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Foreword

India has been an enigma for centuries, and attempts at imposing uniform concepts and ideas have met limited success. Colonial attempts to this end created artificial similarities while also producing major discontents and socio-cultural inequities that continue to haunt us in the age of postcolonialism. Such complex but necessarily imperfect frames of reference provide the backdrop for creating the epistemological tools to investigate the social, cultural and economic development of the country we live in today.

New horizons produced by scholars across diverse disciplines provide the much-required intellectual catalysts that help drive forward the investigations into historical roots of existing problems and future solutions that would be inclusive and distinctively Indian in conception and execution. At the same time, the histories and philosophical studies that ground our identities within the specificities of South Asia in general and India in particular require further analysis so that a true synthesis of the intellectual strands of the ancient, medieval and modern can inform our actions and policies in the new millennium.

Interpreting India, the theme of this issue of *Noesis*, seeks to take forward the complex but vital studies through timely interventions by scholars from a range of disciplines. Burning issues that complicate social and intellectual relations today, such as citizenship, women's rights and safety, panchayati Raj and its inclusiveness and the ideological contours of contemporary India are covered by our authors. Alongside such interventions in current affairs, the necessary intellectual foundations that must inform our current society are further explored through studies of such diverse subjects as Sanskrit texts and philosophical formulations dating back to the ancient period.

This current issue comprises nine academic articles covering a diverse range of subjects, along with one book review. Our

contributors come from various states and institutions, mirroring the pan-Indian nature of the subjects and topics that have been covered. All articles and the book review have been vetted by our peer-review team comprising of veteran scholars from a large spectrum of disciplines and institutions. These include institutions such as the Universities of Calcutta and Jadavpur, IIT Kharagpur and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that this issue of *Interpreting India* seeks to interpret our vast and diverse country to the fullest extent possible.

Before we move to the articles themselves, a word on *Noesis*, its brief history and its future plans would perhaps be relevant. *Noesis* follows from an earlier venture in the specific field of women's studies called *Manan* which unfortunately did not survive for long. In keeping with the growth of interdisciplinary approaches and the complexity of problems that face us today, it was felt pertinent to start anew with a journal that would be grounded in the cosmopolitan Brahmo ethos of its parent, Sivanath Sastri College, while exploring new and unexplored dimensions in various disciplines.

It is our pleasure, as Editors-in-Chief, to offer to you the first fruit of our new academic venture. We hope it will spur new intellectual conversations and catalyze debates on issues that find relevance across India. In doing so, we hope this issue of *Noesis* will be the first stepping stone towards more expansive and detailed volumes and issues in the years to come.

To this end, we look forward to your continued support.

KOLKATA, 10th of July, 2021.

Editors-in-Chief
Noesis.

Acknowledgements

The Editor-in-Chiefs and the members of the Editorial Board would like to express their sincere gratitude to Dr. Runa Biswas, Principal, Sivanath Sastri College, for her unstinted support and encouragement throughout the progress of the first issue of Noesis. Further, we would like to thank our peer-reviewers for the time and effort they have put into studying and commenting upon the works published in this article.

Our authors deserve a special expression of gratitude for reposing their trust in Noesis and cooperating with the Board's requirements every step of the way. Our distinguished authors are –

1. Dr. Goutam Das, Assistant Professor, Sivanath Sastri College, University of Calcutta.
2. Prof. Sukhendu Sarkar, Associate Professor, Sivanath Sastri College, University of Calcutta.
3. Prof. Mithun Das, Assistant Professor, Sivanath Sastri College, University of Calcutta.
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9. Prof. Tirthankar Sengupta, Assistant Professor, Dhola Mahavidyalaya, University of Calcutta.
10. Prof. Bibek Talukder, Assistant Professor, Bankim Sardar College, University of Calcutta.

We reserve blame for all mistakes and omissions upon ourselves. The past year and half has been a period of turmoil and chaos, and

the end of the Covid-19 pandemic seems far off still. This has caused undue delays and logistical problems, which threw our expected time-schedule into disarray. We are grateful to all our authors and peer-reviewers for their patience, cooperation and faith in our ability to publish this volume, and hopefully, further volumes in the future as well.

Last but not least, we thank you, dear Reader, for picking up this issue of Noesis and hope that you will continue to patronize our efforts in the future as well.

Editors-in-Chief,
Noesis.

SECTION – I

ARTICLES

বাঙালি জাতির নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয়

গৌতম দাস

বাঙালির প্রকৃত ইতিহাস আজও অনাবিষ্কৃত। কেননা কোনো দেশের ইতিহাস লিখতে হলে আগে সেই দেশের জনজাতির ইতিহাস সম্পর্কে সম্যক ধারণা থাকা দরকার। রাজা-রাজরা, দেশ-ভূখণ্ড, রাজ্যজয়, শাসক-প্রশাসন প্রভৃতি নিয়ে ইতিহাস লেখা হলেও বাঙালির প্রকৃত জাতিসত্তার পরিচয় আজও সম্পূর্ণ ভাবে উদ্ঘাটিত হয়নি। আজও একজন সুসভ্য শিক্ষিত বাঙালি তার বংশানুক্রমিক নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয় দানে সম্পূর্ণতই অক্ষম। তাই একথা নিঃসংশয়ে বলা চলে যে বাঙালির প্রকৃত ইতিহাস আজও অলিখিত। বাঙালির প্রকৃত ইতিহাস যে এদেশের আদিম অনার্য জাতিগোষ্ঠীর নৃতত্ত্ব, সংস্কৃতি ও ভাষারূপের মধ্যেই আত্মগোপন করে আছে সাহিত্যসম্রাট বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র থেকে শুরু করে একালের প্রায় সমস্ত ইতিহাসবিদ, ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক ও নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণ স্বীকার করেছেন। বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র চট্টোপাধ্যায় আজ থেকে প্রায় দেড়শো বছর আগে বাঙালির প্রকৃত পরিচয় নিয়ে কিছু প্রশ্ন উপস্থাপনা করেছেন আপামর বাঙালি তথা পণ্ডিতবর্গ ও সাধারণ পাঠক-গবেষকদের কাছে। প্রশ্নগুলি ছিল নিম্নরূপ -

বাঙ্গালী জাতি কোথা হইতে উৎপন্ন হইল? অনেকে মুখে বলেন, বাঙ্গালীরা আৰ্যজাতি। কিন্তু সকল বাঙ্গালীই কি আৰ্য? ব্রাহ্মণাদি আৰ্য জাতি বটে, কিন্তু হাড়ি, ডোম, মুচি, কাওরা ইহারাও কি আৰ্য জাতি, যদি না, তবে ইহারা কোথা হইতে আসিল? ইহারা কোন্ অনার্য জাতির বংশ, ইহাদিগের পূর্বপুরুষেরা কবে বাঙ্গলায় আসিল? আৰ্যেরা আগে, না অনার্যেরা আগে?৷

বাঙালির জাতিগত নিজস্বতা ও নৃতাত্ত্বিক স্বরূপ অনুসন্ধানে ব্রতী হয়ে বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র অধিকাংশ বাঙালির এ ব্যাপারে যে ভ্রান্ত ধারণা রয়েছে তা নিরসণে প্রচুর গবেষণা ও অনুসন্ধানের প্রয়োজনীয়তার কথা স্বীকার করেছেন -

ইহারাও কি তাহাদিগের সন্ততি? তাহা যদি নিশ্চিতলোকসংখ্যা গণনায় স্থির হইয়াছে যে, যাহাদিগকে বাঙ্গালী বলা যায়, যাহারা বাঙ্গলাদেশে বাস করে, বাঙ্গলা ভাষায় কথা কয়, তাহাদিগের মধ্যে অর্ধেক মুসলমান। ইহারা বাঙ্গালী বটে; কিন্তু ইহারাও কি সেই প্রাচীন বৈদিক ধর্মাবলম্বী জাতির সন্ততি? হাড়ি, কাওরা, ডোম ও মুচি; কৈবর্ত, জেলে; কোঁচ, পলি না হয়, তবে অনুসন্ধানের প্রয়োজন আছে। কেবল ব্রাহ্মণ কায়স্থে

বাঙ্গলা পরিপূর্ণ নহে, ব্রাহ্মণ কায়স্থ বাঙ্গালীর অতি অল্পভাগ। বাঙ্গালীর মধ্যে যাহারা সংখ্যায় প্রবল, তাহাদিগের উৎপত্তিতত্ত্ব অন্ধকারে সমাচ্ছন্ন।^{১২}

বাঙালি যে প্রকৃতপক্ষে আর্য-অনার্য অর্থাৎ অস্ট্রিক, দ্রাবিড়, ভোটচীনা প্রভৃতি অনার্য এবং আল্লানীয় ও নর্ডিক আর্যগোষ্ঠীর সংমিশ্রণজাত এক সংকর প্রজাতি, পরবর্তীতে শক, হুণ, পাঠান, আফগান, তুর্কি, মোঘল প্রভৃতি বহিরাগত জাতির রক্ত তাতে সামান্য হলেও মিশেছে ভৌগোলিক, ভাষিক, সাংস্কৃতিক ও নৃতাত্ত্বিক গবেষণায় আজ তা সর্বজনগ্রাহ্য সত্যে প্রতিষ্ঠা পেয়েছে। বাঙালির রক্তে যে ভারতের প্রায় সর্বরকম নৃতাত্ত্বিকগোষ্ঠীর উপাদান সংমিশ্রিত হয়েছে তা আজ বলবার অপেক্ষা রাখে না। আধুনিককালে নৃতাত্ত্বিক থেকে শুরু করে ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক, ইতিহাসবিদগণও তর্কাতীত ভাবে তা স্বীকার করেছেন। এ বিষয়ে একালের বিশিষ্ট ভাষাবিদ পবিত্র সরকারের স্বীকারোক্তি -

ভারতের সর্বরকম নৃগোষ্ঠীগত উপাদান - ককেশীয়, দ্রাবিড়, নেগ্রিটো, মোঙ্গোলয়েড, অস্ট্রো- এশিয়াটিক - সব ধরনের রক্ত আর নৃতাত্ত্বিক বৈশিষ্ট্য বাঙালির মধ্যে আছে। কোথাও কম, কোথাও বেশি। আবার বেশিরভাগ ক্ষেত্রে সবকিছু তালগোল পাকিয়ে গিয়ে একটা সাধারণ চেহারা দাঁড়িয়েছে, যা মোটামুটি পাতে দেবার মতো।^{১৩}

নৃতাত্ত্বিকভাবে সংমিশ্রিত নানাজাতির রক্তে বাঙালি যে বহুকাল আগেই সংকরায়িত হয়েছে বিভিন্ন নৃতাত্ত্বিকের গবেষণায় তা উঠেও এসেছে। শুধু নৃতত্ত্বে নয়, ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক ও সাংস্কৃতিক অনুসন্ধানেও তা ধরা পড়ে। ভাষাচার্য্য সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায়ও মনে করেন নৃতত্ত্বগত ভাবে বাঙালির প্রকৃত স্বরূপ বা জননির্ণয়ের ক্ষেত্রে তার ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয় ও ভাষামূলের অন্বেষণ একটি বড় উপাদান। এ বিষয়ে সুনীতিবাবুর যুক্তি হল -

এ বিষয়ে আমি যাহা বলিব, তাহা মুখ্যতঃই ভাষার দিক হইতে অনুমান করিয়াই বলিব। ভাষা-তত্ত্ব হইতে এইটুকু বুঝিতে পারা যায় যে, বাঙ্গলা দেশে আর্য ভাষা আসিবার পূর্বে এ দেশের লোকেরা কোল বা অস্ট্রিক জাতীয় ভাষা এবং কতকটা দ্রাবিড় ভাষা বলিত।পাঁচটি জাতির বা পাঁচটি বিভিন্ন প্রকার ভাষা বলিত এমন লোকদের মিশ্রণে উত্তর ভারতের নানা জনগণের উদ্ভব হইয়াছে; সেই পাঁচটি জাতি হইতেছে - (১) Negroid নিগ্রোরূপ বা নেগ্রিটো (২) Austric অস্ট্রিক, (৩) দ্রাবিড় (৪) আর্য এবং (৫) Sino-Tibetan বা Tibeto Chinese অর্থাৎ ভোট-চীন।এই রূপে অস্ট্রিক, দ্রাবিড় ও উত্তর ভারতের মিশ্র-আর্য্য - এই তিন জাতির মিলনে বাঙ্গালী জাতির সৃষ্টি হইল।^{১৪}

ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক গবেষণাতেও আজ প্রমাণিত যে বাংলা ভাষার শতকরা ৪৫ভাগ শব্দই অস্ট্রিক ভাষা-ভাষী গোষ্ঠীর বিভিন্ন শাখা থেকে এসেছে। প্রাগায়ুগে

ভারতের সর্বত্রই ছিল অস্ট্রিক ভাষার প্রাধান্য। বাংলা তথা পূর্ব ভারতের অধিকাংশ অঞ্চলেই অস্ট্রিক ভাষা-ভাষী গোষ্ঠীর নানা শাখার একাধিপত্য ছিল। ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায় অবশ্য মনে করেন অস্ট্রিক ভাষাগোষ্ঠীর কোল শাখাই বাংলা তথা ভারতের প্রাচীনতম ভাষাগোষ্ঠী। তবে কোল ছাড়াও মুণ্ডা, সাঁওতাল প্রভৃতি অন্যান্য অস্ট্রিক ভাষাগোষ্ঠীরও যথেষ্ট প্রভাব লক্ষ করা যায়। তবে বাংলা ভাষা গঠনে দ্রাবিড় ভাষাগোষ্ঠীরও প্রভাবের কথাও স্বীকার করেছেন অধিকাংশ ভাষাতাত্ত্বিক। তবে বাংলা ভাষায় এবং বাঙালি জনতত্ত্বে মোঙ্গলীয় ভাষাগোষ্ঠী বা ভোট-চিনাদের প্রভাব খুব সামান্য বলেই মনে করেন ভাষাবিদেরা। বাংলা ভাষা গঠনে সবচেয়ে বেশি প্রভাব আর্য় ভাষা গোষ্ঠীর। তবে বাঙালি রক্তে উত্তর ভারতীয় উন্নত কায় বেদপন্থী নর্ডিক আর্য়জাতি গোষ্ঠীর প্রভাব নেই বললেই চলে। এরা মূলত বেদ বহির্ভূত গোলমুণ্ড ও হুয় কপাল বিশিষ্ট আলপাইন আর্য় জাতির লোক। এরা নর্ডিক আর্য়দের এদেশে আসার বহু আগেই বাংলায় এসে বসতি স্থাপন করেছিল। বাংলা ভাষা, বাঙালি জন তথা বাংলা সংস্কৃতির সংগঠনে অস্ট্রিক জাতি গোষ্ঠীর পরেই এই আলপাইন আর্য় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর প্রভাব সব থেকে বেশি পড়েছে বলে অধিকাংশ পণ্ডিতজন ও ভাষাতাত্ত্বিকের ধারণা।

ভাষার মতোই বাঙালির জাতিসত্ত্বাতে নৃতাত্ত্বিক ভাবে চারটি প্রধান জাতিগোষ্ঠীর অস্তিত্ব স্বীকার করেছেন নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণ। যদিও বাঙালি জাতি সত্ত্বায় বিভিন্ন জাতিগোষ্ঠীর উপাদানগত পরিমাণ নিয়ে আজও নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণ সহমতে পৌঁছাতে পারেননি। তবে বেশিরভাগ নৃতাত্ত্বিকের গবেষণাপ্রসূত ধারণায় এটা আজ প্রমাণিত সত্য যে বাংলার আদিম অধিবাসী 'অস্ট্রিক' ভাষা-ভাষী গোষ্ঠী (Proto-Australoid) বাঙালি জাতিসত্ত্বার মূল উপাদান। তবুও একথা মেনে নিতেই হয় যে বাঙালির নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয় আজও জটিল আবর্তে মোড়া। এ বিষয়ে আজও পর্যন্ত পূর্ণাঙ্গ গবেষণা হয়নি। কিংবা বলা যায় যেটুকু হয়েছে তাও ব্যক্তিগত প্রচেষ্টায়। ১৯২৮ খ্রিস্টাব্দ থেকে ১৯৭০ খ্রিস্টাব্দের মধ্যে ভারতের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে প্রত্নতাত্ত্বিক খনন ও আবিষ্কারের মধ্য দিয়ে প্রাপ্ত নরকঙ্কলাদি যেঁটে নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণ প্রাচীন বাংলার আদিম জনগোষ্ঠীর একটা আভাস দিয়েছেন বা দিতে প্রয়াসী হয়েছেন মাত্র। তাই এটা বলা যেতেই পারে বাঙালির জনতত্ত্বের স্বরূপ নির্ণয় অনেকটা অনুমান নির্ভর বা পণ্ডিত-গবেষকদের যুক্তি-তত্ত্বের উপর দাঁড়িয়ে। এ বিষয়ে বিশিষ্ট ইতিহাসবিদ নীহাররঞ্জন রায়ের অভিমত প্রণিধানযোগ্য -

বাঙালীর জনতত্ত্ব নিরূপণের একতম এবং প্রধানতম উপায় বাঙলাদেশের আচাণ্ডল সমস্ত বর্ণের এবং সমস্ত শ্রেণীর জনসাধারণের, বিশেষভাবে প্রত্যন্তশায়ী জনপদ বাসীদের সকলের রক্ত ও দেহগঠনের বিজ্ঞানসম্মত বিশ্লেষণ, এককথায় নরতত্ত্বের পরিচয়। আমাদের দেশের নৃতত্ত্ব গবেষণায় রক্ত বিশ্লেষণ এখনও সাধারণভাবে পণ্ডিতদের দৃষ্টির পরিধির মধ্যে ধরা

দেয় নাই।দেহগঠনের বিশ্লেষণেরও এ পর্যন্ত যাহা স্বীকৃত ও অনুসৃত হইয়াছে তাহা শুধু নরমুণ্ড, নরকপাল ও নাসিকার পরিমিতি ও পরস্পর অনুপাত এবং চুল,চোখ ও চামড়ার রং আশ্রয় করিয়া।নরমুণ্ড, কপাল ও নাসিকার পরিমিতিও পরস্পর অনুপাত বিশ্লেষণে যাহা হইয়াছে তাহাও যথেষ্ট নয়। বহুদিন আগে রিজলি সাহেব বাঙলাদেশের বিভিন্ন স্থানের জনসাধারণের কিয়দংশের পরিমিতি গণনা করিয়াছিলেন; আজ পর্যন্ত নৃতত্ত্ববিদেরা সাধারণত সেই গণনার উপরই নির্ভর করিয়া আসিয়াছেন। সাম্প্রতিক কালে ফন্ আইক্লেস্টাইডট্, জে.এইচ. হাটন, বিরজাশংকর গুহ, ভূপেন্দ্রনাথ দত্ত, রমাপ্রসাদ চন্দ, শরৎচন্দ্র রায়, হারাণচন্দ্র চাকলাদার, মীনেন্দ্রনাথ বসু, তারকচন্দ্র রায়চৌধুরী প্রমুখ কয়েকজন পণ্ডিত কিছু কিছু নূতন পরিমিতি গ্রহণ করিয়াছেন, কিন্তু লোকসংখ্যার অনুপাতে তাহা খুবই অল্প।^৫

আধুনিককালে নৃতাত্ত্বিক গবেষণার মধ্য দিয়ে যে সমস্ত পণ্ডিতজন বাঙালির জাতিতত্ত্বের স্বরূপ নির্ণয়ে প্রয়াসী হয়েছিলেন তাঁদের মধ্যে উল্লেখযোগ্য হলেন রিজলি, রমাপ্রসাদ চন্দ, বিরজাশংকর প্রমুখ। তাঁরা মূলত মাথা, কপাল, নাক, ঠোঁট, কিংবা চোখ, চুল, চামড়া প্রভৃতি নিয়ে পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষা করেছেন। তবে প্রায় তিন হাজার বছরের পুরনো অস্থিকঙ্কালের অনেকটাই আর অবিকৃত নেই। তাই তাঁদের গবেষণার অনেক কিছুই অনুমান ও সুগভীর চিন্তাপ্রসূত। তাবুও একথা নিশ্চিত রূপেই বলা চলে যে, বাঙালির জনতত্ত্বের স্বরূপ নির্ধারণের যে প্রয়াস আধুনিক চিন্তাবিদ, ঐতিহাসিক ও গবেষণাবৃন্দের প্রচেষ্টায় শুরু হয়েছে তা মূলত নীহাররঞ্জন রায় কথিত উপরোক্ত নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণের গবেষণা সমৃদ্ধ তথ্যের উপর ভিত্তি করেই।

বেশিরভাগ নৃতাত্ত্বিক গবেষকদের মতামতের ভিত্তিতে আমরা এই সিদ্ধান্তে পৌঁছাতে পারি যে বাঙালির জাতিসত্ত্বতে ভারতীয় জাতিতত্ত্বের পাঁচটি উপাদানই সংমিশ্রিত হয়েছে। বাংলার আদিম অধিবাসীরা হলেন অস্ট্রিক বা প্রোটো অস্ট্রাল জনগোষ্ঠী। আর্যদের ভারতে আসার বহু আগে থেকেই (খ্রিস্টপূর্ব ২০০-১০০ অব্দে) বাংলায় অস্ট্রিক জাতিগোষ্ঠীর বসবাস ছিল বলে মনে করেন আধুনিক নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণ। বাঙালি জাতিসত্ত্বের প্রধান ধারাটাই অস্ট্রিক জাতি গোষ্ঠীর দান। Sir George Abraham Grierson সম্পাদিত 'Linguistic Survey of India' গ্রন্থে ভারতীয় আদিম অধিবাসী অস্ট্রিক জাতিগোষ্ঠীর নানা শাখার পরিচয়ও তুলে ধরা হয়েছে -

The Austro-Asiatic sub-family is much more strongly represented in India. There is first the great Mon-khmer Branch spoken in Further India, of which we have three representatives in Burma, in the shape of Mon, an ancient

literary language now spoken in Thaton and Amherst, and Palaugn and wa, less civilized languages spoken in Upper Burma, Khmer and a number of other minor forms of speech belong to Indi-China, beyond the Burma frontier. Among the latter, mention may be made of two languages spoken by wild tribes of Malacca, the Sakei and the Semang, Like Khmer these are spoken outside the limits of British India, Nicobarese also belongs to this branch, and seems to form a connecting link between the Munda languages and Mon.^৬

উক্তসূত্র থেকে স্পষ্টই বোঝা যাচ্ছে যে ‘অস্ট্রো-এশিয়াটিক’ জাতিগোষ্ঠী আসলে ভারতে বসবাসকারী ‘মুণ্ডা’ বা ‘কোল’ ও ‘মোন-খমের’ ভাষাভাষীর আদি জাতিগোষ্ঠী। এই জাতিগোষ্ঠীর বাসভূমি ছিল বিহারের ছোটনাগপুর মালভূমি অঞ্চল, ওড়িশা ও মধ্যপ্রদেশের বিস্তীর্ণ অঞ্চলে। ভারতে অস্ট্রিকদের বসবাস স্থান নির্দেশ করতে গিয়ে আচার্য সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায় বলেন –

অনুমান হয়, উত্তর ভারতে গঙ্গা, বাঙ্গলাদেশে উড়িয়ায় এবং অনেকটা মধ্য ভারতেঅস্ট্রীক ভাষী লোকদের বসবাসবেশী করিয়াছিল।^৭

ভারতে মুণ্ডা বা কোল ভাষার বেশ কিছু উপভাষা এবং সেই সব উপভাষা ব্যবহারকারী বিভিন্ন জনজাতিগোষ্ঠী রয়েছে। যেমন – সাঁওতাল, মুণ্ডারি, হো, ভূমিজ, কোরওয়া, কুরকু, খড়িয়া, জুয়াং, শবর, গদবা প্রভৃতি। ভাষাতত্ত্ববিদ গ্রিয়ারসন এইসব ভাষা-উপভাষা গুলিকে একত্রে ‘খেরওয়ারি’ (Kherwari) বলেছেন।

বিভিন্ন নৃতাত্ত্বিকের গবেষণালব্ধ আলোচনা থেকে অস্ট্রিক জাতিগোষ্ঠীর সাধারণ কতকগুলি বৈশিষ্ট্য ধরা পড়ে। যেমন – অস্ট্রিক জনগোষ্ঠী মূলত খর্বাকৃতি, মস্তকাকৃতি দীর্ঘ থেকে মধ্যমাকার, নাসিকা চ্যাপ্টা ও প্রশস্ত, এরা কৃষ্ণকায়, চুল তরঙ্গায়িত।

নৃতাত্ত্বিকদের আলোচনা থেকে আরেকটা ব্যাপারেও পরিষ্কার হওয়া গেছে যে, অস্ট্রো-এশিয়াটিক (Proto Austroid) জনগোষ্ঠী ভারতের আদিম জনগোষ্ঠী বলে পরিগণিত হলেও আরেকটি জনগোষ্ঠীর অস্তিত্বও সে-সময়ে ছিল। তারা মূলত আফ্রিকান বংশোদ্ভূত Negroid নিগ্রোরূপ বা নিগ্রিটো জাতিগোষ্ঠীর কিয়দংশ। যদিও পরবর্তী সময়ে অস্ট্রিক জনগোষ্ঠীর বিভিন্ন শাখার সঙ্গে এরা মিলে-মিশে গেছে বলে বাংলা জনতত্ত্বে বা জন নিরূপণে তাদের স্বতন্ত্র কোনো অস্তিত্ব আর অবশিষ্ট ছিল না। অস্ট্রিক জনগোষ্ঠীর পরেই এদেশে এসেছে দ্রাবিড় ভাষা-ভাষী জনগোষ্ঠী। যদিও পরবর্তী সময়ে বাংলার ভৌগোলিক ক্ষেত্রে দ্রাবিড় গোষ্ঠীর নানা শাখা ধীরে ধীরে অস্ট্রিক জাতিগোষ্ঠীর

সঙ্গে মিশে গেছে। তা সত্ত্বেও বাঙালির রক্ত সাক্ষর্যে অস্ট্রিকদের পাশাপাশি দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর নৃতাত্ত্বিক উপাদানও যথেষ্ট পরিমাণে মিশেছে। দ্রাবিড়দের ভারতে আগমন ও তাদের অবস্থান তথা বাসস্থান সম্পর্কে সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায় জানিয়েছেন -

খ্রীষ্ট জন্মের ৩০০০ বৎসর আগে পূর্ব ভূমধ্যসাগর অঞ্চলে Crete ক্রীট দ্বীপে ও Lycia লিসিয়া (প্রাচীন গ্রীকে লুকিয়া) প্রভৃতি এশিয়া-মাইনরের দক্ষিণ অঞ্চলের দেশে, আদি দ্রাবিড়দের অর্থাৎ আদি-দ্রাবিড় ভাষীদের বাস ছিল।.....এই জাতির লোকেরাই কোনও সময়ে, আর্য্যদের আগমনের বহু পূর্বে ইরাক ঈরাণ ও বেলুচিস্থান, আফগানিস্থান হইয়া, পাঞ্জাব ও সিন্ধুপ্রদেশে উপনিবিষ্ট হয়; এবং সেখান হইতে রাজপুতানা মহারাষ্ট্র হইয়া এই জাতি, ইহাদের ভাষা ও সভ্যতা লইয়া দক্ষিণ ভারতে বিস্তৃত হয়,....ইহারা গাঙ্গেয় উপত্যকাতেও বাস করিতে থাকে।^৮

ব্রিটিশ নৃতাত্ত্বিক স্যার রিজলি দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর অবয়বগঠন তথা নৃতাত্ত্বিক স্বরূপ ব্যাখ্যা করতে গিয়ে বলেন-

In the Dravidian type the form of the head usually inclines to be dolichocephalic, but all other characters present a marked contrast to the Aryan. The nose is thick and broad and the formula expressing its proportional dimensions is higher than in any known race, except the Negro. The facial angle is comparatively low. The lips are thick; the face wide and fleshy; the features coarse and irregular. The average stature ranges in a long series of tribes from 156.2 to 162.1 centimeters, the figure is squat, and the limbs sturdy. The colour of the skin varies from very dark brown to a shade closely approaching black.^৯

নীহাররঞ্জন রায় দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর নৃতাত্ত্বিক স্বরূপ ও অবয়ব গঠনের পরিচয় দিয়েছেন নিম্নোক্ত রূপে -

এইজনের লোকেরা দেহদৈর্ঘ্যে মধ্যমাকৃতি, ইহাদের মুণ্ডাকৃতি দীর্ঘ ও উন্নত, কপাল সংকীর্ণ, মুখ খর্ব এবং গণ্ডাঙ্ঘ্রি উন্নত, নাসিকা লম্বা ও উন্নত, কিন্তু নাসামুখ প্রশস্ত, ঠোঁট পুরু এবং মুখগহ্বর বড়, চোখ কালো এবং গায়ের চামড়া সধারণত পাতলা হইতে ঘন বাদামী। দক্ষিণ ভারতের অধিকাংশ লোক এবং উত্তর ভারতের নিম্নস্তর শ্রেণীর প্রায় সকলেই উপরোক্ত বৈশিষ্ট্যসম্পন্ন দীর্ঘমুণ্ড জনের বংশধর, এবং এই

দীর্ঘমুণ্ড জনেরাই ভারতীয় জনপ্রবাহে যে দীর্ঘমুণ্ড ধারা বহমান তাহার উৎস। বাংলা দেশেও উত্তম ও মধ্যম সংকর এবং অন্ত্যজ পর্যায়ের যে দীর্ঘমুণ্ডের ধারাচিহ্ন দেখা যা, তাহাও মূলত এই নরগোষ্ঠীরই দান।^{১০}

দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর কোনো কোনো শাখা প্রাগৈর্য যুগেই দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম দিক থেকে বাংলায় এসেছিল। এরা কালক্রমে এখানকার অস্ট্রিক জাতিগোষ্ঠীর সঙ্গে মিলে-মিশে বসবাস করতে থাকে।

উত্তর-পূর্ব হিমালয় ও চট্টোগ্রাম অঞ্চল থেকে মোঙ্গোলীয় বা ভোট-চিনীয় ভাষা-ভাষী জনগোষ্ঠী বাংলায়, বিশেষ করে উত্তর ও পূর্ব বাংলার কোনো কোনো অঞ্চলে এসে বসবাস শুরু করে ইতিহাসে এই জনজাতি কিরাত নামে পরিচিত। উত্তর-পূর্ব ভারতের রাজবংশী, নাগা, কোচ, মেচ, মিজো, কুকি, চাকমা, আরকানি প্রভৃতি উপজাতি অপেক্ষাকৃত স্বল্প সংকর মোঙ্গোলীয় জনগোষ্ঠীর অংশীদার।

রিজলির ধারণা, খর্বকায়, প্রশস্থ করোটি, চ্যাপ্টা নাসিকায়ুক্ত, স্বল্প শাশ্রু ও পীতবর্ণের মোঙ্গোল জাতিগোষ্ঠী এবং কৃষ্ণবর্ণ, খর্বকায়, দীর্ঘ শিরঙ্কের ও চ্যাপ্টা নাসিকায়ুক্ত দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠী - এই দুই নরগোষ্ঠীর সংমিশ্রণেই প্রধানত বাঙালি জাতির উৎপত্তি। কিন্তু রিজলির মোঙ্গোলীয়-দ্রাবিড় রক্ত সাংকর্ষে বাঙালি জাতির উৎপত্তি তত্ত্ব আধুনিক নৃতাত্ত্বিক ও ঐতিহাসিকগণ মানতে পারেননি। এ বিষয়ে নীহাররঞ্জন রায় জানিয়েছেন -

রিজলির বাঙালীর জনতত্ত্বগত বৈশিষ্ট্য-নির্দেশে খুব ভুল কিছু করেন নাই; ভুল করিয়াছিলেন সেই বৈশিষ্ট্যের মূল অনুসন্ধানে। মূল যে মোঙ্গোলীয়-দ্রাবিড় সংমিশ্রণের মধ্যে নাই, এ বিষয়ে নরতত্ত্ববিদেরা এখন আর কিছু সন্দেহ করেন না।^{১১}

বাঙালিজাতির কোনো কোনো অংশের বিস্তারিত কপাল ও প্রসারিত নাসিকা দেখে তাদেরকে দ্রাবিড়-মঙ্গোলীয় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর বংশধর বলে সিদ্ধান্ত করেছিলেন হার্বার্ট রিঙ্গে। (রিঙ্গে হারবার্ট : ট্রাইব্‌স্ অ্যাণ্ড কাস্ট্‌স্ অব বেঙ্গল)। কিন্তু রিসলির এই সিদ্ধান্তের সপক্ষে কোনো বিজ্ঞান সম্মত প্রমাণ মেলেনি। অধিকাংশ আধুনিক নৃতাত্ত্বিক, ইতিহাসবিদ ও সমালোচক রিসলির মতকে অস্বীকার করেছেন। এদের মধ্যে আছেন আধুনিক নৃতাত্ত্বিক আর.পি.চন্দ, বি.এস.গুহ, এইচ.সি.হালদার প্রমুখ। বাঙালি জাতি সংগঠনে রিজলির মোঙ্গোলীয় প্রভাবের তথ্যকে অনেকের মতোই অস্বীকার করেছেন বাঙালি নৃতাত্ত্বিক অতুল সুর -

বাঙালী জাতির আকৃতির মধ্যে এমন কোন নৃতাত্ত্বিক লক্ষণ বা তাদের মধ্যে প্রচলিত এমন কোন জনশ্রুতি বা কাহিনী নেই, যা দ্বারা তাদের মঙ্গোলীয় উৎপত্তি সমর্থিত হয়।^{১২}

তবে সমালোচকগণ যে যাই বলুক না কেন, একথা আজ আর অস্বীকার করার উপায় নেই বাঙালি রক্ত সাক্ষর্যে সামান্য পরিমাণে হলেও ভোট-চিনা বা মঙ্গোলীয় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর প্রভাব আছে।

দ্রাবিড় ভাষা-ভাষীর পরপরই এদেশে এসেছে আর্য ভাষা-ভাষী 'অ্যালপাইন' (Alpine) নরগোষ্ঠীর একটি শাখা। এরা ঋতুদের অনেক আগেই এদেশে এসে এই প্রদেশের (বাংলার) অধিবাসীদের সঙ্গে মিশে গিয়েছে। ঋতুদে আর্য জাতির এই শাখাটাই 'অসুর' নামে পরিচিত। এদের সম্পর্কে অতুল সুর বলেন -

দ্রাবিড় ভাষাভাষী লোকদের পর এসেছিল আর্য ভাষাভাষী এক নরগোষ্ঠী।এরা ইউরোপের 'আলপাইন' নরগোষ্ঠীর সমতুল। ভারতের বর্তমান জনতার মধ্যে এদের অস্তিত্ব প্রকাশ পায় পশ্চিমে বারাণসী থেকে পূর্বে বাংলাদেশ পর্যন্ত। তবে বাংলাদেশেই এই নরগোষ্ঠীর বংশধরদের প্রাধান্য বিশেষভাবে লক্ষিত হয়। সেজন্য মনে হয় তারা সমুদ্রপথেই বাংলাদেশে এসেছিল এবং পরে এখানে বসতি স্থাপনের পর ক্রমশ পশ্চিমদিকে উত্তরপ্রদেশের পূর্বপ্রান্ত পর্যন্ত এগিয়ে গিয়েছিল।^{১০}

আর্যদের অপর শাখা নর্ডিক (Nordic) নরগোষ্ঠী।এরাই আর্য ভাষা-ভাষী উন্নত বৈদিক সভ্যতার ধারক ও বাহক। আনুমানিক খ্রিস্টপূর্ব ১৫০০ অব্দে এরা ভারতে আসে। নর্ডিকদের অবয়বগত বৈশিষ্ট্য সম্বন্ধে রুশ নৃতাত্ত্বিক অধ্যাপক মিখাইল নেস্করথ বলেন -

Many racists regard only the tall, blue-eyed blouds of modern North Europe as being "true Aryans" - these peoples have been given the name of the 'Nordic race'.^{১১}

নর্ডিক আর্যগণ দীর্ঘশিরষ্ক ও দীর্ঘকপাল বিশিষ্ট, দীর্ঘদেহী, গায়ের রঙ অতি ফরসা। এরা বলিষ্ঠ ও সুঠাম দেহ বিশিষ্ট এবং উন্নত, লম্বা ও সুঁচালো নাসায়ুক্ত। অন্যদিকে আলপীয় আর্যরা আকৃততে মাঝারি, অপেক্ষাকৃত ছোটো ও গোল মস্তিষ্কযুক্ত এবং হৃৎকপালবিশিষ্ট। নাক লম্বা, মুখাবয়বও গোলাকৃতি, চোখ কালো, গাত্রবর্ণ ফরসা।

বাঙালির নরতত্ত্ব বিশ্লেষণ করে দেখা গেছে রক্তে সাক্ষর্যে যদিও বাঙালি মিশ্র প্রজাতির, তবুও তার রক্তে আল্পীয় আর্যজাতির উপাদান যথেষ্ট আছে। বিশেষ করে উচ্চশ্রেণির বাঙালি অর্থাৎ ব্রাহ্মণ-কায়স্থদের একটা বড় অংশই আল্পীয় নরগোষ্ঠীর লোক। আধুনিক নৃতাত্ত্বিকগণের বিশ্লেষণে দেখা গেছে বাঙালির রক্তে উত্তর ভারতীয় নর্ডিক আর্যগোষ্ঠীর রক্ত একেবারেই নেই। এখানকার উচ্চবর্ণের হিন্দুরা মূলত আল্পীয় আর্যেরই বংশধর। শুধুমাত্র নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরচয়েই নয়, বাঙালির জাতি সংগঠন ও সংস্কৃতির স্বরূপ রূপায়ণে আল্পীয় আর্যদের

ভূমিকার কথা স্বীকার করেছেন নীহাররঞ্জন রায় –

বস্তুত, বাঙলাদেশের যে জন ও সংস্কৃতি শতাব্দীর পর শতাব্দী ধরিয়্যা গড়িয়া উঠিয়াছে, তাহার প্রায় সমগ্র মূল রূপায়ণই প্রধানত অ্যাংলোইন ও আদি-অস্ট্রেলীয়, এই দুই জনের লোকদের কীর্তি।^{১৫}

একথা স্বীকার করে নিতেই হবে যে বাঙালির নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয় আজও জটিল আবর্তে মোড়া। কেননা এবিষয়ে পূর্ণাঙ্গ গবেষণা আজও হয়নি। আধুনিককালে রিজলি, রমাপ্রসাদ চন্দ, বিরজাশঙ্কর গুহ প্রমুখ নৃতাত্ত্বিকেরা নিজ নিজ ক্ষেত্রে এবিষয়ে গবেষণা করেছেন। তা হয়েছে স্বতন্ত্রভাবে। ফলে অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই পরীক্ষালব্ধ ফলাফল মেলেনি। তাছাড়া পরীক্ষা হয়েছে মাথা-কপাল-নাক-ঠোঁট কিংবা চোখ-চুল-চামড়া অবলম্বন করে। কিন্তু প্রায় সাড়ে তিন হাজার বছরের সাক্ষর্যে কারো কোনো লক্ষণই আর অবশিষ্ট নেই। তাই এসব গবেষণা-সিধান্তও অনেকটাই অনুমান সাপেক্ষ। যা হোক আধুনিক নৃতাত্ত্বিকদের সিদ্ধান্তের ভিত্তিতে বাঙালির নৃতত্ত্বের স্বরূপ বিশ্লেষণে প্রবৃত্ত হয়েছেন বাংলাদেশের বিশিষ্ট গবষক আহমদ শরীফ মহাশয়। তাঁর মতে –

মোটামুটি ভাবে বলা চলে নেগ্রিটো, আদি-অস্ট্রেলীয় (ভেডিড) ও মঙ্গোলীয় নরগোষ্ঠীরই মিশ্রণ ঘটেছে বেশি। তাই শতকরা ষাটভাগ অস্ট্রেলীয়, বিশ ভাগ মঙ্গোলীয়, পনেরো ভাগ নেগ্রিটো এবং পাঁচভাগ অন্য নানা নরগোষ্ঠীর রক্ত মিশেছে বলে অনুমান করা অসঙ্গত নয়।^{১৬}

লক্ষণীয় বাঙালির রক্তে জাতিতত্ত্ব নিরূপণে উপরোক্ত আলোচনায় আহমদ শরীফ দ্রাবিড়দের আলাদা শ্রেণিভুক্ত করেননি। প্রাগার্য যুগে দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠীর কোনো কোনো শাখা বাংলায় এসে বসবাস করলেও কালে কালে তারা নৃতত্ত্বগত ভাবেই (রক্ত সাক্ষর্য ও মানস বৈশিষ্ট্যেও) এখানকার অস্ট্রিক জাতিগোষ্ঠীর সঙ্গে মিশে গেছে। ফলে বাঙালি রক্তে তাদের স্বতন্ত্র অস্তিত্ব কিংবা পৃথক চারিত্রিক লক্ষণ আর অবশিষ্ট নেই। বলাবাহুল্য পাঁচভাগ অন্যান্যদের মধ্যে বড়ো অংশটাই আল্লীয় আর্য জাতিগোষ্ঠীর অন্তর্গত। উত্তর ভারতীয় নর্ডিক আর্যগোষ্ঠীর নৃতাত্ত্বিক উপাদান ও রক্ত বাঙালির রক্তে নেই বললেই চলে। আধুনিক পরিভাষায় বলতে পারি বাঙালার দেশেজ মুসলমান ও নিম্নবর্ণের হিন্দুরা মূলত প্রাচীন অস্ট্রিক-দ্রাবিড় জাতিগোষ্ঠীরই উত্তরসূরী (বাঙালির রক্তে শতকরা ৬০ ভাগই)। উত্তরপূর্ব বাংলার রাজবংশী সম্প্রদায় মূলত প্রাচীন কিরাত বা মঙ্গোল জাতিগোষ্ঠীর বংশধর (শতকরা ১৫ ভাগ)। আদিবাসী সম্প্রদায় মূলত নেগ্রিটো শ্রেণির রক্তের বাহক (শতকরা ২০ ভাগ)। উচ্চবর্ণের ব্রাহ্মণ-কায়স্থের বেশিরভাগটাই আলপীয় (যারা শতকরা মাত্র ৫ ভাগ) আর্যের প্রতিনিধি। অর্থাৎ অধিকাংশ ভারতীয়ের মতো নৃতাত্ত্বিকভাবে বাঙালিজাতিও যে সম্পূর্ণতই মিশ্র প্রজাতির উত্তরসূরী তা আর বলবার অপেক্ষা রাখে না।

তথ্যসূত্র:-

- (১) বাঙ্গালার ইতিহাস সম্বন্ধে কয়েকটি কথা, বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র চট্টোপাধ্যায়, বঙ্গদর্শন, অগ্রহায়ণ ১২৮৭। সংকলন: বাঙ্গালার ইতিহাস, প্রাচীন যুগ থেকে ইংরেজ আমল, সংগ্রহ ও সম্পাদনা- কমল চৌধুরী, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, ২০০৬, পৃ. ২৪
- (২) বাঙ্গালার উৎপত্তি, বঙ্কিমচন্দ্র চট্টোপাধ্যায়, বঙ্গদর্শন, পৌষ ১২৮৭। সংকলন: বাঙ্গালার ইতিহাস, প্রাচীন যুগ থেকে ইংরেজ আমল, সংগ্রহ ও সম্পাদনা- কমল চৌধুরী, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, ২০০৬, পৃ. ৩১
- (৩) ভাষাপ্রেম ভাষাবিরোধ, পবিত্র সরকার, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, ২০০৩, পৃ. ৯২
- (৪) ভারত সংস্কৃতি, সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায়, মিত্র ও ঘোষ পাবলিশার্স প্রাইভেট লিমিটেড, কলকাতা, ১৪০০, পৃ. ৬৫-৭১
- (৫) বাঙ্গালীর ইতিহাস: আদিপর্ব, নীহাররঞ্জন রায়, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, ১৪১৬, পৃ. ২৪
- (৬) Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. I, Geroge A Grierson, Calcutta, 1903, P.33
- (৭) ভারত সংস্কৃতি, সুনীতিকুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায়, মিত্র ও ঘোষ পাবলিশার্স প্রাইভেট লিমিটেড, কলকাতা, ১৪০০, পৃ. ১৭
- (৮) পূর্বোক্ত, পৃ. ২১-২২
- (৯) The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol. I, Herbert Hope Risley, Calcutta 1891, P.xxxii
- (১০) বাঙ্গালীর ইতিহাস: আদিপর্ব, নীহাররঞ্জন রায়, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, ১৪১৬, পৃ. ৩২
- (১১) বাঙ্গালীর ইতিহাস: আদিপর্ব, নীহাররঞ্জন রায়, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, ১৪১৬, পৃ. ৩০
- (১২) বাঙলা ও বাঙালীর বিবর্তন, অতুল সুর, সাহিত্যলোক, কলকাতা, ২০০৮, পৃ. ৪৫-৪৭
- (১৩) প্রাগুক্ত, পৃ. ৪০-৪১
- (১৪) The Races of Mankind, Mikhail Nesturkh, Progressive Publishers, Moscow, 1966, P.100
- (১৫) বাঙ্গালীর ইতিহাস: আদিপর্ব, নীহাররঞ্জন রায়, দে'জ পাবলিশিং, কলকাতা, ১৪১৬, পৃ. ৩৩
- (১৬) বাঙলা বাঙালী ও বাঙালীত্ব, আহমদ শরীফ, অনন্যা প্রকাশনী, ঢাকা, ২০০৭, পৃ. ২০

নাগরিক

সুখেন্দু সরকার

শব্দটার মধ্যে কোথাও একটা দূরত্ব আছে! শব্দটার অন্তর্লীন শব্দে ছোঁয়া কোথাও যাদের জন্য এ' শব্দের পরিকল্পিত নির্মাণ তাদের এ' শব্দটা থেকে দূরে রাখে। গ্রাম-ঘরের মানুষ অনেক সহজে বোঝে "দেশের মানুষ"! দ্বিতীয় এই শব্দ-যুগ্ম নাগরিকত্বের সব কিছু ধারণ তো' করেই--তার সঙ্গে জোড়ে এক আবেগময় সংলগ্নতার অনুভূতি! একজন পুরোপুরি বাস্তব কারণে কোন এক বিশেষ দেশের "নাগরিক" হতে পারেন, কিন্তু "দেশের মানুষ" বহন করে গভীরতর ব্যঞ্জনা, যার মধ্যে "নাগরিকত্ব" থাকে এবং তারই হাত ধরে থাকে "দেশপ্রেম"! ধারণা হিসাবে "দেশপ্রেম" "নাগরিকত্ব"-র চেয়ে অনেক বেশি ইনক্লুসিভ। মুশকিল হল আইন-কানূনের বিস্তার গলি-ঘুঁজি মাড়িয়ে তবে আমরা "নাগরিকত্ব" বুঝি; সেখানে 'আবেগ' 'অনুভূতি' নিছকই আপেক্ষিক! "দেশপ্রেম" আবার আইনী কচকচির ধার ধারে না-এ' হল পুরাদস্তুর 'মানবিক'! "সরকার" কোন স্বয়ম্ভু সত্তা নয়। সরকার গড়ে তোলে দেশের নাগরিকরা। সম্মিলিত ভাবে এবং এক বিশেষ পথে। ফলে সরকারের পলিসি-নির্ধারণে জনগণকে প্রাপক-পক্ষ রাখা একেবারেই ঠিক নয়। গণতন্ত্রকে সর্বার্থেই হতে হবে অংশগ্রহণমূলক। ঠিক উল্টোটাই ঘটে চলেছে 2019 সালের 12ই ডিসেম্বর থেকে। ঐ দিনই আমাদের দেশে প্রথম এবং সম্ভবত গোটা বিশ্বেও প্রথম নাগরিকত্বের প্রশ্নটাকে ধর্ম-পরিচয়ের সাথে জুড়ে দেওয়া হল।

ইদানীং:

উনিশ শো' সাতচল্লিশের ৭২ বছর পর 'নাগরিকত্ব' নিয়ে দেশব্যাপী ঝড় উঠেছে। ঝড় উঠেছে একটি ক্ষমতাসীন সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে এবং তা' একতরফা চাপিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে দেশের আপামর মানুষের উপর! আসলে তা'ই হয়! আনুষ্ঠানিক গণতন্ত্রে মানুষের স্বাধীন ইচ্ছা মান্যতা পায় না। মান্যতা পায় সরকারের ডিজাইন। এমন কি সরকার যা করতে চায়, তা নিয়ে বৃহত্তর সামাজিক বিতর্ককেও সরকার অনুমোদন দেয় না বা তার জন্য কোন স্পেসও দেয় না। সমস্যাটা এখানেই এবং সমাজে সংঘাতের বীজও বোনা হয় এখানেই।--- যেমন, আমরা প্রশ্ন করতে পারি: ভারতবর্ষ কি উন্নতির

স্কেলে এমন উচ্চতায় পৌঁছেছে যে পাকিস্তানি বা বাংলাদেশীদের স্বাভাবিক গন্তব্য ভারতকেই হতে হবে? সত্যিই কি বোনাফায়েড ভারতীয়রা "অনুপ্রবেশ-সমস্যায় জর্জরিত"? সমস্যাটা 'বাস্তব' না কি 'ফেনিয়ে তোলা'? সরকারের কাছে কোন পরিসংখ্যান-ভিত্তি আছে? থাকলেও তা' থেকে কি যথাযথ যৌক্তিক সিদ্ধান্ত টানা হয়েছে? কোন পরিসংখ্যানই কি খোলা ব্ল্যাকবোর্ডের মতো করে মানুষের কাছে হাজির করা হয়েছে? সমাজে যে ঐকমত্য বিরাজ করছে, জনগণের ভোটে নির্বাচিত কোন সরকারই কি তা একতরফা সামরিক শক্তি ও পার্লামেন্টারি সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতার জোরে ধসিয়ে দিতে পারে? 'গণতন্ত্র' মানে কি 'সংখ্যা-গরিষ্ঠবাদ'?

"ধর্ম" ও "নাগরিকত্ব":

দুটো অসম্পর্কিত বিষয়কে কিভাবে কোনরকম যুক্তি ছাড়াই জুড়ে দেওয়া হল! প্রতি দিনের বাস্তবে আমরা জানি, ধর্ম হল জীবনযাপনের এক স্ব-আরোপিত ধরণ। ধর্মের ভিন্নতা কোন কালেই মানুষে-মানুষে সহাবস্থানে প্রতিবন্ধক হয় নি। প্রতিদিনের জীবনের চলনে ধর্ম তার নিজের মতো করেই বয়ে চলে। একজন ধর্ম-যুক্ত মানুষ এবং ধর্ম-হীন মানুষ প্রাত্যহিকতায় এক ও অভিন্ন। সমস্যা তখনই তৈরি হয় যখন রাষ্ট্র ব্যক্তিগত পরিসরের এই বিষয়টির সাথে নিজেকে যুক্ত করে কখনো সর্বধর্মসাপেক্ষতার নামে বা কখনো বিশেষ ধর্ম-সাপেক্ষতার নামে! যে কাজ মানুষ সম্পূর্ণ নিজের উদ্যোগে স্বাধীনভাবে ব্যক্তিগত নিরালায় করতে সক্ষম, তা'তে রাষ্ট্রের নাক গলানোর দরকার কি? রাষ্ট্রের তরফে করার মতো কাজের কি কিছু অভাব পড়েছে?

"অনুপ্রবেশ": অন্য আলোয়:

মানুষ যেখানে দীর্ঘদিন ধরে বাস করে--যে ঘরে সে দিনের শেষে তার ক্লাস্ত শরীরে ফিরে আসে--যে পারিবারিক বৃত্তে সে ফিরে এসে নিশ্চিত বোধ করে--এই সবটা মিলেই হল তার 'পরিমণ্ডল'! নাগরিক-সুযোগের যত অভাবই এই পরিমণ্ডলে থাকুক না কেন, এটাই হল তার গুটিপোকাকার খোল। এর সাথে তার আবেগগত-অভ্যাসগত, দু'ধরনেরই সংলগ্নতা গড়ে ওঠে। একমাত্র রাজনৈতিক ডামাডোল--জীবন-সংকট এবং বড় আকারের জীবিকা-সংকট ছাড়া সে তার গুটিপোকাকার খোল পিছনে ফেলে সীমানা পেরিয়ে অনিশ্চিত জীবনের ঘাটে তরী ভেড়ায় না। এক কথায়, 'অনুপ্রবেশ' প্রধানত একটি সাময়িক বিষয়। জোয়ার-ভাটার মতো বিষয়। মানুষ নিত্যন্ত নিরুপায় না হলে তার একান্ত পরিচিত বৃত্ত ছেড়ে বেরোতে চায় না। সরকার অনুপ্রবেশ-এর যে গল্প দেশের অন্য নাগরিকদের সামনে হাজির করে তার বেশিরভাগটাই

পল্লবিত। 'অনুপ্রবেশ'-কে যে সরকার স্থায়ী বিচার্য করে, বুঝতে হবে তার অন্য কোন 'উদ্দেশ্য' আছে।এবং এখান থেকেই সংঘাত ও অস্থিরতার শুরু।

"অনুপ্রবেশ": তৃতীয় মিথ্যা:

কথায় বলে মিথ্যা তিন রকমের: মিথ্যা--নিরেট মিথ্যা--পরিসংখ্যান। শেষটাকেই বলছি 'তৃতীয় মিথ্যা'। আসামে ডেপুটি জেনারেল অফ পুলিশ জয়েন্ট পার্লামেন্টারি কমিটিকে বলেছিলেন, 1971 সালের পর আসামে বাংলাদেশ থেকে এসেছিল 43497 জন বাংলাদেশি। 1997 সালে কেন্দ্রের স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী ইন্দ্রজিৎ গুপ্ত বলেছিলেন সংখ্যাটা হবে 40 লক্ষ। 2014 সালে কেন্দ্রের স্বরাষ্ট্র প্রতিমন্ত্রী প্রকাশ জয়সওয়াল বলেছিলেন আসামে বিদেশীর সংখ্যা 50 লক্ষ। গত বছর নাগরিকত্ব নিয়ে ডামাডোলের সময় কেন্দ্রের স্বরাষ্ট্র প্রতিমন্ত্রী কিরণ রিজিজু বলেন সংখ্যাটা 2 কোটি। 1998 সালে আসামের রাজ্যপাল বলেন বিদেশীর সংখ্যা 75 লক্ষ। 2011 সালের সেনসাস বলেছে বাংলাদেশ থেকে আসামে এসেছে 23 লক্ষ। 2019 সালে RTI-এর উত্তরে স্বরাষ্ট্র দপ্তর বলছে তাদের কাছে কোন তথ্যই নেই। 2018 সালের 31 জুলাই এন আর সি-র প্রথম খসড়া দেখায় বিদেশীর সংখ্যা 41 লক্ষ প্লাস। ঠিক এক বছর বাদে 2019 সালের আগস্ট মাসে সংখ্যাটা নেমে আসে 19 লক্ষতে! এবার বলুন, একটি প্রশ্নের উত্তরে যদি গুণে গুণে না' না'টা উত্তর পাওয়া যায়, কোন উত্তরেরই কি বিশ্বাসযোগ্যতা থাকে?

'অনুপ্রবেশ': 'সম্পদ' না 'বিপদ'?

অন্য দেশ থেকে যে আসে, সে কি শুধু নিতেই আসে? দিতে আসে না? সে কি শুধু একটা পেট নিয়েই আসে? কর্মক্ষম দুটো সবল হাত আর চিন্তনক্ষম একটা মগজ নিয়েও আসে না? তাকে শুধুই দখলদার হিসাবে দেখা কি ঠিক? তার সৃজনশীল শ্রম কি শুধু তার বা তার পরিবারেরই উদর-পূর্তির জন্য? দেশের অন্য নাগরিকদের মতো সেও কি সমাজের জন্য--ব্যবস্থার জন্য উদ্বৃত্ত সৃষ্টি করে না? সে কি একই কেক-এ ভাগ বসাবে? নাকি ভাগ বসানোর আগে কেকটাকে বড় করার দায়িত্বও সে নিচ্ছে? যে অনুপ্রবেশ আদতে কোন দীর্ঘমেয়াদি সমস্যা নয়, তার মোকাবিলায় সরকারের কেন কোন সুসংহত নীতি থাকবে না? সরকার কেন এটাকে রাজনৈতিক ইস্যু করবে? এটাতো শেষমেঘ একটি অর্থনৈতিক ইস্যু! আপতকালে সরকার কেন pro-preserving পলিসি নেবে না এঁদের জন্য, যেমনটা প্রতিটি ব্যক্তি-মানুষ বিপন্ন ব্যক্তি-মানুষের জন্য নেয়?

নাগরিকত্বের ধাঁধা:

প্রশ্ন হল কিসে কী প্রমাণ হয়? নাগরিকত্ব কি কাণ্ডজে প্রমাণ-নির্ভর হওয়া উচিত? যে মানুষটি দেশ ও সমাজের নির্মাণে সদর্থক অবদান রেখেছেন তাঁর নিজস্ব পেশা-বৃত্তে, তিনি তাঁর বার্থ সার্টিফিকেট পেশ করতে পারলেন না বলেই বেনাগরিক হয়ে যাবেন, এটা কি ন্যায়-বিচার? যে কৃষক ফসল ফলান-যে শ্রমিক আলপিন থেকে এরোপ্লেন বানান, যে চিকিৎসক মানুষকে সম্ভাব্য মৃত্যুর দোরগোড়া থেকে ফিরিয়ে আনেন--যে শিক্ষক মানুষের মনন-নির্মাতার ভূমিকা পালন করেন--তাঁদের অবদানকেই কেন তাঁদের নাগরিকত্বের প্রমাণ বলে গণ্য করা হবে না? কেন একটা গোটা দেশের সমগ্র জনসংখ্যাকেই সরকারের কাঠগড়ায় দাঁড়াতে হবে? এই জাতীয় সর্বাঙ্গিক নেতিবাচক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী কি সমর্থনযোগ্য? আমার অস্তিত্বকে এতটাই ডকুমেন্ট-নির্ভর করে তোলা আমাকে মেনে নিতে হবে কেন? আসামে যেভাবে 1600 কোটি টাকা খরচ করে 52000 কর্মী নিয়োগ করে 60 কোটি ডকুমেন্ট আদায় করে 19 লক্ষ অর্থাৎ রাজ্যের জনসংখ্যার 5.8 শতাংশকে বেনাগরিক বানানো হল তাকে কোন বিচারে ধ্বংসাত্মক অনুশীলন না বলে গঠনমূলক কাজ বলা যায়? এই 19 লক্ষ মানুষকে সব রকমের নাগরিক অধিকার-বর্জিত মনুষ্যেতর জীবন যাপন করতে--যেটোর জীবন যাপন করতে বাধ্য করে যে রাষ্ট্র, তাকে আর যাই বলা যাক, জনকল্যাণমূলক রাষ্ট্র বলা যায় কি?

