The niti-samvaad Journal

Empowering the Marginalized
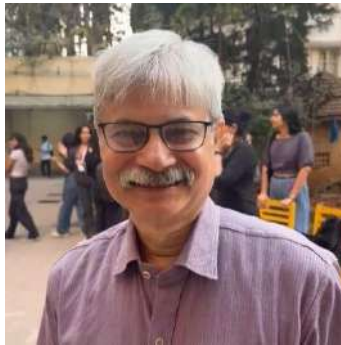
In loving memory of Dr. Fr. Arun de Souza,

A compassionate Jesuit, insightful professor and transformative mentor, Fr. Arun has impacted countless lives with his academic excellence and profound guidance.

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Conferences like Niti-Samvaad encourage our students to go beyond the education in the class to apply their learnings in a real-world setting. I am delighted that the Department of Public Policy has chosen a theme for this year that reflects the very core of our mission: "Empowering the Marginalized: Exploring Pathways to Inclusive Policy Making."

What better setting to delve into this crucial topic than St. Xavier's College? Strengthening and enabling the marginalized is not just a goal but a fundamental aspect of socially concerned policymaking, echoing the ethos of Xavier's three values: innovation, integration, and inclusion.

As a Jesuit educational institution, St. Xavier College, Mumbai, is committed to offering a curriculum that seamlessly integrates academic excellence with real-world relevance. By incorporating crosscutting themes such as gender, human values, environment and sustainability, and professional ethics into our programs, we aim to transcend disciplinary boundaries and foster integration in personal lives and inclusion in social contributions.

Our Social Involvement Program, bolstered by a robust network of 226 NGOs, plays a pivotal role in sensitizing students to empathize with the marginalized and disadvantaged. Initiatives like the mandatory course "Giving Voice to Values" underscore the importance of examining moral-ethical dilemmas and promoting harmony amidst the diversity of Indian culture. The relentless efforts of the Xavier Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged, Social Service League (SSL), Enabling Committee, All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF), Student Inclusion Cell, and various student associations exemplify our steadfast commitment to social inclusion.

As we embark on this journey to explore pathways to inclusive policymaking, it is imperative that we uphold the dignity of every individual and practice compassion and concern. Embracing cultural pluralism and diversity, which are increasingly rare in today's world, is paramount. Striving for social justice, fostering harmony and solidarity, extending care to the marginalized, and devising strategies to safeguard the natural environment are indispensable components of our advocacy for social inclusion.

I hope that the deliberations and discussions curated in this edition will expedite your passion to become socially conscious citizens who endeavour tirelessly for social justice and champion the cause of those who exist at the margins.

Dr. Rajendra Shinde
Principal
St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

<u>Message from the Head of Department of Public Policy, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai</u>

There is much talk about India becoming a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025 and 30 trillion dollars by 2030. But as the latest World Inequality Lab working paper co-authored by Nitin Kumar Bharti, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, and Anmol Somanchi shows, this growth is being cornered by a narrow section of the populace. The report states that the "number of Indians with net wealth exceeding 1 billion USD at market exchange rate (MER) increased from 1 to 52 to 162 in 1991, 2011 and 2022 respectively.

Over this period, the total net wealth of these individuals as a share of India's net national income boomed from under 1% in 1991 to a whopping 25% in 2022" (2024, p. 2). Taking a comparative perspective, they find "The top 1% earn on average 5.3 million, 23 times the average Indian (INR 0.23 million). Average incomes for the bottom 50% and the middle 40% stood at INR 71,000 (0.3 times national average) and INR 165,000 (0.7 times national average) respectively." (2024, p. 19). It is in this scenario that Niti-Samvaad's theme for the year 2023-24 was very apt: "Empowering the Marginalized: Inclusive Policy-making for an Equitable India."

This is not a new idea. Gandhi had already spoken of his talisman that should guide us whenever we take a decision and by extension whenever we design a policy: "…[A]sk yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] … control over his [her] own life and destiny?" (Mahatma Gandhi, cited in Pyarelal, 1958, p. 65).

At the same time, Gandhi tended to romanticize India's poor. A good corrective to this was Ambedkar's dispassionate call to build on the constitutional values of equality and fraternity (1949). That is why Ambedkar inserted the Directive Principles into our Constitution, something that is unique to India. Policymakers are uniquely placed as recognized change agents.

May we constantly draw inspiration from India's constitutional values that are well set out in its Preamble. The papers and discussions at the Conference dealt with a wide variety of issues and came from varied regional contexts. They speak of the diversity of India, they are a clarion call to go back to the vision of our founding fathers and the Constitution.

I am sure those of you who read them will be happy to notice the academic depth of the student researchers and their youthful zeal to establish a new India that is built on egalitarian principles.

Dr. Arun de Souza
Head, Dept. of Public Policy
St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

Message from the Department of Public Policy, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

The Department of Public Policy at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai is proud to inaugurate the sixth edition of its journal, Niti-Samvaad. The Department of Public Policy is the flagship research-oriented department of the college. Our students are not only skilled in carrying out independent research but are also driven by the Jesuit spirit that keeps the interest of the last person in the society first in our endeavours.

The department event and the journal are spaces for students to explore the world beyond the classroom and learn useful skills. It is indeed a matter of pride for us that the student team under the leadership of its convenor Mr. Shawnel D'Souza and the Editorial Heads, Ms. Sherina Poyyail and Mr. Adithya Prakash, have managed to organise an enviable line up of speakers for the main event and have elicited a good response in terms of research papers for the journal.

One of the distinguishing aspects of policy-oriented research writing is that the author often writes on behalf of the society. This is the spirit of deliberation and opinion making that makes democracy possible. We hope to keep the flame of debate alive.

Nandini Naik
Assistant Professor
St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

Message from the Chairperson of Niti-Samvaad 2024

As the chairperson of Niti-Samvaad, I am deeply grateful and honoured to address you all. This year's conference focused on inclusiveness, with the subject "Empowering the Marginalised: Making Policies for an Equitable India." This version of the conference provided a new perspective on policymaking through incisive contributions from prominent speakers, experts, and students from several institutions who presented research papers.

The conference began with a diverse set of papers that presented various useful insights and viewpoints, intended to raise the level of conversation. The panel discussions provided a new dimension to the conference and considerably improved our theme. This was made possible by inviting speakers who have dedicated their lives to this cause. As we neared the end, another informative keynote presentation skillfully covered crucial issues of policymaking.

Noam Chomsky once said, "There exists a significant disparity between public opinion and public policy." This reflects the heart of the discourse about inclusion and the importance of inclusive policymaking in the twenty-first century. As we strive for growth, it is critical to create policies that unite rather than divide us.

The conference provided an opportunity for constructive talks and critical thinking to build policies that will empower marginalised people and create a more equitable India. I hope that the conservation and insights shared during the conference will catalyse more inclusive and effective policy creation.

Shawnel Dsouza
Chairperson
Niti-Samvaad 2024

Message from the Editorial Team of Niti-Samvaad 2024

The Department of Public Policy at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai, is proud to announce the sixth edition of its journal, Niti-Samvaad. With every passing year, our aim is to bring together scholars, practitioners and students to learn from one another.

Our theme for this year's edition is "Empowering the Marginalized: Inclusive Policymaking for an Equitable India," suggested by Agnorra Aranjo, MPP '24. We received an excellent response in terms of research papers for the journal, bringing fresh voices and perspectives that offered innovative and inclusive policy solutions.

Our team prioritised independent research, driven by the Jesuit spirit that prioritizes the interest of the last person in society in all our endeavours. The department event and the journal provide a cross-disciplinary and national forum for students to explore the challenges in achieving a more egalitarian and equitable society.

As Dr. Amartya Sen said, "Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable and unethical." This quote is especially prescient as India stands at the precipice of exponential growth. This journal is our attempt to curate research that centres those at the margins and contribute to academic discourse that drives our nation forward.

This edition of the Niti-Samvaad journal compiles research papers at the intersection of development, caste, environment and gender justice, which were presented at the conclave. We extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Ramesh Kamble, Associate Professor, Mumbai University, and Dr Ravi Saxena, Sr. Asst Professor, NMIMS, Mumbai, for serving as judges for the paper presentation and providing prudent feedback to the authors.

The journal also includes insightful interviews with Dr. Avatthi Ramaiah, professor at the Center for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, TISS, Mumbai, Dr. Sylvia Karpagam, a public health expert and Somnath Waghmare, a prominent documentary filmmaker.

We hope you find the journal an insightful collection of timely research, thought-provoking essays and engaging interviews.

Sherina Poyyail
Head, Editorial Department
Niti-Samvaad 2024

Research Briefs

Feminization of the Agricultural Workforce: Paradigm Shift and Key Challenges

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Abstract

Women's immense contribution to agriculture in India remains largely invisible. With more than 80% of the rural women workforce participating in the crisis-ridden agricultural sector (Patel & Sethi, 2022), a paradigmatic shift seems to be underway. According to a report by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN), in the Indian Himalayas, a pair of bull works 1064 hours per year on a one-hectare farm, while a man contributes 1212 hours, and a woman dedicates a significant 3485 hours (FAO, 2016). This lop-sided figure further signifies the dominant participation of women, a process now identified as the feminization of the agri-workforce, occurring due to a multiplicity of factors. While the feminization trends indicate women's improved standing, its flipside is manifested in their declining economic stake in the face of intensified contribution to agrarian work, consequently inducing feminization of agrarian distress (Saxena, 2019).

This paper aims to address the aforementioned paradoxical process of feminization in the rural agricultural workforce, followed by an assessment of challenges faced by women, such as legal ownership of land, access to market and credit facilities, inadequate capacity-building, and socio-cultural constraints, among others. Emphasis will also be laid on examining the invisibilization of the contributions of the female workforce to farm work and its consequent policy concerns. This paper will also attempt to showcase the urgency of gender-responsive policy interventions that will further the policy discourse surrounding rural development and gender equality in the near future, focusing on translating this feminization of the agrarian workforce into the feminization of socio-economic empowerment.

Keywords: feminization, agricultural workforce, agrarian distress, policy interventions

Introduction

The Indian agriculture sector, the largest employer in India, has witnessed a shift in the gender distribution of its workforce, primarily coinciding with the post-liberalization period of the 1990s. The liberalization era of the 1990s brought about three significant changes in agriculture: a transition from subsistence farming to cash crops, increased adoption of labour-saving machinery, and alterations in land use patterns (Shiva, 2005). These shifts resulted in the migration of male labour from agriculture to other sectors, creating an opportunity for a growing number of rural women to assume roles as cultivators and agricultural labourers.

This phenomenon is viewed as a structural transformation in rural India and is referred to as the 'Feminization of Agriculture.' While this transformation bodes well in terms of numbers and, more specifically, for the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLPR), the issue requires a more profound evaluation to understand whether it is positive.

Examining this trend in the Indian and global context has delineated the absence of a clear definition of the term "feminization of agriculture." Moreover, in the Indian context, several studies have shown that the shift has not translated into the improvement of socio-economic indicators for women, instead placing an additional burden on them, thus demonstrating the paradox inherent in the trend.

Drawing upon this, this paper will review if numerical rise can lead to the empowerment of women entering agriculture in its truest sense. To understand this, the paper analyzes the causal factors leading to a change in the role of women in agriculture-dominated India. Further, the challenges faced by women in agriculture and the various socio-economic constraints that impede true development are understood. Based on this understanding, the paper seeks to provide policy recommendations across sectors to ensure that the numerical rise of women in the agri workforce also leads to true empowerment.

Literature Review

Data from Census (1981-2011) and Periodic Labour Force Surveys have indicated the trend of feminization of the agricultural workforce. Female workers constituted 30 percent of the agriculture workforce in 2017–18 and 40 per cent in the year 2020-21 (Chand, 2022). If there were four women for every ten men in the agricultural workforce in 1991, this changed to six women for every ten men by 2011. However, there has been a recognition of the underestimation and trivialization of women's contribution to agriculture and allied activities in official estimates of the Census. Hence, certain works (Vepa, 2005; IFPRI report 2012; Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, 2021) have instead referred to time-use surveys to gauge women's actual contribution to agricultural and allied activities in temporal terms, which outweighs men's contribution.

(Saxena, 2019) addressed the invisibilization of women's integral participation in the agricultural process, the disproportionate wage gap, and the greater presence of women workers as agrarian labourers and primary workers in small and marginal farm holdings but relative absence in landholding. (Kanchi, 2010; da Corta & Venkateshwarlu, 1999) further supported this argument on the invisibilization of women's work in the agrarian domain.

Expanding on the above argument, Garikpati (2006, p.3) "emphasizes the need to analyze the interrelation between the feminization of agricultural labour and women's household position, with the former directly affecting women's decision-making power". Saxena (2019, p.82) mentions that "the first barrier arises from the type of crop grown with a differentiation made

between male and female crops, with the commercialization of crops inducing a negative impact on women, with men appropriating the cash from the sale of cash crops". Kelkar (2013, p.14) discusses the "constraints imposed by socio-cultural expectations on women's free will to spend the hard-earned money".

Progressive natural growth rates have enhanced relative deprivation and social inequalities in the agrarian domain, paving the way for rapid migration of men out of agriculture and women's confinement to it (Kelkar & Krishnaraj, 2013). Nevertheless, Kelkar (2014) established a positive linkage between women's increased land ownership rights and an increase in agricultural output, consequently increasing yields and ameliorating the hunger crises prevailing in rural areas of developing nations. A work assessing the role played by the complete feminization of agriculture towards agricultural output in the context of China (Liu et al., 2019) provided a comparative frame of reference to analyze the same in the Indian scenario.

The above literature provides a clear insight into the conundrum of the feminization of agriculture.

Research Methodology

The authors of this policy paper employ a secondary research methodology. The quantitative data is collected and analyzed throughout the paper via books, research and opinion papers, and existing survey reports (here: National Statistical Office, Periodic Labour Force Survey, National Family Health Survey, and Time Use Survey). Additionally, the authors supplement their analysis by the data extracted from news articles, working papers, and other academic publications.

The Results and Analysis section of this study presents descriptive statistics that elucidate the feminization trends within India's agricultural workforce since the post-liberalization period. These trends are thoroughly examined through socio-political and economic metrics to elucidate both their underlying causes and consequential implications.

Key Objectives

- To address the inherent paradox surrounding the feminization of the agricultural workforce.
- To investigate the causal factors behind this phenomenon and assess its myriad socio-political and economic impacts since the post-liberalization era.
- To articulate a cogent rationale for enacting policy interventions responsive to gender dynamics, informed by the empirical insights derived from this study.

Results and Analysis

1. Paradox Of Feminization Of The Agrarian Workforce

A general pattern recognised throughout South Asia is that the poorer the area, the greater the contribution of women, primarily as subsistence farmers working on small landholdings of less than 0.2 hectares (Kelkar, 2007). As a trend largely coinciding with the liberalization of the Indian economy, Indian women's productive labour in the agricultural sector has received minimal recognition despite the intensity of their participation (Kelkar & Krishnaraj, 2013). On the one hand, this trend has the potential of translating into enhanced empowerment for agrarian women in the economic, social, and familial domains, reflected in changes in property relations, greater decision-making power in households, increased bargaining capacity in labour markets, and enhanced visibility in the public domain.

On the other hand, however, its flipside could be manifested in their declining economic stake, paving the way for the feminization of agrarian distress and, consequently, poverty (Pattnaik et al., 2017). While supporters of economic liberalization have established a positive correlation between the feminization of the workforce and women's economic empowerment, critics have attributed this trend to agrarian distress (ibid). Srivastava and Srivastava formulated the term "creeping feminization" to depict this trend of gradual increase in the proportion of agricultural work done by women, where they remain overworked and disproportionately burdened (ibid). In the face of the agrarian crisis and consequent male outmigration alongside commercialization and privatization processes, this trend's detrimental impact is likely to continue.

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-> v5 = Rural
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Occupational	Sex			
sector	Male	Female	Others	Total
agriculture	49.13	76.15	99.51	58.41
manufacturing	8.22	8.25	0.00	8.23
non-manufacturing	19.89	4.34	0.00	14.55
service	22.75	11.26	0.49	18.81
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 1: Percentage of women engaged in different sectors of the economy in rural areas of India (PLFS 2022-23). Source: Generated by Authors

While the agricultural sector's contribution to the GDP has declined over the years, it continues to employ the largest share of both male and female workforce. However, the pace of occupational mobility from agriculture to non-agriculture activities has been faster for men, with census figures from 1981-2011 indicating that while half of all male workers are now employed outside agriculture, the corresponding figure for female workers is 35% (Pattnaik et al., 2017). Table 1 depicts the significant share of women engaged in the agriculture sector in 2022-2023, depicting the continuation of this trend. Further, the marginalization of the agricultural workforce occurring during 1995-2005 due to failure in job creation relegated women to low-paid casual work in agriculture, thus increasing the vulnerability of female agricultural labourers (Vepa, 2005). Women's average share as

cultivators and labourers remains high in the most backward districts, with the condition being highly precarious for female-headed farms, paving the way for poverty and lower consumption patterns among female-income-dependent rural households (Vepa, 2005). As Fig. 1 showcases, there has been a marginal increase in the percentage of ownership of landholdings among agrarian women despite the 24% increase in women participating in the agricultural sector (Saxena, 2019).
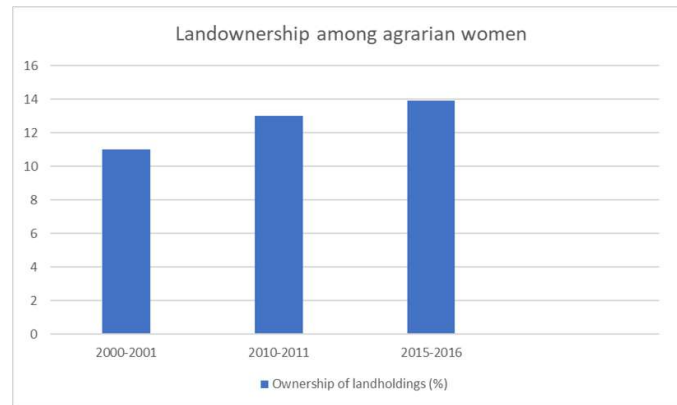
Figure 1: Percentage of land ownership among women engaged in agriculture- 2000-2016. (Agricultural Census, 2000-01 and 15-16; NSSO, 2010-11).
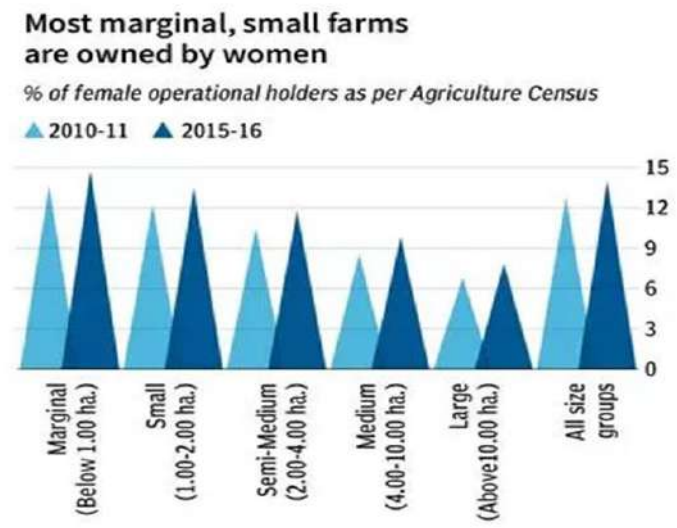
Figure 2: Percentage of operational land holdings among females 2010-11 and 2015-16. (Agricultural Census 2015-16) (Jadhav, 2022).

