goal and establishing their own agency.

I have developed my preliminary understanding on the topic from my keen observation of Dalit representation in Bengali films and in the writings of eminent Bengali authors. I was fascinated to find out the devilish joy in the ‘erudite’ Bengali community while they disrobed Dalit women and belittled Dalit men in the name of art often found in popular literature pieces by celebrated authors. As a Dalit person myself I feel that there is a communitarian responsibility on us to dissolve such stereotypes, misrepresentation and reverting the gaze back. The research has a rationale to correlate the myth of ‘castelessness’ in Bengal and the eroticization of Dalit lives. The research has attempted to find the distinctions in the perception of the Dalit life separately by the non Dalit and the Dalit authors and studying the history of Bengali Dalits from their writings. It has attempted to track a trajectory of the building of Bengali Dalit sahitya and how Bengali Dalit historiography

has been constructed by the Bengali Dalit authors themselves by narrating their own accounts of displacement during Partition, revolutions and movements. It also looks into the contributions of women Dalit authors - especially focusing on all women Bengali Dalit magazines like “Neer” and their historiography that has sociological relevance. Writings of Bengali Dalit women authors like Kalyani Thakur Chnarnal, Manju Bala, Kanan Boral and others have been emphasized as the goal is to discover the frequency of intersectionality and underrepresentation in the world of Bengali literature.

The research tries to find out that there has been an exclusion and trivialization of Dalit emancipators like Dr B R Ambedkar and Jogendranath Mandal from mainstream history and academia. The Bengali refugee identities are homogenized and they are mainly upper caste. The research ventures to find out how the existence of Namashudras and Bengali refugees have been excluded which are later reiterated by the Dalit scholars and authors. Dalit women of Bengal have come out to write their tripartite experiences of inequalities based on caste, gender and politics in the mythical ‘casteless’ Bengal. The writings have brought in a sense of personhood and agency thus dismantling the halo of uneducated, backward, hypersexual and undeserving Dalit individuals. My work can be divided in sub themes such as (a) Partition and Dalit Literature: Making the Bengali Dalit Refugee Identity. (b) Social Exclusion: Stigma and Cultural Segregation (c) Dalit Women, Writing and Revolutions: Changing Images.

The methodology that this research paper follows is a qualitative analysis focusing on the varied experiences Bengali Dalit women had in the due course of their journey as a writer and challenging barriers of being published and recognized. Besides, unstructured interviews have been conducted to study their childhood experience of casteism including invisibilization in workspaces. Their personal accounts have been taken into account in terms of family history, retrieving memories of the Partition and fostering Dalit presence in the amnesiac history of the dominant Savarna population. Snowballing has been done in order to find out respondents.

Sunilkumar Roy in his “Nimnoborger Folito Itihaashe Banglar Namashudras” (2015) raised a relevant question about how to define a piece of Dalit literature. He emphasized on literature composed by Dalits that encompasses everyday crises faced. He gives examples of eminent Bengali authors like Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Mahasweta Devi and their poignant accounts of Dalit lives. Mahasweta Devi in ‘Draupadi’ and ‘Rudali’ writes about the trajectory of the tragic lives of Dalit women. Draupadi, a tribal woman has been a prey of custodial rape and is an epitome of the void agency a Dalit woman has. On the other hand, Rudalis, who are professional mourners by caste show the juxtaposition of emotional labor and odd jobs the Dalit women had to take refuge in. On the other hand there are authors like Kalyani Thakur Chnarl and Smritikana Howlader who have been relentlessly writing about the drudgeries Dalit women in Bengal face daily.

Here, Gopal Guru’s idea of ‘lived experience’ (Guru, 2002) brings out the complexities a Dalit individual faces in bringing out their life experiences. A savarna writer writes about Dalit experiences but from a distance. They have an escape from the horrors of a Dalit life and experiences. It is an episode for them and they have the luxury to switch between two lives, whereas the Dalits have no such option. Bengali Dalit literature got a momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, but the beginning of this movement could be traced from the 19th century in the form of Matua Sahitya, composed under the influence of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur. An outstanding example of Matua literature is Sri Sri Harililamrita by Rasaraj Tarak Chandra Sarkar of the Namashudra community. (Tikadar, 2016) During the Self-Respect Movement, a literary movement started. The first Dalit literary text was “Jati Chandrika” (1881) by Srimanta Laskar. There was another book by Benimadhab Halder called “Jati Vivek” (1891) of the Poundra community.

