



The Department of Sociology And Anthropology

2020: Rethinking Structure

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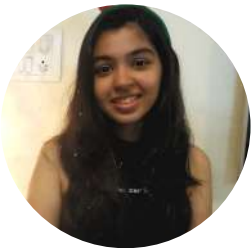
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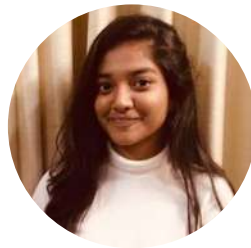
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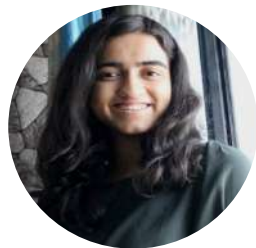
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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Team Eidos is extremely grateful to have the opportunity to publish an edition this year despite the circumstances. This would not have been possible if not for the earnest responsiveness and enthusiasm of our writers. We truly believe their work and dedication reflects in the journal. We also owe our deepest thanks to the Editorial Board- Vanshika Jain, Harshali Shinde, Kshiti Vikas, Priyanka Joshi, Vani Sharma and Stuti Kute for their constant guidance to the writers and their tireless drive to contribute to the journal.

We are thankful for the boundless innovation and creativity of the Graphics team. A big thanks to Chief of Graphics and Layouts- Arfa Sirguroh, Graphics Team Members- Megha Udeshi, Manasi Hegde and Khushi Shah. We also thank the team of illustrators for beautifying the magazine. Our gratitude to the Marketing Team- Shyla Verma and Alysha Mascarenhas for spreading the words of Eidos to all our readers.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the professors of the Department- Dr.Pranoti Chirmuley, Ms. Radhika Rani, Ms. Ankita Gujar, Dr. Sahana Sen and Ms. Arpit Gill, for their continuous support and guidance and for their valuable inputs in honing the journal. Team Eidos owes a special thanks to faculty co-ordinator Ms. Ankita Gujar whose unrelenting support and counsel encouraged us to always put our best foot forward.

We would also like to thank the writers of the 2 seminar papers from this year's annual Seminar of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology on the theme "Cults" and the staff and students who helped us incorporate them in the journal.

We sincerely express our gratitude to Mr. Richard Jacob, our guest interviewer. As one of the founders of the "Lockdown Relief Helpline", Mr. Jacob has provided the readers of our journal a rooted perspective of the events of 2020 and serves as an inspiration to all of us. We would like to thank him for his work and his contribution to the journal.

And finally, thank you to our readers who have decided to embark on this journey with us. We hope you have a wonderful reading experience!

EDITORIAL

As Team Eidos set out to choose a theme for Eidos 2020-21, there was a common sentiment that, we had to acknowledge the drastic change in the world around us.

The year 2020 brought in tow a series of events that forced us to look at the world in a new light. Events like environmental crises, political instability, prejudice and a pandemic have upended our previous perception of structure. As a journal, we realised that the events of the year needed to be contextualised through a sociological lens for us to find a way to the other side of the tunnel. Hence, the theme for Eidos this year is “2020: Rethinking Structure”.

As the first edition of Eidos to be exclusively online, we wanted the Journal to represent a diverse array of ideas that could appeal to everyone. We wanted our shared experiences in the year of 2020 to be viewed and presented through a prism of differing perspectives and for our readers to feel represented as well as encouraged to ponder. It was extremely gratifying to witness the enthusiasm and determination from our writers despite the pandemic making it impossible for us to communicate physically. Bursting at the seams with ideas, our writers have contributed to create an edition that analyses structures like healthcare, education, the justice system, social life, the climate crisis while providing solutions for the future. The journal provides a fresh, critical perspective to life in 2020. We strived to create a space to reflect upon and challenge structures of the past, how they have adapted to our benefit, our fault, our progress and our self-image, while finding solutions for efficiency and equity in the future. We hope that it serves as a way to rethink and revitalise the world we live in.

We also had the honour to interview Mr. Richard Jacob, one of the founders of the “Lockdown Relief Helpline”, a large-scale network that served in helping the people most affected by the Lockdown. His work beckons each of us to be leaders in times of crisis and convert our thoughts to action.

I would like to extend my gratitude to our ever-dedicated and optimistic Editorial board without whom this would not have been possible. A special thanks to our Graphics team for creating a vibrant visage to accompany our writers’ captivating thoughts. My greatest appreciation to our Marketing team for navigating the digital world and connecting with our readers. I would like to thank our extremely supportive faculty- Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley, Ms. Radhika Rani, Ms. Ankita Gujar, Dr. Sahana Sen and Ms. Arpit Gill. Most importantly, a special thanks to our faculty co-ordinator, Ms. Ankita for her unrelenting support and guidance in times like this, always encouraging us to put our best foot forward.

We hope that Eidos 2020-21 serves as a succinct time-capsule for the year we had. The benefit of hindsight has made it abundantly clear that numbers on a calendar were not responsible for the deep-seated issues in our structures. If 2020 was the year of rethinking, we hope 2021 will be the year of rebuilding and we hope that Eidos serves as that starting point for our readers.

Wishing you a very thought-provoking journey ahead. Happy reading!

Simone Lobo,
Editor-in-chief, Eidos 2020-21

The Department Of Sociology And Anthropology

Annual Report 2020-21

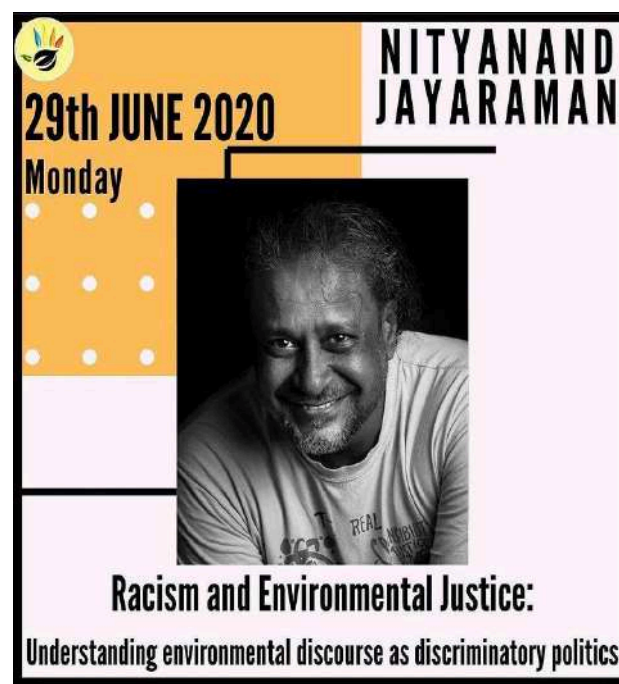
The year 2020 was filled with many new experiences and challenges for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and its constituent student organizations, ie. The Academy of Sociology and Anthropology and the magazine Eidos. In light of the lockdown, the department had to adjust its activities to the online platform. Despite the pandemic, we have been able to keep student engagement strong through webinars and extending support to students in any manner possible. Here are a few highlights of the activities held throughout the academic year:

The Social Spiral Series:

29th June-3rd July 2020

The Social Spiral webinar series was the launch event of The Academy of 2020-21. We had five speakers who shared their insights on different topics. The opening session was by Nityanand Jayaraman on 'Racism and Environmental Justice'. The most striking points in his discussion was about economic development alongside ecological sustainability and the idea that garbage is a sociological issue.

The next session was on 'Gendered Implications of the Lockdown: Home, Work, and Violence', with Professor. Rukmini Sen. Her session highlighted the impact of the ongoing pandemic on women. The discussion focused on domestic abuse faced during the lockdown and how the home is not safe for all women. Professor Sen also spoke about the



increased workload on working women locked down at home as they juggle work from home and housework Eg. cooking, cleaning, making sure their child is able to attend online lectures.

Following this, we had a session on ‘Pardesis and Malabar: Uncovering the social history of Jews in Kerala through music’ by Mark Aranha. The session focused on Mr Aranha’s research on Uncovering the social history of Jews in Kerala through music. He shared his findings on the music, social formations and origins of the Jews of Cochin and the Mappilas, two-centuries-old communities that developed as a result of interactions between pre-colonial maritime mercantile groups and native Malabar society.

The fourth webinar was by Dr. Rohan D’Souza titled ‘Contact Tracing a few Imaginations: What do Yuval Hariri, Orhan Pamuk, and Arundhati Roy think a Post Covid-19 World Should Look Like’. In this interesting session, Dr D’souza reviewed the imaginations of post-COVID 19 futures. In his discussion, he focused on encouraging us to think deeper about the ‘normal’.

The final session of the series was on ‘Social Fault lines: Challenges and Opportunities’ by Farah Naqvi. This engaging session by Ms Naqvi highlighted how the pandemic has not affected everyone the same way. She gave examples of migrants traveling unthinkable distances with a not even bare minimum to reach home. The discussion focused on the challenges faced by people during the nationwide lockdown and the human rights issues it brought about.

Community Conservation, the Way Forward: Gangadharan Menon:

10th August 2020

For World Conservation Day, the Academy decided to explore the complexities of conservation and its connection with sociology. As part of this

theme, we were delighted to have the webinar ‘Community Conservation, the Way Forward’ with Gangadharan Menon. In this session, Mr. Menon shared his experiences while being part of the Save Silent Valley campaign and stressed the importance of communities in preserving the natural world. The highlight of the session were the different stories of community conservation from his travels around India. He has documented these examples in his book *Evergreen Leaves: Recollections of My Journeys Into Wild India*.

Panel Discussion on National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

19th September 2020

In light of the new NEP and the various debates around it, the Academy organized a student panel that discussed the new policy. The student panelists were selected from different streams and years of undergraduate courses of our College.. Each panelist spoke on some pre-selected aspects regarding the policy. All the panelists were mentored by two alumnae of the department who also moderated the session. It was a very insightful session accompanied by critically nuanced analysis of the policy. The discussion was followed by a question-answer session with the audience.

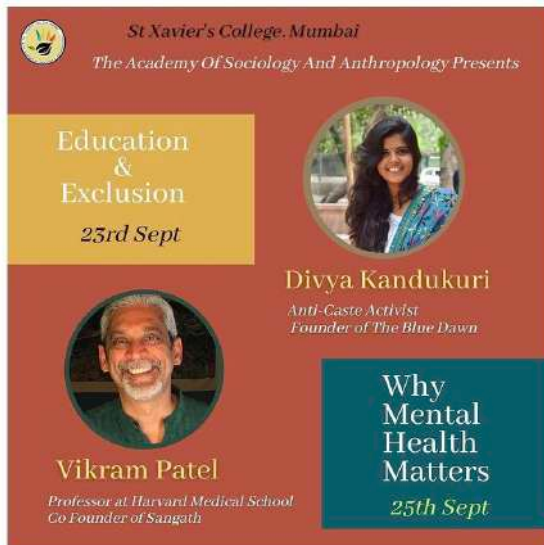
Education And Exclusion: Divya Kandukuri

23rd September 2020

In this webinar, Divya Kandukuri stresses on the systemic and systematic exclusion of certain castes from gaining an education. In this discussion, Ms. Kandukuri took the audience through Indian history and shared examples of Dalit communities fighting for their right to education.

Why Mental Health Matters: Dr. Vikram Patel

25th September 2020



The stress and anxiety onset by the COVID 19 pandemic has led to a rise in mental health issues. In the session ‘Why Mental Health Matters’, Dr. Vikram Patel gave us insights into the discourse on mental health through accounts from his personal experience as a professor at Harvard University and with his NGO Sangath. He shared resources and initiatives hosted by his NGO that would point the global outlook towards mental health in the right direction. He also shared some tips to keep in mind while taking care of our own mental health.

Empathy And Education Among Tribals: Akshay Shetty

17th October 2020

As part of our initiative to create awareness among students about the different opportunities in the social sector, we were delighted to have Akshay Shetty, an alumnus of our college to share his experience of working in the social sector. In this session, Akshay spoke about his job as an operations

director at the NGO Sajha, where he leads the project in collaboration with the Maharashtra government on strengthening school management in Adivasi Ashramshalas. During his presentation, he mentioned some personal examples of difficulties he faced while implementing the policies on ground and also how he navigated them.

Classrooms and Creativity: Riverside School

24th October 2020



This session was an interactive discussion where we invited students and faculty of Riverside School (Ahmedabad) to share their experience of using design thinking in education. The panel included Kiran Bir Sethi (Founder of Riverside School), Muzzamil Mohammed (Physics teacher), and Shanaya Mehta, a 9th grade student of Riverside School. The panelist gave different perspectives on some of the innovative pedagogies used at Riverside and how it impacts their students’ learning experience. The panelists shared the different activities done at the school and their philosophy

of cultivating the mindset of I CAN in students.

Academic Writing Workshop

27th October 2020

The department organized a writing workshop for all sociology and anthropology students which was conducted by Ms. Ankita Gujar. The workshop explained to students how to write academic papers, their assignments and also gave tips on citations and referencing.

Teach For India Fellowship Orientation

January 29th 2021

This year we collaborated with Teach For India to highlight opportunities in the social sector. The orientation was conducted by an alumna of our department, Nandini Sethi who was a Teach For India Fellow a few years back. The orientation increased awareness regarding the fellowship and gave students adequate information that would enable them to start their application form. It also gave students an understanding of the challenges within the social sector, and then let them understand how the fellowship will allow them to bring about a change in the context of primary education.

Annual Seminar as an Honours Program activity

6th March 2021

This year the department decided to conduct its seminar as a webinar. The theme this year was Cults. Students have written papers on a number of topics such as BTS fandom, Church Of Euthanasia and personality cults, among others. The students were assigned a faculty as supervisor who were

guiding them with their papers. After writing their paper students presented them formally in front of their peers and evoked a very engaging and healthy discussion on critical aspects of their paper and the theme.

Legally Literate

12th-16th March 2021



This RUSA-sponsored webinar series consisted of eight sessions aimed at Indian undergraduates about to enter the public life. Through this series of interactive sessions with lawyers and experts on legal affairs, we aimed to sensitise students towards some legal tools and remedies available for navigating through various aspects of their professional and personal lives. Our goal was to enable students with an elementary knowledge of some commonly-heard of laws, legalese and the rights afforded by them. Each day had a different theme and each session covered a different topic within it. On the first day the theme of both the sessions was the basics about law which was conducted by Prof. Kishu Daswani and Adv. Lara Jesani. The second day had sessions conducted

by Adv. Persis Sidhva and Vikramaditya Sahai on gender-based violence and the some ways of legal redressal of them. On the third day, sessions were held by Mr. Jehangir Gai who spoke about consumer protection laws and Mr. Gokul Narayan explored different data and online security-related concerns. The last day focused on inclusions and exclusions with Adv. Kanchan Pamani giving us an insight into the nature of disability rights in India, with special reference to the Rights of Persons With Disabilities Act (2016) and the amendments to Copyright Act brought about in 2012. In the final session, Adv. Mihir Desai explored the various nuances of dissent and its criminalisation as per laws in India.

Career Fair

8th-10th April 2021

We invited alumni to speak to our students about the possibilities after graduation. The event comprised of a series of three panel discussions. The panelists were ex-students who are working in unconventional fields or are pursuing Masters programmes. The objective of the panel was to build our perspective and help shed light on possibilities that lie after the undergraduate space, especially given the anxieties and uncertainty that came with the past year.

Deconstructing Realities Blog

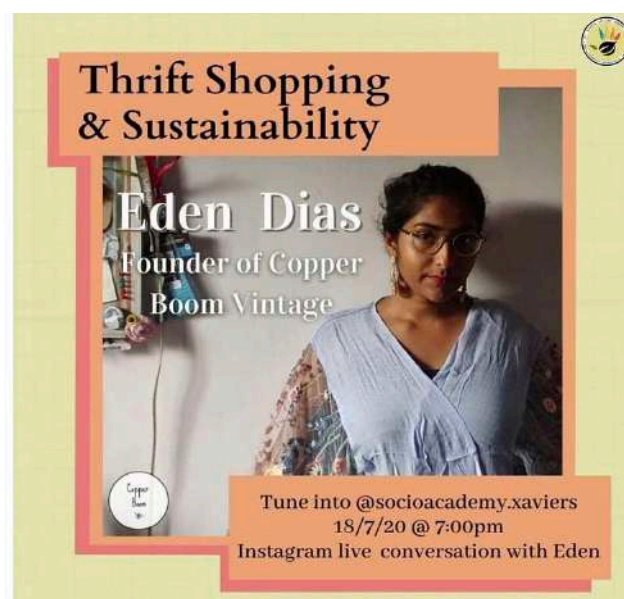
The Academy blog this year has published a number of articles on themes such as music, politics, and pop culture. The team has also accepted submissions of assignments done by students. Some of the themes included identity construction through food habits, caste groups and papers presented at Finding

Mothers conference 2020. In addition to this, the team has extended blog submissions to include poems, comics, and short videos so that we can be inclusive of the various mediums of expression. The blog has introduced a new series called “Into The Rabbit Hole” which focuses on the theme of pop culture.

Instagram Live sessions

This year, the Department’s Instagram Account was used as a platform to conduct interactive conversations between students and experts/professionals on topics relevant to the themes running through their other activities.

18th July 2020



As part of the theme of conservation our first IG Live was with a thrift shop owner to understand how thrifting can be a sustainable practice and to what to what extent. As online thrift shops have been on the rise during the pandemic, we spoke to Eden Dias the founder of Copper Boom Vintage who is also an alumna of our College.

9th October 2020

The other IG Live session was with Dr. Anshu Singh where we had explored the role of digital humanities for the new context of research in India. She focused on the relevance of quantitative and machine learning methodologies for social science research.

Staff Updates

Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley took over as the Head of the Department on 1 st January 2020. She delivered an online lecture titled: ‘Dummies Guide to Feminism’ for The Theory Club of St Xavier’s College, Mumbai on the 30 th of May, 2020. She conducted another online lecture on ‘Reproductive Rights’ with Dr Manasi Kanuga (Dept of Life Science) on the 9 th of June 2020. Along with Linda Dhakul she had an online lecture that discussed Mental Health along with a re-reading of Durkheim and Suicide on the 9 th of July 2020. She featured in the first podcast of the Department of Inter Religious (DIRS) St. Xavier’s College, Mumbai titled ‘Is this thing working?’ with Dr Agnelo Menezes on 19th August, 2020. Facilitated a lecture titled: ‘Feminism in a Locked Down World’, for the Student Inclusion Cell (SIC) St Xavier’s College, on the 25 th of September 2020. Published a blog titled: ‘Friendships and Ideas of Social Appropriateness’ with Ms Florian Pereira on the 15 th of October 2020. Published a short article titled: ‘Aai kuthe kaay karte’ for the College Magazine, St Xavier’s College. Delivered 4 lectures for the Online Diploma in Inter Religious Traditions, in January 2021. She presented a paper at the 11th IASR Conference on 26th February 2021, on ‘Manipulations within a religion: Parsi Zoroastrians in urban spaces.’. She was invited to

chair one session for the aforementioned conference on the day prior to her paper presentation.

Ms. Radhika Rani conducted a session “Sociological Implications of a Pandemic“ for the Honours Program activity Pan(aca)ademic. She participated in a panel discussion on “Freedom, Not Safety” as a part of the Security Summit 2020 organised by SheThePeople. She also engaged in a conversation with Ms. Ankita Gujar on “The World Of Anthropology” for Binge Factory’s IGTV. She presented a research paper “Seeking Salvation in Contemporary Hindi Cinema” at the 11th IASR Conference held in February 2021. She participated in a RUSA sponsored Faculty Development Program on Curriculum Design and Pedagogy. She was a panelist for AICUF’s annual Women’s Day event Ujali where the topic was De-normalising Stereotypes. She contributed an article in Hindi on adapting to teaching in the times of this pandemic for the Marathi Vangmaya Mandal’s annual magazine, Pakharan 2021. She has been engaging with a few informal students’ groups for a range of activities. She hosted a discussion on JC Scott’s book Weapons Of The Weak (1985) for The Reading Club and another one on the importance of political awareness for the smooth functioning of a society and the need of women and LGBTQIA change-makers in contributing towards the development of this world for The Readers Corner of Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta. She engaged with Youth Opportunities and Uprising for an Instagram Live on adapting urban design in a post-pandemic world. She has joined Xplore, a research journal published by our college, as an assistant editor and is the faculty advisor for the Department of Inter-Religious Studies’ The Harmony Project.

Ankita Gujar conducted a 5-part lecture series with infotainment start-up 'Binge Factory' on "Making sociological and anthropological theory accessible through popular culture." She also conducted a lecture with the Theory Club of St. Xavier's College, on "Inclusion in Education in times of Covid-19" and conducted a workshop with the Student Inclusion Cell on "Building a Gender-fluid World." She was the facilitator for an "Introduction to Academic Writing" workshop through the Academy of Sociology and Anthropology. She moderated a session with Raman Iyer on patriarchy and feminism in Indian mythology. She was a Panel member at a national-level seminar conducted by CEQUIN and a part of the civic society dialogue sessions on improvement in urban transport services by SUM-NET. She is also faculty in charge of Eidos, the annual departmental student journal. She attended a national level workshop conducted by the XRCVC on "Making Online Learning Inclusive for Students with Disabilities" and a two-day national webinar on "Research in Times of Covid-19" conducted by K. C. College. She was also a participant in the webinar on Mind-Maps as a pedagogical tool and a New Teacher's Webinar on the "Values and Ethos" of St. Xavier's College- Autonomous. She presented a paper titled "Religion among Desi expatriates and their children – Performing agency and identity" at the 11th IASR conference conducted by the Department of AICHA on the 25th of February, 2021. She completed a 6-day Faculty Development Programme on "Re-igniting the research spark" conducted by the IQAC for St. Xavier's College-Autonomous, Mumbai. She has also joined the Council for International Programmes this year.

Dr. Sahana Sen conducted a lecture on Qualitative Coding Techniques for two courses (Gender and Media) in the Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology in a combined lecture on 18th January, 2021. This lecture aimed at helping students understand how to conduct and evaluate primary research for their final year dissertations. She presented a Paper titled 'Mahaviharas' as Seats of Learning: A Study of the Culture of Learning in a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in India at the 11th IASR Conference, conducted by the Dept. of AICHA on 25th February 2021.

Fr. Savio Abreu successfully completed his tenure of 2 years and has now joined St. Paul's School (Belgaum) as the principal. We wish him the best in his new role.

We are delighted to welcome Ms. Arpit Gill as the newest member of the faculty at our department. Ms. Arpit Gill graduated as a promising student from the department and we are delighted to have her with us.

IN CONVERSATION WITH
RICHARD JACOB

FOUNDER OF LOCKDOWN RELIEF PROJECT BASED ON A TELEPHONIC
 INTERVIEW WITH THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

1) The Lockdown Relief Project was created at a time in 2020 when most people were barely coming to terms with the pandemic. It was swift and its impact was commendable. How was the helpline created and what did you hope to achieve? Can you walk me through the starting process?

I guess it was the suddenness with which the lockdown was imposed. It was a bit of a shock and unprecedented. For a lot of us, its impact was quite unclear in the first hours of the announcement. Questions like, “How was it going to pan out?”, “What was and wasn’t going to happen”, “How much freedom will we have”, “What happens to the supplies” did not even arise in the first few hours. We were dealing with the shock of the announcement and trying to cope with that.

Some of us who were part of the CAA/NRC protest who were in touch, were trying to figure out the impact of this on the various sections of society, especially people of lower economic status who did not have any kind of fallback.

A group of us started doing on-ground work. We started distributing ration kits in slums and in the next 3-4 hours a lot of people across the city started doing the same. A lot of organisations and individuals realised that people needed support and started to do that.

Around 25th March, we realised that some areas

were going to have more supply and some areas were going to have no supply at all. Which actually happened in the initial days. Some areas like Dharavi got a lot of attention, while some areas like Nalasopara were not taken care of.

Which is why we wanted to try and create a network where people in need can reach out and people who want to provide can connect with them and if we can map the needs and supplies to each other in various geographies, we would bring in organisation and streamlining. That is how the “Lockdown Relief Helpline” came about. The helpline was formulated with the intention for it to be helpline for anything and everything. We knew that the problem was not just food. It could also be security, robbery, etc. because with the lockdown and lack of earning, people might get desperate. There was a rise in domestic violence, people with mental health issues were stuck with their families, etc. All of these we wanted to address.

Then we had various resource teams for each of these things. We had a resource team for political turmoil, a resource team that would connect you to government schemes in case of food crisis. We also had a team in place for animal rescue, people who were looking for pet supplies and treatment for their pets, a fire team, ambulances, etc. All of it was mapped out.

2) It is amazing how many teams you had on board for this! I was made aware of your work through my college Whatsapp group. In fact, most of my peers all across Mumbai were aware of the helpline. How did you manage to mobilise so many volunteers?

I think social media is a big play. The CAA/NRC movement was a big catalyst. I would like to give credit to the youngsters who were connected using Whatsapp groups. With the movement, there was a sense of belonging to a cause and it was very easy for us to shift the goalpost to something else with the same spirit. We realised it was a crisis and people's lives were at stake so the protest took a backseat and we moved towards helping people and rising to the occasion. So those networks amplified our cause. We were also in touch with a lot of the beneficiaries because the CAA/NRC affected the same section of people the maximum in terms of impact. We were taking sessions in various bastis so that connect was already there. Thus, there was this group of people who were concerned about the CAA/NRC and protesting about it and a group of people who were going to be most impacted by the CAA/NRC, so both of them were connected already, and it fell into place at that point in time.

3) Creating a network as expansive as this, no matter how passionate people are must have required extremely thorough and planned resourcing. How did you work on organisation of the workforce, speaking logistically?

I don't think we slept for the first week or so! (laughs). Because when we thought of the helpline, we knew that it had to be 24/7. It cannot be like, "We'll operate only between these hours" because emergencies can arise at any point in time.

When we started, we were only about 4 people or so, and we decided to do 8 hours shifts and manage among ourselves. But of course, within the very next few days we realised that this would not be enough. That was when we put out the call for volunteers and man the helpline. A lot of people from various sections of society responded. We had a small interview where we tried to figure out if they were ready, because in hindsight it took quite an emotional toll on us. But really, it was all on the fly because there was really no time! We did not have time to structure. We went with what was the need of the hour, what was required of the system to make sure that the right help reaches the right people without too much delay. So those were the criteria with which the decisions were made. It was the needs that designed the system, not the other way around.

4) I heard from one of the volunteers that the helpline has changed drastically from when you started it. How has the helpline managed to evolve constantly in such a short amount of time?

The evolution of the helpline is phenomenal. It's like chalk and cheese! The greater number of volunteers came in, the complexity of the systems increased and developed simultaneously. Every step we had a new problem to take care of! Like the migrant system for example. We had to develop a new system, integrate it into the software, the backend database and manage all that data. The initial days were really chaotic.

5) You worked closely with many migrants, providing them with transportation and other facilities. I can imagine that working with unorganized groups of people would require a great amount of systemization. What were the administrative challenges you faced there and

how did you overcome them?

It was important to catalyse efficiently without taking too much load on ourselves. We tried to figure out what activities each Government was doing. For instance, Jharkhand Government did a fantastic thing by sending Rs. 1000 to each migrant labour from Jharkhand. Wherever, they were in India, they could fill a form online and the Government would transfer them that money. That is a fantastic thing. So, we were giving out information about these things. We would spread information about train schedules. We went around Thane, Bhivandi and even Nashik to assist people who were walking on the streets and on the highway.

Food packets were made keeping in mind dry rations like channa and dates that would not get spoilt and also give them energy. We gave them ORS powder so that they could put in a bottle of water and they'll have energy. Some things we thought through on the fly. Mainly we connected with groups and tried to bring together demand and supply.

We co-ordinated with great organisations like the 'Karwan foundation', we really appreciate their fantastic work especially in the town side. Priyanka Sharma also had a fantastic initiative where she chartered flights for free for many migrant workers through donations and sponsorships.

6) Given the scale of your work I would assume that you had to work with government officials for permissions and later as collaborators. What was your experience working with Government authorities?

I think quite a few of the IAS officers were very cooperative. But most people below that were difficult to work with. At the ward level it was

difficult when we were trying to work with the ration scheme announced by the central government. There was resistance from the shops as well as the next in charge. Some ration officers were cooperative some of them were not interested. Places like Thane had a very good response to our call of help. So, it was mixed bag, mostly negative. I wish the government officers responded with more responsibility and more sense of service. I think our bureaucracy has gone moribund. It is more of a duty or job to them than an act of service. A central officer is a public servant that's the constitutional definition of their job and they've forgotten that. That's the message that should be given to the system and the government. "You have been appointed on behalf of the people, for the people to serve the people. I think it was starkly clear that it wasn't the case. It's not a good feeling.

7) For a grass roots organisation such as yours this seemed to be a mammoth task. Do you think the Municipal authorities were reliant on you at the expense of their own public responsibility?

I would not say that. At least not the BMC. They did a very good job. Having said that, they didn't do enough. The scale was too large. If we considered corporators I would lay a lot of blame on them. They did not budge or do enough. And if they did distribute food or supplies, they did it only for their constituencies. People who did not have ration cards weren't even touched by them. It was a mixed bag. The MLAs and MPs didn't step up. Some of them did, but it was mostly tokenism. If they had done a good job there would not have been a need for Lockdown Relief project or any other community service.

8)At times of constant imposition of policies and policing, there may have been certain regulations that were impossible to overcome. What were some loopholes that you observed in the system? How did you conceptualise its mitigation?

I think a major hurdle that people faced was the major police crackdown. If you remember there was a statement by the Home Minister where he alluded that anyone who is outside will be dealt with harshly. We saw a lot of videos where police were beating people. Poor people selling their wares or even people who were going out for some relief work were stopped or beaten up. However, some people especially those with political connections got passes.

I think in the initial days it was tough. Though most of the policemen were understanding and would let go seeing the car full of material and food stuff, maybe they could come up with a better system. They could have been a little lenient with the relief process.

9)The helpline not only maintained a steady network but also consistently delivered resources to those in need. What were your sources of funding for facilities, whether it be monetary or some other tangibles like food?

For the first month or so we did not have any funding at all. The helpline was sponsored thanks to the owner of the phone company. He gave us this facility free of cost and also kept revising numbers as the team grew.

We wanted to match the needs with suppliers. We made sure that if there is an organisation in Dharavi that had supplies and someone needed them to be called and transported, we did the connecting. We looked at funding much later. Maybe around the

second lockdown.

During the first lockdown people realised the bad state of affairs and donated generously. By second lockdown, funding was a little low. Organisations reached out to us asking for resources instead of the other way round. That is when we decided to have our own fundraising on Ketto on a public platform. We had support from artists that promoted the helpline. *

10)As someone with a first-hand view of the challenges faced by people on the ground. Did you feel like there was a dissonance between reality and the media's portrayal?

Frankly I've stopped watching TV or news channels. One thing I remember seeing on social media was people being very happy about police beating up people, which was quite sadistic. It wasn't right. It isn't the duty of the police. The police is not supposed to beat up people but to maintain law and order. And we can see them using excessive force of people. They were overturning somebody's food carts! You can reprimand a person but you don't have to destroy his produce! That was quite insensitive in that way.

11)Your organisation also adopted the role of spreading awareness, educating people about various schemes and solutions. However, with constant changes in policies there may have been inconsistencies and false information. How did you streamline the overwhelming amount of information?

We had a research team. They collated information, checked it, verified it and then gave it to the helpline team. So, we would have a properly checked and vetted information that would go to the helpline team. So, there was checks and balances on that. That was well organised and something we planned

from the start. When we started getting changes every day from the Government initially, that is when we instituted a team that was doing only data analysis.

12) Another thing I heard from your volunteers, food insecurity was a major issue and a lot of communities came together to provide food to people. So, what was your experience with that?

Mentionable, very rightly so and very respectfully so, was the role of Muslims. I think what we saw on the ground, the very first responders were Muslims. They also contributed the most in the private sector. They distributed food and other supplies, across the board, across geographical locations anybody and everybody. I would like to thank “Jammat-E-Islami-Hind”, “Student Islamic Organisation” for doing a fabulous job with their volunteers. Their division called “Movement for People’s Justice” (MPJ) who co-ordinated with ration officers ensuring everyone got rations. There were also a lot of examples of Churches. Various Christian groups, one of them was Fr. Fraiser Mascarenhas from St Peter’s Church in Bandra, who organised his youth to distribute cooked food in Bandra. Quite a few examples like that across the city Navi Mumbai and Thane. Of course, there was the Hindu community too. The KhalsaAid, the Sikh community, stepped into this in a major way. I think the civil society responded pretty fantastically. Unfortunately, it was not their job to do it but someone had to do it.

13) Did you feel people’s passion waning with fundraising?

No. I think with donations, it is acceptable that there will be a fatigue. Because when the situation is dire, people do respond by contributing, but then you also think about your own financial

security. They go to a point then finally stop and pause to take stock of whether people are doing the right job. Because a lot of people also use this opportunity to make money. So, people would be wary about it. They would take some time and come back. However, when it was for a specific situation, people would respond.

14) I speak as someone who only reads the news. Just the sheer statistics of the people affected seems to cause a sense of fatigue. But you and many of your volunteers are witnesses to these experiences, and in large numbers for hours on end. As social workers, how does one balance the empathy one feels in these circumstances and the apathy that comes from disillusionment?

Ground volunteers would be dealing first hand with the people and those on the helplines worked from home. Though seemingly privileged to work from home, it did take an emotional toll on all us. We saw quite a few people leave the helpline because it was overwhelming. A lot of people had never experienced something like this, never heard stories like that first hand from the sufferer. So quite a few of us took multiple breaks or a backseat during the helpline work. We also had a few psychologists who came on board offering services free of cost like Dr Hema and team. I think a lot of us are still recovering from, if we may call it, trauma.

When we were down and out, we would have questions like “When is this going to end?”, “How is there so much pain in this world?”. When you see a lady, who has her husband killed in a freak accident 4-5 days ago and has a child to take care of and her in laws are not taking her home, you really don’t know how to respond to these things. It gives one a feeling that the helpline has brought

about a lot of good things but it is also a reminder how much our society has to do. So much to improve. There are so many levels of poverty, so many levels of abject poverty. We have to work on it. In a city like ours which is supposed to be a global city, it is horrendous to see such things happen. It should not be the case. We need to look at how people can exercise their rights and not be left in the dredges of the society.

15) The course of the pandemic and the subsequent effects on people seem unpredictable at the moment. What are your plans for the foreseeable future?

One of the things we have already started is reaching out to communities and have conversations with them to find out the problems they are facing right now and what specific issues they need help with. We're going to help them with information, resources, activation wherever required so they can find a solution. And they can fight for their own rights, we won't fight their battle. Rather than provide food etc because there are enough organisations doing that, our aim now is to help communities become more self-sufficient and self-reliant.

16) Is there a particular story that stood out in your experience that you would like to share with our readers?

There is one story that happened early in the helpline history. At around 11 pm at night, a lady in Pune told us that her grandfather was going to be thrown out of his house due to non-payment of rent. One of our volunteers managed to speak to him and got him admitted to a hospital because he had health issues too. We found out an organisation that could help. In about a week's time, we were

able to reunite that gentleman with his family. This story really left an emotional impact on us, there are quite a few stories like that.

So, it is really wonderful that this lady knew of this helpline and we were able to help. There are so many people who did not know of the helpline. When you think of that, you feel how as a government you've failed the people.

17) I speak as someone who greatly admires how your organisation was created as a response to instability in structure. You quite literally as our theme says, rethought structure and put it into effect. What would your advice be to students who wish to do the same?

What I must say to every student is you must go to every "galli" and "basti" and speak to your voice for the heck of raising your voice. You have to give them an alternate. The youth of the government must help people know their rights, help them fight for their rights. Because the right you have is not an option, it is something you own. That's the revolution in the nation. And read Ambedkar! If you were to walk on those lines, we can achieve what we wish to.

A special show of gratitude to the owner of the teleservice company "Myoperator" for sponsoring the helpline. We owe our thanks to various artists such as- musicians like Tirthankar Potdar from 2blue, Raman Iyer from Kabir Café, Teesta & Kiara Band, Ishan Ghosh, poets like- Hussain Haidry, Sabika Naqvi, Rabia Kapoor and actors like Gauahar Khan and Momita Jaisi were some of the artists who promoted and supported the helpline.

I SENTENTIAE IN Strūctūrā

Written by **Oscar Kinny**

Cogitō ergo sum aut sum ergo cogitō? The words that we exhale from our mouth are manifestation of the thoughts that we inhale, of the “structures” that we integrate ourselves into. My essay titled “Sententiae in Strūctūrā” is an amble down the path of social philosophies. My essay is a repository of terminologies, replete with simple explanations. The chronology of exposition hopes to nudge the reader towards the ever expanding compendium of literature that the sociology, anthropology and philosophy has to offer. It also aims to jerk the reader in order to stimulate the reader, to develop a scrutinizing lens to view present structures and make sense of things.

“Structure emerges out of a need.” “Strūctūra ex necessitāte ēmergit.”

ष्ट्रक्चर इमरजेस आउट ऑफ अ नीड.”

The aforementioned statements share peculiar similarities and dissimilarities with each other; however, the triumvirate relays the same message. We consider the first statement as our reference point for drawing analyses with respect to the other two. The first statement is written in English, the second in Latin and the third in Marathi.