Fig. 2 depicts a more significant presence of rural women workers as agrarian labourers and primary workers in small and marginal farm holdings, but a relative absence in landholdings. While 80% of economically active women work in the agriculture sector, only 12.8 % of the operational landholdings are owned by them, with 25.7% of these being categorized as marginal and small holdings (FICCI, 2020). This disjunction between women's involvement in all stages of the agriculture value chain and their marginal benefits derived from the same highlights the contradiction that necessitates urgent policy intervention.

2. Causal Factors

Developing on the literature on the feminization of agriculture and rural transformation, the causal factors for the changing role of women in Indian agriculture are as follows (Slavchevska et al., 2016):

- Male outmigration

A primary reason for the feminization of agriculture is the outmigration of males from low-paid agriculture to high-paid industries (Vepa, 2005). This is because of the reduced farm income, casualization of the workforce, and a rise in jobs in the service sector, mostly post-1990s. According to Census data, the percentage share of rural male migrants has averaged around 30 per cent from 1991-2011 (Bhagat & Keshri, 2020). The loss of family male labour is compensated by women in the household who stay behind and take up agriculture to maintain subsistence agricultural production and to ensure stable family income in case of low remittances. Thus, an increasing number of women are taking up the role of cultivators.

- The absence of non-farm employment opportunities

This factor correlates with male outmigration. Census data from 1991-2011 showed that employment-led migration from rural areas is abysmally low among females compared to males, indicating that rural male outmigration is solo in most cases. This is due to scarce employment opportunities for females and social norms that restrict them to traditional reproduction responsibilities. To safeguard food security and household income, women engage in crop production. Limited land, low productivity, and agricultural commercialization have opened up casual, temporary wage employment opportunities on larger farms to women.

- Loss of productive male labour to suicides in agrarian sector

In India, traditional gender roles designate males as the primary breadwinners, and the loss of male family members imposes a severe financial burden, compelling women to assume family responsibilities. This is especially evident in Indian agriculture, with the latest National Crime Records Bureau report revealing a 29% surge in farmer suicides. This has been attributed to climate change and government policies, causing financial distress. Consequently, women are driven to enter agriculture more out of necessity than choice, reflecting the feminization paradox. While it may appear empowering numerically, it ultimately adds to their burden
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Socio-economic Challenges

To delineate the socio-economic challenges, three considerations are important- one, women's active engagement in all stages of the agricultural process; two, their critical role in assuring food security for household survival, particularly in times of agrarian distress; and three, their subordinate position in the realms of household and market, which imposes severe restrictions on their functioning (Kanchi, 2010). The trend towards feminization has to be situated within the economic and socio-cultural challenges that impinge upon agrarian women's working conditions, ultimately deciding the extent of their empowerment.

Economic insecurity

Even in areas where women had previously enjoyed customary rights to assets, the functioning of a laissez-faire market economy following privatization and globalization in the 1990s adversely impacted their right to assets (Kelkar & Krishnaraj, 2013). Since agriculture no longer remains profitable, low levels of agricultural produce have furthered relative deprivation and social inequalities, formulating negative consequences for both women cultivators and agricultural labourers (ibid).

Besides having limited ownership and control over material resources, women engaged as cultivators also have restricted access to credit, market information, education, skill-building, and occupational mobility opportunities (Vepa, 2005). Since women's outmigration for employment opportunities remains as low as 3.6 % for rural migrants, they remain confined to family enterprises, where the absence of remuneration invisibilizes their productive work (Vepa, 2005). Those women employed as casual agrarian labourers are paid less than minimum wages, with growth in wages further failing to keep pace with inflation and rise in consumption expenditure (Kanchi, 2010). According to government estimates, the wage gap is as wide as 25%, ultimately reducing women's bargaining power within both the public and private realms, thus continuing the vicious cycle of abysmally low remuneration for female agricultural labour (FICCI, 2020).

Occupation	Sex	Average daily wage rate- June 2001 (in Rs.)
Ploughing	Female	42.16
	Male	66.10
Sowing	Female	41.58
	Male	57.92
Weeding	Female	43.26
	Male	51.23
Transplanting	Female	47.03
	Male	58.28

| Harvesting | Female | 45.77 |
| | Male | 55.67 |

Figure 3: Average daily wage rates for agricultural Occupations in India- gender wise. Source: Census, 2001 (As quoted by Shiva, 2005).

Since women lack access to basic tangible and intangible assets, they remain incapable of accessing markets for selling their produce and increasing household income, ultimately being forced to sell produce at lower than market price (Kanchi, 2010). Within the policy spectrum of India, the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) under DDAY is the only sub-program mainly targeting women farmers. However, its low level of allocation, reflected in the Budget estimate for 2018-19 as Rs. 1000 crore, has meant the failure of practical realization (Rai, 2019). These economic challenges of obtaining credit, accessing market chains, and bridging wage gaps are inextricably linked to rural women's socio-cultural subordination, indicating that this trend is a prime manifestation of feminization out of compulsion.

Socio-cultural barriers

Land and property inheritance favor men across both rural and urban India, thus relegating women to the status of unpaid subsistence labour on family farms or as agricultural wage labourers, failing to get categorized as primary workers (Kelkar & Krishnaraj, 2005).

Despite various laws purporting to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment, prevailing social ills such as patriarchal sociocultural norms and customs, with males securing land ownership rights and managerial control, result in the loss of entitlements for women, such as institutional credit, and, finally, the absence of collateral. Women's economic potential in agriculture has further been hampered by gender disparities in access to agricultural inputs, technology, information, and intangible assets (World Bank, 2007; FAO, 2011). The sexual division of labour imposes a double burden on rural women to undertake both domestic responsibilities and arduous agrarian tasks, exacerbated in the face of the absence of capacity-building, assets, and knowledge alongside the agrarian crisis (Kelkar, 2015). This poses the foremost challenge of failure of recognition as farmers since women's agrarian tasks on family farms are viewed as an extension of domestic responsibilities, leading to their positioning as farmers' spouses (Kanchi, 2010). Non-recognition of women as primary workers is linked to their abysmally low educational attainments, skill training, and technical awareness due to the time poverty and unpaid care burden without formal institutional support. Thus, women's working conditions in this ongoing trend directly affect their household decision-making power, impacting their mobility and control over agrarian inputs and assets. These norms further constrain women from accessing the benefits incurred from the land, with males dominating intra-household resource allocation.

From an intersectional perspective, the double disadvantage faced by Dalit and Tribal women is visible in that in 2011, 83.7% of agrarian women workers belonged to Scheduled Tribes compared to 69.1% and 59.9% from Scheduled Castes and General Castes, respectively (Pattnaik et al., 2017). According to an ILO report, 81% of women agricultural workers were from Dalit, Adivasi, and OBC households, with the majority belonging to the landless or marginal farm holdings (Kanchi, 2010). Thus, the vulnerability of women agrarian workers is reinforced based on caste, class, religion, geography, etc., all of which need to be factored into policy interventions.

Policy Interventions

On economic security:

- Any policy action has to be preceded by formulating a well-categorized database by public authorities (as in, MoSPI), recognizing all types of activities undertaken by women, as both paid and unpaid workers on family farms, within agriculture and allied sectors. Thus, a reconfiguration of the present approach that counts only women whose primary occupation is agriculture as farmers need urgent institutionalization to formulate women-centric policies (FICCI, 2020).
- Primacy needs to be accorded to a gender-sensitive asset-building approach overtaking income redistribution measures, such as cash transfers, since the former has an incentive component attached to it, with women favoring land retention and development. The importance of women's land ownership for reducing poverty, enhancing food security, and accessing secondary resources such as credit cannot be overemphasized. Besides regular updation of land titles, a structural policy transformation is required to delink land titles from access to agricultural inputs and entitlements (Kelkar & Krishnaraj, 2013).
- Regularization of time-use surveys by Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI) to quantify women's contribution to agriculture and allied activities, alongside their unpaid domestic and care activities.
- Owing to the greater concentration of women agricultural workers in the backward districts of the nation and distressed regions within states, targeted policy interventions should prioritize these areas. Further, since the concentration of women workers is higher in small and marginal landholdings, the focus should be on increasing the productivity of these farms (Kanchi, 2010).
- As climate change negatively impacts agricultural productivity and food security, and women make up a disproportionately large share of the agricultural workforce, their condition becomes excessively precarious with unpredictable climate patterns (Choudhary & Padhi, 2023). To attain the SDGs of- Climate Action, Zero Hunger, and Gender Equality, it is necessary to empower women farmers towards undertaking climate action through diversification of crops and institutional support such as- access to markets, credit in the absence of collateral, and capacity-building and managerial skills.

- Beyond access to and ownership of land, access to inputs such as water, seeds, fertilizer, market, information, and skill training are equally important, requiring increased public investment (Kelkar and Krishnaraj, 2013).

On socio-cultural empowerment:

- It is necessary to conduct social impact assessments that map the intersectionalities among agrarian women to include caste, class, and regional cleavages into account while formulating gender-responsive policies.
- The gendered division of agrarian tasks necessitates greater policy emphasis on increasing the yield of food crops, specifically cereal, and pulses, instead of cash crops, owing to women's greater involvement in the former (Kanchi, 2010). With 2023 being categorized as the International Year of Millets, the All-India Millet Sisters Network, an initiative under the Deccan Development Society, can serve as a model case of a women-led crop network. Since primacy is accorded to women's traditional farming knowledge, food security is assured through agro-biodiversity, thus retaining decision-making power over crops in women's hands (Kelkar & Krishnaraj, 2013).
- To relieve the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work combined with agrarian tasks, easily affordable and accessible government services in the form of-good quality Anganwadis, primary and secondary schools, health facilities, specifically reproductive and neonatal health care should be provided (Kanchi, 2010). This will allow women to participate in managerial and authoritative control over agrarian tasks.

These policy interventions can pave the way for harnessing the trend of feminization of the agricultural workforce to improve India's current low agricultural productivity. Bridging the gender gap in agriculture by ensuring women's access to and ownership of land and productive assets could increase yields in female-headed farms by 20-30%, raising total agricultural output in developing countries by at least 2.5%-4%. Since women are predominantly tasked with managing crops, increasing total agricultural output might minimize the number of people who are prone to hunger by 12%—17% globally (FAO, 2011).

Conclusion

Having delved into the multifaceted discourse surrounding feminization, we assert that the time is ripe for establishing novel frameworks with robust foundations. The prolonged oversight in preparing the female populace for future uncertainties has rendered the existing structures inadequately equipped to uphold the weight of emerging responsibilities. Therefore, now more than ever, it is of paramount importance to evaluate the evolving requirements for empowering women to assume ownership in agriculture and address the concurrent challenges that exacerbate the situation.

The authors of this paper realize that addressing the long-drawn conundrum around the feminization of agriculture is not a one-step process. However, via the proposed socio-political and economic policy interventions, they endeavour to provide a definitive trajectory for discussions on gender equality in rural India while also nudging the agricultural growth process and transforming the feminization of socio-economic empowerment from a theoretical construct to a tangible and actionable reality.

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From Caste to Contract: Dissecting the Systemic Challenges of Manual Scavenging in Mumbai

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Introduction

Manual scavenging, the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling human excreta, remains a grim reality in India, including in its financial capital, Mumbai. Despite legal prohibitions, the hazardous occupation persists, underscoring systemic failures and social injustices that particularly affect the most marginalized communities. In Mumbai, the issue of manual scavenging is not only about sanitation work but also about the city's inability to protect its workers.

Between 2017 and 2022, the Safai Karamchari Andolan, an organization advocating for the rights of sanitation workers, recorded 70 deaths of manual scavengers across Maharashtra, with 19 of these in Mumbai alone. These figures starkly contrast with the official denials of such deaths by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), which claims no workers have died from manual scavenging under its employment or contracts. This discrepancy highlights a concerning gap between reported incidents and official acknowledgements, revealing a systemic disregard for the lives and safety of sanitation workers (Johari, 2023).

The economic desperation of these individuals further exacerbates their plight. Driven to manual scavenging by unemployment and a scarcity of alternative employment opportunities, they receive meagre compensation in return for risking their lives. This predicament reflects wider issues of economic inequality and societal disregard, thrusting the most vulnerable into perilous conditions without protection or adequate compensation. Challenges in eradicating manual scavenging in Mumbai are manifold, spanning bureaucratic apathy, accountability voids, and the socioeconomic frailties of the workers. Despite existing laws and technological progress, the continued practice of manual scavenging reveals entrenched problems like caste bias, poverty, and urban planning deficiencies.

Historical Context

Manual scavenging, a dehumanising practice deeply entrenched in India, finds its roots in the ancient caste system. This practice began when settled communities emerged, necessitating systems for waste management. Specific caste groups were assigned the task of cleaning human excreta, as documented in texts like the Naradiya Samhita and the Vajasaneyi Samhita, which referred to certain groups as slaves responsible for such duties. Even during the Maurya period, cities like Pataliputra had designated sweepers and scavengers tasked with cleaning the city's waste. Scholars argue that manual scavenging intensified with the arrival of Muslim invaders, who introduced indoor toilet facilities for their women. Captives

from battles were forced into cleaning these facilities and disposing of waste, forming the basis for the caste of Bhangis, who continued the scavenging work even after their release (Chauhan & Dadwal, 2021).

The expansion of towns and cities over the last two centuries saw a parallel expansion of the manual scavenging occupation. Under British rule, establishing public toilets and employing individuals to remove excreta became systematic. Municipalities were formed during this period, and the practice of employing manual scavengers became institutionalised. Containers were commonly used in these toilets, requiring daily emptying, and special positions for manual scavengers were created by the British, particularly for cleaning army cantonments and municipal areas (Srivastava, 1997). The systematic employment of certain communities as manual scavengers stayed in India, even long after British colonial rule. Presently, there are nine distinct forms of manual scavenging works in the country: sewer cleaning, latrine cleaning, faecal sludge handling, railway cleaning, treatment plant work, community and public toilet keeping, school toilet cleaning, sweeping and drain cleaning, and domestic work (Bakshi, 2018).

Urban manual scavenging remains prevalent in Mumbai despite the implementation of various laws and campaigns, such as the Sulabh movement initiated by Bindeshwar Pathak in the 1980s for social inclusion of manual scavengers and their rehabilitation and various acts from 1955 to 2013 by the Government of India.. This persistence is entrenched within a framework significantly shaped by both the enduring caste system and neoliberal economic policies (Dubey & Murphy, 2021). Many individuals, particularly from Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, who have historically been employed in this sector continue to take up these roles. Additionally, migrant workers, such as the Vadari community, who were once artisans but lost their jobs due to modernisation, have also become involved in manual scavenging. Privatization and contractualization trends exacerbate sanitation workers' plight, particularly those engaged in wet waste management (Johari, 2021). Municipal corporations responsible for sewer waste management often hire these workers on a temporary or contract basis, with only a small fraction being permanently employed by the government. This precarious employment situation leaves workers vulnerable, with low wages and uncertain job security. Temporary workers, hoping for permanent positions, endure years of exploitation at meagre wages.

The government's indirect hiring through contractors allows it to evade responsibilities as an employer, while private employers similarly exploit and underpay workers. The contract system leads to the informalization of employment, denying workers access to credit and pushing them towards high-interest private moneylenders. This intersection of the caste system and neoliberal policies reinforces the exploitation of oppressed caste groups working as manual scavengers in Mumbai. Moreover, the subcontracting system which ensues from the legal loopholes, further perpetuates the historical engagement of specific communities in manual scavenging by outsourcing work to subcontractors within these communities. This practice ensures continuity in labour patterns while decentralising accountability and placing responsibility on the communities involved.