In Bengal there are many contemporary Dalit authors like Kshirod Bihari Kabiraj, Amrita Bagchi, Shyamal Biswas, Kalyani Thakur Chnarl, Smritikana Howlader, Manju Bala etc. But the history of representation of Dalits in Bengali literature can be traced back in the poems known as ‘Charyapads’ of 10th-12th century mostly composed

by the people from the 'Panchama' group or consisting of ati-shudras of subcastes like Shabars, Doms, Chandals, Sunris etc. Such representation can be found in Manasamangal, where the Goddess Chandi in Chandimangal, a god of the Byadhs, the untouchable hunting community of the forests. There are many accounts around the Kaibarta fisherman community during the Pal dynasty of Bengal. Similarly 'Nathpantha', another one, mainly authored to break the shackles of Brahminism. There are many traditions included like Minachetana (fish cult) or Gorkha Vijaya (conquest of the Gorkhas) and Maynamati Gopichanderyan (love epic of Maynamati and Gopichandra)(Tikadar, 2016). Neer Ritupatra also serves a very important space for Bengali Dalit women. Though Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and Mahasweta Devi have written a lot about Dalits, their work remains as works of Dalit sympathizers or 'Dalit Daradi Sahitya'.

The large peasant communities or the Namashudras in East Bengal suffered immensely during the time nearing and in the aftermath of the Partition. A quinquagenarian respondent also a Namashudra herself said that there is no such evidence from where the term 'Namashudra' came but pointed that there can be some Sanskritic roots to it. She further added that there can be terms like 'namate', 'nama' or 'namas' which can be linked to it. However, Risley's accounts of the etymological roots of the term portray that there were Chandals who preferred to call themselves Namashudras and elevated Chandal for the Doms due to purity and pollution. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's account on the Namashudras tells us that there was no such term like Namashudra and they were usually identified as Chandals. These people resided predominantly in six districts of undivided Bengal namely: Khulna, Jessore, Bakerganj, Dhaka (Dacca), Faridpur and Mymensingh.. The rising 'Matua' philosophy also binded them together for their shared experience of Brahminical torture and exploitation. The respondent said that there was growing tensions when the partition was on its verge and there was rising right wing propaganda around; the presence of Jogendranath Mandal assured them security and hopes amidst the tumultuous period. She said that 'Jogen Babu' propagated a Dalit-Muslim unity alongside the All India Scheduled Caste Federation.

But religious radicalization continued to such an extent that Partition became inevitable and they had no other option left.

The existing literature on Partition and refugee agency has eliminated the plight of the Namashudras and focused on an overgeneralization of refugee experiences. In accounts of “Colony smriti” by Indubaran Ganguly most of the chapters are dedicated to citing the plight of the upper caste refugees and creating a concept of self-reliant Bengali refugees who are denied governmental aid.. Uditi Sen in her path breaking research found that there were taxonomies in constructing refugee history and a mental amnesia toward recording the Namashudra side of the story. She drew a contrast between the ‘self reliant’, ‘cultural’ Azadgarh and the poor, uneducated Namashudras of Dandakaranya. Both of them had polar different experiences to say. All the respondents have questioned against the blatant erasure of Dalit narratives and creating a whole grand theory out of one-sided experiences but they also gave names like of eminent Dalit authors Manoranjan Byapari and Jatin Bala who have pointed out the experience of being a Namashudra refugee at a refugee camp. “Shikorchhera Jibon” written by Jatin Bala has recorded the everyday plights of being a Dalit. Adhir Biswas’s memoir “Desh Bhager Smriti” or “Allah r Jomite Paa” are huge contrasts with the ideal prototypes of the self-reliant Bengali refugees. The first generation Dalit refugees had very negligible education and even that luxury of spending their time behind constructing literature was absent when their lives were at stake. The second generation Dalit refugees as per the respondents succeeded in establishing a voice in the savarna dominated literary world. Hence they took a major role in reviving ‘memory’ as a tool for constructing Dalit literature and asserting agencies giving rise to an alternative bottom-top approach to the Bengali refugee identity. The sufferings and plight of Dalit women during Partition is a topic least spoken about. Their views and opinions on caste bias and gender discrimination are often overlooked. But with the introduction of women centric magazines like “Neer” and growing literary participation of women. Similarly, Kalyani Thakur Chnaral’s novella named “Adhaar Bill O Kichu Manush” is evident to do justice with the Dalit women’s experiences. It deals with the postmemory of the highly gendered and