দেখপ্রেম বনাম দেশপ্রেম:

গতবছরের 12 ডিসেম্বর থেকে আমাদের চেনা দেশটা কেমন এক অচেনা ঘোরের মধ্যে ঢুকে পড়েছে! একটা আইনে সই করলেন ঐ দিন দেশের রাষ্ট্রপতি! আইনটার নাম 'নাগরিকত্ব সংশোধনী আইন, 2019'। অদ্ভুত মারণ আইন এটি! আইন বলছে, 2014 সালের 31 ডিসেম্বরের আগে বাংলাদেশ, পাকিস্তান ও আফগানিস্তান থেকে হিন্দু, বৌদ্ধ, শিখ, জৈন, পার্সি ও খ্রিস্টান সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষরা এদেশে আসলে সরকার তাদের 'শরণার্থী' বলে গণ্য করবে এবং ছয় বছর বাদে নাগরিকত্বের জন্য আবেদন করার সুযোগ দেবে। কিন্তু ঐ একই দেশগুলি থেকে আগত মুসলিমদের 'অনুপ্রবেশকারী' বলে গণ্য করা হবে এবং নাগরিকত্বের বিবেচনার বাইরে রাখা হবে। যেহেতু ধর্ম-ভিত্তিক নাগরিকত্ব দেশের সংবিধানের মর্মবানীর বিপরীত, তাই এই আইনের চাঁদমারী মুসলিমরা ব্যাপকভাবে পথে নেমে পড়লেন! তাঁরা এই আইনকে তাঁদের যৌথ অবমাননা বলে বিবেচনা করলেন। গোটা দেশ জুড়ে বিক্ষোভিত হল এক নতুন ধরণের জন-আন্দোলনের! দিল্লির শাহীনবাগ-এ অবস্থানে বসলেন

অশীতিপর বৃদ্ধারা! পথে নামল জামিয়া মিলিয়ার --জে এন ইউ-এর ছাত্র-ছাত্রীরা। মহামিছিল-এ সামিল হলেন সমাজের সর্বস্তরের মানুষ! সরকারের মুখোমুখি টানটান প্রতিবাদে দাঁড়িয়ে পড়লেন মানুষ! আন্দোলনকে "দ্বিতীয় স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রাম" বলে চিহ্নিত করা হল! মানুষের কাঁধে কাঁধে শোভা পেতে থাকলো জাতীয় পতাকা--আর হাতে হাতে ভারতীয় সংবিধান! শাহীনবাগ-এর সমর্থনে দিকে দিকে মানুষ পথে বসে পড়লেন! অদ্ভুত বিদ্রোহ-শিহরণের চেতনা ছড়িয়ে পড়লো দেশজুড়ে! গোটা আন্দোলন ক্লাইম্যাক্স-এ পৌঁছাল যখন দিল্লিতে সংগঠিত হল জেনোসাইড! পরোক্ষ সরকারী নিষ্পৃহতার সুযোগে! সরকার যখন ঘোষণা করলো 'বহিরাগত মুসলমানদের নাগরিকত্ব দেওয়া হবে না, ওদের নিজেদের দেশ আছে!', বিপরীতে দেশের জনসংখ্যার 14.2 শতাংশ মুসলমানরা ঘোষণা করলেন 'আমরা ঘটনাচক্রে এ'দেশের নাগরিক নই! ভারতীয় নাগরিকত্ব আমাদের সচেতন নির্বাচন!'। সংবিধানের 14 ও 15 নং ধারা লঙ্ঘনের অভিযোগ উঠলো সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে! প্রশ্ন তোলা হলো, কেন মায়ানমারের রোহিঙ্গা শরণার্থীদের মানবিক বিবেচনায় আনা হবে না? কেন ভাবা হবে না শ্রীলঙ্কার তামিল উদ্বাস্ত জনগণের কথা বা নেপালের মদেশীয়দের কথা? কেন ভাবা হবে না মুসলিম সংখ্যাগুরুদের দ্বারা অত্যাচারিত আহমদিয়া গোষ্ঠীর কথা বা সিয়া-সুন্নি সংঘাতে বিপন্নদের কথা? কেন ভাবা হবে না নাস্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীর কথা,যারা সব ধর্ম-সম্প্রদায়ের দ্বারাই কোণ ঠাসা? সামনে এল 1950 সালের জনপ্রতিনিধিত্ব আইনের 16 নং ধারা, যেখানে বলা হয়েছে:" কোন ব্যক্তি ভারতের নাগরিক না হলে ভোটার তালিকায় নাম তোলার যোগ্য হবেন না।" সোজা কথায়, যাঁদেরই ভোটার-কার্ড আছে, তাঁরা দেশের নাগরিক! তা-ই যদি হয়, তাঁদের ক্ষেত্রে নতুন আইন প্রয়োগ করাই যাবে না!

এ'প্রশ্নও সামনে এল: ঠিক কত জন নতুন আইনের পক্ষে? দেশে 90 কোটি ভোটার হলেও বিজেপি পেয়েছিল কম-বেশি 27 কোটি ভোট,যার অর্থ নতুন আইনের পক্ষে যদি এই 27 কোটি মানুষ থাকে, বিরুদ্ধে তার চেয়ে ঢের বেশি অর্থ্যাৎ 63 কোটি মানুষ! আইনের ন্যায্যতা কোথায়?

আপাদমস্তক স্ববিরোধী আইনে বলা হল, হিন্দু, বৌদ্ধ, শিখ, খ্রিষ্টান, জৈন ও পার্সিরা নাগরিকত্ব পাবেন, যদি তাঁরা প্রমাণ করতে পারেন যে, তিনটি উৎস-দেশে ধর্মীয় কারণে নিপীড়িত হওয়ার কারণেই তাঁরা ভারতের নাগরিকত্ব চান! প্রশ্ন উঠল, এ'টা কারও পক্ষে কখনোই কি প্রমাণ করা সম্ভব? আইনটি কি আখেরে মুসলমানদের প্রতি দ্বৈষ-পূর্ণ এবং অন্যান্য সম্প্রদায়ের প্রতি প্রতারণা-পূর্ণ হয়ে দাঁড়ায় না? মুসলমানদের "আদার" বানানো এবং উঠতে বসতে দেশের 19 কোটি মানুষের দেশপ্রেম-এর পরীক্ষা নিতে চাওয়া কোন যুক্তিতে সমর্থনযোগ্য? 1947 সালে যাঁরা এই দেশটাকেই থাকার জন্য বেছে নিয়েছিলেন, পাকিস্তানের অপশন থাকা সত্ত্বেও, তাঁদের দেশপ্রেম নিয়ে প্রশ্ন

তোলা কি অন্তর্বস্তুতে দ্বেষপ্রেম নয়? আমাদের শিকড়ে কিন্তু এই বিভাজন-ভাবনা নেই! এই ভারতবর্ষের অন্য অনেক সত্যিকারের সমস্যা ও সীমাবদ্ধতা আছে। প্রগতি-পরিপন্থী অনেকানেক জড়তাও আছে এ' দেশের। কিন্তু হলফ করে বলা যায়, সাম্প্রদায়িক সংঘাত-ভাবনাকে কে সে একেবারে গোড়া থেকেই নির্মূল করেছে! এই করোনা-ভাইরাস বিশেষ শাসকদের ল্যাবরেটরিতেই তৈরি! যা উপর থেকে আরোপিত, যা সত্তার অনুষ্ণ নয়, তাকে সবলে ডাস্টবিনে ফেলাই যুক্তির কাজ--মনুষ্যত্বের বিধান!

সম্প্রীতির ইতিহাস ও ভূগোল:

আমাদের দেশের ইতিহাসে আর ভূগোলে মাখামাখি হয়ে আছে সম্প্রীতি। এই বোধটুকু থাকলেই হিন্দুত্ববাদী ন্যারেটিভ আর মগজ দখল করে না! দু'একটা উদাহরণ নেওয়া যাক!

বেড়াচাঁপা: বাংলা চতুর্দশ শতকের গোড়ায় পীর হজরত শাহ সৈয়দ আব্বাস আলী রাজী বা গোরাই পীর বালান্দা পরগনায় ইসলাম ধর্ম প্রচারে আসেন। বালান্দা পরগণা হল বর্তমান বেড়াচাঁপা ও বসিরহাট অঞ্চল। ঐ অঞ্চলে চন্দ্রকেতু ছিলেন একজন হিন্দু রাজা, যাকে গোরাই পীর ইসলাম ধর্মে দীক্ষা নেওয়ার জন্য অনুরোধ করেন। রাজা সম্মত না হলে পীর তাঁকে যে কয়েকটি কেরামতি দেখান তার মধ্যে একটি হল রাজপ্রাসাদ-সংলগ্ন লোহার বেড়ায় চাঁপাফুল ফোটাণো! সেখান থেকেই নাম বেড়াচাঁপা।

হাড়োয়া: পীর গোরাইচাঁদ যুদ্ধে নিহত হওয়ার পর তাঁর হাড় যে সমাধিক্ষেত্রে সংরক্ষিত থাকে সেই জায়গার নাম।

মারিয়াম্মান মন্দির: তিরুপুর শহরের প্রান্তে রাউথরপালায়াম-এ অবস্থিত একটি 225 বছরের পুরাতন মন্দির। মন্দিরটি স্থাপন করেন টিপু সুলতানের একটি অশ্বারোহী বাহিনীর সেনাপতি রাউথার, যাঁর নামে স্থানটির নাম। এখানে শিবির তৈরি করে থাকার সময় তাঁর ছেলের চিকেন পক্ক হলে গ্রামবাসীরা তাঁকে মা মারিয়াম্মানের আরাধনা করতে বলেন। তিনি তা করলে 10 দিনের মাথায় তাঁর সন্তান আরোগ্যলাভ করে। কৃতজ্ঞতাভাবে তিনি মারিয়াম্মান মন্দিরটি তৈরি করেন, যাঁর চত্বর ও ভিত ছিল মন্দিরের আদলে এবং গম্বুজটি ছিল মসজিদের আদলে। মন্দিরটি বিবেচিত হয় হিন্দু-মুসলিম সম্প্রীতির প্রতীক হিসাবে।

সুন্দরবন: সুন্দরবন ঘিরে যাঁদের বেঁচে থাকা তার মধ্যে মুসলমান বাওয়ালি-কাঠুরে-জেলেরা বনের দেবী বনবিবির এবং বাঘের দেবতা গাজীর পূজা করে। হিন্দু বাওয়ালি-কাঠুরে-জেলেরা বনের দেবী বনদূর্গা এবং বাঘের দেবতা দক্ষিণ রায়ের পূজা করে। এখানে হিন্দু-মুসলমান বিভেদ অনুপস্থিত! যীশুর ভূমিকায় মসজিদের ইমাম: 2018 সালের মার্চ মাসের শেষ সপ্তাহে

আসানসোলের মুসলিম-প্রধান চাঁদমারী ও কুরেশি মহল্লায় দু'দিন ধরে একটা সাম্প্রদায়িক দাঙ্গার ঘটনা ঘটে, যার শিকার হন নুরানী মসজিদের বর্ষীয়ান ইমাম মুহাম্মদ ইমদাদুল্লাহ-এর 16 বছরের ছেলে মহম্মদ শিবগাতুল্লাহ। দাঙ্গার দু'দিন বাদে শিবগাতুল্লাহ নখ উপড়ে নেওয়া আধপোড়া মৃতদেহ হাসপাতালে শনাক্ত করেন তাঁর বাবা ইমদাদুল্লাহ। এলাকায় মানুষ-জনের মধ্যে জেগে ওঠে তীব্র প্রতিশোধস্পৃহা। ইমদাদুল্লাহ বুঝতে পারেন একে সামলাতে না পারলে এলাকায় শুরু হয়ে যাবে বড় আকারের সাম্প্রদায়িক দাঙ্গা! তিনি সন্তান হারানোর কষ্ট বুকে চেপে মাইক হাতে নিয়ে মহল্লায় মহল্লায় শান্তি-সম্প্রীতির প্রচারে নেমে যান! ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি যাতে না ঘটে তার জন্য মুহূর্ত্ত আবেদন জানাতে থাকেন! এলাকা শান্ত হয়ে আসে--উত্তেজনা প্রশমিত হয়! আসানসোল রক্ষা পায় বড়সড় দাঙ্গার কবল থেকে! সময়ের হাত ধরে ক্ষমাশীল যীশুর ভূমিকা চাক্ষুষ করলো আসানসোলের মানুষ!

নাথওয়াল, লুধিয়ানা:

নাথওয়াল গ্রামের এক পুরাতন মসজিদ মেরামতির জন্য দরকারী 25 লাখ টাকার 15 লাখ টাকা তুলে দেন হিন্দু ও শিখ সম্প্রদায়ের মানুষ! টাইমস অফ ইন্ডিয়ার সাংবাদিককে ওরা জানান, দেওয়ালি, দশেরা, রাখি, ঈদ ও গুরু পরব ওরা প্রতি বছর এক সঙ্গেই পালন করেন!

দিল্লি-গণহত্যা: সম্প্রীতির রূপোলি রেখা: দিল্লিতে পুলিশের সক্রিয় সহযোগিতায় দাঙ্গাবাজদের আক্রমণে প্রাণ হারালেন সংখ্যালঘু সম্প্রদায়ের 60 জন মানুষ! বিশ্বব্যাপী নিন্দিত হল আমাদের দেশের সরকার! হেঁট হল আমাদের মাথা! ---পাশাপাশি আমাদের হেঁট মাথাকে উপরে তুলে দিলেন হিন্দু সম্প্রদায়ের অতীব সাধারণ একজন মানুষ যাঁর নাম প্রেমেন্দ্র বাঘেল! কি ভাবে? একটি মুসলিম বাড়িতে আঙুন লাগিয়েছিল দাঙ্গাকারিরা। বাঘেল নিজের জীবন বিপন্ন করে আঙনের কুণ্ডে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়ে সাত-সাতজনের জীবন বাঁচান! তাঁর শরীরের 70 শতাংশ পুড়ে যায়! ডাক্তাররা পর্যন্ত তাঁকে প্রথমে ভর্তি নিতে চান নি!

এলাকায় দাঙ্গায় বিপন্ন মুসলিমদের বাঁচানোর জন্য শিখরা তাঁদের গুরুদ্বারের দরজা খুলে দেন!

হিন্দুরা নামাজ পড়ার সময় মুসলিমদের ঘিরে মানব-শৃঙ্খল রচনা করেন! সম্প্রীতি-রক্ষায়--মুসলিমদের রক্ষায় মিছিল করেন শিখরা।

বালিয়ানগাদি জুম্মা মসজিদ:

কেরালার মাল্লাপুরম শহরের বালিয়ানগাদি জুম্মা মসজিদ আজও অষ্টাদশ শতকের হিন্দু শহীদ কুনহেলু-কে বছরে এক দিন পরম শ্রদ্ধায় স্মরণ করে!

290 বছর আগে কোম্বিকোডের তৎকালীন রাজা খাজনা আদায় নিয়ে বিরোধ দেখা দেওয়ায় মালাবার আক্রমণ করেন! কুনহেলু তাঁর 43 জন মুসলিম সাথী নিয়ে যুদ্ধে যোগ দেন এবং প্রাণ হারান! পেশায় স্বর্ণকার কুনহেলুর সমাধির উপরে গড়ে ওঠে মসজিদটি! স্মরণের বিশেষ দিনটিতে মুসলিমরা সেখানে সমবেত হন এবং শ্রদ্ধানুষ্ঠানে কুনহেলুর বংশধরদের আমন্ত্রণ জানান প্রতি বছর!

জৌনপুর, উত্তরপ্রদেশ:

আবিদ আলভী, একজন মুসলিম যুবক, উর্দুতে হনুমান-চালিশা অনুবাদ করেন। লক্ষ্য উভয় সম্প্রদায়ের সংস্কৃতি ও বিশ্বাসকে আরও গভীরভাবে বুঝতে চাওয়া! জৌনপুরের বাসিন্দা অনুবাদ করতে তিন মাস সময় নিয়েছেন।

একই সামিয়ানার নীচে গণেশ চতুর্থী ও বকরা ঈদ:

এই আপাত-অবিশ্বাস্য ঘটনাটি ঘটে মুম্বাইয়ের কোলাবায়। ওখানে গণেশ-উৎসব মন্ডল-এর সেবা সংঘ দেখে যে, মাদ্রাসা রহমতিয়া তালিমুল কোরান মসজিদ জায়গার অভাবে সমস্ত মুসলিম প্রার্থনাকারীদের প্রবেশ করতে দিতে পারছে না! তখন সেবা সংঘ তাঁদের একাংশকে গণেশ-প্যাভেলের নীচে এসে শান্তিতে নামাজ আদায়ের আমন্ত্রণ জানায়!

"পয়গম্বর থেকে পয়গাম":

এটি একটি 112 পৃষ্ঠার বই। প্রফেট মহম্মদের জীবনী। লেখক রাজীব শর্মা। লিখেছেন মারওয়ানী ভাষায়। শর্মার ই-লাইব্রেরিতে বইটি বিনামূল্যে পাওয়া যায়।

মুসলিম কীর্তন-গায়ক:

মহারাষ্ট্রের বিড শহরের 73 বছর বয়সী শেখ রিয়াজউদ্দিন আব্দুল গণি কীর্তনের সুরে ও কথায় হিন্দুধর্মের প্রতি আকৃষ্ট হন। স্ব-প্রশিক্ষিত গণি মাথায় জলভর্তি কলসী বসিয়ে নাচের সঙ্গে কীর্তন পরিবেশন করেন, যাতে শ্রোতারা একঘেয়েমিতে আক্রান্ত না হন!

কোন যুক্তিতে দেশের স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী বলেন যে, এই কার্ডগুলির কোনটাই নাগরিকত্বের প্রমাণ নয়? এতগুলি কার্ড থাকার পরেও যদি কেউ তাঁর বার্থ সার্টিফিকেট পেশ করতে না পারার কারণে এবং বাবা-মা'য়ের নাগরিকত্ব প্রমাণ করতে না পারার কারণে সরকারের চোখে বে-নাগরিক হয়ে যান, তাহলে তাঁর এতকাল এ'দেশে থাকাটা কি 'ফেক'? দোষ এবং দায়টা কার? তাঁর নিজের? নাকি রাষ্ট্রের, যে এতকাল ধরেও তার নিজের দেশের মানুষের

স্টেটসাই ঠিক করে উঠতে পারে নি? একটা অঙ্ক প্রায় শেষ করে এনে মুছে দিয়ে আবার শূন্য থেকে শুরু করার মানে কি?

"নাগরিকত্ব" নিয়ে কিছু বাস্তব বিবেচনা:

প্রথম যে প্রশ্ন যে কোন বাস্তব বুদ্ধির মানুষ করবে তা' হল: আদৌ কোন নাগরিক-তালিকা দেশের জন্য প্রয়োজন? যে ব্যবস্থা ইতিমধ্যেই চালু আছে, তার বাইরে গিয়ে কেন প্রতিটি মানুষের আলাদা করে একটি 'জাতীয় পরিচয়-পত্র'(যেমনটা দেশের জাতীয় জনপঞ্জি বা NPR-এর ক্ষেত্রে দাবি করা হয়েছে) থাকা জরুরী? একজন একাডেমিক শিক্ষায় শিক্ষিত মানুষের এডমিট কার্ড আছে, যাতে তার জন্ম-তারিখ লেখা আছে। তার পেশাগত পরিচয়-পত্র আছে। তার প্যান কার্ড আছে। তার আধার-কার্ড আছে। তার এপিক কার্ড অর্থাৎ সচিব ভোটার আই ডি কার্ড আছে। রেশন কার্ড আছে। মেডিকেল ইন্স্যুরেন্স কার্ড আছে। পাসপোর্ট-ভিসা-ড্রাইভিং লাইসেন্স আছে। এই দশটা কার্ড যখন একটা দেশের চালানের সঙ্গে একজন মানুষকে আষ্টেপৃষ্ঠে জড়িয়ে ফেলছে, তখন আলাদা করে তার নাগরিকত্ব সপ্রমাণ করে এমন আরেকটা কার্ড থাকতে হবে কেন? শ্রমজীবী মানুষের ক্ষেত্রে এই দশটা প্রমাণের সবগুলি স্বাভাবিক কারণেই থাকবে না; যেমন ড্রাইভিং লাইসেন্স-পাসপোর্ট-ভিসা। আবার কতকগুলি বিশেষ কার্ড থাকবে, যেমন, বি পি এল কার্ড, জব কার্ড, জমি থাকলে তার পাট্টা ইত্যাদি। আবার ভোটার আই ডি কার্ড-মারফত নির্বাচন-প্রক্রিয়ায় অংশগ্রহণ করার অর্থ আমি দেশের রাজনৈতিক প্রক্রিয়ার একজন সচেতন অংশভাক। তাহলে নাগরিকত্ব-প্রমাণের গিলোটিনে আমাকে অকারণে গলা দিতে হবে কেন?

আসামে 3 কোটি 29 লক্ষ মানুষের মধ্যে 19 লক্ষ মানুষকে বাদ দেওয়া হল। একটা রাজ্যের 90 লক্ষ বাঙালির(আসামে বাঙালি জনসংখ্যা 90 লক্ষ) মধ্যে কমবেশি 18 লক্ষ বাঙালি বাদ পড়লেন! অর্থাৎ এক বিশেষ প্রাদেশিক পরিচয়ের মানুষের এক-পঞ্চমাংশ পড়লেন বাদের খাতায়! এই জাতীয় 'বাদ দেওয়ার নীতি' কি কোন বিচারেই সমর্থনযোগ্য? একটা সরকার কোন সংরক্ষণমূলক আর্থ-সামাজিক নীতি গ্রহণ না করে একের পর এক 'শক খেরাপি' দিয়ে যাবে তার নিজেরই জনগণকে--এ মনোভাব কি করে সমর্থন করে যায়? নোটবন্দি-জি এস টি থেকে শুরু করে বর্তমান আচমকা প্রস্তুতিবিহীন 'ঘরবন্দি' পর্যন্ত তো একই বিরক্তিকর ট্রাডিশনই চলেছে! সাথে কি মানুষ এই সরকারকে 'দাবাং-সরকার' বলে ডাকতে শুরু করেছে?

আরেকটা দিকও ভাবা দরকার: যাঁরা বেনাগরিক হয়ে পড়বেন, তাঁদের দেশ থেকে তাঁদের সোর্স-কান্ট্রিতে ফেরত পাঠানো হবে না, সরকার ইতিমধ্যেই এরকম সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে! দেশের ভিতর এত মানুষকে ডিটেনশন সেন্টারে

পাঠানোও যাবে না! তাহলে কি করা হবে এত বিপুল সংখ্যক মানুষকে, যে সংখ্যাটা গোটা দেশে কয়েক কোটিতে পৌঁছাতে পারে? একটাই "বিকল্প(!)": সমস্ত নাগরিক সুবিধা ছাঁটাই করে এদেরকে দ্বিতীয় শ্রেণীর মানুষ হিসাবে বিভিন্ন খেঁটো-তে বন্দি করে ফেলা! ঠিক যেমনটা করা হয়েছে 2002 সালের পর গুজরাটে মুসলমান-জনগোষ্ঠীর ক্ষেত্রে! এ' হল অনুন্নত অর্থনীতির পশ্চাদপদ দ্বৈত অর্থনীতির মডেল, যা মোটেই অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নের সূচক নয়!

সরকারী নিয়মের যাঁতাকলে পরে পঞ্চাশ বছর বয়সে যদি কেউ বে-নাগরিক হয়ে যান, তাঁর নতুন স্টেটাস কি হবে? তাঁকে দেশ থেকে পুশ ব্যাক করা হবে না, ভাল কথা। কিন্তু নাগরিক অধিকার-বিবর্জিত যে জীবন তাঁর জন্য অপেক্ষা করছে তাকে কি করে তিনি এর আগের জীবনের সাথে মেলাবেন? কেন নাগরিকত্বের প্রশ্নকে সমাজে ব্যক্তির অবদানের সাথে না যুক্ত করে যান্ত্রিকভাবে শুধু বিশেষ ডকুমেন্টের সাথে জুড়তে হবে? কেন নাগরিকত্বের প্রমাণ সারকামস্ট্যাঙ্গিয়াল হবে না? নাগরিক-বে-নাগরিক এই বিভাজনের মাঝখানে হিন্দু-মুসলমান বিভাজনের এক্সট্রা ব্যাগেজ ঢোকানো হবে কেন?

এবং একটি 'বিকল্প'-র ব্লু-প্রিন্ট:

অতঃ কিম?:

একটা কথা যত দিন যাচ্ছে স্পষ্ট হচ্ছে: নাগরিক-পঞ্জি মোটেই দেশের জনগণের, গণতন্ত্রে যাঁকে আমরা 'জনগণেশ' বলি, তাঁদের দাবি নয়! এটি হল শাসকদের কর্মসূচী, যে শাসকরা আবার নানা রঙের রাজনৈতিক দলে বিভক্ত! তাদের মধ্যে কটরপন্থী আছে--আছে নরমপন্থী--মধ্যপন্থীরাও আছে! আজ পার্লামেন্টপন্থী সব দলই বিজেপি-চালিত সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে--জনগণের এক বড় অংশের বেনাগরিককরণের বিরুদ্ধে! কিন্তু ভুলে যাওয়া যায় না সে কথা যে, আসাম-চুক্তি স্বাক্ষর করেছিলেন রাজীব গান্ধী এবং ভোট-রাজনীতির অঙ্ক মেনে কোন দলই তাঁর বিরোধিতা করে নি সেদিন! আজ অঙ্কটা বদলে গেছে! এনআরসি যাঁরা করতে চান, তাঁদের একটা যুক্তি(যে যুক্তি আবার মিথ্যা তথ্যের চোরাবালির উপর নির্মিত) থাকলে, বিরোধিতায় গোটা দেশজুড়ে পথে নেমে পড়া জনগণের তার বিরুদ্ধে রয়েছে হাজারটা যুক্তি! এই ইস্যুতেই আবার মেশানো হয়েছে সাম্প্রদায়িকতার সৈকো বিষ! গোটা বিষয়কে তা করেছে সমাধান-অসাধ্য এক জটিল অংকের মতো! আমাদের এখান থেকেই ঘুরে দাঁড়াতে হবে আরও বড় পরিপ্রেক্ষিতের দিকে--এনআরসি-নিরমোক খসিয়ে এক সুচিন্তিত বিকল্পের দিকেই শুরু হওয়া উচিত আমাদের অভিযাত্রা! এটাই বৃহত্তর মানবতার দাবী!

জিডিপি হিন্দু গ্রোথেরটকে ছুঁতে পারেনি। মূল্যবৃদ্ধি-কৃষক-আত্মহত্যা-দুনীতি দেশকে টেনে হিঁচড়ে নীচে নামিয়েছে। প্রাক-আশির যে সব পলিসি আমরা বাজে কাগজের ঝড়িতে ফেলেছিলাম সেগুলিতে ফিরে আসার দাবি উঠেছে!

গত শতাব্দীর নব্বইয়ের দশকে সরকার 'শিশু শিল্প সংরক্ষণের যুক্তি'-টি পুরোপুরি বর্জন করে। গ্রহণ করে টুটি-কাটা প্রতিযোগিতার মুখোমুখি দাঁড়িয়ে শক্তি-অর্জনের নীতি। এর ফল কি হয়েছে? অসম প্রতিযোগিতায় টিকতে না পেরে একের পর এক দেশীয় শিল্পের গঙ্গা-প্রাপ্তি ঘটেছে। নির্বাচনে সংরক্ষণ যেমন বেশ কিছু শিল্পের সামনে দক্ষতা-অর্জনের চ্যালেঞ্জ হাজির করে না, এর বিপরীতে সমস্ত শিল্পকেই সংরক্ষণের বাইরে রাখার অর্থ যে শিল্পগুলির ভিত্তি তেমন শক্তিশালী নয়, তাদের বিদেশী হাঙ্গর-কুমিরের মুখে ছেড়ে দেওয়া! তাই আজকের বাস্তবসম্মত নীতি হতে পারে 'নির্বাচনমূলক সংরক্ষণ অর্থাৎ বেছে বেছে কিছু শিল্পকে সংরক্ষণ এবং এই নির্বাচনের ক্ষেত্রে প্রধানত শ্রম-নিবিড় শিল্পগুলিকে গুরুত্ব দিতে হবে, যাতে কর্মসম্ভাবনার ক্ষেত্র প্রস্তুত হয়।

নাগরিকত্ব-চর্চা থেকে বিকল্প-চর্চায় সরে আসা দেশের আজকের পরিস্থিতিতে এক ধরনের লজিক্যাল ডাইগ্রেসন বলে মনে হয়। কারণ ইতিপূর্বে শাসকদের একপাক্ষিক আরোপনের সুবাদে দেশ তার লজিক্যাল অভিমুখ হারিয়ে পথভ্রষ্ট হয়েছে। দেশকে ঘিরে ভাবনায় একটা সবল মোচড় আনা তাই সময়েরই দাবী। মানুষের জীবনের রিয়েল ইস্যুগুলি আরোপিত ইস্যুর জগদদল পাথরের নীচে হাঁসফাঁস করছে!