The Legal Framework

The Indian State, though, frames legislation to take punitive action against the practice of manual scavenging and avoids structural changes that could effectively tackle this practice in Indian society. Saldanha et al.(2022) have said that the legal instruments the State has in place to deal with the issue are paternalistic "quick fix" solutions that have done little to change the sociological and infrastructure problems that constitute the larger structural issues. The top-down policies and legislations that have been enacted thus far come from a "top-down model of decision-making" that takes political agency away from the communities engaged in the occupation. Much of the recent laws that have come up against Manual Scavenging are results of social movements, but these laws fail to get implemented on the ground level. This section aims to take a comprehensive look at all the legal mechanisms in place that aim to eradicate manual scavenging from India. Through this analysis, we intend to delve into a more historical overview of how Manual Scavenging has been looked at in the country's legal discourse and the current mechanisms that are in place. It will become clear from the ensuing discussion that these instruments in place are but a smokescreen to fuel the pretence that meaningful legislation are in place to protect the community from atrocities, which could not be, as we argue, further from reality.

Rights Discourse

Koonan (2021) looks at the legal discourse on the practice of Manual Scavenging as having evolved from a 'customary right' to a 'crime'. Through the course of the change in discourse, he traces three distinct phases that the legal discourse has been through since the pre-colonial era to the present day: the rights discourse, the humanisation discourse and the dignity discourse. The rights discourse here talks about how the general perception of the practice was that it is a duty sanctioned by the codes of religion. This religious duty being relegated to particular caste groups led to the occupation becoming hereditary, Legally, it translated to the practice becoming a customary right of those castes thereby entrenching the monopoly of those castes into this occupation. This resulted in a legal obligation of the manual scavengers to engage in the occupation with punitive measures if they did not comply with it.

Manual scavenging during this era, also was formalised through different acts and laws, making it a statutory obligation deriving its legitimacy from it being a customary right. The United Provinces Municipalities Act of 1916 is one such law. According to it, the customary right must be undertaken in a 'proper way' at 'reasonable intervals'. Section 21 of the Act says that if this was not adhered to, there would be a fine of ten rupees for the first offence and with its repetition, the right had to be forfeited. The fine for non-compliance is severe when compared to the paltry sum of 25-30 Rupees that manual scavengers earned monthly.

Humanisation Discourse

The second discourse starts as we enter the era of independence. A range of committees were set up right after independence to examine the working and living conditions of communities involved in manual scavenging in the country and to frame specific laws and regulations

based on the reports that were published. (Gupta, 2016) has given an overview of these committees starting from the Scavengers' Living Conditions Enquiry Committee headed by V. N. Barve which was constituted by the erstwhile Government of Bombay in 1949. Even though it was a localised committee focusing mainly on the State of Bombay, it was the first systematic study to regulate the working conditions of those involved in manual scavenging and fixing a minimum wage.

In 1953, the First Backward Class Commission chaired by Kaka Kelkar was constituted. In the report submitted by them in 1955, they described the sub-human conditions of people involved in the occupation and the outdated techniques of removing night soils, including doing it manually. The report deemed municipal corporations as the 'biggest sinners'. In 1956, the Central Harijan Welfare Board recommended the need for Centrally sponsored schemes. In 1957, the Scavenging Conditions Enquiry Committee, better known as the Malkani Committee was constituted. One of the main issues taken up by the committee was carrying night soil in baskets as headloads. It suggested instead the use of wheelbarrows. Similarly, it also suggested the use of standardised equipment as opposed to improper tools. However, the suggestions were by and large ignored by the authorities. The Pandya Committee was then constituted over a decade later in 1969 and recommended the strict application of labour laws. It also suggested banning the construction of insanitary latrines and the usage of more dignified words like *safai sevaks* or *sevikas* (sanitation workers) in place of 'scavengers'.

Dignity Discourse

A turn occurred in the 1980s due to a plethora of social movements that sought to expose the systemic issues of caste and untouchability which are inextricably linked with the hereditary and intergenerational nature of manual scavenging. This turn led to the dignity discourse. The Safai Karamchari Andolan filed a Public Interest Litigation, which calls Manual Scavenging an "affront to human dignity" and a blatant violation of the fundamental rights and principles enshrined in the Constitution. Now the focus shifted to the abolition of the practice, drawing the power of their arguments from the Constitution of India itself. The Indian judiciary echoed this discourse when the Supreme Court said that manual scavenging is a practice "rooted squarely in the concept of the caste system and untouchability". The concept of dignity is also used as a normative tool for high court cases on the safety of sewage workers. The use of dignity has been the centre of The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993. The Act punishes the employers of manual scavengers as well those constructing dry latrines. According to Tandon and Basu (2016), the Act, though ambitious, is still riddled with loopholes and inefficiency. The same Act of Parliament from 1993 formed the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK), a statutory entity that was established in 1994 and was in effect until 1997. However, later on, it was extended indefinitely. When NCSK submitted its initial report in 2000, it noted that there was a significant void in the actual application of the 1993 Act.

To address the limitations of the 1993 Act, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 was passed. The Act acknowledged the indignity meted out to the people engaged in the occupation. The preamble of the Act talks about how we must "correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by the manual scavengers, and to rehabilitate them to a life of dignity". The law prohibits, finally, the practice of manual scavenging, making it a punishable offence. This Act marks an end to the policy tolerance and begins the journey towards abolition. Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was further introduced to focus on mechanisation of the sewer cleaning, onsite protection of workers as well as compensation of those who died as a result of manual scavenging. Along with this the Scheduled Castes and The Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 2016 also considers anyone who employs or permits the employment of members for this purpose as committing atrocity and punishes them accordingly.

The Persistence of Manual Scavenging and Caste-based Occupational Identity

The discourse that exists on the occupational narratives and the legislations surrounding manual scavenging or conservancy work is written in a context that ultimately looks forward to a day when manual scavenging is extinct. But decades after legal banning and technological evolution, manual scavenging still continues to persist in our society. Hence, the question: What facilitates this persistence? Or, to put it in other words, why does the ultimate liberation seem impossible in this struggle? It is as if both the traditional and neo-liberal systems are preserving this occupation of manual scavenging.

This might have to do with the identity of people who are leading this struggle in their everyday lives since they are forced to be involved in this occupation. In India, aspects like education, employment, etc, are inherently in the social structure, and they, in turn, contribute towards the reproduction of these social structures, especially the hierarchical and unequal caste structure. Thus, even with multiple legislations and alternative technological innovations being available, a humiliating and undignified occupation like manual scavenging continues to draw its legitimacy from the caste system.

People who are situated in the margins of society are pushed by poverty and the caste-based occupational structure to occupations like manual scavenging, and the precarity involved in these subjects them to social exclusion by reinforcing their marginalisation and poverty. For instance, operationalisation of the nature of this occupation and following social exclusion is how manual scavenging itself is described in scholarly works as an "untouchable" or "polluting" occupation and the people who are forced into this occupation are considered to be born into an "untouchable" or "polluting" caste. There is a high concentration of Dalits in occupations like manual scavenging. 90% per cent of unclean menial jobs, which in economic terms are considered dead-end jobs, are reserved for individuals from the Dalit community (Darokar, 2020).

Historical Migration and Urbanization of Caste-based Occupations

Manual scavenging is a caste-determined occupation sanctioned by the scripts of the Hindu religion. Various mixtures of Dalit communities fall into this category in different parts of India. Bhangis are considered to be the community performing manual scavenging in Bombay and Mumbai. Professor Shailesh Daroker quotes R E Enthoven's work 'The Tribes and Castes of Bombay' and suggests that Bhangis were found almost in every district of the Bombay Presidency. In local and regional languages, communities involved in manual scavenging in Maharashtra are also known as Mehtar, Balmiki, Rukhi, and Lalbegi. The traditional occupation of Bhangis includes the removal of dead animals, handling dead bodies on funeral grounds, drum beating, sweeping roads and the manual removal and cleaning of human excreta. The Bhangis, with nearly 2%, are the fourth largest SC population of the state of Maharashtra. Under the entry "Bhangi", there are ten subgroups. They are Bhangi, Mehtars (sometimes native Muslims), Olgana, Rukhi, Malkana, Halalkhor, Lalbegi, Balmiki, Korar, and Zadmalli. The population of Bhangi is highly urbanised as they have migrated to these areas (Darokar, 2020).

Urbanisation and governance of urban areas by the British made space for the migration of Dalit communities from other areas to cantonment settlements like Mumbai and Pune. Some of these Dalit communities were not traditionally manual scavengers. However, they ended up performing manual scavenging in the urban areas. The Board of Conservancy was set up in Bombay in 1845 to enable the recruitment of scavengers or conservancy workers. Thus, these communities who collectively migrated to Bombay identified themselves as Valmikis, mostly irrespective of their local caste names. Though the purpose of their migration was to escape the casteist feudal system of rural India, even in urban areas, Valmikis were forced to be contained within caste clutches and perform impossible inhumane tasks.

Other than Dalit communities such as Scheduled Tribe (ST), Denotified Tribe (DNT), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and General Category individuals are found to be engaged in manual scavenging. However, their percentage is very low or negligible (Darokar, 2020). Elaborating on the presence of the general category community in the occupation of manual scavenging, Shailesh Darokar says that it is because, in India, many Muslim communities are still included in the general category despite their marginalised living and involvement in "untouchable" occupations like manual scavenging. These communities, according to Professor Darokar, live in much more deprived conditions in comparison to their Hindu counterparts (Darokar, 2020). Sub-categories that perform manual scavenging, like Mehtars, Lalbegi and Sheik, belong to the Muslim community.

Another minority general category of Hindus that is claimed to be part of manual scavengers in the city, according to the baseline survey of Darokar, are not engaged in the "filthy" tasks. Rather, they try to get into the supervisory positions of safai karmagars using their influence. While these people would not mind tasks like sweeping roads for a short time, the undignified task of carrying human excreta or night soil is still expected to be performed by

Dalits and Muslims (Darokar, 2018). Though various legislations and banning dry latrines changed the nature, manual scavenging remains India's most discriminated occupation.

Technological Interventions

In lieu of the recent Manual Scavenging Acts and legal discourse of dignity, the Government of Maharashtra also put out a resolution to fully mechanize cleaning of sewers and stopping the manual scavenging.(Marpakwar, 2022). It was the urban development department that put out the resolution in order to stop the practice within three months and aimed to appoint certain mechanised cleaning agencies for it. The resolution further discusses using funds from the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan funds from the 14th and 15th Finance Commission or a Private-Public Partnership to buy desludging vehicles. The integration of adaptable technologies such as the Bandicoot robot into Mumbai's intricate sewerage system, which combines dated colonial structures with modern engineering, poses complex challenges. The system's diverse design, dimensions, and conditions necessitate highly advanced and flexible technological solutions.

The Bandicoot robot, designed for cleaning and unclogging sewers, has to navigate through narrow, often congested lanes, as well as varied manhole sizes and shapes that are characteristic of Mumbai's urban landscape. The challenge lies not only in physical navigation but also in the robot's ability to effectively clean a range of debris types, from solid waste to heavy sludge, which can differ significantly from one area to another. Moreover, the effectiveness of such robots in monsoon conditions, when Mumbai's sewer systems are under the most stress, poses another layer of complexity. The city experiences severe flooding and clogging issues during the monsoon season, requiring robust and flexible technological solutions that can operate under such extreme conditions. This necessitates continuous innovation and customization of technologies like the Bandicoot robot to enhance their functionality, durability, and resilience against Mumbai's challenging urban and environmental conditions.

Furthermore, the integration of these technologies into the existing municipal operations involves training personnel not just in the technical operation of the machines but also in troubleshooting and maintenance specific to the demands of Mumbai's sewerage system. Addressing these adaptability challenges is crucial for the successful implementation of technological solutions in Mumbai's fight against manual scavenging. It involves a commitment to ongoing research and development, collaboration with technology providers for customized solutions, and an agile approach to urban planning and infrastructure management that prioritizes safety, efficiency, and sustainability.

Policy Recommendations

1. The BMC should end the contractual works for the desilting of drains before monsoons.

2. BMC's policy of outsourcing waste collection and cleaning to NGOs in Mumbai's slums be banned.

3. All gutters, drains, rivers, and stormwater drains in Mumbai should be declared sewer lines under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Rehabilitation of Workers Act 2013. The sanitation work done by these workers should be added to the list of manual scavengers in the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers Act, 2013, and under this law, all workers should be surveyed as soon as possible.

4. The BMC needs to invest in modern technology such as Bandicoot, the manhole cleaning robot devised by Genrobotics, in order to minimize the human toll caused by manual scavenging.

5. The BMC needs to institutionalize a formal hiring process for workers engaged in manual scavenging and provide them with the necessary benefits, such as insurance and healthcare, in order to compensate for the dangerous nature of the work.

6. The BMC needs to provide the necessary gear, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), to all workers engaged in manual scavenging.

7. The BMC needs to tackle the intergenerational impact of manual scavenging and provide additional scholarships for the children of manual scavengers similar to the ones instituted under the Pre-Metric Scholarships for the Children of Those Engaged in Unclean Occupations program.

8. Even our current recommendations are a product of a top-down approach to the problem. Existing interventions have never worked since they were based on a top-down approach. The BMC needs to form a committee with representatives from individuals involved in manual scavenging and sanitation department officials to adopt a more inclusive and integrative approach to the issue.

Conclusion

A review of the history of manual scavenging in cities like Mumbai reveals it as a caste-based occupation predominantly undertaken by Dalits. Escaping feudal landlords, many find themselves ensnared in a socially ostracizing and undignified occupation, passed down through generations.

This occupation's social exclusion, rooted in caste, renders legal measures ineffective, maintains discrimination in technology, and further marginalizes the community. Scholarly discourse often condemns manual scavenging from a distance, offering sympathy without actionable solutions, while urban planning and development policies overlook the issue entirely. Even proposed solutions perpetuate the caste-based nature of manual scavenging, binding Dalits to supposedly liberating technologies.

The caste system compels Dalits into manual scavenging, seeking meagre incomes and benefits to escape poverty—a feat nearly impossible within the neoliberal economy. Therefore, the true liberation from manual scavenging lies not merely in introducing laws or technologies inaccessible or too costly for municipal cooperation but in acknowledging the need for significant redistribution to rectify historical injustices and immediate, unrestricted financial investment to safeguard every manual scavenger.

As Ambedkar poignantly observed, "In India, a man is not a scavenger because of his work. He is a scavenger because of his birth, irrespective of whether he does scavenging or not."

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Environmental Justice In India: Fostering Inclusivity in Environment Conservation & Climate Change Policies Through Community Based Adaptation

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Abstract

As the world grapples with the challenges of climate change and its far-reaching repercussions, the concept of environmental justice becomes imperative, especially in the context of countries like India. The discourse on climate change policies in India has tended to be exclusive, frequently overlooking marginalized communities situated within the lower echelons of both economic and cultural strata. This omission is rooted in the inherent socio-political structure of the country. This particular study investigates the complex dynamics surrounding climate change policies in India, emphasizing how it excludes historically marginalized communities and its implication in the context of environmental justice in India. Further, it tries to understand how community participation as a strategy can help in developing climate change policies and in implementing them with the help of a case study about Kuruwitu, Kenya.

Introduction

The world is facing the problem of climate change, global warming, pollution, biodiversity loss and over population. But, these problems are not equally felt by all, some are enjoying drinking filtered water directly from the tap, some are drinking lead-contaminated water and some cannot even access potable water. This inequitable experience is called environmental injustice. Environmental justice is when everyone regardless of race, colour, gender, caste, place of origin or income has the right to the same environmental protections and benefits, as well as meaningful involvement in the policies that shape their communities (Skelton & Miller, 2023).

The struggle for environmental justice in the 1980s, when a class action lawsuit Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management,Inc., was filed challenging the environmental discrimination faced by black homeowners in a suburban middle-income Houston neighborhood, in the US. Robert. D Bullard, known as the father of environmental justice and the lead researcher behind the lawsuit, established a correlation between housing segregation and environmental pollution. Many structural issues were brought to light

following this. The discriminatory practices in urban planning only helps the affluent to maintain the "green lifestyle" but the poor and the marginalized have to suffer the most even though their carbon footprint is lower than that of the rich (Watts, 2023)

Environmental justice is becoming more and more important and relevant globally. In India, they gained momentum as social justice movements grew along with environmental issues and gained more public support. A nationwide push for environmental justice came about after the Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984. The unequal effects felt by different communities as a result of a man-made disaster resulted in activism and mobilization around environmental issues concerning industrial policies. This brought about a wave of environmental justice movements like, Narmada Bachaao Andolan, Appiko movement etc. (Verma, 2023).

Activists have found that the most common factors among the communities being affected by these inequalities is that they are among the most vulnerable groups. These communities are most often historically marginalized and kept away from major decision making even if it affects them the most. They lack connections to decision makers that protect their interests and most often lack resources to even get in contact with them. Usually from economically weaker sections, they either have the least or no exposure to education. Since these are the communities that are most affected by these climate issues, their involvement in the policy making will not only ensure the most efficient use of resources but also provide a sustainable and equitable solution. There is a need for "Environmentalism of the Poor" as suggested by Sunita Narain i.e. a bottom-up approach to finding solutions to the problems.

Internationally, India advocates for the "polluter pays" principle in environmental politics. Despite advocating for development in the Global South and highlighting the North-South divide, India's domestic policies have failed to effectively translate this development into tangible improvements for the country's marginalized communities. This inconsistency is glaring, especially considering the disproportionate impact of climate change on these vulnerable groups. The critical question that emerges is the purpose of economic development if it does not uplift the living conditions of those most in need. This study aims to delve into the significance of understanding India's domestic climate change policies, shedding light on the discrepancies between rhetoric and action in addressing the needs of marginalized communities.

Evolution of environment conservation Policies in India

The trajectory of environmental conservation policies in India can be divided into four major phases. The first phase spans the immediate post-colonial period from 1947 to 1972. During this time, the Indian Forest Act of 1947 was introduced as the initial legislation in independent India to define and categorize forest areas. These early legislations were heavily influenced by British colonial policies, particularly the Forest Act of 1927. Forests were primarily viewed as sources for economic development rather than as pristine resources in need of conservation.