The Latin statement is a translation of the English assertion, its core meaning is the same as its English reference. The Marathi statement, is a phonetic transcription of the English statement, i.e. it sounds the same as the English statement albeit having no substantial meaning in the Marathi language. To recap, the English statement is similar to the Latin

in terms of meaning and the Marathi statement is similar in terms of sound. The difference arises when one compares the other two with respect to the syntax, semantics and vocabulary of the English reference. In the first instance, the Latin statement is an idiomatic translation of the English reference, however, its syntax and morphology differs from the English language.

The following is a minimalistic syntactical (grammatical) deconstruction of the two sentences: Structure (subject) emerges (verb) out of (adverb) a (indefinite article) need (object). Strūctūra (subject) ex (pronoun) necessitāte (object) ēmergit (verb).

The Latin statement would lose its meaning in Latin if it were to be a transliteration of the original reference, after all, an idiomatic translation maintains the natural meaning of the target text into the language that it is converted into.

Since the Marathi statement is a phonetic transcription, it does not amount to any meaning in Marathi. The meaningful idiomatic translation in Marathi would be, “रचना गरजेतून उद्भवते.”

In terms of syntax, the Marathi translation is similar to the Latin one, as both have an SOV construction (रचना - object, गरजेतून - object and उद्भवते - verb.). Another similarity that Latin shares with Marathi are the phonetic symbols which define the length of assonance, macrons in Latin and काना, वेलांटी, उकार, etc. in Marathi.

There are a few commonalities to the sentences, all of them are sentences made up of words, phrases, of punctuation, all of them have a subject, object and a verb. In conclusion, all sentences, or must I say, all languages, have a common pattern, or rather, a structure!

But what exactly is structure? How do we define structure? Etymologically speaking, culture is derived from its Latin root *Strūctūra* meaning structure which has been formed from the Latin infinitive *struere* which has multiple meanings: to build, to arrange, to organize, etc. Simply put, a structure can be anything, a form, a pattern, an arrangement or a skeletal framework. There is a litany of words and expressions which exist that define structure, but for us, structure is the way we



Building Structures on Structures

Illustrated by Vidisha Navalkar

make sense of things, the way we perceive them.

Another question which automatically arises after the what, is the why. Why does structure exist? One answer to that question is our opening statement, fulfilment of a need. Simply put, French Sociologist Emile Durkheim explains that structure exists to serve functions. Need is a blanket term which can be interpreted in ways numerous, but here, for the sake of understanding we will consider need to be an exigency and as the starting point in the emergence of structures. The biological structure of homo sapiens from prehistory such as the opposable thumb bestows a vast array of

dexterities upon humankind, with which they were able to construct weapons and tools, to process comestibles. To make fires and cook meat, skin animals and wear their hides, use their bones to create tools and jewellery and so on and so forth. Living in groups ensured better chances of survival. These structures, biological, psychobiological and social served as a means of instant gratification. However, as tastes developed, so did civilisation, giving rise to a need for refinement. And thus began the immortal journey for perfection which led to the inception of delayed gratification. Delayed gratification, further served to lay the foundations for morality. Morality in turn facilitated self-preservation. Delayed gratification brings in a guarantee of plus-de-jour i.e surplus enjoyment. And slowly but surely, the need, mentioned in the very beginning evolves from an exigency to a want, a desire, a wish, a whim... Structure plays an instrumental role.

Structure has some special properties, one of the most distinguishable one is that it is omnipresent. It exists in everything. Another peculiar property of structure is that it's never static, structure is dynamic. It changes from time to time, it never stays the same. Last but not the least, structure is recurring.

Social structures exhibit these properties quite often, as they are cyclic in nature. A cultural universal, as discussed by Emile Durkheim, George Murdock, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Donald Brown and others, is an element, pattern, trait, or institution that is common to all human cultures worldwide. Taken together, the whole body of cultural universals is

known as the human condition (Brown, 1991).

In Anthropology, survivals are cultural phenomena that outlive the set of conditions under which they developed (Survivals, December 28, 2020); in simpler terms, survivals are cultural vestiges. Homo sapiens as a species has adapted several forms of society, bands, clans, tribes, villages, feudalism, monarchy, fascism all the way to modern day democracy. A common theme across all forms of governance/ruling has been the need for concentration of power, to ward off insecurities of all sorts. There are different binding agents which have worked in tandem to craft cohesions among societies, vis-a-vis totem, religion, ideology, geography, race, language, sex, and so on and so forth. These structural constructs are something we call identities. Different identities have different histories behind them, these histories mesh into each other to create infinite variations across social structures.

However, limiting identity to the confines of definite constructs would take away the lucidity of the concept. Edward T. Hall in his work Questions of Cultural Identities defines an identity as a meeting point the point of suture, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes, that produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken' (HALL, SMYTH, DUGAY, & Frith, 1996). In his explanation, Hall explains identities with the metaphor of the meeting point, an intersection where we engage in transactions

which interpellate i.e. give us an identity. Hence, identities are agreed upon, they are subjective. Identities are also a social cement, they give us the feeling of being a part of a bigger whole, they fulfil our psychosocial need for kinship. There is a binding agent, which often supersedes the existence of identities; it is none other than ideology. An ideology is a set of beliefs or philosophies attributed to a person or group of persons, especially as held for reasons that are not purely epistemic, in which “practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones” (Soanes, Hawker, & Elliott, 2006). Ideology is our differential lens through which we process phenomena. It includes all processes, stimulation, perception, reaction. Using our ideology, we negotiate our way through different social structures.

Much like Plato’s allegory of the cave, where the prisoners in the cave perceive the world through the shadows on the wall, we emulate the same kind of behaviours. Shadows are at best, representations of figures caused due to occlusion of light. The amount of light shed and its direction determine the size and shape of the shadows. Cultural or social practices, or even personal rituals are shadows, representations of a group/person. We perceive the world through shadows, our only light being the truth, the truth being endemic to its speaker. What happens in the process is the loss of the canon, the seminal, the authentic, the real. The shedding of light is what we call enlightenment. But a better suited word would be understanding.

Everyone owns a heritage that is their structure. Structures were not supposed to be rigid. ‘Tis

naught but the vice of humanity which holds onto structures, favourable structures. This ossification of structures takes away its flexibility. The rigidity breaks in time with anarchy and anti-structure. But what is anti-structure and what is anarchy and are both the same? The answer to that question is not linear, as one’s all three terms, structure, anti-structure and anarchy are perceptions more than states of being. Anti-structure is defined across dictionaries as a sociological structure that intentionally counteracts the main-stream while anarchy in its basic usage is defined as a state of disorder caused by lack of authority. Authority creates structures and conversely authority is created by structure. So anarchy in an alternate definition would explicitly imply a lack of structure. As Hegel’s observation of negation points out our tendency to primarily define things as “what they are not”, anything that does not have a specific, favourable, cognizable structure, in an ideology’s case a specific structure is either deemed to be anti-structure or anarchist by means of negation. Growth plates in bones stop after ossification (hardening), humans aren’t immortal but humanity is... Just like Jim Gordon says in the Dark Knight Rises, “There’s a point, far out there, when the structures fail you. When the rules aren’t weapons anymore, they’re shackles, letting the bad guy get ahead...” (Nolan, 2012)

Civilisation tends towards perfection, at the cost of delayed gratification. However, the gratification keeps delaying, delaying to a point where we ourselves are alienated from it, instead, what we exist in is the interstice that leads to the gratification, i.e. the medium of gratification. Humans create an

Elysium for themselves continually by dumping fellow humans into the Tartarus which serves as the supporting beam. One can't help but wonder if we created gods in our own image or did we create an image to turn ourselves into gods. Structures exist temporally. The way we approach them mentally is what determines their existence. Afterall, it's a matter of negation...

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2 SOLASTALGIA

Written by **Ronit Shah**

With the climate crisis upon us, we are now seeing increasing signs of global environmental changes. But the less obvious effect of the climate crisis is on mental health, especially that of the youth. Social media plays a double role of perpetuating doom and helplessness while furthering a mental health crisis, but it also acts as a medium for the youth to raise awareness about the climate crisis. This has led to a louder, more effective movement for environmental justice driven by the younger generation. This article aims to delve into said cause of the mental health crisis and the subsequent activism.

Climate Crisis is a term that is well known to anyone keeping up with the news. It's the biggest existential threat that humanity faces and its devastating effects are already starting to show on a global scale in the form of high temperatures, floods, wildfires, food scarcity, hurricanes and tornadoes, among other "natural" disasters. While these disasters have been put into motion by decades of reckless environmental degradation, they pose a greater existential threat to the present and future generations. Those who are at a risk of not having a habitable planet to live in are in their childhood and teenage years now (UNICEF, 2019). That is why we see a flurry of protests, rallies and movements aimed at raising awareness about climate change and getting governments to take solid measures towards sustainable development and conservation.

A lot of these activists such as Greta Thunberg and Autumn Peltier are children and teenagers coming from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The fact that the youth are now taking over the mantle for Climate justice is indicative of large scale structural changes triggered by complex reasons, some of which I would be exploring in this article.

Climate Change has more than just a devastating impact on the world. Unsurprisingly, these changes also affect people on a psychological level. Glenn Albrecht coined a term, Solastalgia, which is a diagnosable Psychoterratic illness meaning "Nostalgia of the solace provided by one's home". With the Earth as humanity's home, and climate change causing some irreversible changes to this home, a lot of youngsters are experiencing

Solastalgia. But what is fuelling it to the extent that the youth have taken to the streets, challenged governments and have even made it to the United Nations? Social Media. This technological marvel has a lot to contribute to the modern world, in both visible and invisible ways. Millennials are quite self-aware about their social media usage. Its use, besides sharing parts of their life with others, is to keep oneself updated with what's happening around the world. Social media has almost replaced newspapers, online news portals and televised news channels. When every piece of information is available in one portal, many opt to get their news from social media. However, being constantly connected to the internet and therefore, the news has its own set of disadvantages. One can get minute by minute updates on the state of affairs, especially with regards to climate change, government policies, international decisions etc. This has resulted in increased eco-anxiety, which is the chronic fear of environmental doom (American Psychiatric Association, 2017), ecophobia, which is the pervasive worry over environmental degradation (Shaffer, 2017), solastalgia etc. News such as floods in different parts of the world, diminishing wildlife and forest cover, and irresponsible, climate-averse decisions taken by government leaders have flooded our social media timelines. Unlimited access to potentially anxiety-inducing information without the power to do something about it immediately brings with it more anxiety. Social media usage in itself tends to have a negative impact on the mental well-being of its users, as studies indicate that social media usage contributes to depression and anxiety among adolescents (Keles, 2019). Multiple studies point out that there are direct effects



Climate change activism online

Illustrated by Vidisha Navalkar

that climate change, rising humidity and mean surface temperatures have on the mental health of individuals (Cianconi, Betrò, & Janiri, 2020). In an interview, young activist Greta Thunberg admitted that after learning about climate change, she went through a period of depression (Hammond, 2020).

Social media is one example of how technology has come to direct the way our societies, cultures, economies and governments change. This concept, known as technological determinism, has been observed with several technological developments (Volti, 2020). It's a noted fact that technology is coming to change the way our societies have come to evolve, and it's not due to direct human interference. Social Media is attributed to the

increased political polarization nowadays, and it is also the cause for the increased anxiety and depression regarding climate change. The reality of climate change is indeed alarming, and the negative effect that it has on adolescents can be seen in studies conducted by Norris and colleagues, who discovered that young individuals were more likely to be susceptible to environment-related trauma than adults (Norris, Friedman, Byrne et.al, 2002). It might only worsen the symptoms of those already undergoing anxiety and depression, especially among the youth and adolescents. This mental health crisis is pushing the youth to come out and protest for a more sustainable path to development, one that does not result in the destruction of the living world in its wake.

Thus, “environmental justice” has been a strong demand in these protests. Environmental justice calls for a fair distribution of environmental burdens and benefits, a balance that has been deeply and unfairly shifted in recent times. The unbalanced distribution of burdens is not an unconscious phenomenon, but a deeply rooted system that puts the brunt of development on the ones that get the least benefits of it (Mohai, Pellow, & Roberts, 2009). Underdeveloped regions face the unequal consequences of unchecked pollution, fuelled by the first world countries, in the form of natural disasters, which forces a lot of their citizens to become climate refugees.

Individuals who have been displaced by their homes due to the effects of climate change are referred to as climate refugees. With increasing incidents of floods, wildfires, hurricanes, droughts

and other such incidents across the world, there has been an increase in the number of people who have had to relocate because their home was rendered uninhabitable. A study conducted by The Nansen Initiative estimates that around 24 million individuals were forced to relocate in 2017, due to the “sudden onset” weather conditions (The Nansen Initiative, 2015). These mass-scale relocation leads to a conflict over resources and brings with it unimaginable mental trauma. Climate refugees are among those who experience the uneven burden of the effects of the climate crisis (McDonnell, 2018). Young climate activists have grown up watching the discriminating effects of climate change on developing countries vis-a-vis developed ones and are actively advocating for systemic changes to mend the harmful practises that are now normalised before it is too late. Environmental Justice has been a strong demand of First World climate activists, but more so by the climate refugees-turned activists who have experienced the devastating effects of climate change first hand (Roth, 2020, Lee, 1992). Artemisa Xakriabà, a 19-year-old activist from Brazil who is protesting the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, and Autumn Peltier, a 16-year old Canadian clean water activist are two of many young climate activists coming from Indigenous origins.

Social media also puts incidents of environmental injustice in the spotlight. More visibility is given to environmental news on social media than by conventional media houses. People on social media can get more targeted news regarding climate change online. Social media is the go-to portal for teens and adolescents keeping up with

the world. In their quest to raise awareness, young climate activists are leaving no stone unturned, and are using technology and social media to raise awareness for this global cause. Young people have been talking about climate change for a long time, but this generation is louder and more coordinated, according to Dana Fisher, a sociologist at the University of Maryland (Fisher, n.d.). Activists have used it to organise protests, gather large crowds of people, and put out credible news about climate change. This strategy has made this generation of climate activists more relatable, and accessible to the masses. Greta Thunberg and Licypriya Kangujam are some young climate activists fervently engaged in the protests against climate policies. They have famously protested against the Parliaments of Sweden and India, respectively, to draw the attention of policymakers to their cause. Their use of technology has helped in the organization of collective action for climate change. Engagements with social media accounts talking about climate change have reached momentous heights in the past years, thanks to the efforts of climate activists who have staged dramatic and eye-catching protests. In 2019, the engagements with climate change content crossed 132 million, more than twice of how much it was in the year prior. This meteoric rise can also be seen in the number of people who started following notable young activists, like Greta Thunberg, who started with a modest 10,232 in October of 2018 and rose to a stunning 41,41,366 in May of 2020. This digital following has materialised into on-ground action as well. What started with just Greta Thunberg standing outside the Swedish Parliament in 2018, snowballed into a global movement around 7500

cities with more than 1,30,00,000 participants.

We can see how climate activists have effectively utilised the reason for their mental agony, social media, to further the movement around the Climate Crisis. This dual role played by social media is an example of both technological determinism, and social construction of technology. While we saw how technology has had a negative effect on the mental health of people, it is also helping raise awareness and get more people involved in the quest to resolve the greatest threat to the planet. Studies have shown that climate activism has in fact helped reduce the anxiety caused by climate change. Young activists have started several international movements, such as Fridays for Future, Zero Hour, Climate Australia, and The Child Movement, among others. Brazilian Indigenous activist, Sonia Guajajara, rallies support using social media for the social rights of the indigenous populace of the Brazilian rainforests, which are often neglected by environmentalists seeking protection for the Amazon forest (Tozetto, 2018). Raising awareness, and showing solidarity with others who experience similar anxiety reduces the feeling of helplessness that is brought upon by the enormity of climate change (Busby, 2019). Therefore, climate activism is not only important for the environment but also the mental health of the activists.

Solastalgia is not just pervasive among climate activists. Most people realise that our planet is not the same as it was a few decades ago and that the health of our planet will continue to get worse unless we act on it. This article comes from a deeply personal space, and although the changing climate affects everyone physically, its mental health

impacts are more widespread among the youth. Content regarding climate change available on the internet has educated, influenced and terrified me to great extents. Regulated use of social media, and maintaining a proper balance between news consumption is something that helped me maintain a more or less positive outlook on the state of affairs. While it is a personal struggle to come to terms with the devastation done by humanity on nature, there is a silver lining in the horizon. Youngsters raising their voice, and being actively involved in the fight to secure a habitable planet is a sign of reassurance that as long as there are individuals who care for the world, all is not lost.

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3 CLIMATE ACTION THROUGH A NEW LENS

Written by **Kyra Songadwala and Dhanisha Raj**

In context of the approaching Sustainable Development Goals deadline, this article explores two complementary but unique approaches to conservation. First, community conservation of the Apatani tribe which underlines the integration of 'Traditional Ecological Knowledge' into natural resource management. Second, the Climate Smart Village model as a way of sustainably restructuring society.

The article aims to comprehend the age-old systems of sustainable cultivation and rural living as well as the modern innovations in agricultural villages, in order to examine the feasibility of a scaled up model incorporating the best of both. Finally, it attempts to further the conversation of the need for climate action with new perspectives and solutions.

The ecological cost of human existence is not only endangering lives, but if this trajectory continues, it will leave the earth utterly uninhabitable for future generations.

Years of treating natural resources as simply a means to the end of exponential economic growth have resulted in bitter consequences. The subsequent climate crisis takes many forms. In urban spaces, climate change includes increased pollution or temperature changes but for agricultural communities, the implications are far worse, affecting entire livelihoods by causing land

degradation, unpredictable rainfall, temperature changes, subsequently impacting crop yields (Arora, 2019).

This ecological crisis is finally getting international recognition, resulting in the formation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) namely 'Zero Hunger', 'Sustainable Cities and Communities', and 'Climate Action'. However, with less than 10 years until the looming deadline to meet the SDGs, we have barely grazed the surface of climate action required to undo the environmental damage.

Now is the time to re-evaluate our lifestyles, for legislation to rethink climate laws and for us to restructure our society to collectively act against climate change. In this article, we examine the Climate Smart Village (CSV) model and traditional community conservation methods practiced by the Apatani tribe as possible solutions to achieve the SDGs before the point of no return.

The narrative in urban spaces is that villages are huge polluters given their “backward” agricultural practices. The Eastern Himalayas’ Ziro Valley, inhabited by the Apatani tribe proves an exception. Their traditional values and spiritual beliefs (nature worship) is what contributes to their systematic, community-based resource management, land use, and conservation; thereby perfecting the co-existence of man and nature. Ziro valley’s system has immense universal value as a potential way to mobilize simultaneous community conservation and developmental work.

Ziro Valley’s wet rice cultivation system is extensive, compared to the surrounding regions’ shifting cultivation. The network of meticulously engineered irrigation channels ensure irrigation despite limited water availability. This system is a direct result of efficient conservation of the surrounding forests, which forms the crucial watershed for the field streamlets. Strict customary laws governing utilization of forest resources and hunting practices along with nature worship are responsible for this. Such practices hold immense value in a world now attempting to prevent the blatant exploitation of nature. Apatani traditions set an example of optimally harvesting forest



The way to the Sustainable Development Goals

Illustrated by Mansi Mandhani

resources, and effective conservation.

Their farming methods and their determination to stick with their values have served them well in combating the ever-changing nature scape. Their culture-specific practices set them apart. Traditional manual farming is much less polluting than using animals or machines. Soil fertility is maintained by time-tested traditional methods, avoiding chemical fertilizers.

On the other hand, regular villages that do not uphold a value system like the Apatanis have been unsuccessful in effectively tackling the challenges of climate change - changes in weather patterns, inadequate rainfall, reducing soil fertility. Thus, farmers are unable to produce sufficient crop yields, resulting in food insecurity on a national scale. As per Food and Agriculture Organization data (2016), if the current situation of GHG emissions and climate change continue then by the year 2100

there will be a decline in the production of major cereal crops (eg: 20–30% in rice). To equip the farmers with awareness and the tools necessary to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) research program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) has come up with the CSV approach.

This approach acknowledges that there is no one universally applicable strategy to offset the negative impacts of climate change, and thus follows a four-step plan generating unique solutions for each village. The steps include a baseline assessment of the society. First is a consideration of natural resources, socioeconomic conditions, social structure and physical resources, where local knowledge is incorporated. A survey then assesses the current agricultural practices and techniques; on the basis of which, a CSV is designed to fit the specific village's needs. Finally, depending on the level of success, models for scaling up are created. CSVs are unique in their intervention as they do not simply provide financial aid; instead, after introducing sustainable farming practices, they empower the community and local organizations to continue these practices independent of external resources and guidance.

CSVs are successful in implementing agricultural practices that are weather-smart, water-smart and carbon-smart to ensure adequate yields. For instance, regular farmers experienced yield losses of 30-50% whereas those in CSVs only lost 5-10%, which is significantly lesser than the regular farmers (CIMMYT, 2015). In South Asia, the models were

successful and results showed that tillage practices and residue incorporation increased rice-wheat yields by 5–37% and reduced GHG emission by 16–25% (Agarwal, et al., 2018). Further, the Haryana Department of Agriculture has launched an action plan that aims at integrating 500 more villages under the CSV model. One major reason behind this success is that CSVs promote active participation of the local community, to the extent that it even addresses social inequality by involving women as an integral part of the decision-making process. Farmers shortlist the agricultural practices on a priority basis and farmer cooperatives are set up to ensure knowledge sharing. Thus, the CSVs focus on improving the lives of the farmer by allowing them to be a part in the process.

The structure of globalisation and free market economy has practically exhausted the natural conditions required for farming. Therefore, it becomes imperative to take inspiration from these villages. This section explores the potential adaptivity of these practices into mainstream society.

The Apatani community conservation practice of watershed management could be extremely valuable on a larger scale. Neighbouring forest land is often used for shifting agriculture in rural areas; small urban forest patches are developed into residential spaces. Instead of irrevocably changing the nature of this land, they should be utilized in an effective and sustainable manner. The forestland is key to maintaining soil nutrient levels, allowing rain water to percolate, providing the area with a reliable ground water supply, simultaneously

maintaining land integrity and preventing erosion. This water can reduce the pressure on the land and on neighbouring water bodies as a source of irrigation for the fields. In cities, the urban forests destroyed for development are green lungs in an overpopulated area, providing a solution for the increasing demand for water in the city while also maintaining a certain amount of green cover and biodiversity.

Smart irrigation methods in agricultural fields are another example of optimal, sustainable resource utilization that could potentially help a community reduce their negative environmental impact. With paddy cultivation, there is a need to flood the field. The Apatanis create channels that originate from the valley's river, irrigate the field and then the excess water drains back into the river, thereby, minimizing wastage as well as sustaining the soil and water nutrients for the next season.

Today's urban spaces exhibit inefficient city planning, water management, and waste management. Sustainable architecture is on the rise, with projects like the green architecture movement (The Economist, 2004) and India's rural cultures have always inspired people to innovate. It is time the Indian civic look towards our traditional, forgotten "rural" architects to combat climate change effectively, in the matters of agriculture and planning.

Future attempts of environmental reform should incorporate equal partnership, as showcased by the CSV model. The project does not force change upon the stakeholders, especially the farmers;

instead it enables an inclusive, participatory process. The aforementioned process of decision making ensures that all the stakeholders get a voice. Therefore, there can be minimum interference - the organization provides the initial catalyst for change, subsequently leaving the community to function independently. A similar mechanism could be adopted on different platforms (cities, resident welfare associations) paving the way for long term solutions that people would voluntarily abide by.

Additionally, CSV takes into account the opinions of those most affected. There is evidence that women are adversely affected by climate change (Goh, 2012) therefore, they have different priorities when adopting climate smart technologies. This method of inclusion has proved successful in fostering gender equality, women empowerment, poverty reduction and food security (Chanana et al., 2018). Prioritising the needs of those most adversely affected by climate change in international organisations can prove equally helpful in achieving the SDGs. For instance, instead of a list of policies being applied as a blanket rule by international treaties, if developing countries indicated, on a priority basis, measures that could be adopted by them out of a wide range of options, there would be a greater chance that these reforms would be successful. This would allow for active participation of the countries most affected, just like in the case of women farmers under CSVs.

The two case studies explored are underlined by a theme of co-operating in order to co-exist with the environment. In the case of CSVs, it is an understanding of how people must work together

to create meaningful change. Therefore, social inclusion becomes an equally important goal and must be focused upon in order for society to fully accept and adopt new ways and methods that are designed to ensure sustainable production and development. Additionally, in the case of the Apatanis, the reason behind their success also lies in an understanding of their environment and their connection to natural resources, on a cultural level. Perhaps, we need to finally do away with the view of tribals as backward, and start respecting and adapting their core value belief that nature is something sacred.

For too long natural resources have been viewed as expendable and exploitable, ultimately forcing their inclusion in the never-ending cycle of development at the cost of the environment. The key to changing this lies in repairing our relationship with nature. There is a need for mutual consensus in climate action for regeneration of the environment. In keeping with this message, these efforts serve as a lesson and we must make an active effort to turn a spotlight upon these much-needed innovations. The efforts of tribes and of projects like Climate Smart Villages stand out as examples of rethinking our current way of life in order to give priority to that which we depend upon, the environment. It is exactly the kind of rethinking without which the SDGs remain a hopeless dream. While reaffirmation of environmental degradation in the form of goals like the SDGs and the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration '21-'30 is important, it is simply not enough. By encouraging the visibility of sustainable efforts in agriculture, forest conservation, architecture and city planning, we can finally bridge

the gap between realisation and restoration towards the ultimate goal of regeneration.

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4 HEALTH EDUCATION IN A WORLD OF DISPARITY

Written by **Gayatri Thakkar**

The Coronavirus Pandemic has been a watershed period for a number of institutions, one of them being that of Health. As a world, we have scrambled to rapidly learn how to cope with a deadly virus, disseminating important information regarding general health regulations along the way. A conduit has been created to reach out to the masses, the economically stable and weak sections alike, and it is important for us to expand upon this means of health education. In a world where money is everything, economic disparity runs rampant. It seeps into spheres of basic human rights like health, making it our responsibility to carry this conversation forward.

The Coronavirus Pandemic has wreaked havoc in its wake and has had many negative impacts on society due to its very scale and extent. One interesting development accrued to this emergency is the hyper-awareness formed around Health Education, especially with respect to the lower-income strata that till date combats limitations in accessing information involving health maintenance. What makes Health Education essential is its role to inform society of the existence, prevention, and treatment of certain illnesses. It also educates individuals of their right for health maintenance. Here, I aim to explore the possible evolution of health education especially with respect to economically weak groups, in the wake of this pandemic.

The sheer nature of Coronavirus has ensured that it does not discriminate between the rich and poor. Of course, high- and mid-income individuals are at an advantage when it comes to the curtailment and treatment of the virus. Apart from this rather apparent economic divide, health inequities involving one's social, cultural, spatial and environmental factors play a major role in the furthering of health disparity. These include the interstices of caste, gender and sex which strongly affect one's accessibility to health. According to the World Health Organisation, "Health inequities are avoidable inequalities in health between groups of people within countries and between countries. These inequities arise from inequalities within and between societies." (Authors, 2013). One such

major inequality is that of the unequal distribution of financial capital. Those with financial capital have the opportunity to obtain an education from a quality establishment, which probably covers basic health and hygiene instruction. They have access to medical facilities that have qualified doctors, with high-end equipment, focused treatment, and appropriate medication. Those lacking adequate financial capital have little to no alternatives of availing this quality of services. Thus, they remain in a state of poor health. “Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of poor health. Poverty increases the chances of poor health. Poor health, in turn, traps communities in poverty.” (Roberts, 2018). It’s a vicious cycle. The basic human right of health is elusive even to people who have been pulled out of absolute poverty, only to be stuck in the rut of relative poverty. While poverty and poor health may always remain interrelated, it is possible that adequate health education may help scale down the cases of poverty-related ill-health in the long run.

In a country like India, where we celebrate diversity, the two unfortunate forms of “diversity” that we must discuss are those of economic status and development. Access (to healthcare) is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “The right or opportunity to use or benefit from (healthcare)”. In this sphere, the rural population, the rich, in addition to the poor, are at a stark disadvantage. “Access to health care facilities is significantly urban biased” (Barik & Thorat, 2015). Therefore, people living in rural areas face the additional handicap of such a situation forming a disproportionately larger share of the unhealthy population (Barik & Thorat, 2015). While we can measure access in terms of physical availability, such as distance of health facilities



Obstacles in healthcare education

Illustrated by Kiara Coutinho

from rural areas, it is important to note the quality of healthcare that is available in these areas too. A positive that has emerged due to Covid-19 is that everyone is being forced to reevaluate their lifestyles with respect to sanitation and hygiene. To ensure collective health, governments are being forced to rapidly educate even the economically weaker sections of society. In fact, this virus has possibly gained such attention solely because it has affected the economically stable too. Hypothetically, if it was only the poverty stricken who had been affected, this would have been classified as a disease of poverty, and would not have gained the attention that it has today. However, we are in the midst of an exceptional scenario: death rates are on the high,

entire countries have been locked down, industries have come to a screeching halt, economies are struggling. This is our reality. For an emergency of this scale, the negative effects are far too tangible, not easy to ignore. Right from every billboard, bus sign, televised advertisement, radio broadcast, news channel, article, WhatsApp forward, to the very cautionary message that is played out for every phone call we make, they all say the same thing—wash your hands regularly, consult a doctor if you exhibit certain symptoms, wear a mask, sneeze or cough into your elbow to reduce the risk of spreading germs through contact and use a sanitiser. Many of these preventive measures are common for a number of communicable diseases. Simple teachings like hand hygiene have shown to reduce the incidence of diarrhoea by more than 50% amongst children, a major cause of mortality in India (Jain et al., 2019). This gives rise to the theory that perhaps this generation, having been a part of this pandemic, shall be better armed with the basic knowledge of hygiene. We are witnessing a generation that will become hyper-aware of this aspect of health, and hopefully better equipped to combat certain common illnesses. This awareness that has suddenly reached the masses may prove to be a beneficial starting point to understand how infections and illnesses work. The dissemination of general information is the need of the hour. However, in the long-run, Health Education needs to be streamlined and fine-tuned in a manner so as to avoid confusion between the symptoms and treatments of various illnesses. Ambiguity in the provision of this information may cause confusion, and must be addressed.

India is home to a variety of traditional systems

of medicine such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and other indigenous systems too (Ravishankar & Shukla, 2007). While a large amount of the Indian population doesn't have access to modern and western medical facilities, they have been extremely self-sufficient when it comes to developing methods of treating illnesses. Use of herbs, leaves, roots and other natural products in the form of oral medication or ointments and salves has been quite popular. Western medicine is far from the only reliable source of treatment. The benefits of turmeric (as an immunity booster) have been recently backed by modern scientific research. However, nutritional deficiencies, lack of access to clean drinking water, inadequate sanitation give rise to certain diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, dengue, diarrhoea, and AIDS, which contribute to the high death rates of the poverty-stricken (Singh & Singh, 2008). These can be combated by furthering health education amongst the people, an endeavour that is already underway through NGOs and government schemes. Community Health Volunteer schemes are considered vital to achieving the goal of increasing community participation and access to the healthcare system. Since 2006, many Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) have been deployed as community health volunteers throughout India. These are women who are part of a certain geographical community, and are assigned the same community so as to facilitate access to healthcare, treat minor illnesses, and generate health awareness amongst the community members. While being successful in dissipating information regarding maternal and child health, oral rehydration therapy etc., the ASHA workers were found lacking in training for lethal diseases

(Fathima et al., 2015). Recruitment and training of ASHA workers is essential to enable them to bring a wider range of illnesses under their purview.

Today, healthcare is a profit-seeking industry. It is incredibly tough for the economically weak sections of society to navigate through this. However, our point of focus is health education, which is the first step. Our aim is to shed light on the extent of ignorance regarding health in our country, and the role of education in mitigating it. Even if we had a well-functioning healthcare model, lack of awareness would hinder its efficient utilisation. It is key to disseminate as much information as possible regarding basic health and hygiene, however, this endeavour of the government and voluntary organisations has not been very successful. The extent of Covid-19 and its sweeping consequences has gained a minor victory: day by day, a large number of people are being educated about it. Unsurprisingly, the tribes residing in the remote areas of India were initially not even notified of the Coronavirus pandemic. Increasingly, some tribes have been contacted in Chhattisgarh and information about the virus is being given to them through audio platforms and radio programmes, in various dialects known to them (Vaid, 2020). This is a powerful system of networking being forged, that can prove to be useful for disseminating health information in the long run.

By harnessing the momentum gained during this period of strife, we can positively utilise the grim reality and fear of this pandemic to drive home the importance of health, hygiene, and sanitation especially to the socio-economically disadvantaged groups in our society. We can use this opportunity to expand our knowledge on health as an



Image courtesy: Gayatri Thakkar

institution, to change the way we perceive it, and move towards a more inclusive, equitable system. Due to the pandemic, we are being forced to forge new connections across our nation, with the singular view of circulating information regarding Covid-19. These are important points of contact that are being formed, and if maintained, can be revisited even after the pandemic subsides to spread awareness with respect to other diseases and illnesses, and to promote health literacy.

Today, housing societies and offices have developed a standard protocol of regular temperature checks and hand sanitisation to maintain hygiene. Subsequently, formulating policies such as free or subsidised compulsory medical check-ups for all staff and visitors is a step in the right direction. If we simply regularise the topic of health and hygiene amongst people, work it into their daily lives, perhaps we will succeed in overcoming the first hurdle; that of ignorance. This virus shall condition the masses to maintain a certain standard of hygiene and sanitation, which should ideally reduce the rapid spread of communicable diseases.

This can be done if the masses are made receptive to education, using Covid-19 as a precedent. In the rural areas, it is the lack of outreach that prevents this knowledge from being imparted to the people. Often the main hindrance in remote areas is lack of access to relevant news and health information. A supply of devices like radios, phones, and an internet connection can create a point of access to the outside world.

It is an unfortunate world we live in, where a fundamental requirement such as health is fuelled by a profit-motive. To change that shall not be simple. It begs us to put an end to this disparity, to usher in an era of equality. The first thing that we can do is notice the value of using this pandemic as a precedent, and to formulate a model to rapidly educate people who face socio-economic deprivation. It is essential to take advantage of the fact that people are becoming hyper-aware of health as an institution today. It is being talked about constantly due to our current situation, and using this, we can spread awareness about health education. The concept of health is very layered. By taking the first step to promote health education, we chip away at these layers, and can expect to move towards the availability of health provisions, and ultimately achieve better health outcomes in the future. Today, a conversation on health has begun. It is our duty to keep that conversation going.

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5 HEALTHCARE DELIVERED

Written by **Priya Noronha**

The response to the pandemic has necessitated an assessment of the public healthcare delivery system, and its efficiency, equitability and effectiveness. It is vital that issues such as inequities in affordability and access, fragmentation of healthcare provision, and the lack of public spending on health and health-insurance coverage are addressed. The solution proposed is to adopt a patient-centric model of healthcare delivery, which would emphasise Primary Healthcare Centers, improve proactive care, reduce the load on tertiary care centers, minimise household expenditure on healthcare, and use modern medical technology and Health Information Technology (HIT) to integrate the healthcare delivery system.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an unanticipated burden on the health resources in India. It is apparent that an evaluation of the health systems in the country- their quality, availability and efficiency- is imperative. Rethinking the structure of healthcare delivery systems has multifarious benefits beyond the short-term treatment of diseases, including alleviating poverty and accelerating economic development. This article intends to examine the need for a better healthcare delivery system in India, and subsequently, propose a more effective and equitable system.

A Healthcare Delivery System is the organisation of the personnel, institutions and resources required to provide for the healthcare needs of the population

(Amzat & Kolo, 2020). In India, it is three tiered:

1. At the primary level, there are public sub-centres, primary health centres (PHCs), and community health centres,
2. At the secondary level, there are public general hospitals, district hospitals, and some specialised services such as radiology,
3. And at the tertiary level there are medical colleges and super speciality tertiary centres

It is important to recognise the scope of the services provided by healthcare delivery systems. There are several components that it must have, namely- Assessment, Prevention, Diagnosis, Intervention, Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Administration (Noronha, 2014).

In India, there are many inequities in the accessibility

and affordability of quality healthcare for several minority groups, such as lower castes and tribes. Often, these groups are poor and can ill afford to spend on healthcare or take leave from work. Discrimination in healthcare delivery on the basis of caste is evident by higher caste providers not touching dalit patients, not entering their houses, not treating them with care, and so on. Sometimes, this social exclusion offers the impression that they cannot approach the health system or utilise healthcare provisions (Acharya, 2018). Likewise, the health of women is often marginalised. A lack of understanding of the female context in social situations, along with many aspects of women's reproductive health being seen as taboo, implies that a significant portion of the time women cannot utilise the healthcare system easily, and are not diagnosed at an early stage. Hence, the mortality and morbidity rate for preventable diseases such as cervical cancer is high (despite the availability of vaccines). The maternal mortality rate is also high. Maternal healthcare is infrequently utilised, even if available, especially by poor women.

The lack of an integrated system for healthcare delivery in India is the underlying cause of many of its issues concerning equitability and efficiency. The system is very complex, with the patient having a large number of options and often being unaware of them. The presence of both public and private providers of health services and financing, with further splintering within each sector further compounds confusion. There is no centralised authority effectively supervising healthcare delivery. Supervision is fragmented depending upon the kind of health institution, and also the region



Everyone's right to healthcare

Illustrated by Rashi Shah

(health is a subject in the State List of legislature topics). This aggravates inequities in access across the country. Hence, data surveillance is difficult (as seen with the insufficient monitoring of detected and latent tuberculosis cases), and policy making is hindered (as is apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic, with healthcare providers not recording, maintaining and sharing information efficiently). It also means that the enforcement of quality and patient protection regulations is problematic (Niti Aayog, 2019). Additionally, well-known tertiary care centers become overcrowded (for example, people coming to Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai for a cancer diagnosis that need not have been done at the specialty itself).