casteist space; a respondent reported that Partition left a physical and psychological impact on them; as second generation Dalit women the inherited memory is strong enough. They had left their 'bhite' (habitat) and it was tough to merge into a new place and start a new life. She said that there is a generalized misconception of the image of Dalit women in savarna literature. It is often a hyper-sexualised picture like that of 'Duli' in Satyajit Ray's "Aranyer Dinratri".

The first woman Matua Sangh, according to a respondent, was formed in 1980, where the Namashudra women united to keep their tradition going by singing Matua songs and reciting religious texts. They mostly included domestic maids of upper-caste households and impoverished, deserted women. The respondents, nearly all, pointed out the dual faces of the then existing Marxists who had vowed the credentials of Marxism but still were absorbed into the puritan ideas of caste. Kalyani Thakur Chnaral's "Ami Keno Chnaral Likhi" is another example of attacking their 'bhadralok' mentality of maintaining purity and pollution. It also raises a very important question regarding how Dalit women were excluded from their perspective of feminism, which was often reduced to remnants. A respondent, Pushpa Bairagya's narratives also are vocal about these issues. She is a Namashudra author who has written "Chinnomul Doridro Dalit Paribarar Meyer Bere Otha". The pain and grunt of generational memory and trauma is a live example here. She brings up Namashudra rituals like Hyachra Pujo, Kulo Namano, worship of Goddess Panchra in Hyachra to explain the Namashudra women's struggle to keep their culture visible. The participation of Matua priests and discarding Brahmin priests for her marriage are small yet very powerful accounts of how these 'uneducated', 'helpless' women bore the capability to revolt.

In this research an attempt has been made to understand how an act of invisibilization of dalit lives has taken place and how it is now being recognized and debunked. The agency of Dalit women is taken away yet they have managed to counter-attack the higher authorities. Muddled up with the horrors of the past and the intersectional torture these Dalit women still hope for emancipation by writing and holding protests. It is evident that all authoritative states have tendencies to remove the downtrodden voices but there has always been retaliation against it.

Regaining their existence in Partition horrors to claim their lost autonomy are crucially noted. The discourse of Dalit historiography from the writings of the Bengali Dalit women has been emerging and gaining acceptance. A new perspective in memory, power-dynamics, torture, erasure and re-assertation of agency are the crucial factors in their writings majorly meant for empirical and theoretical transformations. This study finds its relevance in contemporary society as it embarks into a journey of finding the lost existence and agency of the people excluded from the popular memory from time immemorial.

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Understanding the Intersection of Ageing and Technology Use: A Sociological Exploration

Srijoni Sanyal

INTRODUCTION

Owing to the proactive intervention of life-saving medications in recent decades, there has been a sudden upsurge in the proportion of the “elderly” population in the world, that is to say, people aged sixty and above. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that by 2030, older people will outnumber children under the age of ten, with 1.41 billion older people compared to 1.35 billion children (World Health Organization: WHO, 2022). However, this demographic transition stands at the juncture of a nuanced possibility, especially at a time when loneliness and lack of in-person connectivity have resulted in increasing rates of “dissatisfaction”, “depression” and “psychological instability” among a sizeable proportion of older adults, all across the world (Hansson et. al, 1987).