আমরা যাকে এল পি জি-নীতি অর্থাৎ উদারিকরণ-বেসরকারিকরণ-বিশ্বায়ন বলি, তার প্রায় তিন দশক পার হতে চললো! নীতিটিকে যেভাবে সমস্যা সমাধানের সব-খোল চাবি বলে উপস্থাপন করা হয়েছিল, তার মায়া-কাজল প্রায় মুছে গেছেই বলা যায়! নীতিটি ইতিমধ্যেই 'কর্মহীন বিকাশ' অভিধা পেয়ে গেছে। চরম দারিদ্র কমলেও আয়বৈষম্য বৃদ্ধির সুবাদে বেড়েছে আপেক্ষিক দারিদ্র। কৃষির গতি থমকে গেছে--শিল্পমন্দা স্থায়িত্ব পেয়েছে। অর্থনীতিতে এখন ফাটকা পুঁজির বাড়বাড়ন্ত। সংগঠিত ক্ষেত্র গুটিয়ে গিয়ে অর্থনীতির ইনফর্মালাইজেশন সর্ব-ব্যাপক। বিরাস্ত্রীয়করণ এমন উচ্চতায় পৌঁছেছে যে কাজের পরিসর কমতে কমতে পাঁচ দশকের মধ্যে নিম্নতম।

1991-এর পর থেকে দেশে চালু হয়েছে এক anti-subsidy ইকোনমি। সাবসিডি মানেই সরকারের ব্যয়-বৃদ্ধি। বিষয়টাকে শুধু এভাবেই দেখা আদতে একধরনের একচোখমি! সাবসিডির দুটি দিক আছে: কনজিউমার-সাবসিডি নিত্যপ্রয়োজনীয় জিনিসের চাহিদা বাড়িয়ে দেয়। ফলে সামগ্রীর উৎপাদন বাড়ে। চূড়ান্ত পণ্যের উৎপাদন বাড়লে ঐ শিল্পে ব্যবহৃত যন্ত্রপাতি-উপকরণের চাহিদা ও উৎপাদন বাড়ে ফলে দেশে মূলধনী সামগ্রীর উৎপাদন-বৃদ্ধির হাত ধরে বিনিয়োগ বাড়ে এবং জি ডি পি বাড়ে। প্রোডাকশন-সাবসিডি

উৎপাদকদের যোগান বাড়তে উৎসাহ দেয় এবং যোগান বাড়লে জিনিসের দাম কমে--কেনাকাটা বাড়ে। যে দিক থেকেই যাওয়া যাক, সাবসিডি শুরুতে সরকারের খরচ বাড়ালেও অর্থনীতিকে শেষ বিচারে তা চাঙ্গাই করে! সরকার এসব এলিমেন্টারি ইকোনমিক্স জানে না এমন নয়! সরকারের এই নীতির পিছনে রয়েছে এলিট-লবির চাপ। আমাদের সাবসিডি ফিরিয়ে আনার দাবি খুব জোরালোভাবে তোলা দরকার! নব্বই দশক-পরবর্তী গ্লোবায়িত জাতীয় অর্থনীতিতে 'বিলগ্নিকরণ' একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ শব্দ, বহুব্যবহারে যার গা থেকে নেতিবাচকতার গন্ধটুকু পর্যন্ত লোপ পেয়ে গেছে! খুব সাদা-সিধা একটি প্রশ্ন নীতি-নির্ধারকদের করা যায়: লাভজনক নয় বলে আপনারা যে সংস্থাটি বেসরকারী বহুজাতিকদের কাছে বিক্রি করে দিচ্ছেন, নিরন্তর লাভের কারবারিরা সেটি কিনছে কেন? নিশ্চিতভাবেই তাদের অন্য কোন সূক্ষ্ম হিসাব আছে! কি সেই হিসাব? তারা সংস্থাটির বর্তমান বঙ্গগত মূল্যই শুধু দেখছে না--একই সঙ্গে তারা ঐ সংস্থা থেকে ভবিষ্যত আয়-প্রবাহের বর্তমান মূল্যও দেখছে! এই দ্বিতীয় হিসাবটা সরকার দেখছে না! হাতবদল হলেই যদি মূল্য-বদল হয়, সেক্ষেত্রে বুঝতে হবে হাতের কারসাজিটাই প্রধান দিক! আরেকটা কথাও বলা দরকার: একটি ঘোষিত জনকল্যাণমূলক রাষ্ট্রে সরকার যা যোগান দেয়, তা হলো 'পাবলিক গুডস'---সেখানে লাভলাভ এত গুরুত্ব পাবে কেন? আশির দশকে কিন্তু বিলগ্নিকরণ এতটা মসৃণ ছিল না! কাঠামোগত এমন বাধা থাকে যেগুলি অতিক্রমযোগ্য। আজকের সরকার কি এ' প্রশ্নে ইতিবাচকভাবে বিচক্ষণ? 'বিলগ্নিকরণ'-এর উপর একটা জোরালো 'ব্যান' ট্যাগ সেটে দেওয়া যায় না?

দারিদ্র্য-দূরীকরণের প্রশ্নে অবশ্য সংস্কার-পন্থী ও বিরোধীদের মধ্যে কোন লড়াই নেই! দেশে সব রঙের সরকার দারিদ্র্য মেপেছে 'বেয়ার মিনিমাম ক্যালোরি'-র তৌল-দণ্ডে। এটা ভেবে দেখা হয় নি যে, শুধু ভরপেট খেয়ে বেঁচে থাকাকাটাই মানুষের অস্তিত্ব নয়! যেভাবে দারিদ্র্য-সীমা ঠিক করা হয়েছে তা মোটেই মানবিক নয়। তা এক অর্থে 'নিঃস্বতার সীমা'। একটি সমতা-সূচক সমাজে যা দরকার, তা হল 'শালীনতা সহ বেঁচে থাকার সীমা'-নির্ধারণ! প্রগতিশীল সমাজে এটাই হওয়া উচিত দাবী!

1991 সালের পর যেভাবে 'বাজার'-কে ঈশ্বর বানানো হয়েছে, এ একরকম পিছনের দিকে 'এগিয়ে যাওয়া'(!)। বাজার-অর্থনীতির দেউলিয়াপনা বহু আগেই ঐতিহাসিকভাবে প্রমাণিত! তা সত্ত্বেও তাকেই বারবার পুঁজিবাদ কবর থেকে তুলে এনেছে! বড় রকমের সংকট দেখা দিলেই সামনে এসেছে সরকারী হস্তক্ষেপের দাবি! সে 1930-এর মন্দাই হোক বা 2008-এর হাউসিং বাবল! তা সত্ত্বেও রাষ্ট্র বারবার সংকট পার হয়ে গেলেই ফিরে এসেছে বাজার-অর্থনীতির দুয়ারে! এই অযৌক্তিক মোহকেই কোন কোন মহল 'বাজার-মৌলবাদ' শিরোপা দিয়েছেন। নিয়ন্ত্রিত কেন্দ্রীভূত জনকল্যাণমূলক

অর্থনীতিতে ফিরে না গেলে বাস্তবিকই আমাদের নিস্তার নেই!

সবচেয়ে শোচনীয় অবস্থা কর্মসংস্থান-এর ফ্রন্টে! দেশে সরকারী-বেসরকারী ক্ষেত্র মিলে যে ক্ষেত্র সেখানে নিয়োজিত আছেন মেরেকেটে 20 শতাংশ! জনগণের 80 শতাংশই নিযুক্ত অসংগঠিত ক্ষেত্রে! কাজের সুযোগ যত কমছে, ততই বাড়ছে অর্থনীতির ইনফরমালাইজেশন! এই অবস্থায় দেশকে যদি এক পা'ও এগোতে হয় ইনফর্মাল সেক্টরকে নীতিনির্ধারণের অংশ করতেই হবে! এই সেক্টরকে বাঁচানোর উন্নয়নমূলক কর্মসূচী নিতেই হবে!

'বিকল্প' মানে কি শুধু 'বিকল্প অর্থনৈতিক নীতি'? 'বিকল্প রাজনীতি' নয়? উত্তরে বলা যায়, 'অর্থনীতি' ও 'রাজনীতি'-র পরস্পর-সংলগ্নতা ছাড়া কোন 'সামগ্রিক নীতি' হতে পারে না। 1991-পরবর্তী কালে সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে প্রতিটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পলিসিগত বাঁকবদল হয়েছে একেবারেই একপাক্ষিক আরোপনের রূপে, যা জনগণের পক্ষে--গণতান্ত্রিক মূল্যবোধের পক্ষে অবমাননাকর! 'গণতন্ত্র' এবং 'সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতাবাদ'-কে ক্ষমতাসীনরা সবসময়ই সমার্থক বিবেচনা করেছে। গণতন্ত্র হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে আলংকারিক--আনুষ্ঠানিক। এই প্রবণতা বিশ্বায়নের তিন দশকের আগেও ছিল ঠিকই, কিন্তু প্রবণতাটি দিন কে দিন আরও প্রকট হয়েছে! সমাজে কার্যকরী ডায়ালগ-এর গুরুত্ব যত কমেছে, বৈষম্যও ততই বেড়েছে! সরকার ও জনগণের সম্পর্ক যে শাসক-শাসিত সম্পর্ক নয়--এই বোধ একেবারে পিছনে ঠেলে দিয়েছে বিশ্বায়ন। এই প্রবণতার বিরুদ্ধে সোচ্চার নীতিসম্মত প্রতিবাদ জরুরী।

বিগত তিন দশকে সবচেয়ে বেশি চর্চা হয়েছে যে বিষয়টি নিয়ে সেটি হল 'মানবিক মুখ-সম্পন্ন বিকাশ' এবং ঘটনাটি খুবই স্বাভাবিক। কারণ, এই সময়কালে অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই জিডিপি বেড়েছে লাফিয়ে লাফিয়ে এবং তারই পাশাপাশি বেড়েছে আয় বৈষম্য! অনেকক্ষেত্রে আবার আয়বৈষম্য-বৃদ্ধি জিডিপি-বৃদ্ধিকে টেনে নামিয়েছেও! শুধু জিডিপি দিয়ে বিকাশ মাপার একপেশেমি সমালোচিত হয়েছে। এসেছে গ্লোবাল হাঙ্গার ইনডেক্স-এর মতো ধারণা। আয়বৈষম্য অবশ্য নিছক এলপিজি-কেন্দ্রিক নয়! আয়বৈষম্য একটি ব্যবস্থার পরিণাম। শুধু এটুকুই বলা যায়, বিশ্বায়ন আয়বৈষম্যের মাত্রা ও গতিকে বাড়িয়েছে। আমাদের দাবি করা উচিত, প্রসাধনিক সংস্কার ছেড়ে সরকারের উচিত আয়বৈষম্য কমে এমন পরিকল্পিত নীতি গ্রহণ করা।

একটি গণতান্ত্রিক কাঠামো ক্ষমতার স্বতন্ত্র স্তম্ভগুলিকে আপেক্ষিক স্বাধীনতা দেয়, অনুসরণ করে ক্ষমতা স্বতন্ত্রীকরণের নীতি। আমাদের দেশে এই নীতি বর্তমানে আক্ষরিক অর্থেই ভূ-লুপ্ত! এমনকি সুপ্রিম কোর্টের বিচারপতিদের স্বচ্ছতা ও নিরপেক্ষতা নিয়েও প্রশ্ন উঠছে, যেমনটা এর আগে কখনো হয় নি! এখানে একটি ইতিবাবহক ইউ-টার্ন জরুরী!

পাঁচ বছর প্রতিটি ইস্যুতে সরকারের অতি-রাষ্ট্রবাদী অবস্থান সমাজে আনছে নিন্দনীয় দূষণ! সরকার যে কোন বিরোধীতাকেই দেশ-বিরোধী বলে চিহ্নিত

করে তার বিরুদ্ধে আইনী ব্যবস্থা নিতে অতি-আগ্রহী। যুক্তিপূর্ণ বিরোধীতাকেও আরবান নকশালদের বিরোধিতা বলে আখ্যায়িত করা হচ্ছে--বিরোধীদের টুকরে টুকরে গ্যাং বলে অবনমিত করা হচ্ছে। সব কিছুতেই পাকিস্তানের হাত খোঁজা প্রায় কু-সংস্কারের স্তরে নেমে এসেছে। বেছে বেছে সংখ্যালঘুদের-দলিত-আদিবাসী--নারীদের আক্রমণ নিত্যনৈমিত্তিক ঘটনা হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে। রাজনৈতিক শক্তিগুলির সামরিক মোকাবিলা সৃষ্টি করছে নেতিবাচক দৃষ্টান্ত। সরকার যেভাবে সুস্থ রাজনৈতিক পরিসরকে দূষিত করছে, মানুষ ক্রমশই তার বিরুদ্ধে বেশি বেশি সোচ্চার হচ্ছেন। রাষ্ট্র যেভাবে তার প্রতিপালক ভূমিকা ছেড়ে নিজের জনগণের বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধে নেমেছে, তার বিরোধিতা আজকের সময়ের দাবি এবং কর্মসূচী!

ইতিহাসের জঘন্যতম প্রতারণার প্রত্যক্ষ ফলভাগী হতে হয়েছে জম্মু-কাশ্মীরের জনগণকে। স্বতন্ত্র ও স্বাধীন দেশীয় রাজ্য- পরিচয় থেকে ভারতভূক্তির সমস্ত শর্তগুলিকে নস্যৎ করে --370 ও 35A ধারা দু'টিকে বাতিল করে রাতারাতি সামরিকভাবে জম্মু-কাশ্মীরকে দু'টি আলাদা কেন্দ্রশাসিত রাজ্যে পরিণত করা হল এবং এক্ষেত্রেও হিন্দু-প্রধান জম্মু ও মুসলমান-প্রধান কাশ্মীরকে আলাদা করার মধ্য দিয়ে সাম্প্রদায়িক বিবেচনাকেই অগ্রাধিকার দেওয়া হলো! কাশ্মীরে ইন্টারনেট ও যোগাযোগ-ব্যবস্থাকে স্তব্ধ করে দিয়ে তাকে কার্যত পৃথিবী থেকে বিচ্ছিন্ন একটি জেলখানায় পরিণত করা হলো। দখলদারি নেওয়ার সময় কাশ্মীরের সশস্ত্র পুলিশকে পর্যন্ত নিরস্ত্র করা হলো! যে রাজ্যটির স্বাভাবিক ব্রিটিশরা পর্যন্ত মেনে নিয়েছিল এবং দীর্ঘ একাত্তর বছর ধরে যার বিশেষ সত্তাটিকে ভারত সরকার পর্যন্ত মেনে এসেছে, তার স্বীকৃত রাজনৈতিক নেতাদের পর্যন্ত বন্দী করে নিছকই মিলিটারি-শক্তির জোরে এই বিশ্বাসঘাতকতার কাজটি সমাধা হলো। 1947 সালে ব্রিটিশরা যে আলাপ-আলোচনার পরিসর বজায় রেখেছিল ভারত-পাকিস্তান-বিভাজনের প্রশ্নে, 47-পরবর্তী ভারত-শাসকরা সে' সৌজন্যটুকু পর্যন্ত দেখালো না! অবশিষ্ট ভারতের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ জনগণের মতামত ও মনোভাবকেই গুরুত্ব দেওয়া হল, কাশ্মীরের জনগণের নয়! এমনকি বহুকাল ধরে বারবার সরকারের পক্ষ থেকে উচ্চারিত এবং একপাক্ষিকভাবে পরিত্যক্ত গণভোট-প্রসঙ্গটি বিবেচনাতেই এলো না! এই ঐতিহাসিক অন্যায়ে-এর সংশোধনের দাবী তোলা নিঃসন্দেহে কোণঠাসা সংখ্যালঘুর দাবী বলে বিবেচিত হবে, যতই দেশের বাইরে আন্তর্জাতিক জনমত সংশোধনেরই পক্ষে থাকুক না কেন!

নোটবন্দি-ক্যাম্পবন্দি-গৃহবন্দি: একই ট্রাডিশন চলছে! সরকার জনগণেরই তথাকথিত 'ভাল'-র জন্য উপর থেকে জনগণকে পলিসি-শক দেবে এবং জনগণকে গবেষণার গিনিপিগ হিসাবে কাজে লাগাবে! দেশের জনগণের ভাল'র জন্য কোন স্বচ্ছ পরিকল্পনা দাবী করলেও সরকারের কাছ থেকে পাওয়া যাবে না-- কোন শিক্ষণীয় বিতর্ক আয়োজিত হবে না--যে কোন

পলিসিই হবে সরকারের গুপ্ত কর্মসূচির ষড়যন্ত্র'র অংশ! একে যদি গণতন্ত্র-লঙ্ঘন না বলা যায়, তো' কোনটিকে বলা হবে? মানুষের ইচ্ছা ও সরকারের অভীক্ষা যদি নিরন্তর একে অপরের বিপরীত অভিমুখে গতিশীল থাকে, দেশে-সমাজে শান্তি-সুস্থিতি থাকবে কি ভাবে? অথচ, যুগ যুগ ধরে ভারতবর্ষের মানুষ, তাঁদের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ অংশ উচ্চাকাঙ্খাহীন সহজিয়া জীবনশ্রোতে প্রবহমান। অন্ন-বস্ত্র-বাসস্থান-নিম্নতম শিক্ষা ও জরুরি স্বাস্থ্য পরিষেবার বাইরে তাঁদের আর কোন চাহিদাই নেই! এ'টুকু পূরণ করার জন্য যেটুকু রাজনৈতিক সদিচ্ছা থাকা দরকার তা' এদেশে কোনকালে কোন সরকারেরই ছিল না-আজও নেই! শুধু যে নেই তা' নয়, সরকার সবসময় চেষ্টা করে এসেছে গণমুখী ন্যারেটিভকে বদলে দিয়ে তার কর্মসূচী জনগণের উপর চাপিয়ে দিতে! আজকের পরিস্থিতির দাবি, নিছক বিকল্প'র বিবৃতি নয়, তার শপথবদ্ধ রূপায়ণ! সমস্ত লেখার উপর বারংবার আলকাতরা-পালিশ টেনে দেওয়া হচ্ছে! কখনও এই আলকাতরা-পালিশ নোটবন্দির রূপে আসছে--কখনও আসছে এনআরসি-দুর্যোগের রূপে--কখনও আসছে অপ্রস্তুত লকডাউনে মানুষের বিপন্নতার রূপে! এই হতাশ পুনরাবৃত্তির নিকষ অন্ধকারে জাগ্রত থাকুক বিকল্প ভাবনা-রূপায়ণের অধ্যবসায়ী সংগ্রাম! এই বিকল্প ভূখণ্ডটুকুই হোক আমাদের প্রীতির বসুন্ধরা!



Panchayat's and the Emerging Leadership of Rural Women: a comparative study of the two important states in India

Mithun Das

When the panchayat raj is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do.

— Mahatma Gandhi

1. Introduction and Evaluation of Women Representation in Panchayat:

Politics basically involves representation, policy, power and position with Government as its area. Political participation of individual is very much essential in the political process. It ensures that the individual are able to take part in deciding the common goals of the society and the best ways of attaining it. And the word “empowerment” comes from the verb “empower”, which means to give or add up some extra ability. Empowerment has often been the catchphrase of crusaders trying to make the world a better, more equitable place through revolution or at least, fundamental social transformation. By the 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992, three tier of panchayati raj system has started in India. And that was the most significant contribution of the decentralization process in India as well as the turning point of the women and the weaker section of the society. By this act one-third of the total seats are reserved for the women. And women got the chance to join in grassroots politics actively and share their idea for the future upliftment. Before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the Balwant Rai Mehta study team which gave the blue print of a three tier panchayati raj structure in 1957, has given them a substantially development programmers delivery orientation. After that in 1978

Ashoke Mehta committee submitted its report and recommended to establish the two tier panchayati raj system in India .These are the zilla parishad at the district level and below it, the Mandal Panchayat. The reservation for weaker sections namely SCs/STs in proportion to their population were introduced in some states earlier. But 73rd constitutional amendment act made them mandatory universally.

2. Research Methodology:

The methodology adopted for the study would be a thorough analysis of archival materials in the form of government records, files and published records as gazetteers, census reports and published official records contemporary newspapers. Secondary sources as books, journals, and local literature will be used. Qualitative and quantitative data in the form of interviews through questionnaire and field survey will be conducted. Proper care has been taken to make an objective assessment for the participation and empowerment of women in decentralization process for the purpose of situating the proper idea about the participation of women in panchayat raj institution in India. The methodology applied for this study is historical-analytical, for the purpose of understanding the problem and situate of women in politics, the proper perspective and a brief historical overview is necessary. It should be mentioned that no such phenomenon about the participation and the development of women appears on a sudden. Its manifestation may be observed at a particular point of time but its roots can be found in a long historical process. In fact in such a study much depend on the actual understanding of the historical contextual settings, in which the issue is to be analyzed. And the changing political scenario, the role of different political parties plays a very important role to give a new shape in cases of India. Apart from the historical analysis, the different contemporary political parties play a very crucial role for the participation of women in Indian politics.

3. Participation as well as empowerment of women in Indian politics: A brief review

3.1. *Conceiving the mantra ‘empowerment’:*

The word “empowerment” comes from the verb “empower”, which means to give or add up some extra ability. (Chakraborty & Choudhury, 2009, p.15). Empowerment gives women the capacity to influence decision-making process, planning, implementing and evaluation by integrating them into the political system. This implies political participation which includes right to vote, contest, campaign, party membership and representation in political offices at all levels and effectively influences decision thereby leading to political empowerment (Khan, October 2012, Third Concept, p.7). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1993 mark historic events in the advancement of Indian women as they ensure one-third of total seats for women in all elected offices of local bodies, in rural and urban areas. Women empowerment in politics might well be a decisive factor that will purify and save the democratic politics of India from the deterioration of standard values it is experiencing today” (Sinha, 2004, pp.56-57).

3.2. *Feminist understanding of empowerment:*

Feminist social work theory and practice has much in common with empowerment, particularly in their focus on domination and subordination. Throughout history, women have been and continue to be appeared and discriminated against in ways that are different than men. Feminist scholars, educators and social workers encourage women to reclaim power to the extent possible in our society, express anger and built self-confidence and self-efficiency. Feminist social work is based upon the desire to change social structures so that women will no longer be oppressed and will further. (<http://www.tandfonline.com>).

4. Participation of women in electoral politics at the grassroots in two important states in India:

4.1. *Panchayati raj and the participation of women in West Bengal:*

Panchayati raj system or democratic decentralization is one of

the important political innovations of independent India and come into existence in 1959. (Methew, Ghosh, Methew & Roy, 2000, p. 606). West Bengal adopted the three tier panchayati raj system following the West Bengal panchayat act 1973. Prior to 1973, old panchayati raj system existed in West Bengal. Accepting the Ashoke Mehta committee's recommendation of participating political parties directly in panchayat Act 1973 era of new panchayati raj started in West Bengal from the year 1978 when the first panchayat election was held. Under new era of three tier structures, Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad were established. And the Gram Panchayat is the lowest unit. (Govt of W.B., Panchayat Act 1973).

4.1.1. Post 1992 Amendments:

The 1992 amendment of the state acts provided that not less than one third seats of all the three tiers would be reserved for women. Similarly, seats were reserved for the SCs/STs in all the tiers, the number of such reserved seats being proportionate to the percentage of their population in the area. West Bengal became the first state in the country to enable women to contest in slightly more than one-third of the total seats reserved for them. In 1998, the offices of chairpersons and vice chairpersons of all the three tiers had been reserved for women (not less than one third of the total number of such offices) and for the SC/STs (in proportion to their population) (Ghosh, 2013, p. 613). Previously, there was no reservation of seats for women of general category or for the SCs and STs. There were, however, provisions for nomination of women, not exceeding two, if at least two women did not get elected (Ghosh, 2013, p. 612).

The village council meetings cover a large number of voters and as a result offer them limited opportunities to exercise effective control over their elected representatives as well as to provide inputs to the planning process. The Gram Sabha meets ordinarily in December every year after the completion of the half yearly meeting of the Sansad are included in the Gram Sabha meeting (Datta, 2002, pp. 105-106 and Ghatak, 2002, p. 49). All eligible voters in a particular village constituency area (i.e, everyone who is 18 years or older) are eligible to attend the meetings (Ghatak, 2002, p. 49).

The meetings of the Gram Sabha and the Gram Sansad are to be convened by the Pradhan, in his absence, by the Upa-Pradhan (Datta, 2002, p. 105). A Gram Sansad is required to guide and advise the Gram panchayat in regard to the schemes for economic development and social justice undertaken or proposed to be undertaken in its area and may : (Ghatak, 2002, p. 49 and Datta,2002, p.105). This is important to know that the Gram Panchayats have three different types of other functions, obligatory, delegated and discretionary, while the obligatory functions are civic functions, the other two are concerned with development and reconstruction.(Datta,2002, p.102 and Mookherjee,2007,p.210)

4.1.2 Some of the important panchayat related works are as follows:

- a) Identify or lay down principles for identification of the schemes which are required to be taken up on priority basis for economic development of the village.
- b) Identify or lay down principles for identification of the beneficiaries for various poverty alleviation programmes.
- c) Constitute one or more beneficiary committees consisting of not more than five persons who are not members of the Gram Panchayats.
- d) Mobilize mass participation for community welfare programmes and programmes for adult education, family welfare and child welfare.
- e) Promote solidarity and harmony among all sections of the people irrespective of religion, faith caste, creed or race

The village constituency meetings are being held in West Bengal only for the last couple of years. Since 1998 meetings have been regularly held in practically all of the around forty-five thousand constituencies over the state (Ghatak, 2002, p. 49).

4.1.3. Participation of women in panchayat:

Women's representation in Panchayats has been finally fixed at one third after 1993 (now 50%) of membership and chair person's

position after a long journey in British period and post Independence period.(Buch, 2013, p.50). Before 1993 elections there was no provision for reservation of seats of women in the West Bengal Panchayat Act and it provided for a token inclusion of two women in every panchayat and if they were not elected, they could be nominated. There were less than 1 per cent women members elected to different panchayat bodies in the state (Datta P., 1995, p. 74).

4.1.4. Here I am showing important charts by which you can get the clear idea about elected member of panchayat in two different years and the number of elected member in different stages of West Bengal panchayats...

TABLE 1
WEST BENGAL
Panchayats at a Glance

Elected Members (1998)					
	Nos.	Total	SC	ST	Women
Gram Panchayats	3330	50345	14131 (28.06)	3755 (7.45)	17907 (35.56)
Panchayats Samitis	341	8579	2410 (28.09)	613 (7.14)	3015 (35.14)
Zilla Parishads	17	723	279 (38.58)	68 (9.40)	246 (34.02)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

From the panchayati raj election 1998, table we find that there was a three tier system of panchayat, Gram panchayat, Panchayat samity and Zilla parishad and their numbers are 3330,341 and 17. And the total elected candidate of that three tiers are 50343, 8579 and 723. And in cases of SC population of the village panchayat is 14131(28.6 percent), STs 3753(7.45 percent) and the participation of women in village panchayat is 17907(35.56percent). In the panchayat samity total number of SC candidate was 2410(28.09 percent) and the participation of total number of ST candidate

was 614(7.14 percent) the participation of women in panchayat samity was 3015(35.14 percent). The elected member of SCs in cases of Zilla parishad was 279(38.58 percent) the elected ST member was 68(9.40 percent) and the elected women member was 246(34.02percent).

There was a good number of participation of women in each tiers of panchayati raj system in West Bengal in the year 1998. But we see the total scenario then we find in cases of Gram panchayat and Panchayat samity the participation of women is high (35.56 & 35.14 percent) as compare to the Zilla parishaad level (Methew & Buch, 2000, p.613).

TABLE 2
WEST BENGAL
Panchayats at a Glance

Elected Members (2008)					
	Nos.	Total	SC	ST	Women
Gram Panchayats	*3354 *112	41681	11567 (27.75)	2676 (6.42)	14673 (35.20)
Panchayats Samitis	**333	8883	2648 (29.80)	603 (6.78)	3090 (34.78)
Zilla Parishads	18	755	206 (27.28)	52 (6.88)	258 (34.17)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages.

* out of 3354 Gram Panchayats, there were no elected bodies in 112 DGHC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Councils) areas.

**4 Panchayat Samities in DGHC area have no elected bodies.

From the panchayati raj election 2008 table we find that there was a three tier system of panchayat, Gram panchayat, Panchayat samity and Zilla Parishads and their numbers are **3354 **112, **333 and 18. And the total number of elected members of the three tiers are 41681, 8883 and 755. And in cases of SCs, STs and Women in Gram panchayat level was 11567(27.75), 2674(6.42) and

14673(35.20). In the panchayat samity total number of SC candidate was 2648(29.80percent) and the participation of total number of ST candidate was 603(6.78 percent) the participation of women in Panchayat samity were 3090(34.78 percent). The elected member of SCs in cases of Zilla Parishads is 206(27.28 percent) the elected ST member was 52(6.88 percent) and the elected women member was 258(34.17 percent).

From the above 2008, table of the panchayati raj system of West Bengal we find it that, there was a good number of participation of women in each tiers of panchayati raj system in. But in cases of Gram panchayat the percentage of the participation of women was high (35.20 percent) as compare to Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad (Methew & Buch, 2000, p.619).

4.2. Andhra Pradesh panchayat and the participation of women:

The state of Andhra Pradesh consists of three distinct religious-the coastal region comprising nine eastern districts, generally called Andhra; the interior region called Rayalaseema consisting of four south-western districts; and the Telengana region, consisting of the capital Hyderabad and nine adjoining districts in the north-western part of the state. Andhra Pradesh was the first state in India that was created on a purely linguistic basis. The coastal region is considered the most developed and prosperous, whereas Telangana is seen as the most backward. (Baviskar and Methew, 2009, p.80-81). Andhra Pradesh is one of the two Indian states which had taken a lead in introducing the system of Panchayat Raj in 1959. The Three tier system of Panchayati Raj in the state based on the Acts Viz.,

- a) The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959
- b) The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayats Act. 1964
- c) The Andhra Pradesh District Boards Act 1920 and
- d) The Andhra Pradesh (Telengana Area) District Boards 1955.