In comparison with other countries, the extent and

nature of health insurance coverage (with respect to out-of pocket expenditures on healthcare) and public financing for healthcare in India is below par. As of 2019, government spending on healthcare is about 1.1% of the GDP, amongst the lowest in the world (in the low to middle income nations bracket) (Niti Aayog, 2019). This spending is spread inequitably across the country's massive population. 62% of healthcare expenditure is by households themselves, implying that most people do not have health insurance. This is devastating for the poor, the homeless, and those with low incomes who could fall into health-related poverty if a family member falls sick. (Niti Aayog, 2019). According to the Medical Council of India, in 2020, the doctor-patient ratio is one doctor for 1445 people (the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends 1:1000). According to the Niti Aayog, as of 2019, 98% of healthcare facilities in India employ ten people or less. Studies have also shown that there are high absenteeism rates among government health workers, and that even when they are present, they often do not treat their patients well. Referrals are rare, patients are not given instructions, follow-ups are not recommended, and often, they do not touch the patient at all (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). Other serious issues include the over prescription of drugs such as antimalarials and antibiotics. Many times, steroids are administered which alleviate symptoms, but do not treat the disease. This is causing the rise of drug resistant microorganisms which have very harmful implications in the long run (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011).

Based on this understanding of the problems being

faced, it became apparent that a systemic change of the healthcare delivery system to make it more integrated would be vital. Hence, I propose a shift from our current doctor-centric model of healthcare delivery (where the patient approaches a doctor or health institution for care) to a patient-centric model. This model focuses on addressing the needs of the community, rather than offering a range of services that the patient approaches the healthcare system for. It would be more proactive, effective and equitable in providing universal healthcare. It would also be wholly integrated, cost-effective, and comprehensive, thus improving the quality and ease of access to healthcare, especially for poor sections of society who can ill afford the present set up.

This shift would reorient the health delivery system towards the primary level. This would translate into the visibilization of Sub-Centers, Primary Health Centers (PHCs), and Community Health Centers (CHCs). It would remove the bottleneck of having to go to a doctor, or a tertiary care center in a city. It would reduce unnecessary expenditure, improve health literacy, and result in the potential decrowding of hospitals. Such a system would be proactive in the assessment of local healthcare, and in the prevention of diseases with vaccination drives, etc. It would take healthcare beyond the intervention stage, where it usually begins in India. As an integrated system, catering to everyone in the community, it would be easy to collect health data which could then be analysed.

This would require the creation and revamping

of primary healthcare centers. With modern technological developments, health infrastructure is affordable; for example, there are already low cost medical devices that can be made at scale for diagnostics, such as HemoCue (for anaemia). It would also require the training of many more nurses, paramedics, and community healthcare workers, thus creating gainful employment. Both the creation and development of health infrastructure, and the improved quality of labour would more than make up for the size of public investment. Healthier people provide better quality labour, and the resultant improvements in the standard of living would greatly contribute to the development of the nation. Thanks to the widespread availability of smart devices and the internet, it is possible to train those in remote locations online and at scale. It would also be important to hold regular workshops and other training sessions to also teach the healthcare workers how to interact with those in the community in an empathetic and fair manner. This would enrich the community, and provide the healthcare worker with a valuable set of skills. The highly integrated nature of the system would make it easier to keep track of the work conducted, and the behaviour of the healthcare worker as well as the patients. With more skilled paramedics, services such as dialysis treatments could be brought to the patient's home, rather than them having to go to a hospital or clinic. Rehabilitation and palliative care could be done at the primary level, rather than putting a strain on the family or forcing them to invest in a hospice. Also, since this will be at a local level, the family could live at home and visit often, while still being able to work and earn. The key to doing all of this is HIT (Health

Information Technology). It will truly integrate the health delivery system. This includes both a uniform, homogenised Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system, and software that can analyse the incidences of diseases (especially useful for containing the spread of highly contagious diseases). This will expedite administration. HIT would also link each person to the integrated health system via their health insurance, ensuring that no one is alienated from it. Telemedicine, which has become very popular during the pandemic, is an excellent means to reach those with poor access to healthcare professionals. HIT would potentially bypass social barriers of caste, gender, etc. It would make access to quality affordable healthcare equitable in a way that human intervention never could. For example, regardless of social strictures about what pregnant women should or should not do, HIT could be used to inform both the expectant mother and the healthcare worker that particular nutrient supplements need to be taken. It would alert both the families and the healthcare worker that the child needs to be immunised and given the full course of a vaccine. It would be vital for data surveillance and hence combating diseases, especially communicable ones like Tuberculosis

. With healthtech solutions, government money can be used more efficiently via the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY). This scheme is the nation's health insurance scheme which is fully funded by the government, with the intention of funding the healthcare of those who can least afford it. People are generally very reluctant to opt for health insurance, despite its benefits (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). This needs to

be changed by improving the accessibility, efficacy and equitability of public health insurance, and educating people about the importance of health insurance, which could be done best from the primary health center.

After examining the deficiencies in the current healthcare system, I have come to the conclusion that a significant change in the healthcare model would be best for the country. It would be a welcome shift from reactive and fragmented care, to proactive and integrated care. The public investments required for this will more than pay for themselves through reduced illness and death, higher wages, and better education. Such a shift would greatly strengthen and spread equitable, affordable quality healthcare, improve the standard of living, build human capital, and increase human happiness and well-being.

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6 THE JIGSAW CLASSROOM

Written by **Rishika Shah**

As 'puzzling' as the name may be, the Jigsaw Classroom is a simple yet effective classroom model that suggests a change in the traditional pedagogy. As an attempt to rethink the unidirectional classroom model found in most schools today, the 'Jigsaw Classroom', a method developed by Psychologist Elliott Aronson facilitates positive interpersonal and interethnic relations among students, increases self-esteem, and enhances academic achievement. This article seeks to explore the sociological aspects of this unique strategy that revolves around student-interactions and how the implementation of the model can contribute to solving many systemic problems rooted in education systems globally. It further explores the viability of such a learning technique in the Indian context. There is a rampant disparity between people on the basis of socio-economic, religious, economic grounds, even in terms of access to education in India. While policymakers continue to focus on that, this article aims to look into the classroom, where students from different backgrounds come together by acknowledging the question - "Is this classroom inclusive in the true sense?" This article seeks to start a discussion on breaking the rigidity of the traditional classroom model and think unconventionally.

Out of the many takeaways from the movie, 'The Breakfast Club', a prominent one was that every classroom is an assortment of archetypes. So, what happens when the 'Jock' and the 'Geek' taking the same class bump into each other in the hallway? Pop culture has certainly helped to establish the differences extant in every student. Such variances can be in terms of race, caste, social class, interests, intelligence, or aptitude. A classroom is structured such that every student

receives knowledge through the same means but is it an equalizer in the true sense for individuals belonging to varied walks of life?

A school is one of the primary institutions of socialization that can mold an individual's perspective towards the rest of the world to a great extent. Socialization facilitates processes of inclusion and participation of diverse individuals and groups in society. With the ever-increasing

expectations from students, the classroom atmosphere has proven to become excessively competitive. In a competitive setting, students are more performance-oriented and are more likely to sacrifice their learning experience for the former. Performance-approach goals are reinforced, as per the Achievement Goals Theory and a more negative self-evaluation is found upon failure (Shui Fong Lam, 2001). With the intent to combat this problem and to create a cooperative classroom model, Psychologist Elliott Aronson developed a unique learning method called the ‘Jigsaw Classroom’.

It can be defined as a cooperative learning method used to reduce racial prejudice through interaction in group efforts. It is a unique way of learning that involves a shift in roles- students assume the responsibility of understanding the study material, interact with peers and pass on the newly acquired knowledge to the rest of the group. “The jigsaw technique is so named because each child in a jigsaw classroom has to become an expert on a single topic that is a crucial part of a larger academic puzzle.” The classroom is divided equally into academically and racially mixed groups wherein each individual is responsible for learning their piece of the puzzle, followed by teaching that material to the rest of the group. This creates a sense of interdependence amongst classmates and sets aside their differences. “When compared to a traditional learning method, it is found that those who studied in a jigsaw classroom grew to like their classmates more, they performed better on standardized exams, had a greater liking of school, showed lower levels of absenteeism, and showed true integration in areas other than the classroom, were less-prejudiced and



Education unlocked

Illustrated by Ashna Ranade

had higher self-esteem” (Aronson, 2004). Another important finding was that students perceived out-group members as part of their in-group. This fits into Allport’s Intergroup Contact theory where all groups working towards the same goals, in this case: learning, can effectively reduce prejudice and discrimination. Students are now more likely to see their commonalities rather than their differences. The conflicting ‘us vs. them’ classroom environment can transform into an amicable, co-dependent, and efficient model of learning in a jigsaw classroom.

In the Indian context, the Indian education system is faced with its own set of challenges at the grass-root level making it difficult to experiment with

newer models. The beginning of education in India was marked by elitist domination and gatekeeping, hence access to mobility remains in already privileged groups. Historically, traditional Hindu education was accessible only to the Brahmins. This elitist attitude coupled with colonial education policies trying to reinforce their propaganda led to an education system marked by an intersecting caste-class bias. There was no doubt that the upper caste had a lot more access to what the forces of urbanization and modernization had to offer and therefore, climbed the ladder leaving behind the lower caste. This disparity is visible to date.

With several government policies and reformations for the advancement of education, the quality of education available to the masses has still been consistently low. Disproportionate student-to-teacher ratios, poor quality of teaching, lack of basic amenities, and poor hygiene are some of the grave challenges faced by schools across the country. The urgent need to tackle such primary issues questions the prioritization as well as the smooth implementation of student-centered pedagogy.

One can see the culture of prejudice embedded in our culture and it reflects in the education system. Stereotyping and discrimination on several grounds are not uncommon. Thus in order to implement the Jigsaw Classroom model one must approach the model through the lens of Intersectionality. According to the 'Intersectionality Theory', developed by Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins in 1990, one cannot separate the effects of caste, class, race, sexual orientation, and other attributes from one another as they all collectively

add to formulate a position of privilege or disadvantage for an individual.

The Jigsaw classroom model approach is to address this Intersectional analysis through Symbolic Interactionism. 'Symbolic Interactionism theory of Sociology', which suggests that "racial prejudice is formed through interactions between members of the dominant group" (Herbert Blumer, 1958), interactions in the classroom must be governed such that the scope for discrimination is minimized.

Herein it is theorised by Blumer that it is through interactions of individuals (in this case, students) with each other, with popular media and culture, and the blinding exposure that is the benchmark of the twenty-first century: the differences present with respect to social groups are brought to the surface. This implies the need for effective interaction amongst groups in the area of education to eliminate abstract ideas or misconceptions targeting any individual who might go on to feel alienated. When we look at the institution of education from a sociological lens, it is imperative to look into its methods and curricula concerning "the economic, political, religious, social and cultural forces of the society in which they operate."

Du Bois and his concept of 'double consciousness' as experienced by the marginalized racial and ethnic minority groups puts light on the "tension young people experience as they navigate the distinct socialization processes associated with the dominant culture and holding a marginalized and inferior social status." (Saraš et al., 2018) Double Consciousness can be explained further as the

internal conflict which brews within folks from marginalized communities wherein the conflicting sentiment of seeing oneself through the eyes of the colonizer (or persons in similar positions, as in India the upper castes) is a persistent fact of life. When the Supreme Court of India enforced a 25% reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in private schools, one of the most important concerns was that the disadvantaged children would feel out of place in elite schools, according to a report. The jigsaw strategy takes into account the potential hindrances that may arise due to implicit and explicit differences and aims to restructure the classroom thereby creating a healthier environment for the students.

Another important component to assure the success of the Jigsaw model is the role of the teacher, who would be responsible for creating equal groups of students, guiding the class throughout the process, resolving difficulties as well as assisting anyone, as and when required. According to a report in the Economic Times (2018), even though India has made a significant improvement in its Education system, its Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) is still higher than many developed and developing countries. With class strength as high as our schools, logistical constraints challenge the effective implementation of this classroom model. That being said, we could adapt and refine the existing model to make it viable and effective in the Indian education system.

It must be noted that, due to the stark inequalities that students face in access to education, there is a research gap focusing on the inequalities inside a classroom. These inequalities exist throughout

the years in various forms like financial resources, family environment, support system, mental wellness, etc. Such factors can predispose students to certain outcomes and therefore, should be taken into account. This suggests that we have a long way to go to create a fair environment in schools across the nation. Another point to note is that this model does not directly take into account the multifold differences that exist in India such as regional, religious, and lingual barriers. The multi-ethnic structure of the Indian society makes it a challenge to put forth a model that will be effective uniformly throughout the entire system.. Hence, we cannot be as certain about the effectiveness of the jigsaw model to mitigate such differences by simply relying on Western implications, which do not take into account the challenges unique to the Indian subcontinent.

If I were to ask you to imagine a typical classroom, what would you envisage? My schema of a classroom involves a committed teacher, a few attentive students, a few trying to keep up with the pace of the class, and the rest completely out of sync. Our pedagogy has become unidirectional insofar that there is minimal interaction amongst students. A student-centered pedagogy helps to overcome the limitations that short-attention spans pose in the educational setting. The jigsaw classroom is one such model that brings about a sense of responsibility and involvement in those who lack interest in the traditional classroom environment. Since this model is not additive, individuals remain motivated to put in the effort and fulfill their piece of the puzzle. Systematic implementation of the jigsaw classroom has the potential to bring about

significant improvements in academic and social outcomes. An interesting and unique modality of studying can break the monotony of a lecture-based pedagogy. The transition from face-to-face learning to online learning and the increased popularity of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) during the Coronavirus pandemic has questioned the unparalleled authority of the institution of school over education. However, one can argue that digital learning has not been very successful in the Indian context due to reasons like inaccessibility to resources. Nonetheless, this can be seen as an opportunity to implement new ideas for when we return to normalcy. Finally, it is time to start a discussion on breaking the rigidity of the traditional classroom model and think unconventionally for better results. Such pedagogies are simply an attempt at adding value to our existing, rather monotonous, education system by creating an environment that is conducive to a student's development in a holistic sense.

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7 A MEAL THAT CARES

Written by **Anjali Mewlani**

Midday meal is a meal that cares for the underprivileged children of this country by providing them with a free and hot meal in government and government aided schools. This article focuses on the past, present and future of this meal, with a lens that looks at the changes that the pandemic has brought about making us question our methods up until now and its bureaucratic structure. Started in 1995, it has tackled a plethora of problems, illiteracy and malnourishment being a few of them. Herein under scrutiny lies the policy which secures the present of the children of this country, who are the future.

How many hours can you go without having a proper meal? Have you ever skipped a whole meal intentionally? Food has always been one of the three essential requirements of a human being along with shelter and clothes. Childhood is the stage where the physical and the mental growth of a child (Shirvoiker and Shirvoikar, 1542) takes place, so it becomes important to provide proper nutritional food. Children were unable to have an appropriately nutritional diet due to poverty that was prevalent in the Indian society during and before 1995. Poverty often led to child labour, which in turn had a direct effect on the enrolment of kids in schools. Hence to reduce the dropout rates and in turn, to increase the attendance and the

enrolment, and to provide a proper nutritional diet—Mid-day meal was introduced in schools in 1995. It is a scheme which makes sure that children in government and government aided schools receive a proper nutritional meal till class 8. It is a meal that cares with a goal to eradicate malnourishment among children.

Due to the COVID pandemic, schools have been shut leading to the halting of the Mid-day meal programme as well, which was provided during lunch. To understand the present, it is important to delve into the past. Even though the Mid-day meal was started in 1995, it actually commenced in 1925. Tamil Nadu was the first state to initiate the mid-

day meal. It was then made a national policy by the central government in 1995, making it compulsory for every state to follow the Mid-day meal scheme in all government and government aided schools. Today all the states in India provide mid-day meals to children in these schools. It started as to feed the socioeconomically poor children and ended up achieving multiple other objectives as we shall see.

Corruption was one of the reasons for people's delayed understanding of the importance of this scheme. It has set a remarkable bench-mark internationally as The Mid-day meal programme is the largest school feeding programme in the world. The impact that the Mid-day meal has had on the education and the health of millions of school-going children is tremendous. By launching this scheme, there has been a direct motivation for enrolment of children in schools for the socioeconomically challenged. This has helped the government to not only solve the problems of malnourishment but also of literacy.

Education is the most important part of one's life. It shapes our future, gives us opportunities. In order to make a living, our educational qualification is an important factor. Along with providing hot meals to children, it was also successful in increasing the enrolment, attendance and retention of children in schools (manual for district- MDM scheme, 2017). The MDM has provided employment opportunities to cooks and teachers as well. Even discrimination in the class seems to have diminished among peers. Children from different castes, race and gender sit together and share a meal during lunch creating and encouraging equality and brotherhood among



Food for thought

Illustrated by Mahak Bajaj

them. This is vital considering the diversity of this country. Although it was able to achieve the above objectives, it has failed to improve the quality of education and the food provided. The main focus of educating children was diverted to providing them with the meal (SRJIS / S. S. Rana, 1511). Having had its ups and downs, teachers still favour this scheme and support its continuation in the future (SRJIS / S. S. Rana, 1512). MDM feeds more than the mark of millions of children every day. But this whole system has been shaken up due to the coronavirus pandemic.

There are questions about the present condition and the future of the MDM scheme and very little to no solutions or answers. The progress made till now although little, seems to have been for naught.

People have lost their jobs and the closure of school for the past few months has aggravated the problems of malnourishment and undernourishment among children (Swami and Gurtoo, 1). The government is trying to make sure that all the progress made till the present doesn't go in vain. They are still finding more appropriate ways in which they can make sure that every kid is receiving the meal.

MDM has helped in the development and the growth of cognitive abilities in children. But due to the shutdown of educational institutions and the scheme, there seems to have been a deterioration in the nutritional level of children (Swami and Gurtoo, 3). It has resulted in a weak immune system, making them an easier prey to the deadly virus. Undernourishment is rampant. It feels like we are back to square one. Starting all over again to eradicate classroom hunger. For some kids, this used to be the first meal of the day, as they didn't have any breakfast in the morning (Banerjee, 52). Thus, for most kids this meal is a means of survival. They are heavily dependent on it, and so are the parents. Parents used to send their children to school knowing that they will receive MDM and they wouldn't need to worry about them not eating in the course of the day.

Government officials decided that the meal should be served even in the pandemic. It was decided to distribute the meal at every doorstep of any eligible kid. Other methods initiated by the government were transferring money straight to the bank account of the parents while some states decided to give dry rations instead of supplying hot meals. The dry ration was provided in April and May and

then the government stopped providing it without giving notice to the families (M, 2020). Every state has adopted different methods according to their convenience, but it can be said that they have not been completely successful. Although most of them did receive something at home, there were some who didn't receive anything at all. This has had severe repercussions. There has been an increase in the budget by 11% that is allocated for the mid-day meals (Upadhyay, 2020) to make sure that the kids receive MDM even in the lockdown.

Upadhyay (2020), conducted a research regarding the Mid-day meal during the lockdown. Interviews were taken of government officials as well as some of the parents and the kids who were dependent on the mid-day meal. A mixed result was found, some received the meal while some did not receive any meal or money in compensation. Results showed that there were 40% of the children who did not receive any dry ration kit or reimbursements in cash. Even though some children were receiving the dry ration along with the cooking cost, it cannot be said that the food cooked was solely eaten by the child. As their entire family has been suffering from an economic crisis during the pandemic, at times the means fell short and the resources provided in the name of the child fed the entire family unit. This only leads to low intake of nutrition for the children. In some schools during the delivery of ration packets, sometimes the authorities even checked their weight to ensure that the meal portion is singly for the child, but the same can't be said for other states and institutions.

Where does this extra money go? This is where corruption and bureaucratic apathy comes in (Lahariya, 2018). However, the concerned officials confirm that the money is used for the said purpose only. Then, the main question is why are there 40% of eligible children who haven't received anything (Upadhyay, 2020). In Bihar during May, this money was used to feed COVID patients who were housed in quarantine centres (Kumar, 2020). Schools are turned into quarantine zones and all the money is used there. Money used for MDM seems to be mishandled by the authorities since the beginning. If this keeps going on how are we going to achieve zero hunger by 2030 (UNDP, India)?

In the midst of all this, another important question that arises in our mind is: what about the future? People with daily wages have lost their jobs, they have no income. As soon as the lockdown is lifted, they would want their children to earn money, to bring some income in the household. After schools reopen, going back to normal is not going to be easy. What is the new normal going to be (Swami and Gurtoo, 6)? Will students still go to school after lockdown? Are children going to receive mid-day meals of good quality? What about the quality of education? Government officials are trying to find different ways to make this scheme stable. Though we don't know what the future will be, we need to make sure necessary steps are taken in the present to secure the future.

While recovering from the existing problems of low nutritional levels we also need to deal with the problems that are arising due to the pandemic. Measures taken by the government will be effective

only if they are taken seriously. Government does provide food security allowance to families but they also need to make sure that people do receive it and use it. It is not possible sometimes to deliver the meal or the dry ration at each and every doorstep. So, they can allot a time and ask people to collect it from the nearby allotted place, whichever might be convenient to them. The doorstep delivery should only be provided to the families who are in quarantine and are unable to go out and collect it themselves. Teachers of the school could also do the random health check-ups to ensure that children are provided with proper and healthy food. Midday meals should not be perceived as charity but a civic responsibility (Kumar, 2020). Society plays a very important role in all the policies and decisions made by the government.

Policies should be implemented beyond just being on paper. Children are the future of India; we need to make sure that they not only receive a good education but also a proper nutritional diet. All the structures of society, be it family, health or education, are interrelated and interconnected. Changes brought in one sphere would lead to massive changes in another. There will be an increase in the enrolment rates of schools if there will be reduced poverty. And although MDM does not directly contribute to reduction of poverty, it acts as an additional nutritional resource for children and their families to fall back on in times of need. With the provision of MDM, we can ensure the fulfilment of dietary needs of children in the learning age and curb hunger related mortality. Mid-day meal is a meal that cares for the children of this country, the only obstacle to make this meal

a perfect school feeding programme is created by the bureaucracy and us as the citizens who enable corruption in the said system. Such negligence should not come at the cost of the future of India.

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8 WHAT ROLE DOES THE LANGUAGE OF GODS PLAY IN THE WORLD OF MEN?

Written by **Nisha Gokhale**

The National Education Policy urges us to be forward-looking - it intends to introduce several changes to the overall system to make it more practical and in pace with the technological development of the past few decades. And yet, the same document proposes to 'mainstream' Sanskrit - a language associated with power, privilege and exclusivity. This begs the question - what role does the language of Gods play in the world of men? The paper looks to deconstruct the structures of education and language in the context of NEP. It explores the relevance and feasibility of teaching a classical language like Sanskrit in modern India.

The debate on the relevance of Sanskrit has been revived with the National Education Policy (NEP) claiming that “Sanskrit will be mainstreamed with strong offerings in school.” (National Education Policy, 2020) The policy’s special emphasis on the classical Indian languages in general and Sanskrit in particular raises the question - what role does Sanskrit play in shaping modern India’s educational landscape? With a history of association with exclusivity and privilege, Sanskrit has never been known as a language of the masses. One of the synonyms of the language in Sanskrit is devabhasha - language of the Gods. Sanskrit has traditionally been a language of intellectual discourse. In the light of this knowledge, how relevant is the “mainstreaming” of the language?

Questioning the relevance of a classical language is not a modern phenomenon. At the time of framing of the Constitution, adoption of Sanskrit as the national language was proposed and highly debated. Given the astounding plurality of languages in India, it was deemed necessary to formally adopt a language as the medium of official communication to avoid confusion. Since Hindi, including its variants Urdu and Hindustani, was the most widely spoken language, it was prescribed as the official language and assimilation of expressions used in other languages was recommended. (Basu, 2019) As noted by Dr Durga Das Basu, the framers of the Constitution failed to decide upon a single language as the national language and what appears in the Constitution is indeed a compromise

between diverse claims. It must also be mentioned here that the Constitution has provisions regarding the official language and not the national language. This distinction is of paramount importance in our discussion.

Let us now consider the arguments in favour of mainstreaming Sanskrit. Sir William Jones' claim of Sanskrit being "more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin and more exquisitely refined than either" is widely quoted to establish the colonial gaze on Sanskrit. (Ramaswamy, 1999) Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had stated in the *Discovery of India*, "If I was asked what is the greatest treasure which India possesses and what is her finest heritage, I would answer unhesitatingly - it is the Sanskrit language and literature, and all that it contains." (Ramaswamy, 1999) The 1957 report of the Sanskrit Commission set up by the Government of India eloquently lauds the language and holds it in high esteem. It states, "... the people of India love and venerate Sanskrit with a feeling which is next only to patriotism for Mother India." (Ramaswamy, 1999) The national education policies of 1968 and 1986 also laid special emphasis on teaching the language and have supported the idea of mainstreaming it.

While it is clear from the above statements that Sanskrit language has garnered tremendous appreciation over the last few centuries, it must be noted that there is no dearth of criticism regarding the practicality of using it. Macaulay and Gilchrist, the critical counterparts of Jones, described Sanskrit using terms such as 'priestly', 'dead' and 'arcane', revealing that the colonial perception of



Reconnecting

Illustrated by Ashna Ranade

the language was not devoid of criticism. The very fact that the adoption of Sanskrit as the official language was opposed by a major section of the society is representative of the sentiments in the newly independent India.

It is important to examine the reasons underlying this criticism. Sanskrit comes with the historical baggage of being the 'select privilege of an exclusive few'. (Ramaswamy, 1999) As noted by Ramaswamy in her essay, Sanskrit was identified as a weapon of oppression by the Dravidian Movement, secularists fretted its association with Hindu revivalism, modernists considered it to be an obstacle to scientization and regionalists declared it to be a cause of disempowerment of the commonly spoken "mother tongues". Moreover, as a student of Sanskrit, I can vouch for the difficulty that one might experience as a beginner on account of the complex structure of grammatical concepts. The manner in

which the vagaries of the language have been tidied up by Panini has a lion's share in Sanskrit's identity as a sophisticated yet complicated language. Thus, it is difficult for a beginner to learn the language without quality reference material and teachers.

These challenges, though mentioned in the context of adoption of Sanskrit as a national language, apply to mainstreaming its teaching in schools as well. The pronounced emphasis on offering the language as an option would require an increase in standardized textbooks. Chapters dealing with modern technology and other such topics would necessitate adopting words from other languages, a phenomenon that linguists refer to as 'borrowing'. (Sinha, 2020) If it indeed is taught in such a manner, one wonders whether the classicism of the language would be retained.

From an economic point of view, Sanskrit education has been increasingly funded by the government over the last few decades due to its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. (Pollock, 2001) This is visible from the allocation of funds by successive Five Year Plans which rose from Rs 5 lakhs in 1956 and 75 lakhs in 1961 to 2.75 crores in 1969. (Ramaswamy, 1999) In addition to renovating old institutions, establishment of new centres such as Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha at Tirupati and Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha at New Delhi was undertaken. (Ramaswamy, 1999) In the last three years, as many as Rs 643.84 crores have been spent on promoting the language. (Madhukalya, 2020) This figure seems especially significant in comparison to the total Rs 29 crore spent on the rest of the classical

languages. (Madhukalya, 2020) A further emphasis on Sanskrit could worsen this funding gap between the languages.

This article does not look to deny or disregard the inherent value of learning a classical language but instead questions the feasibility of teaching a classical language when it cannot currently compete with the opening of economic avenues that a language like English or Hindi would. One simply cannot look past the contribution of the English language in augmenting the access to global opportunities of employment especially in the IT sector. Increasing the offerings of the language in school without a corresponding increase in employment opportunities would be economically inefficient.

The policy acknowledges the "severe scarcity of skilled language teachers". In 2019, the HRD minister revealed that over 800 of the total 1,748 teaching positions in the prominent Sanskrit universities across the country were lying vacant. (Ghosh, 2019) As stated earlier, learning a language as complex as Sanskrit requires a teacher's aid. To remedy this lack of teachers, the policy proposes professionalizing Sanskrit teachers "across the country in mission mode" by offering a 4-year integrated degree in Sanskrit and Education. While the implementation of measures such as these shall determine the success of this policy, it is clear that the current human and material resources involved in teaching the language cannot keep up with the scale of the proposed mainstreaming.

Sanskrit is a language greatly revered for its reservoir of knowledge of various disciplines. However, it is not possible to consider the relevance

of the language in modern India without looking at its past association with exclusivity and privilege. Whether one can move past the various identities that Sanskrit has acquired over the past few decades and appreciate it simply as a language remains to be seen.

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9 FOR MENTAL HEALTH: CHAMOMILE TEA OR COLLECTIVE AGENCY?

Written by **Amanpreet Kaur and Dhwani Kataria**

2020 was a year of reckoning for most, rising emphasis on prioritisation of the self and especially mental health awareness, however these are not enough for actualisation of advancement and equity. Social mobility, furthering or breaking away from reinforced economic disadvantages, is heavily influenced by the social institution of family. Warranting systemic and structural response to collective trauma to turn questions of personal experience into mass struggles. It would be amiss to overlook the contribution of societal and hierarchical inequalities to mental ill-health. Thus, this article seeks to delineate mental health's structural representation and review it in these contexts.

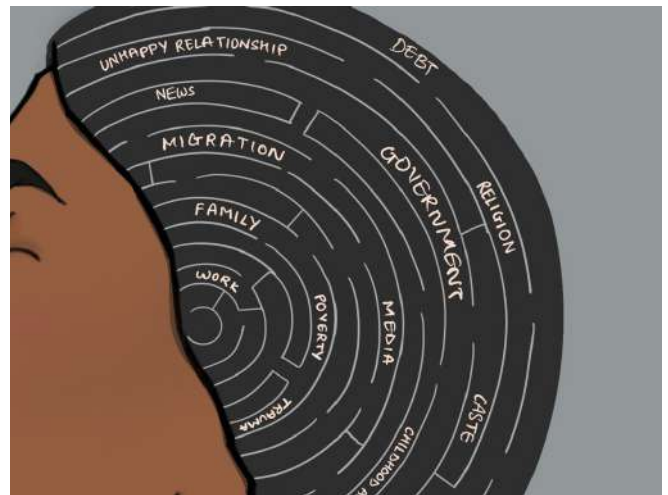
As posts and pictures of inspirational never-give-up quotes, aesthetic flowers, candles, and “instagrammable” self-care do the rounds on social media, mental health and surrounding ideas are attributed to the notion that a healthy body corresponds to a healthy mind. Possibly implying that human experience can be medicalised after being broken down, compartmentalised and translated into a diagnosable disorder. This is despite them being deeply rooted in the social and psychological structures. What we often fail to realize is that while we use terminologies such as *self-care* and treatment; and suggest trivial ways to keep anxiety at bay, we largely ignore the need to address deeper-rooted persisting systemic issues.

This article highlights the need to incorporate social and psychological variables into the prevalent mental health narratives and models.

Most aspects of mental health and psychological well-being are influenced by various social institutions such as family, education, religion, and government. The ability of the growing number of people to cope with certain mental illnesses depends substantially on the societal factors that affect family, work, and socioeconomic status. Today, overcoming the stigma in society that is associated with having a psychiatric diagnosis is farfetched. People are uncomfortable in disclosing that they have a mental disorder and, consequently,

in receiving help. This is due to the deep-rooted fear ingrained in us that speaking candidly about our mental health will lead to unwanted societal consequences and outright discrimination (Butcher, 1971). According to a study conducted by the Sylvia Brafman Mental Health Center (2016), it was observed that families tend to have substantial effects on one's mental health and behaviour. Contingent on the nature of relationships in the family, the family member's psychological well-being can be enhanced or impacted negatively. The family's role in the occurrence and escalation of mental health has been found to be imperative. Dysfunctional families or a hostile environment within the family structure can adversely affect one's mental health. When it comes to the treatment and care of individuals suffering from a particular disorder, they often rely on their families for such support. If that itself is denied, then it can have adverse effects on their mental health.

Today, acceptance of one's mental health within the family itself has become a cause of significant concern. The family pressure, the stigmatization, and the corresponding notions attached to it can easily cause breakdowns. This can be attributed to our constant fret regarding society's judgments and opinions. The idea of 'fitting-in' and not being labelled as 'different' has made its way down to the deeply-rooted societal structure. For instance, disclosing the diagnosis of one's mental disorder especially an uncommon one, such as schizophrenia is often shrouded in stigma and discrimination. It makes the person carrying it "different from others and of a less desirable kind" with a quality of being "not quite human" (Goffman, 1961). As a result,



The maze of the mind

Illustrated by Shagun Soni

prejudice, avoidance, and rejection may be directed towards the person and their family members, affecting their belongingness in social groups and events.

Within families, both mental and physical abuse can have adverse effects on the individuals' mental health. This also depends upon the intensity, extent, and amount of abuse that has occurred. The harsh reality stands with the fact that this abuse can even influence the children within the family, leaving a significant impact on their mental health. Family scenarios that cause stress and pressure can, over time, lead to the development of common mental disorders such as anxiety or depression (Behere, 2017). This only seems to aggravate one's health, especially when they are always surrounded by their family, leaving them with limited stress-relief options.

On the other hand, the positive nature of relationships within the family structure can help speed the individual's recovery process. As shown by Sylvia Brafman Mental Health Center (2016), support, companionship and stability within the families play a robust role in shaping one's mental health. Thus, a more comprehensive, accommodating and benevolent family approach will help create a positive environment and can potentially relieve one of their mental health symptoms.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, people were forced to reckon their feelings as they came to terms with their social realities. It became imperative to address the burnout that came along with the burden of having ignored these contexts for so long. The fear of falling ill, the pressures of uncertainty, anxiety, and loneliness piled on during this crisis; people's economic conditions mainly drove their decisions to put themselves at risk. This was further intensified by feelings of isolation and powerlessness and aggravated problems for those already experiencing mental health problems. This holds the potential to induce skewed feelings of worthiness as people question their productivity. The pandemic did not indiscriminately impact everyone along with social classes. It was not merely a question of biological predisposition to specific mental health problems but one rooted in more comprehensive social conditions.

A wide range of social and environmental factors could increase the risk of mental ill-health. These include poverty in childhood, social inequality and early exposure to an urban environment; migration and belonging to an ethnic minority (all trending

in the negative direction); childhood adversities, multiple traumatic experiences were at a much higher risk. In fact, the evidence of a link between childhood misfortune and future psychiatric disorder is about as strong statistically as the link between smoking and lung cancer (Bentall, 2016).

We often observe stigmatization of such mental illnesses within the societal structure or through media portrayals. This stigmatization not only exists within the healthcare system but also among those who provide treatments. It creates severe barriers to access and quality of care, thereby affecting the recovery process for those with such mental illnesses. Stigma as a complex social process, is often conceptualized as labeling, othering and discrimination involving interdependence of certain behavioural and emotional components. Most people who experience mental health problems face such stigmatization not only from society but also from family, friends, and peers (Knaak, 2017). This essentially appears to worsen their condition and postpone or impede their getting help and support. Society has these notions and stereotypes associated with mental health, where receiving treatment is often 'looked down upon.' Those who actually take a step towards seeking help are labelled as 'abnormal' and/or attention-seeking since they do not seem to conform with society's established norms and morals.

The fact that such stigma has spread to healthcare professionals' workplace culture only seems to exacerbate the situation. Individuals with lived experiences of a mental illness often report feeling devalued, excused, and dehumanized by most

of the professionals with whom they come into contact (Hamilton, 2016). They feel excluded from decisions, receiving indirect or overt menace of unscrupulous treatment or being treated in a demeaning manner. At times, these healthcare professionals may hold pessimistic views about the reality and probability of recovery, which may also be experienced as a source of stigma by certain people seeking help for mental illnesses.

Contrary to the stigmatizing portrayals that make people with mental illness seem aggressive and incompetent, we would also like to shed light upon a phenomenon commonly practiced among individuals – trivialization. Often, we hear someone describe having had a “panic attack” when they’ve really just been apprehensive for a moment. Similarly, people will talk about suffering from “depression” when they’re just a bit sad or stressed. This misrepresentation of the symptoms and using self-assigned labels causes the social trivialization of such mental health disorders. As a result, people actually suffering from enervating mental health disorders feel that the severity of their ailment is being minimized. Moreover, physical illness is never trivialized in the same way. Hence, what is required is to develop an increased understanding of mental health and thinking about it the same way we think about one’s physical health. This involves waiting for a diagnosis and getting examined by a practitioner instead of self-assignment.

As a direct result of the increase in awareness about mental distress and its subsequent trivialization, mental health now seems to be understood by everyone but remains misconstrued. Emphasis on looking at this “medical model” of understanding

mental distress through ideological agencies is imperative. There needs to be a collective, systemic response to collective trauma as we turn questions of personal experience into mass struggles of resistance, demand and work towards, as collective action is vital in developing a sense of agency and challenging conditions of powerlessness.

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10 THE BLURRING LINES OF LEISURE AND LABOUR IN THE PANDEMIC

Written by **Divya Nair & Tanushri Muruges**

The advent of the pandemic has caused us to increasingly operate from home, thus presenting a unique challenge. Despite the general consensus that working from the comforts of our homes is unlikely to cause stress, we have never felt more exhausted. Studies have shown that people are now increasingly devoting more hours not just to work, but also to leisure activities. However, the downside to this has been the ongoing productivity contest that one feels compelled to participate in, as a result of constantly being bombarded on social media about others' time utilization in the lockdown. Ironically, leisure experiences are now beginning to resemble work and are thus becoming a source of burnout. The following article seeks to explore the roots of our internalised capitalism that lead to this modern obsession with productivity.