Consequently, most academic strides have pointed to a persistent rise in the dependency ratio among the urban landscapes of both developing and developed nations. This has further augmented the need to explore the vast arena of gerontology, wherein the psychology of ageing has emerged as a distinctive and significant field of study. However, for the sake of this particular study, I would be solely attempting to address the deep-rooted nuances of the process of ageing, while conducting a systematic and thorough investigation into the relationship between older people’s life-chances and their propensity to adopt technology.

OBJECTIVES

With a broader motive to analyse and deconstruct the relationship between ageing and technology use, particularly in an era dominated by artificial intelligence (AI), this dissertation aims to locate the elderly adult population within the duality posed by tech-engagement and digital exclusion. Through this nuanced investigation, I have made an attempt, howsoever meagre, to deconstruct ageism in the backdrop of this digital age, while simultaneously trying to gain a concrete understanding of the following research questions:-

- 1) How do the senior citizens of our nation perceive technology?
- 2) What are the primary uses of technology among the urban elderly of India?
- 3) How do factors like gender, education and income shape the elderly's use of technology? 4) What are the potential barriers to technology use among the elderly?
- 5) Can intergenerational learning speed up the elderly's rate of technology adoption?
- 6) Are there any governmental schemes or mechanisms to deal with this evolving paradigm?
- 7) Is technology truly empowering the 'older adults' of our nation?

METHODOLOGY

This study has therefore, sought to adopt an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the "Age-Tech Revolution", a term used by Keren Atkin in one of his best-selling non-fictions, whereby the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has been posited as one of the chief factors revolutionizing the lifestyles of "older adults" – a development that has significantly aided senior-citizens to enhance their connectivity with the rest of the world, even from within the confines of one's domestic space. However, this study on the psycho-social elements of technology adoption is solely based in the city of

Kolkata, thereby having limited scope for generalization, especially for the people living in towns and rural areas, “a demographic historically less inclined to embrace these digital advances”. (Heinz et. al, 2013).

In terms of methodology, this research is neither “quantitative” nor “qualitative”. In fact, the progression of this dissertation saw the combined usage of both these elements – the former for gaining an overview of the changing trends, and the latter to substantiate the variations in their responses. However, this research drew the majority of its data from the in-depth interviews of 25 senior citizens based in the city of Kolkata, out of whom there were 13 elderly men and 12 older women. To gain access to these participants, I predominantly relied on the method of “snowball sampling” and at a later stage, representative sampling. Comprehensive attempts were also made to underscore the differences in technology use between the two exhaustive categories of the elderly populace (that is to say, the one between 60 to 75 years, and the other above 75 years)

The questionnaire administered to the participants of this study utilized a unique blend of open ended, opinion-based and multiple-choice questions, with some inquiries asking the participants to rate themselves on varying dimensions of their technology use. In regard to the analysis of the said data, my chief preferences were essentially delimited to the use of Google Sheets, self-made tabulations and numerical substantiation.

The variables used in the study were primarily those of gender, approximate yearly income/pension, former or present occupation, and intergenerational support, all of which were found to have perceptible impacts on the elderly’s propensity to adopt modern technology. While the markets of Europe and America already boast of several innovative age-assistive devices like ‘ElliQ’ and ‘Kindred’, India has continued to remain deficient in creating and disseminating the market demand for these progressive gadgets. Consequently, even the marketing campaigns of the existing ‘age-tech’ startups (like myUDAAN and nxtQ Private Limited) have failed to garner adequate attention and market demand for these commodities in India.

Thus, for the elderly, technology use has forever been equivalent to a great degree of struggle and hard work. This is arguably logical, since the former was born at a time when there were neither computers nor mobile phones, not to mention the absence of the Internet. Research by Heinz et. al, 2013 corroborates that older people often struggle with the usability of these complicated interfaces, thereby underscoring the importance of user-friendly technologies to navigate this digital transition. Now the question may arise: why is it at all necessary for the elderly to keep themselves abreast with modern technology? Why can't they simply not remain rooted in the culture and tradition of their old days?