In order to revitalize and strengthen the system of Panchyati Raj the State Government adopted the Andhra Pradesh mondal Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Abvhirvuth Samuksha mondals Act (1986).(Chandrashekhar, 1999, p.21).

After the 73rd constitutional amendment in 1992, the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, replaced the earlier Act of 1964 and 1986. Elections were held in 1995 to the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) at all the three levels. Fresh elections were due for PRIs in 2000, but were postponed for some reason or the other for about a year. Finally, elections to mandal parishads and zilla parishads were held in July 2001 and gram panchayat elections were held in August 2001 in Andhra Pradesh (Baviskar and Methew, 2009, p.82).

4.2.1. Post 73rd Amendment Developments:

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 enacted on 21 April of the same year replaced the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayats Act, 1964 and the Andhra Pradesh Mandala Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Sameeksha Mandals Act, 1986. The 1994 act provided for a three-tier structure-gram panchayat at the village level, mandal parishad at the mandal level and zilla parishad at the district level. The word 'praja', in the erstwhile 'mandal praja' parishad and zilla praja parishad has been dropped in the new act.

4.2.2. Gram Sabha:

Under the 1994 act there shall be a gram sabha at the village level comprising all the voters. It must meet at least twice a year under the chairpersonship of the sarpanch. The gram sabha considers all matters relating to the annual statement of accounts of the gram panchayat, its report on administration, development programmes of the village, new schemes and tax proposals.

4.2.3. Gram Panchayat:

A gram panchayat comprises 5 to 21 members depending upon the population of the village. The members of the gram panchayat are directly elected by the gram sabha. For this purpose the village is divided into wards, and one member is elected from each ward. Provision has also been made for the reservation of seats in the gram panchayat for persons belonging to scheduled castes (SCs) and

scheduled tribes (STs) in proportion to their population by rotation. Similarly, one- third seats are reserved for backward classes (BCs) and another one- third for women (including seats reserved for women in each of the reserved categories).

Each gram panchayat is headed by a sarpanch who is directly elected by the voters of a village. His term of office is five years. The up-sarpanch is elected by the gram panchayat. There is reservation for the post of sarpanch for members belonging to their population in the state. The important functions include maintenance of government roads and buildings provision of street lights, supplying drinking water, sanitation, primary education, cooperatives, agricultural development and housing. The gram panchayats are also vested with taxation powers.

4.2.4. Mandal Parishad:

The act provides for the formation of a mandal parishad for each mandal. A mandal parishad consists of members directly elected from the territorial constituencies consisting of population between 3,000 and 4,000, the members of the Lok Sabha and MLAs representing a constituency which comprises wholly or partly the mandal, as well as any member of the Rajya Sabha who is a registered voter in the mandal. One person belonging to the minorities is also to be co opted by the elected members. The elected members of the mandal parishad alone are eligible to contest or vote in the election to the offices of president/ vice president of a mandal parishad.

Seats are reserved for SCs and STs in proportion to their population in the mandal and by rotation between different constituencies. One-third of the seats are reserved for BCs by rotation. Similarly, one-third seats are reserved for women. This includes one-third seats allotted to women in each of the reserved categories. The important functions of the Mandal Parishad are: community development, agricultural development, animal husbandry and fisheries, rural health and sanitation. Other areas of work include land development, irrigation, roads, electricity, education anti-poverty programmes, women and child welfare.

4.2.5. Zilla Parishad:

The 1994 act provides for a zilla parishad for each district (except the district of Hyderabad). Zilla parishad has seven standing committees: (i) Planning and finance; (ii) rural development, (iii) agriculture, (iv) education, and medical services, (v) women's welfare (vi) social welfare, and (vii) works. Standing committees have the chairperson of the zilla parishad as an ex-officio member. The other members are nominated by the chairperson. The important sources of income of the zilla parishad are central or state government funds, grants coming from various bodies to develop villages and small scale industries, share of the land cess, local cess, state taxes, income from enterprises, endowments or trusts administered by the zilla parishad, contributions from mandals and annual grants from the government at the rate of two rupees per person residing in the district. (Methew & Buch, pp.54-56)

4.2.6. Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Election 1995:

ANDHRA PRADESH

Panchayats at a Glance

Elected Members (1995)					
	Nos.	Total	SCs	STs	Women
Gram Panchayats	21943	230529	38674 (16.77)	15304 (6.64)	78000 (33.84)
Kshetra Parishads	1093	14644	789 (5.39)	803 (5.48)	5420 (37.01)
Zilla Parishads	22	1093	128 (11.71)	66 (6.04)	363 (33.21)

Elections to PRIs in Fifth Schedule Areas were held in 1998.

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

From the above table we find the clear idea about the 1995 election of the state Andhra Pradesh. In cases of Gram Panchayat election of 1995, the total number of Gram Panchayat was 21943

and the total elected member of that gram panchayat was 230529, and out of those total candidates there was a distribution of seats among SCs, STs and the women. In cases of SCs the total appointed candidates in panchayat was 38674(16.77%), reserved seats for the STs was 15304(6.64%),and out of that total seats 78000(33.84) was reserved for the women. After that when we start describing the data of mandal panchayat of 1995, it is clear that the total number of mandal panchayat was 1093 and among those panchayats the elected number was 14644. Out of that total elected numbers 789(5.39) seats reserved for the SCs and seats reserved for the STs was 803(5.48). And in cases of mandal parishad total number of seats reserved for the women was 5420 (37.01). if we follow the zilla parishad election of 1995 we see that the number of zilla parishad is 22 and total elected candidate of zilla parishad is 1093, out of that total seats reserved for the SCs is 128 (11.71 percent).

After analysing the three tier of the Andhra Pradesh panchayat we can easily understand that in every stage gram panchayat, mandal parishad and zilla parishad. There was a good number of participation of women and their percentage was good .In cases of mandal panchayat panachayat women participation was high, 37.01 percentage.

5. Supports and obstacles: Analysis of the conditions

5.1. West Bengal:

Although there are many factors which play a very important role for the participation as well as the empowerment of women in politics but most important factors are the education and economy. Without these women as well as overall societal development never be possible.

5.1.1. Education:

Education plays a crucial role in social and economic development of a country. It can also help in the development of human civilization through reducing poverty, ignorance, exclusion etc. So education must be provided in every section in our society specially marginalized sections who are the deprived class in our

society. After completing the elementary and secondary education attention must be provided on higher education. According to ASHE (Annual Status of Higher Education of states and UTs in India) 2013 total enrolment of students in regular mode in higher education in India is around 241.8 lakh with 55.7% male and 44.2% female enrolment. In India women consist half of the total population, but there enrolment in higher education is lower than men's enrolment. In word Swami Vivekananda "women must be educated, for it is the women who mould the next generation and hence the destiny of the country". But present picture is different, according to 2001 census report women are consist 48.2% of the total population but they have had limited access to higher education (Day & Halder, <http://www.ijhsss.com>).

Various plans & policies have been formulated by our government for women in Higher Education.

1. Coaching Facility.
2. Scholarship facility
3. Hostels' facility
4. Capacities building for Women Managers in Higher Education and during 11th plan, some approaches are being taken. (Day & Halder, <http://www.ijhsss.com>).

5.1.2. Economy:

West Bengal is situated on the eastern part of India. The state has a total area of 88,752 square kilometers (34,267 sq mi). It is bounded by Sikkim and Bhutan on the north, by the Nepal on the North West, by Bangladesh and Assam on the east, by Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa on the west and south-west and Bay of Bengal on the south. In 2009-10, the territory sector of the economy (service industries) was the largest contribution to the gross domestic product of the state, contributing 57.8% of the state domestic product compared to 24% from primary sector (agriculture, forestry, mining) and 18.2% from secondary sector (industrial and manufacturing). Agriculture is leading occupation in West Bengal (<https://en.wikipedia.org>). The state has been experiencing a steady economic growth. When India

has grown 6.48 percent, West Bengal has grown 6.55 percent as per CSO's report published on 18th August; 2012. GSDP growth in West Bengal was higher than the national average for 2011-12. Growth rate in National Average of GDP as Current prices in 2011-12 was 15.02%, while Growth rate in GDP in West Bengal for the same period was 15.87%. Growth rate in National Average of GDP at constant prices in 2011-12 was 6.48%, while Growth Rate in GDP in West Bengal for the same period was 6.55%. Similarly, the growth rate in Per Capita Net Domestic Product at Current Prices for 2011-12 for West Bengal was 14.86% as against the National Average of 13.64% during the same period (FDI inflows for RBI, Kolkata).

5.1.3. Key agricultural product of West Bengal:

- ▶ Rice, eggplant, cabbage, cauliflower and sugarcane are the top five crops of the state. In 2007-08, the total production of these major crops was over 26.3 million tonnes, accounting for over 82 percent of the total crop production of the state.
- ▶ Rice is the principle food crop of West Bengal. West Bengal is the largest production of rice in India an annual output of 14.7 million tonnes.
- ▶ Other major food crops include maize, pulses, oil seeds, wheat, barley and vegetable.
- ▶ Tea is another important cash crop. Tea garden in the state is located in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, the two northern districts of West Bengal (www.ibef.org, April, 2010).

5.2. Andhra Pradesh:

If we analyze the Andhra Pradesh decentralization or panchayat raj system a real picture came to us that the participation of women or men in politics depend some of the important related factors. These are

5.2.1. Education:

The increase in literacy in A.P, especially in rural areas is quite remarkable. In A.P, literacy level has increase from 44.09% in

1991 to 60.47% in 2001. With 73% of the population living in rural areas, whose spatial distribution is unequal, the state has recorded a growth of 18.76 points in rural areas which is higher than the urban areas. But even in 2001, when compared to the literacy rate in urban areas (76.9%), the rural literacy rate (54.5%) lags behind urban areas with a huge gap of 22.4 points. It necessitates us to assess the challenges in spreading education and revisit the efforts which have helped us to come so far and also to make necessary amendments to face the challenge. Similarly there is a significant increase in literacy among SC and ST population in the state. Among SC literacy rate has increased from 31.59% in 1991 to 53.52% in 2001 and points increase in both groups. Nonetheless, the fact that they are still lagging makes it essential to pay greater attention to bring them on equal status. And it is important to point out that as per 2011 census Andhra Pradesh female literacy rate is 59.7% that is better than the previous position (Centre for good governance, Hyderabad).

5.2.2. Economy:

Economy is the backbone of the society. In terms of gross domestic product and per capita income and the impact of growth on the quantity and quality of employment, on inequality and poverty, state policy and the allocation of (budget) resources, all play an important role in human development (www.aponline.gov.in). The growth in the state of Andhra Pradesh was mainly driven by agriculture, industry service sectors. The priority areas of the state the economy include food processing, software experts, financial services, electronics, power, textile and tourism. (<https://en.wikipedia.org>).

There is some good effect in Andhra Pradesh decentralization process. The provision of two child norms, by this system population control can be possible. There was a very good contribution of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, by this act the sarpanch post was reserved for OBC women. There was a reservation for the SCs and STs, OBCs as well as the women prior to 1994; the situation has changed significantly after the implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act. As required by the 73rd Amendment reservation

post in gram panchayats is being implemented on a relation basis. Thus in each village the post of sarpanches and ward member will go to a different category each time. (Chandrashekar, March, 2000).

The increase in literacy in Andhra Pradesh, especially in rural areas is quite remarkable. In Andhra Pradesh, literacy level has increase from 44.09% in 1991 to 60.47% in 2001. And side by side economic status of the state is quite good which help the state for the socio-economic development as well as political development.

6. Significance of the study:

The study tends to bring out all those barriers, which the women members are suffering from and their role to active participation in PRIs. Social transformation for the women is an essential component in the society, and the political empowerment of women is one of the most important factors for the transformation of a society. Side by side, educational, economic and social awareness play a very important role for the participation of women in politics because when women become educationally as well as economically conscious they can participate in politics, they can share their demands in politics and empower themselves. There has been very progressive and numerous changes taking place in the field of panchayati raj system in India. The Balwant Rai Mehta study team which gave the blue print of a three tier panchayati raj structure in 1957, has given them a substantially development programmers delivery orientation. After that in 1978 Ashoke, to inquire into the working and the causes responsible for the poor performance of the PRIs and made 132 recommendations to revive the strengthen and the declining panchayati raj system in the country.

Social justice signifies making good to each member or section of the society what is 'due' unto the member or the section. Social justice is social betterment. Passion for social betterment is sometimes taken as a condition for spiritual graduation. Swami Vivekananda has woven this fabric in the following words: "Liberty is the first condition of growth. Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress and marriage and in every other thing..."

After India became independent in 1947, the Constituent

Assembly was formed under the chairmanship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to lay down the principles of governance of the country. The Constitution of India became application of India promises to secure to all its citizens social, economic and political justices; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and opportunity; and to provide among them all fraternity, assuring the dignity of individual and unity of the nation. Thus, the founding fathers, gave us the Constitution of India and we made a pledge to give to the people of India 'justice-social, economic and political' (Joshi & Narwani, 2002, pp.164-165).

Conclusion:

Education and economy plays a very big role for the betterment of a society. By the educational fulfillment women can empowerment of themselves. For the overall societal development women empowerment is important. Education is one of the most important weapons because education gives us or teaches us how to move forward in an organized way. Education makes us the complete human being. And by the educational development men or women easily can take the decision in different important factors in society. The development of a country depends on its growth of education because education is one and only tool which helps to create skilled, responsible, resourceful citizen, who actively participate in economical, political and social field in the achieving economic and technological development of a country. But it does not mean life without education is nothing, can be a life. But educations enlighten the human being to think for the society and the people who are living under it and obviously for future generation. There education should first be monopolized or concentrated in future. Education must be spreader among each and every individual. Therefore education should be the priority for every well developed as well as less developed society. So education must be provided in every section in our society specially marginalized sections who are the deprived class in our society. And a women can confidently participate in politics or in the decision making process when she become educationally aware. She can cross the limited barrier of

the society by the educational development. For that reason at first each and every women should get the chance to enter into the field of education. Side by side economic development also plays a big role for the development of society as well as the development of men and women both. Economy makes men or women self dependent, which is essential to make a strong social structure and it helps the women to participate in politics. Finally it is true to say that for the overall development of society the development of both women and men is essential. For that reason not only the government but also each individual should be conscious about the important development related factors of women and should take necessary step for the development as well as the empowerment of women. Who are playing a very big role for the establishment of a well developed society in a country like India.

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The Horrors of Citizenship: Evaluating the National Register of Citizens in Assam

Debasreeta Deb

Introduction: Locating the Problem

Citizenship, is a kind of ‘recognition’ (Isin & Turner, 2002) and a concept that essentially defines the relationship of an individual to the idea of the state (Heater, 2004, p. 2). It can be understood as a contract between the state and the individual where the former bestows political, economic, and civil rights upon the individuals who in turn have duties and responsibilities towards the state. This form of social citizenship was advocated by T.H. Marshal in his seminal work, ‘Citizenship and Social Class’. However, the concept of citizenship has undergone a shift from ancient to modern societies, as, in ancient societies, citizenship was considered as a privilege conferred on the ruling class¹ while the modern understanding of citizenship has a political connotation attached to it as it enables individuals to exercise their political power by participating in the electoral process. According to Roy(2010), this politicizing of citizenship has created a ‘crisis of citizenship’, especially in the context of the growing international migration as the nation-state is now committed to fortify itself against the illegal immigrant which is reflected in the strict immigration laws worldwide as well as the corresponding shifts in ideological basis of citizenship rooted in ‘descent’ and ‘blood ties’ i.e. *jus sanguinis* (p.3) rather than *jus soli* or ‘birth right’, as international law recognizes the right of independent states to define who may or may not be

¹ The concept of citizenship, introduced by the Greeks, was based on membership and political participation in the city-states by only the elites, as women, slaves and the poor were excluded from it.

permitted to be its citizens (Heater, 1999).

Moreover, scholars argue that the contemporary meaning of citizenship is based on the amalgamation of citizenship with nationality with the nation assumed as a homogenous entity (Brubaker, 1992; Heater, 1999) forming the basis of delineating the conditions for the inclusion of individuals to the broader socio-political community. However, Isin (2008) notes that this inclusion is often invariably associated with the exclusion of others from the same unit (p. 137) as citizenship represents the ‘politics of belonging’, defining a collective and its boundaries (Yuval-Davis et al., 2017, p. 4).

In homogeneous societies, citizenship is often an instrument of equality. However, with rising cross border migration and human movement, states have been witnessing an increasing number of cultures and identities which are shaping the citizenship laws. In such societies the concept of citizenship becomes inherently exclusionary as framing of the very term ‘citizen’ concurrently leads to the production of the ‘other’. Thus, when linked with identity, citizenship becomes an instrument at the hands of the state to categorically deny or confer rights. As Tilly (1995) puts it, states often use ethnicity or nationality as bases for forming citizenship or as grounds for exclusion from citizenship (p.9). The true test of citizenship lies in its ability to reconcile these competing identities in a heterogeneous society.

The ‘National Register of Citizens’ in Assam, a citizenship test is deeply embedded in linking citizenship with identity which threatens the existence of those who trace their ancestry to the erstwhile East Pakistan, present day Bangladesh. Assam has historically been a society formed by migrants and which has shaped its diverse and highly complex demographic composition. The birth of the NRC in Assam is rooted in the history of the state that is characterized by a hatred towards the ‘Bangladeshi’, the ‘outsider’ and a political culture dominated by debates over belongingness and citizenship. This project was backed by an emotive appeal of identifying the de jure citizens of Assam citizens and bringing a closure to the conundrum of citizenship in the state. The NRC unleashed a Pandora’s box of problems for the illiterate and impoverished who

had to run for documents to prove their citizenship which exposed the horrors entailed in the process. A number of people had to give up their land and property, as they were made to run for bureaucratic and institutional errands from one office to another, from one lawyer to another, and pay for the same from their own pockets. The case of citizenship in Assam, fractured by the exclusivist notions of identity, culture and belongingness and the attempt to produce a 'homogeneous' group of individuals by annihilating the minorities in the state is a hegemonic exercise that is only paving the way for the creation of a highly closed society. The abandoned subject in the NRC process, bereft of one's rights, is being relegated to the detention camps and foreigner's tribunals. A culturally plural society like India is not supposed to limit or deny citizenship based on one's identity rather it is expected to integrate them as individuals and humans than as members of any group and maintain the sanctity of the opening words of the Indian Preamble, 'We the people of India'.

Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to investigate the problems associated with linking citizenship with identity by analyzing the National Register of Citizens in Assam and portrays the problems of such a process of documentation in an ethnically diverse and marginalized region where citizenship and nationality overlap and demarcate one's sense of belonging. It also focuses on the possible policy responses to address the crisis of citizenship in the state.

Chronicles of the National Register of Citizens in Assam.

The NRC in Assam is the culmination of decades of anti-immigrant sentiment that has been brewing in the state since its boundaries with Bangladesh were drawn up in 1971. The history of immigration in Assam owes its origins to the Ahom rule in Assam that began in the 13th century. The Ahom rulers initiated this trend in Assam which resulted in the racial assimilation as well as cultural synthesis of the region. The Ahom kings brought people to work and settle in their kingdom and patronized the immigration of army personnel, surveyors, weavers, scholars, artists, priests etc. from Bengal. During the reign of Gadadhar Singha, surveyors were imported from Bengal and Koch Bihar for

the purpose of construction of the roads (Gait, 1926, p. 171). During the Moamariya rebellion (1769-1805), Gaurinath Singha recruited 400 army personnel from Bengal to fight the war (ibid, p. 199). The Ahom king, Rudra Singha was inclined to Sakta Hinduism and summoned from Bengal, a Bengali Brahmin priest, Krishnaram Bhattacharya who initiated him to the Sakta cult (Baruah, 1986, p. 293). He was succeeded by his elder son, Siva Singha who followed his father's footsteps of taking initiation from the priest and made him the head priest of the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati (ibid, p. 294-295). Lakshmi Singha, Rudra Singha's younger son also imported a Sakta priest from Bengal (Gait, 1926, p. 189, 194) who, along with his followers, came and settled down in Assam permanently. These Bengali priests who migrated to Assam under the royal patronage significantly contributed in strengthening the connections between Assam and Bengal. Thus, immigration in Assam during the Ahom rule happened in driblets and a sizeable portion of them assimilated and integrated with the medieval Assamese society.

The birth of the anti-immigrant sentiment in Assam, a postcolonial construction, presupposes that Assam faces a demographic, economic and cultural threat at the hands of the 'illegal immigrants', the Bangladeshis. The roots of this sentiment can be traced back to the colonial era when the trend of migration initiated by the Ahom kings was further accelerated by the British government as they encouraged and facilitated mass migration of Bengalis, both Hindu and Muslims from the then undivided Bengal province along with migrants from across India to work as peasants, traders, clerks, labourers, as Assam was uninhabited with "not a vestige of any habitation or a human being... a dreary, desolate, wilderness that seemed totally devoid of man, beast or birds". (Baruah, 1991, p. 44)² This migration continued till the twentieth century for a host of reasons, outbreak of communal riots, economic distress and natural calamities among others.³

² Major John Butler who visited Assam in between 1837-1851 pens this account of 19th century Assam as quoted by Baruah.

³ See Ahmed (2006), p. 999-1015.

The NRC traces its origins to the Assam Accord of 1985, which put an end to the six yearlong Assam Agitation (1979-1985) against the identification and deportation of foreigners from the state. This movement of the citizens against the outsider and indigenous against foreigner and claimed the lives of innumerable Bengalis, both Hindus and Muslims, perennially suspects in Assam, as the ‘threats’ by the forerunners of this movement, the Assamese ethno-nationalists.⁴ The NRC implementation was in tune with the provisions of Clause 5 of the Accord that created a threefold system of sifting illegal immigrants from legal migrants and aimed at detecting and expelling every individual who came to Assam from Bangladesh after the midnight of 24th March, 1971.⁵ This particular clause was incorporated into the Citizenship Act of 1955 under Section 6A which is particularly problematic as it leaves a gap regarding the fate of those who fall under this category and it is this gap that has been instrumentalized by the NRC to disenfranchise millions of migrants who had been settled in the state for decades.⁶

The following sections of the paper will examine the typology of the humanitarian crisis created by the implementation of the NRC in the state building on the information gathered from the 60 in-depth, semi-structured and open ended interviews conducted in the town of Silchar, located in Barak Valley of Assam between March and April 2019. To achieve this information, the interview comprised of a broad question – ‘What are the challenges that you have to face because of the NRC?’ Purposive sampling method was used for sample selection, thus consisting of those individuals whose names were absent in the Complete Draft NRC published on July 30, 2018. Barak Valley, primarily inhabited by a Bengali speaking population, the interviewees primarily belonged to this linguistic group. The interviewees included both men and women who

⁴ See, Dutta, (2012) p.104-110 .Dutta provides narratives of remembrance shared by the witnesses of the movement that indicate that the target of the Assamese agitators were the Bengalis.

⁵ See, Assam Accord and its Clauses. <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/information-services/assam-accord-and-its-clauses>

⁶ Names of the interviewees have been reproduced with due permission of the participants after explaining the research ethics to them.

belonged to different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, occupation types and educational levels and with and without their own and a parent's immigrant background.

To be qualified as a citizen beyond doubt by the NRC officials, applicants had to prove that they or their ancestors had entered Assam prior to 24th March, 1971. To do this, people were required to furnish certified copies of official documents or List A legacy documents –birth certificates, refugee registration certificates, land documents, bank/post office documents, voting records; all issued before the midnight of the said date, proof of inclusion of names in the 1951 NRC etc. All those who were born after 1971 had to furnish two sets of evidence, legacy documents to prove that their ancestors were not illegal immigrants along with List B or linkage documents to establish direct familial ties with the original person.⁷ The burden of proof under the NRC made it an instrument of exclusion as any individual unable to furnish the required evidence was to be dropped from the list.

This resulted in a hunt for documents throughout the state; people scrambled to locate age old documents, the names of their parents in archival electoral rolls to prove that their ancestors were legal citizens of the state. Procuring decade's old documents became a nightmare, not only for the illiterate and impoverished, but also for the relatively well-off sections of the society. A tiny discrepancy was reason enough to delist someone from the NRC. This was the case with Naruttam Das, a 55 year old rickshaw puller who could not prove that his father is not an illegal immigrant in the state even after submitting his father's refugee camp certificate since the archival document had developed stains on it and his father's name was not clearly visible on it. Maintaining frayed papers was an arduous task in the yesteryears when digitization was not in practice.

However, furnishing of the documents as evidence, did not guarantee a place in the NRC. Dipendra Dutta Choudhury, a former employee under the Government of Assam was left out from the list despite furnishing all correct documents. Showing frayed pieces

⁷ For a complete list of admissible documents to be submitted for the NRC, see NRC, Leaflet no 1/2015. http://www.nrcassam.nic.in/pdf/NRC%20Family%Tree_leaflet_English.pdf

of papers including his refugee registration certificate, school certificate, dating back several decades wrapped in plastic he asked in grief, “What more proofs do I have to show?”

The annual floods in Assam worsened matters by submerging settlements and washing away belongings, including important identity documents. Labonya Biswas, a fruit seller in his mid-60’s now, was born in Bangladesh and migrated to Silchar, Assam when he was only 5 years old with his parents long before 1971. To establish his father is not an illegal immigrant, he submitted his father’s post office papers dating back to 1955 along with his bank details of 1969 to establish lineage with his father. However his name was excluded from the NRC list on the ground of faulty documents. He was asked to produce his birth certificate or refugee registration certificate, both of which he had lost during the Assam floods.

The NRC also incurred huge personal costs for the applicants along all economic strata: both monetary as well as with regards to time and it was particularly challenging for the day-laborers, daily wage earners and housemaids as they lost days and weeks of work and associated income in their attempts to gather the documentation, filling up the application form as well as for appearing at the re-verification hearings which were often held at distant locations. For Joydeep Das, it was a long journey between two countries to prove his citizenship. Das, raised in Silchar, working at a private firm in Dubai made his journey to Assam to appear at a re-verification hearing as his name was excluded from the draft NRC list citing ‘doubts’ over his birth certificate and voter ID card that he had submitted. He stated that, besides the distress of leaving behind his wife and his 3 months old kid alone in Dubai, he also had to struggle to get his office leave approved, as well as incur the exorbitant travel expenses. He further expressed that despite all these challenges, there was still no guarantee of inclusion in the end.

For Radhika Mondal, a middle aged day laborer working at a construction site, and a mother of two, the exclusion of her children from the list, however meant absence from her work as she got busy with filling up the fresh citizenship claims forms at a local NGO and appearing at the verification hearings. Despite

being constantly rebuked by her employer for her absence, Mondal shared that she was helpless, and could not risk the citizenship of her young children. Mondal, who had submitted the original birth certificates of her children earlier, had to attend the verification hearing at 'Lanka', a town located 260 kilometers away from Silchar. However, this was not the end of the trial for the family as they were summoned thrice by the officials. She earned a meagre amount of Rupees 250 each day and stated at the time of the interview that she had already missed over a week's work and that the process had already cost her more than Rupees 5000, amounting to over half a month's earning, for the travel expenses. Unable to manage these expenses anymore, she had to borrow money from a local moneylender. In the same vein, Naruttam Das too had to travel over 400 kilometers to Nagaon, a city in Upper Assam to attend the re-verification hearing spending around Rupees 9000 on the whole process thereby exhausting most of his savings. As a rickshaw puller, with an inadequate daily earning to support a family of five, the loss of several days of work and earnings, running about to the NRC Seva Kendra to submit and verify the documents, had badly affected him and thus, when he was summoned again for another hearing session, at the same location, he was unable to attend it, as he had no more money to travel and insufficient resources to figure on.

The NRC process in Assam has indeed reaped some peculiar outcomes. In a particular case, Rekha Deb Nath, a middle aged woman submitted her school certificate to prove her citizenship and her father's refugee registration certificate to establish her linkage with her father who had settled in Assam before 1971. However, she was declared a foreigner when the NRC list was published. Strangely, all her siblings who submitted the same set of documents passed the citizenship test.

Twelve and fourteen year old, Ripa and Riya Chanda from Assam's Silchar town were dropped from the list because the authorities were not 'convinced' with their birth certificates and link documents. Thus, while their parents found their names in the final NRC, they did not, despite being born in Assam. This is one of the many cases of children being left out from the NRC inspite of their parents featuring on it.

Nogendra Das, a middle aged rickshaw puller complained that his wife and son went missing after the publication of the NRC list in which their names did not appear. Das, gripped with worry insisted that anxieties over citizenship had been the driving force behind this tragedy. “NRC amrare oto jalar. Ei koshto kobe sesh hoibo?” (NRC is troubling us so much. Will this suffering ever end?). These testimonials depict the human tragedy of colossal proportions created by the NRC.

The NRC implementation has also depicted the unfeasibility of implementing a document based procedure as a means to determine citizenship in a country like India, which does not have a proper documentation infrastructure in place. A basic document like the birth certificate is not available to all. Child births in India, especially in rural areas usually take place at home devoid of medical supervision and hence, such births are not registered and no birth certificates are issued. When the NRC listed birth certificates as a valid proof of citizenship, there was an attempt by such people to get false certificates made by fraudulent means in lieu of a huge sum of money. However, these certificates were easily recognized and thereafter rejected by the officials. The victims therefore lost their hard earned money with no inclusion in the end. A large section of those left out from the NRC thus consisted of children whose parents could not procure their birth certificates.