The advent of the pandemic has caused us to increasingly operate from home, thus presenting a unique challenge, the likes of which we never had to deal with before. According to Giurge and Bohns, “the lines between work and non-work are blurring in new and unusual ways”. This has further led to a confusion of roles in our lives. As per Goffman’s theory, “Interaction is viewed as a “performance,” shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with “impressions” that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor. Within the current context, there is a confusion of behaviours that are demanded of specific environments; in this case the home and the workplace. Specifically, the home which was

previously a sanctuary for one to unwind and let their hair down, has now turned into a shared workspace for families. For example, the role and associated responsibilities of being a parent can conflict with that of an employee and juggling these demands can throw us off track, adding stress to the rest of the day. Thus, the novelty of working from home, the benefits from zero commuting, saved time and flexible schedules, eventually wore off, and what remained was the lack of structure and difficulty in determining boundaries between our personal and professional lives.

Despite the general consensus that working from the comforts of our homes is unlikely to cause stress, we have never felt more exhausted. A recent

survey from the Society of Human Resources Management found that 35% of employees reported feeling tired or having little energy often and 32% reported feeling that way sometimes (Moran, 2020). Moreover, there has also been an increase in the number of hours devoted to work each day. A survey by Deloitte found that a whopping 90% of CEOs say their teams are putting in more working hours and there has been significantly less absenteeism, during the crisis (Khetarpal, 2020). One of the causes was that employees felt the need to be productive simply because they have more time on their hands.

On the other hand, many are devoting this time to themselves or indulging in activities that they have been longing to do. The social isolation and its consequences on people's mental health have caused them to turn to leisure activities as a coping mechanism. According to a survey by The Healthy Work Company, 22% of respondents had taken up a new pastime in lockdown, while 35% had rediscovered an old one (Turns, 2020). Michael Kocet, a licensed mental health counselor believes that in this period of uncertainty, hobbies can provide people with "a sense of accomplishment that is satisfying and comforting," (Wagner, 2020). Chloe Ting's '2-week abs challenge', baking brioche and sourdough breads from scratch, cooking restaurant style food at home and exploring one's creative side through various DIY projects were some of the activities that took social media by storm in the first few months of the pandemic. Numerous works of art such as Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, and even Newton's theories on optics, were born



Work and leisure, two sides of the same coin

Illustrated by Khushi Shah

as a result of confinement to homes during the bubonic plague. Since coming up with life changing scientific theories or literary works seemed far fetched, we all turned to quarantine challenges that gave us a sense of accomplishment. However, the downside to this has been the ongoing productivity contest that one feels compelled to participate in, as a result of constantly being bombarded on social media about others' time utilization in the lockdown. An article in *Refinery 29* named this phenomenon as the "Ultimate Humblebrag", describing it as "a part impulse, part distraction, partially born out of a need for something to help define us" (Munro, 2020). Consequently, these hobbies began to be viewed as a measure of one's ability and a means of proving oneself and cooking experiments became opportunities to flaunt one's

culinary conquests.

The modern obsession with productivity began in the early 1980s, with the rise of industrial capitalism. A distinction between time oriented and task oriented behavior, widely used in industrial sociology, indicates how the orientation to work has changed over the years. Pre industrialization, humans organized their sense of time based on how long it took to complete an activity, i.e. they led their lives in a task-oriented manner, instead of categorising their day into work and leisure. Workers related the measurement of time to naturally occurring phenomena, such as ‘the time between sunrise and sunset’, the seasons of the year, and there was a complete disregard for the artificial units of clock-time. (“task-orientation versus time-orientation distinction | Encyclopedia.com”, n.d.) In industrial societies, workers are forced to judge their productivity in a time oriented manner- doing as much as possible, in as little time. There also came a distinction between “working time” and “free time”. This is not a contrast between work and leisure but between that time in which human labour is productive of exchange value and that time when it is not. (Tuckman, 2005). Effort was now bought and sold by the hour; time was ‘spent’ rather than ‘passed’; and the ‘time—effort bargain’ could be budgeted like any other commodity. (“task-orientation versus time-orientation distinction | Encyclopedia.com”, n.d.)

Our hyper productive behaviour has led us to believe that any time spent that neither adds to our employer’s worth, nor our own is wasteful. In the words of Marx, “The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist

consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist.” In his theory of alienation, he further claims that humans are reduced to the level of an animal, working only for the purpose of filling a physical gap, producing under the compulsion of direct physical need. According to Marx, our engagement in any activity is not an extension of our self expression and does not reflect our desires, and is instead just a means to fill our stomachs. As a consequence, we live in a time where every action of ours, even leisure, must amount to something, be it monetarily, socially or in the area of self growth.

In western societies, optimal leisure experiences have been equated with concepts such as self-actualization (Cohen; Murdock, 1994). According to Abraham Maslow, self-actualization emphasizes an individual’s development and fulfillment of potential. For instance, several people stop pursuing hobbies they enjoy; such as dancing or singing because they are unable to “unleash their full potential” in comparison to standards set by professionals or people they see online.

Further, the notion of “practice makes man perfect” and the aim to achieve “socially prescribed perfectionism”, leaves us with the inability to do something we love just because we might not be perfect at it. Hobbies were meant to be personal and therapeutic, not driven by compulsion and competition. As a result, the intrinsic benefits and meaning of these activities have been lost. Further, individual growth and development occurs when there is freedom to learn an activity for its own

sake. (Cohen,2013)

Maslow's theory also states that one should ideally focus on fulfilling basic needs such as rest and comfort, which includes leisure, before moving onto higher esteem needs such as the feeling of accomplishment that one gets from completing a task. However, in trying to achieve these higher needs through leisure, people tend to neglect their primary needs. Eventually, leisure begins to resemble labour. For instance, people listen to podcasts and audiobooks at 1.5x speed, and even speed up their binge watches as Netflix now provides the option to do so (Grady,2020). Noticeably, we are chasing the end result of being able to speak Spanish or play the guitar, without actually engaging in the process of learning them. Another instance of this laborious form of leisure is when vacationing is also seen as a means to check off experiences, an act that Keinan of Boston University calls building an "experiential CV" (Blum,2020). And with more time spent indoors during the pandemic, this phenomenon has caused leisure activities too to become a source of burnout. Josh Cohen, a psychoanalyst, writes "You feel burnout when you've exhausted all your internal resources, yet cannot free yourself of the nervous compulsion to go on regardless" (Petersen, 2019). Despite reaching this state, we have been internalised to believe that we must be productive at all times, even with respect to leisure.

With more time on our hands, moments of doing nothing are accompanied by feelings of guilt to make up for lost time. We are multitasking more than ever by delving into various projects on both personal and professional fronts. However, Stanford University researcher Clifford Nass

found that heavy multitaskers were less mentally organized, struggled at switching from one task to another and found it difficult to differentiate relevant from irrelevant details (Nass et al., 2009). For early humans, this ability gave them an evolutionary edge because it was essential for survival; however today, we are overestimating our ability to multitask.

While it may be true that these ingrained tendencies are causing us to be in a constant state of burnout, it is also difficult, or rather impossible to do away with this system that is evidently keeping us from being happy. The act of engaging in activities just to check them off of our lists may seem to be driven by superficial reasons, but it also adds stability to our lives due to the feeling of having accomplished something at the end of the day. Given the saying that "the idle mind is a devil's workshop", when confined to our homes, the constant immersive state distracts us from the chaos and uncertainty, and keeps our mind from becoming "a devil's workshop". Further, drawing from Darwin's theory, it can also be said that by choosing to stay in this constant state of productivity we have learnt to adapt to this new normal as a survival mechanism. For instance, baking bread from scratch, while also being useful as food for the family, was "experienced as beneficial for its ability to fill time, give structure to a day, with the useful end product providing a sense of accomplishment" (Easterbrook-Smith, 2020). Perhaps this is why baking bread was observed to be the most sought after leisure activity in the beginning of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to be mindful about the structures that push us to be compulsively

productive. With entrepreneurship on the rise and people increasingly trying to convert their passions into professions, we still need to preserve a few interests that are meant just for ourselves. Undoubtedly, there is a need to rewire our minds and free ourselves from this need; however the pandemic may not be the right time to do so. During a pandemic, when our mental and physical capabilities are limited, taking on more than we have the capacity for can be detrimental. At this juncture, placing importance on ourselves as humans before our “productive pursuits” might be the best form of self care that we can engage in. Indeed, there is an urge to rush back to normalcy, but we need to reflect upon our experiences in the pandemic and decide what behaviours need to be left behind.

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11 DO WE REALLY NEED MARRIAGE ANYMORE?

Written by **Ankitha Tauro**

The article attempts to examine the evolution of the institution of marriage and its changing functions over the years and tries to bring to light, based on current functions and motivations for marriage and its intersection with capitalism, the incompatibility of “marriage” with late stage capitalistic life. All this in order to challenge the purpose and relevance of “marriage” today and investigate, by looking at different and same-sex marriages, whether we’re fooling ourselves by saying that we “marry” for ‘love’; which formed the basis for the need to restructure marriage or ‘structure your own marriage’.

While the pandemic-enforced lockdown has been a boon that rekindled relationships, aiding in providing many, some emotional support, much required in such trying times; it had others confront the harsh realities of relationships. There has been a significant spike in divorce rates in many countries including India, amidst the pandemic. In China, there was a surge of at least 10-20% while in India, divorce and domestic violence cases (combined) increased almost 3 times in Mumbai and close to 2.5 times in Delhi after the lockdown was imposed. For these reasons, and with ample time on hand, it has made some take a step back and question the purpose of the institution of marriage. In this article, the focus is on a typically

arranged marriage in India, but in an urban setting –heterosexual and monogamous, unless stated otherwise.

Herbert Spencer’s analysis of domestic institutions and kinship argues that in the absence of alternative ways of organizing a population, kinship processes (such as marriage) will become the principal mechanism of *social integration* (Turner, 2002). It provides for the nurture and rearing of children. Traditionally, the function of marriage was also to safeguard bloodlines by ensuring that a man’s children were his own thus, the woman ‘belonged’ to her husband like property. According to Friedrich Engels, marriage and family resulted from this

need for legitimate heirs to *inherit* private property (Engels, 1972) as also to form trade alliances between families and hence, marriage was an economic contract/transaction, not between the spouses, but between the man and the father of the woman, who would previously control her sexuality. Talcott Parsons gave man the instrumental role, and the wife, the expressive role based on gender stereotypes and stated the function of *division of labour* (Parsons, 1955) much like the breadwinner-homemaker model.

Then the Catholic Church and its teaching emphasized the importance of fidelity and monogamy, which is interesting given how difficult, evolutionary biologists say, it is for humans to be sexually monogamous. The anatomical aspects of humans' closest relatives in the animal world -bonobos- seem adapted to their promiscuity, and many of these aspects are also found in humans, such as body dimorphism, female copulatory vocalization and having sex to bond, suggesting that we may have evolved to be non-monogamous (Barash & Lipton, 2002)(voxdotcom, 2018) (Barash, 2016). Now, with the modern period, came the realization that marriage could be relationships built on “love” and equality (as opposed to older functions and bases of marriage mentioned above) (Coontz, 2005), which also holds true of urban marriage, today, (Bhatia & Devulapalli, 2020) and this is the kind of marriage that this article aims to rethink.

Back to the present, in many rural parts of India, cases of forced and child marriage have resurfaced during the pandemic for the purpose of *economic*



Relationship status: Undecided

Illustrated by Shania Ferrao

security and *survival*. The situation there can be said to be similar to marriage in the traditional argument, as a labour relationship where the woman pledges her labour, sexuality and reproductive capacity in exchange for protection, sustenance and rights to children from the man (Leonard, 1980). Women from marginalized communities may not have the means to accrue wealth and even if they do, the lower wage in relation to men, may not be sufficient to support themselves causing them to be more dependent on marriage. So we also see that in many cases, marriage is an economic arrangement, above other things, in rural India.

From an urban or suburban perspective, individualism is coming to prevail in society, evidenced not only by the transition from joint to nuclear families but also with changing gender roles and the growing need to move out and make one's own living. And with the technological progress in the household sector such as mechanization of household chores, it's becoming easier to live by oneself, once economic independence is attained. Living in a capitalist society, the entirety of one's life's purpose is *productivity*. Having such a hyperproductive lifestyle, and with enough relationships with friends for emotional satisfaction, today, the need to get married might never naturally occur to one. Thus, in this day, one would expect being "single" to be the norm and marriage, an anomaly; however, marrying is still considered the norm and not doing so, a social disgrace. Why?

Now, the two main, and supposedly exclusive, functions of this marriage are usually sexual gratification and procreation. But the truth is that sex is no longer a function of marriage alone. There may be societal stigma, but on an individual level, it is increasingly becoming normal to have sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage. According to the National Survey of Family Growth, 1982-2002, almost all Americans engage in premarital sex (Finer, 2007). In India 3 in 10 tier-3 residents and one in five tier-1 residents were open to the idea of premarital sex in 2019 (Bhatia, 2020). Similar is the case of reproduction: practically thinking, we don't *have* to be 'married' for it.

Then why 'marry'? We can either remain single or mutually decide the terms of one's relationship.

Then the question that arises is: why do we need to get our relationship -sexual or otherwise- approved by the society, and our private life scrutinized by it? The answer to that, as sociologist Andrew Cherlin puts it, is that it is still "the most prestigious way to live your life." Mostly people get married to achieve a personal milestone for a "successful life" and a status symbol. This can also be evidenced by the recent generations' tendency to marry late, after securing social and economic independence. Then there are also legal rights and benefits that marriage confers upon the individuals in the contract. Many also see marriage as "a public marker of their successful union, an opportunity to display their love and companionship to family and friends." (Cherlin, 2010).

Now, for same sex couples, the need to get married is also about the possibility of and having the choice to get married as well as legally and socially being recognized as spouses which, in India, they don't under the current legal definition of marriage. Additionally, there are also several other legal benefits to marriage which they too, would like to avail such as inheritance, insurance, tax benefits, legal decision making-benefits, provisions for proper legal protection, etc. Now, the State isn't intending to incentivize marriage by doing this, but things have somehow come to automatically fall into the structure of a 'family' and its patriarchal norms that it excludes providing legal protection to live-in relationships, which is another reason why same-sex couples are demanding the right to marry. An interesting development since US' nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 is that 61% of such couples who were cohabiting, by

2017 were married, compared to 89% of different-sex couples (Jones, 2017). In 2013, 46% of LGBT individuals aligned with the ‘rights and benefits’ argument for marriage. 84% claimed that ‘love’ and 71% said ‘companionship’ was a reason to marry (Pew Research Center, 2013). But, the latter exist even in non-marital relationships with their partner/s and do not explain the need to institutionalize a cohabiting relationship. All marriage would do is put costly boundaries such as divorce in the way of splitting apart, making it hard to walk out of the marriage. Cherlin (2018) reasoned this with same-sex couples’ desire to claim a long-denied right that created a backlog of those wishing to marry and called this an example of William Ogburn’s ‘cultural lag’ – the tendency of attitudes to change more slowly than the material conditions underlying them. He expects a slowdown in the proportion of younger same-sex couples choosing to marry, much like heterosexuals in the US.

Then there have also been instances of marriages becoming stronger amid the lockdown due to availability of time to spend and ability to detach from work, social life, etc. which shows us the benefits of a relationship, marital or otherwise but at the same time, also poses the question: is marriage really practical in a normal modern world?

The romantic idea that relationships are meant to bring stability (hence, calling it getting “settled”) and ‘save you from loneliness’ and that you are supposed to ‘understand and comfort each other in the face of external hardships’, as Justice Kennedy reflected during the US Supreme Court’s 2015 decision (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, [2015]), is not

very practical or compatible with today’s modern, individualistic, fast-going world, mainly due to issues stemming from capitalism. Simply following the traditional norm can be quite problematic. Marriage, or any relationship today, is also another task, which needs nurture, responsibility, and a significant investment in time (Flood & Genadek, 2016). But we need to think whether we have that kind of time today. The production profits that drive capitalism, pressure workers to be competitive and available 24/7 (Greenhouse & Barbaro, 2006) and the exhaustion, frustration and alienation it leads to, have been expounded upon by Marx back in 1844 (Marx & Marx, 1982) (Prins, 2015). The growth of capitalism disciplined humans to internalize its principles of time use for ‘optimum’ productivity. Besides, humans are fallible, and/or their choices are liable to change with age, life values and priorities, which would then mean that the partners would either have to *compromise* in their marriage, so as to save themselves the costs of divorce - the boundary that marriage itself created, or if they still don’t see merit to it, they could get divorced and separate. The problem with the institution of marriage as we know it, is that there are several issues in such a relationship (some are mentioned above) as well as in human interpersonal or sexual relationships in general, the end to which then has to be brought by going through the cumbersome process of divorce, which can have its own hard consequences.

Looking at the way forward, different suggested structures such as the sunset clause, secret affairs, polyamory, finding love on dating apps, serial

non-binding monogamy or celibacy have been analyzed. However, all of these, though have some upsides, also have little or huge downsides and are not infallible, due to our human nature. Relationships are complicated (loyalty vs freedom) which is why, more than amending the structure of marriage and trying to arrive at a conclusion with a revised structure, we could take into consideration the central “problem” that is our human nature, and improve our understanding of our own emotional skills.

As for changing the structure, the concerned parties within the relationship should be allowed to mutually design, in good faith, the terms of *their marriage* – whether it’s an open, love or sex union, a separate spheres relationship, a yearly renegotiated relationship, whether they’ll cohabit, and so on.

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12 RESTRUCTURING THE DIVISION OF UNPAID DOMESTIC LABOUR

Written by **Ishwari Sonawane**

This article analyses Unpaid Domestic Labor, or the invisible work of women in the household. While Unpaid Domestic Labor is an essential, productive activity for the sustenance of the economy and society, it is disproportionately borne by women around the globe, dictated by gender norms. This excessive burden of Unpaid Domestic Labor on women is detrimental to their social, economic and general health. This article analyses the theoretical framework surrounding this activity, its repercussions on the female population and the findings of the Time Use Survey 2019-20 regarding the division of paid and unpaid labor. Further, it analyses the structuring of domestic labor in the ongoing pandemic.

In almost all cultures worldwide, the distribution of labour has been categorised into breadwinning and caregiving (Alesina et al., 2013). Breadwinning, once exclusive to the males, is being explored by females equally in today's age. The responsibility of caregiving, however, falls entirely on the females in addition to earning. Caregiving includes essential daily activities like cooking, cleaning, childcare, caring for the elderly, fetching water and fuel. Although both the activities are equally necessary, only the breadwinning activities are counted as 'real' work and subsequently compensated monetarily. Although physically taxing and time-consuming, the caregiving activities are not considered

economic labour, as no monetary remuneration is given in exchange for these services. These activities are considered the societal responsibilities of women and are considered a 'labour of love.' This labour, performed primarily by women, is known as Unpaid Domestic Labour. Alternatively, it is also called reproductive labour, or care work (*It is Time to Make "Women's Work" Everyone's Work*, 2016, 03:15–05:21).

Globally, women still are responsible for the majority of unpaid domestic labour. This division of labour is entrenched since childhood and reinforced at matrimony. The process of socialisation,

internalizing society's norms and ideologies, results in the belief that it is a woman's 'duty'. Due to its time and energy consuming nature, women often lose control of their time and experience poverty. This limits the time that can be spent on education, leisure, paid employment, and other activities and significantly impacts their mental and physical health (Sanghera 2020).

The movement, 'Wages for housework,' which started in the 1970s, initiated a conversation about this invisible work and started a discourse about domestic labour. This movement emerged during the second wave of feminism. Its objective was to unite all the housekeepers, prominently women, to assert their independence and demand the share of the wealth they create. Various theoretical perspectives try to explain the gendered division of labour.

Parsons proposed the functionalist perspective of such division, backed by the economist Gary Becker. According to functionalism, the social system is assumed to have functional unity. All parts of the system work together and have a positive function crucial to the society, with some internal consistency. They believed that men and women had distributed this labour based on their natural roles. While men are better at paid work, women are naturally suited to do household tasks. This specialisation in designated fields leads to optimisation of time and resources and thus is rational. In addition to this theory was the concept of the feminine mystique or 'femininity,' which was tied to domesticity (Primeau, 1992).



The cost of labour of love

Illustrated by Mahak Bajaj

The time availability perspective was another attempt to theorise this division. It proposed that women spend more time at home because they spend less time at paid work and thus should take up unpaid work. It tries to justify their economic dependence on men. However, this theory has been disproved multiple times. Even as women took up paid work, they are still shouldering most of the unpaid work (Bianchi et al., 2000, p. 191).

Although Marxist theory mentions reproductive labour, it does not emphasise it and does not explain the distribution. Later, the socialist feminist perspective explains it as a product of patriarchy and capitalism, which exploit females by controlling their labour and sexuality. The reproductive labour

of women is exploited by the capitalist system as a resource for more labour force, and it essentially functions on the unpaid and unrecognised domestic labour. Simultaneously, the patriarchal society tries to control female sexuality and defines the woman as a caregiver and supporter of male labour. This strict definition of female gender role robs women of equal opportunity, equal pay in the workforce and manifests itself through gender biases. (*The Productive-Reproductive Labouring Body In The Current Market Economy*, 2020).

The intersectional approach considers the equations of power, social norms, gender roles, and economic dependence. The feminist perspective of the Productive-reproductive labouring body explains that femininity has been strongly associated with domesticity, maternity, and sacrifice. Thus, the mother or the wife has always been seen in a position of subservience. The body of women (a term used by intersectional feminism to include trans and nonbinary people, avoiding the binary of man and woman) is considered fit only for birthing and supportive or complementary jobs to men's labour. (Bianchi et al., 2000, p. 191) (*The Productive-Reproductive Labouring Body In The Current Market Economy*, 2020). In this scenario, it becomes necessary to unlearn the internalised norms of gender to contextualise the differences in male and female labour's lived realities and bring about a meaningful change in the same. To aid the theoretical aspects of unpaid domestic labour, it is necessary to provide empirical proof of gendered labour distribution disparities.

A useful tool for quantification of this labour is

a Time Use Survey. This survey records the time spent by men and women on different activities. The Indian Government's Time Use Survey 2019-20 can be analysed for a ground-level understanding of this distribution.

The last Time Use Survey conducted by the Indian Government in 1998-99 projected the time spent daily by men on household tasks as 0.36 hours and women's time as 4.38 hours (Central Statistical Organisation, 1999). Compared to these figures, the time spent by both men and women has increased to 1.5 hours by men and 6 hours by women. Around 27.7% of rural men participate in domestic tasks, as compared to 82.1% of women. 22.6% of urban men and 79.2% of urban women participate in domestic labour. The disparity in the time spent on domestic labour and the participating population percentage show that women are primarily responsible for Unpaid Domestic Labour. Further, women spent 2 hours per day on Unpaid Care Activities for family members compared to men's 1 hour 15 minutes. Roughly 40% of the waking hours of rural women and 37.2% of urban women are spent on Unpaid Domestic Labour, compared to 5.4% of rural and 4.4% of urban men. 80% share of household work is borne by women in rural areas. In urban areas, the share is 87% (MoSPI, 2020).

Between the ages of 15 to 29, 31.2% of men in rural areas and 36.6% in urban areas participated in educational activities, spending 102 minutes (average) daily. This figure is significantly higher than 22.6% rural women and 32% urban women, spending 85 minutes daily. One possible explanation for this disparity might be the time

spent in Unpaid Domestic Labour on which men spent 94 minutes, as compared to 301 minutes spent by women between the ages of 15-29. The disparity can also be seen in the 25.3% (rural) and 21.9% (urban) participation rate by men as compared to 88.7% (rural) and 79% (urban) participation rate by women. Domestic work's disproportionate burden can result in time poverty, severe restrictions of time, lack of control over one's own life, and limit or hinder development in other essential activities like education (MoSPI, 2020).

However, these findings were recorded before the onset of Covid-19. Due to this worldwide pandemic, workplaces, schools, and other public places were placed under lockdown. This resulted in the additional burden of childcare, household chores, and emotional labour. In addition to this, the economic recession brought on by the pandemic has led to unemployment. Due to work from home provisions, the barriers between the workplace and home have crumbled. These conditions have led to a restructuring of the divisions of paid and unpaid work.

Compared to December 2019, men and women both did more housework in April 2020 in India. However, women's share has increased more than men's has, increasing the gap between the gendered distribution of housework. Comparatively, employed men did less work than unemployed men. However, women's employment status did not affect their Domestic Labour hours. This disproves the time availability theory, as domestic work is seen as the mother's responsibility or the wife in the family, regardless of her involvement

in paid work. Due to this pandemic, in addition to overall unemployment, women were more likely to be fired, and pre-existing inequalities along gender lines are likely to get reinforced (Deshpande, 2020)

Due to the closing of schools, additional childcare has added to the burden of domestic labour, primarily borne by women. However, the gap between men and women performing domestic labour has reduced from 2.5 hours (2014) to 2.3 hours (2020) in British households. In a household where only the father is working, the father devotes 35% of the total time spent on housework by both the parents. On the contrary, in a household where only the mother is working, she contributes 50% to domestic tasks, equal to the father, who is not working. This reinforces that the housework is not divided according to rational optimisation or time availability but is more closely linked to gender norms and family dynamics. Certain policies may worsen this phenomenon, e.g., the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ensures retaining one job per household and laying off the other parent. Women are disproportionately laid off from their jobs owing to this scheme, the gender wage gap, and gender norms, thus worsening the time gap spent in paid/unpaid work (Andrew et al., 2020).

Moreover, for negotiating time spent on Unpaid Domestic Labour, women have to take the initiative and start a conversation for restructuring these arrangements. Thus, it is still thought of as the primary responsibility of women (Desk, 2020). However, men are taking up a positive attitude regarding sharing their part of domestic chores. The gap between the gendered division of labour is

decreasing in certain parts of the world (Sadasivam, 2020).

The Indian government is trying to incorporate the value of this unpaid housework into the National Economy through various methods. While universal basic income and wages for housewives are some popular ideas, a practical economic computation of satellite accounting is being experimented on a small scale to recognise domestic labor as a productive, economic activity.

It has been observed that major historical events like wars and revolutions have changed social equations and altered norms, which have been crucial for restructuring social perceptions and long-term societal structure changes. This pandemic might lead to the emergence of a new understanding of household labour, its importance and impact on those who produce it, and give rise to new forms of structures for the fair and equitable distribution of this essential yet invisible work.

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13 INFORMAL IN THE PANDEMIC: EXAMINING THE SITUATION OF DOMESTIC HELP IN THE LOCKDOWN

Written by **Manasi Awate & Meghna Banjan**

The informal sector has witnessed significant developments along the course of the globally imposed lockdown, in view of the Coronavirus pandemic which has led to various negative repercussions on the lives of people employed in the sector. However, the effects of this global crisis weren't experienced equally by all sections of society, as traditionally disadvantaged groups had to endure a number of adversities owing to their various socio-economic identities. The present article draws from the case of female domestic workers to explore various shifts in the informal sector and highlights the way in which the intersections of caste, class, and gender identities have determined the way in which people have experienced the global disaster.

In our globalized existence, the informal sector has witnessed a massive boost by absorbing most of the expanding labour force in countries with high rates of population growth and urbanization. The first Indian national commission on labor defined the informal sector workforce as – “those workers who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance, and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishments” (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2015). Employing over 90% of the Indian workforce, the dominance of the informal sector in India has become one of the central

features of the Indian labor market (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2015). The dualist school which believes in the existence of two or more separate but symbiotic economic processes within the same socio-political framework views the informal sector of the economy as comprising of marginal activities – distinct from and not related to the formal sector – that provide income for the poor and a safety net in times of crisis (Hart 1973; ILO 1972). However, the Covid-19 crisis, which necessitated a complete lockdown for safety measures, has proven the opposite. The health crisis had an extensive impact on global economic development, social structures, etc. Thus, this

article attempts to analyze the various changes caused by the pandemic in the Informal Sector of India, with an intersectional approach.

This crisis has been called a great equalizer; notwithstanding, evidence suggests that the impact of the lockdown and economic shutdown has been highly uneven, hitting the already vulnerable groups harder (Deshpande, 2020). One such vulnerable group is the domestic workers, with almost 4.75 million (of which 3 million are women), employed in the Indian informal sector (true number estimated to be between 20 to 80 million workers) (ILO). Domestic work can be defined as, “work performed in or for a household or households”, and a domestic worker as, “any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship” (ILO, 2020). This term includes a wide array of functions performed by person(s) in and for a private enterprise: cooking, cleaning, gardening, taking care of the children, etc. The uniqueness of domestic work is that labor takes place in an intimate workplace i.e., the employer’s home, and the lines of professional contractual relationships get blurred due to the close level of interaction between the employer and employee. The pandemic called for work-from-home conditions, rendering thousands of domestic workers unemployed (permanently or partially), as the nature of their labor is inseparable from their bodies. The absence of legal contracts in their professional relationships has left them at the mercy of their employers for payment of salary and continuation of their service(s), threatening the livelihoods of more than 55 million people engaged in domestic work, including 37 million women worldwide (ILO, 2020).



Restrained

Illustrated by Saurav Bania

Through a study conducted by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) on the impact of COVID-19 National Lockdown On Women Domestic Workers In Delhi, we can witness the extent of the economic crisis faced by them as follows-

- 83% women reported severe to moderate economic crises for their families causing further anxiety over the security of jobs,
- 51% women faced difficulty in buying essential food items like milk, vegetables, tea, etc. due to the price hike during the lockdown,
- 57% respondents worried about paying their rents in the coming months as income will be affected even after lockdown is over.

Hitherto the women were in the fringes of society, and have been facing an excessive economic crisis due to the pandemic, further aggravating their vulnerability. This sheds light on the impotence of the informal structure of the economy to protect its workers in times of such crises.

An additional issue instigated by the economic crises, which is greatly exclusive to female domestic workers is the increase in violence. Crises and times of unrest have been linked to increased interpersonal violence, including incidence of violence against women and children (Fraser, 2020; Palermo and Peterman, 2011). Pandemics lead to economic instability, further leading to poor coping strategies, substance abuse, an increase in debt, transactional sex, and deteriorating mental health, which in turn leads to rising violence against women, and by extension, female domestic workers. Appropriately termed as a shadow pandemic by the UN, domestic violence cases continue to rise with the nation witnessing a 2-fold increase in gender-based violence as recorded by the National Commission for Women (The Hindu, 2020). Other factors like increased financial dependency, compulsory confinement, constant surveillance due to social isolation, reduced working of courts during the Covid-19 pandemic, etc have contributed towards violence against domestic workers.

The role of domestic workers is not just confined to tasks needed for survival but also as status reproducers- reproducing values of class, race, and patriarchy in the very nature of their work (Anderson, 2001), making their position in the society very unique. Their various identities

greatly determine their negotiations in different aspects of their life, including the way in which they experience the pandemic. Therefore, to study their situation during this period without assessing such underlying identities is not adequate. While Covid-19 is a global disaster, its effects on traditionally disadvantaged communities are disastrous. The current pandemic has thus amplified pre-existing inequalities. According to Du Bois, the issue of domestic violence in the

USA gets complicated by the fact that it was performed by slaves for years, and now largely by black freedmen, thus adding in the facet of systemic racism (Nilliasca, 2011). In India, such a facet materializes in the form of caste. During the pandemic, low caste groups had to face identity-based discrimination in addition to the global economic brunt. Research reveals that the severity of the negative effect on employment is different for different castes, owing to pre-existing education, economic backgrounds, and capital. The presence of stigmatized caste group members (Dalit, Adivasi, Pasmanda and Bahujan communities) in the informal sector is higher than the more privileged caste members, with only 3% of upper caste members working as daily wage earners, in contrast to 16% from the scheduled castes (SCs). This reflects the largest relative presence of low ranked and marginalized Dalits within the informal sector.

In addition to caste identities, intersections of gender also need to be examined, as women form a large part of the informal sector and had to bear a disproportionate impact of the pandemic.

In India, almost 94% of total women workers are engaged in this sector, of which about 20% work in the urban centers. Nearly 50% of them are sole supporters of their families while a mere 7.5% are availing the membership of authentic registered trade unions. Domestic workers are also overwhelmingly female, rendering them more vulnerable from a health, economic, and social perspective. The impact of Covid-19 is gendered owing to the preexisting patriarchy and socio-cultural norms that push women into precarious informal employment with no job security (Sili 2020; UN 2020). The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008, guarantees various government schemes that assure health insurance and pension among other benefits, but most women haven't claimed membership. Potential reasons for this include- getting certificates from resident welfare associations, employers, trade unions, and the police. As explored earlier, women are also almost exclusively faced with the issue of abuse which has only increased during the Covid-19 lockdown. As quoted by Pune District House Maids' Association president Kiran Moghe (Imamdar, 2020),

“The maids lack social protection and have been reduced to living in poverty amidst rising malnutrition and illness. This is a very scary scenario and minimum wages must be paid to the domestic workers and their health needs need to be taken care of by the government and the society as a whole.”

Hence, we witness that female domestic workers are more likely to face socio-economic disparities. Moreover, as the term ‘women’ does not refer to a homogenous group and transwomen also fall under

this purview, their plight in the pandemic needs to be taken into consideration. Amnesty International has said: “As the world comes together, India’s transgender community fights COVID-19 alone.” This particular group that has been structurally dismissed for ages, has been made even more marginalized under the double jolt of the disease and physical distancing. As a result of the stigma associated with them, transwomen are hardly seen in the formal sector and thus most transwomen are daily-wage earners, are forced to subsist on sex work, and begging. Therefore, social distancing has hit them hard, the second time around further deteriorating their situation.

For these and other marginalized groups, employment positions i.e., the class identity of their employer has also influenced their own class identities. Traditionally, domestic workers working for upper-class/ upper-middle-class families or affluent businesses received relatively higher incomes and as a result, better social standing in the society which could have increased their reach to security nets as compared to people employed in middle-class workspaces. Workers employed in middle-income workspaces, majorly migrant workers, earn comparatively fewer wages and lack valid residence proof, which leads to their exclusion from state government welfare schemes. For instance, in Kolkata, Below Poverty Line (BPL) cardholders got rice and wheat for free, whereas Above Poverty Line cardholders got only rice at a subsidized rate. In Ahmedabad, BPL cardholders got ration, but APL cardholders did not get anything. (Goel, Sen, Dev & Vijayalakshmi, 2020). Therefore, it is safe to assume that the position

of invisible groups in the informal sector such as female domestic workers continue to remain precarious during the pandemic, aggravated by their intersectional standing in the society. These interstices have largely determined how informal workers dealt with the global crises on economic, social, and emotional fronts.

Governments across the globe have adopted various approaches to aid the female domestic workers, keeping their intersectional position in mind. For example, Argentina announced an executive order providing approximately \$155 to domestic workers and other low-wage workers as emergency financial relief (Varia, 2020). Mask -19 was adopted by Argentina, Italy, Norway, etc to combat the rise in domestic violence, wherein a woman asking a pharmacist for this type of mask is a pseudonym for help. The Indian Central government's relief package, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, was intended to provide safety nets for those who were hit hardest by the Covid-19 lockdown but according to Nobel award-winning economists, Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerji, a much bolder approach should have been undertaken with the packages' social transfer schemes (The Economic Times, 2020). In addition to the government, several NGOs, like SEWA, have initiated various approaches to help domestic workers, such as the distribution of food, health kits, cash transfers, advocacy efforts, etc. On behalf of the informal sector, it has submitted an appeal to the Minister of State (IC) for Labour and Employment & Union Minister of Finance in March 2020 requesting aid for the informal sector workers during the COVID-19 crisis. However, as evidence suggests, these schemes are not enough

to sufficiently redress the enormous economic and social upheavals caused by the pandemic and the government must make continuous attempts to rectify the COVID relief policy which must also address existing gender inequalities and health care benefits for the workers.

Taking into account the case of female domestic workers, the fragile nature of the sector has been exposed, with its workers having to absorb a disproportionate blow due to the crises. So, the question begs to be asked: how can the condition of the informal sector and its workers be improved? Major schools of thoughts have different opinions on this matter. The Dualist school advocates for extending social assistance to the informal workers, while the Structuralists who believe in consideration of structural features, call for regulating the social relations of production. Formalization of the informal economy is another popular approach, with the International Labour Conference (ILC) adopting a Recommendation Concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (R204) in 2015. If this is achieved, various benefits such as legal protection, minimum-wage guarantees, membership in formal trade unions, freedom from discrimination, and rights from being formally employed can be availed by the informal workers, including domestic workers. However, many choose to be voluntarily employed in the informal sector as it acts as an escape from regulatory control brought about by formalization. Owing to the large number of occupations falling under the informal economy, the formalizing approach must be comprehensive yet context-specific. For example, in the case of

domestic workers, the workspace is highly intimate due to which maintaining a formal, contractual relationship becomes difficult as there is no way of monitoring the condition of the workers. In this context, importance must be given to defining elements of employment relationship i.e. having defined terms of employment, organizing them into formal trade unions with awareness about their rights, etc. Formalizing Domestic Work Converging Systems for Decent Work undertaken by the ILO serves as an excellent example of context-specific approach as it improved coverage of domestic workers' working conditions in existing / new legal and policy instruments, facilitated workers' organizations who take a lead in ensuring domestic workers have access to rights and grievance redressal, etc.