The second phase from 1972 to 1980 in India, following the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment, witnessed a surge in environmental legislation aimed at conservation efforts. The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 was swiftly enacted, leading to the establishment of nine tiger reserves. This phase also saw the establishment of central and state pollution control boards to oversee licensing and enforcement, broadening the scope of conservation in the policy domain. Notably, grassroots movements like the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan highlighted growing public awareness and activism surrounding environmental issues, signaling greater community participation in conservation efforts.

The third phase, catalyzed by the Bhopal gas tragedy and subsequent judicial activism, significantly influenced environmental policy regimes in India. This tragic event brought the principle of 'polluter pays' to the forefront of the environmental narrative, prompting the judiciary to take an active role in ensuring justice for affected individuals. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change was established in 1985 to oversee environmental governance. Public interest litigations emerged as a popular mechanism for seeking judicial redressal in environmental matters, eventually leading to the creation of the National Green Tribunal.

The fourth phase, spanning from the late 20th century to the present day, is characterized by an increased focus on sustainable development and climate change mitigation. Key developments include the adoption of the National Action Plan on Climate Change in 2008, which outlines strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts across various sectors. The Paris Agreement in 2015 marked a milestone in global efforts to combat climate change, with India pledging to reduce its carbon intensity and increase the share of non-fossil fuel-based energy sources in its energy mix. However, challenges persist, including the need for effective implementation of policies, addressing environmental inequalities, and balancing economic development with environmental conservation.

Patterns of Exclusion in Environmental Conservation and Climate Policies

Throughout history, vulnerable communities such as Dalits, indigenous peoples, women, and both rural and urban poor have consistently borne the brunt of climate change impacts. However, existing policy discussions have often overlooked their needs and failed to implement inclusive practices. To understand this the research conceptualizes exclusion patterns into four distinct categories: distributional injustice, procedural exclusion, recognitional injustice, and transitional exclusion. This framework will help elucidate the various ways in which marginalized groups are systematically sidelined in environmental policymaking and climate change mitigation efforts.

Distributional Injustice

Disproportionate allocation of land and natural resources extends beyond mere quantity or volume, encompassing the critical aspect of quality. Historically marginalized communities experience limited access to pollution-free resources such as clean water and air. Land has traditionally been a focal point of contention within the discourse of environmental protection and climate change, particularly evident in the policy landscape dating back to pre-independence India. The 1927 Forest Act, which laid the groundwork for subsequent environmental policies, exemplifies this trend by centralizing control over forest land and wildlife, thereby adversely impacting forest-dwelling tribal communities and their livelihoods. Forests were primarily viewed as sources of economic development rather than through the lens of conservation.

While ostensibly aimed at wildlife protection, this legislation has often led to the displacement of tribal communities from designated protected wildlife habitats, without adequate compensation or resettlement strategies. Similarly, subsequent legislation in 1971 perpetuated these injustices against marginalized groups such as forest-dwelling tribals and Dalits.

For an extended period in India, wildlife and environmental protection initiatives focused on establishing protected areas, often at the expense of indigenous communities. According to the constitutional definition of 'Scheduled Tribes', they constitute 8.6% of the national population (Bathija & Sylvander, 2023).

These conservation strategies were influenced by colonial policies of segregation and spatial exclusion. The discourse on environmental conservation has predominantly been shaped by urban elites, who have portrayed traditional forest communities and their management practices as ineffective and naive (Bathija &amp and Sylvander, 2023). Access to resources, whether water, land, or forest resources, is intricately linked to one's social position, exacerbating inequalities based on caste, class, and gender. Consequently, forest-dwelling communities and other vulnerable groups have been marginalized within this discourse, reflecting a savior complex among the urban elite.

However, compromising the access of marginalized communities to natural resources is untenable, as the right to life cannot be sustained without environmental and ecological security. Consider the case of the Baiga tribe, a forest-dwelling community from Chhattisgarh, which faced significant challenges and displacement due to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 (GreenStories, 2023), leading to widespread resistance and revolts. Numerous similar examples abound, illustrating the struggles of marginalized communities within the discourse of environmental conservation in India. In the contemporary narrative of climate change mitigation and sustainable development goals, the transition to alternative energy models poses significant challenges and risks of land conflicts within communities.

For instance, the establishment of a solar power plant in Nedan village, Jaisalmer district, by a corporate entity has resulted in conflicts over traditional pastoral lands utilized by villagers and small-scale agriculturalists (Chari, 2020). Legal battles surrounding such cases underscore how marginalized communities, including the poor, lower castes, and tribal people, face discrimination within the realm of environmental conservation and climate change policymaking in the country.

The spatial organization of land presents a critical issue, as it exacerbates the disproportionate effects of climate change. Spatial gentrification and the displacement of vulnerable communities, including the urban poor and Dalits, expose them to harsher climate change impacts. In India's urban landscape, marginalized communities often inhabit the periphery, while the urban elite reside in the core. Resources, such as clean water, flow from the periphery to the core, yet access to water for those in the periphery is frequently denied due to systemic inequalities. Peripheries, or suburbs, housing vulnerable communities, often serve as dumping grounds for waste from core areas and host hazardous industries.

The Bhopal gas tragedy epitomizes this dynamic, with disproportionate negative impacts on the poor, Dalits, and women. Hazardous industries in peripheries often operate without proper guidelines, endangering the lives of marginalized communities and compromising access to clean drinking water and air. Recent study titled "Urban Heat Stress in major cities of India: Delhi" (2022), investigating social inequities in urban heat and greenspace distribution at the ward level in Delhi, reveal alarming correlations between heat exposure, greenspace availability, and social vulnerability. Vulnerable demographic and economic groups, such as young children, outdoor agricultural workers, and households lacking assets or electricity, face heightened exposure to climate change impacts and possess fewer resources to cope with heat stress (Mitchell et al., 2021). These findings underscore a profound climate injustice, where certain segments of the population bear a disproportionate burden of environmental factors, exacerbating existing social disparities.

Procedural Exclusion

Another major issue is the procedural exclusion of marginalized communities in the decision-making process. Procedurally, they are often excluded as their representation in decision-making bodies is minimal, compounded by limited access to information about climate change. Historically, climate change and environmental conservation policies have been centrally determined, with the transfer of environmental matters from the state to the concurrent list through amendments like 42nd Constitutional Amendment. Despite variations in the sociopolitical landscape and climate change impacts across regions, policies and practices continue to be determined at the central level. Frequently, the concerns of these marginalized groups and the ways in which climate change affects them are overlooked, leading to a significant knowledge gap regarding climate change and its impacts among vulnerable populations. Their voices are predominantly heard through resistance and protests in the public domain, although the Bhopal gas tragedy has prompted judicial activism in this area. Courts and legal battles have emerged as prominent mechanisms for addressing

discrimination, with the establishment of the National Green Tribunal and an increase in public interest litigations related to climate and environmental issues (Umashankar, 2014). While there have been improvements, the transition to a just society where marginalized groups have equal access to information and influence in decision-making processes remains a distant goal.

Recognitional Injustice

Another major problem is the recognitional injustice in these marginalized communities. As previously highlighted, displacement and land conflicts resulting from environmental policies in India often lead to the cultural erosion of indigenous societies. These displacements disrupt food habits, kinship ties, religious beliefs, and local art forms, resulting in a profound impact on the cultural fabric of these communities (Joseph & Bheegom RK, 2015). Despite possessing traditional knowledge and practices that contribute to sustainable resource management and climate resilience, both women and Dalits find their contributions unrecognized or undervalued by mainstream conservation and development initiatives. Moreover, the gendered division of labor places a disproportionate burden on women in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, particularly concerning issues like water and food scarcity (Rao, 2017). This exclusion not only undermines the diversity of perspectives needed for effective policymaking but also perpetuates social inequalities.

Transitional Exclusion

Transitional exclusion presents a significant challenge for policymakers in India, particularly in the context of transitioning to greener and more sustainable energy sources. While alternative energy technologies offer promising solutions, they often require substantial capital investment, rendering them inaccessible for marginalized communities, who typically belong to lower income strata. Affordability of energy remains a pressing issue, despite subsidies and grants that prove inadequate in addressing the needs of these communities. While job opportunities may arise in the renewable energy sector, socio- economic barriers such as educational and training deficiencies impede access for many individuals. Moreover, the tangible impacts of climate change, such as droughts, rising temperatures, and erratic rainfall patterns, exacerbate the urgency of basic needs such as access to water and cooling systems, which are often overlooked. A significant portion of the marginalized population, including Dalits, indigenous communities, and rural poor, are engaged in agricultural practices. Transitioning to environmentally friendly organic farming practices holds promise but often results in increased debt pressure due to production fluctuations exacerbated by climate change-induced losses. The failure of initiatives like the introduction of BT cotton varieties in Telangana illustrates the complexities and risks associated with technological solutions. Despite promises of reduced pesticide usage and climate resilience, the high costs of genetically modified seeds coupled with unpredictable production outcomes have led to hardships for farmers, including instances of suicides (Karamchedu, 2023c). The use of technologies like BT cotton hasn't progressed smoothly. Instead, it's been unpredictable, with

both successes and failures. This challenges the idea that technological advancements always bring benefits, because the one who loses out are always the vulnerable communities.

Case Study: Kuruwitu

"Conserving to restore the promise of the sea"

In the early years of the 2000s, Kuruwitu, a popular tourist destination on Kenya's northern coast, embarked on a transformative journey that set an example for the marine communities worldwide who are fighting the challenges of climate change. This case study chronicles the community's evolution into active participants in identifying challenges and formulating solutions, aligning with the constitutional emphasis on public participation, local accountability, and enhanced grassroots service delivery. The catalyst for this transformation was the dwindling stock of fishes near the landing sites and its effects on their livelihoods. Overfishing and unsustainable fishing methods emerged as the central causes, prompting fishermen to seek alternative areas and employ illicit fishing gear. Commercial fishing organizations exacerbated the issue through uncontrolled harvesting and gathering of live fish, corals, and ornamental fish, putting the reef nurseries at risk. Fueled by the imperative to safeguard their livelihood and further sustaining it pushed the community to act up immediately (Centre for Public Impact, 2021)

The Kuruwitu Conservation and Welfare Association (KCWA) played a pivotal role in improving the lives of the local community. The association was set up by a resident, Des Bowden and fisherman Dickson Juma in 2003 with the aim of protecting the Kuruwitu-Vipingo area from overfishing. For this they brought together 550 families across six landing sites, set up a range of discussions between the community and the marine conservation experts (the summary of which was put together in a report to reach the local fishing community) and came up with solutions where the community was directly involved and represented. In 2005, the KCWA with the community's approval set aside 30 hectares as Marine Protected Area(also called the Kuruwitu Marine Area) which is the first Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) in Kenya. KCWA membership was opened up to the local community and expanded to include over 1,000 people managed by a 15-person committee. This committee has subcommittee on environment, security, welfare, education, each headed by a local member and one-third of all committee members are women. Through the course of its work the objectives of KCWA have evolved. What started as an initial set up to give the local fishing community a voice to manage the marine resources later helped in creating alternative sustainable sources of employment and income for the wider local community. Apart from this they also offer job opportunities for the wider community. Focus group discussions were constant and consisted of interviewing community members so they could share their perspectives and aspirations for the community, attending training sessions, discussing the LMMA and sustainable marine conservation issues and activities. These sessions have not only improved community cohesiveness but also made people more aware and active in the conservation process.

In just 6 years when the Kuruwitu Marine Area was formed, there was a 30% increase in the live hard coral coverage and a 200% increase in the fish population, which went up to a 400% increase in 12 years (Miller, 2022). Kuruwitu's journey signifies the potential of community engagement and collaboration with stakeholders to address the multifaceted challenges confronting informal settlements, ultimately fostering positive transformation and sustainable development.

These fishermen communities are poor, and their only way of livelihood was fishing but with the cleaning of marine desert, and revitalization of coral reefs has also engendered ecotourism which has opened a new channel for generating income.

The lessons learnt at Kuruwitu allow us to measure the effects of our activities elsewhere. The effects of environmentally damaging activities are often felt by the poorest communities who are sustained by jobs that depend on the environment. Growing commercial demand for fishes, corals, other natural resources and their unregulated extraction is disrupting the ecosystem and threatening the livelihoods of poor communities.

Why Kuruwitu is a textbook example for other Marine Protected Areas

The inspiring tale of Kuruwitu's successful revival of its coral reef and fisheries holds crucial lessons for the restoration of India's beleaguered coastlines, which share common challenges of overfishing, pollution, climate change, habitat destruction, and a lack of sustainable practices. This narrative resonates strongly with many developing countries, including India, where regions like Lakshadweep are grappling with the adverse impacts of climate change, particularly on their coral reefs. In Lakshadweep, overfishing, exacerbated by destructive bottom trawling, has led to the decimation of reefs and marine biodiversity, contributing to a decline in fish catch. Maharashtra too witnessed the effects of this with its lowest fish catch in 45 years in 2019, and a 50% decline in the annual fish catch. The disproportionate impact on coastal communities, where a significant portion of the population depends on fishing, is a stark reality, with 61% of fishermen reported to be below the poverty line in 2010. This underscores the environmental injustice inherent in climate change effects, as the economically vulnerable bear the brunt of ecological degradation.

The Kuruwitu model becomes a beacon of hope, showcasing that grassroots involvement, collaboration with experts, and locally managed initiatives can lead to tangible positive outcomes. By emphasizing community engagement, Kuruwitu not only revitalized its marine ecosystem but also created a blueprint for climate resilience and sustainable development. This approach is particularly pertinent in addressing environmental injustice, as it places the well-being of vulnerable communities at the forefront. As urban areas may remain insulated from the immediate impacts, recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental health and livelihoods in endangered marine regions becomes imperative. The rules laid down by the Kuruwitu community members have been upheld, not without sacrifices but the marine environment is on the way to full recovery. By fostering community participation and

replicating successful models like Kuruwitu, India can work towards mitigating the climate crisis and ensuring a more equitable and sustainable future for its coastal communities.

Conclusion

The multifaceted challenges of environmental injustice persist globally, affecting vulnerable communities disproportionately. The evolution of environmental conservation policies in India, reflects a transition from a focus on economic development to broader considerations of conservation and sustainability. Nevertheless, the historical legacies of marginalization persist, particularly evident in the patterns of exclusion in the allocation of land and natural resources. Vulnerable communities, including forest-dwelling tribes and Dalits, continue to face displacement and discrimination, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach.

Procedural exclusion in decision-making processes and the lack of recognition for traditional knowledge contribute to a knowledge gap among vulnerable populations. Transitional exclusion poses additional challenges as India strives to transition to greener and more sustainable energy sources, with affordability and access barriers hindering the participation of marginalized communities.

The case study of Kuruwitu exemplifies the transformative power of community engagement and collaboration in addressing environmental injustice and emphasizes on the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach that considers the intersectionality of social, economic, and environmental factors. Policymakers must prioritize the voices of marginalized communities, recognize the value of traditional knowledge, and ensure that the transition to sustainable practices is accessible and beneficial for all. There is a need for decentralization of climate policies to the grassroots level because the effects of climate change are felt differently by different communities and as seen in the case study of Kuruwitu we can conclude that the most efficient solutions come from the people most affected by it. An inclusive approach, grounded in environmental justice principles, is pivotal to achieving sustainable and equitable climate resilience for all.

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Policy Intervention for The Betterment of Domestic Workers In India

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Introduction

The domestic worker has been a perennial labourer through historical times as well as a ubiquitous worker in most residential houses. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines a domestic worker as 'someone who carries out household work in a private household in return for wages [1]. The ILO's definition indicates that as the workspace within which domestic workers operate is not the usual production space, the labour efforts of domestic workers mostly fall outside the purview of the conventional social security labour laws. It is the absence of holistic legislative protection that makes domestic workers a part of 92% of India's informal sector's workforce. This informal sector placement exposes domestic workers to an exploitative employer-employee relationship, which consequently, leads to a persistent rise in inequality that has been normalized at the societal level.

From the sociological point of view, inequality is a mechanism that reflects lack of social mobility [2]. As social immobility is a hallmark of paid domestic work, questions that rankle the mind are: What socio-economic facets of paid domestic work makes these employees vulnerable? How can policy be used to reduce the susceptibility of domestic workers? The following objectives of this paper will help it find critical answers to the above questions:
a.   To study the characteristics of paid domestic work.
b.   To delve into reasons behind the adverse employer-employee relation that has persisted in this type of work environment.
c.   To submit a policy proposal that symbiotically benefits all the three stakeholders (viz., employee, employer, and government) in this work domain.

Review Of Literature

To obtain answers to the above queries and to acquire insights for the objectives of this paper, the following academic writings of experts in this domain along with a couple of reports were accessed.

Sujata Gothoskar's paper (2013) on 'The Plight of Domestic Workers', published in EPW, succinctly captured the varying struggles of domestic employees in not only their workspaces but also outside of it. Gothoskar's insights have helped this paper better understand the reasons for the insufficiency of formal policy measures for the protection of domestic worker rights.
Sonal Sharma's exploratory paper (2016) in EPW, titled 'Rasoi ka Kaam/Bathroom ka Kaam: Perspectives of Women Domestic Workers', deals with the intersectionalities that exist in

paid domestic work relations within the country. Sharma's articulations have provided this paper with the information about the caste, class, and gender issues that underpin paid domestic work in India.

Ramana Murthy's paper (2019), in an IMF publication, entitled 'Measuring Informal Economy in India – The Indian Experience' engages with information and data on domestic workers as provided by the 2007 Arjun Sengupta Report. Murthy's analyses have helped this paper in reiterating the fact that the unorganized sector (of which domestic workers are a part of) is an integral component of the Indian economy.