Almost one-fourth males and one-third females in Assam are illiterate (Census of India, 2011).⁸ Hence, the unlettered found it difficult to fill the application form often depending on secondary sources to fill out the forms resulting in incorrigible errors adding to their worries. Nufisa Khatun took help of her neighbor who miswrote her father’s name as Abdul Mannan instead of Mohammad Abdul Mannan. The poor lady did not make it to the list due to this inconsistency of names between her documents and the application form and was visibly traumatized.

Beyond the material impacts, the NRC ordeal had a profound effect on the physiological and as well as psychological health of the people. Almost all the interviewees complained of anxiety and stress

⁸ See, Census of India, (2011). Educational level by age and sex for population age 7 and above. <https://bit.ly/2zR3nSD>

over the uncertainties associated with the NRC and their citizenship status, while some even suffered massive health complications. Sushen Das, a carpenter by profession, aged 65, expressed that he had suffered from a stroke owing to the mental stress following the publication of the Draft NRC on July 2018 in which his name was excluded. The poor and illiterate man had submitted a wrong legacy data and seemed visibly afraid that he would be sent to Bangladesh. Nilima Dutta, a housewife in her mid-50's, met with the same fate, as she asserted that her husband suffered from a stroke and narrowly escaped paralysis, after the NRC list was published, unable to find his and their daughter's name.

The NRC which has forced every individual in the state to appear in the litmus test of citizenship reflects a deeper humanitarian and citizenship crisis in the state that is characteristic of the hatred against the 'others' and a reluctance to acknowledge, accommodate and embrace differences. NRC has been used as a weapon against those who lack the financial and material resources to produce documentation or even to defend themselves legally. It is an attempt to identify the illegal and delegitimizing the identity and existence of those who do not fit into the homogeneous construction of the 'indigenous' in the state relegating them to an 'existential peril'. This shame and fear of indignity and identity crisis has forced many to end their lives. The final list of the NRC released in August 2019 left out 1.9 million people who are effectively stateless now ("Assam final list," 2019). The United Nations has expressed its deep concern over this ethnic cleansing, however, supporters of the NRC claim that it is the only legal tool to bring a closure to the problem of illegal immigration in the state.⁹

Authorities in the state have said that those excluded from the list will have 120 days to prove their citizenship in the Foreigner's Tribunal,¹⁰ a court set up for that purpose that is notorious for arbitrary

⁹ For the full report of the UN on NRC, see UN experts: Risk of statelessness for millions and instability in Assam. (2019, July 5). <https://in.one.un.org/un-press-release/un-experts-risk-of-statelessness-for-millions-and-instability-in-assam-india/>

¹⁰ Assam final NRC list released (2019, August 31), India Today. <https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/.www.indiatoday.in/amp/india/story/assam-final-nrc-list-out-over-19-lakh-people-excluded-1593769-2019-08-31>

categorization of ‘foreigner’s’ based on the whims of the officials or targeting those who are unable to produce necessary documents. These people then languish in either of the six detention camps in Assam living a life, worse than those of criminals. An extremely poignant report of the National Human Rights Commission led by Harsh Mander on the condition of Assam’s Detention Camps portrays the harsh realities of the victims living under tremendous human distress and sufferings. Separated from their families and children for years in the detention camps, they highlight the terror which a piece of paper can cause, overshadowing human and moral considerations in the state. In his words, “detention centers lie on the dark side of both legality and humanitarian principles” (p.2).¹¹

The NRC in Assam reflects the deeper crisis of intertwining citizenship with nationality and identity making it inherently prejudiced for identifying those who trace their lineage to Assam as home landers, thus furthering a distinct idea of ‘belongingness’. Habermas(1997) thus, was in favor of unlinking citizenship from nationality, as these linkages make citizenship more rigid by categorically excluding the ‘others’ from the ambit of benefits of membership and rights as citizens.¹² This divide further creates a parallel between individuals and community where ethnicity has a universal appeal and is accepted and legitimized by the state imposing a false opposition towards others. It creates a scenario where the ‘others’ are strictly defined and set off against the ‘us’ as ‘hostile’ thus contributing to a sense of hyper nativism as it has been the case in Assam.

Conclusion: The way forward.

The consequence of the NRC is potential statelessness of millions in Assam, an abstract state of belonging to ‘nowhere’ devoid of ‘rights and recognition’. The main human right, a right which belongs to every person by virtue of their existence under threat in

¹¹ See Report on NHRC Mission to Assam’s Detention Centers. 2018.
<https://avaazpress.s3.amazonaws.com/NHRC%20Report%20Assam%20Detention%20Centres%2026%203%202018.pdf> for the detailed report on detention camps.

¹² Habermas, as quoted by Oommen, (1997) p. 240.

this context is the ‘right to nationality’. The NRC is directed towards declaring individuals ‘non-citizens’ and subsequently stripping them off their rights thereby trapping them into a bureaucratic maze of statelessness. India does not have any official policy that specifically deals with the subject of Statelessness, nor has India ratified the International Conventions dealing with this issue, the United Nations Statelessness Conventions of 1954 and 1961.¹³ This implies that any International obligations pertaining to it are not legally binding upon India. This passivity is surpassed by India’s ratification of several human rights conventions¹⁴ that makes it legally and morally binding upon her to not deport or detain the millions in Assam who fail to make it to the NRC as article 51C of the Indian constitution mandates the government to foster respect for international treaty obligations and laws. Furthermore, India is a signatory of the core principles of Human Rights as laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that places India under an international obligation to protect the right to a nationality and the avoidance of statelessness. Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states ‘right to nationality’ as a basic human right which no person shall be arbitrarily deprived of. Thus, India has reasonable restrictions regarding the withdrawal of nationality in situations where a person is most likely to become stateless and also has an international obligation which requires states to change national legislations to prevent such a situation in addition to providing procedural safeguards in terms of facilitating legal and financial aid to those excluded from the NRC to fight their cases in the foreigners’ tribunals as well as arranging for their fair and just trials before an impartial court of law. This emanates from India’s long tradition of protection of rights as enshrined in Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution dealing with the ‘equality of any person before the law and the equal protection of law’ and ‘the right to life

¹³ The 1954 Convention relating to the status of the Stateless persons and the 1951 convention on the Reduction of Statelessness are the key international conventions on this issue that establishes the rights and legal safeguards for the stateless and prevention of statelessness.

¹⁴ India has ratified international treaties such as the CEDAW (1993), ICCPR (1979) and has also signed the CAT in 1997.

and personal liberty’ respectively. As the horrors of citizenship in Assam continues, India needs to uphold the vision of the framers of the Constitution by being a tolerant and inclusive nation valuing the human rights of all and their equality before law.

The discussion regarding the procedure of the NRC and the testimonies of those who have been excluded from it thus reveals that the process of NRC was not only flawed but also arbitrary resulting in a systematic human rights violation. Daily wage earners had to incur huge financial crisis while paying for the legal expenses associated with proving one’s ‘Indianness’ and many, unable to cope with the anxiety and burden, subsequently committed suicide.¹⁵ There have also been cases where persons excluded from the NRC have been born in India and have been living all of their lives here, contributing to the society yet having to furnish evidence of citizenship. The state has maintained a deafening silence on the unfathomable plight of these victims and is planning to deport them to Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh does not recognize those excluded from the NRC as its citizens nor has it agreed to accept those branded as ‘foreigners’ by India as there exists no treaty or agreement between the two countries specifically stating the acceptance of disputed beings deported from India by Bangladesh which has repeatedly denied claims of any illegal migration between the two countries. Furthermore, the absence of any regional or bilateral discussion about the fate of those declared ‘foreigners’ in this process have pushed many individuals to the margins of ‘invisibility’.

Assam needs to take into cognizance the potential humanitarian disaster that is likely to be stirred by statelessness of the people in the region and work urgently on sealing its international boundaries to prevent further encroachment and employ stronger surveillance, thereafter working towards securing the rights of all those residing

¹⁵ See, Citizens for Justice and Peace. (2019, July 18) Citizenship and NRC related deaths in Assam. <https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/cjp.org.in/citizenship-and-nrc-relate-deaths-in-assam/amp/> for a complete list of victims who committed suicide because of the NRC. The families of the victims complained of psychological stress faced by them over the issues of not having adequate documents, or being unable to cope with the stress of having their names dropped off the list and the burden of expenditure over proving their citizenship.

within the delimited territory rather than proposing forced detention and deportations of those unable to prove their citizenship.¹⁶ As a champion of Human Rights, India should strive to guarantee the protection of the dignity and human rights of people who are unable to meet the requirements of evidence beyond their capacity rather than subjecting them to any punitive action as part of its commitment to contribute to the broader goal of fostering international peace, harmony and security. Hannah Arendt's famous phrase, 'right to have rights' serves as the moral foundation of the right of every individual to be a member of a nation-state or community as she argues only through citizenship the universal nature of human rights can be ensured (Arendt, 1951, p.298).

This journey of postcolonial Assam towards resolving its citizenship crisis induced with xenophobia and migrant related societal anxieties has resulted in unleashing unprecedented violence and turmoil in the lives of those outside the dominant monochromatic idea of a 'citizen'.¹⁷ It is imperative that citizenship becomes a more inclusive paradigm existing beyond the frontiers of a common nationality or identity, representative of the multicultural demography of the state. An alternative discourse to ensure long term peace and stability in the region needs to be built which seeks to resolve the problem of cross border migration through dialogue and diplomacy and thus arrive at a rational and harmonious framework which embraces plurality. Imprisoning and dehumanizing people who are unable to prove their citizenship and categorizing them as 'illegal' will fail India and its people because 'no human being is illegal'.¹⁸ As Martha Nussbaum puts it, only love and compassion

¹⁶ See, Government of Assam. Home and Political Department. (2012) White Paper on Foreigners Issue. <https://cjp.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/White-Paper-On-Foreigners-Issue-20-10-2012.pdf> Point 3.4.1.8 mentions that 63.79 km of the Assam-Bangladesh land and river border still remains unfenced. Such irregularities facilitate unchecked migration.

¹⁷The Assamese ethno-nationalists have tried to attach a narrow definition to the term 'citizen' with the aim of protecting their socio-political, economic and cultural interests while disenfranchising those they consider the outsiders to create a citizenship based on Assamese identity.

¹⁸ This phrase was coined by Elie Wiesel, a Nobel Prize winning Holocaust Survivor and refugee.

can make people sacrifice their self-interest for the greater well-being of others.¹⁹

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¹⁹ See, Liberalism Needs Love: A conversation with Martha Nussbaum (2014, September 3). <https://www.eurozoine.com/liberalism-needs-love/> . Nussbaum speaks of love and compassion as a means in differing societies to ensure justice and equality among its members.

Health and Educational Trajectories among the Urban Poor: An exploratory study at slums of West Delhi, India

Deepa Idnani

Introduction

Understanding middle class in India is multifarious, as the vastness and the diversity of the group poses challenges as well as prospects for the growing economy. The question raised is - What does it mean? And who comprises it? According to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) estimate, India's middle class population was 267 million in 2016. While Banerjee and Duflo (2008) identified the "middle class" in developing countries as those living between \$2 and \$10 a day. The different criteria used in India range from World Bank estimates which use income criteria to define middle class as those living between \$2 to \$10 per person per day, and further divided it into two - lower middle and upper middle class. Kharas (2010: 3) who defines the emerging new middle class in developing countries as those with daily per capita income between \$10 and \$100 in purchasing power parity terms (Kharas, 2010; World Bank, 2007; Ernst & Young, 2013; Bank of America Merrill Lynch, 2016). But going by income tax data only 3% filed tax returns and only 1.7% actually paid taxes in the year 2015-16. Thus, the middle class in India doesn't exceed 10-15% by most estimates. While Ravallion et al.(2008) in their sample use national poverty as a criteria of \$2 a day, which states that most may not fall under the category of 'middle class'. However, the vast majority of Indians living in urban slums are represented as urban poor, or the lower middle class with spending capacity of 4-6 US \$. This comprises mason, carpenters, vendors, maids, drivers etc. This

group has 1/3rd of their income for buying consumer goods, health care, tuition and children's fees (Roy, 2018). Whereas the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data of 2012 in the 69th round, approximates that there are around 33, 510 slums in India, out of which only 41% have been reported as slums by their concerned local government. The urban poor in India are vast and growing rapidly. Most migrate due to lack of proper infrastructure in rural areas, health and better employment opportunities to urban areas. However, the urban sector lacks the facilities to provide affordable housing to them, sanitation, education, and they lack the proper communication skills and qualifications to get jobs easily. The life at urban slums is very tough and challenging for most and extremely dreadful besides they have to work on their own trajectories to improve their life chances.

The present study looks at the rise of urban poor in two urban slum locations in West Delhi, situated in the capital of India. It tries to explore their engagement around education, environment and health related issues and its impact on the community. The study was conducted among 15-20 households in each slum, and used family as a unit of analysis and conducted focused group discussions with them. The analysis suggest growth in their awareness and collective engagement around issues affecting the slums like drainage or garbage disposal etc. Besides the RTE Act the changes around them and the varied policy initiatives in the government schools by the present state government since 2013 had an affirmative impact among the children and young and has given sustenance to the aspirations of the families.

A slum is small settlement of around 20 households, which are mostly temporary and live in poor, congested, unhygienic conditions and facilities. But in the Indian context, the slums assume vast size and proportion as the number of people living there is extremely high, poor housing facilities and urban infrastructure, pose a challenge.

While the UN in 2003 had tried to provide an operational definition of the slum for the first time as a group of households lacking one or more of the following-

1. Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climatic conditions;
2. Insufficient living space;
3. Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price;
4. Adequate access to sanitation in the form of private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people; and
5. Security of tenure that prevents against forced eviction.
(UN-Habitat, 2003)

This definition was later revised by the UN-Habitat (2006) to the individual household level (that is, a group of individuals living under the same roof). These definitions are based on two major characteristics- physical and legal aspect. As per the 2011 census, any specified area with population over 300 and around 60-70 households with poor infrastructure and unhygienic conditions has been notified as slums in the Indian context. However, in the Indian context, the policies and situations at the ground level and their implementation poses a challenge. In 2012, McFarlane put forth that the informality experienced by the slum dwellers is dynamic and changing all the time, so it is imperative to monitor continuously implemented policies, which are changing due to the challenges faced by them in the slum.

Location of the slums-

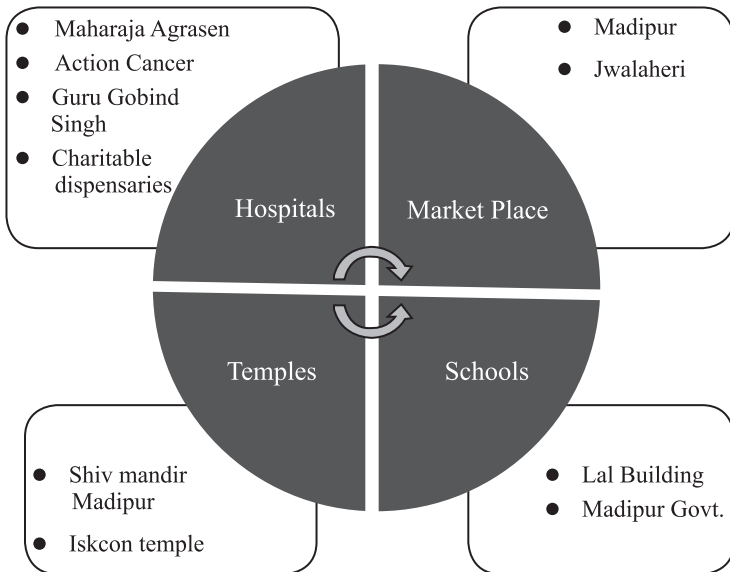
The present study was conducted at two urban slums of the capital of India, New Delhi. The location of the slum is at West Delhi and was selected as it is close to an industrial area and proximity to residential area and health care centres. The study is based at Punjabi Bagh Road No.77 and another at Madipur slums.

A brief descriptions about both the slums -.

Punjabi Bagh Road No.77 slum is situated near the affluent area of Punjabi Bagh West in West Delhi. The neighbourhood developed in the early 1960's as Hindus and Sikhs who had migrated from Pakistan came to settle here and were allocated land here and it was

popularly known as Refugee Colony. The area is now developed with huge bungalows and also has commercial institutions like banks, restaurants, shops and stores of big brands like Star Bucks, Bikanerwala, Titan etc. The area is close to the Ring Road and is well connected by road, bus and the metro. The neighbourhood has reputed schools, ISKCON temple and Club for recreation. Most of the male residents were working as cabdrivers and women were mostly at home, with some working as domestic maids in the residential areas. The Punjabi Bagh club is popular and used for recreation and cultural events.

Location of the slum-



Madipur Slum is a small census town, located in West Delhi. The area is located near one of the leading female footwear industry. It is surrounded by affluent neighbourhood of Paschim Vihar, Rajouri Garden and Vishnu Garden. Most of the slum dwellers had migrated from neighboring states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. The houses were quite small and 3-10 people were staying together, overcrowding was common. The lanes were narrow and open and

clogged and garbage was lying at different places. There was an Aganwadi in the slum and NGOs used to visit to distribute sanitary napkins for girls as well as other medicines.

Aims and objectives of the study-

The aim of the project is to understand the health and educational needs of the urban slums in West Delhi. The objectives of the study were to –

- i. understand the demographic and social context of the slum;
- ii. analyse and examine the status of health, hygiene and sanitation within the slum;
- iii. ascertain their awareness around health and access to facilities and health care provided;
- iv. access to education of children in different schools and facilities provided to them;
- v. examine the provisions of the Right to education (RTE) especially the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) category and it's access to them;

Methodology of the study-

The slum were chosen as they were in existence for more than 20 years and their proximity to industrial and residential area. The study was particularly interested in considering health and education contexts at both the sites from August - December 2018. A brief survey was conducted of both slums to understand the infrastructure, facilities, access etc. to ascertain the demographic and social context of the slum. Each household was used as a unit of analysis. Within the household, family members extended from 3-8 in each house and focused group discussion were carried out with them as per their availability and convenience which lasted for 20-45 minutes in 15-20 households in each slum which were selected randomly. The age range varied from 12 years to around 70 years among the respondents.

In the next section, the findings from the present study are

presented below:-

Education-

Education is central to the understanding of urban slums, as it provides an idea of the aspirations and complexities at play, as most of the studies suggest that parents have aspirations for their children. In both the slums the children were enrolled in the nearby municipal school for primary classes, and the government schools for the secondary classes. In the Madipur slum, the students were attending a mix of schools ranging from government, public, religious charitable institutions, or schools run by NGOs. The residents narrated administrative matters related to admission process and the difficulties they faced and other challenges (as most children were born in the native town of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and getting birth certificate and the paper work associated with it posed challenges) for them. At the Madipur Slum, the resident were mostly farmers and casual labourers and narrated that they would visit their native place during the harvesting season and would take their children along with them, which would hamper their studies and students found it difficult to cope up with studies at school and mostly relied on tuitions.

The study also tried to look at the varied provisions of the RTE especially related to the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category and tried to gather if the residents had been able to take advantage of the provisions for education as mentioned in the RTE and the encounters faced by them, besides the challenges and problems associated with it. At the Punjabi Bagh slum, the children among the slums had taken advantage of the provisions of the Economical Weaker Sections (EWS) RTE Act with the help of intermediaries, and some had gained access in nearby public schools with inordinate difficulties. During the interview, parents praised the work of the present government at Delhi in government schools and appreciated marked improvement in infrastructural facilities and resources. There was awareness among the parents, about the government policies and programmes related to education like free textbooks, uniform, Mid-Day Meal, scholarships etc. The findings of the study reveal that gender inequality was common, boys were

going to public schools and girls were enrolled in government school as they were seen as a burden, as they will eventually get married and go away to their new home. But some parents were keen to get their girls educated and take up jobs and not be dependent on anyone. It was also seen that some of the boys in the age group 10-18 years had dropped off from school, and were seen in the slums doing odd jobs or were at home (slum), while girls helped their parents in household chores and looking after their siblings, apart from helping their parents to supplement their household income by making paper bags, shoe boxes etc. which they got from the nearby industrial units.

In discerning about education the following case study from Madipur Slum stands out, as the determination and aspirations to pursue their dreams was seen in these girls-

Case studies-

Two cousins, Afsana and Rubina study in class XI and class X respectively. Afsana, said she wanted to be a medical doctor. But when asked about her stream, she said 'arts' so she was informed that it was not possible to become a medical doctor with this stream. She said that she sews soft toys along with her mother and supply them to nearby factories to supplement her household income, as her father had expired when she was quite young. Rubina was in class X and was doing well in her studies and gave tuitions to younger children in the slum to earn some money for her own expenses and further studies, as she wanted to be a teacher and pursue her Graduation. Another girl Shahin, had finished Graduation and was working in a Call Centre .

However, the senior citizens among the slums expressed their desire to study even at this age and wanted the government to provide facilities and support, but most said that they were illiterate or had studied in the village school up to class V or VIII, and they had to drop out of studies due to poor financial condition, large families to take care of, or had to take care of their younger siblings. or secondary school was far away so they could not attend.

Health:

The Constitution of India guarantees right to equal opportunities and facilities to all children to develop in a healthy manner. Health of the citizens has assumed priority in recent times in most countries, some of them have shaped it in the health curriculum for its citizens like in Australia (see Leahy, 2012; Lupton, 1995, 1999; St. Ledger, 2006). However a similar trend is seen in other countries as well, like in the United States (Vander Schee, 2008), Canada (Gard and Leahy, 2009), United Kingdom (Rich, 2011a), as it stems from the government desire to have healthy and productive life for citizens so many schemes have been launched by the government at the centre and the state. In the slums in the urban areas, health and sanitation posed a great challenge to its citizens, however the government initiative of Swachh Bharat Mission has been popular among the respondents, and they were aware about it and wanted their surroundings to be neat and clean.

The basic infrastructure at Punjabi Bagh slum was improved than Madipur slum. The density of population, overcrowding, narrow lanes, poor sanitation, open and clogged drains, pose a difficult situation for the health and hygiene situation of the slum. The houses were one storey to three storey pucca in both the slums with basic infrastructure in them however they were crowded with poor lighting and ventilation. The environment in the slum was not conducive for a healthy living and chances for infection and illnesses were quite high. Some of the resident had television, refrigerator, washing machine, air-conditioner, motor bike, scooter, and music system etc. which was seen at Punjabi Bagh slum much more than at Madipur slum, which is a reflection on the economic earning and lifestyle of the slum dwellers as well.



1.1



1.2



1.3

1.1, 1.2, 1.3- Pictures from the Madipur Slum

Cleanliness in the slum and the surroundings is one of the primary concerns as it poses challenge to health of the people within the community. Most of the slum dwellers responded that there were better health care facilities for them in the city, that is in the urban areas than in the rural areas from where they had migrated, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan.

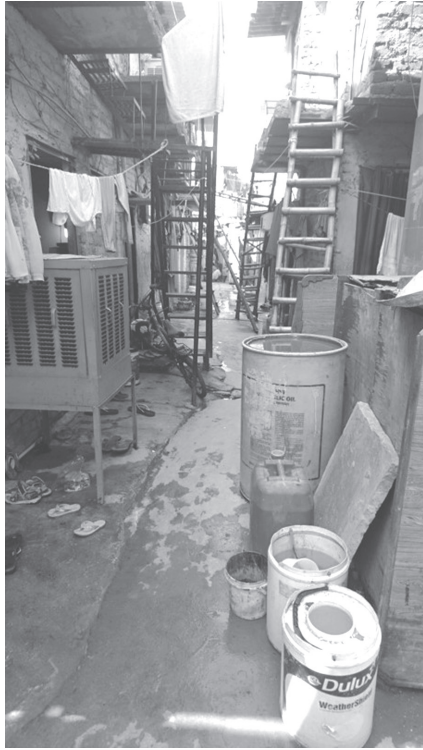
The issue of health and sanitation are complementary as poor quality of water, hygiene and sanitary conditions resulted in spread of water borne diseases and in increasing the financial burden among the families. These issues get further aggravated among the young children as their health deteriorates, due to environmental factors and thereby leading to infant mortality and poor child health sickness, diseases and malnutrition, which may affect their overall development and chances of survival.

Further the varied aspects related to personal hygiene revealed during the study are as follows:

Some of the respondents reported that water is a scarcity becomes acute in the summer months, as a result they are unable to take bath or wash clothes daily. Quite a few reported poor oral hygiene with respect to brushing and cleaning their teeth, keeping their hair clean, or using soap after going to the toilet, and washing hands after meals.

Despite the poor conditions, one initiative is remarkable as was narrated and seen in the Punjabi Bagh slum, which was taken by women who had formed Self-Help Group (SHG) to take care of sanitation in the slum, as during rains, the water get clogged and enter their homes. So they all initiated a campaign to create awareness and monitor throwing of polythene or garbage in the drains, and to avoid disposing off waste in the open. The respondents reported that municipal workers are not regular in collecting garbage as a result it piles up and overflows and accumulates and blocks the drainage system in the slum. It also becomes a dumping ground for garbage and leads to infection, foul smell and breeding site for mosquitoes leading to diarrhoea and other skin diseases among the residents.

The health services are provided mainly through government hospitals, health centers and private medical practitioners. These facilities are provided through a two-tier system with the dispensary at the local level and referral to the nearest government hospital for serious ailments. But mostly they also access and approach the government hospitals directly as two- three hospitals were very close by. There were also untrained, semi trained women birth attendants available in the slums, who help in the delivery of children in the slum and residents sometimes rely on them for child birth. There were some NGOs also working in the area, which provide free anti-natal care, immunization for pregnant mothers and young children. They train and employ female workers from the slum to be health workers, and support them to spread awareness about health education, personal hygiene, family planning methods. There was high risk for infection, water borne and vector borne diseases like diarrhoea, dengue and malaria due to poor hygienic conditions.



1.4

1.5



1.4, 1.5 - Pictures from the Punjabi Bagh Road No.77 Slum

Most of the girls and women were quite aware of menstrual hygiene and had access to free sanitary pads from the schools or from different Non –governmental agencies who came to distribute them within the slum on a regular basis. The school going girls also narrated that in the school they were provided with mid-day meals, milk and iron tablets to control anemia. There was a government polyclinic within the slum, but most reported that they visit nearby government hospitals, as the polyclinic did not have adequate facilities. Within the slum, there was an Aganwadi where infants were provided day- care facilities. They also provide medical facilities to pregnant and lactating mothers.

Case Studies

During an interview, one of the female respondent Shobha said: ‘That all politicians before coming to power make big promises to get votes, but when they win and come to power, they forget their promises, and don’t think about their problems’.

Another interview with an old man Babul who was running a tea stall for many years, said about the lower cost of electricity and free water supply up to 20,000 litres per month done by the present government has helped the community meet their daily needs and reduced their household expenditure, and there is inclination to save water and electricity within the slum.

The above mentioned statement shows that people are quite happy with the lowering of prices of electricity and water bills. Another interview with an old lady Maya regarding the difficulties faced during the demonetization done by national government last year, she narrated that they had to face extreme difficulties as cash flow was meagre but as it is for the nation’s benefit, she supported the policies of the central government. Some of the resident worked as casual labourers, and some in nearby factories, but most of the women worked as maids in the nearby residential areas. A resident Jagdish also narrated that minor accidents take place in the factory they work, however they hardly get any compensation from the employer.

Discussion:

Slums are an urban manifestation which emanates into existence on account of various reasons which may range from personal, social to contextual like migration from rural to urban areas, due to poverty, jobs, health care etc. The urban areas are dependent on the slums for unskilled and semi-skilled manpower, apart from daily household items and civic facilities. Government agencies and NGOs have flung into action and initiated several measures to improve the plight of slum dwellers and make the slum areas liveable for the habitants as of late they are viewed as effective agents in the process of urban development rather than burden on urban infrastructure. In the capital city of the country, New Delhi, slums are a reality and it is a multi-dimensional issue, however the pressure it poses on resources is tremendous and wide range of factors attribute to its occurrence.

The UN Millennium Development Goals aims to improve the lives of 100 million slum dwellers worldwide by 2020 (United Nations, 2015a). This goal has received a tremendous boost in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, where the focus is to reduce poverty and hunger. (For details see United Nations, 2015b). In India, the government with its policies and legislations like Swachh Bharat, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY), Pradhan Mantri AwasYojana, Ayushman Bharat, Rajiv Rinn Yojana (RRY) etc. have tried to improve the lives of slum dwellers across the country.

The rural-urban migration, and access to better resources, facilities and infrastructure is a boon for people coming to Delhi. However with poor and expensive housing facilities, most prefer to stay in the slums. In both the slums, economic condition was acute and most relied on the informal sector. In the Punjabi Bagh slum men, were mostly cab drivers, casual labourers, while in the Madipur slum mostly construction workers, casual wage earners and working in neighbouring industrial and residential area. But most were on daily wage and did not have any fixed source of income. While most women in both the slums stayed at home, some were working as maids in the nearby residential area. The

jobs and employment opportunities for the young were limited and they mostly were used as helpers for odd jobs like in plumbing, road side eateries or shops.

The respondent's also mentioned the presence of intermediaries who were powerful in the area, and could get the work done easily. This was seen largely in the EWS admission in public school. Recent literature (Rains et al. 2018; Auerbach and Thachil, 2016; Krishna 2002) also put forth in their discussion that how they were able to get admission to public schools. This is quite evident in the Punjabi Bagh slum and the residents mentioned it during the focus group discussion, that there were some slum leaders, who had contacts with the schools and helped them to gain admission in the public school. Some narrated their experience of not getting admission due to birth certificates, voter ID or Aadhar and the encounters or challenges, bureaucratic hurdles they faced to access services.

It was also evident that some of them had refrigerators, LED TV, washing machine, air-conditioners and cars in the slums as well, which showed that they were earning well and had improved their lifestyle. Some of the teenagers and young were seen with smart mobile phones; they were not going to school or higher education institute but were seen roaming around in the slum.