To answer this, we must focus on the recent socio-cultural shifts in India, especially in the domain of communication, whereby everything from socialization to the sending and receiving of invitation cards have gone for a digital turn. Such was the situation after the global pandemic (COVID-19) that even our aged population was compelled to accommodate themselves with such phenomenal shifts in interaction patterns, banking, shopping, entertainment and most importantly, healthcare facilities. However, even today, quite a number of these elderly people (specifically those over 75) are overtly reluctant to use these modern technologies, citing "how these digital interfaces rob them of the joyfulness and enhanced possibilities for connectivity."

FINDINGS

By now, it is clear that our older counterparts have an irresistible urge for in-person interaction, face-to-face communication, making new connections and sustaining them over a lifetime. Moreover, our senior citizens have seemingly found it difficult to acclimatize themselves to the complicated usage of modern technology, especially at a time when there was no significant governmental involvement or inter-generational transfer of knowledge. In fact, one of my respondents (Sharmila Dey, 81 years) was quoted saying –

"These wires and screens have trapped me in an unending maze, with

no exit in sight. I feel like a lonely fish stripped out of a vast digital sea, struggling and gasping for the last hope of survival.”

Behind these subtleties lies the rationale for this study – an endeavour that may offer a nuanced understanding of how gendered roles, social expectations and historical constructs relate to the elderly’s digital involvement.

Upon carefully considering all the dimensions of this radical demographic shift, I came to infer that the “senior citizens” are currently the worst affected generation in terms of an exclusionary “digital revolution”; elderly women being more vulnerable to the engulfing digital divide than their male counterparts. The specificities of this evolving situation manifested a great many determining factors, besides the ones already mentioned, encompassing parameters like retirement benefits, family support systems, affordability and prior experience. Although 16 of these participants (that is to say, 64 percent of my sample population) appeared to share a positive outlook towards the diverse uses of mobile applications and health monitoring devices, they portrayed a certain degree of reluctance to use such digital devices by themselves. Thus, despite acknowledging the vast potential of these new “age-tech” devices, a majority of our older adults (19 out of 25 of them) continue to remain apprehensive about modern gadgetry, thereby perceiving technology as a steady contributor to the dwindling rates of human contact and in-person communication.

Thus, even though “changes and advancements in technology have the potential to benefit older adults by promoting independence and increasing the ability to “age in place”, it is essential to draw on Roger’s “diffusion of innovations” which contends that “older adults are less likely to adopt new technology unless they see benefits to themselves” (Heinz et al., 2013). Moreover, the tendency of an increasing number of younger adults to spend their fortunes on the purchase of the latest gadgetry hardly make any sense for this “now outdated” population. Consequently, their concerns for the lack of privacy and security offset their desire to utilize technology to meet their hitherto-unmet needs of communication, socialization, home-based entertainment or even the management of personal finances.

For a majority of these senior citizens, therefore, technology is equivalent to a necessary evil – a novel phenomenon that gained massive traction, despite making a potential segment of its users feel inadequate about their relative inferiority in the modern age. However, this did not deter them from agreeing on its massive capacity and its potential for diverse uses. Among the

tools aiding the smooth progression of elderly lifestyles, the gadgets having the greatest share were smartphones (23 out of 25, i.e., 92 percent), television (76 percent) and thermoflask (72 percent), followed by air-conditioners, micro-waves and hearing-aids. This suggests that it is extremely difficult for the impacts of novel innovations to trickle down to our elderly population, unless there is the absolute necessity of use or urgency of purpose.

However, even the elderly respondents included in this study acknowledged how the exceptional capabilities of modern technology have far superseded their rational expectations, thereby encouraging them to allow ICT-enabled interactions and transactions to become the only “substitute for offline activities” (Bakshi et. al, 2021).

While the National Library of Medicine remained consistent in reassuring the general public about the vast potential of modern gadgetry and how advanced “technology can enhance and enrich the lives of older adults” (William J. Chopik, 2016), there still exists a considerable inequality in terms of the elderly’s technology usage, particularly along gendered and socio-economic lines.