Neetha's paper (2021), published in the Indian Journal of Labour Economics as 'Misconstrued Notions and Misplaced Interventions: An Assessment of State Policy on Domestic Work in India', sheds light on how state interventions occur in various facets of the informal sector. Neetha's research essay laid the foundation for this paper's argument on the need for a centralized policy for domestic workers in the country.

This essay also garnered relevant information on paid domestic work through the ethnographic research works undertaken by Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao and Self Employed Women's Association] and published as respective booklets, entitled 'The Plight of Domestic Workers in a World Class City (Mumbai)', (2010) and 'Domestic Worker's Laws and Legal Issues in India' (2014).

Research Methodology

The deliberations of this paper are based mainly on secondary sources. However, to better comprehend the issues of domestic workers and to confirm some of the findings of the secondary sources, this researcher administered a brief questionnaire to 40 active domestic workers from across Mumbai. The focus areas of this survey and its findings are given below: The gender identity of the respondent domestic workers: Of the 40 respondents, 36 identified as female while only 4 identified as male. The age range of the respondent domestic workers: The age range of the respondents was between 25-51, with the average age being 39.7 years. The income of the respondent domestic workers: The average monthly income of the respondents was Rs. 19,415. The family size of the respondent domestic workers: The median family size of the respondents was 5 members. The number of years the respondents had laboured as domestic workers: The mean number of years that any respondent put in as a domestic worker was 15.9 years. The respondents' awareness of any government schemes that were curated for them: 73% of the respondents were not aware of any policies or schemes that the government (Union or State) have promulgated for them.

Theoretical Analysis of Paid Domestic Work

Skewed work relationships between the hirer and the hired have been in existence for most of human history – with the former dominating over the latter. The Communist Manifesto [5] points to this type of dominance by citing the instances of 'freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeymen and bourgeoisie and proletariat'. Marxian analysis shows how the 'oppressor' (here it is the employer) dominates over the 'oppressed' (here it is the domestic employee) due to the economic inequalities that persist between them. In Indian society, this unequal work relation is further aggravated by the existence of "multiple and intersecting identities — (religion, caste, gender) which often create confusing and stratifying differences" (Sharma, 2016).

Regressive caste hierarchies and gender inequalities continuously subjugate domestic workers. Further, in India, the callous attitude towards paid domestic work is perpetuated by people who do not depend on it as a livelihood source as well as by policymakers who, inappropriately, limit such a vitiated employer-worker relationship to just being a class issue. Such popular and policy attitudes have made Indian policies incapable of alleviating the adversities and privations that domestic labourers continually encounter. Thus, empathetic policy redressal mechanisms have to be put in place to better the work conditions of the battered domestic workers.

General Profile Of Domestic Workers

It is out of the sheer desperation to find a livelihood source, to eke out a living in an urban economy, that lowly skilled labourers (especially women) with little to no formal education [7] opt for paid domestic work or 'residue work' (Gothoskar, 2013). Paid domestic work is profuse mainly in urban spaces. In metropolitan spaces, like Mumbai, the hardships of such workers are further aggravated due to the inherently deep-rooted social stigma of paid domestic work not being 'real' work but earning opportunities that are 'inferior and impure' (Sharma, 2016). Domestic workers find that although the existing urban areas are expansive (from the point of paid household work opportunities), they are competitive (from the point of finding work in the midst of a large lowly-skilled workforce) and expensive (from the point of consumption with limited incomes and high inflation rates).

Unfair Contracts and The Employer

Domestic workers, on account of the unstable nature of their contracts, are among the most marginalized labourers. The casual unwritten contracts leave domestic workers "bereft of any form of employment security, safety, healthcare benefits and skill development" (Gothoskar, 2013), as the terms and conditions of work are determined by the whims and fancies of each employer. This empowers the employer to determine the unequal social hierarchy and work boundaries within which the domestic worker operates. This establishes the higher positionality of the employer and the significantly lower positionality of the domestic worker.

Beyond this constrained workspace, the social world of both stakeholders varies immensely, due to each group occupying vastly different social locations.

Due to this imbalance in power and status, the employer becomes the presumed 'exploiter', and the domestic worker becomes the presumed 'exploited'. The most common exploitative practice among employers is to underpay their domestic helpers. This paper's survey shows that the average monthly wage paid to a domestic worker is Rs. 19,415. When this nominal income is discounted for an inflation rate of 6.5%, the real income [11] becomes about Rs.18,199, which is a pittance for living any sort of a dignified life in any urban space. Furthermore, the lack of effective policies to standardize and protect the rights of domestic workers increases their vulnerability.

India's Policy Response

Although governments claim (mostly through their election manifestos) that social justice is their chief objective, they have failed to give legislative priority to the vulnerable domestic workers. It seems as if the electoral insignificance of domestic workers makes governments fail to take cognisance of the intersectionalities mentioned above and thereby they fail to improve the work conditions of such workers.

A few Governments of India policies for the unorganised sector that have been enacted are: the Aam Aadmi Beema Yojana (2007), the Unorganised Sector Social Security Act (2008), the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan Yojana (PM-SYM) (2019) and the eShram Portal (2021). Similarly, Maharashtra promulgated the Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act, in 2008. However, the actual benefits that have accrued from these policies to the domestic workers are far from adequate. This is mainly due to the fact that none of these policies were created specifically for domestic workers, and so they do not target problem solving mainly for this group. Additionally, due to varying priorities and ideologies at the national, regional and local levels of governance, domestic worker rights are often overlooked as being of lesser priority. There is also widespread ignorance on the part of domestic workers vis-à-vis any government schemes, which means that the information dissemination mechanisms of such policies / schemes have to be made more efficient and effective.

The above deliberations indicate that domestic workers continuously suffer at the hands of their employers as well as the rest of society. The domestic workers' livelihood per se, is bereft of policy protection and so it is constantly threatened by and susceptible to the whims of their employers. As a case in point here, one can cite the heightened severity of the domestic workers' livelihood crisis during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdowns left many domestic workers unemployed and/or with little to no earnings. Many live-in domestic workers found themselves trapped within abusive homes (Saluja, 2022). Discrimination against these workers was at such an all-time high that the ILO alarmingly reported that the pandemic worsened unfair practices against domestic workers under the disguise of 'COVID-19 risk management'. In the post-pandemic period, not

unexpectedly, barely anything changed favourably for domestic workers on the socio-economic and policy fronts.

Recommendations

Human relations operate on organic solidarity and so it is obvious that the domestic worker's employers, the domestic worker per se and the government are symbiotically related to each other. Employers need domestic workers to aid them with their household chores.

Domestic workers require employees so that they can earn a living. Both employers and employees depend on the government for their welfare and security and the government counts on them to contribute to the economy through their work and commitment.

This high degree of cross-dependency makes it imperative for policy measures to be undertaken to create a definitive path that can be charted out for the benefit of all the three above-mentioned stakeholders.

Contracts between employers and the corresponding domestic workers, have to be legislatively changed from being bipartite (between employers and employees) to becoming tripartite (employer, employee and the government). This is required as the employer-employee contract is inherently exploitative for the latter, while contracts based on the employer-employee-government relationship can be made: a) more benevolent for the worker, b) incentivised for the employer and c) welfare delivering for the government. In India, a Union policy for domestic workers is necessary because these workers often migrate in search of work across inter-state boundaries [13]

Policy Proposal for Improving Employer-Employee Relations

As Section 80G of the Income Tax Act, which gave tax benefits for charitable actions like donations, has been withdrawn under the new tax regime [14], this paper proposes the 'Social Responsibility in Domestic Spaces' Rule as an alternative source of being charitable, for the benefit of both, the domestic workers and their employers.

Based on the model of corporate social responsibility, the proposed rule is meant to foster the values of empathy and generosity on a quid-pro-quo basis, between the employer and the domestic worker. The framework for this proposed rule is designed to propagate goodwill practices by the employers, in lieu of predetermined proportionate income tax deductions – up to a maximum of Rs 10,000.

The ways in which employers of domestic workers could claim said tax deductions in the concerned financial year, is when they actually and verifiably:
. Pay the annual school fees (against receipt) of their domestic workers' children or grandchildren; and/or

. Pay the annual college fees (against receipt) of their domestic workers' children or grandchildren; and/or

. Pay the fees for and enroll their domestic workers or his/her kith and kin in skill development/vocational training courses; and/or

. Defray the medical bills that the domestic workers' families have to incur.

. To avail of the proposed proportionate fiscal benefit, the employer will be required to state the amount of monetary benefit that his/her intervention has brought to his/her domestic worker. This claim by the employer has to be certified by the respective institutional authority (of options 1 to 4 mentioned above). The employers can file this goodwill reciprocation in their income tax returns quarterly or annually.

Rationale Of the Proposal

With the rescinding of 80G, there is a possibility that being charitable gets disincentivised in India. This indirect dissuasion of philanthropic activities can be extremely harmful, especially in a Global South country like India, where many individuals, such as the domestic workers, depend upon the outreach of their employers. Hence, the proposed Social Responsibility in Domestic Spaces' Rule would ensure that benevolence continues to be an integral aspect of Indian society as helping one's vulnerable paid domestic worker has the government's (especially the fiscal authority's) sanction. Again, creating this kind of a policy measure will not only organize and uplift many marginalized individuals in the country, but will also help establish stronger and more permanent central laws for domestic workers.

Conclusion

Every new policy proposal, when initially enacted, is bound to be ridiculed and resisted as it appears to be far-fetched and impossible to execute. It is such reactions that challenge nascent policies to take root, be pruned (through amendments) and ultimately bear fruits.

For any policy to gain permanence and prominence, it needs to be reviewed at regular intervals for its relevance and continued viability – hence, policies are amended and updated. The proposed 'Social Responsibility in Domestic Spaces' Rule is bound to go through such appraisals. The proposed policy at first glance sounds utopian and vague; but, when all the concerned stakeholders begin to reap its envisaged paybacks, it can become a democratic model policy of benevolence of the employers' goodwill actions, for the vulnerable domestic workers and supported by the government for the welfare of all the three stakeholders.

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[1] This magnitude has been stated in the Sengupta Report (2007) as well as by S V Ramana Murthy (2019).

[2] Quip from, and interview given by Nobel Laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo to Indian Express on 17th January 2024, page 11.

[3] GBGA is the abbreviation for Ghar Bachao, Ghar Banao Andolan.

[4] SEWA is the abbreviation for Self-Employed Women's Association.

[5] Marx, Karl., 1818-1883., (1996), The Communist Manifesto, London; Chicago, Ill.: Pluto Press.

[6] Sharma, S., (2016), Of Rasoi ka Kaam/Bathroom ka Kaam: Perspectives of Women Domestic Workers, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 51, Issue No. 7.

[7]https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/WCMS_141187/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=Domestic%20work%20refers%20to%20housework,those%20with%20very%20little%20education.

[8] Gothoskar, S., (2013), The Plight of Domestic Workers, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 48, Issue No. 22.

[9] Inferences drawn from Sonal Sharma's paper (EPW, 2016).

[10] Neetha, N., (2021), Misconstrued Notions and Misplaced Interventions: An Assessment of State Policy
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[11] Real income is the purchasing power of money income. It can be calculated as under: Nominal income minus inflation rate times that nominal income.

[12] Saluja, R., (2022), How Covid-19 Worsened Hardships of India's Domestic Workers, The Wire. https://thewire.in/rights/how-covid-19-has-worsened-hardships-of-indias-domestic-workers#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20with%20the%20sudden%20announcement,with%20abusive%20employers%20for%20months

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Empowering Slum Communities through participatory slum upgradation of the Jaga Mission: A Case Study of Penthakata Slum in Odisha

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Shifting paradigms, shaping policy: Slum Upgradation as a critical tool to deal with slums

In the realm of successful housing policies for the urban poor in cities, Jaga Mission in Odisha is one such state-wide housing policy touted as the 'world's largest slum titling and upgradation initiative' (Jaga Mission Portal, 2021) which aims at empowering slum communities with land rights, infrastructure and municipal services. Slum upgrading initiatives are regarded as one of the best practices to deal with the problem of slums, replacing the dominant trend to uproot, displace, resettle and rehabilitate slums. There is a global consensus in the view that rapid urbanization has contributed to the rapid formation of slum settlements, which are also a sign of the inability of our cities to provide affordable and adequate housing to masses of urban poor who are then forced to settle in informal settlements.

Scholars are trying to look at the existing practices that have been experimented in developing countries and have proved significant in terms of their outcomes to reduce the socio-economic housing vulnerabilities of slum dwellers (Collado et al., 2020). One such currently accepted best practice that local governments have adopted in the global south is slum upgrading (Abbott, 2002; Werthmann & Beardsley, 2008; Patel, 2013; Cities Alliance, 2016).

The historical background of slum upgradation initiatives started in response to the ineffectiveness of slum clearance and relocation programs, which were in force until the 1970s (UN-Habitat,2003). Slums are comprised of marginalized groups who are seen as "problems" by city governments. Relocation programs became popular strategies to eliminate the poor from cities, which in turn deprived them of work and economic opportunities because the relocation sites are usually far away from the city center, and the question of adequate housing and infrastructural services still existed in the new area.

The Slum Upgradation Program (SUP) was popularized by FC Turner (1976), who viewed slums as part of the complexity of cities and every government needed to have a "humanitarian approach" to deal with slums. He believed that slum dwellers are 'incremental' builders who require external support in terms of finances to upgrade their own houses and basic services and infrastructure such as proper streets, sewage connections, piped

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water supply, electricity, and toilets to improve their living conditions. The city governments can resolve the issues of "slum-like problems" by extending these facilities to the slum dwellers in the cities. Turner's ideas inspired the World Bank's sites-and-services schemes, where housing subsidies and essential municipal services were given to slum dwellers to improve housing and living conditions.

Jaga Mission - "Transforming slums into liveable habitats"

In the Indian context, experimentation around slum upgradation was very popular around the 1980s. Mumbai and Kolkata are well-known examples where in-situ upgradation was implemented to solve the housing demands of the urban poor by making efficient use of the city's resources and land. The Rajiv Awas Yojana, which advocated for 'Slum Free India', was one final effort at the national level to promote policies like Slum Upgradation. The Jaga Mission, or Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission, is a slum upgradation program launched by the Odisha government in 2017 to

"transform the slums into liveable habitat with all necessary civic infrastructure and services at par with the better off areas within the same urban local body (ULB) and to continuously improve the standard of the infrastructure and services and access to livelihood opportunities."

The mission was preceded by land titling under the Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act (2017). Under the slum upgradation, nine infrastructures had to be laid down in slums after the Infrastructure Gap Assessment. The assessment is an analysis to identify the primary infrastructural gaps which require upgradation and post that, nine infrastructures including piped water supply, stormwater drain, street light, electricity, rainwater harvesting structure, parichaya, child playground, toilet and paved road will be laid down in the slum. In addition to that, the Slum Dweller Association (SDA), which would act as a community representative body for slum dwellers, will be constituted at the slum level. SDA aims to provide a platform for slum dwellers to collectivize, participate and monitor the implementation work under this mission.
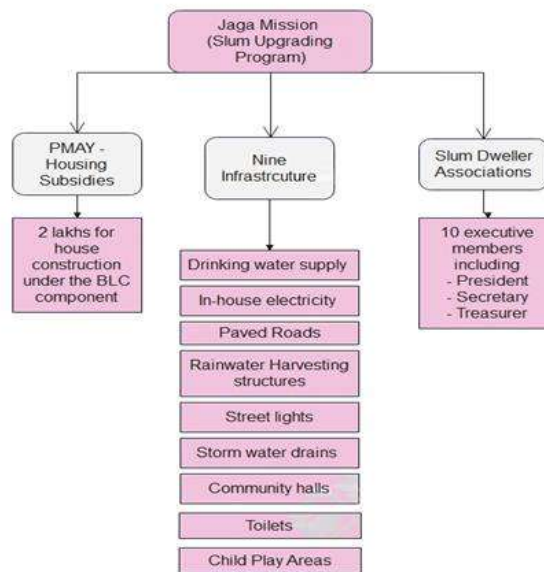
Figure 1: Jaga Mission

Research Methodology

The research design of the study is case study-based qualitative research. The data collected is analyzed by identifying patterns, themes, and relationships to develop new insights and theories. For my research site, I have chosen two slums named Chakratirtha Slum and Penthakata Nolia B slum in the Penthakata area in the Puri district of Odisha. The data collection methods employed for the study are participatory showing, in-depth interviews of government officials, oral histories and narratives, personal interviews of community members and focus group discussions.

Locating Penthakata slum in Odisha

Penthakata is the largest urban fisherfolk settlement in India (Salagrama, 2004), which is located in the Puri district of Odisha. The fisherfolk community who reside in Penthakata are the Telugu migrants 'Noliya' who have migrated decades back from Andhra Pradesh (Salagrama,2004). The fishing settlement is diverse, and over the years, social hierarchies of class and occupation developed within the community. This has led to the creation and spatial segregation of two dominant groups belonging to the same community. The Telugu group who reside in Chakratirtha slum are the socio-economically-culturally affluent and privileged group who are no longer dependent on fishing for their livelihood and call themselves "permanent" residents of Puri and discriminate against the "seasonal" Telugu migrant group living on Penthakata Nolia B slum because they are still engaged in fishing and migrate back to Andhra Pradesh during fish breeding season. The two groups living in two different slums

are a part of my study. The two distinct slums are taken into study to understand the variance in the encounters and experiences with the slum upgradation program.