The poor sewage networks, sanitation and hygiene posed serious challenge to slum dwellers, but nevertheless water taps and electricity meter were provided which was quite expedient for the residents. Access to hospitals and dispensaries nearby was somewhat advantageous to them, as they spent around 1-4% monthly earning during these visits. Some of the residents suffered from chronic to serious ailments, apart from infections or water borne diseases which were reported very often.

Conclusion:

Slums pose a challenge for urban development, but in reality if we see the cities and their neighborhood are dependent on them for providing them with services, facilities and work as a buffer for them. Housing poses a challenge for them when they migrate from rural areas due to various factors or context, but largely due to poverty. In both the slums, the respondent were trying to cope

up with the challenges, but health was an issue which affected the families and major amount of their earning was being spent on it. The respondents were quite aware and responded favourably to the present government's policies and schemes for electricity and water in Delhi. Overall in both the slums, children were enrolled and were attending the government schools. However at the Punjabi Bagh slum, some of the students were enrolled in public schools under the EWS category with respect to RTE. The parents were mostly illiterate or educated till primary or secondary classes, but they had aspirations for their children to be educated. Even the students were aware and some in senior secondary classes had completed graduation and were working in nearby shops, Call Centre or giving tuitions. Quite a few people narrated their experiences during demonetization and the problems they faced and how they lost jobs and faced unemployment for months, which affected the families in both the slums. Overall environment in the slum was small rooms, cramped, overcrowded, narrow lanes and full of dirty surroundings and poor sanitation and hygiene. They were visiting nearby government dispensaries or hospitals and spending on health related issues.

The results of the study indicate the problems faced by the slum dwellers, yet it is evident that they have also realised that it is important to take initiative on their own and try to look and solve their problems themselves rather than running all the time to MCD or wait for government efforts. This manifests itself consistently in the SHG formed in the area. Apart from it, the aspirations of the parents towards studies of their children has been very positive as some have gained admission in public schools, which is a paradigm shift for school education and shows improvements in education sector at the school level. With respect to health and environment the realisation towards cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation is visible, but more concerted efforts are needed to improve the conditions of the slum dwellers, which is also dependent on their own ingenuity.

Disclaimer:

(The pseudonyms were assigned to the respondents to provide anonymity and to protect their identity and confidentiality).

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The Story Of Mahī And Sanājjāta

Samir Kumar Mukhopadhyay

Introduction:

The present paper attempts to deal with a purāṇic story, recorded in the Brahmapurāṇa¹ (XCII.1-49), from different points of view. This story describes the incestuous relation between Mother Mahī and Son Sanājjāta.

Content:

There was a famous Brāhmaṇa Dhṛtavrata by name. His wife was pretty young with exquisite beautiful physique. Sanājjāta was their only son. Unfortunately, when Sanājjāta was merely an infant, his father expired. His mother, an ignorant teenaged widow (*bāla² - vidhavā*), left him in the custody of seer Gālava and finally started to live the life of a prostitute in various places just to have her livelihood. She ultimately settled at Janasthāna, a place where people of various origins resided.

Meanwhile, Sanājjāta profoundly learned the Vedas and the Vedāngas at the residence of seer Gālava. Then he left that residence and began to enjoy prostitutes here and there. Interestingly, his daily life was absolutely peculiar. Every day he performed the duties of a Brāhmaṇa; earned enough money with the help of his scholarship; distributed his daily earnings in charity; engaged himself in regular duties after paying homage to the Brāhmaṇas and finally spent his night by enjoying prostitutes at his own sweet will. What needs a special mention is that he at last also settled at Janasthāna.

Once Sanājjāta came across Mahī. But unfortunately mother failed to recognize her own son. At that time Sanājjāta was wealthy enough while Mahī was in quest of such an affluent customer.

Naturally mother entrapped her affluent customer i.e. son both with her exquisite female beauty and polite behaviour. As a result both the mother and the son started to live together without knowing their mutual relation.

Now Sanājjāta was in the habit of taking bath in the river Gautamī Gaṅgā every morning. The place where he took bath regularly was adjacent to the dwelling of seer Gālava. It came to the notice of that seer that every morning Sanājjāta looked ugly on his way to Gautamī Gaṅgā because at that time purulent blood flew out from his leprous untidy limbs. But just after taking bath in the river, he looked gentle, bright and beautiful. This physical change in Sanājjāta amazed seer Gālava. But Sanājjāta himself was not aware of the same. However, one day Gālava, from a desire to detect the reason behind that miracle, asked Sanājjāta about his identity, wife and his daily activities. In reply Sanājjāta said that he would make Gālava aware of his particulars tomorrow.

In that night Sanājjāta and Mahī took their food and went to bed. There Sanājjāta recalled Gālava's queries. He said Mahī that though she was a harlot, she was endowed with all qualities and was extremely devoted to her husband (*pativratā, Śloka.28*) i.e. living partner. Then he, expecting that their mutual love would last till death, asked Mahī about her name, her demised husband, caste and her only abandoned son. Mahī unfolded her particulars without distorting anything. Her answer was so shocking to Sanājjāta that he suddenly fell to the floor. This incident bewildered Mahī. She naturally wanted to know whether she had hurt him or not. Sanājjāta somehow managed to regain his consciousness and revealed his identity to Mahī. Then grief struck both the mother and the son.

In the morning, Sanājjāta went to seer Gālava and unfolded his identity to his teacher. He confessed his guilt, committed unknowingly and expressed his desire to atone for the same. In reply, Gālava revealed that it was Sanājjāta's unusual dual forms, (of which the pre-bath one was associated with the sins while the post-bath one was connected with his good qualities) that actuated the sage to inquire about latter's identity. The seer further said that Sanājjāta had destroyed all his sins by taking bath in the river Gautamī Gaṅgā and that his mother would also get rid of her sins

by doing the same. Then the mother-son duo freed themselves from all sins by obeying seer's advice properly.

Thus the aforesaid Tīrtha earned for itself the names '*dhautapāpa*', '*pāpa-praṇāśana*' and '*Gālava*' respectively.

Discussion:

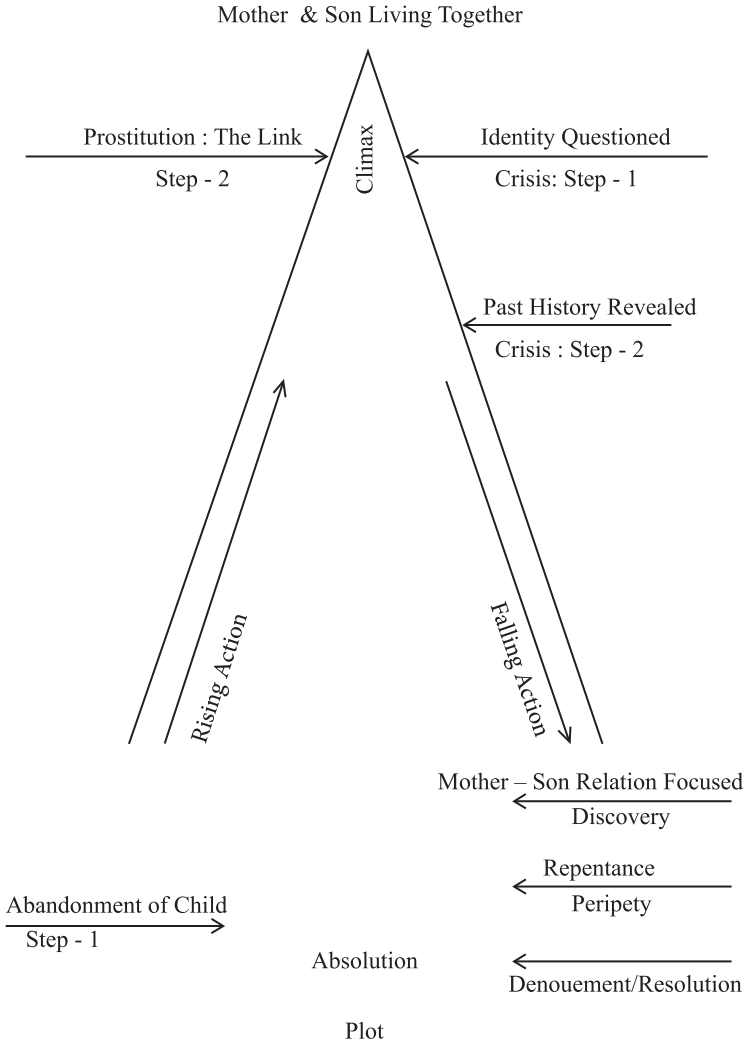
This story is a third person narrative because it is told by Brahman playing no role in the main body of the story. However the three protagonists of this story are Mahī, Sanājjāta and seer Gālava. The other characters, mentioned here, are Dhṛtavrata, God Brahman and Nārada. Its language is simple and lucid. Formation of a verse with the help of a few short interrogative sentences is really unique by nature. Thus the verse runs as:

*ko bhavān kva ca gantāsi kiṃ karoṣi kva bhokṣyasi /
kiṃ nāmā tvaṃ kva śayyā te kā te bhaārayyā vadasva me //*
(*Śloka*.24; also see *Ślokas*; 29,33 and 38)//

The whole story actually aptly illustrates the proverb *āpātaramyā viṣayāḥ paryantaparitāpinaḥ*. Besides, unique maxim like *bhūtānāṃ viṣaye prītir vatsa svābhāvīkī yataḥ* (*Śloka*.45) also deserves mention here. What is worth mentioning here is that the delineation of Sanājjāta's duel forms with the help of a few words clearly displays story-teller's immense descriptive powers.

*The plot*³ of this story is woven in *pyramidal shape* consisting of *a rising action, climax* and a falling action. In the story under discussion *the rising action* begins with the abandonment of child Sanājjāta by his own mother Mahī. It matures further when Mahī embraces prostitution as her livelihood and when lecherous Sanājjāta begins to enjoy prostitutes ignoring his respectable position in society. This *rising action*, however, reaches the *climax* when mother and son meet each other and start to live together happily without knowing their mutual relation. Now, *the falling action* opens with the facts that the miraculous physical deformity of Sanājjāta actuates seer Gālava to inquire about former's identity and that Sanājjāta consents to satisfy seer's queries next day. The *crisis* further deepens when Sanājjāta, with a desire to spend rest of his life with Mahī, wants to know her past. Her reply paves the

way for peripety by enabling Sanājāta to unearth the hard truth that his mistress is none but his own mother. Besides, *denouement* or *resolution* makes its presence felt in the plot by representing both the mother and the son as repenting after knowing their actual relation and as absolving themselves of their heinous act. Following diagram is given herewith for further clarification:



It is interesting to note that *Fate* has played key role in controlling the course of events in this story. In fact the mother-son incest would never happen, had the untimely sudden death of Dhṛtavrata not actuated his helpless wife Mahī to embrace prostitution as livelihood after abandoning their only beloved child. Thus *cosmic irony* is apparently present in the story at disposal. Moreover, the *dramatic irony* also makes its presence felt in the story through that situation where Sanājjāta is represented as sustaining the *mockery of fate* by expressing his desire to live together with his own mother for the rest of his life, of course, without knowing his actual relation with mother Mahī.

That Sanājjāta is a *true tragic hero* is evident from the fact that though he was religious-minded, an exponent of Vedic lore, wealthy and benevolent, he had weakness for prostitutes. And the said weakness actually is the source of *hamarita* that ultimately brought misery in his life by causing him to commit incest with his own mother. However, the misfortune of Mahī should be traced as *poetic justice* because she neglected her duties as a mother just to lead a lustful luxurious life (cf. *sā vabhrāma bahūn deśān puṃsakāmā kāmacāriṇī* ***// *Śloka, 5*; *mahī cāpi dhanam dātṛṇ puruṣān samapekṣate* ***// *Śloka, 9*). What is worthy of mention is that the story-teller has squarely held Mahī responsible for the lascivious nature of his son. c.f.

tat putro gālavagrhe veda-vedāṅga-pāragah /

jāto 'pi mātṛdoṣeṇa veśyeritamativabhūt // (Śloka, 6) //

Meaning:

Though her son in the hermitage of Gālava became an exponent of the Vedas and of the Vedāṅgas, [the said son], simply because of [his] mother's fault, became addicted to enjoy whores."

This story perhaps belongs to **Type 931 Oedipus**⁴. It is truly a treasure trove of *folkloric Motifs*⁵. Thus motifs, preserved here, are:-

1. P200. *The family*.
2. S0. *Cruel family*.
3. S12. *Cruel Mother*.

4. S12+. *Cruel mother abandons child in the hermitage of a seer.*
5. S301. *Children abandoned (exposed).*
6. S310. *Reasons for abandonment of children.* Absence of financial support caused mother to abandon her beloved son.
7. S321. *Destitute parents abandon children.*
8. S321+. *Destitute mother abandons children.*
9. S350. *Fate of abandoned children.* Abandoned child reared by a seer.
- 10 E600. *Care of Children.*
11. T610. *Nurture and growth of children.*
12. J152. *Wsdm (knowledge) from sage (teacher).*
13. J140. *Wisdom (knowledge) through education.*
15. W0. *Favourable traits of character.*
16. W11. *Generosity.*
17. W11.3+ . *Dutiful Brahmin spends his daily earnings in three ways :* (1) religious activities,(2) charity and (3) personal purposes.
18. W137. *Curiosity.* Curious sage wants to know the particulars of the man. .
19. L111.4. *Orphan hero.*
20. T450.3. *Prostitution to avoid starvation.*
21. N735. *Accidental meeting of mother and son.*
22. T80. *Tragic love.*
23. T400. *Illicit Sexual relations.*
23. N365. *Incest unwittingly committed.*
24. N365.1. *Boy unwittingly commits incest with his mother.*
25. T412. *Mother-Son incest.*
- 26.T450.4. *Prostitute has favourite lover.*
27. T450.4+ .*Whore-monger has favourite lover.*
28. V20. *Confession of sins.*
29. Q36. *Reward for repentance.*
30. Q36.1. *Reward for confession of sins.* Mother and son advised to take a dip in the holy river for destroying their sins and then to lead a happy normal life together.
31. Q242. *Incest punished.*
32. Q551.6. *Magic sickness as punishment.*

33. F1041.9. *Extraordinary illness.*
34. P162. *Lepers.*
35. F576. *Extraordinary ugliness.* Pre-bath invisible untidy purulent blood-stained leprous limbs of the brahmin.
36. V96.1. *Taking bath in a sacred river (Gaṅgā) [daily].*
36. F932. *Extraordinary occurrences connected with river.*
37. D1788. *Magic result from bathing.*
38. F950. *Marvellous cures.*
39. F955. *Miraculous cure for leprosy.****. Jausta a dip in the sacred river enabled sinners mother and son to regain their happy normal life by destroying their sins.
40. D2161.4.14.2. *Magic cure by bathing in consecrated water (Lake etc.).*
41. D18866. *Beautification by bathing.*
42. D52. *Changes to different appearance.*
43. Q243.1. *Prostitution punished.*
44. Q243.1+. *Whore-monger punished.*
45. Q36. *Reward for repentance.*
46. V21. *Confession brings forgiveness of sin.*
47. T412.1. *Mother guilty of incest with son forgiven by pope (Virgin Mary).* Both mother and son, held guilty of incest with each other, forgiven by seer.
48. V441. *Forgiveness.* Sage forgives his ex-student by instructing how to destroy his sins.
49. D1500.1.18.3. *Holy water as remedy.*
50. A1617. *Origin of place-name.* How the bathing place of Sanājjāta earned the titles *dhautapāpa*, *pāpapaṇāśana* and *Gālava*?
51. A980. *Origin of particular place.* How the holy place *pāpapaṇāśana* came into existence?
52. V513. *Saints have miraculous visions.*
53. V513+. *Ascetics have miraculous visions.* Daily change of brahmin's leprous physique into gentle, beautiful and bright one came exclusively to the notice of the sage.
- It is pertinent to note that Mother-son incest, the leit-motif of this story, has formed the basis of a number of tales around the world. However, presence of the name Oedipus in the Type 931 compels

us to go through that world-famous Greek mythological legend⁶ where the great tragic Hero Oedipus played key role. Now, if we collate the story at our disposal with the legend Oedipus, it will come to our notice that the superficial details of the two stories widely vary from each other. But a careful structural analysis of the two reveals that the aforesaid two stories resemble each other in the representation of the following facts:-

- (1) Parents of hero are described as alive in the beginning of the story;
- (2) The son is abandoned when he is infant;
- (3) The son is brought up not by his parents but by another kind-hearted person;
- (4) The father leaves this world long before the son meets his mother;
- (5) The mother accidentally meets her son;
- (6) Both the mother and the son fail to recognize each other;
- (7) Illicit relation between the mother and the son takes place;
- (8) An uncanny incident occurs;
- (9) Both the mother and the son succeed in identifying each other through the Intervention of a third person in their affair;
- (10) The grief-stricken mother and son repent of their sin;
- (11) They expiate;
- (12) The offspring from such union are set at defiance.

The above structural affinities between the story at hand and that of Oedipus clearly points to the fact that the former is nothing but the Indian counterpart of the latter.

Let us now try to throw light on the philosophical aspect of the story of Sanājjāta and Mahī. Eminent Philosopher Sigmund Freud has noticed a kind of psychological problem in which a *son desires his mother, and wants to get rid of his father as a rival*⁷. Freud has designated the said problem as the *Oedipus Complex* on the

excuse that the legend of Oedipus retains *the two extreme wishes that arise from son's situation – to kill his father and takes his mother to wife*⁸. In this connection, it can easily be noted that the story of Sanājjāta, the Indian counterpart of the legend of Oedipus, also aptly illustrates the said Complex. One may argue against aforesaid view by underscoring the fact that Sanājjāta is nowhere represented in the story either as killing his father or as marrying his mother. To counter this point, one can easily nullify the said view by pointing out the fact that though the story itself neither explicitly speaks of the marriage of Sanājjāta and Mahī, it indirectly acknowledge their marriage by representing son as describing his mother as *pativratā* meaning, a devoted and virtuous wife (*tvaṃ tu sarvaṅuṇopetā bandhakyapi pativratā* /*** // *Śloka*, 28). Moreover, though this purāṇic story does not record the killing of father by the son, it fulfils other condition of the *Oedipus Complex* by enabling Sanājjāta to get rid of his father by recording latter's early death. Thus the story of Sanājjāta also aptly exemplifies Freud's aforesaid *Oedipus Complex* and thereby the story deserves special mention.

Interestingly, Freud⁹ is of the view that the story-teller of the legend of Oedipus has exploited no device to suppress his own *Oedipus Complex*, latent in the core of his own mind, as a result of which the literary flavour (kāvyarasa) of the story outflowed automatically from within and thereby won the heart of all connoisseurs through the ages¹⁰. Now, though the purāṇic story in hand is hardly rich in literary merits, it lends support to Freud's aforesaid observation by representing God Brahman as story-teller because he (i.e. God Brahman) is described elsewhere¹¹ as attempting to outrage the modesty of his own daughter. In fact, Brahman would never even think of such heinous act, had he not been suffer from aforesaid *Oedipus Complex*.

Conclusion:

It appears from the above discussion that:

1. The story at hand is devoid of divinities and therefore may be designated as legend;
2. The protagonists of the story are Mahī and Sanājjāta while

Seer Gālava is described as saviour of dead Dṛtavrata's family;

3. The whole story revolves around incest between mother Mahī and son Sanājjāta and also records how merely a dip in Gautamī Gaṅgā enabled them to get rid of the sins, committed by them;

4. The only purpose of introducing the story is to glorify river Gautamī Gaṅgā and to justify why the place where Sanājjāta and his mother got rid of their sins is so called;

5. Mention of the place Janasthāna and river Gautamī Gaṅgā in the story draws our attention;

6. Leprosy is the only clinical data collected from the story;

7. The only miracle, we notice in the story, is regular origin of leprosy in Sanājjāta's physique because of incestuous act with his own mother and recovery from that disease simply by taking a dip in the river Gautamī Gaṅgā. That physical disorder exclusively in Sanājjāta's physique came to the notice of seer Gālava only also deserves special mention here;

8. The fact that absence of financial assistance to an ignorant teen-aged widow of righteous and learned Brāhmaṇa either from her relatives or from any part of the society compelled her to embrace prostitution just for her livelihood, aptly explodes the myth that Brāhmaṇas in general belonged to privileged class in the contemporary society;

9. That even well-established learned brāhmaṇas were also not free from social evils also comes to our notice;

10. That sages nourished and taught orphans in their hermitage properly also needs a special mention here;

11. The only philosophical aspect, hidden in the story, is *The Oedipus Complex*;

12. Though literary merits of the story are negligible, it appears that its plot is in pyramidal shape. That Fate played key role in the story also deserves mention here;

13. Not less than fifty folkloric motives can be traced in the story. Besides, Type of the story also comes to our notice;

14. Gālava's failure in identifying his own ex-student Sanājjāta

appears as mysterious to us;

15. That Sanājġāta's residence was not far from Gālava's Hermitage is evident from the fact that both of them met each other regularly at same place; and

16. Whether Mahī was also afflicted with leprosy is yet to be discerned.

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**“People from Nowhere”: Food, Consumption
and Marginalisation of Santhals in Hansda
Sowvendra Sekhar’s
*The Adivasi Will Not Dance***

Jayanta Rana

INTRODUCTION

■ Peter Leonard, in his book *Personality and Ideology* (1984), has defined social marginality of sections of people as a state of being “outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity”(184). In the dominant interests of the mainstream, marginalisation of a few people becomes almost inevitable. In India, the worst victims are its indigenous people. In an article titled “India, largely a country of immigrants”, published in *The Hindu*, it is claimed that “the original inhabitants of India weren’t the Dravidians but the pre-Dravidian Munda aborigines”. Their descendents now reside in parts of Chotonagpur(Jharkhand), Chhatisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. However, the tribes in India are understood in terms of their geographical locations and not quite understood as per their specific social development. In the process, the mainstream idea of tribes never points to the heterogeneous concepts of different communities or to the difference among these groups of people. The Santhals, however, are a tribe of people indigenous to Terai of Nepal and India, who live mainly in the different states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and Assam.

Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar is a doctor by profession in Jharkhand and between 2002 and 2015, he has written stories about Santhal people of Jharkhand for the anthology *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015).Sanjay Srivastava has termed this an important work the way

Hansda has rendered the “quotidian struggles and aspirations” of Santhal lives struggling under the collective pressure of non-existent infrastructure, market-driven economic interests of large corporate houses and an indifferent state power. Hansda’s scathing look at the hierarchies of power has been appreciated in his native Jharkhand. However, things changed dramatically when Jharkhand government banned the book for Hansda’s alleged portrayal of Santhal women in a bad light.

This article is trying to understand Hansda’s depiction of Santhal marginality through the food cultures and habits of that tribe, its consumption stories and the way these narratives are linked up with the oppression of the Santhal in the normative hierarchical ideals of India.

MARGINALITY AND MARGINAL SUBJECTIVITY

The marginality of the Santhals has its root in the socio-economic hierarchy of the Indian state where a marginalised tribe has relatively little control over their lives and the resources in the region. Devesh Saxena, in his article “The Problems of Marginalised Groups in India”, refers to David Laitin’s observations to chart out what this literally means for a tribe of people:

Marginality is thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security. Marginal groups can always be identified by members of dominant society, and will face irredeemable discrimination.

This discriminatory approach in our society has resulted in violations of civil, political, social-economic and cultural rights of the tribal people and other marginal sections of society in this country.

Bhattacharya and Basu, in their edited book *Marginalities in India: Themes and Perspectives* (2017), identify visible forms of marginality in different parts of India: prevalence of hunger in some pockets, forcible land acquisitions, material deprivation and exclusion of religious, ethnic and sexual minorities and tribals. One crucial aspect of this marginalisation is how marginalities are conceived and practised at the core levels:

Marginalities at the very site(s) of their occurrences, that is in customary practices, laws, codes, markets and ethico-political traditions of our society. (p.4)

With the gradual realisation of this institutional discrimination, however, the emergence of a new marginal subjectivity becomes a possibility. This is conceived through a marginalised community's "struggle, resistance and quest for identity, dignity and justice" (ibid.).

At the basic level, food is a crucial human need and no dietary regime can survive if it doesn't include protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and required minerals. On the other hand, down the ages, people's choice of food is determined also by caste, class, gender, ethnic and religious identities. But for the marginalised sections of society, food preferences are dominated by a sheer lack of choices. It has been a life of denial for them and as they get uprooted from their land, their food choices also change as per their shifting location. In Hansda's stories, food and its consumption not only depict this spatial flux but also establish food as a system of significations. Ronald Barthes (2013) elaborates on this:

... food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes information; it signifies...it is not just an indicator of a set of more or less conscious motivations, but that it is a real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication. (p24)

Hansda's stories depict the lived reality of the Santhal within a system of signs. The food stories, on the one hand, bring in the suggestions of group solidarity, communicates ideas about Santhal social status, the gender roles and the region-wise specificity in food consumption. On the other hand, these stories delineate the Santhal lives within the dominant network of exclusion, discriminations and restrictions produced at the intersection of caste, religion and the market. Food habits, food rituals and its consumption embody a crucial power play among the people involved. Here is Alison Clarke(2015) on this brand of power play:

... consumption is an arena of power in which social relations and knowledge are constantly rehearsed, rearranged and

challenged. (73)

FOOD: AN IDEOLOGICAL POWERPLAY

Hansda's story "They Eat Meat" is anthologised in his book *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. And, here, in the social arena of the power play, a conflict rages between notions of 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' food. Through these contentious ideas, two communities of people turn food into an ideological battlefield. The story is about a tribal family's right to consume the food it prefers in opposition to the dominant Hindu food practices. This could be turned as an 'aesthetic intolerance of one class against another. "They Eat Meat" situates a middle class tribal family in Vadodara. Panmuni-jhi and her husband Biram find their lives disrupted when they come to know that Vadodara as a place is not quiet associated with meat. They are told that in this city the food habits are different: "You may have to stop eating a few of the things..." (Hansda, p.3). The next bit of warning comes from their landlord: "... people here don't eat non-veg...meat, fish and chicken, eggs. Nor do they approve of people who eat non-veg" (ibid, p.6). Distinct food habits, thus, create separate groups of people. Communities of people are made, remade and forced to operate in a hierarchical society which puts limits on people's choices in what they eat or are allowed to eat. A city-space, thus, gets reduced into ghettos where separate sections of people survive with their distinct choices. While mutton and eggs are available inside CISF campus, a non-veg. item is available in the rest of the city. Within this constricted space operates another 'outsider', Mr. Rao. He has truncated his family's food habits as per the requirement of Vadodara as a distinct Hindu city. It's 'a small price' according to him, to get to live in a neat and tidy city. Hansda's story, thus, situates two families in a hierarchical social system based on the underlying notions of purity and pollution. The food regime imposed by the majority Hindu community is resulting in the marginalisation of the certain groups, violating their basic human rights. E.N. Anderson(2005) refers to Immanuel Kant's Principles of aggregation and differentiation to link the classificatory norms to tabooed food: "all must eat certain foods, often in a certain way; all must avoid certain other

foods”(p.155). However, in this story, people’s food choices further decide whether they get a decent house on rent or not. This is an effective process through which assimilation into dominant food practices are worked out.

However, in Hansda’s stories, food choice is also resistance as people stick to their food habits. The craving for “the simple sin of an egg” in “They Eat Meet” is a sign that food is a crucial to a community’s idea of itself. The Sorens stand by their own distinct culture. Massimo Montanari(2004), here, explains how food becomes culture:

Food is culture when it is eaten because man ...chooses his own food...Food takes shape as a decisive element of human identity and as one of the most effective means of expressing and communicating that identity.(p.XI-XII)

In the story, the Sorens make elaborate planning in not only procuring eggs but also in suppressing the odour as well as in dispossession of the eggshells. This elaborate planning is needed as one is supposed to be only veg-eating citizen in Vadodara.

IN SEARCH FOR FOOD: SANTHAL MIGRATION

The Adivasi Will Not Dance (2015) came under fire for the story “November is the Month of Migration” which tells the story of a Santhal girl who sells her body for fifty rupees and two cold bread *pakodas*. Hansda stood accused of writing a ‘porn’ story at the cost of poor Santhali women. However, beyond the politics of banning a book, the story remains a distressing portrayal of the predicament of migrating Santhali population. In the title story of the anthology, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, Hansda has understood impoverishment of tribals is due to insecurity of land tenure and usurpation of land by private interests and the state. This results in wide-scale migration of the Santhals as depicted in “November is the month of Migration”:

Come November, Santhal men, women and children walk down from their villages in the hills and the far-flung corners of the Santhal parganas...to Namal, the Bardhaman district of

West Bengal... (p.39).

Santhals migrate into Bengal to search for food which they get by planting “rice and other crops in farms owned by the *zamindars* of Bardhaman.” These landless labourers can neither ensure minimum wage nor better working condition for themselves. But the fight to earn one’s livelihood is so desperate that a new work-ethic is born. For Talamai Kisku, the protagonist, sex work is work through which survival on regular basis is ensured. She is looking for food along with her family members as they migrate into another state. On the way, Kisku accepts a RPF *jawan*’s ‘sex for food’ proposal:

She [Kisku] knows many girls who do that work with truck drivers and other men...Santhal women do this work for food and money at the railway station too.(Hansda,p40)

In an article published in *Hindusthan Times*, Sanjay Srivastava, has found in Hansda’s anthology of stories the multiple levels of oppression in *adivasi* lives:

Hansda’s stories are powerful narratives of multiple forms of violence towards adivasis: Dispossession from land and helplessness against the might of mining companies; the venality of politicians; the whimsy of missionaries and the hollowness of middle-class sympathies.