From a perspective combining empirical data and inductive research, it appears that a majority of older women in our country face a lifelong struggle with digital literacy due to historical and cultural factors. Such a demographic trend, compounded by an even sharper lag of basic education and their consequent confinement within the realms of domesticity, translates into women’s limited exposure to technology. It is in line with these demographic trends that only 7 out of the 12 women I interviewed (that is, 58 percent) were adept with modern technology and its recent developments. However, such a scenario did not hold for the two retired government officials, both woman, who contributed to

this study and claimed to have equal expertise in the basic operations of “Microsoft Word and Excel”, as compared to their male counterparts.

Most women in my chosen sample, who claimed themselves to be well-versed with modern gadgetry (6 of them), deployed the Internet only for tasks like binge-watching soap operas on OTT platforms or for online shopping. On the other hand, men showed a greater engagement with digital interfaces, whether for recreational activities (like listening to music) or for such ‘professional’ tasks as net banking and bill payments. To add to this, income differences also underlie the massive disparity between the “haves” and the “have-nots” of our society.

Thus, a steady flow of pension or income can readily help the upper and middle classes overcome the difficulties of having to travel to physical stores to buy essential commodities

(food, medicines, machines etc.), while further marginalizing the poorer segments of the population, who have limited or no access to such digital devices. However, such a broader generalization does not hold for Gaur Maity, a veteran rickshaw-puller, who went beyond his way and bought his much-desired “Samsung phone” for his son. This also points to the importance of emulation in determining the choices and consumption patterns of lower-class households, albeit occasionally.

Although contemporary research points to a reinforced “social connectedness to family and friends” among older adults, facilitated through the use of technology, it is still disheartening to learn how most independent residential complexes still fail to accommodate the evolving needs of its ageing residents. (Mahmood et. al, 2008)

Even in households with adequate financial stability (about 80 percent in this study), it is mostly the informal paid caregivers, who are recruited to look after and assist their aged employers, thereby overlooking their “passive” longing to reunite with their long-lost friends and relatives. However, most of these elderly desires remain unsatiated, especially at a time when most of them are left by themselves or at the disposal of a paid caregiver. Also, while accounting for instances where ageing adults co-reside with their children or grandchildren in the same house or apartment (72 percent of this study sample), the “jam-

packed schedule” of the latter’s professional lives significantly strip off their time and energy to spend leisurely time with their older counterparts.

Although the rising tide of “gerontechnology” is still confined to an “elite minority”, a handful of Indian citizens who can afford such devices like remote monitoring technology, automated chatbots, sleep monitoring devices, robotic house assistants, hearing aids and fall detectors, it is fortunate that the government of India has introduced at least one targeted initiative, namely “Digital Sarthak”, primarily with the motive to help our senior-citizens leverage the complete benefits of technology. However, potential buyers of advanced age-tech gadgets in India, that is to say, the members of middle-class households, are yet to understand how the greater use of these advanced technological tools can foster better health, improved agility, lower depression and fewer cases of chronic conditions within their age bracket.

However, to gauge whether technology truly “empowers” the senior citizens of our nation, we must approach the matter through an “emic” perspective and therefore take account of the elderly’s self-perception of their needs and wants. However, only 6 participants of this research (i.e. to say, 24 percent of the older cohorts under study) acknowledged the immense

transformative and “empowering” potential of technology, with a significant few relegating their use of computers and mobile phones to such tasks as gaming, news-watching, entertainment and socialization. The rest of them were, however, either indifferent to the vast uses of technology or conceived of age-assistive technology as relegating them to the sphere of age-related disability.

As we traverse the complexities of gerontechnology, it becomes increasingly evident that addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by older adults, ranging from social isolation to fears of technological inadequacy, requires holistic approaches that prioritize emotional support, accessibility and intergenerational collaboration. While disparities in technology adoption vary on the grounds of class, gender and economy, the expanding assistive-technology market of our nation

holds immense potential to quench the evolving needs of its aging population. By fostering innovation, collaboration and inclusive design practices, the conjoined efforts of governments and NGOs are likely to unlock the transformative power of technology to empower and enrich the lives of older adults, ensuring they thrive in the digital age and beyond.

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