Although, historically, the fishing community resided on the beaches of Puri for their traditional livelihood, i.e., fishing, they do not have legal rights to the land they occupied. The "illegal" occupation of land by the fishing community has led to a series of state-sponsored involuntary displacements and denial of formal municipal services for years.In the past, the municipality has drawn Resettlement and Rehabilitation plans for the settlements located on the beach which has triggered huge resistance from the Noliyas. Such relocation plans impact their source of livelihood by shifting them away from the beach. With the coming of the Jaga Mission, land rights were provided to the Noliya fishing community for the occupation of land, which gave legitimacy to their slums in Penthakata. Land rights were highly significant in their case as they ensured the security of tenure and protection from evictions.
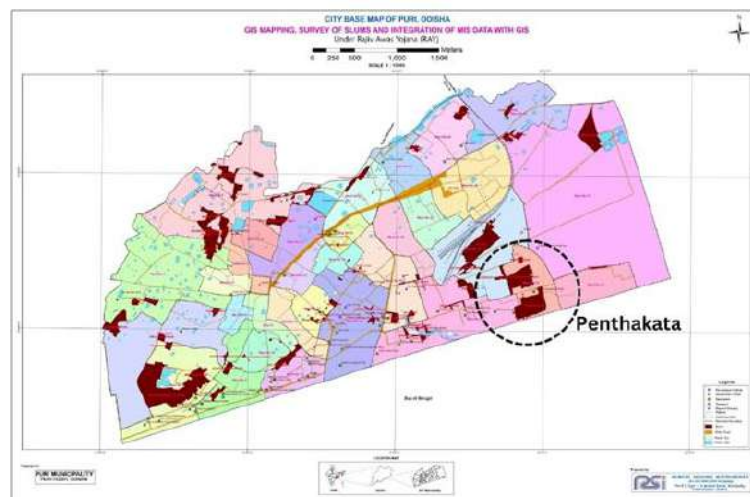
Figure 2: Location of Penthakata area in the Puri administrative boundary
Source: Puri Municipality Database
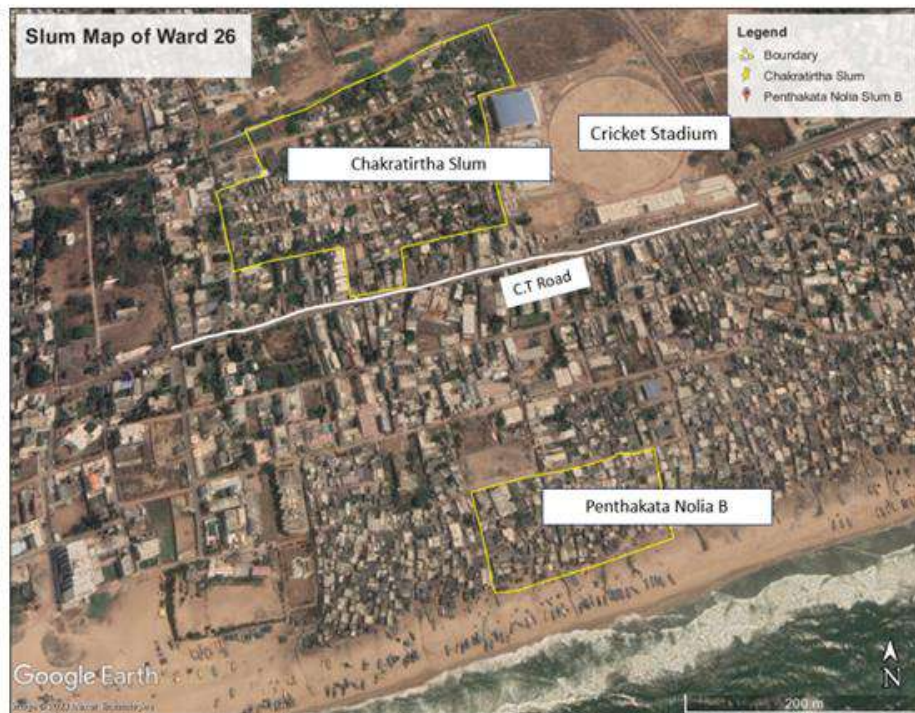
Figure 3: Research Site, Penthakata slums
Source: Google Earth

Decoding Jaga Mission: Understanding the On-ground Transformation of Slums into Liveable Habitats

A Journey from Unsafe Houses to Concrete Houses

One of the significant impacts of the Jaga Mission has been on the housing structures of the fishing community in both the slums. These slums are located at a highly vulnerable location, approximately 50 to 100 meters from the Bay of Bengal Sea. The spatial location makes the fishing community extremely vulnerable to natural disasters like cyclones and coastal flooding, which is frequent in Puri. The majority of the houses in both the slums were semi-kutcha, made of mud, bamboo, rice straws, and asbestos that are highly likely to suffer damage from cyclones. The socio-economically weak fishing community needed more finances to upgrade their housing structures. Post Jaga Mission, when the fishing community living in these slums received land rights, they could access housing subsidies of 2 lakhs under the Beneficiary led construction (BLC) component of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), which was interlinked with the Jaga Mission. This motivated the fishing community to construct more substantial concrete houses, which could protect them and safeguard their assets from damage to some extent.

In the last 1-2 years, the Chakratirtha Slum has undergone a substantial transformation as the majority of the households availed of the scheme and built concrete houses. On the other hand, the "seasonal" Telugu migrants living in the Penthakata Nolia B slum did not receive

subsidies under PMAY for house construction even after securing land rights from the government. This is because the Penthakata Nolia B slum falls under CRZ II.

"Hume kuch nahi mila hai, awas yojana k liye pooche the, lekin ek paisa bhi nahi diya. Yeh dekho patta bhi hai phir bhi nahi diya. Apne pocket se ghar banaya hai, 5-6 lakh lag gaye,abhi bhi kaam baaki hai" (I did not get anything, I did apply for Awas Yojana but I did not get any money.See,I have my patta.I spent around 5-6 lakhs from my own pocket to build this house and still the work is ongoing- A resident of Penthakata Nolia B Slum.

Figure 4: Dominant housing structures before and after Jaga Mission
Source: From author

Provision of Basic services and Infrastructure in Slums post-Jaga Mission

The fishing community in Penthakata face everyday problems of unclean water and water logging due to lack of stormwater drains. majority of households were dependent on "extra-legal" sources of electricity, and infrastructure facilities like roads, sewers, and street lights were inadequate and mostly dysfunctional within the slum. These slums had vast problems with open defecation because of lack of in-house toilets, sewerage connections and poorly maintained community toilets. With the coming of the Jaga Mission, the living conditions of the fishing community living in Chakratirtha Slum have substantially improved. The households have started receiving municipal services like piped water supply, electricity and garbage collection facilities. Most of the community-level infrastructure, like the community hall commonly known as the "parichaya" and the playground prescribed under this mission, were built inside the slum. The residents of Chakratirtha slum came together and decided to have an enclosed community hall so that it could act as an informal emergency cyclone

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shelter during times of disaster. The playground serves as an open leisure space for the community.

To a large extent, the mission has successfully addressed the everyday vulnerabilities in relation to poor housing and substandard living conditions, but the experiences of the two groups were different. In the Penthakata Nolia B slum, except for access to piped drinking water and electricity, most of the services and infrastructure were denied to the slum residents. The Puri municipality did not allow for the construction of in-house latrines, and the households are either dependent on the beach or the community toilet, which is in deplorable condition for defecation. The upgradation process in this slum is marked with delays and poor execution of work. Most of the facilities like community hall, playground, stormwater drains, and sewerage connections are not provided because the land where the slum is located is on CRZ II. The differential treatment of the local government towards the "seasonal Telugu migrants" is clearly evident. Even before CRZ policies came into effect, the fishing community had been residing on the beach for their livelihood, and they always faced discrimination from the larger society and local governments because of their migrant identity. The provincial government maintains a different stance towards seasonal migrants. It denies access to infrastructure but, on the other hand, provides sewer, stormwater drain connections and other infrastructural facilities to the hotels, resorts and restaurants constructed within the CRZ II. This shows the political economy of the local governments who, on the one hand, gives clearances to "tourism-based commercial developments" and, on the other hand, deny the fishing community access to housing subsidies, basic services and facilities for better housing and living conditions.

Role of Slum Dweller Associations: Empowering Slum Communities?

Often, slums are left ungoverned by the municipality and the state because of their dubious legal status, depriving the urban poor of basic services and substantial citizenship (Chatterjee, 2004). In Latin America, best practice upgrading programs are based on participatory approaches that promote citizenship (Rojas, 2010), decentralization and participation (Campbell,2003), and ways of empowering local communities by establishing local organizations. The Slum Dweller Association (SDA) is a community-led body that would drive the implementation work under the mission and provide a platform to collectivize their needs and put it forward to the local government via formal institutionalized channels.

But the on-ground reality of the Slum Dweller Association in both slums is different than what is written on paper.

"Kya hai SDA, yaha kisi ko nahi pata kisi committee k bare mein, koi community meeting nahi hui hai" (What is SDA, I don't think anyone knows about any committee,there has been no community meeting.)- A resident of Chakratirtha Slum.

SDAs as a body are non-existent for the community because people hardly know anything about the body, how it was formed, who the members are, and what its roles and

responsibilities are towards them. Development practitioners and urban planners, including Dasgupta and Beard (2007), Fritzen (2007), Mansuri and Rao (2004), and Platteau and Gaspart (2003) have pointed out the problems of elite capture and corruption at the community level, which hinders collectivisation and transfer of power to the community. Informal settlements are fertile grounds for the cultivation of political patron-client networks and rent-seeking behavior (Fox, 2014). It's a similar case of elite capture in the slums of Puri, and the nexus among the councilors, SDA members, municipality and contractors is clearly evident. Thus, the body becomes redundant because it works in isolation and hence fails to deliver the needs and demands of the community. The SDA became a tool for politicians to exploit funds and resources for personal gains rather than investing in slum infrastructure, maintenance and community development. In such scenarios, slum upgradation programs typically meet their ill-fate as they require sustained efforts of community associations to implement and maintain the physical improvements, ensure broad-based participation of people and bargain with the state for their rights.

Policy recommendations

1. Involvement of community in the 'planning' and 'monitoring' process -

The 'mission' document was limited in its scope for community participation. Involving communities in planning their neighborhood spaces, architectural designing of houses and monitoring the execution works can be integrated into the mission document.

2. Revamping of SDAs

The Slum Dweller Association is the cornerstone for the success of Jaga Mission. It thus needs to be revitalized through various mechanisms such as training of association members, mandating community meetings, and holding elections to SDA.

3. Social audits

The problem of poor quality and delays in execution can be checked through social audits conducted by community members themselves. Social audits are evaluator tools performed during or after post-completion of the program to ensure transparency and a democratic process.

Conclusion

Jaga Mission in Odisha is a well-thought-out pro-poor housing policy, at least in design. At a policy level, few housing policies in India aim to empower slum dwellers through land rights and in-situ upgradation. Such slum upgrading initiatives have their own merits. Still, they are often executed half-heartedly in terms of poor provisioning of infrastructure, delays in

execution, neglect of institutional structures and community participation. Although the question of efficiency, poor execution and disparities in access to amenities remains in Chakratirtha and Penthakata Nolia B slums, it can be resolved by timely strategic interventions.

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Annexure

7.2. Survey questionnaire for the community members

(Note: The interview was semi-structured and most of the questions were open-ended in nature)

Socio-Demographic Profiling
- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Occupation
- Literacy Status

a. No formal Education
b. Primary School
c. Secondary School
d. Diploma
e. Graduate/Post Graduate

- Do you think the intensity of cyclones has increased over the years?
- How many cyclones did you witness in your life?
- How far used to be the beach from the sea, let's say, 20-30 years from now?
- How much time did it take to reach the beach?
- How far is it now?
- Can you name the deadliest cyclone you have witnessed till now?
- Why was it the deadliest? Can you share some of your experiences with the cyclone?
- What were some of the major damages and losses you have suffered due to the cyclone?
- Did you go somewhere safe, like a cyclone shelter, to protect yourself? What did you take with yourself?
- How long did you stay there, and what was the condition there?
- What was the scenario like in the basti when you came back?
- Are you afraid of another cyclonic event?
- Do you think the changing climate is affecting your livelihood?
- Can you share details on the fish catch – quantity , quality of fishes , number of man hours spent at sea, and income generated from the catch ?

Physical Built Environment
- How was your housing condition (material, type and structure) before the Jaga Mission?
- Why did people start building concrete houses after Fani?

- Did you receive any rehabilitation assistance from the government to repair or rebuild houses after Fani? If yes, how much was it?
- Did you receive any housing subsidy under PMAY?
- If yes, what kind of materials did you use to build or upgrade your newly built house?
- How often do you invest in repair and reconstruction of the house?
- Do you think the newly built structure can protect you from natural disasters? If yes, then why?
- Will you run to the cyclone shelter the next time any cyclone hits? If yes, then why?
- Did you take additional loan for house construction from banks or other sources? Did having Pattas help you in securing bank loans?
- From whom do you generally take loans for house construction post-disaster ?
- What motivated you to rebuild your houses - cyclones, land rights (pattas) or housing subsidies?
- Why was it important to invest in concrete housing?

Infrastructure and basic Services Provisioning
- How did the unavailability or poor quality sanitation affect your situation during and post-disaster ? Explain.
- What is the condition now after the construction of in-house latrines and construction of community toilets at the slum level?
- What used to be the situation of flooding at the neighbourhood level, given the inadequacy of storm water drains pre-Jaga Mission?
- Were there sewerage network connections to households and stormwater drains in the slum earlier? If not, how did the inadequacy affect them, especially during cyclones?
- Was garbage collection service provided to the slum earlier? Does it happen now?
- What were the sources of water on which the households depended before the Jaga Mission? Any challenges faced related to it.
- Do you face problems of water shortages or access to clean water post-disasters? List down the challenges.
- Do you use piped drinking water?
- Did the provision of a clean piped water supply help minimise the issues of water shortage and contaminated water during and post-disasters?

Social Capital
- Did you seek help from family, friends and relatives to deal with and recover from the adverse impacts of natural disasters?
- If yes, what kind of help and at what stage of the disaster?
- Are you a member of SDA, volunteer group, union, club, SHG Or similar groups?

- Are these groups mobilised to reduce and recover from natural disasters? If so, how?
- Who resolves everyday slum level problems in the slum?
- Do you receive relief and rehabilitation assistance from external stakeholders other than the government?
- Who are the members of SDA? Are you aware of the workings of the SDA in the mission?
- How many meetings did they hold after the body came into existence?
- How involved are you in the planning and execution works of the Slum Upgradation program?

Essays

Hook, Line and Sinker: An Account of Gendered Vernaculars of Developmental Violence in Coastal Mumbai

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As Mumbai continues to be gripped by a fever of building anew, large-scale infrastructure projects have taken centre stage in the city's imaginary, and as much as this imaginary is deeply marked by the neoliberal political-economic order, it is, first and foremost, a product of the colonial state-led "rule of property" (Dossal, 2010)—which was a project designed to "consolidate emerging market(s) in urban land under colonial sovereignty" (Kamath and Dubey, 2020) while fundamentally churning the circulation of capital in order to create new "geographies of value" in the city (Ibid)—the legacies of which persist in the contemporary present as attempts to reclaim, build, transform the sea and adjoining commons into landed property. This kind of property regime is distinctly extractive in its preoccupation with ownership as an absolute (Singer as cited in Blomley, 2004) and subsequent dissolution of any customary claims on land, rendering them informal, if not illegal. This is what we call 'developmental gaze'—a method of analysis employed in this essay to make sense of the systems and processes that have facilitated a restrictive and splintered property regime in coastal Mumbai. Spatialising urban land in this binary fashion encourages a definitive, technical, and certain imagination of property relations such that any customary claim-making around property is devalued which is apparent in the capricious ways in which land use is being radically reconfigured, consequently dislodging indigenous Kolis as stewards of Mumbai's coastal commons.

However, addressing the categorical and material reworking of land–water commons require disentangling the question of development from a broader set of questions around land, neoliberalism and indigenity. For centuries, Kolis have inhabited the coast of what is now the Mumbai city region, claiming original inhabitancy ('sons of soil' or 'bhumiputra') and invoking a historical claim upon the city. Notwithstanding, Kolis and their relationship with the State, be it colonial, postcolonial or contemporary neoliberal, has presented precarity on multiple scales involving the physical, material, social and cultural reworking of Mumbai's coast. For instance, in talking about Malad's koliwada, Parikh (2021) writes: "During the pre-colonial and colonial era, the area between the settlements of Koli communities and the creek leading into the Arabian Sea was characterized by a stretch of shallow flats…These shallow waters were conducive to small-scale subsistence agriculture such as rice. These crops were managed and maintained by women [emphasis added]. Fishermen used to fish and swim in the wetland, treating it as a space for livelihood and leisure. [But] the wetland underwent a categorical transformation in land ownership under British colonial governance." (Ibid.) Ever since this categorical conversion of land use, it has privileged a morphology of reworking

commons into splintered private property and water into land—rhetoric that is made especially explicit in the ways koliwadas have either been transformed into garbage dumps (Parikh, 2021) or sites of large-scale infrastructure projects iconic of the neoliberal city or at worse, fragmented and disappeared. Now, "spatially squeezed and choked by surrounding urban developments," Koli fisherfolk have been compelled to turn away from their customary livelihoods (Kamath and Dubey, 2020). But the question one is forced to ask here is who are the winners and who are the losers in such an arrangement? How do we better understand the Koli claim to coastal commons? Is it possible, at all, to frame such claim-making without acknowledging the heterogeneity of the claim-makers as opposed to treating them as a homogenous subaltern subject? Here, dissecting the Koli claim is complicated by the uniqueness of Koli women's lived experiences—constituted by (in)visibility, vulnerability, and dispossession.