To recapitulate, we can observe a negative shift in the lives of people working in the informal sector, as well as in the sector itself, as the lack of job security and social protection has been starkly highlighted in the past few months. The informal sector is frugal. People working in the informal sector are more susceptible to unemployment than those in the formal sector but this gets compounded when barriers of caste, class, and gender act together to restrict people's access to the various resources for mitigating their situation. The overarching themes explored here are the fragility of the informal sector, the intersectional positionality of marginalized groups, and how it affects their societal standing. Therefore, we observe that the pandemic has dismantled the majority of the informal sector, however, this provides us with an opportunity to restructure it in an inclusive manner.

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14 DISPARITY IN GENDER ROLES AND THE PANDEMIC

Written by **Zainab Dahodwala**

We have been rendered vulnerable by the pandemic in myriad ways. This article intends to explore women's vulnerabilities during the pandemic in particular, with a enduring focus on motherhood. We are turning to our mothers now more than ever. However, the mother is the most susceptible to the negative and long-lasting impacts of the pandemic. The article aims to study the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on motherhood, especially analyzing the structure of gender roles and the structure of healthcare for expectant mothers. The continuing hardships of the pandemic leave much to be discussed in terms of inherent social structures and expectations from women, now floodlit for us to scrutinize.

Right from birth most of us have the tendency to go to our mothers when we look for comfort and support. The pandemic has made us all vulnerable, in a plethora of ways. We are turning to our mothers now more than ever. However, the mother is the most susceptible to the negative and long-lasting impacts of the pandemic. This article studies the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on motherhood, especially analyzing the structure of gender roles and the structure of healthcare for expectant mothers. A pandemic amplifies already existing disparities; social, political and economic with the gap in gender-based structural inequalities only worsening. The difference between the infected and the affected must be duly noted. The

secondary wave of predicaments that a pandemic birth could potentially inflict more damage on women than a spike in infection rates. Earlier this year, UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that "COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights"

The measures pursued to offset the impacts of the pandemic also contribute to reinforcing the regressive phenomenon of women being solely responsible for carrying out the tasks associated with domestic life. Women's vulnerabilities across the world are intensifying and their pre-existing gender-based susceptibilities deepening as school

closures and household isolation are moving the work of caring for children from the paid economy—nurseries, schools, babysitters—to the unpaid one. For instance, online education requires a mother’s assistance ready for disposal, dedicating long hours to help the children acquaint and adjust with the demands of an online class while also considering subsequent assessment. Similarly, the onus of protecting the children and the elderly from likely Covid infection and attending to home-quarantined members who are exposed to the virus rests heavily on women. The intensity of care work goes up substantially if male members of the household are working from home. By demanding inconsistent time and energy from women’s domestic work, the pandemic has coerced them into confining themselves to an endless shift of unpaid effort.

The universal phenomenon of the ‘second shift’ still exists as women tackle household management, child care and their professional lives. One would assume that working from home would open up an avenue of liberties but the constantly changing availability of time and resources has created impractical working windows for various women, as they struggle with assigned gender roles. CARE, a non-profit organisation surveyed 6,200 women and 4,000 men in nearly 40 countries around the world. One of the biggest disparities they encountered in their research was that 27% of women had reported increases in challenges related to mental illnesses. This statistic was in comparison to 10% of men who reported their struggle with mental health. Women identified the fact that unpaid labour in the house had increased exponentially and, in many



The many roles of a woman

Illustrated by Shagun Soni

cases, inadvertently led to stress, uncertainties about provisions, employment and health care. Women were also almost twice as likely to report that accessing quality healthcare services that they need has been harder during the pandemic (Financial Insecurity, Hunger, Mental Health are Top Concerns for Women Worldwide, 2020).

Pandemics create unanticipated disruptions and trials which makes us resort to less-than-ideal coping measures to offset their impact which may create dependencies and disparities. Avoidance-based coping mechanisms such as disengagement, denial, and energy conservation are deployed to deal with such situations, according to a research paper published by Aldossari and Chaudry (2020). These collapses build on and aggravate the

prevalent hierarchies and inequalities. Intensive demand for care and domestic work from women during the present pandemic takes advantage of the patriarchal structure, which consigns care work largely to women. In multiple ways, COVID-19 has contributed to lowering women's well-being and freedom, and to the recidivist trend of domestic responsibilities being solely a woman's job.

A series of recent studies has demonstrated a significant drop in the productivity of female scientists, especially those early in their careers, relative to their male peers—and the gender gap is particularly pronounced for COVID-19 researchers. Among the first to rigorously quantify such inequality in research productivity as a result of the pandemic is a study conducted by Cui et al. They found that during the 10 weeks after the lockdown in the United States, although the total research productivity increased by 35%, female academics' productivity dropped by 13.9% relative to that of male academics. They show that several disciplines drive such gender inequality. Finally, they discovered that this intensified productivity gap is more pronounced for academics in top-ranked universities, and the effect exists in six other countries (Cui, Ding, & Zhu, 2020).

Most researchers whom *The Scientist* spoke with pin the blame on childcare, a burden that disproportionately falls onto women. Researchers say they worry that the pandemic will exacerbate the already existing underrepresentation of women in scientific research and impair women's scientific careers as well as the quality of research itself.

New-York based virologist Jillian Carmichael, the

only mother working in Benhur Lee's lab at Mount Sinai's Icahn School of Medicine could not join the team for its research on Covid-19 because of parenting duties. With her husband at the forefront with his work in the health care sector, Carmichael was left with little choice.

Cassidy Sugimoto, an information scientist at Indiana University who specializes in gender disparities in research and has investigated publishing trends in the face of the pandemic suspects that childcare duties, which have increased with the closure of schools and day-care facilities, are a significant factor driving this trend. Male academics have children too, but they're four times more likely to have a partner who is a full-time caregiver than female academics, who are more likely to have partners who also work outside the home. Women are also more likely to be single parents than men are. Even in relationships with two partners, both of whom are academics, there's often an unequal division of labour. In a recent survey on parenting among academics, Sugimoto and her colleagues found that women tended to take on more childcare duties, even if couples insisted that the work is split evenly between them.

Mothers who haven't even given birth yet also face a looming crisis. Women's issues, especially childbirth related complications may be ignored in developing countries as resources will be directed away from the lesser priorities. The most striking statistic from Sierra Leone, one of the countries worst affected by the Ebola epidemic, was that from 2013 to 2016, there was a corresponding 34% increase in the maternal mortality ratio and 24% increase in the

stillbirth rate. During the outbreak, more women died of obstetric complications than the infectious disease itself (Jones, Gopalakrishnan, Ameh, White, & Broek, 2016). While the Government of India deemed RMNCAH+N (Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child, Adolescent Health and Nutrition) services as essential in mid-April, access and availability continues to pose a challenge. The supply and demand factors here play an essential role. The supply of medical provisions for pregnant women has decreased while the birth rate and the number of pregnancies on an average is steady. Women are dying preventable maternal deaths due to the decreasing investment in maternal health care with the unavailability of hospital beds being the most tell-tale sign of the disinvestment. Recently, Times of India reported the death of a woman who was in the eighth month of her pregnancy. She died in an ambulance after eight hospitals either referred her to another facility as she showed symptoms of COVID-19, or cited lack of beds.

The anxiety of contagion, uncertainty, disruption, and social isolation have become the norms of daily life for large populations around the world. This will undoubtedly have profound effects on the mental health of the populace at large, but being pregnant during a global pandemic is likely to be even more terrifying for many women. Even though containment strategies, such as those that require women to deliver without a companion present including partners and doulas, have already been established along with those that isolate newborns from COVID infected mothers immediately after birth, but these may also have detrimental short- and long-term mental health implications for

women despite being clinically required to reduce transmission. Amongst women who have younger offsprings, previous research in Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam found that women who experience family-related stressful life events, such as illness or death within their domestic sphere and face financial insecurity, are more likely to experience episodes of severe mental distress (Burki, 2020). With the unending need to social distance, family and community networks may struggle. Pregnant and postpartum women may feel even more vulnerable and isolated over a lack of social support.

The adversative effects of the pandemic in relation to women's reproductive health are not limited to pregnancy or motherhood. As movement restrictions are instituted, supply chains are disrupted, and businesses are barred, procurement of even general supplies is proving to be grueling. Women may be at a heightened risk of an unplanned pregnancy should it become difficult to obtain their regular contraceptive method or emergency contraceptives, if needed. Additionally, some states within the United States have begun to impose restrictions on certain medical procedures that they deem to be elective, including abortion, suggesting they must be delayed until after the pandemic is over.

Another area of grave concern for women's health are the spikes in domestic violence during such constrictive times of crisis, and as governments continue to put into place more extreme measures to enforce social distancing, for some women, more time at home may mean more time spent with an abusive partner. Fewer social interactions may also mean less accountability for offenders and fewer

opportunities for intervention. We must better recognize the gendered impact of this global crisis on reproductive and sexual health rights as these rights are vulnerable to patriarchal regression and nationalist securitization.

These preventable deaths and hostile experiences, like the unnoticed caring labour on which the modern economy runs, attract less attention than the immediate problems generated by a pandemic. Blurring the rigid lines that patriarchy imposes on gender roles could be the first step to mitigate the plight of women, starting from their home. When it comes to a work-life balance, women can be their own worst enemy in attempting to do it all and be available for everyone. Women have taken on multiple roles to adjust to changes in societal expectations and the demanding economy that requires multiple sources of income to run a household. They continue to meet familial responsibilities, while also maintaining personal and professional interests. Women in the 21st century have been constantly encouraged by society to see these demands as challenges that they must fulfil in order to achieve the ideals of 'perfect womanhood.' As these strains intensify, women often feel a sense of helplessness, making them prone to distress and burnout. To avoid running out of steam, women must consistently set boundaries even when it comes to responsibilities regarding their own family. Policy makers and governments have been consistently working to improve these dire circumstances for women and other marginalized groups but there is always room for improvement and we should create a demand for it. The Feminist lens will now be more relevant than ever in the post-Covid world.

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15 WAVES OF RELIGION

Written by **Vaishnavi Lingayat & Shanaya Carvalho**

The research article focuses on the changing structures of religious institutions throughout the past, present, and future. It starts with a brief introduction to what religion is, and applies this idea to sociological theories. It also discusses the characteristics of religion and questions the element of a congregation in the wake of the pandemic. 'Can religion exist without the need for collectivism?' is the fundamental question that the article aims to answer. Lastly, the paper would try to decipher the future course of religion by exploring the youth's approach to religion today, as they form the basis for religion's future.

Religion is a system of beliefs, values, and practices concerning what a person holds sacred or considers spiritually significant (Little, 2014). In India, this system is highly influential as it holds a strong hegemony over the social and political spheres of people's life. People have been united, divided, and sacrificed for religion. Ludwig Feuerbach said that God is a necessary human creation. It helps humans deal with their fears and aspirations as they project all good qualities towards an external, superior being and worship this 'other' as God. Voltaire further added, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to create him," as God plays an essential functional role in society's sustenance (Choudhury, 2019).

Currently, our societal structures are facing a crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Keeping in mind the crucial role of religion, it would be intriguing to understand how this pandemic would affect religious structures. Would faith be questioned due to an influx of science, or would it remain undeterred to the face of the latter? Before jumping to this question, let us try to understand the characteristics of religion.

If we are to examine religion sociologically, it is adherent to the cyclical theory of social change - it takes birth, grows, and dies. While the new religions emerging today are often dismissed as cults, the extinction of the traditional religions that existed before has caused the redundancy of the existing beliefs, ideas, and customs. A classic

example is Egyptian & Greek mythology tales, which are now considered legends and not holy writ. Religious institutions have also moulded themselves to ensure their existence, justifying the social adaptation theory that proposes - ‘adaptation’ and not ‘rationality’ animates change. It assumes that schemata grow due to dynamic adaptation through assimilation and accommodation (Kahle Homer & Beatty, 1986). This human instinct among the powerheads of religious institutions makes the latter flexible and susceptible to change. The dichotomy between the efforts of new religious structures to expand themselves and traditional religions’ attempt to maintain the status quo is thus always visible.

As religion patterns itself according to changing realities and circumstances, its characteristics also change. Theoretically, religion comprises three main features - faith, charity, and congregation (Singh, 2020). However, with social distancing becoming a norm, mass socialization has become difficult. The pertinent question is, will religion again mold to survive, or will it fade away with individualism capturing the minds of the people? To understand this, let us first look into the past of religion, explore similar instances, and determine how religions have responded to such unique situations.

When it comes to survival, religions worldwide and across ages have always managed to sustain despite the many challenges and trying times. History is full of examples of how religions had grappled with challenges similar to the one the world is facing when it has become increasingly



Modern forms of worship

Illustrated by Megha Udeshi

difficult to practise religion collectively. This was seen in the case of Jews in Germany during the reign of the Nazis, when it was close to impossible for the former to congregate for religious activities and, if done otherwise, would have had to bear dire consequences. Some religions like Zoroastrianism have also endured invasions and are yet thriving presently. Such a scenario was also witnessed during the Bubonic plague that overthrew most of Europe in the mid-1400s, and people had to withdraw to their homes to flee the wrath of God supposedly.

In the present times, the global pandemic has deterred numerous institutions from operating traditionally, and religion is one of them. Religious activities are now restricted, and conventional practices have been discontinued. Initially, several coronavirus

cases had been linked to religious institutions, i.e., a South Korean church, a gathering of 16,000 faithful at a mosque in Malaysia, and an Orthodox Jewish congregation in New Rochelle, New York. While these instances may paint a gloomy picture of religion from a scientific perspective, religion cannot be dismissed entirely as being hostile, given its strong roots. History shows that any religion that refuses to evolve dies out. Thus, many religious organizations adapt to the present pandemic situation by exploring novel ways to connect with the masses. Many Christian churches worldwide are streaming Sunday masses online, and in another case, drive up confessions were being offered to followers to avoid instances of person to person contact (Prieve, 2020). Hindus celebrated Holi and Navratri differently this year with only their close ones to avoid community transfer of the virus. Some Hindu temples also discouraged believers from forming large gatherings and restricted their visits to temples. In Saudi Arabia, the government restricted access to the Haj as a step to tackle the global pandemic, forcing Muslims around the world to practise their faith in the confinement of their homes (Singh, 2020). Something as significant as death has been observed with caution, and funerals are being live-streamed online (Sherwood & Pidd, 2020). These instances show how religions have sought ways to operate, even without the ability to congregate freely.

According to a recent survey by Pew Research Center, one-fourth of U.S. adults (24%) say their faith has become stronger because of the coronavirus pandemic, while just 2% say their faith has become weaker. The majority say their faith has not changed much (47%) or that the

question is not applicable because they were not religious, to begin with (26%) (Gecewicz, 2020). This survey indicates how people are turning to religion during these times of extreme uncertainty. Many communities believe this pandemic to be an act of God and hence have resorted to prayer and worship, as can be seen in Tanzania, where places of worship were kept open to the public, unlike other forms of gatherings.

Furthermore, while this has been a general stance of the population at large, it is equally essential to look closely at the younger generation as they are the ones who will eventually determine the role of religion in the imminent future. Interestingly, their approach stood as a direct contrast to our previous proposition. Although the adverse conditions instigated the youth to use religion more intensively, their methods have been slightly different. The trend suggests that they have been tailoring the tradition they had formally accepted to create their sense of identity and ownership of the beliefs (Cook & Hughes, 2006). In short, youngsters today are still struggling to form a satisfying idea of God and the divine. They have been trying to curate a belief system fitting to their needs, and the pandemic has acted as a catalyst in this process.

This brings us to a pertinent examination of the debate around secularism, which gives a clear idea about religion's future. Secularism is a process by which religious structures lose importance in the social life of people. Those in favor have put forth the argument that church attendance has been reducing significantly in many countries. With a fast life and the need to be constantly productive

to meet the material needs of life, people find it challenging to attend religious gatherings.

However, as we have established above, the congregation is not a primary requisite for religion to thrive. Grace Davie brings an interesting argument in this regard as he explains the gray area between believers and nonbelievers (Singh, 2020). Between these two polar extremes lie two kinds of people. The first kind is those who belong but do not believe. These might include children who are forced to accept and follow their parents' or adults' beliefs and traditions and unwillingly go to religious places to create an acceptable image in society. The second category involves people who believe but do not belong. Davie believes that reducing church attendance does not necessarily mean reducing religiosity. Religious structures may not have the same kind of control over the lives of people. We may not perceive the everyday environment as an extension of the divine. Nevertheless, faith will continue to exist as religion becomes a part of people's private life.

Thus, religion tomorrow will become more individualized and customized. There is a surge in the emergence of new religions that lay their basis on traditional norms and mix religious ideas to come up with a more modern religion and suits the lives of the people. Such joints are often seen in younger religions like Vodoun or Rastafarianism. In a book by Linda Woodhead called 'The Spiritual Revolution,' she noted that people have been trying to change their idea of religion to meet their individual needs. An excellent example is that of Sheila. In his book 'Habits of the Heart', Robert Bellah (1985), an American sociologist, quoted a

nurse named Sheila Larson who curated her faith. Sheila, in her opinion, was faith beyond belief in God. To her, it meant loving one's self and taking care of each other.

Michael Maffesoli (Giddens & Sutton, 2017), a French sociologist, suggests that instead of older religious teachings of mass society, religion would now come in fragments. People with similar ideas, thoughts, and aspirations would come together into small groups to form neo tribes. These would not last as long as the traditional religious structures but would be adjusted as per people's needs. Thus, the pandemic seems to have boosted the process of privatising and customising people's religious beliefs. It has made people realize that faith is also accessible through their homes, and this realization has the potential of revolutionising religion forever.

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16 IS BIG BROTHER THE NEW SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITY?

Written by **Abhinav Jha and Mrinal Walavalkar**

The COVID-19 pandemic was a major breaking point in the contemporary world. It has transformed every single aspect governing our lives. The state, visibly, has tightened its noose around people. Through this article, we explore this new functionality of the Government via classic Foucauldian concepts mainly Governmentality, Panopticon and Surveillance.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically reshaped the entire world. The power relations, systems, and governmental functions have undergone sweeping changes. Commenting on the new order post-pandemic, Yuval Noah Harari, an eminent historian lamented that the structure post-pandemic would be largely regulated by surveillance. Be it routine mobile apps, or complex databases monitoring our actions, this new development is inevitable (Harari, 2020). The pandemic has catalyzed the speed of surveillance systems and has translated some shreds of the dystopia into a reality. Be it the pandemic control measures, the recording of body temperatures, or movement tracking, it's all now, a daily phenomena.

This postulation by Harari is incredibly similar in nature to the Foucauldian analysis pertaining to the

exerting influence of the government. It becomes largely important to study Foucault and his theories in the current climate and to revisit its relevance.

Foucault postulated the concept of Governmentality. According to Foucault, Governmentality is a tight grid of power relations. However, it stands apart from biopolitical power or disciplinary power. It is the technique of employment of power over people. Simply put, it is the wide framework under which surveillance and biopower are exercised. The mandala of governmentality actually helps us to better understand the concepts. Governmentality basically implies governing people through affirmative means and involves the willing participation of the people involved. There is an implicit consent of the people with respect to the government. In the context of governmentality,

the individuals upon whom power is exercised are assumed to be free individuals not bound by any other constraint. To give an example, the recent pandemic control measures were imposed without any formal consent. Here, the consent is ‘implicit’ and the means of subjugation here are ‘affirmative’ and it has been seen that people follow. Therefore, with an understanding of this basic premise, it would be beneficial to delve into the specifics of the Foucauldian theory.

The imposition of stringent restrictions by the government, under the pretext of ‘health’, ‘security’ and ‘survival’ has markedly impinged upon our bodily autonomy. It has normalized constraints set by the government on human bodies.

Foucault had introduced the concept of ‘biopolitics’ in 1976 in his book “La volonté de savoir” (the first volume of the “History of Sexuality”) with the aim to describe the emergence of political tricks in the late 18th century. “This was nothing less than the entry of life into history,” Foucault writes, “that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques.” (Sarasin, 2020) In other words, he means expansive control over human bodies. It also paves way for human anatomy to be used as a tool to fulfill political motives. It can be described as an intersection of politics and biology, or specifically the control of the former over the latter. However, he argued that there was a host of mechanisms to do so. The governmental regulation during the French Pandemic of the 17th Century with excessive surveillance and police concentration to curb the



Who will watch the ones watching you

Illustrated by Mansi Madhani

spread led to the coining of the term. He argues that the outbreak of the plague has birthed a new form of ‘discipline power’. Everyone was forced to undertake strict isolation measures. On the darker side, it perpetuated incessant control and restriction and became an entrenched form of surveillance by the state into the lives of the people.

This brings us to surveillance, which is another important component in this biopolitical order. Surveillance means monitoring one’s actions. Drawing heavy inspiration from the model of Jeremy Bentham about Panopticon, Foucault argues that we have transformed from a ‘culture of spectacle’ to a carcel culture. This means that

punishment which was a public affair was confined to close quarters. This new emerging form of punishment accedes more control in the hands of the authorities, thus, stripping us away from personal freedom.

Foucault lays emphasis on the shift of disciplinary power from prisons to each and every sphere of modern life - be it schools, markets, and so on. Thus, it is observed that the previous association of panopticon with the prison system has evolved with time, and this panoptical outlook has percolated in each and every aspect of our life. According to him, it is seen that power and knowledge come from supervising and monitoring others. Thus, Foucault advocates that the panopticon model has been internalized by us without much thought and realization. Suitable behaviour is expected from us, not by any explicit declaration but by conformation to this reality. This has a direct link with the aspect of knowledge. The greater the observation, the greater is the knowledge and the greater the power. Thus, it has a cyclical fashion i.e. power gets reconsolidated when it is merged with monitoring and surveillance. Foucault says that “by being combined and generalized, they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase in power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process” (Foucault, 1977). To illustrate, protest and rebellion is viewed in an antagonistic light as they are deviations from this mode of discipline.

In the times of the pandemic, the traditional surveillance model has reimagined itself in a new avatar. The increasing percolation of technology and smart means has aided this ‘surveillance’. This

surveillance is not marked by traditional prisons but by modern new-age technologies like smartphones and drones. The Government has unfettered access to the daily lives of people. This perpetuates a culture of additional asymmetry between the people and the government and the government is virtually near to us, but on a power scale high above us.

For example, The Government of South Korea was able to track the movements of those citizens who remained infected prior to their diagnosis. It was able to do so by compiling information gained by video surveillance, GPS tracking through smartphones, and credit card records. But the Government also went on to display this information by creating a website. There was enough data available on the website that could help anyone identify which citizen was infected.

The display of such data and information was exceeded beyond what was considered imperative to curb the virus, according to The National Human Rights Commission of Korea. (Thomson & Ip, 2020)

In countries such as France, Spain, Malaysia, and Mainland China, drones were used to convey messages to citizens regarding public health and to effectively enforce lockdowns, whereas Hong Kong ensured that quarantine rules were adhered to, through the mandate of wearing electrical watches. (Thomson & Ip, 2020)

It is also very apparent that the government has reconsolidated its power over citizens. The power-knowledge concept of Foucault particularly becomes relevant as the government has reinforced its power by accessing data. Thus, the cycle has

become all the more apparent these days. It comes as no surprise when the government is using this recently regained power to stifle dissent and curb any kind of anti-narrative that exists. This recently regained power has seeped the public lives in many ways. Many countries have called off public protests, have arrested prominent journalists, and have passed anti-public legislations in the midst of the pandemic. This is all the more worrisome, as it will take a really strong force to soften this newly earned might of the government.

For instance, the Prime Minister of Serbia authorized by decree that healthcare facilities and local administration must pass on all information related to COVID 19 to the ‘COVID 19 Crisis Staff’ headed by the Prime Minister, herself. The dissemination of information related to the virus by people not authorized to do so would attract legal penalization on themselves. After the decree came into effect, a journalist was arrested, when a hospital reported her to the police stating that she had published an article that revealed that it was not fully equipped to deal with the virus. (Thomson & Ip, 2020).

Similarly, In Hungary, in March 2020, the Hungarian Parliament passed a bill that allowed Viktor Orban, the Hungarian Prime Minister, the go-ahead to rule the country by decree. The bill allowed him the leniency to not consult other lawmakers and to depart from existing laws and statutory requirements when it comes to making decisions. The bill criminalized disinformation, which was punishable with up to five years of prison. It also allowed the prime minister to shut

down protests and shun public disapproval by the opposition and media. (Amaro, 2020).

All these developments paint a grave picture of the world. Therefore, it is important to analyze whether this new order would prevail, or crumble. The emerging trends like the general rise of populism, protectionism, the conscience of individual rights, and distrust in government are certain determinants in the emergence of this new order. To dissect each one of these, and their fitting the model seems an apt task to do.

Speaking of the factors which would aggravate the biopolitical order, the pandemic has exposed deep-rooted problems existing with populist leaders. The prominent populist leaders across the globe like Donald Trump in the US, Boris Johnson in the UK, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, have lagged far behind to curb the growth of the pandemic with the countries listed amounting for more than 50% of the cases. This puts these populist governments in a tricky position as the general sentiment won’t necessarily rest with these leaders and their governments as the guardians of the health of the citizens. However, according to a CNN poll, 43% of people above 65 had faith in Trump’s handling of the COVID 19 crisis. Despite the majority of the voters not having faith, it is important to note that the margin is not huge. This will remain a concern.

Protectionism and increased focus on sealing off global borders and isolating the nation in lieu of the coronavirus pandemic is another sentiment that has gained traction. It is important to highlight that in the globalized world, sealing borders

would only remain a temporary phenomenon. However, it cannot be denied that the world is tilting towards protectionism. This pronounced governmental action could prompt nations to exert more influence on the choices of the citizens. The building Anti-China sentiment across the world is another manifestation of the government majorly influencing the citizens' minds and choices.

However, the picture isn't that bleak overall. The increasing importance of individual rights and freedoms can act as a mitigator of this all-pervasive government. The ethos of democracy and individuality has triumphed during the course of the pandemic. The large-scale protests in Hong Kong to oppose the National Security Act which subjugates it to China or the recent protests in Poland related to the anti-abortion bill are certainly some of the events which have highlighted the importance of personal freedoms and opposition to governmental subjugation. Incidents like these reflect that there is some hope at the end of the tunnel.

Drawing upon the analysis and finally putting things in context, it is seen that the biopolitical order has found prevalence due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, it has to be mentioned that not all governmental advances are detrimental to mankind like contact tracing and testing. Contact tracing to a great extent has mitigated the severity of the pandemic. Therefore, it is essential that the lines between the safety of citizens and the increasing governmental restraint be clearly realized and demarcated. The greater the blurring of the lines, the more pervasive shape the governmental power would take. Therefore, clear discrimination

has to be made within the two which will come with increased awareness. Thus, this brings us back to the one-fits-all remedy i.e awareness and education. The dissemination of information and knowledge would only hold us back from losing it all to the government. Therefore, it must be utilized at all levels. After all, knowledge is power.

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17 THE ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS: THE NEED FOR AN EFFECTIVE BANGLADESHI REFUGEE MODEL

Written by **Nameetta Nierakkal**

Bangladesh hosts around 8 lakh Rohingya refugees. Following the prosecutions and the mass exodus from Myanmar, Rohingyas became one of the largest stateless populations in the world. Is genocide happening in Myanmar? Who will guard the future of the Rohingyas? The paper aims to address these issues and to propose a effective and efficient refugee model that ensures the progress of the refugees as well as the host country.

Today, Cox Bazar in Bangladesh is home to around 8 lakh Rohingya refugees (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). Effectively denied citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law of Myanmar, they became one of the largest stateless populations in the world. Following the prosecution of the community in Myanmar, they ran for their life to the neighbouring country of Bangladesh where they live confined to an area with a population density of 1265/km² (World Bank, 2020). Many civil societies have been urging countries to acknowledge that genocide is being committed against the ethnic minority of Rohingyas in Myanmar since the mass exodus in 2017. Around 6 lakhs of them continue to remain in the Rakhine state subjected to government prosecution and

violence, confined to camps and villages without freedom of movement, health care, education or adequate food where genocidal actions may recur (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Politics of Genocide

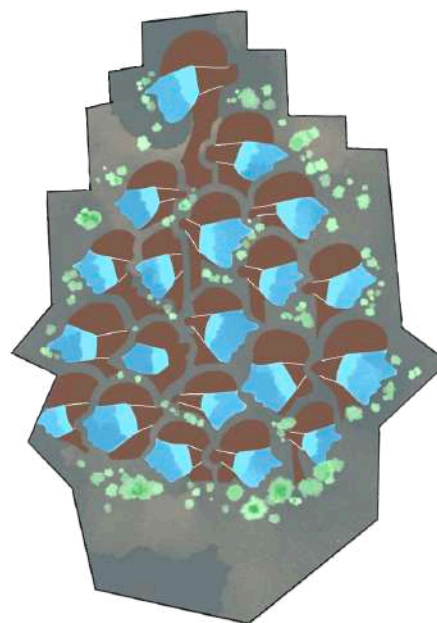
Jacques Sémelin, a French historian and social scientist voices that genocide is initially ignited through thoughts, ideologies and normalized stereotypes against certain communities. The organizers of genocide or in this case, the Government of Myanmar is intently creating a division or hate between the Buddhist citizens and Rohingyas. The attack against the Rohingyas started decades ago when it was proliferated among the masses that Rohingyas are not originally from

their country and that they will side with invaders in case of an attack on Myanmar because of their religion of Islam. For this same purpose, Facebook was used by the Military to spread Islamophobia among Buddhist citizens. There was a systematic campaign that stretched back half a decade targeting the Rohingyas. They exploited Facebook's wide reach in Myanmar, where it is so widely used that half the population confuse the platform for the internet (Mozur, 2018).

Another major factor that fuelled the Rohingya crisis was the Buddhist Nationalism promoted by Ashwin Wirathu, popularly known as the Buddhist Bin Laden. Wirathu is pushing the idea that the Islamic faith puts Buddhism, and the very essence of Myanmar in jeopardy (Mohajan, 2018).

The prejudiced views inculcated by the Government within the two cultures have led to racism and consequently genocide. Tajfel and Turner introduced the concept of social identity as a way to explain inter-group behaviour. It states that groups that people belong to will be an important source of pride and self-esteem for them. Thus, resulting in the division of the world in terms of "us" and "them" through a process of social categorization (Britannica, 2020). In the case of Myanmar, the Government along with Wirathu has pitted the Buddhist citizens, the majority, against the minority Muslim Rohingya community.

The authorities used the institutions of the state to transform this fear and hate into myriads of hunting, raping and killing the Rohingyas who are mainly concentrated in the Rakhine state. To make



Choked

Illustrated by Arfa Sirguroh

the propaganda all the more deadly, the leaders gave orders to the military, administration and the political parties with the agenda of erasing the Rohingyas from the country. The Myanmar army targeted crops and resources of the minority community to starve and kill the group. Once the army got control of the area, they force Rohingyas to build bases from which they attack and burn the surrounding villages as well as mining the razed areas to discourage returns. Recruiting child soldiers into the Myanmar army is another method used to strip minorities of their identity (CNN, 2013). Rape is a tool of suppression used in controlling the reproductive capacities of the minority group. In addition to this, the Myanmar government had also imposed a two-child policy in Rakhine state which was only applicable to the Rohingyas but not to the Buddhist residents of the area to limit the number of births (Human Rights

Watch, 2019). Genocide is not war targeting the physical body but the identity and self-existence of a certain community.

Myanmar leaders have denied that genocide and ethnic cleansing have been committed against Rohingyas, contradicting to the accounts of the people who have escaped the country following the violence. Myanmar has an obligation, as a party to the genocide Convention under customary international law, to prevent genocide. To date, they have taken inadequate measures to assuage the risk of genocide and advance nominal justice measures. The majority of the Rohingyas are in refugee camps outside the country. It is extremely important to prevent mayhems, protect the vulnerable communities and advance justice and accountability for the violence against Rohingyas.

An Effective Refugee Model

The Cox market itself is inadequate in providing human resources for healthcare. Its estimated that even with a mild spread of infection, the situation is incredibly precarious (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). The presumed attitude on ground between the two stakeholders remains hostile as there's a clear barrier of mistrust between the refugees and Bangladeshi health workers (Islam, 2020). Given the spatial context, a coherent solution for the refugee crisis is one of the most complex problems faced by international political decision-makers and theorists. Protecting and resettling the refugees around the world depends on grasping many issues starting with articulating the meaning of "protection", to the complexities of aid distribution. Implementation of an effective

and efficient refugee model for the resettlement and integration of the Rohingyas to the Bangladeshi community is vital for their protection especially as Myanmar is denying the claims of genocide but continues to prosecute the remaining Rohingyas in Rakhine state.

The basic criterion for a good refugee model is self-reliance and integration. Many countries including Australia, Canada and Sweden have had long and robust immigrant traditions and proactively resettled millions of refugees. These countries all have development-friendly refugee policies which make it the perfect prototype. The integration policies of the aforementioned countries will be looked at in closer detail in terms of citizenship, language acquisition and employment to suggest an effective Bangladeshi refugee model with the best elements of these policies at its core. In order to assemble such a policy, an analysis of the components of integration policy should solidify the need for ramification.

Canada is known for its progressive refugee policies specifically in resettling and integrating refugees into its host community. Resettled refugees are immediately given permanent status in the country along with free language training both at federal and provincial levels. The refugees also have the option to apply for a work permit provided that the individual shows that he or she needs a job to pay for the basic needs of his family members who are currently in Canada. Australia has similar policies regarding refugee integration starting with a permanent residency on the arrival of the refugees. They are also provided with 510 hours of free

language training under the Adult Migrant English Program and separate visa application granting them the right to work. On the other hand, Sweden follows stiffer refugee policy when it comes to citizenship. Refugees must have been granted a residence permit and lived in Sweden for at least four years to become a citizen. But they do not need a work permit to work in the country except for certified skills such as health care. Sweden also provides all foreign adults with unlimited language lessons at no cost.

Similar policies can be implemented in Bangladesh to help the Rohingyas and consequently reduce the burden on the host country as well as its population. Certain core elements of Canada, Australia and Sweden are feasible for implementation in Bangladesh which includes the right to work, language building and interaction with the host community.

To pursue such a model further, Bangladesh can issue a work visa on a time period basis to arriving refugees as a quick-fire way to give them recognition with the clause of withdrawal if the refugee is found to be lethargic in contributing to the economy which is very similar to Australian refugee employment guidelines. As of 2019, Bangladesh received around USD 6.5 billion as foreign aid (OECD, 2019). The foreign aid received by the country should be used for conducting skill development training and language acquisition programmes with a similar structure of Australia's Adult Migrant English Programme provided that work permits will not be issued until both of these programmes are completed by a refugee. These

skill development programmes should be focused on teaching them new necessary skills for industries suffering from skill gap which includes Argo-food, tourism, construction, leather goods, hospitality and so on (Bhuyan, Sen, 2017). Further, this money can also be used to give the refugees an unemployment allowance along with food rations in case there is a surplus of labour in the market and involuntary unemployment persists. As the refugees have freedom of movement in the country, this policy will allow them access to social services of the country such as education, health, water and so on. Currently, the refugee population is disadvantaged over the local communities to get same quality social services as the society they dwell in is highly stratified leading them to fall in the lower section of the social hierarchy. The proposed model will give the community a chance to break from the vicious cycle of poverty which refugee families all over the world usually never get out of.

According to UNHCR, 85% of the refugees are hosted in developing countries while developed nations refuse to take in the displaced community. The developed countries have a moral imperative to give aids to the refugee hosting developing nations to improve the conditions of the refugees. Government of Bangladesh can also ease capital inflow regulations to increase the inflow of foreign aid.

It is imperative to develop pro-refugee policies at an international level to create a new positive narrative around them. Policies of developed countries like Canada, Australia and Sweden among others can play a crucial role in achieving this. Economic

integration of the refugees is also extremely important as it leads to increased productivity for the host country and lesser deviance in the society as the refugees get a sense of belongingness. Canada and Sweden have a hassle-free method of granting the refugees right to work which in time results in the self-reliance of the community. The legal services available to the refugees indicates the attitude of the Government towards the refugee population. This inevitably leads to the process of agenda-setting which has the potential to bleed into institutions like the law and order putting the refugees at a disadvantaged spot. Executing a good refugee model also has benefits for the host country as well in terms of economic interactions between them and the host communities promoting economic growth.

Conclusion: Looking forward

It is important to acknowledge that the refugee crisis is one of the most complex problems faced by man. There is no perfect solution to the problem encountered by countries in handling the issue of refugees. It is evident from the aforementioned case in points that genocide is materializing in Myanmar. There is a need for the Rohingya's in Bangladesh to be supported by a national policy like the one proposed above that emphasizes integration, refugee and local communities live together in a manner that is got the most part beneficial to both, indicating what is possible when refugees are not only welcomed by their hosts but provided the fundamental right to work. To complement this line of analysis, there is idle potential for future research in terms of effects of refugee presence on host country economy, the feasibility of refugee models

and its implications on the host population as well as the refugee population among other issues.

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18 THE URBAN HOMELESS OF INDIA

Written by **Bhakti Chaudhari**

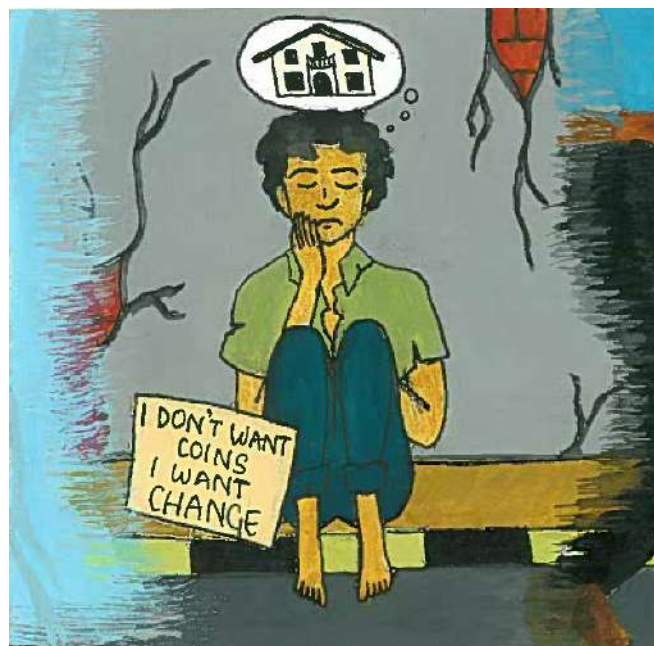
A significant proportion of the urban poor face unique problems due to imbalances in resource allocation. Consequently, many people live below the poverty line and experience homelessness. 1.77 million of India's 1.36 billion population is homeless and is one of the most marginalised populations in India. The funds allocated for their upliftment are not spent appropriately. Owing to the global pandemic, the plight of the homeless has worsened. This situation rings alarm bells and calls for an evaluation of the current structure.

The manner in which cities are planned lay the very foundation of how they develop over a period of time. Cataloguing spaces is vital in order to analyse elements of our society like the environment, available resources, demographics, transport and future prospects for development. Territorial spaces are primarily categorized as urban and rural. People belonging to these areas face unique problems due to imbalances in resource allocation. Consequently, many people live below the poverty line and experience homelessness. 1.77 million of India's 1.36 billion population is homeless. These staggering figures undoubtedly showcase one of the most marginalised populations in India and reflect policy responses to the same. The government aims to ensure that every Indian has a home by 2022. However, given the current economic scenario in which the fiscal deficit

amounts to almost 3.5% of the country's overall GDP, housing for all seems like a daunting task. In 2017-18, the state issued a fund of ₹228 crores for the welfare of the homeless but a report (PTI, 2017) revealed that the states are not spending it appropriately. This implies how there is lack of regular auditing and monitoring which are quintessential mechanisms to ensure that policies are implemented properly. Transparency of work and data is also essential as it helps evaluate the system and keeps it in check. Owing to the global pandemic, the plight of the homeless has worsened. This situation rings alarm bells and calls for an evaluation of the current structure.

It being crucial for the government to account for all stratas of society, it has formulated some schemes that can help uplift the homeless. The Pradhan

Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is one such mission launched by the government in 2015 which aims to provide everyone a home by 2022. Another scheme with a similar intent is Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) that intends to provide self-employment and shelters to the homeless in order to improve their livelihoods. Despite schemes being devised to help the homeless, there is not much that is visible at the ground level. A significant reason behind this can be explored through the concept of poverty capital due to which institutions that produce authoritative literature on poverty, themselves come from a position of privilege and narrate poverty in terms of their ideas of development and progress (Roy, 2010). The urban poor are indispensable to the urban middle class in India. They are employed in countless skilled blue-collar jobs that a truly urban population could never sustain without. Yet, the city is never planned with the slum in mind and a slum always has an illegitimate birth. (Chandhoke, 2009, p.121). Census 2011 data reveals a rise of 20% in the homeless population of urban India over the past decade, whereas the homeless population of rural areas has declined by 28%. These figures indicate a rise in migration towards urban areas in order to get better life opportunities. First generation poor migrants who want to establish themselves in cities often struggle due to the exorbitant real estate rates and are pushed to the margins of society. This scenario challenges us to check how we can provide better opportunities to the rural population by investing in MSMEs, promoting rural employment programmes like the MGNREGA and other such activities. The status of these initiatives in society should also be enhanced



The still life

Illustrated by Hannah Cardozo

as that would help the labour force gain a sense of dignity and belonging whilst participating in these schemes.

In Maharashtra, 95.8% of shelters that were supposed to be built were simply not built thus violating Supreme Court orders. Despite this, there are no legal penalties imposed on institutions for not implementing their allotted tasks efficiently. Moreover, the terms “beggar home” and “shelter for the homeless” are deliberately used interchangeably in government reports to lure people into believing that the situation is improving. There are no set guidelines to distinguish between beggars and the homeless which adds to further confusion and difficulties. This also highlights how important it is for various agents involved in this ecosystem to perform their roles in a prescribed yet

socially-conscious manner. This highlights how governments take advantage of poverty capital to nullify and merge various boundaries of the poor.

Generally, the reasons of homelessness in India include factors like family conflicts, disabilities, poverty, unemployment, migration, calamities, redevelopment and more like displacements and forced evictions of people. Nearly 2.9 million people were displaced through natural disasters and violence in 2018 (Internal Displacement, 2019). Along with these factors, forced evictions caused by the government is a prominent factor that renders people homeless. In the year of 2019, central and state government authorities demolished at least 22,250 homes, thereby forcefully evicting over 107,600 people across urban and rural India (HLRN, 2019). The justification given by the government for these evictions remains unquestioned under the umbrella term of “development.” There is not enough mention of how development could mean different things to people belonging to different stratas of society. Some of the professed reasons include city beautification drives, slum clearance projects, improving infrastructure, demolishing illegal constructions and more. On 24th September 2020, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) cited the National Green Tribunal’s (NGT) law and demolished around 200 houses rendering 800 people homeless in the slums near Batla House, Delhi (Malik, 2018). The NGT law is to protect and handle environmental cases where the violating entity needs to be held accountable. The slums demolished were on the banks of the Yamuna river and the officials imposed the notion that they were illegal constructions. They stressed the fact that

the slums were built during the pandemic so that their actions would go unquestioned. However, residents said that they had been living there for two decades. In this way, the NGT law was misused to displace hundreds of homeless. On the one hand, the government aims to provide everyone a house by 2022 whereas on the other, it renders lakhs of people homeless every year. Generally, when it comes to welfare, government as well as private giants marginalize the homeless at the expense of commercial benefit. It is extremely crucial to address these grey areas and see how the loopholes can be adequately mended to help the homeless of our nation.

As discussed above, misuse of government guidelines and power is just one side of the problem. Another demanding task is that of accounting numbers; as inadequacy in them can lead to huge misjudgements while forming government welfare schemes. It would not be wrong to say that the schemes like PMAY and NULM-SUH are prey to this. India is also a host to around 20 million refugees and does not abide by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Temporal and geographical restrictions of the Refugee Convention were removed and replaced with universality by this protocol which included giving refugees a legal status and basic social security. This makes the situation graver as these people will also have to be catered by the state along with its own citizens. Furthermore, not having a domestic refugee policy in place will complicate matters further as it would get highly difficult to classify refugees as citizens or residents. Having a policy in place would help in the welfare of people and grant justice to those

who have been disadvantaged due to reasons like war, persecution, natural disasters, etc. It will also help in computing accurate figures while forming policies which will help bridge the gap between the actual data figures and ground reality. In 2012, the Supreme Court had passed an order calling for the setting up of one shelter home with a capacity of 100 for every 1,00,000 city population (Shaikh, IE.). However, the scenario is graver in reality, especially in megacities. The state of Kolkata is a perfect example in this regard. Despite having a population of 1.4 lakh homeless people, it has only 33 shelters which does not meet the proposed mandate. The same situation persists in other metro cities.

Irrespective of structuring schemes that can really help the needy of the country, it is very difficult to ensure that components like accurate data figures, an appropriately customized budget, detailed reports on the socio-economic profile of the cities and a monitoring body are in place. This will help avoid any issues on the ground level. Taking into account the reasons for homelessness, there is no doubt that this is one of the most marginalized sections of our country. Surveys conducted by officials and NGOs continue to highlight that these are people who have been exposed to poverty, violence and violations of basic human rights throughout their lives (HLRN, 2019). Providing them with a home would solve one of their challenges. Further, everyone cannot be given aid in the same shelters. There is a wide array of problems that they have faced and the NULM-SUH also has provisions in order to cater to their various needs (NULM, 2016). The scheme states that there should be different

shelters for men, women, family and other special shelters. There can be some shelters that cater to all these classifications together but in that case, the shelter should be well maintained and consist of separate rooms for different groups. Facilities like provisions for persons with disabilities, a common kitchen, geyser, storage and recreational facilities are not properly provided (NULM, 2016). These goals remain far-fetched as the existing number of shelters and those getting constructed are extremely low.

In order to explore these issues in detail, let us look at the case of Mumbai which hosts an immensely burgeoning population of 200,000 homeless people. Being the financial centre of India, a huge contribution to the economy is by the informal sector that is not officially recognized. The homeless population of mega cities like Mumbai largely consist of migrant workers who are employed on a contract basis. A significant number among these are daily-wage labourers whose earnings are below the poverty line (Das, 2020). According to the homeless population in Mumbai, the city should have 184 shelter homes. However, Mumbai only has 18 functioning shelter homes as of now (Shantha, 2020). Moreover, the capacity of these homes is not optimized. This might be due to the weak network between the administrators of these shelters and the local authorities other than only the aloofness of these shelter homes among the homeless. The scenario is worsened by the fact that among these shelter homes, not all of them are open 24/7. Many of these homes are only night shelters and hence don't serve their purpose of aiding the homeless in an adequate manner.

The number of issues that the homeless face is endless. As mentioned earlier, a majority of these shelters being night shelters also lack provisions for food. The Public Distribution System (PDS) that is given as a government aid is futile to these people due to the problem of documentation and identification. Earlier, the homeless population had access to basic food grains but now, as the government has made it mandatory to link the ration card to the Aadhar card, a massive number of people are blocked from availing the benefits of the PDS system (Choudhary, 2018). Due to this, “One Ration, One Nation” sounds very appealing but that is not the case in reality (ANI, 2021). Moreover, during the global pandemic, these shelters did not have enough water and sanitary facilities to maintain cleanliness. There were no health check-ups by doctors as such and one could only imagine what would happen if anyone from these shelters contracted the virus.

Owing to the facts stated, it is very evident that the plight of the homeless in our country has not improved. A 2017 committee that reviewed the progress of shelter homes said that not even 50% of 21.85 million which was given as funds to the states has been adequately utilised (Jena, 2017). In order to improve this situation, policies need to be critically analysed and amended so as to suit the needs and maximise welfare of the larger homeless population. Moreover, there needs to be a strict monitoring nodal authority that keeps implementation in check. There needs to be more emphasis on the problems that the homeless are facing as their issues warrant urgent attention. Why is it, that the funds allocated are not used efficiently? Why is it that people who help sustain the life of

city dwellers are not in a position to secure their own livelihood? We need to dwell upon these questions so that we can comprehend the situation better. The pandemic has not left the development of shelter homes unaffected around the country and the government needs to take concerted efforts in order to achieve their goal of affordable housing for all by the year 2022.

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19 POLICING AND POLITICS

Written by **Ishita Puri and Simran Mendon**

Entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding justice in the society, the judiciary relies on the police for accurate and independent investigations in matters of injustice. This paper scrutinizes the festering relationship between police and politics and its impact on the ideal of justice in India. Tracing the colonial features entrenched on the police functioning, it proposes certain indicators of the increasing politicization. Subsequently, key methods for depoliticization of the police are evaluated, including an examination of the viability of defunding.

Introduction

Since time immemorial, the ideal of justice has been heavily shaped by the way it is applied through the two primary institutions- the judiciary and the police. While the former restores people's rights and liberties- violated by unjust deeds, the latter acts as the facilitator, enabling courts to uphold rule of law via its independent investigations.

Increasingly, this ideal of justice has been continuously marred by the dynamism of political functioning. Though the police force is not the only institution troubled by political interference, its effect is glaringly evident in it. According to Marx, the state enjoys a 'monopoly of violence'. When this power is expressed, the legitimacy of the state- guaranteed under extensive provisions and rules- lends itself to the act of violence. The police,

being one of the most visible arms of the state that supervises law and order, also become a party to this- overshadowing any breaking of procedure in the quest for justice.

The paper aims at exploring the multifaceted relationship between police and politics- historical developments, reasons and indicators of politicization and a comment on the ways and means of depoliticizing the Indian police force.

Historical Background

Pre-Independence Era

To unravel the state of policing today, one must delve deeper into the history of the nation as a whole, with a particular focus on our colonial past. Much of the laws governing the police system

in India today had been implemented during the colonial rule. The foremost one, Police Act, 1861, had at one point been the repository of colonial subjugation. Passed as a direct response to the War of Independence in 1857, it was a formal tool for fulfilment of its authoritarian agenda.

The rigid rank hierarchy, a centralized institution under the full control of the British and a visible educational, income and opportunity disparity between superior and lower level officers are stark features of this colonially inherited structure (Arnold, 1986). The British rarely introduced reforms to this system. The police mirrored their idea of a colonized India.

Furthermore, with the formation of the Congress in 1885, the police took up newer responsibilities: those of surveillance and coercion (Arnold, 1986). For the British, the police became a powerful but compliant institution deeply entrenched in their own colonial agenda which could be routinely used to quell dissenters. To turn the natives against the natives is the oldest trick in the book.

Post-Independence

The political instability, cross border wars and internal anarchy that marked the initial years of the newly independent India impacted the police. As the decision-making agency of the State, the governments' attributes heavily influence the working of the police force. In the years of the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi-led Congress government, internal anarchy reigned. The abuse and misuse of power became rampant; brutality and impunity found footing and the people came constantly in conflict with the police.



Rising Voices

Illustrated by Kiara Coutinho

Gujarat Riots, 2002

The violence in Gujarat was State-sponsored because: (a) refusal of police personnel to curb rioting in time despite prior knowledge of the same, (b) police enabling a lack of accountability in refusal to lodge complaints against Hindu perpetrators, or (c) being mere bystanders at the site of violence. (Subramaniam, 2007)

The District Magistrate of Gujarat as well as the Superintendent of the Police had their headquarters at the time in Godhra, the initial site of the riots. They are connected to various police units at all times and their prime responsibility is to oversee law and order (Subramaniam, 2007). With the arson attack on Hindu pilgrims a day prior, it's improbable that they hadn't already been on high alert. The DGP of Gujarat did not advise the Chief

Minister against the taking out of the procession of victims of the arson attack (Subramaniam, 2007). The official instruction given to the police was to adopt the ‘line of least resistance’. The case of the Gujarat Riots is a classic example of how the police can be manipulated to protect and satisfy vested interests of few powerful groups.

Hence, the political class that emerged post-independence modified the role of police, wanting to use it as “personal fiefdom” (Singh, 2010). Terms like ‘lucrative postings’ and ‘shunting posts’ soon gained prominence as the politics-police relation got imbued with financial implications.

Recent Indicators of Politicization

Subversion of Legal Procedures

Being the first port of call for victims seeking safeguard of their rights, the police force theoretically acts as an intersectional agency introducing the legalities of justice. Thus, it builds the foundation for criminal procedure by filing FIRs, charge sheets and conducting adequate investigations. Politicization of the police means use of its powers for the vested agendas of politicians, rather than general wellbeing and security of people, by means of violation of the procedures established.

Such reprehensible assertions of political power on legal procedures have been evident in numerous instances, including the Unnao rape case, 2017. Former BJP legislator Kuldeep Singh Sengar employed such machinations backed by his political clout to stop the rape survivor from raising a voice against him. The respite came from the Allahabad High Court a year later. However, by then her father

had died in police custody and her family ensnared in a false case of feud with that of the accused.

Police and Public Pressures

Thus, the idea of justice and working of the police have been noticeably altered to deal with certain cases of rapes. An abomination of our civilized society, rape evokes a sense of frustration and helplessness among the public- redefining their demand for justice within democratic setup. In December 2019, a female veterinarian was gang-raped and killed by four in Hyderabad which educated public anger. Despite the police swiftly arresting the four accused, the protracted struggle for justice for Nirbhaya was fresh in people’s minds, which spiked feelings of retribution. With these pressures, the police went to recreate the crime scene where the accused tried to flee and were shot dead in defense. This extra-judicial killing was hailed by politicians, seated members and women’s rights activists as instant justice served (Prasad, 2019).

Such killings not only violate judicial processes but also convert the police into the investigator, judge and executioner- all in one. When this concentrated power is expressed in terms of extrajudicial killings, it goes scrutinized and unquestioned by people whose vindictive demand for justice seems fulfilled. Despite copious instances of highhandedness of the police, this social justification extended to police encounters can further encourage police brutality. Amongst many, the inhuman Bhagalpur Blindings Case depicts such a scenario where politics, tainted by rising criminalization, interfered in police’s working and was overpowered by the latter’s high-handed attitude.

Recently, this had reemerged when gangster Vikas Dubey was killed in an encounter by the UP Police. Dubey was a product of the growing nexus between politics, criminals and corruptible police. Increasing criminalization of politics i.e. criminals engaging in political affairs of the country and political parties relying on criminal groups' money and muscle to win power, has manifested in the relationship between politics and police as well. Police officers who attain certain positions out of political interference are obliged to carry out ulterior agendas of their patrons. This has not only ensured continued sustenance and terror of goons but also has emboldened many (Riberio, 2020). Consequently, while the need of the hour is improving the system to overcome limitations, means have been crafted to bypass it.

Reforms

Current Status of Policing

Police Brutality is a terrifying reality for a massive chunk of the population today. With the custodial deaths of J Jayaraj and his son, Bennicks Immanuel due to extreme torture in the state of Tamil Nadu in July 2020, the demand for reform has risen again. Policing is a state subject therefore, budgetary allocations fall under the realm of the state government. According to the India Justice Report, the police force as a whole – its maintenance, the salaries of personnel, their training and upkeep, and upgradation of its stations, make for only 3% of the annual budget (Status of Policing Report, 2019). And what is most interesting to note here is that 90% of the budgetary allocation is spent on salaries

of high - level officers further widening the income gap between different ranks of officers. (Kapur, 2020)

Thus, with a distribution system so fraught and mismanaged, the crisis of underutilization also arises. Utilization of funds for installing better equipment, adequate technology and infrastructure, and on the training of newer officers is crucial to preserve the partisanship of police. But states such as Rajasthan utilized less than 5% of funds available to them (Kapur, 2020).

Defunding the Police - Is it Viable in India?

The argument, as explained by Alex Vitale (2017) in his book 'The End of Policing', pushes for a defunding of the police (which also includes de-arming it to some extent), reallocating the same funds towards community investment including creation of more community involvement programs, youth centers, anti-violence programs, rehabilitation, and access to mental health infrastructure as a crime prevention method and alternative to a tradition of policing and incarceration.

In a broader sense it also calls for reforms to the police system with more minority representation with respect to recruitment of personnel, more de-escalation training, riot management, compulsory implicit bias training and more general accountability. However, data shows that the problem in India is not over overfunding of the police as it is in the US but rather just the opposite. Indian police are largely underfunded and overstretched (Kapur, 2020).

The infrastructure to support partisan policing is pitiable. According to an official report submitted

to the Rajya Sabha, 267 police stations do not even have telephone facilities. Most of the personnel have never received any human rights training or implicit bias training (Status of Policing Report, 2019).

Suggested Reforms

Professionalizing the service in terms of more internal incentives, better salaries and better living conditions can help curb politicizing of the police (Brass, 2003). In what are considered ‘high risk areas’ the concentration of police officers only serves to increase resentment and distrust among the people they are policing. For instance, in the Bronx district of New York, USA, less than ten percent of the population is white but the number of white police officers is at thirty three percent, almost three times as high (Keating & Uhrmacher, 2020). This in turn leads to more delinquency, more disregard for societal norms and increased conflict between the people and the police (Schuck, 2007). Hiring more police officers from the community being patrolled is a possible method to counter this phenomenon. Community policing (Schuck, 2009) - the idea that police personnel are members of the community they seek to police and not just an aggressive external force - formulates a co-dependent relationship based on mutual respect, regard for each other’s civil liberties and promotion of social harmony.

Racism and xenophobia are a systemic issue, aligning themselves with histories of colonialism and the economy of exploitative capitalism. It needs to be dealt with at the highest level and

trickling downwards so that one day, the police can if not mirror but empathize with the people and find a more humane way to really progress – and do so together.

At the root of it all, the growing connections of police and politics has impaired the ideal of justice in its truest form, polluting it with ideas of vindication and patronage. As propounded in the Neutralization theory, delinquents utilize numerous arguments to gain social sanction for their illegal acts, proposing that violation of laws and regulations can not only be justified but also deemed valid given the disfigured reality.

Analyzing the politicized police force from Marxist ideas and theories of Delinquency, it becomes clear that people have a pertinent role to play in matters of procedural injustice due to violations by the police. At the root of it all, society grants legitimacy to the government running the state and enjoying the right to inflict violence upon the governed. Equality and liberty are essential ideals for a functioning democratic state which are to be protected under an impermeable system that ensures timely justice for all within the legal framework.

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20 INDIA AND NEPAL: CHANGING RELATIONS IN 2020

Written by **Biyon Sony Joseph and Schwn Cyril Sabu**

India's foreign policy has been instrumental in shaping the power equations between countries in the South Asian region. Over the years, India has asserted its role as the Big Brother and thus the relationship with other countries have often fluctuated. Taking Nepal as a case study, this article explores how India's relations with the Himalayan country have transformed. Realism, as a theory of international relations, is an important tool used to explain these developments. The primary focus is to bring out the impact of Chinese expansionism on this relationship and also the possibility of trilateralism in the region.

Introuction

The Indian foreign policy laid its foundation with the Non-Alignment Movement. The foreign policy of the country reflected variations with the changing time and politics. India has been working towards regional cooperation in the South Asian region through its proactive engagement of regional institutions and support mechanisms. However, recently, the rise of China as a global power has proved to be a threat to India's regional interests. The 6th phase of Indian Foreign Policy began with the inception of the Neighbourhood Policy in 2014 to improve regional cooperation (Jaishankar, 2020). Despite the policy's initial success, it has faced setbacks resulting in conflicts

with the neighbouring countries. This article would be taking Nepal as a case study to understand the historic significance, reasons for the conflict and the way forward for India in tackling these issues.

Background

Since time immemorial, India and Nepal have shared deep, historical, cultural, social and religious ties. The strategic relationship between them began with the Indo-Nepalese Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950, establishing strong bilateral links. After the Sino-Indian war (1962), relations developed further but they went downhill after Sikkim was annexed in 1975. Due to India's increasing involvement in the internal politics,

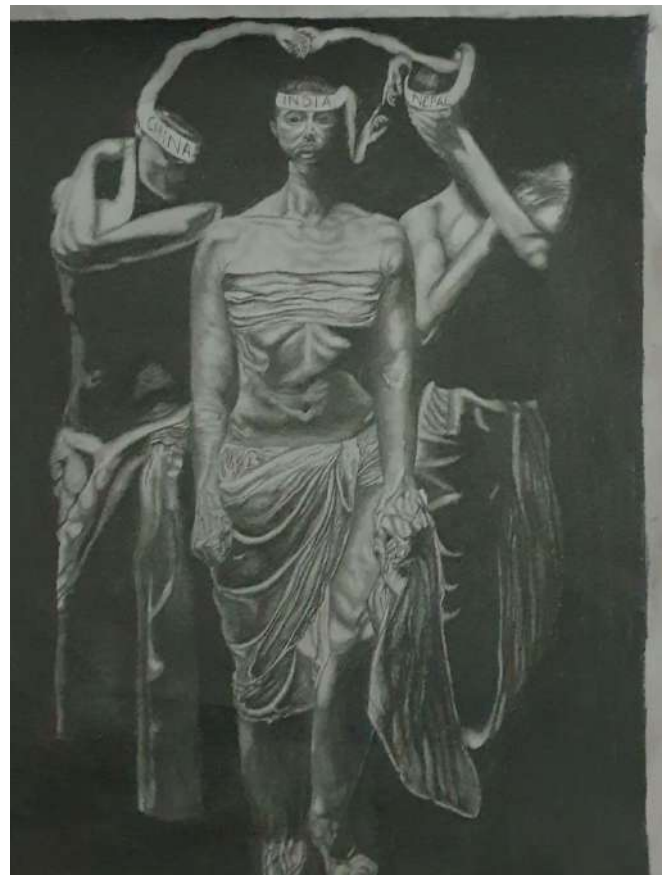
Nepal refused to agree to a single trade and transit treaty. The contention between the two countries increased, resulting in an economic blockade, and further straining the relationship. Eventually, a new trade treaty was signed in December 1991 (Hudson Institute, 2020).

After democracy was restored in 2008, talks on water sharing happened and decisions regarding modification of the 1950 Treaty were also taken. In 2014, Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal in 17 years (Baral, 2019). The earthquakes in 2015 had devastated the country and India was among the first to provide relief to its neighbour. Even though the relationship has continued to grow, the last decade has witnessed the rise of China's influence, both politically and economically.

Nepal's new Constitution came into being on 20th September, 2015 (Dahal, 2017). There were widespread protests by ethnic groups such as Madhesis and the crisis finally led to an economic blockade. Nepal quickly blamed India for denying access to several necessary resources but India denied these allegations (Dahal, 2017). Recently, both countries have been involved in a 'cartographic war' as they claim disputed territories such as Kalapani, Lipulekh, etc. as their own (Hudson Institute, 2020).

Declining Relations since 2014

The 'People's movement of 2006' against the monarchical structure resulted in the restoration of democracy in Nepal. The Government of Nepal



Ally or opponent?

Illustrated by Saurav Bania

promulgated the new Constitution in 2015 while facing criticism, especially from the Madhesi community (Dahal, 2017). They felt alienated and marginalised due to their inadequate representation in the constitution, erupting into a border blockade which further led to an economic and humanitarian crisis. However, the Nepalese government accused India of worsening the embargo by not allowing vehicles to pass along the border where there were no protests being held (BBC, 2015). The Indian government denied the allegation made by the Nepalese government. The border blockade was followed by severe economic repercussions

for Nepal. The conflict with India was ultimately resolved with Prime Minister K.P Oli's visit to India (Dahal, 2017).

The economic blockade made Nepal realise the need for engagement with an alternative regional power. Nepal started shifting its position towards China, which came into spotlight with the signing of Belt and Road Initiative [BRI] in 2017 (Kathmandu Post, 2017). China has always tried to use Nepal as a proxy against India, especially when Indo-China relations are strained. Even though we cannot argue that China has been directly behind the recent border dispute, it does not mean that China hasn't motivated Nepal to take a bold stand against India. China, which was instrumental in Nepal Communist Party's unification, has been keen on maintaining political stability. Developments like making Mandarin a compulsory language in Nepalese schools and the Nepal-China Transit protocol that came into being in February 2020 have helped China to gain ground in the Himalayan country. This strong Chinese presence means that Nepal isn't overly dependent on India anymore and their strategies have made Nepal drift away from India's sphere of influence (Singh & Behal, 2020).

Exacerbating the insecure relationship between the two nations, the Indian Government announced a new political map that included territories claimed by Nepal, after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 (Xavier, 2020). On 8th May 2020, India inaugurated an 80 km long road for the Kailash-Manasarovar pilgrims passing through the disputed territory of Lipulekh (Xavier, 2020). Nepal made an accusation against India for altering the status-

quo without proper diplomatic consultation, leading to the rise of anti-India sentiments. The Nepal Government responded by deploying police forces and summoned the Indian Ambassador. A constitutional amendment was initiated to formalise and extend territorial claims releasing the new map showing Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh (Xavier, 2020).

Here, we need to look at both sides to gain better clarity of the power relations. India refused Nepal's request for diplomatic engagement before the border dispute. Here, the failure of Indian diplomacy to coordinate with the security and diplomatic establishments has resulted in the issue aggravating to a security tension (Xavier, 2020). On the other hand, the border issue has been utilised by K.P Oli's government to counter the internal political instability at Kathmandu, generating anti-India sentiments among the people of Nepal.

Analysis of India-Nepal relations through the lens of Realism

Realism has always been an important and enduring approach in International Relations. It advocates that nation states are the most important actors in the global system. Realism also endorses that the international order is anarchic, i.e., there is no higher governing authority. So, the states' survival in such a system depends on constant struggle for power. The three key players in this particular context are India, China and Nepal. From a realist perspective, each of these countries survive by maximizing their own interests (McGlinchey & Walters, 2017).

In this case, being emerging global powers, both India and China are expanding their control beyond their borders. Since independence, India has worked towards maintaining dominance in the subcontinent. Due to strong historical and cultural ties, India always wanted Nepal to be under its sphere of influence. On the other hand, China wants to make use of Nepal as a transit state to South Asia, also protecting their economic interests. Nepal provides a pathway to Tibet and as the latter is a security concern for China, it has tried to exert influence on the Nepal (Jaiswal, 2014). Therefore, bringing Nepal closer would aid in implementing their expansionist policies (Karki & KC, 2020).

Interestingly, Nepal becomes significant due to its geographic location between the two Asian giants. The Indo-China competition has helped Nepal to develop itself over the years, and as long as they continue to expand their influence, the bilateral relations with Nepal would involve different sectors such as development of transportation, infrastructure, tourism, increase in grant aids, foreign investments, etc.

From a realist point of view, Nepal has undertaken the role of a buffer state. A buffer state lies between two rival states and helps in preventing confrontation between them. Buffer states help in balancing power and if the situation turns hostile between India and China, Nepal can act to prevent direct contact between them. Both India and China wrestle for dominance, exerting influence on the smaller states and Nepal stands to benefit the most out of this competition. Thus, realism shows us how power structures shape the relations between nation states (Karki & KC, 2020).

Trilateralism: A Possibility?

Trilateralism can be defined as “practice of engaging in three party relations, agreements or negotiations”. Usually, the unequal distribution power in a region gives rise to trilateral cooperation among countries and it mostly emphasises on maintaining cooperation and interdependence. If the concept has to be put into practice, it is necessary that Nepal transforms from a buffer state into a bridge or transit state (Baral, 2019).

Trilateral cooperation will benefit not only the three countries but also the entire region. If it is realised, Nepal stands to benefit the most out of such a relationship. The country’s infrastructure development, tourism and employment opportunities will be boosted, resulting in a positive economic growth. Both China and India can utilize the rich water resources of Nepal to their own benefit. India can gain better access to China and East Asia through this relationship and simultaneously, China can further develop its economy by finding new markets in South Asia. A triangular relationship will help in tackling common problems such as food insecurity, poverty, climate (Baral, 2019).

In the 1970s and 1980s, King Birendra (late monarch of Nepal) advocated it and Nepalese leaders have emphasised on reviving its status as a transit state since. During the BRICS Summit in 2016 and Nepal’s Foreign Minister’s visit to China in 2018, discussions regarding trilateral cooperation happened. However, India distanced itself away from those deliberations. Indian policy

makers have not been supportive of such relations due to various concerns and lack of an environment of trust with China (Tagotra, 2017). If trilateralism has to be realised, the three countries would need to keep aside their differences and cooperate with each other. The region has a lot of potential and such a triangular relationship would be a win-win situation for all, especially Nepal.

India's diplomatic relations with its South Asian neighbours have been declining over the past few years. In order to ensure that its pre-eminent status is maintained, India needs to make sure that the requirements and concerns of her neighbours are accommodated. Such an approach would require the restructuring of Indian diplomacy, which could in turn help India enhance its position in the subcontinent. We believe that, even though regional integration has become a difficult task now, trilateralism is a plausible method to realise this goal.

Conclusion

Nepal is a landlocked country strategically located between the two growing powers of Asia. In a positive light, it has benefitted from the contribution of both India and China. The relations with India have become difficult due to the Madhesi protest, map-border dispute and absence of diplomatic talks. From a realist analysis, both the countries are promoting their self-interests in the sub-continent. The article would like to put forward trilateralism as a possibility to deal with the ongoing differences. Indo-China engagement is equally important for the growth of Nepal. This factor has resulted in

K.P Oli's government engaging in talks with India for diplomatic negotiations in order to resolve the border dispute and continue building a stronger relationship with India.

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21 THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PRESENT POWER PARADIGM

Written by **Sanika Sawant**

The intricacy of power relations between individuals makes the attainment of an optimal balance equivalent to a delicate house of cards. Shifts in the fabric of society without a doubt lead to alterations in the power dynamics. The Covid-19 pandemic did just that, unfortunately not in any desirable direction. In a world where escape from power paradigms is futile, what do these new changes mean for the uncertain time to come? Moreover, amidst it, what role does the government play when influencing these imbalances?

“Power can be socially malign; [but] it is also socially essential.”

– John Kenneth Galbraith (1938)

The perpetual quality of power is its ability to infiltrate any political process, social framework, or society’s cultural foundation. It has become an integral and conventional aspect of life, in the sense that all individuals are aware of its existence. However, the consensus on the acceptance of power cannot be stated as indisputably because, inherently, power does not have a positive or negative constitution attached to it. Nevertheless, the connotation varies based on the nature of its acquisition, application, and utilisation.

Unfortunately, the desire to wield unrelenting power has created an atmosphere where it has become

possible for political and economic apparatuses to portray an unhindered inclination towards and to engage in the procurement of copious amounts of power, with no regard for its detrimental ramifications. This has only exasperated during the current times, where the world has been grappling with the ongoing health crisis.

Since power is intangible and abstract, there is a lack of consensus on a comprehensive definition. Nevertheless, to put it into perspective, this article would consider the Foucauldian notion of power. Foucault defined power as a summation of a set of influences in an intricate web of relations (Hinkle,

1987). The emphasis on the interplay of functions between established social structures can be identified in most post-covid world nations.

By highlighting the functional relationship between public authorities or governments and the state's people, the skewed nature of power and influence can be easily identified. In a democracy, people are the ideal source of the nation's strength. Ironically, the functional relationship between the two puts the authority in a position to dominate and influence the very people who elected it. There has been a palpable shift from 'power to' to 'power over,' only worsened by stressful situations. Accordingly, the Covid-19 pandemic has blatantly exposed the inappropriate, damaging, and ultimately unsustainable nature of concentrated power.

According to the structural-functionalist perspective, developed based on Durkheim's work, social institutions are erected out of an inevitable need and play a vital role in exerting a positive influence on society (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020). As a social apparatus, the government would be just one of the many varied organs of society working in an interconnected and interdependent fashion to produce a unified body. These institutions' total would pave the way for a stable and well-functioning society, adapting to minor changes to maintain equilibrium. However, the 2020 pandemic unearthed many flaws in these institutions that fundamentally govern this day and age, portraying society's possibility of moving towards instability.

Amid intensifying uncertainty early last year, universally, respective governments were entrusted



Do the pieces still fit the puzzle?

Illustrated by Rashi Shah

with the responsibility of saving lives. This compromised certain human rights, such as the right to freedom of movement and assembly (Roth, HRW, 2020). The derogation of specific human rights is permitted by most constitutions, the Human Rights Convention and the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, "only to the extent strictly required by the situation" at the time of an emergency (Pettersen, 2020). Unfortunately, Human Rights Watch reported that authoritarian-minded leaders of authoritarian states, faltering and traditional democracies alike, were utilising the disarray in the world as an opportunity to "silence critics and consolidate power" (Roth, 2020).

The weekly 'Hirak'— peaceful protests and mass demonstrations as an appeal for political reform,

which had become characteristic to Algeria since February 2019, were conveniently terminated by the Algerian government under the health's pretext crisis (Zoubir, 2020). Although it can be argued that this was necessary, given the pandemic, it is fundamental to note that it maligned the political and social health of the people of Algeria. In Russia, any explicit objections or protests against the President, Vladimir Putin, were embargoed. This was the government's means of ensuring a long-standing and unopposed incumbency of Putin (Roth, 2020). During a 'normal' state of affairs, this would be heavily criticised. However, the pandemic turned out to be an ideal device to muffle any expression against governmental tyranny.

Various governments prioritised their political agendas over public health. From the first signs of the outbreak in China, the government denied the claim, soon followed by professing that the coronavirus had been mitigated. It refused to permit any independent verification, as well as expelled and revoked visas of journalists. Reporters that provided any information about the Chinese government's need to repress (especially those venturing to Wuhan) were detained and punished. Simultaneously, conspiracy theories about the virus were being promoted, "hoping to deflect attention from the tragic results of its early cover-up" (Roth, 2020).

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt and President Trump of the United States both downplayed the coronavirus threat for weeks. While the Egyptian Head of State also expelled journalists who questioned government facts and

figures to avoid hurting Egypt's tourism sector, Trump insisted that the coronavirus was but a "hoax," that propagated rumours and fraudulent news (Milman, 2020). This trend followed suit in Turkey, Venezuela, Cambodia, and Thailand, to name a few, whose governments also detained activists, healthcare workers, and every individual opposing official figure.

The severe restriction and silencing of the media, press, and, more importantly, drowning out accurate information and news from the public domain, was a clear power-play by the governments to advance self-serving propaganda rather than facts. The Human Rights Watch reported— "Recognizing that the public is more willing to accept government power grabs in times of crisis, some leaders see the coronavirus as an opportunity not only to censor criticism but also to undermine checks and balances on their power" (Roth, 2020).

Further, Foucault classified power as submission and resistance, and not only as a state of domination (Hinkle, 1987). He put forth the idea that power could constraint actions and not individuals. Foucault elaborated on the pervasive nature of modern power systems, due to which no individual, group, or system can escape power relations (Hinkle, 1987). Unlike medieval power structures, identified through absolute control exercised by the sovereign authorities, today's exercise of power can be more implicit and subtle. Power can be consistently and covertly implied, like through surveillance (Hinkle, 1987).