As an intrinsically communal activity, collective practices of governance and arbitration are especially important for the Kolis. Consider the Vesave Koli Jamat of Versova headed by a 'Patil'—a hereditary position helmed by a man—supported by a committee of male members called the 'panch'. Mondal (2017) writes how not only were Koli women (who constitute two-thirds of Mumbai's total Koli population [Bansi, 2022]) barred from participating in the panch committee until very recently but are also forced to pay 'chulla'—a contribution representing their traditional responsibility: the kitchen. However, as it turns out, this is an especially confusing arrangement because, in reality, Koli women are the primary actors—both buyers and sellers—in markets, responsible for going door-to-door or neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood to sell the surplus. But as surplus dwindles, Parikh (2021) finds that Koli women assume the dual responsibility of adapting to these (financial and ecological) changes and managing masculinity at home. If we zoom out a bit from the household, we find similar patterns of invisibility and dispossession speaking to multiple scales. Across Versova (Mondal, 2017), Trombay (Kamath and Dubey, 2020) and Malad (Parikh, 2021), spaces for fish-drying, which is traditionally 'woman's work' are fast shrinking. In koliwadas, even though communal lands are community-managed spaces used for activities such as fishing, boat repair, fish drying, and drying of nets (Shetty et al., 2007)—the non-recognition of this spatial decay by both the Koli jamat and the MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority) points towards a more complicated reality where Koli women experience dispossession from within and from above. Often, the Koli woman finds herself responsible for the collective but deprived of meaningful care networks she is liable to build and participate in.

Koli women, however, "respond to the duality of their responsibility by placing emphasis on the women of the community being socially and financially independent" (Bansi, 2022). With men spending substantial time away from home—either out in the sea or in search of jobs—Koli women have "developed a complex network of solidarity…shaping a sense of collective identity" (Soni, 2021)— a matrix through which older generations of fisherwomen pass on knowledge of fish selling and trading to younger generations "like an heirloom" (Bansi, 2022). Sociologist Dr. Niharika Banerjea describes these networks as "existing within the cracks and fragments of society" explaining that "the Kolis' informal structures of care arise

both as a result of the economic and gendered injustice they face and in resistance to it" (Banerjea as quoted in Soni, 2021). This solidarity reflects in the way koliwadas are spatially organised, as well: "Their houses look right into each other, their doors are always open, kids run through them all the time, and they do most household and business work together" (Parthasarthy, as quoted in Soni, 2021). But the State's neoliberal developmental gaze is such that market-driven urban agendas have transfigured koliwadas into "competitive landing strips for territorializing capital" (Kanuga, 2018), spatially squeezing what were typically communal spaces, leaving little space—material, social and cultural—to build informal structures of care and solidarity. "We shared [physical] space for work and other things, but we also shared an emotional and fun space where we could just hang out," said Hema, fondly recounting funny stories and encounters from the past few years (as quoted in Soni, 2021).

Even in community organisations such as the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) and the Maharashtra Macchimar Kruti Samiti (MMKS)—bodies that often interface with the local government in decision-making—women's participation is either limited or positively liminal in shaping negotiations with the State. For instance, Soni (2021) reports how two fish worker unions that advocated for relief during the pandemic were run by men, and therefore privileged demands relevant for fishermen who go out to sea such as "fuel subsidies, discounts on fishing nets, and compensation for hours lost on boats" and not so much the fisherwoman on land—resulting in policies that unsurprisingly, do little to aid fisherwomen. Another example is that of the Jawla dryers in Trombay Koliwada. As part of the relief fund offered by the state in the aftermath of Cyclone Tauktae, fishermen were offered direct cash transfers whereas fisherwomen were offered conditional cash transfers on the purchase of cold storage ice boxes (Kamath, 2024)—which is curious because no explanation was offered by authorities to explain why.

Often, practitioners and bureaucrats find themselves recommending polemical and at worst, rhetorical 'policy solutions' to the predicament of Koli women such as better participation, wider representation and installing accountability in traditional processes and bodies of decision-making. But as policy scholars, it is important for us to rescue deeply complex lived realities from such redundant and ritualistic incantations of solutions that are nothing but empty signifiers and instead work towards identifying the distinctiveness of Kolis as fishing communities, identify the differentiated vulnerabilities of Koli women, and discern their unique needs instead of subsuming them under the heterogenous label of small fish vendors all while ultimately aiming to trouble the contemporary neoliberal developmental gaze preoccupied with dispossessing through accumulation.

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Bridging the Gap: Addressing Disparities in Gender Identity Rights and Policy Implementation

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Sex and Gender Identity are two separate concepts. Sex is assigned at birth mostly depending upon your biological genitals and sometimes in cases of intersex babies, The doctor or the parent chooses to assign one sex at the time of birth. Gender Identity is how a person feels about themselves and how they internally feel to express themselves. (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.; Planned Parenthood, n.d.)

The Acronym LGBTQIA+ stands for
- Lesbian, (a woman who is attracted to women only - sexually, emotionally or romantically)
- Gay, (a man who is attracted to men only - sexually, emotionally or romantically)
- Bisexual, (A Man or a Woman or any person attracted to two genders - sexually, emotionally or romantically)
- Transgender, (the sex assigned at birth does not align with one's gender identity)
- Queer/Questioning, (An Umbrella term for everyone who does not identify as homosexual or cis-gender)
- Intersex, (A person who is born with physical, sex characteristics (SC) and biological-chromosomal differences than male or female SC)
- Asexual (May be romantically attracted but not sexually attracted or neither)
- Plus denotes various other gender identities and sexualities. (Social Protection and Human Rights, n.d.)

Gender Identity is a person's innate feeling of how the person feels which can be either male, female, genderqueer, non-binary, a girl, a boy, gender non-conforming or agender. The gender identity may or may not be the same as the sex assigned at birth by the medical practitioner. When the sex assigned at birth aligns with the gender identity then the person is cis-gender. Gender non-conforming person or a non-binary folk is a person who does not align to the sex assigned at birth and does not abide by the binary construct. (Nazariya, a queer feminist resource group, n.d.)

"SOGIESC "stands for Sexual orientation, Gender Identity & Expression, Sex Characteristics. Sex Characteristics can be anything related to one's physical features pertaining to genitals, sex characteristics, chromosomes, gonads or sex hormones. It can also cover secondary physical features which evolve during or after puberty. (IOM LGBTIQ+ Focal Point Jenn Rumbach, 2020)

Policy Landscape

Ghosh (2017) in her paper "State, Citizenship And Gender-Variant Communities In India" talks about the first time India started taking any interest in gender-variant communities post-Independence, it was only concerning AIDS. Until then, India's policies have rather been ignorant of a large section of fantasised, over-sexualised and sometimes regarded as someone who has been given some sort of powers by god. Abhina Aher who sits on the National Council of Transgender Persons board currently in the year 2024 highlights that the average cost of living for transgender persons is 3 times of that of a man or a woman (Chaudhary & Agrawal, 2022). Queer workers come from different intersections and politics of identities and layers of oppression which are heavily unaccounted for while making any policy in general. The landmark case of NALSA vs UOI in 2014 recognised transgender persons as the third gender and offered guidelines. Although the 'Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019' had its limitations, it played a primal role in establishing a groundwork for a more equitable future. (सामाजिक न्याय और अजधकाररता मंत्रालय अजधसूचना न, 2020) Several guidelines which were given during the hearing of the 2014 judgement were not consistent with the making of the "Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019 and Rules 2020"

Given below are a few specific policies that are exclusionary in nature towards the queer community and thereby hamper their potential to become active participants in the labour force:

The 'Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 & Rules 2020' (सामाजिक न्याय और अजधकाररता मंत्रालय अजधसूचना न, 2020) :

- Primarily, the Act aims to end discrimination against transgender persons. The Act was framed in order to protect the rights of transgender people for their economic and social welfare.
- "The Act failed the community in a lot of ways, Rules 2020 tried mending a few of them like no physical screening needed (Self-identification of gender) and employment provisions and safeguarding etc."
- "The Act failed to provide safeguarding rules for employment opportunities and derailed mention of horizontal reservations made under NALSA judgement in 2014 for transgender and intersex persons."
- "The Act fails to acknowledge non-binary as a specific gender identity and any employment provisions for them. (सामाजिक न्याय और अजधकाररता मंत्रालय अजधसूचना न, 2020) Notwithstanding, the protection of rights in the private sector remains inadequate for non-binary, transgender individuals, and those across the gender and sexual spectrum".
- For the last 11 months, Garima Greh's Funds allocated by "the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment " have not been released. Directors and programme

managers of these shelter homes recognised and functioning under the government are finding it difficult to run their job fairs, training and even to keep up with the rationing for these homes. (Sengupta, 2023)

- The Act failed to offer Menstrual Hygiene Management services to transgender people.
- Ignores the fact that the Transgender person comes from different intersections of identities and layers of oppression.
- The Act failed to implement any monitoring mechanism to safeguard the essence of the policy and its implementation.
- The Act fails to provide any specific provisions for intersex people and protection of the killing of infant foetuses of intersex babies. (Brindaalakshmi, 2023)

Case Study: Karnataka's Implementation of Horizontal Reservations:

Karnataka's initiative to implement 1% horizontal reservations for transgender individuals sets a precedent for inclusive policies. By acknowledging diverse identities within the transgender community, this measure aims to mitigate systemic barriers and promote equitable opportunities.

What is Horizontal Reservation?

Horizontal reservation is not a new concept. This has been used for women and persons with disabilities. Transgender people come in intersections of different identities. Segregating transgender as one category and not acknowledging their caste identity, their disability identity would be unfair. Unlike vertical reservation, Horizontal reservation would cut across all the caste reservations. This would ensure that 1% of all the reservations would be reserved for the transgender community. Claiming multiple identities would only make targeted welfare schemes a success for the transgender community. Grace Banu, Nikita Mukhdiyal and Shameebha Patil who is a Dalit transgender activist have been at the forefront of this struggle. (Rajamane, 2021)

Impact of Exclusionary Policies

Exclusionary policies and frameworks push transgender people into poverty. Most of these policies entail education and employment. Transgender persons are forced by the law of society to compete with their cis-gendered peers in terms of recruitment. Dr Ruth John Paul Koyyalla was rejected by 15 hospitals just at the beginning of their recruitment process is one prime example. This incident took place in Hyderabad in 2018. ('Beyond Binaries: Understanding Sexual Identities and Queer Rights Issues In India - IMPRI Impact And Policy Research Institute', 2023). Hence, horizontal reservation recognises the fact that Transgender people come in various intersections of caste, sexuality and other minority groups. (Singh, 2023)

Shamibha Patil and Nikita Mukhdiyal lead Transgender Hakka Adhikar Sangarsh Samiti from Maharashtra. The Samiti has been voicing out in protest for 1% horizontal reservations, part of affirmative action which is covered in Article 15(3) of the Indian constitution for transgender persons across different communities and from each vertical category. The reservation should be implemented nationally by the centre as one of the amendments under Transgender Persons Protection of Rights Rules 2020. (Double Standard? Maha Govt Gives 10% Reservation to Marathas But Denies 1% Quota to Transgenders, 2024)

Conclusion

The discrepancy between gender identity rights and policy implementation highlights the urgency of inclusive measures to uphold the dignity and rights of marginalised communities. Recognizing the multifaceted identities within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum and enacting comprehensive policies, such as horizontal reservations, are imperative steps towards fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. By challenging exclusionary norms and advocating for affirmative action, we can pave the way for a future where every individual is embraced and empowered, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

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Interviews

Caste & Nutrition

An Interview with Dr. Sylvia Karpagam

Noel Sakhi

Dr. Sylvia Karpagam is a public and community health doctor and researcher who has been working on access to healthcare with a focus on regulation of the private sector and the social determinants of health. She sees caste as an important determinant affecting health and nutrition She has worked with communities, healthcare workers, activists, lawyers and researchers to build evidence for advocacy with policy makers. In our conversation we delve into how casteist practices affect policy making around food, nutrition and health.

Niti-Samvaad (NS): One of the main topics that we would like to focus on is the role of caste in food politics and food policies in India. When we talk about caste, a lot of times in India people think of it as simply an identity or a monolith. But in your experience, how have you seen it play out in the way that it shapes the way that we think about food and nutrition in India?

Dr. Sylvia Karpagam (SK): I think one of the problems in public policy is that it's always seen as something that is done by the experts. If you look at how caste manifests, I think it manifests right from the way policies are envisaged, the influence actors have in these public policies, right up to the implementation. So, I think caste is very present, especially in the context of food. People tend to very interestingly take offense every time caste is called out, people tend to collate it with religion. If someone like me who's not a Hindu criticizes casteist practices or policies, you are labelled as anti-Hindu and therefore I think the discourse or the narrative stops there. If you look at the way the policies are made. It's again a very narrow caste group that is deciding the policies. When it comes to food, it has a lot of consequences.

NS: One of the things that you've written about extensively is the midday meals scheme. In India, midday meals are seen as one of the most successful examples of redistributive policies but one problem that you've constantly highlighted is the uneven implementation of the policy especially about the inclusion of certain items like eggs as part of the midday meals. Can you tell us why you think that a better diet moreover, the implementation of such policies is necessary in this case?

SK: There's a difference between providing food and there's a difference between providing nutrition. In India, the focus and attention even by civil society organizations has been on food. There's this constant talk about grains, rice, and pulses, and of late there are conversations around millets, which again are grains. In terms of nutritional science, if you

look at foods, all foods are not the same. The nutrient quality of foods is not discussed and most of these are left out because they tend to be a little more expensive. They can be subsidized and the government can invest in those foods if they have the political will. But apparently, that's none. How caste operates is the same for nutrient-dense food when it comes in the form of dairy, like butter or paneer or ghee or milk or yogurt, it's considered pure but with the same Composition, nutrient-dense foods like meats, eggs, and poultry, fish are considered as impure. So scientifically, it makes no sense. It comes purely from caste illogic, I wouldn't say logic, which qualifies one food as pure and therefore consumed by only a narrow caste group, primarily consumed by a narrow caste group. I think this significantly contributes to malnutrition, anemia, and B12 deficiency and they significantly contribute to poor health in India.

And it's very unusual that if you have such high levels of stunting for malnutrition, all the other deficiencies will not coexist. So, in terms of policy, also what's happening is policymakers pick up one deficiency for example anemia. And then they'll say to treat anemia, we'll give you iron. These policies don't work because they fail to see nutrition in terms of food and have reduced it to ingredients. The replacement of those ingredients is becoming very corporate-centric and corporate-dependent. It still moves away from the realm of science, because there's no real scientific basis for many of the interventions that are being planned.

NS: You said in *The Wire* article that Akshaya Patra, one of the main providers of midday meal contracts in several states, has an unscientific stance which has impeded the nutrition that is being given to children through this program. Can you take us through such challenges that are preventing the upscaling of the midday meal program to the potential that it could achieve?

SK: The Midday Meal Scheme, Public Distribution Systems, and Integrated Child Development Services are schemes that are under the realms of social justice, but there are a lot of barriers to people accessing nutrient-dense foods like black meats, eggs, dairy, fish, and poultry. These schemes have at large a cereal-centric approach. In terms of the functioning of medieval schemes like school kitchens, the intention should be to cultivate a culturally suitable diet for the child. You'd be a little more sensitive in terms of what the children are used to eating in their homes.

It was meant to meet certain protein requirements and calorie requirements but increasingly, these contracts have been centralized and given to centre-controlled agencies. These entities have a lot of caste and religious agenda. They practice their casteist practices overtly without hiding it, a lot of the ideas that they have about food come not from science, but from a caste basis. They divide food into *sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic* foods. And most of the nutrient-dense foods have been pushed into tamasic foods or rajasic foods. They're denoting that if you eat meat and eggs you are going to stimulate all your baser instincts, like you're going to be more violent, aggressive, and lustful. These devise connotations to food have become a redundant casteist practice. Food that is bland, tasteless, homogeneous, and nutrient-poor has

become an excuse for sattvic by adding notions of purity to it. In the guise of sattvic, you're giving children food that is completely devoid of any kind of basic nutrition.

There's this very casteist mindset that is ingrained in us that if it's a poor child, then the child should eat whatever is given. We as mere spectators have autonomy over their dietary practices. It's almost like a form of eugenics. The midday meal has now become the target of such a practice. Another problem that the country faces is the problem of corruption. In Karnataka, the board of Akshaya Patra had to resign due to the numerous charges of corruption levied against the organization. Akshaya Patra has been called out for siphoning off funds meant for the mid-day meal scheme, using MDM as a means to get crores of donations that are unaccounted for, and violating the menu prescribed by the government. This can be largely attributed to the huge amount of social capital they have to walk into ministerial offices and abuse power to influence decision-making.

On the other spectrum, we have international groups like the Eat Lancet Commission, funded by billionaires pushing for veganism. Riding on the back of the climate change crisis their prerogative is to portray meat as a problem. Led by corporate narratives, their immediate target becomes the midday meal scheme in India to portray it as an exemplary example of vegetarianism and low carbon footprint food. They've completely erased the fact that we (India) also have high levels of malnutrition. It's horrible that they're using India as a model for food for the rest of the world and I think that's going to have huge consequences in terms of the nutrition for the country.

NS: The recipients of these programs are people from the poorer strata of society, especially people from marginalized backgrounds. A lot of these kids in government schools are scheduled castes and tribes. Studies have already highlighted that there is such a large malnutrition problem within those communities and pushing for a plant-based diet in those communities that are already suffering from these health challenges aggravates the existing issue. When you think about a program like this, which has been implemented across the country, do you think that there is a better way to bring more uniformity in its implementation? What do you think are some of how it can be improved to start resolving the malnutrition issue at the very root level?

SK: I don't think there should be a uniform approach to this. Moving beyond these schemes, if you look at a lot of communities, they do have traditional food that they eat, which is again being attacked from multiple fronts. For example, there were incidents of unethical reporting about eggs from the West, where they said that eggs have cholesterol. For several years, doctors and medical professionals have discouraged and vilified patients from having eggs which has eventually affected people's access to it. Eggs are a very good source of nutrition. The government needs to sift through and see what the current research states about the nutritional elements of eggs. The guidelines on cholesterol have been changed. There's no limit in terms of cholesterol. The same is the case with saturated fats. Saturated fats are important to absorb our vitamins, if you're having a vitamin A deficiency and you're just being given vitamin A supplements without fat in the diet, then it's not going to absorb the vitamin A. It is the responsibility of the Indian Medical Association and Government to

sensitize people about the importance of Eggs and Saturated Fats in the diet, actively, because there's already a lot of damage that has been done.