Attributable to the pandemic, the surveillance of citizens was heightened in China (particularly

Xinjiang). Public authorities rationalised the infringement of privacy by presenting the motive of contact tracing. In China and Israel, the governments sanctioned security agencies to resort to location-tracking via tracing chips or sims in cell phones. The state authority of Montenegro undertook the decision of making personal information, inclusive of names and home addresses, of anyone suspected to be infected, public.

Even in relatively developed economies like Singapore and South Korea, privacy violation became a normal response to the pandemic. South Korea broadcasted “detailed and highly revealing information” on the movement of citizens suspected to be infected (Roth, 2020). Moreover, their success in curbing the virus was, in fact, globally applauded, with no consideration for the breach of the right to freedom from interference.

Hence, from the right to detain people, close borders, conduct invasive surveillance to emergency laws, and disrupted democratic elections, the plethora of infringement of people’s rights have been largely overlooked in the new given setting; partly due to rapid alterations in norms and cultural hegemony and partly due to preoccupied public cognisance. Therefore, although this article argues that power is impersonal and purely relational, in concurrence with Foucault’s stress on the functionality of power, the nature of its employment has maligned structural stability and inflated the role of the government far beyond the requirement. The overvaluing of the governmental organ in the state’s functioning has propelled society towards disequilibrium, contradicting the self-correcting

equilibrium proposed by structural functionalism.

Therefore, John Kenneth Galbraith stressed the importance of countervailing power (Kesting, 2005). Parsons argued that power is mutually exclusive and ‘zero-sum’ is flawed because the very nature of the generation of power opposes the idea that power is finite in quantity. Seconded by Foucault, Parsons maintained that power was not a mere static commodity but rather a “circulating medium” (Giddens, 1968). Following Parsons’ ‘non-zero-sum’ notion of power, John Kenneth Galbraith highlighted the need to augment the power held by the people in society, a requirement for when power relationships get incredibly lopsided.

Interestingly, Foucault would argue that Galbraith’s countervailing power concept would itself be an act within the power paradigm and not against it since power is not what is ‘held’ by a structure but is the dynamic between two (or more). Unfortunately, countervailing power among citizens has become harder to propagate. Galbraith and Parsons failed to recognise the asymmetrical magnitude of functional power and the gestational time required for a shift to transpire. Given the pandemic, various governments, as mentioned above, undertook continual repression of any opposition by the citizens.

Therefore, now more than ever, there is an urgent requirement of kindling countervailing power. The nature of power shifts is not as self-generator or quasi-automatic as Galbraith stated either, which can be countered with the present reality.

Therefore, criticising the over-optimistic and utopian notion of equilibrium maintained by the structural-functionalist perspective, this article promotes the idea that correctional forces like countervailing power, more often than not, need to be actively generated over time in order to move towards equilibrium. Nevertheless, the belief of ever reaching a state equilibrium is an idealistic outlook in itself.

It is critical to address how power can overstate one organ's position (here, government) and therefore promote disequilibrium over time because it can shape and distort the systems that tomorrow's society is built upon. If left unchecked, the world could move from a health pandemic to an epidemic of oppression and despotism. Furthermore, contrasting the traditional functionalist belief, the need for active countervailing power or conflict is urgent and real. If not acted upon or corrected in time, the power paradigm's unbalanced growth could result in a dystopian future. After all, the deconstruction of paradigms is always harder than their preliminary construction.

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22 'JAMMU AND KASHMIR': IN A STATE OF CONFLICT

Written by **Salonee Kumar**

This article addresses the politicisation of Jammu and Kashmir with respect to the psycho-social concepts of conflict and collective, transgenerational trauma. It highlights the perpetration of human rights violations by the Indian State and its military forces, particularly during the lockdown-within-a-lockdown. The perspectives of civilians and international organisations have been offered in a complementary manner. Keeping in mind the controversial and sensitive nature of varied issues, policy recommendations have been made to restore justice and normalcy to this humanitarian hotspot.

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is a contested terrain that has witnessed cross-border and internal insurgency, communal riots, and catastrophic wars (1947, 1965). The formation of the state itself foreshadowed its dark future. In the aftermath of an alleged invasion by Pashtun tribesmen from Pakistan, Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of the princely states that had amalgamated into Kashmir, acceded to India (BBC, 2019). This was facilitated through the Instrument of Accession (1947) – a legal document that gave India the power to legislate in J&K on matters of defence, external affairs, communications, and ancillary issues (Hassan & Shafi, 2013).

India and Pakistan created a Line of Control between them to establish clear boundaries (Ayres, A. A., &

Blackwill, R. D. B., 2020). Indian-administered-Kashmir was granted special status under Article 370 of the Constitution of India (1949). Article 35A was introduced by a Presidential Order (1954) and it empowered J&K to define its 'permanent residents' (Mustafa, 2019). From 1989 onwards, the region under study asserted its right to self-determination and independence from India (Tremblay, 1996). Since its special status was rescinded in August 2019, its integration into India as two Union Territories – namely J&K and Ladakh – has been widely condemned.

Militarisation and an intractable cycle of violence and counter-violence for over seven decades have adversely impacted the welfare of civilians in the state under siege. The lockdown that commenced

in August 2019, is the longest one in recorded history, with more internet shutdowns than any other democracy (Khan/Srinagar, 2020). Less than a year later, the Kashmir valley and three districts of Jammu were declared ‘red zones’ (P., 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic and put into lockdown again.

Media and communication blackouts – a ‘digital apartheid’ (Al Jazeera, 2020), arbitrary mass detentions (Al Jazeera, 2020), criminalisation of journalists (Isaac, 2020), and inaccessibility to education and healthcare facilities during this period have marred the territory. The lockdown-within-a-lockdown has exacerbated domestic abuse, mental disorders, and substance misuse in the region (Ashiq, 2020). Thus, mental health concerns in J&K are inextricably intertwined with the politics of the state, where nine out of ten people have experienced conflict-related traumas (Yasir, 2020) - 99.7% of citizens (Dar, 2020).

A socio-political event is labelled ‘traumatic’ to denote that the experience is abnormal. However, it may be questionable whether facing violence is considered traumatic in an environment where strife is the norm (Gilmour, A. R., Adithy, A., & Regeer, B., 2019). As a school of thought, Karl Marx’s conflict theory explains that there is no acknowledgement of injustice without the presence of conflict. Antipathy arises because society is an arena of inequality where the power dynamics benefit a select few. J&K is a contemporary case in point.



Chaos within and around

Illustrated by Shania Ferrao

Deviance on the part of sufferers is a common reaction to oppressive and dominant systems (Marx, 1848). When Kashmiri citizens rebel against their military tormentors, they are labelled ‘deviants’ and punished severely. The theory of structuration put forth by Anthony Giddens is interwoven with the conflict theory, given that many processes take place at the interface between actors and social structures. They influence an individual’s autonomy as they are not mutually exclusive (Giddens, 1984), that is, people perform actions within the context of powerful social structures (Gibbs, 2017). Their non-compliance with authority results in the loss of the desired social equilibrium.

Let us hear it from Kashmiri civilians themselves: Shehzada Bano is a citizen of Srinagar who was blinded by pellet shots. She has recently stated that the police forcefully carry away minors when the situation in J&K “becomes bad”. Children protest against such separation from their families by throwing stones at the police. They are then charged with numerous legal Acts, branded terrorists (VICE Asia, 2020), or brutally beaten up in special lock-ups for minors (The Quint, 2019).

If an individual’s trauma is neglected, it could translate into genetic disorders due to structural changes and degeneration in the brain (Hassan & Shafi, 2013). Secondary traumatising takes place by symbolic presentation or narration of the original trauma. This often causes psychiatric disorders in the listener. Individuals’ suffering must be understood against the backdrop of larger patterns of collective trauma. Transgenerational effects of trauma in communities affected by politically-induced violence could be analysed using criteria like resilience and reconstruction (Alexander, 2004; Robben & Suarez-Orozco, 2000). Psychosocial interventions could be used to aid the healing process by helping conflict survivors cope with the interpersonal impacts of war (Locke, 2009). This necessitates the acknowledgment of the role of culture in health research (Dixon, 2013).

Pre-existing frameworks such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have played a key role in training health professionals and assisting Kashmiri detainees. However, their operations have been suspended as the Government of India (GoI) has refused the issuance of visas to

foreign aid workers (Barad, 2007). The GoI has continually engineered fear psychosis through the deployment of troops. As a result, J&K is the most militarised zone in the world (Singh, 2016). The Indian State has executed ‘social torture’ under the garb of maintaining public order and national security (Dolan, 1986-2006).

The need of the hour is to revoke archaic laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA 1958 & 1990), Disturbed Areas Act (1976), the Army Act (1950), and Public Safety Act (1953), which provide immunity to the armed forces. The classification of J&K as a ‘disturbed area’ in Section 4 of AFSPA has led to state terrorism being categorised as a service-related act. Kashmiri citizens have been let down in 99.99% of cases in the Jammu & Kashmir High Court, especially in cases of rape, enforced disappearances, and custodial deaths (VICE Asia, 2020). From 1990-2015, no member of the security forces in J&K was tried in a court of law for human rights violations.

In 1991, at least 23 women in the twin villages of Kunan and Poshpora were gang-raped. Even eight-year-old minors were not spared. As per the 2012 Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission (J&K SHRC) report, the men in these villages were taken to a separate location. Then members of the security forces entered their houses and “gagged the mouths of the victims and committed forced gang-rape against their will and consent.” (Jha, 2016).

“Three army men caught hold of me and 8-10 army men raped me in turns. They had huge battery torches with them and they used them to see my naked body while making lewd remarks.”

-A survivor, ‘Do you remember Kunan Poshpora?’

Rashida Manjoo, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on violence against women, visited India in April 2013. In her report to the UN Human Rights Council, she stated that the AFSPA “allows for the overriding of due process rights and nurtures a climate of impunity and a culture of both fear and resistance by citizens.”

The mechanical jurisprudence that is currently present in India does not consider laws and principles in specific contexts. Sociological jurisprudence was theorised when a similar narrative played out during the Progressive Era in the United States of America (Marshall, 2020). Sociological jurists espoused that law, as a social institution, must focus on social purposes and progressive reforms rather than sanctions (Pound, 1912). This theory could be applied to the Indian legal system, where ignorance of on-ground realities is safeguarded through regressive laws. These unconstitutional Acts have become inflexible since the commencement of the lockdown-within-a-lockdown in the humanitarian hotspot of J&K.

The eightfold path to policymaking by Eugene Bardach (2018) could be interlinked with the UN Principles for the Prevention of Extra-legal, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions to resolve the conflict in Kashmir. To illustrate: firstly, the findings of all past and present inquiries could be made

publicly available on the grounds that the personal details of all victims, their families, and witnesses are removed from the publications to ensure their safety. However, the precedents containing the original and confidential details could also be kept as sources to avert similar infringement of human rights in the future. Secondly, the Government of J&K must guarantee the ‘right to truth’ by updating victims and their families when it comes to investigations and prosecution by authorities (Amnesty International, 2015). This is a prerequisite under International Human Rights Law and will strengthen public-policy relations as laid down by the National Human Rights Commission of India in 1999.

The imbroglio in J&K has been aggravated by the abrogation of Articles 35A and 370; and more recently, by the Coronavirus pandemic. This makes it pertinent to give back to the populace their basic human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of India and various international instruments, to which India is a signatory. A potential rights-based regime could obfuscate memories of the conflict that has unfortunately been characteristic of the region and its people.

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23 THE HEALTH CRISIS, AN UNLIKELY INVITATION TO AUTOCRACY AND THE PEOPLE

Written by **Jui Chawan**

The paper examines the erosion of democratic values and traditions in the backdrop of the pandemic. It attempts to determine the role of the extant health emergency in accelerating anti-democratic trends in different nations.

The recent past has witnessed the unexpected health crisis that caused upheaval worldwide. The most common measure adopted in order to curb the spread of the virus was the imposition of lockdown in different parts of the world. This resulted in a global standstill and the normalcy of quotidian activities dramatically altered. The limited functionality of public institutions, the enforcement of emergency provisions, the lack of transparency regarding government actions and judicial processes were some of the many vital implications of the lockdown.

There has been a view that these precautionary health measures put certain restrictions on some basic personal liberties of individuals. The basis for such an observation are the actions undertaken which brought forth constraints on travel & interactions in public places, censorship of information, etc.

The anomaly questions the capacity of its impact on democracies with health emergencies calling for necessary restrictions. However, the contrapuntal argument put forth argues that they have also been used by governments with underlying autocratic influences to further undermine rights and democratic values.

While understanding the latter view, it is imperative to determine whether the pandemic has really been a catalyst for political systems to usurp more authority and thereby vilify fundamental democratic ideas? Within the last few months, there have been laws passed that allowed leaders to rule by decree, dissent against mainstream ideas stifled, opposition leaders jailed for allegedly violating health protocol, the freedom of press calumniated and a stark rise in identity politics. The rhetoric used justify such actions by highlighting that the

necessity of increased power stemmed from the need to bring the pandemic under control. It is to be noted that most of these measures do not seem limited to the containment of the public health crisis and are selectively enforced.

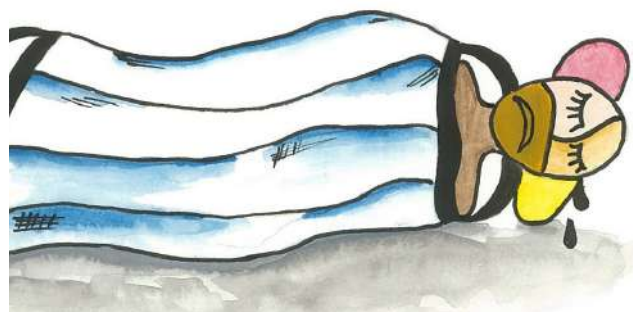
The article tries to navigate and assess the link between the Covid19 pandemic and the rise of anti-democratic trends. Additionally, the aim is also to understand the repercussions on freedoms and democratic ideals.

Background To Pre-Pandemic Power Structure

While understanding the extant vanquishing of freedoms by imperious governance, it is imperative to investigate the reasons for development and acceptance of such undemocratic ideologies in the pre-pandemic era.

One of the prominent issues has been the crescendo of right-wing populism in the concerned nations. Populism can be defined as “a style of politics that manipulates and exacerbates identity cleavages for political gain” (Velasco, 2020). The features of such political rise include the increase of protectionist and chauvinist colloquy, socio-politically divisive and bellicose rhetoric and policies undermining the basic liberties of the people. Populism stems from the profound cynicism for the existing political systems and has a radical impact on the current establishments. In many democratic nations like the USA, Brazil, India, UK, Philippines, Australia, Hungary populists control the highest offices.

Yasuma Takata while delineating the power of wild-growing and popular movements, elaborates that



Masked Problems

Illustrated by Kiara Coutinho

several leaders become a part of such ideological movements and hence “promote a certain kind of interest, they then obtain external power; this, in turn, creates a deeper faith in the ideas which are supported by the movement and the internal powers of the leaders then also increases” (Takata, 1995, p.48). These movements also have a following categorized in general terms as the ‘public’ with no clearly denoted followers who believe obedience to the central authority of the movement (Takata, 1995). Taking into consideration Takata’s interpretation, it becomes evident that popular movements are ostensibly loyal to their ideas rather than extant principles in socio-political parley. Such a trend is very visible in nations having populist regimes. Though this has come at its own cost as when analyzing the countries where the polity has transduced the fundamental rights it is visibly observed that populist ideas have ingrained themselves into the social fabric over the past few years.

The trajectory of democracy worldwide has been on the wane with the rise of what can be termed

as ‘democratic barbarism’. Democratic barbarism can be delineated in a circumstance where there is weakened protection apropos of the civil liberties of the people and a deference towards the power of the state. It also includes, as Bhanu Pratap Mehta mentions, a situation when “the state treats a section of its own citizenry as enemies of the people. The purpose of politics is no longer equal justice for all: It is to convert politics into a game of victims and oppressors and ensure that your side comes up the winner” (Mehta, 2020, para 2). This identity politics also derives from the popular political ideology. (Velasco, 2020).

The uncertainty of the pandemic has increased the spread of such movements as most populists are using this time to garner more strife and fuel disharmony. Ergo, the pandemic has only expedited the populist idea and the totalitarian behavior.

Analysis Of Current Scenario

Today’s situation has been marred with anxiety over the spread of the virus, incertitude regarding the end of the ongoing situation as well as an adaptation to the new normal. The study majorly draws from two case studies namely the Coronavirus law in Hungary and subjugation of minorities and dissent in India.

Hungary

On 30th March 2020, the Hungarian parliament passed a law Act XII of 2020 which allows the government without any limitations to rule by decree. The validity of the law is not time bound,

“it also mandates jail time for intentionally spreading disinformation that hampers the coronavirus response” (Walker, 2020) and does not allow elections or rallies to take place in the country. This isn’t the first time that the ruling party in the country, Fidesz, with prime minister Viktor Orban, has undermined the democratic institutions. But the pandemic has provided an excuse for this open “erosion of a liberal democracy” (Ash, 2019). The said law is also similar in nature to the ‘Enabling Act of 1933’ of Nazi Germany which gave dictatorial powers to Hitler rendering the then German Parliament as a redundant body. The repercussions of the Enabling Act can be gauged in history and hence it is necessary to address the potential implications of its Hungarian version. This trajectory shows the potential threat of democracy in the nation.

India

In the past few years, India has been moving away from secular ideals and in the direction of being a polarized republic. In the past one year itself, the country has had a number of institutionally discriminatory stances and policies which include the abrogation of Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 legislation. Though the reasons for these actions were neutrally worded without any prejudice against any group, as Bhatia (2019) notes, “discriminatory laws must be tested by their systemic and institutional effects rather than by their intentions” (Bhatia, 2019, p. 33). The implicit agenda of the current government promotes the ideas and traditions of the majority religious group in the nation. In this view, most of

these actions reek of minority subjugation as they disproportionately represent the interests of the Indian population. The lockdown presented an opportunity to the ruling party to suppress opposition to any of its ideas. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 with its preventive detention regulation and sedition charges has been widely used against critics, activists, journalists and protestors. The vilification of anti-government figures comes in tandem with the partisan behavior of the Supreme Court of India in matters questioning any central government actions. The shutting down of Amnesty International's operations during this period in the country due to constant harassment is another blow.

What does this mean?

The changing democratic dynamic isn't limited to these countries. In Germany, an amendment to an existing law can enable the government to restrict certain constitutional freedoms in the face of health emergencies, invasive surveillance has been adopted by countries like Singapore and South Korea, allowing people to be tracked via their cell phones in Israel, the situation in going against the liberties and privacy of citizens. In the said context, the pandemic has in ways just accelerated the process since there was a lag in the checks and balances prevalent in these States. Laws like these which would have taken a lot of time to pass have been pushed through under the garb that emergency powers are the necessity for the States today. The imposition of emergency by most nations led to further corrosion of democracy as it disbanded the fundamental rights.

The challenges posed to liberties also brings into account the attrition of the law and legal framework. Understanding the idea of social jurisprudence, which considers a linkage among social systems and development of law, some major issues need to be addressed. This school of thought has two main intellections that law acts like "a means of alleviating conflict through the imposition of organized force" and "functions to secure the realization of as many individual interests as possible" (Masotti & Weinstein, 1969). In our present situation, fracturing of liberties has hindered the interest of most individuals and increased strife between groups. Moreover, political interference in judicial systems has escalated partisan legal discourse. Ergo, legal frontiers which shield individual liberties in tumultuous waters and their future form remains in question.

In other words, the pandemic can be said to have been proved to be advantageous to the antidemocratic tendencies in many ways.

Individuals And Future Systems

Moving ahead from this time, there must be a discourse on what restrictions must be allowed in a public health crisis. There is also a growing need to attempt an answer to whether limitations on individual rights are allowed, what is their extent and impact in the longer run. When gauging the idea of potential future systems, there must be consideration regarding the assessment of how the undemocratic stylus takes shape in the longer run. Recalling Sen's interpretation that development is on a whole is nothing but the broadening of individual

freedoms, there should be work in that direction by making the administrations and legislative more accountable in their recent actions. These steps will be necessary to protect and preserve the democratic tradition of the long past.

In conclusion, there needs to be acknowledgement about the fragility of democratic sentiment, a movement to break down the narrow domestic walls of division and find the reason within the chaotic backdrop.

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24 CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING CHARACTERS

Written by **Ria Shukla**

Literature and society evolve together. Wars, civil movements, pandemics and revolutions, all inspire literature and society to change. This article aims to showcase the relationship between them with the help of modern day pop culture. Since modern day popular culture is heavily influenced by superhero comic books, the article draws examples from the same. Captain America, Ms Marvel, Wonder Woman, Black Panther and NorthStar are just a few examples of superheroes who have become ideals and have been voicing the concerns of the everchanging society. The article also brings out examples where superhero comic books have helped in restructuring society.

Representation in literature is crucial as it gives us a glimpse into how various communities exist in society. “Literature is interpreted as reflecting norms and values, as revealing the ethos of the culture, the processes of class struggle and certain types of social facts” (Albrecht, 1954). It is pivotal to understand that the studying the literature is the key to demystify the functioning of the society or culture under observation. Comic books fall under the realm of literature and are one of the best sources to engage with primarily due to their boundless genre and use of superheroes. Why study superheroes? They are what we might call a subject of ideal social conditioning since they are often birthed out of society’s moral values. Moreover, the constant changes that these superheroes’ character arcs go through reflects the culture’s feelings,

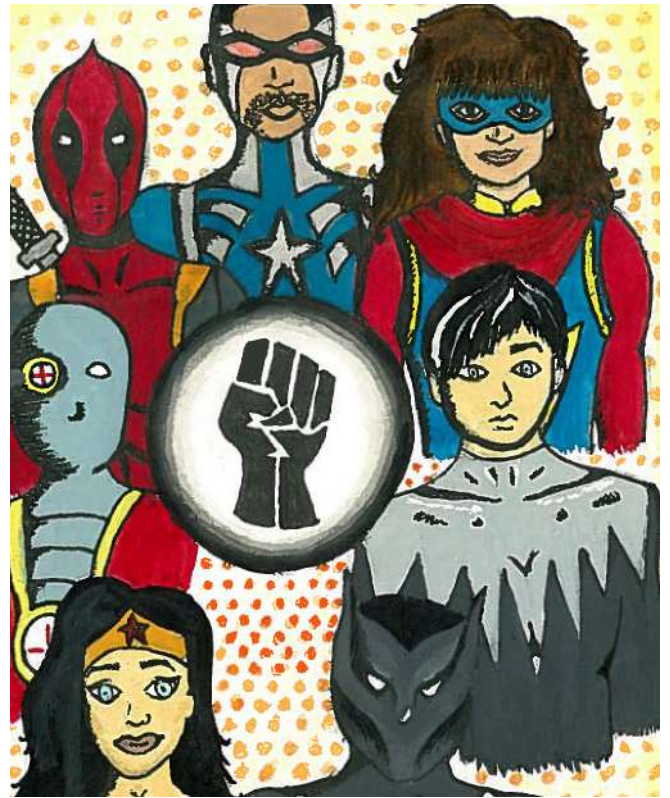
norms of society, and the movements prevailing in society at a particular point.

To highlight a country which has dabbled in the comic book industry for around 75 years now, let’s look at their socio-political and socio-economic history briefly. Due to the World Wars, Cold War, and the attacks of 9/11, the political and military situation of the United States has changed. Today, the U.S.A spends more on its military than China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil - combined (U.S defense spending compared to other countries, 2020). In the economic sphere, it has the world’s largest economy by nominal GDP and second-largest by Purchasing Power Parity (Frankel, 2020).

The country has also gone through a cultural revolution; it has managed to dominate the sphere of soft power and has homogenised the world's culture while adding onto its own culture from other cultures as per its convenience. This phenomenon is known as cultural appropriation. This drastic change in every American society's dimension has allowed comic books and their characters to refine their developments, stories, and arcs accordingly. For example, Captain America, one of the first superheroes to be created by the Marvel comics, has always mirrored the ideals of the hegemonic state's society (United States of America). During WWII, the character stood for the hyper-patriotism the common man felt. It further developed a fear of outsiders when the Cold War took place. Meanwhile, the modern Captain America no longer stands for these ideals, and by questioning the government's moves, the character manages to represent the country's social and political concerns (Hodo, 2011).

Comic books have also looked after representing the LGBTQIA+ Community. NorthStar, the first openly gay character in Marvel comics, finally got a chance to marry his partner in X-Men's May 2012 issue, conveying society's acceptance of same-sex marriage. This was made possible with inspiration derived from various real-life civil rights and gay activists, marking the beginning of an inclusive world.

In our primarily patriarchal world, women were and often continue to be treated as damsels in distress who need a man to save them. However, with the creation of female superheroes, the world



The power of representation

Illustrated by Hannah Cardozo

steered towards a massive social change. The development of these characters has been crucial for the evolution of feminism. Earlier, women used to be pushed around the lower rungs of the ladder, however, now we those very women standing high on pedestals, oppressing the gendered stereotypes. Today, with women of colour belonging to different races and various sexualities have come together to equip the world of comic books with intersectional feminism.

Characters like Wonder Woman, Lois Lane, Kamala Khan, and Ms. Marvel, tell us about women's role in our ever changing society. Wonder Woman, the first female superhero created during WWII, leads

the path for many more to come. Her past connotes women's role in steering WWII in favour of the allies, while her present reflects the successes a woman can acquire once exposed to predominantly patriarchal fields. Lois Lane is another excellent example of women in a workplace setting. Known to be a journalist, Lois Lane gives stiff competition to Clark Kent (Superman). Kamala Khan, known by her superhero name as Ms. Marvel, is the first Muslim character to have her comic book published in 2014. The portrayal of Khan generates a sense of hope for today's society in reducing the islamophobia prevalent ever since 9/11. Lastly, Black Widow, created in 1964, is an integral part of the Avengers. She is known for defying gender roles by being the best assassin S.H.I.E.L.D has.

Other heroes such as Black Panther and Deadshot represent add colour in mainstream American comic books. While Black Panther showcases the minority of authoritative people of colour, Deadshot has to face racism and cope with the trauma and problems being of colour brings. Meanwhile, Luke Cage, a modern-day black superhero, faces much of the contemporary problems suffered by the coloured community. Though people of colour are being exemplified in comic books since the 1940s, their perception in society has not changed significantly. Their representation has been an issue up for debate for a long time, dating back to 1956 when the Comics Code Authority tried censoring a story titled Judgement Day from the comic book – Incredible Science Fiction, since the main character was a black man. To fight such injustice, various movements are carried out that fight for equal standing for people of colour.

One such movement is the Black Lives Matter, formed in 2013, in response to Trayvon Martel's murderer's acquittal. The movement gathered force again in 2020 after the death of George Floyd, proving that even today, many communities feel oppressed in the current scenario. It highlights how their acceptance in mainstream society is required for making society more holistic and egalitarian. BLM also acts as a changing force in comic books amongst other forms of media. Comic books, often considered a part of white-washed media, have increasing black representation. Black Panther and the crew, a comic book with most black characters, was published by Marvel, but it had to be cancelled due to low sales. This signifies that even though the media is increasing representation, society might not be ready for it.

Society's evolution and, accordingly, the evolution of comic books can be studied with the help of the functionalist theories of Durkheim which suggest how society influences individuals. Society had an identity of its own, which was superseded by the identity of individuals. Both stand for a collective set of morals, values, principles, and ideas ("Functionalism – An introduction," 2017). Hence, during different eras, Captain America showcased different sentiments, which copied the prevalent sentiments in society and the individuals respectively, such as the fear of outsiders during the Cold War Era and the unwavering sense of patriotism when World War II was going on.

As society moved towards feminist principles, the female superheroes came into focus because individuals now understood the social importance

of feminism. Talcott Parsons' functionalism also explains how society's growth goes hand in hand with the representation of various communities in literature. According to Parsons, society is like a human body that functions well when all its institutions, such as religion, gender, and family, which are its organs, are working together ("Functionalism – An introduction," 2017). However, society also needs harmony amongst its various communities to function well. Hence, to reach the ideal level of coordination between these communities and restore society's proper functioning, making the various communities feel a part of society is essential. Hence, a need for representation in literature comes in.

With the evolving society, comic characters have also evolved according to the various changes. The concept of Wakanda inspires activists who are working to undo the damage done by evolving forces of capitalism. Characters such as Kamala Khan, Deadpool, Sam Wilson - the new Captain America, and Miles Morales - the black Spiderman have also sparked discussions as their existence breaks away from the homogenised culture of the white-washed world, allowing inclusive representation of various communities and cultures. This increased representation in literature helps restructure current society by making it more inclusive in nature. Holistic representation also helps people be well-informed about cultural diversity, thus taking a step towards eradicating ethnocentrism.

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SEMINAR PAPER

“THE CHURCH OF EUTHANASIA - MISINTERPRETED OR MISORGANIZED?”

Written by **Sibin K Daniel & Keith Fernandes**

By Modern English terminology, cults are considered to be social groups with unusual social/religious practices. The word cult has huge pejorative connotations attached to it and is generally considered to be a group of members indulging in self-harming rituals and practices. Through this paper, we would like to explore cults with much more depth and provide explanations as to why an individual, despite being aware of the harmful kinds of behaviour prevalent within the group, might choose to join or continue to be part of a cultic group. We'll try to bust down some of the negative stereotypes by taking a holistic approach towards the topic, trying to view them under a microscopic lens. Along with this, we would also like to explore more about the Church of Euthanasia which is considered to be a cult, and explain various doctrines preached within this cult. Further, we would compare this cultic group with other mainstream religions and conduct an in-depth analysis of the same. It is hoped that we can thoroughly comprehend the idea of cults and their influence over us, while also changing our perspective towards it, looking at the topic from every angle.

The term cult never fails to bring out this Forbidden Fruit effect inside the mind of every individual that is drawn towards it, like moths collectively drawn towards a flame, from voluntarily participating in what would normally be perceived as obscure, an aberration that is usually debarred from the general society. Derived from the Latin word cultus, it initially referred solely to gatherings of religious worship or adoration and is conventionally considered to be particular systems and symbols of religious practices. But as times and layouts change and new features and problems arise simultaneously, any group or organization that stands out from the rest, whether on the grounds of deviance or plain uncanniness can be labeled as a cult today. The word cult has thus, almost always been associated with negative connotations, mainly because they are considered as barriers to healthy development and the progress of society and also due to the manner that the media portrays them. Due to its immense influence and firm control over us, we choose to place our faith in the media almost blindly, and hence, we naturally assume that members of cults are rebellious individuals, often on the lookout for ways to destroy society and all

that it stands for, by bringing down its pillars and shaking it to its very core. But, when we choose to peer closely, we are embraced with a multitude of surprising elements, and these leave us confused, yet, we always find ourselves coming back for more.

The human psyche, by itself, is a ginormous world of its own. Its complicated structure and layers, having very meticulously been put together, makes it extremely hard to understand human beings and civilization as a whole. We are often made to put everything around us in little boxes with clear and precise labels attached to them, so as to make sense out of them. As confusing and out of place as it seems, we believe in this sense of collective consciousness, and hence, like a herd of sheep, we naturally find ourselves being drawn towards these 'pens' in which we happily lock ourselves into, feeling this immense feeling of pride of being in unison with everyone around us. Yet, we still find many individuals that do not necessarily meet the required expectations or manage to see eye to eye with them. Like every other person, naturally, these individuals also try to find ways to look out for and make groups inclusive to themselves, while also trying to stand up for what they feel is right and making their existence valid to a society that is so oblivious of them. Because of their very compulsive and mysterious energies, these groups are greatly feared and hence, collective hate and repulsion is thrown onto them, making them outcasts in our societies, a new label that society deems worthy to such individuals, considered so peculiar and different from the rest.

The leaders of cults are generally very authoritative and charismatic in nature, making their followers believe that they are fighting for the right cause, and through all the pain and negligence that these individuals may have faced in their lives, their leader appears as a helpful guide to them, pulling them out of the pits of darkness into the vibrant and colorful light of never-ending happiness, the end to their misery and suffering. Generally being part of marginalized groups, these individuals are made to cut ties with the outside world and happily embrace the new families and lifestyles that they are introduced to, without making any questions or demands. With active and rigorous sessions of brain-washing their followers to gain profit and fulfill their own agendas, these individuals are taken advantage of and made to seal their mouths, both from asking questions and from seeking answers from the outside world, making the cult a twisted version of what could be considered as a wonderland, which they cannot and will never be able to get out of. They are so effectively misguided with preaching and chantings, added to repeated feelings of shame and guilt being imposed onto them, that they don't dare to even consider stepping out of line. Cult leaders manage to gain full control over their followers, while also keeping themselves out of the picture, to not be held accountable for any reason if the cults agendas happen to be taken down or exposed.

But despite being aware of the harms of joining any particular cult group and the fatal repercussions of various actions they have to perform as a ritual to remain a part of this group, why do individuals

join it and why do they find it difficult to leave the group once they join the same? In their work, M. Rousseleta, O. Duretete, J.B. Hardouin, M. Grall-Bronnec, 'Cult membership: What factors contribute to joining or leaving?' (2017), research was conducted on individuals who were former cult members. The main motive behind the research, as the researchers argue, was to understand the vulnerable factors involved in the commitment towards the group and also during the process of retention from the group. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) is one of the theories used to explain the reason behind an individual joining or staying in a cultic group. Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of observing modeling and imitating behaviors of others. The theory focuses on the interaction of environmental and cognitive factors with each other and thus influencing human behavior. Applying this theory to the given topic, Rousseleta, et.al argues that the individual as a child is influenced by the social actions of their parents/ other close neighbors or other individuals whom these children admire. Through the constant observation of the actions of someone close to them, they try imitating/ modeling the same in the latter stages of their life and as a result of this, these individuals eventually become a member of this cultic group. The need for affiliation and sense of belongingness results in them copying the behavior of their loved ones and as a result of which, they become a participant of this group intentionally or unintentionally. When interviewed about why these former cult members decided to stay in the cult despite being aware of the repercussions of their actions, the presence of family members, other loved ones, relationship

with the cult leader, and even love interests with another cult member, made it difficult for the individuals to leave the group. Thus the impact of family and other loved/ admired ones has a huge impact on the child's decision of joining or not joining a social group. In the case of the Church of Euthanasia as a cultic group, one can argue that if the parents actively participate in various activities related to the protection of the environment, the chances of child modeling the same behavior is high. As a result of this, the children might look-up for various methods through which they can ensure regular participation in environmental protection events/ actions, as a result of which the chances of them joining the cultic group increases considerably as well. The need for affiliation and a sense of belongingness with a group of people who share the same ideological values and cognitive processes increases the chances of the behavior being modeled.

Yet another psychological factor contributing to their action of remaining within a cultic group is due to a constant dispute between various contradicting and colliding aspects like the positive reinforcement gained from being a cult member, anxiety from the possibility of being disqualified from membership, and rejection or even abuse resulting from the constraints imposed by the cult (Rousseleta, et.al, 2017 p. 4). This can be explained using the theory given by Leon Festinger (1957) - Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, which suggests that humans as individuals make a constant attempt to avoid any kind of disharmony or dissonance caused due to the contradictory beliefs and when there is an inconsistency in the feelings/motivations, change

in the pattern of belief is required which will help them in resolving the dissonance. One of the factors which result in dissonance within an individual is due to the process of decision making, wherein an individual is supposed to choose between two factors/ stimulus with boon and bane of its own. In the case of Church Of Euthanasia as a cult, the positive reinforcement might be received from a cognitive thought process of helping in avoiding the degradation of the environment, which might play a pivotal role in influencing them in staying as a part of the group. However, a dissonance/ disharmony can be created due to factors like disinterest from the family/loved one's end and attempts made by the family members to force them to leave the cultic group or an emotional and social toll created due to being a member of the cult, which can force them to leave the cult. As a result of this, conflict is created within the minds of members of the cult resulting in dissonance in the thought process. The member might choose to stay a part of the group and continue tolerating the other factors which can harm them or else they might choose to leave the cultic group even though it is closely associated with their individual belief. Thus the individual will try maintaining harmony in their cognition by choosing to ignore one part of the debate and focus on the other side alone. Thus through these psychological theories, we can see how shared views of thoughts and the social relationship with individuals around us can affect decisions made by us. The constant encounter with other human beings and the need to associate ourselves with them influences our decision-making process.

Through the development of classical sociology,

Émile Durkheim greatly influenced the discipline and its development further, by putting forth the concept of anomie, but it was only decades later that the idea was refurbished and put through a fine sieve, which led to the development of the theory that we now refer to as the Anomie theory, put forth by Robert King Merton. According to the Anomie theory (1954), individuals in society strive to reach culturally acceptable goals by using institutionalized means prescribed by society to achieve these goals. A state of anomie only arises as a result of blocking partial or complete access to an individual or an entire group of people as a whole and depriving them of basic rights, leading them to diverge from the 'right path' and hence, be categorized as deviants. In the case of the Church of Euthanasia, the followers can be categorized into two of the typologies prescribed by Merton, being Innovation and Rebellion respectively. As an institution, the church stands for pro-abortion rights, putting an end to overpopulation and spreading awareness of the harsh and unethical treatment that animals are put through at slaughter houses, making interested people switch to ideas of vegetarianism or follow the ever-growing trend of veganism, as suited by them.

Even in today's developed and progressive societies, such ideas are still considered as vile and are neglected by general society, and hence, the church takes it upon themselves to promote sodomy, voluntary yet encouraged cannibalism, suicide and abortion, all ideas being put forth in such a manner, where one cannot comprehend if the followers of the church genuinely believe in what they would consider being progressive steps

towards the development of society, or if it is just a satirical way to put the symbols of power in a spot and make them reconsider their decisions and choices hence, help saving the environment. As society continues to label followers of such cults as deviants, solely based on not understanding the real message they try to promote, or only focusing on the bad halves to shut them down completely, these individuals continue to rebel against a society with firmly rooted ideas of what they believe is the real truth, to give life to their reasoning and make it an undisputed segment of our society. They are not necessarily provided with a proper explanation as to why their reasoning is illogical, and this only makes them more adamant in proving their point and hence, turn the tables around once and for all.

The Church of Euthanasia was founded by Reverend Chris Korda and Pastor Kim and specifies itself to be a non-profit organization to restore the balance between humans and other species. The whole idea of humans being the superior race of species, and hence naturally uphold a superiority complex, is greatly looked down upon by the Church. The founder Rev. Korda considers it to be the only religion that considers itself to be an anti-human institution. Like any other religious organization, the church was created to spread awareness and solve problems that acted as maladies on several stages of human development, both mentally and physically. The Church started off being fairly unknown, but received massive recognition after being invited to be part of The Jerry Springer Show, in an episode very conveniently titled “I Want To Join A Suicide Cult”. The premise of the episode revolved around several questionable aspects of

the Church’s teachings while also introducing us to Grace, a woman very keen on going through her initiation and hence, to be part of this cult. Even though the episode aired for cheap laughs and ludicrous entertainment mixed with the need to educate and bring the cult to light, the eye-opening fact that people are ready to be part of such institutions, even if it has unreasonable demands and expectations, shows how people have started giving up hopes from society and expecting any change to take place conventionally, which is extremely sad but also the painful truth. The main focus of the institution is preaching pro-abortion rights, environmental laws, overpopulation and extinction and human rights. They passed out brochures, with detailed steps on how to go about with ending one’s lives or working with dead fetuses, just to name a few. Getting their hands over a suicide prevention helpline, they planned on making use of it to encourage already depressed individuals to willingly give up their lives, but their plans were foiled as their helpline was never permitted to air mainstream. While painting a rosy picture to the outside world, and portraying themselves as environmentalists, a deeper perspective colors them as the providers of euthanasia to our dying planet and its inhabitants, yet their views and ideas are so concerning, that the untouched layers of the human mind fill individuals with both wonder and dread, all at the same time. Even with what could be considered as good intentions, their take on the subject and questionable methods make their institution look more like a joke, and this makes it very hard to take any of their ideas seriously.

The prominent belief among the members of the

Church of Euthanasia is that the overabundance of one species, i.e. Homo Sapiens (human beings), is the reason behind the immense environmental degradation. To deal with this issue, according to the Church of Euthanasia, it is very important to restore the balance between humans and other species, which can be achieved only through methods like mass suicide, no procreation, etc. The founder of the group, Rev. Chris Korda is believed to have encountered an extra-terrestrial in her dream, that proceeded to warn Chris about the environmental crisis and the constant denial by the leaders of the world regarding the same. Chris woke up after the encounter with “The Being” and coined the infamous slogan of the cult- “Save the Planet- Kill Yourself” implying the need to reduce the human population. The most important commandment put forward by the founder, which is supposed to be followed by every member strictly is ‘Thou shalt not procreate.’ In the prayer by Rev. Chris Korda for a good death, Chris Korda calls the human species disgraceful and apologizes to the “Being” for all the mistakes committed by human beings, which has led to the massive deterioration of the environment and the earth as a whole. The main motto of the group is to ensure that the balance of the environment gets restored and humans need to be motivated by their own conscience, to willingly take actions to reduce the population.

The 4 pillars of the Church of Euthanasia are suicide, abortion, cannibalism, and sodomy. The primary motive behind these pillars being preached by the members is to ensure that the demography of the human species will reduce in this world and cannibalism is added as a pillar for the members

that consume meat, to ensure that no animals are slaughtered for human consumption. The most important aspect of the Church of Euthanasia is that all these actions performed by the members are supposed to be wilful and it is their conscience that resulted in them behaving in a particular manner. Abortion is considered as a sacred rite by the members, thus challenging the various traditional notions gyrating around abortion- which is considered as ‘murder’ by conventional religions. Due to these practices and teachings, the members of the Church of Euthanasia are generally laughed at by fellow human beings. Most of the outsiders consider this cult as a joke played by a few insane people, however, some others are highly cautious and worried about the harm this cult can have on the individuals who decided to become members. However, this answer is given to the non-members by the group through one of their slogans, “Six Billion Humans Can’t Be Wrong.” Through this, Chris Korda and fellow cult members are challenging society’s perception about them as a group and have made it clear that it is their conscience that inspired them to be members of the group and also urge people to open their eyes and observe nature to see the constant deterioration of the environment and take it as their responsibility to restore environmental aesthetics.

When placed on a pedestal alongside major world religions, with their numerous subsections and freshly introduced new age movements, we see great parallels between them and the church of Euthanasia, both filled with negative and positive aspects. The identity of a person belonging to a particular group depends upon the practices they

follow and the actions they perform and if an individual wishes to remain and be a part of the group, they need to follow the instructions given to them. Similarly, the presence of a supernatural being is advocated in the Church of Euthanasia, similar to the ideology followed by most of the religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, etc. Thus the followers' conscience and the cognitive process are inspired and impacted by the existence of this supernatural being that they consider as the supreme leader and the true savior of the world, despite having differences in ideologies. This "being" guides individuals and helps them to fight against various atrocities of the world and shapes their life, in every faith/ tradition. The existence of the "being" of another faith is questioned by individuals who consider their own faith as true and authentic, invalidating others beliefs. Yet another similarity prevalent is that the Church of Euthanasia has prayers for each of their pillars which remind them of how humans are disgraceful and apologize to the "Being" for ruining and hampering the world, similar to the prayers and offerings wherein an individual might repent and apologize for every mistake they have committed. Thus repentance for their mistakes and apologizing for their fellow beings can be seen in these faiths. Despite being perceived as different from one another, uniformity can be seen in various thought processes and ideologies preached. Edward Tylor explained this using the concept of "Uniformitarianism", in which he argues that irrespective of the place and time individuals live in, the processes of culture are similar due to the similarity in cognitive processes of the human minds (Moore, 2008, p.10). Thus the various cultural practices, ideologies and the pattern

of following a particular rite/ ritual have uniformity according to Tylor, even though there might be differences in the way these individuals follow the rituals of their faith (monotheism v/s polytheism as a practice of their faith). This can be seen even in the comparison of the Church of Euthanasia to other mainstream religions which is mentioned above. Similarly, every religion performs a particular action/ ritual to attain a goal. Salvation/ Moksha in the case of most of the mainstream religions, and on the other hand maintaining an equilibrium of nature and restoring the balance destroyed by the humans by reducing human pollution is the main aim of the Church of Euthanasia. Thus despite being seen as opposite and polar versions of worship, the Church of Euthanasia has certain uniform/ common grounds when compared to certain other religions.

The church's first pillar, being Suicide, is greatly frowned upon by most religions all across the globe. In ancient pagan religions, that being of Greek and Roman origin, it has been noticed that suicide was viewed with an extremely relaxed attitude. Neo-pagan religions, such as Wicca on the other hand, consider suicide as an infringement of the most fundamental Wiccan laws, the Wiccan Rede. Their views are still relaxed compared to harsh Abrahamic laws, mainly because of their views of the human soul being reincarnated time and again. Hinduism, in itself, is repulsed by ideas of suicide, unless they are done ritually through rites of Prayopavesa, where old yogis kill themselves, having no ambitions or responsibilities placed onto their shoulders, the now banned act of sati, a funeral custom where a bride chooses to voluntarily climb her husband's funeral pyre and give up her

life and dying for honor on the battlefield. Swami Vivekananda himself is said to have attained both Moksha and suicide by meditating. Human lives are considered to be invaluable gifts given to us by this divine entity or force of nature that connects us and makes us one with them. Taking one's own life can be considered to be denying this gift given to us, as well as also showing contempt towards the giver. The 5th commandment of Moses, just one of 9 others followed almost rigorously by members of Abrahamic religions, says, "thou shalt not kill", a sharp contrast to the cult's sermons that voluntarily encourages its followers to do exactly that. Though the Bible does mention multiple cases of suicide through its pages, the most famous being that of Judas Iscariot, the religion ensures that their followers value life as a wonderful creation of God, through its plethora of stories and parables.

The same commandment is said to go against the 2nd pillar of the cult, that being abortion. Abortion, in today's day and age, even though it can be triggering and sad to be in a state like that, is considered absolutely necessary, keeping in mind that the global population is and will proceed to cause immense problems that endanger our lives on a larger scale, while also considering the fact that some people are not ready to raise children, both financially or mentally. Even though this isn't necessarily the cult's explanation as to why they support Abortion, it still opens our minds and makes us consider several other aspects of the situation. By religion, the Quran suggests that it should be avoided at all costs unless it is to be done to save the life of the mother. The 3rd pillar, Sodomy, or sexual gratification with little to no intention to

procreate, is not necessarily looked down upon, but is either acceptable on certain grounds or scorned at by different religions. In Christianity, the body is supposed to house God in one's heart, a vessel of purity, and hence, such acts pollute the mind and the soul of the individual. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah, from where the word Sodomy is derived from, is very popular in Abrahamic religions, sharing similar ideas of how the cities were burned down due to the tainted minds of the individuals residing there, with homosexuality perceived to be the major cause of their madness and lust. On the other end of the spectrum, Hinduism, being extremely diversified about their opinions regarding the same does not necessarily condemn sodomy but opposes the same due to the influence of colonization over its people. Hindu mythology and culture, along with its immense vibrancy, is known to contain several queer identities in the forms of heroes and deities and answers several questions that oppose the history of queerness. Several modified and reformed versions of major religious groups have also begun to open their arms wide and accept people regardless of their choices and lifestyles.

The 4th pillar, cannibalism is detested by the majority of the human population in general, regardless of views, due to how unethical and immoral it is considered to be. The Church of Euthanasia greatly supports consumption of dead individuals, not the living. According to them, the dead have no real value, and eating their flesh will not only help in disposing them but also preventing innocent animals from dying for human consumption and satisfaction. As the church practices vegetarianism,

cannibalism is only reserved for followers that cannot give up their preference for meat. A few known sects and cults are said to share similar beliefs with the Church of Euthanasia. The Aghori religion, a subset of Hinduism, is greatly feared and ostracised because of how they are perceived to be deranged individuals that indulge in human flesh. Residing in the holy city of Varanasi, their temple and its surroundings are known to be an ideal representation of the valley of Gehenna for many Hindus. Worshipping the God Shiva, their rituals generally take place on cremation grounds, from where they pick up the bodies of the dead, individuals whose families could not afford to ritually cremate them and hence, just leave them afloat the river Ganges. Under the darkness of the New moon, they proceed to consume these bodies after making offerings to Shiva. Like the church of Euthanasia, they also believe that nothing is base, and death makes individuals lose meaning.

The Church believes in helping women shatter the bounds of religion that have held them back from exercising an agency over their own body due to the conventional rules and laws which prohibit abortion. The infamous Salem witch trials is an example of the traditionally perceived to be powerless being persecuted, falsely accused of witchcraft and burnt at the stake. This is also becoming extremely relevant in recent pop culture. Ariana Grande's 'God is a woman' being one of innumerable examples, not only empowers women but also literally shatters the age old theory of God being this masculine entity, the yang being replaced by the yin. It also almost directly attacks existing patriarchal ideology, changing and redefining

ideas of what is and what should be. The Church of Euthanasia challenges the notion of "Abortion is a Sin" present amongst many religious fanatics, by creating the persona of a Woman as a Goddess incarnate thus having sovereign power over issues of life and death. One of their infamous slogans, "Eat a Queer Fetus, For Jesus" was coined by the members of the group when they went against the anti-abortion groups in front of an abortion clinic. Through this slogan, the members of the group chose to preach the practice of abortion and cannibalism as well. Chris Korda, being transgender herself, fought hard to have her gender accepted. It is possible that the slogan was probably coined to make a satirical dig towards the ideology of major religions and their views on homosexuality and the LGBTQ+ community in general.

The church's eagerness to save the environment is probably the only quality that has no negative responses, either from other religions or society in totality. With the ever-increasing issue of global warming and how our planet is almost ready to give out its final breath, ending every trace of life in and around it, religious heads and institutions have started taking the issue a little more seriously and through their influence, are hoping that individuals start working towards fixing their mistakes effectively. Several religious environmental campaigns have begun all over the world. The Baha'i Faith believes in the importance of the harmony between human life and the natural world. They believe that both sides are inseparable and must co-exist side by side. Abrahamic religions, Hinduism, Confucianism, all in their own teachings, signify that nature needs to be sustained

and treated well, with due respect. We also see a ray of hope shining from the country of Indonesia. Known for its thousands of islands, inhabited with several religions, both indigenous and major, one sees all of them coming together as one to save the planet that has the same value in every heart. Green mosques and churches have started making an appearance, using renewable energy to promote conservation, Hindu and Buddhist initiatives to plant multiple trees and increase recycling, we see happy individuals, working towards reviving the planet, to choose an alternative to save the planet by giving life, rather than taking it away, alongside all its pain and suffering.

From a liberal perspective, the Church of Euthanasia has preached pro-abortion and support to the LGBTQIA+ community. Through these doctrines the individuals are given agency over their own body, giving them the ability to choose what traditional and conservative norms of various religions would have normally deprived them of. The Church of Euthanasia, through its doctrines has helped individuals who have been traditionally persecuted, harassed, tortured, and denied an identity and social status to gain societal recognition. The regressive and repressive notions of the conventional religions which disallowed same-sex relationships and women from exercising rights over their body are constantly questioned by the various activities of the Church of Euthanasia and an opportunity is given to them to live rightfully and with respect. These two doctrines of the Church of Euthanasia helped women and every individual who would be considered as a deviant by society to gain an identity of their own and regain the agency

by challenging the traditional, conventional norms formed by religion which favored the cis-gendered heteronormative men. However, the extent to which the exercising of personal liberty is taken is constantly questioned and criticized even amongst liberals. The practice of suicide and indulging in other self-harming behaviors as a choice is still not accepted amongst the masses and actions are taken to prevent such events from taking place. Euthanasia v/s assisted suicide is yet another debate widely seen amongst individuals following a liberal thought process. Euthanasia is an act of intentionally killing someone to relieve them from their suffering which is made legal in various countries, whereas assisted suicide is an act that involves intentionally helping people to kill themselves. The act of Euthanasia could be voluntary i.e. the consent is given by the family as well as the patient, non-voluntary where the person is not in a state to give their consent, or involuntary where the person is in a state to give informed consent but does not do the same due to factors like not willing to die or because they were not asked. On the other hand, assisted suicide requires the voluntary and competent consent of the person and is generally considered as an act to relieve the person from persistent and intractable suffering. From a liberal perspective, the act of Euthanasia disallows people from having an agency or control over their own body as it has to be done under the instruction of a professional at times and sometimes the act of procuring consent from the person on whom Euthanasia is performed might not happen. On the other hand, assisted suicide helps the individual to exercise autonomy over their own body and helps them to relieve themselves from the long-enduring pain they had been suffering. In

the case of the Church of Euthanasia, members act upon their conscience while engaging in the act of suicide. The consent is given by these individuals themselves to relieve the world, themselves, and the rest of the human species from the drastic effects of environmental crises. However, the impact of the ideologies preached by the group and also the fellow members and the leader of the group might have an impact on the cognitive framework impacting their decision. The agency that an individual has over themselves and decisions as a whole can also be questioned as they have to follow the commandment strictly to continue being members of the group, thus restricting them from making a decision which they feel is for them is the best.

All in all, the Church of Euthanasia lets out mixed emotions in the hearts and minds of individuals. Like many other “cults”, the Church has several questionable and also controversial arguments and doctrines. That being said, most religious institutions, major or not, also preach and teach individuals about matters that also raise a lot of questions, rather than provide us with answers. Just because cults are supposed divergences from the main, deeply rooted beliefs and religions don't necessarily mean that they have to be bad or evil. The Church of Euthanasia definitely raised fear and left many individuals in a stupor, but it also helped open the eyes of the world, not necessarily through what they had to say or do, but what they believed to be the final goal. You can say that the members genuinely had good intentions at heart, but knowing that people would take their arguments and issues with a grain of salt, were blinded with

the idea of making their voices being heard, even though their ways leading to it ended up distorting in the most dreadful ways possible. If something good came about with their emergence, they helped people think more reasonably and make use of logic, something that they themselves lost sight of. By doing so, individuals could now make better decisions for themselves and the future. As Durkheim suggests, deviance brings about a massive change in the structure and functioning of society, positive or negative based on the situation and stimulus. We can say that as generations move forward, ideologies continue to change, and though not necessarily always being right, are still learning to be more open and more understanding of people and what they choose to believe and influence others to believe in. We can only hope that someday, individuals will live in times where judgment is used minimalistically if not completely taken away, and this leads to individuals knowing that someone out there will listen to them and be open to them and hence not lead them to end up taking such drastic measures. Until then, we can only hope to dream this impossible dream. Or will someone choose to reach out and provide euthanasia to our never-ending dilemmas?

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SEMINAR PAPER

VARKARIS- THE CULT OF VITHOBA

Written by **Shrawani Saiprasad Vilankar**

Until recently, I equated anarchy with lawlessness. Over time I realized that anarchy is a form of protest that rejects the controlling system and aims at establishing an egalitarian society. When I pondered upon the theme of 'Cults', a picture of lakhs of people walking along the streets, dancing and singing, 'Jai Vitthal, Jai Hari Vitthal' took form before me. An individual devotee of Lord Vitthal is known as a Varkari and together they make this anarchist cult that is a part of Hinduism, and yet, rejects the elitist view of the religion. It is a social paradox as this 'subset' of an umbrella religion, goes against it and preaches equality and simple devotion to all. The Cult of Vithoba has a vast scope of study but for this research paper, I have specifically chosen to focus upon the identity of Lord Vitthal and his influence on the formation of the traditions of this cult, its social implications and its critique.

Introduction to the cult

Lord Vitthal, the deity of Pandharpur who is also known as Vithoba, Vithumauli, Pandurang and much more is the tutelary God of the Varkaris. The Varkaris are distinguished by a devotional focus (i.e., Bhakti) on the deity Vitthal, two major annual pilgrimages to Vitthal's chief temple in the town of Pandharpur, and a textual corpus consisting of Marathi compositions by sant-kavi or "saint-poets." (Keunes, 2011). Marathi is an essential part of the Varkari canon as the saints within the cult preached devotion to the Lord in the language of the people, unlike the then pre-dominant language of worship, Sanskrit which was only accessible to

Brahmins. The etymology of the word 'Varkari' is Vari meaning pilgrimage and Kari meaning being done; ultimately meaning 'one who does Vari'. The cult is known as the 'Varkari Sampraday' in Marathi language.

Due to its paradoxical position, the cult was condemned by the hegemonical priestly classes for defying the norms of devotion and worship and challenging the authority of the Brahmins. With innovative methods, the cult set the common man on the path to simple devotion and the 'Bhakti' saints pioneered a new religious movement; a cult that has kept growing even after 800 years of its emergence and is a strong message to the society.

Vitthal and his Varkaris

Vitthal is a regional deity who is as unique among Hindu sectarian practices and mythological frameworks as his stance- hands on hips, elbows pointing outward – is distinctive in Hindu iconography (Keunes, 2011). Vitthal is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Krishna who came to Pandharpur. He has a dark complexion but is contradictorily known as ‘Pandurang’, meaning, the white one. The intersectionality within the cult arises at the point where the Lord is openly addressed as ‘Sawala Vitthal’, meaning the one with a dark complexion while metaphorically implying the purity of his attributes. This challenges the racist popular representation of other incarnations of Krishna who are predominantly portrayed blue. As pointed out by Jon Keunes in his research, Lord Vitthal is never depicted with more than two arms. He never holds any weapon and silently stands on a ‘Vit’, meaning a brick, awaiting his devotees. Hindu mythology involves a good amount of violence in the form of either wars or punishments but none of the tales of Vitthal portray him involved in any such acts. While most devotees get their identity based on the God that they worship, Lord Vitthal is known because of his devotees. As per a Maharashtrian folklore, Pundalik was a devotee of Lord Vitthal but he revered his parents more. One time when Pundalik was taking care of his parents, Vitthala approached him. Pundalik denied him instant assistance and asked him to wait. On asking for a place, Pundalik threw a brick at Lord Vitthal and asked him to wait there. Even today, Lord Vitthal awaits his devotees on the same brick.



(Google archives)

Vitthal’s identity is charismatic in nature. Unlike most other Hindu gods, he is not pleased by sacrifices, prayers or naivedya (offering in the form of food). According to the Sant-Kavis poetry, Vitthal’s devotion toward his followers is said to match or exceed their own feelings for him, and Vitthal is said to care for them as a parent cares for a child (Keunes, 2011). Lord Vitthal is addressed as both Vithoba, ‘Ba’ meaning father and Vithumauli, ‘Mauli’ meaning mother by his devotees. Apart from Shiva, who is known to be a representation of the union of Prakriti and Purusha, it’s unlikely in the Hindu tradition to address a God by both genders. The Varkari Sampraday’s literature is a collective documentation of works by male and female saints, among which, some belonged to the lower classes. A neutral gender identity of the God helped in breaking down the notions of purity and pollution around gender discrimination in the society.



(Google archives)

The Vari is one of the most successful pilgrimages in the world. A Vari comprises of Dindis which are smaller processions making their way to Pandharpur from the hometowns of various saints or contemporary maharajs. Abhangas, kirtans and bharuds are devotional songs, sermons and entertaining devotional plays respectively which were curated by the saints of the Varkari traditions that form the core of Varkari canon. The pilgrimage becomes a medium of social solidarity. From the Durkheimian perspective, this solidarity helps in strengthening social ties that are rooted in simple devotion and equality. The most ardent communicators of the principles of the Varkari tradition were the saints and their simple yet effective preachings.

The Varkari Canon

‘इमारत फळा आली ॥१॥ (The sants bestowed their favour [and] the building came to fruition.)

ज्जानदेवे रचलि पाया।(Jñānadev laid the foundations)

उभारलें देवालाया ॥२॥(And erected God’s house)

नामा तयाचा ककिर ।(Nāmā, your servant)

तेणें रचलें तें आवार ॥३॥(He formed the enclosure)

जनार्दन एकनाथ। (Janārdan’s Eknāth erected its pillar)

खांब दधिला भागवत ॥४॥ (Through his Bhāgavata)

तुका झालासे कळस ।(Tukā became the pinnacle)

भजन करा सावकाश ॥५॥(Sing the bhajan slowly)

बहिणी म्हणे फडकती ध्वजा ।(Bahiṇī says, the flag flutters)

नरूपणा केलें बोजा ॥६॥(This is an honest account)’

- (Daukes, 2014).

The above abhang by Sant Bahinabai, a female saint, attributes the formation of the Varkari Sampraday to the work of Sant Dyaneshwar, Sant Eknath, Sant Namdev and Sant Tukaram, the four most prominent male saints. Female saints like Bhagubai, Janabai and Bahinabai were icons of women empowerment for a period when women were compared to the lower classes. The saints expressed bhakti through their poems and texts. The contribution of the female saints is exemplary as they tackled between renouncing their marriage or retaining it. The female saints had comparatively lesser agency and had to strive hard to express themselves through ovis and abhangas. Overcoming

illiteracy, they passed down their literature orally. The entire pilgrimage of Vari is based on the notion of 'Bhakti' which means devotion. Vari is not compulsory but a Varkari preferably undertakes it every year to engross oneself into Vithhal Bhakti. Let us look at the ideology of this cult of Vithoba now.

Why 'Bhakti'?

While the Varkaris are a part of Hinduism, their origin within it is a tale of constant attempts, that were made to give a new lease of life to the decadent religion by reviving the past and attempting to interpret it in the light of the new socio-economic forces, giving rise to new ideas, more in keeping with the times (Pande, 2000). Times, that go back to the 13th century. The Bhakti movement in India is the origin of the Varkaris. Due to the experience of the West with its own tradition, men like Max Weber had to understand the break from tradition as a unique and particular process, as a rationalization of the past within an artificially bisected conception of rationality (Lele, 1980). Due to this narrative, the concept of Bhakti got restricted to being a path of devotion developed by the shudras and women in the society to accommodate themselves in the religion. However, the Bhakti movement is a lot more than just devotion to the God.

Bhakti was explicitly a revolt against the dichotomous view which had upheld the duality of existence of those engaged in debating sterilized abstractions and those practising mindless rituals (Lele, 1980). During the emergence of Bhakti movement in Maharashtra in the 13th Century, the roots of caste hierarchy within Hinduism had

spread deep into the social system. As a result, the upper classes, which predominantly included the Brahmins and some Kshatriyas had the hegemony to control the functioning of the society. The tyrannical hegemony disallowed the lower classes from participating in religious affairs and live like outcasts within their own society. Women hardly exercised any social agency. Apart from their marriage and household (Saunsar), women were not allowed to participate in the affairs of the society, let alone be involved in the priestly rituals. The right to worship the Lord rested in the hands of a few, and the larger masses were left to endure the brunt of social inequalities. While Bhakti in the Bhagvad Gita was an individual sentiment, the Bhakti movement brought forth the collective existing resentment against the social order and gave a vent to the feelings of new classes and castes that were emerging by that time (Pande, 2000). To understand the background of the Varkaris, it is necessary to identify the Bhakti Movement as a socio-cultural movement.

Worshipping the Lord has been an important practise in the Hindu religion and the Bhakti movement's greatest achievement was that it could give all the people their right to religion. But what would an action against the dictators of power structure be called?

Deviance.

The Bhakti Movement was based on the philosophy of Sant Mat, meaning 'point of view of the Saints'. They cast aside the burden of rituals and subtleties of philosophies in favour of expression of intense love for God in vernacular language (Rajagopalachary

and Damodar Rao, 2016). The Saints of the Bhakti Movement spearheaded the protest against the Brahminical society. Through innovative repertoires, the saints tried to preach devotion to the common people and aimed at establishing an egalitarian society. Due to the priestly classes' hegemony, Sanskrit became the gatekeeping tool that excluded the commoners from accessing religious texts. As a result, the lower classes who did not have the social and cultural capital to understand Sanskrit faced alienation from their religion. The earliest Saints in Maharashtra like Sant Dyaneshwar, Sant Namdev, Sant Tukaram, Bhagubai and others curated devotional content in Marathi. While this was a huge breach of social norms according to the priestly classes, the use of Marathi, which was the language of the commoners became a source for the commoners to appropriate their devotion and significantly decentralised the knowledge system. By helping the commoners to find their path to salvation, the Saints were turning into socially deviant pioneers and had to face massive resistance from the upper classes (Pande, 2000).

Understanding the movement

The reason I took a little longer to explore the reasons for why the Varkari Sampradaya is a cult is because of its dense socio-cultural history. A religious community of people with an unusual yet charismatic deity, a movement pioneered by saints, a heterogeneous community with the most 'unpriestly' practices and an extremely anarchist 'cult', is how I see the Varkaris.

There is no clear consensus about what groups are appropriately termed cults, nor has any clear distinction been made between genuinely religious cults and quasi-religious groups (Campbell, 1978). Since the study of humans is highly subjective, I realised that understanding a group of people who are predominantly branded as 'deviants' for contradicting the ways of the dominant group, wouldn't pass their test to gain an acceptable definition. Even after years of study, this phenomenon still stands on a shaking stone.

Earlier, religious cults were considered as groups that completely gave up their original religious identity and embraced a new one. However, over the years, religious cults have been identified as groups that promote divinity within the Self. The sect was identified as a group which operates within an established religious tradition and seeks to purify it, while the cult was described as a religious group that makes a break with the religious tradition of the society in which it arises and looks for its basic authority in distinctive scriptures or an inspired leader (Campbell, 1978). The Bhakti movement saw a reformation in the Hindu religion, where the age-old traditions that were set up by the upper classes were rejected by the plebians, to establish a religious identity which gave their devotion a voice. The saints focused on the importance of 'Work is worship' and encouraged the masses to 'call' the Lord to remind him of their devotion. It's an idea which is somewhat opposite to Marx Weber's notion of 'calling' which has a religious connotation of a task set by God (Weber, n.d.). But in the case of the Varkaris, Vitthal is a God that seeks the love and devotion of his devotees. Hence, Vitthal's 'calling' was preached as the 'calling' by

the devotee to express one's devotion.

To understand the concept of cults, I focused on Troeltsch's study on 'Mysticism' and 'Technical mysticism'. By studying the abhangas of Sant Tukaram, one of the most revered saints within the Varkari traditions, it is said that 'His mysticism was not rooted in a rejection of reality but rather in a spirited response to it after its total acceptance as a basic fact of life. Tukaram's hard common sense is not contradicted by his mysticism: the two reinforce each other' (Sonawne, n.d.). The characteristics of mysticism in Troeltsch's presentation can be summarized as: an emphasis on direct, inner personal experience; loose and provisional forms; voluntary adherence, usually not formal; a spiritual conception of fellowship; inclusiveness in attitude; and indifference toward the demands of society (Campbell, 1978). The Varkaris rejected the caste system along with the rejection of rituals that were exclusive to the Brahmins. The movement taught people to express their devotion to Vitthal in the purest form; the rest was a human illusion. As per the story, when the Brahmins rejected the preaching of Sant Tukaram, who was a lower caste (Kunbi) saint, he was made to throw his abhangas into the River Indrayani. However, his scriptures floated back to him, metaphorically implying the power of pure devotion and name chanting.

Further ahead, technical mysticism, makes a break with traditional religion, and understands itself to be an independent religious principle, "independent of all institutional religion ... timeless and nonhistorical," (Campbell, 1978). Troeltsch's technical mysticism, found among most cults were defined as non-traditional religious groups based on belief in a divine element in the individual

(Campbell, 1978). The Sants in Varkari Sampraday advocated the belief in the divine through their abhangas and kirtans.

जे का रंजले गांजले ।
त्यासमिहणे जो आपुले ॥१॥

तो चिसिधु ओळखावा ।
देव तेथे चिजाणावा ॥२॥

The above abhanga by Sant Tukaram expresses that the true form of divinity existed within an individual who embraced those in distress and treated them equally. For the Varkaris, Vitthal's divinity existed within all those who were virtuous by heart, empathetic and selfless enough to serve the society.

The term 'cult' carries heavy negative value connotations which appear to make a "new" or "deviant" religion. Many prefer calling such cults as 'New Religious Movements'. The Varkaris were a product of the Bhakti movement which clearly had an anarchist approach. This cult needs to be approached as a social movement due to its distinctive characteristics such as collective mobilization against the rudimentary system, collective behaviour which encouraged the masses to go against the priestly class and embrace their personal devotion, use of innovative repertoires to challenge the gatekeeping of devotional religious knowledge in the form of abhangas, kirtans, bharuds etc. and lastly, their collective identity of being Varkaris. Not only do the Varkaris call Vitthal 'Mauli', but also address each other the same. The essence of the cult lies in hard work, empathy and faith. The use of a universal notion of motherhood

to address their Lord and fellow mates was a strong opposition to the existing system that had evolved into a mechanism of social oppression.

In the 13th century, when the caste and class discrimination was at its zenith, the emergence of a group with the foundations of equality that led to social solidarity was a huge breach of law and order for the people in power. Individual devotion that focused on kindness towards all also encouraged community worship. Women could break the barriers and get exposed to a way of life, distinct from the orthodox narrative of catering only to household chores. Even the deity, Lord Vitthal, defied the notions of Godliness by becoming the care giver of his devotees by expecting worship through pure devotion and hard work. The saints were considered a medium for teaching the ideology of simple devotion to people .

Interestingly, the Varkaris do not have any real and specific head. The ideology of simple devotion is what leads the Maulis. With no political affiliations, they became anti-structure but pro-social in nature. Any anti-structural approach is deemed criminal. With the power structure crumbling and a new wave of social devotion emerging, the ideology of the Varkaris became a social problem. While the sociological concept of New Religious Movements is relatively recent, it can be applied to the 13th century religious ideology. NRMs are considered a threat but do not pose any kind of real threat: it is the purely the way that they are portrayed by their opponents that results in their being perceived as a social problem (Eileen, 2010). At the time of its emergence, this NRM was a primary construction where the pioneering leader and his followers had started to associate themselves with a new

ideology, belief and identifying themselves as a unit with a new name (Eileen, 2010). Over the years, this same NRM entered its second phase of construction whereby the pilgrimage to Pandharpur became a unique identifiable image for the world. Not surprisingly, one of the most common and effective means by which an NRM is depicted as a social problem is simply through using the term ‘cult’ (Eileen, 2010).

Critique

The cult has many hidden layers which need exploration in my opinion. A Marathi play ‘Devbhali’ addressed the plight of the wives of Vitthal and Tukaram, namely Rakhumai and Aavali respectively, who could not associate with the blind devotion of their husbands that led to negligence towards their households. It might be seen as another form of devotion within the tradition, but it is essential to ponder upon the question whether all were happy and satisfied with this new ideology of devotion, especially women? The society already gave very little agency to the females. Some chose the paths of devotion by revoking any worldly desires while some could not attach themselves to the path of Bhakti. Would an imposed identity bestowed upon by the men do justice to equality? While the Varkaris detached themselves from the caste and the class system, they hadn’t detached themselves from the social institution of marriage. For a woman, getting married and keeping her household prosperous were the only functions as dictated by the society. Hence on the path to devotion, the women had to either walk along with her household or all alone. On the contrary, the men had the agency to choose the path of Bhakti

while leaving behind their household and not fulfilling their share of duties. Many female saints are not recognized and revered by a huge section of the Varkari Sampraday. Only the abhangas by male saints are accepted in some parts of the community. Gender equality in the Sampraday is somewhat unachieved. Many of the Bhakti Saints, though clamoring for a change and protesting vocally against the prevalent injustice in society, conveniently left out the women (Pande, 2000).

The Varkaris are highly praised for their values of equality and integrity within their tradition. Anybody can be a Varkari. From a woman who daily worships Vitthal to a photographer who worships his work every day, anybody who takes the holy pilgrimage of Vari becomes a Varkari. While this is true and it denotes a division free, flexible outlook of the community, the subsets within the Varkari tradition are contradicting it. Various Maharajs, meaning people who are contemporarily revered by their followers have their groups that are sometimes caste based or protocol based. The Maharajs play a small but important role of hearing the vows of people who want to formally join the sampradāy and placing a necklace of 108 tulsī beads (a tulsīmala) around the newly initiated Varkari's neck (Keunes, 2011). Once a member joins this subcult, s/he has to follow their norms and perform rituals as prescribed by the head of their group which also include attending kirtans regularly, or chanting specific hymns.

One of the greatest contributions of the Varkari Sampradaya was considered to be its involvement in eradication of the caste system; but historical research points out that the saints within the Sampradaya were not ardent opposers

of the caste system. The earliest saints like Sant Dynaneshwar make no mention of caste equality. The influential Marathi historian V.K. Rajvade dismissed the Vārkarī Sampradāya as too passive, other-worldly, and uninterested in politics to be useful for the struggle toward independence. Even saints like Chokhamela and Tukaram, who belonged to the lower classes were taken for a ride by the hegemonic classes.

उंबरठ्यासी कैसे शवि आमही जाती हीन
(How do we touch the threshold of your shrine?
We belong to the lower caste)

रूप तुझे कैसे पाहू त्यात आमही लीन
(How do we behold your visage? We prefer being
engrossed in thinking about it)

पायरीशी होऊ दंग गाऊनी अभंग
(We'll rather loose ourselves while singing about
you at the stair.)

The above abhanga by Sant Chokhamela denotes contrary view of the cult where it lost touch with its structural core. The revered temple of Pandharpur, the abode of Lord Vitthal who claims to love his devotees equally was prohibited for the 'untouchables' to enter until 1947. Not surprisingly, some social reformers judged the Vārkarī Sampradāya to be ineffective for thoroughgoing social reform. Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar both openly discouraged their low-caste and "untouchable" communities from joining the Vārkarīs (Keunes, 2011). Due to this pertaining discrimination, which is also visible in the Vari as

mentioned by Keunes in his first-hand account of Aashadi vari indicates an 800-year-old tradition failing to uphold its basic structural value.

Conclusion

Cults are still being studied for a more nuanced understanding today. I still wonder if they have the potential of being a social fact, and if yes, would they be able to universalize themselves? The Varkari Sampradaya is unique in comparison to other cults due to its grandeur in simplicity. While most other cults have charismatic leadership and distinct norms to set them apart, the Varkaris have tried to reform the Hindu religion by dissolving into it, yet, their charisma and integration keep their distinct identity afloat. The ideology of devotion is formed on the basis of reciprocity from both the deity and his devotees. In my opinion, the magnificence of the Vari is a symbolic protest against the regressive system that breeds within the society to this day.

Having said that, the cult of Vithoba is, losing its core structural essence over time. The practises within the subsets are becoming congruent with the characteristics of a conventional cult, which allow limited entry and has rigid behaviours. The absence of a leader might be the reason for the disintegration of equality among such a huge base of followers of the ideology, especially when there are many provisional leaders who have initiated their distinct ways within the tradition. Though it was anti-structure and was fit to be a cult, over time, mainstream Hinduism has usurped its form and started turning it into a sect.

This research tried to address some fundamental aspects of the Varkari Sampradaya. However, the intricacies of this cult have a lot more to explore and maybe I'll get to do that when I personally visit the abode of Vitthal, sometime during Ashadhi or Kartiki, and witness how devotion created a God.

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