It's a well-known fact that beef is a chief source of protein. It's culturally eaten by a vast section of people from different communities as organ meats especially are extremely nutrient-dense. There is a myth that the Dalit community is malnourished because they don't know. Research has reinforced this wrong notion that Dalit communities or Adivasi communities don't know, are ignorant, and don't care for their children which is untrue. They have a sound and organic understanding of what nutritious food is and those foods (Dried Fish, Dried Meat, Beef, Organ Meat) are being removed from their plates through laws, policies, and propaganda. The midday meal scheme and the ICDS have to be backed by science and not by ideology or propaganda, which is currently what is making the decisions and schemes about food in the country.

NS: We've seen cattle slaughter vans and meat shops being forced to close which is a trend against meat-eating practices. India being a vegetarian country is a myth because the majority of our country does consume meat in one form or the other. There has been this narrative built around how plant-based diets are superior or pure, do you see this causing a long-term impact on the general health of the country?

SK: There was a study conducted last year that talks about states where cattle slaughter bans have been instated, the haemoglobin of the beef-eating communities or women in beef-eating communities has dropped by one to two points. That is a significant amount because it means that there is an anaemia crisis in the country and you're taking away the foods that are useful in addressing anaemia. We're seeing the aftermath of it causing a long-term impact on the general health of the country. This is especially true for post-COVID patients who have lost their livelihoods and receive precarious incomes and with schemes not operating properly their subsistence is in question. With the current government, it's a myth. when they say Hindus don't eat meat. For a lot of Hindus, meat is something they have been eating traditionally.

While I think the pushback is important, criminalizing these foods in public spaces, and trying to omit these foods from institutions, colleges, and universities sends a very wrong message because we are considered as a country with diversity and this includes diversity in dietary habits. Diverse food makes nutritional sense. The more food you consume from more food groups, the more likely you are to have all the nutrients that your body needs. Eating one kind of food while criminalizing and erasing the other food groups is going to aggravate malnutrition. The effects of malnutrition cannot be reversed, it is going to have effects on future generations as well. Children of malnourished parents are not going to reach their maximum heights or their maximum potential.

Post-COVID, the government, if it was serious about where the country is headed, would have inquired into how people's accessibility to basic foods is affected. I think more people should put aside their caste and religious prejudices and start demanding these as electoral demands.

We need a government that is more scientific, more sensible, and more progressive in its vision for future generations rather than those that suffice the current political interests.

NS: One of the sub-themes of our conference is community-oriented policy making. How do we empower communities to fight for better policies that will benefit them? As someone who's worked extensively in public health, how do you think that we can empower communities to fight for an India that works for them?

SK: In terms of policy making in health, the decisions are more or less expert-driven and the experts come from a very narrow caste and class group, completely disconnected from what's happening in the rest of the population so I feel representation is important.

The idea that people are going to be mere spectators to calamities has to be removed from the heads of policymakers. These spaces have to be opened up because people with lived experience i;e persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, people living with chronic diseases, senior citizens, and young people who bring in their own experiences to make the health system much more comprehensive, accessible and centered around principles of social justice. The COVID pandemic was a testimony to the fact that the public health sector in India is completely underfunded. It's struggling to meet even the basic needs and requirements of the population. The private healthcare sector in India is unregulated, unaccountable, and unethical in many ways. There is no oversight on this system which purely functions on a business model. Even the idea of a public-private partnership while it appears like there's an equal partnership is often untrue. The involvement of corporations and multinational agencies in decision-making hinders transparency and accountability as they take place behind closed doors. These are things that need to be discussed in the public domain. in a genuine way. We need a public health cadre trained in the Indian context, not someone who's gone to the US for two years and comes back to think that they have an upper hand due to their social capital. So yes the need of the hour is to mobilise the public health sector with a people-centric approach within an Indian context.

Reclamation of the Indian Cinematic Narrative

A Conversation with Somnath Waghmare

Mayank Majumdar & Noel Sakhi

Somnath Waghmare is an internationally-acclaimed documentary filmmaker based in Maharashtra. His documentary Battle of Bhima Koregaon was screened at the Dalit Film and Cultural Festival at Columbia University, New York. His latest film Chaityabhoomi was screened at the London School of Economics. He holds an M.Phil from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, where he is pursuing his PhD.

How does one holistically cover the manifestation of marginalization? Is it bound by dimension? We delve deeper into this question in our interaction with Waghmare.We are immensely grateful for his profound insights into the dynamics of power, representation, and resistance within the cinematic landscape and congratulate him on his recent documentary "Chaityabhumi".

Unveiling Caste Hierarchy in Indian Cinema

Waghmare begins our education by shedding light on the entrenched structures of power within society. This pattern has found itself translated into Indian cinema where narratives predominantly centre on the elite, dominant castes, the stories of marginalized communities being conspicuously absent. Despite its veneer of progressiveness, Bollywood, by banking on the popularity of its superstars, subliminally perpetuates this narrative through props such as the Janeu.

Given the current political climate where the marginalised are fighting for a seat at the table,

Waghmare stresses the urgency of reclaiming this space to accurately represent the rich diversity and complexities of Indian society. Through his films, he endeavours to amplify the voices of the marginalized, providing a poignant portrayal of their lived realities and cultural assertions.

Evolution of Dalit Representation in Cinema

Waghmare attributes the dearth of Dalit representation, or at least its authentic portrayal, to Savarna hegemonic control. However, while paying homage to the seminal work of Jabbar Patel, he marks the paradigm shift in contemporary cinema catalysed by the assertive storytelling of visionaries like Pa Ranjith and Nagraj Manjule. He extols these narratives that

offer a counter-hegemonic discourse while simultaneously celebrating Dalit agency and identity.

Navigating Censorship and Media as a Tool for Advocacy

While the spectre of state censorship may forever loom over artistic expression, Waghmare urges filmmakers to traverse the fine line between creative autonomy and state scrutiny. He fervently cautions against slipping into tokenism, reductive caricatures and worst of all-commodifying marginality for academic or commercial gain. Media and Cinema can be potent tools for advocacy, he maintains, so long as they authentically represent lived experiences.

Towards Economic Empowerment

Waghmare tells us of the formidable challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing resources and opportunities within the industry. The sustained amplification of marginalized voices requires the bolstering of economic autonomy through the establishment of production houses and fostering collaborative networks. For him, this process is imperative for the preservation of artistic integrity.

Chaityabhumi's Journey

Waghmare's film delves into the posthumous legacy of Dr. BR Ambedkar and the vindication of his ideals by his followers. Through this, Waghmare wishes to eschew the prevalent trope of Dalits as victims by choosing instead to illuminate their agency and resilience in navigating social structures.

The Intersectionality of Globalisation, Labour & Caste:

An Interview with Dr. Avatthi Ramaiah

Noel Sakhi

Dr. Avatthi Ramaiah is a Professor at the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He obtained his M.A. (Social Work) in 1984 from Loyola College, University of Madras, M.Phil. (Population Studies) in 1987 and Ph.D. (Sociology) in 1999 from the Jawaharlal Nehru University. His areas of academic interest pertains to the broader areas of caste and development.

Niti-Samvaad (NS): In one of your papers titled 'Dalits to Accept Globalisation', you've talked about the history of neglect that Indian governments post-Independence have shown towards Dalit upliftment and about the positive impact of globalisation on Dalits and the marginalized. Could you give us an overview of how globalisation has impacted the marginalised in ways that state measures couldn't achieve? Has India been able to achieve what you envisioned while writing the paper?

Dr. Avatthi Ramaiah (AR): The very fact that I am sitting here is an outcome of the state initiative. When I say that globalisation has been of help, this doesn't imply that I completely deny state policies and its positive effect but it's rather a critical approach towards the populous opposition towards globalization. Globalization should not be projected as a hindrance for the marginalised. The problems of the caste system as argued by Dr B R Ambedkar did not end post colonization. Even today, there is untouchability, there are atrocities and crimes against the SC/STs after more than 70 years of independence. The argument made in my paper was a sentiment as to why Dalits shouldn't be worried about global sanctions. After all, what do you have to lose? At least globalization has paved ways for greater opportunities. Firstly, meritocracy required for jobs in the Indian industry looks at employability from a caste perspective and in their dominant understanding, the Dalits are not meritorious or productive to be employed. Secondly, technology has had a positive role in shaping the lives of the vulnerable. People from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been able to migrate rather easily to settle abroad. Those who should and would fear globalisation are people who own industries, who sell their product with the foreign investment and divestments. These are the challenges of the local capitalist in a fight against global capitalists. It is not a problem for the Dalits who own nothing and whose plight still remains unheard by institutions.

There is caste illogic when it comes to representation. Brahmin's entry is beyond their population. They take up around 90 percent of seats in every occupational sphere in India. Thus, the answer lies in putting an end to over-representation of any community which has been represented beyond their population. The principles of proportionality when applied in India withdraw the entry barriers for the marginalized in terms of representation.

NS: Social location is an important aspect of inclusive policy making because of how normalized it is for the affluent to make policies for the marginalized. Most of the spaces like civil society organizations, newsrooms, as you said, administrative positions as well, are dominated by the upper caste. On the other side, we also see the upper caste disregard the reservation policy with the same privilege and the same social location. How then do we discourage plutocratic policy making or a policy making which is influenced by the wealthy and also how do we increase sensitivity and acceptance amongst the UCs about representation?

AR: Sensitivity is a very unfortunate position. It is not that people in India are insensitive or there is a lack of awareness amongst them to understand caste. "If somebody is sleeping, you can wake them up but if somebody is pretending to be asleep, he will snore even more." The educated classes know why they perpetuate caste discrimination thus it makes sensitisation programmes a medium for the upper castes to feel better about themselves. Social location in a caste society is made up of a mechanized hierarchy.

Even the interjection between poverty and caste is intricately bound to please the brahmin caste. A brahmin being poor is seen as a misfortune whereas a person from the SC/ST community being under the realms of poverty is the norm and their fate. India is a country which sensationalizes the plight of a brahmin for being poor and questions if a Dalit manages to come out of the system to hold land and wealth. The atrocities and brutality that Dalits face in India is a testament to the social barriers that the caste system has created. Dalits who might be economically better off now still go through social ostracisation at various levels and environments.

There is caste illogic when it comes to representation. Brahmin's entry is beyond their population. They take up around 90 percent of seats in every occupational sphere in India. Thus, the answer lies in putting an end to over-representation of any community which has been represented beyond their population. The principles of proportionality when applied in India withdraw the entry barriers for the marginalized in terms of representation.

Here's an unpopular opinion on Reservation.

Currently most private academic institutions in India, even the liberal ones will argue for merit. We can let reservations be based on economic criteria rather than social stigma because as of today there are no caste communities left out of the purview of the reservation system. Even then, people who get abused for reaping its benefits remain the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Community. The reservation system today has become a tool to

perpetuate caste and caste-based discrimination because the only people threatened for accessing it are the marginalised. Thus, there's an urgent need to reform policies and state measures to implement a social system based around the social evil that is marginalisation. When it comes to laws related to untouchability and atrocities there is an insincere implementation of such laws and people who are bound to protect the marginalised end up being the perpetrators of violence instead. The blatant misuse and ignorance shown towards violence towards Muslims, Christians, Dalits and women needs to be tackled with just measures.

There is a deliberate effort from the Brahmin caste to undermine the efforts of minorities in nation building and in attaining India's freedom. The immediate question that arises then is Why haven't we gotten rid of such a regressive practice that is the caste system? The answer to that lies in understanding that this caste system serves the greater purpose of the brahmins to maintain their role in the power structure. The division of caste into shudra and non-shudra caste, that is the lower caste and upper caste is to preserve the hierarchy and this creates a detrimental impact on those at the bottom of the caste system.

The constitution clearly says that fraternity is the ultimate goal. Fraternity means oneness, the feeling of '*bhaichara*' (brotherhood), the feeling that we are all a part of one community, a community called India and the people of one nation, that is the dream of the Constitution. The constitutional preamble also underlines the way to achieve it through liberty and equality. It is only when each and every individual of this community experiences liberty, equality and social justice that India as a nation grows. If you are honest in implementing and ideating policies through this lens then we would have resolved social evils such as the caste system way before we knew it. We would have emerged as one of the most powerful nations not one that is governed by the GDP but one that evaluates the loves we share with each other irrespective of their orientation.

NS: India has a history of practicing social exclusion in various ways. Untouchability as a social practice is a topic of the present and still exists in India. Would you say that exclusion has expanded to other forms to include economic as well as political exclusion?

AR: Caste is a very dominant reality in most parts of rural India and presently it has permeated to the cities as well. There is a notion that social exclusion in caste is only practised in rural areas but when we come to urban economies it is even more isolated and brutal. There are several programs to combat these issues. What we lack is a political will to implement them. The data on the efficacy, the list of beneficiaries and how well it has permeated on ground are nowhere to be found. From post-Independence till the present, there is no record to evaluate how well certain communities have fared in comparison and probably it is in their vested interest to keep it that way.

By saying that going for a caste census perpetuates casteism is an absurd argument that lacks logic. One should go for a survey irrespective of arguments to see which community is

lacking and then frame policies on that basis of the survey. The absence of data is a threat towards the dignity of the marginalised.

Public policy should take into consideration all the interwoven aspects of the society. The social burden one carries and shoulders right from childhood is as important as the economic deprivation. There should be a balance of these intersectional ideas when we introduce policies and support mechanisms for the marginalised. We often ignore that the Reservation Policy came as a means for those communities that suffer from immense amounts of social discrimination and untouchability. The absence of such a policy raises the apprehensions of the society acting against them and flickers the scope for them to enter the realms of education, employment and social cohesion which in turn is the economic exclusion that should be addressed.

NS: What are the institutional mechanisms in place to protect their rights and how as policy students can we contribute to building fraternity between the oppressor and the oppressed?

AR: If one looks at this issue very pragmatically, this is not a conservative issue. You have minority commissions; you have a commission for scheduled castes but the role doesn't end there. The major problem is not something within the policy sphere but it is of the mind. Unless people who hold power, the so-called majority, make an effort in sensitising themselves about the plight of minorities it is a difficult task to move forward within the process of policymaking.

The dominant opinion has been clouded by prejudices against the minorities. It has become common for people to practice the form of social exclusion that perpetuates hierarchy through power politics. The moment you are made to feel like you're a minority and they tell you to "Go to where you came from, You are in my Nation" words like these affect the fraternity that the nation was built on. The unfortunate aspect of academia is that the moment minorities cling together and strive to live in one place they will state that that's a form of ghettoization and connote that it's their choice to live in such a situation. Ghettoization is not their choice but it imparted on them. It is the choice they are left with so as to reclaim social cohesiveness amongst their own community. It is unnatural to expect minorities who face brutalities, threats, and fear of living in one place that they will show their nationalism freely only for it to be questioned at a later stage.

That kind of ambiance should be created in a country so that everybody is accommodated and to oversee that their rights are not violated. The so-called majority has to take a step forward and see that the minorities do not feel left out, excluded, or fearful. So, it is their moral duty to ensure that everybody feels warm enough for issues and policies to be highlighted towards them.

NS: That's very insightful for us. In one of your papers, you stated that social work professionals look at caste as economic back holders rather than caste based discrimination. More often than not, CSOs and NGOs that employ these professionals are not free from caste

prejudices. How should social sciences work, research, and document in safeguarding the interests of minorities and marginalized people?

AR: Social Sciences professions are dominated by people from the upper caste and their work on caste lacks experience. With a lot of protests here at TISS, we introduced Dalit and Tribal Studies as one of the specializations. The history behind such an initiative is my work in the particular area. The plight of Dalits challenged social work professions to look and do things differently. Social work professionals throughout India, by and large, think that teachers in elementary learning should not talk about caste. That's a very archaic and condescending stand to take as academicians. By not talking about it you are further contributing to a system of oppression against the SC/ST's.

We want the entire nation and population to grow irrespective of caste, gender, or religious background. Everybody should be given an opportunity and that is why these specializations were introduced in Tata Institute. We hope at least in the future, social work institutions throughout the country take up the question of caste seriously, come out with a new curriculum, and study about how caste affects an individual's rights, privileges, and freedom. Students should be sent to village areas to understand how caste operates and why caste brutalities take place.

Caste is a serious issue that the social work profession has ignored all the time. They think that everything is in the hands of the powerful but Dr B R Ambedkar asked this beautiful question "Why should a millionaire fall at the feet of a penniless sadhu?" Further than money being a tool for economic empowerment, your social identity and caste position is what defines your role at least in the Indian context.

"Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains." A call of unity by Karl Marx. If you call workers of India to unite, they will ask you first if you're a Brahmin worker or Dalit worker? Brahmin workers will be happy to unite with the other Brahmin workers. The Brahmin workers will however not unite with the Dalit workers that is why Baba Saheb defines that the Hindu proletariat and Hindu bourgeois are of the largest case, he said, bourgeois and proletariat. He clearly said they are Hindu bourgeois and Hindu proletariat, which means they are qualitatively different. The Hindu bourgeois will align only with the upper-caste bourgeois. And the Hindu proletariat will align only with the upper-caste poor.

Similarly, across castes, this unity, and mobilisation will not take place. In my opinion, it's still a reality which is why Marxism is not intended into power because there is stark division in realms itself. To a large extent those who advocate the ideas of marxism are also the ones who have prejudices against caste realities because they ignore the caste struggles.. Unless social work understands how caste operates and how it is a determining factor in every individual's life, in every individual's decision-making process, you will not be able to address it. So, I appeal to all social work institutions to take up caste questions as part of their social work teachings and practices.

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