Dispossession from one’s own land is a crucial factor in Hansda’s story “Merely a Whore” which depicts the transformation of Lakhipur into a mine town. Farmers begin to desert their fields once a draught happened and village *zamindars* sold out to mining firms. This is how Hansda depicts the change in the story:

Villages fell, a town rose: Lakhipur, the coal-mine town. Mud-houses fell, concrete ones mushroomed. Roads, police outposts, a railway station, a bus-depot, shops, market, a slum and the busiest red-light area in the whole of the mining-zone. (p.147)

Lakhipur is another instance of how most mines and other individual projects are located in the highly dense tribal concentration of western, eastern and central Indian states. If land is the foundation for human survival and livelihood, then, the dispossession from land is a serious threat to tribal production

systems and other related activities. While landlessness resulted in migration in search for food, in Lakkhipur, it also created a red-light district in the newly developed mining-zone. Hansda is unequivocal in making his story of men and women working in tandem fundamentally a food story:

...men eat and feed their families out of what they earn after labouring for hours at a stretch within the belly of the earth... women too eat out of their sweat and labour. Only, it is also mixed with the semen and sweat of men. (p.144)

Lakkhipur is a mining town where saleable petty human labour has found a new momentum. Operating from their slum quarters, men and women wage a daily struggle for survival. Jharna di runs a brothel and knows to earn one's livelihood is a priority in life. In this story, Jharna di's new recruit, Sona, turns herself into an efficient professional for the paying consumers because it is her survival at stake:

What else will I do if I don't do this [sex-work]? Who will feed me and clothe me? (p.161)

In the market economy, some santhal women not only survive through 'Food for Sex' but they also literally get turned into consumable food. In "Eating with the Enemy", Mohini operates at the beginning as an alcohol seller but, then, she finds greater security in living in the house of a man with a regular job. Later, she accepts another man, Babu, who provides financial stability to her. In both these cases, Mohini ensures survival through her sexual saleability:

In return for on-demand sex, she [Mohini] would receive food, a clean toilet, cold air from an air-conditioner, all day entertainment from the T.V. To her, it didn't seem like a bad deal at all. (p.72)

Babu is a believer too in this exchange of favours as Mathabhangi, a minor girl learns to her chagrin:

Why am I [Babu] feeding you, buying you things? And why did your mother send you here in the first place? To eat free food? (p.78)

The paying consumer gets into the sex-act as if “sex were food”(p.158) and a satisfying climax is a requirement. However, Sona brings it upon herself when she tries to go beyond the ‘sex for food’ model in “Merely a Whore”. Her search for a marital home and an affectionate relationship ends up in humiliation. A *rendi* she remains who has to mind her own work.

FOOD: A MATERIAL AND HIERARCHICAL REALITY

Hansda believes the two ‘gifts’ of industrialization and progress in *adivasi* regions resulted in the decline of agrarian *adivasi* society and the dilution of *adivasi* culture. In “Besho-jhi”, he further writes about how the newly built copper town is threatening to gobble up Sarjomdih belonging to Purbi Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. The repercussion of development also means forcible seizure of villagers’ properties for the confrontation of new roads and the quarters for the mine workers. What gradually emerges is this monstrous Copper-town:

Concrete houses; cable television; two-wheelers and a hand-pump; a narrow winding tarmac...a primary school.(p.115)

When Besho-jhi, a widow and a branded ‘witch’ at her native village, arrives into this industrial town, her primary requirement remains food, clothes and a shelter. This also means that her employer, Sorenbabu and his wife finally could afford the luxury of a house maid:

In Besho-jhi, Pushpa [Soren’s wife] found a baby-sitter,a house-keeper,a laundry woman, a vegetable chopper, a *masala*-grinder, a fish-scaler, a back-scrubber, a scalp-masseur, a confidante and a companion.(p.117)

In this context, Besho-jhi is no different from Jharna *di*, Talamai Kisku or Sona who are marginal players in the prevalent socio-economic hierarchy. For them, food is a material reality-a nourishing substance which sustains the body and gives strength to carry on with the daily chores. On the other hand, stereotypes around the *adivasis* are rife among the upper classes. This can be understood as symbolic marginalisation through stereotyping Santhal men as

nothing better than habitual drinkers and merry-makers. In relation to that Santhal women are dismissed as good only in a sex-act: “*Saali*, you santhal women are made for this[sex-act] only.”(p.41). These stories are situating the marginalised *adivasis* in power relationships but they do develop a sense of their individuality and location in society. In a power relationship, food is thrown at hapless marginals but they can also understand it as food earned through sincere work.

Food practices, however, of the working classes belonging to Santhal identity are visibly different from those Santhals who belong in the upper echelons of the same tribe. Daniel Miller(1994) makes a crucial comment on working class taste:

A person who provides manual labour, and whose access to the basics of sustenance and comfort is not guaranteed, has a respect and desire for the sensual, physical and immediate. (p.150)

While the working class Santhals go for basic food, cheap clothes and *desi* liquor, a middle class government servant Santhal family, in the story “They Eat Meat”, can afford better food in the comforts of home or in a restaurant. This is evocative of not only the better financial state or mobility of a particular section of Santhals but also the fact that this section of people can afford to appreciate the aesthetics of an eating space outside home. On the other side of this comfort zone stands Talamai who works as a sex worker to get her food on the road in “November is the Month of Migration”.

AN ELABORATE FEAST: *BIRIYANI* AND ALCOHOL

For a few Santhal women, in Hansda’s stories, sex-work is a better choice than other forms of labour available in the tribal regions. Interestingly, this work becomes part of an elaborate feast and a celebration of consumption driven idea of life. In “Merely a Whore”, a sex worker, Sona, is treated with *pulao*, *biriyani*, mutton, chicken, fried fish, whiskey, Rum and cold drinks on various occasions by her regular client, a young transporter named Nirmal. Here, Sex is not a few minutes’ affair inside a dingy room:

Nirmal would lie on Sona’s bed, shirtless, in his trousers, or only in his briefs, smoking a Navy cut, while Sona prepared

drinks for him or served food to him on a styrofoam plate. He would feed her *pulao* and *biriyani* with his own hand...They would drink...Blender's pride whisky...He would fuck her, drunk. (p.150)

At least in her sessions with Nirmal, Sona comes to enjoy the pleasures of his company and in that idea of pleasure, these food items as well as the camaraderie over food play an important role. Alcohol and *biriyani* are considered to be 'hot' substances which can result in passionate sex. Alternatively, this male fixation with alcohol results in violent reprisals in "Eating with the Enemy". Dinanath, in "Eating with the Enemy", goes berserk when drunk and punishes both of his female partners:

There were days when Dinanath would savagely beat Sulochana in a drunken rage. Once done, he would drink more alcohol, and, to let off remaining steam, fuck Mohini equally savagely. (p.66)

However, *biriyani* and *angreji* alcohol remain 'special occasion' food and drink in the lives of these poor working women. "Eating with the Enemy" literally has a domestic help, Sulochana, melting over mutton and Bagpiper whisky duly sponsored by a businessman called Babu who in the past also attempted rape on her daughter, Mathabhangi.

CONCLUSION: A PITHY PROTEST

In Hansda Sowvendra Sekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015), complex socio-economic and cultural situations of the Santhals are delineated through food and its consumption models. Food emerges as a crucial marker of difference groups of people located in different levels of hierarchy. Hansda tells stories of Santhal migration, destruction of their traditional way of life as well as the establishment of a new industrial town. The marginalization of the Santhals is, thus, clearly linked with the neoliberal economical model initiated at the behest of the State in close links with the multinational corporate agencies. In the stories, Hansda links food with caste, class as well as locational socio-economic significations.

Another important aspect is the consumption stories of the female characters. Women's bodies are sites of patriarchal control but the dominant structures can't quite control what these women eat. The deviant consumption of biriyani, alcohol or even boiled egg in particular contexts gives us a resistance narrative. Raja and Thieme(2007) refers to Spivak's idea of "a continuum that has both complicity and resistance in its end-points"(XXVII). The title story, in Hansda's anthology, "The Adivasi Will Not Dance", in particular refers to this idea of "omplicity and resistance" continuum as Santhals both comply and resist the powerful entities of the State, market economy and the legal frameworks. Mangal Murmu emphatically says that Santhals won't be automatons anymore. It's a protest against the coal and stone merchants who take away the tribal land, resulting in a gradual loss of faith, identity and roots:

"We are losing our Sarna faith, our identities, and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere."(p.173)

The Santhals have been forced to perform *Jharkhandi* culture for food. Even there restrictions are put in place by sections of the Hindu community against a Santhal's preference for cow-meat, pig meat or *handi* liquor. The title story raises a resistant voice to reach the echelons of power in Delhi. The food, its consumption and the discourses around it, in these stories of Hansda, are, in fact, vitally aligned with the Santhals' lived reality, their marginalisation as well as in their resistance to different forms of oppression in the hierarchical socio-economic structures of India.

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Popular Culture and Indian American Identity in the United States

Sunanda Ray

As one of the least-studied ethnic groups in the United States, people of Indian origin have been overlooked by historians and social scientists, as well as by scholars of Ethnic Studies. Indian Americans are an enormously diverse group by region, language, culture and religion. Within the nation-state of India, there are different regions with different histories, different languages and different ways of practising the same religion. It is estimated that every language of India is now represented in the United States. The population of Indian-origin people in America grew by 38 per cent in seven years between 2010 and 2017, according to a South Asian advocacy group, in its latest demographic report. In 2017, the population of Indian-Americans with multiple ethnicities was recorded as 44,02,363, up by 38.3 per cent from 31,83,063 in 2010, the South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) said in its snapshot. The demographic snapshot is based primarily on Census 2010 and the 2017 American Community Survey.

(“Indian-American population grew by 38 percent between 2010-2017: Report”). In spite of their significant numbers and long residency in the United States, Indian Americans remain peripheral to any discussion of American culture, experience or history. As with many other marginalized groups, they are absent from the dominant discourse of the nation-state. Contemporary Indian Americans are contesting their position on the periphery of American life and culture.

The Karma of Brown Folk by Vijay Prashad is perhaps the first comprehensive effort to survey the understudied history of Indian Americans in the United States and the role of Orientalist imaginings of India in American culture and thought. He begins

with an assessment of the place of the “Indian” in the American thought and conceptualization, first among intellectuals, such as Thoreau and Emerson, and then in popular culture. He skilfully intertwines culture and politics in his exploration of the affiliations and antagonisms that have shaped relations between African Americans and Indian Americans historically. His book is a sincere and impassioned engagement with the role that Indian Americans in the United States could play in national and transnational struggles for social justice.

As Indian Americans have entered the United States in the past fifty years, there has been a tendency to compare their destiny with that of African Americans. Prashad focuses on the feelings, the consciousness of being Indian American, of “being *desi* (those people who claim ancestry of India)” in the United States. It is also “a set of *sutras* (aphorisms) of the *karma* (fate) of *desis*,” who must visualize themselves within the American racial formation and seek to mediate between the American dream and their own realities (viii). Prashad’s contention is that as *desis*, Indian Americans are used as a weapon in the war against black America. So Indian Americans must refuse this role and find other places for themselves in the moral struggles in the United States. He not only offers a historical look at the Indian American life but also attempts to address the dilemmas of *desi* life and suggests ways to transform their aporias.

Though Indian Americans are seen as nonwhites, they are also seen as “bearing an especial spiritual patina” (Prasad x). Both intellectual and popular culture approach the Indian American as fundamentally different from the American and subscribe to the view that the former is spiritual and the latter is pragmatic and this kind of binary is often referred to as American Orientalism. When Indian Americans come to the United States and find that the racist polity is interested in their labour and not in their lives, they try to develop a life centred around reaffirmation of ethnic identity and cultural heritage. The claim to spirituality and a higher civilization allows them to be positioned as superior to African Americans, a location that is attractive to an immigrant in search of accommodation in a racist setup. The Indian Americans provide a

role model for success, and they uncritically adopt that role without conscious reflection on the political and racial project to which it is entangled. Most Indian Americans wish to distance themselves from African Americans. Some want occasional alliance with other minorities in the United States, sometimes from fellowship, but sometimes simply to gain some of the resources for advancement guaranteed to historically oppressed and marginalized minorities.

Indian Americans divide their world into two: the outside world, the world of the work place, is a world of capital that must be exploited as much as possible, and the inside world, the world of home, is a world of culture that must be nurtured and protected. What the Indian Americans want is the best of both worlds. They take cultural refuge in the home, a place where they feel superior, powerful and dignified. The Indian American woman emerges as the repository of culture and tradition, and as long as she is able to reproduce Indian culture at home, she is encouraged to go out and work to enhance the wealth of the family.

Indian Americans are often discouraged from getting involved in radical activities for those are not in keeping with *desi* traditions and culture. *Desi* traditions are imagined to be dedicated hard work and cultural conservatism. The homeland is wielded against the second-generation Indian Americans who are forced to feel culturally inadequate and unfinished. *Desi* culture is treated as an “ahistorical trait, a fetish, that must be inhabited to avoid being suspected of cultural treason” (Prasad124). The second generation is not introduced to the complexity of their situation and to the difficulties inherent in their pastiche cultural location. Prasad suggests that rather than turning to India for pure tradition and culture, Indian Americans must be able to turn to the complexity of India in order to imbibe the elements of culture that are meaningful solutions to their own local questions.

Most young and second-generation Indian Americans do not find the model minority category useful in their social lives. For many of them, city life and culture have been the most welcoming and adaptable culture. Hip-hop is definitely a medium of living and cultural expression for people of colour and most second-generation Indian Americans feel more like people of colour than

whites. They have fashioned their cultural politics around some of the icons of black diaspora culture. Many Indian American music innovators explore and blend a variety of musical heritages such as jazz, *bhangra* and hip-hop. Though this musical fusion allows for a certain amount of social fusion, it does not create any political solidarity. Indian Americans and African Americans forge cultures to fight the disenfranchisement of their localities and also create subcultures that both enrich their lives and pit them against each other (Prasad181).

Music and other cultural products indicate the disenchantment of the youth with the false utopias of the past. As various class fragments of the Indian American community meet, there is an appreciation that the parental utopia has failed. Urban Indian Americans are forming groups in order to protect their communities and to transmit their culture to the next generation. Various activist groups in the United States are drawing in young Indian Americans and training them to fight for social justice rather than for narrow identity politics. These activists face great difficulties in their struggle to transform negative ascription to affirmation and their marginalization into mobilization. The longstanding cultural connections between Indian Americans and the African Americans help in forging inter-ethnic and anti-racist groups and alliances. The battles against employer exploitation and police harassment waged by Indian American taxi drivers in New York City help them re-create their bonds and enable them to fight ceaselessly, for what they deem to be their rights not just for themselves, but for working class people in general (Prasad 203).

Sunaina Maira in her essay, “Identity Dub: The Paradoxes of an Indian American Youth Subculture (New York Mix)” shows how the adoption of black styles by Indian American youth is less a rebellion against the power structures and more, perhaps, a generational protest against their parents’ cultural conservatism. One young woman interviewed by Maira tells her that blackness is a fleeting fashion that will be rejected once the young Indian American enters the professional life. But even at the parties, Maira notes, the adoption of *bhangra* moves allows the Indian American youth to assert their ethnic identity and distinguish themselves from blacks.

Maira examines the emergence of a second-generation Indian American youth subculture that revolves mainly around the use of music and fashion as displayed and performed at parties in Manhattan. She draws on her interviews with Indian college students in Manhattan who have grown up in the United States and come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from lower middle to upper middle class. The subculture that has sprung up around Indian music remix includes participants whose families originate from other countries of South Asia, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, but Maira dwells on Indian American youth because her research has focused on their experiences in particular. She underscores the importance of popular culture as a local context in which the students are creating and enacting ethnic, racialized, class, gender and sexual identities. She suggests that an analysis of youth subculture sheds light on the question of negotiating identities for two reasons: first, because it is an important context in which college students socialize with one another and in which they are simultaneously socialized into a particular, local culture of second-generation Indian Americans; and second, because it is a context in which the cultural contradictions of second-generation ethnic identity are, literally and symbolically, enacted.

Maira points out that in New York City, second-generation Indian American popular culture is centred around music and dance, specifically the fusion of hip-hop, rap, techno and reggae with Bollywood Hindi film music and *bhangra*. This subculture sometimes involves the performance of a culturally hybrid style. Instances of this include the juxtaposition of hip-hop fashion with Indian-style nose rings and *bindis* and performing ethnic identity through dance, as in the borrowing of folk dance gestures from *bhangra* while gyrating to club remixes. While this “remix youth culture” has emerged in other urban areas in the United States that have large Indian American population, such as Chicago and the Bay Area, these expressions are necessarily shaped by local contexts. It is clear that the New York setting lends certain distinctive features to this youth culture in Manhattan.

Theorizing the dynamics of a subculture, Maira posits that youth subcultures are based on rituals that resist the values inherent in

the dominant culture. She suggests that the creation of a subculture should be understood as “a response to the personal, political, and economic crises that youth confront on the brink of adulthood and as a means to resolve---at least symbolically---the contradictions of the ‘parent culture,’ or the larger, adult group from which youth subcultures are derived” (35). So subculture is a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm their subjectivity.

Maira points out that the Indian American youth of her study occupy very different class positions from the black and Latino youth. However, they have appropriated some elements of hip-hop from urban black and Latino youth in fashioning their own second-generation style, particularly the use of clothing, of dialect and of music. They also draw on sounds from Bollywood movies and Indian music that their parents introduced them to, in order to inculcate an Indian identity. By remixing this with rap and reggae and donning hip-hop gear or brand-name clothes, they display the “markers of ethnicity and material status used in a multiethnic, capitalistic society” (36). However, the particular ways in which ethnic or class identities are signalled depend on the specific local community and its racial and ethnic composition.

Maira argues that for Indian American youth, musical remixes and urban fashion are materials with which to construct and display a seemingly hybrid identity that symbolically juxtaposes Indian and urban American popular culture. For Indian American youth, it is easy to see the diasporic musical remix as an attempt to mediate between the expectations of first-generation immigrant parents and those of mainstream American culture by trying to integrate signs of belonging to both worlds. The first-generation parents’ desire to preserve an authentic ethnic identity lingers in the second generation, for whom being essentially Indian becomes a marker of cultural superiority. Yet Indian American youth are, simultaneously, positioning themselves in the hierarchies of race and class in American society and also coming of age in contexts formed by public institutions such as schools, colleges, universities and professions. Maira posits that a uniquely Indian American subculture thus allows second-generation youth “to socialize with

ethnic peers while reinterpreting Indian musical and dance traditions using the rituals of American popular culture” (37).

For youth in this subculture, fashion labels are symbols of buying power, but Maira suggests that in some contexts it is the “subcultural fashionability of an iconic item of style” that is more important, regardless of the “authenticity of its label” (39). Clothing and consumption rituals testify to the power of consumption as a means of cultural expression and hip-hop fashion is a good example of this sort of appropriation and critique via style. However, the class distinctions do not disappear into subcultural appropriation and mimesis. The expressions of consumption and musical remix make more complex the reaffirmation of ethnic identity and material status. Unlike the creators of hip-hop, the youth who participate in the Indian remix subculture are not using it to recognize limited opportunity for economic mobility. They do not view this culture as a resistance to a system of economic and racial stratification. On the contrary, they are keen on succeeding within that system.

Maira further postulates that hybridity, though fashionable in theory, is not always easy to live because families and communities demand loyalty to cultural ideals that may be difficult to maintain for second-generation youth. The contradictions of lived experience challenge binaries of authentic and syncretic cultural identities. While Indian American youth move among multiple social and cultural spaces, there is “a degree to which this mediation of cultures happens largely on a symbolic level,” and after the party is over, youth must return to the realities of interacting with parents, peers and communities (44). This youth subculture however does not provide an all-encompassing stage on which to enact ethnic identities.

A source of tension within the Indian American world of dance parties and social gatherings is “the contestation of heterosexual and gender roles and of racial identifications performed in these spaces” (Maira 45). For second-generation men, hip-hop style connotes an image of racialized masculinity that is the ultimate definition of “cool.” Black style is viewed as the embodiment of “a particular machismo” and the object of racialized desire. Indian American men are drawn to symbols of tough masculinity to counter

the popular construction of South Asian, and more generally Asian American, men as effeminate, an emasculated image drawn from racial stereotyping of Oriental men. On the other hand, women are expected to carry the burden of embodying pure tradition of chaste Indian womanhood, as is apparent in the double standard that applies to sexual behaviour for young Indian American women as opposed to men. Maira argues that rather than subverting the dominant tropes of cultural identities at work in the second generation, “this subculture has provided a setting in which to contain the presumed paradoxes of second-generation experiences by performing a hybrid identity that is still questioned by many of these youth themselves” (53).

She explores the subtle nuances of the youth subculture in order to illuminate the complexities of the second-generation Indian American identity politics. She has thoroughly examined the ways in which second-generation youth critique ideologies of chaste identity and overturn simplistic theoretical dichotomies through the complexities of their everyday social actions and cultural constructions. Indian American youth simultaneously participate in performances of culture that remix elements of tradition and modernity, and authentic and hybrid. She calls for a theory of identity that transcends old binaries of essentialization and hybridity while still being able to encompass both these possibilities as aspects of the lived realities of social actors. On the level of identity, individuals draw on and create different elements of cultural premises at different moments, asserting both stability and flux. One cannot posit a general theory of identity for expressions of identity vary with context and at different times in an individual’s life. Her contention is that this “conceptualization refigures the notion of identity to acknowledge the complexity of identity strategies that second-generation youth use in navigating various cultural models” (54).

In the article “Desi Music Vibes: The Performance of Indian Youth Culture in Chicago”, Gregory Diethrich like Sunaina Maira underscores Indian American youth subculture’s reliance on black urban music. Diethrich suggests that one of the most interesting aspects of Indian American youth’s search for both acceptance and

individuality in America, and a prominent aspect in Indian American music is the reliance on indices of black American culture, present in music as well as in image, style, speech and body language. His essay is based on research with the South Asian community in Chicago, specifically focusing on its youth, mostly second-generation Indian Americans. By *desi* music Diethrich means a combination of *bhangra*, hip-hop, house, techno and Bollywood film songs. It encompasses multiple fluid forms, shaped by local contexts and tastes; a particularly local Chicago identity is produced by incorporating house music, an upbeat, repetitive dance club rhythm that arose as an underground black dance music in Chicago in the 1980s.

Diethrich reads the link to black music not as a form of direct social protest but as an identification with the shared heritage of Indian Americans and African Americans as minorities, who in different ways and degrees have been oppressed. He suggests that the music of black youth is borrowed because of its strong identity-asserting role, expressing a refusal to assimilate to white culture, to stake out a distinct niche in the meaning of American. In other words, *desi* music represents less a protest than an appeal within the subculture to resist change and maintain a distinct identity. Diethrich suggests that it functions as much more than simply party music. It very consciously asserts a distinct and vital Indian American identity through the combination of popular Indian music and black house music and hip-hop; “it is more about pride than protest” (43). The affinity to blackness goes beyond borrowed musical style. Mainstream American youth culture has a romanticization of the urban black subculture and its associated music, which carry strong connotations of “coolness”. Indian American youth are often stereotyped as passive, effeminate Asians with repressed sexuality and overprotective families. Reaffirming Maira’s argument, Diethrich suggests that Indian American youth appropriate images of blackness to subvert this stereotype and flaunt coolness and masculinity.

He argues that the acceptance by the Indian American community of *desi* music as reflective of their tradition is significant considering it has few Indian references. Maira suggests that young Indian

Americans, although partaking of such hybrid popular culture, often consider it to be “diluted” or less authentically Indian. But Diethrich, through his interviews, has found that Indian Americans, rather than rejecting increased hybridity, find such music accurately representative of their hyphenated identities. He affirms that the issue of authenticity is further complicated by the basis of Hindi remixes in highly Westernized Indian film music. Even in cases where hybrid diasporic Indian music is considered to be inauthentic, film music, by far the predominant Indian musical genre consumed by Indian American communities, is considered authentic. As diasporic genres return to the homeland to assert further influence, issues of authenticity become increasingly complex.

The issue of relationships between Indian-American youth and Indian versus Western culture prompts Diethrich to introduce the concept of “twin paradoxes” of Indian American youth identity (48). On the one hand, Indian American youth require and are dependent on an authentic or traditional homeland culture because it constitutes their sense of heritage and distinguishes them as unique from other Americans. On the other hand, these youth as Americans require and depend on American culture as a significant aspect of their identity, while they are simultaneously threatened by the possibility of losing their distinctiveness and heritage. Diethrich argues that by interweaving Indian and American life experiences through music, *desi* music has created a style that these Indian American youth could truly call their own. He affirms that more than one Indian American glossed over *desi* music as the best of both worlds.

The American social mode serving as a base for *desi* culture is the dance party. For Indian American youth, music has the most important role in the mapping of social networks. The dance parties provide integrative venues for Indian Americans of highly heterogeneous backgrounds. They are highly inclusive of different regional, religious and linguistic backgrounds, serving to bond the heterogeneous groups. They create an arena for the integration of different parts of the Indian American community, providing the Indian American youth with a broader sense of its scope. Diethrich’s contention is that such unity is necessary in Indian American diasporic communities, in order for marginalized

minorities to consolidate their social and cultural power. The *desi* music is itself conducive to pan-Indian identity: the emphasis on Hindi film songs, popular throughout the Indian subcontinent and across the Indian diaspora, inherently marks such an identity. Even the presence of the regional genre *bhangra* has become a site of pan-Indian identification. Language comprehension is not an issue here; song lyrics are far more meaningful as “non-semantic indices” of Indianness than as semantic texts (49).

Thus the *desi* music scene has become a space for the creation and mediation of Indian American youth consciousness. From the extremely heterogeneous regional, religious, social and cultural heritages of these youth, *desi* music has been vital in the formation of an integrated Indian American youth community. This unity can be easily distinguished from an externally-imposed sameness constructed by the homogenizing view of Americans. Instead of portraying Indian American youth identity as a singular entity, Diethrich examines carefully the complexities of their multiple and heterogeneous identities. The formulation of *desi* music serves the dual function of bringing together diverse groups of Indian Americans within a particular diasporic community, and providing a cosmopolitan expressive form which maintains links with Indian communities in diverse locations, becoming the common language shared by all. The great impact of global capitalism and technology for strengthening diasporic links cannot be denied. Very interestingly, the *desi* music scene, by creating contexts for the community to bond, operates as a diasporic extension of traditional family relationships. *Desi* music contributes significantly to the ongoing process of identity formation among Indian American youth. Indian culture is adept at musical and social syntheses, for cultural diversity and hybridity have always been a prominent aspect of Indian history.

Just as Diethrich and Maira underscore the importance of music in shaping Indian American identity, Jigna Desai in her book *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* argues that the language of Indian American diasporic identity is the language of cinema. She suggests that film has played a significant role in the formation of Indian American diasporic cultures, partially

because of its key role in India itself. Although Hollywood cinema dominates global film culture, it is Indian cinema that produces the most films per year. Vastly understudied, unlike its Western counterpart, Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, the Bombay-based, Hindi language cinema, is also a global cinema popular in the Middle East, other parts of Asia, Africa and South Asian diaspora. Suspended between these two giant cinemas are the films of the South Asian diaspora. In her pioneering project, Desai analyzes the emergence, development and significance of contemporary South Asian diasporic cinema.

he focuses on films in English from and about the “Brown Atlantic” (South Asian diasporas in the United States, Canada, and Britain) as well as India within a transnational comparative framework. She positions South Asian diasporic cinema as an interstitial cinema located between Hollywood and Bollywood. In this regard, she studies this hybrid cinema as resulting from the transnational migratory processes engendered by capitalism and postcoloniality. She does not argue that diasporic cinema has transcended Bollywood; instead she understands “beyond” as posing hybrid possibilities forged out of Hollywood and Bollywood. The “beyond” in this context signals an investment in mobilizing an analysis of cinema to ask questions regarding significant cultural, political, social and economic processes in globalization. Desai further examines the formation and characteristics of Indian diasporic cinema and the development of a diasporic spectatorship and subjectivity that creates a new mode of understanding transnational cultural productions, identities and experiences. She presents critical frameworks, postcolonial critique, theories of globalization and diasporic studies that provide the modes of understanding and engaging transnationality.

At the outset, Desai outlines the sociohistorical and economic context for the formation and development of diasporic film in the Brown Atlantic and provides a detailed overview of the emergence of particular films and filmmakers. She focuses on the United States, Canada, and Britain, respectively, in an analysis of popular feature films, while addressing significant issues in queer, feminist and diasporic cultural studies. She examines the American discourses of

mobility and migration in Mira Nair's Hollywood film *Mississippi Masala*. She argues that tropes of westward migration in Indian American films can become postmodern narratives of uprooted mobility and surplus service labour. She also discusses elaborately Srinivas Krishna's Canadian film *Masala*, which interrogates the shifting relationship between ethnic and racial identities and the politics of the pluralistic multicultural nation-state. Her postulation is that planes function as chronotopes for the experiences of diasporic displacement. *Masala* parodies the nostalgia that is associated with diasporic spectatorship of Bollywood cinema and Indian American cultural production and advocates foregrounding a diasporic spectatorship that is based on cultural politics.

She probes the idea of nostalgia further and discusses how it is gendered and embodied in Gurinder Chadha's film *Bhaji on the Beach*. An interesting thesis in her book is how *nostos*, meaning return to home, and *algos*, meaning pain, suggest a physical embodiment of the postcolonial diasporic condition of homesickness. She explores how women's bodies reflect homesicknesses---"the gendered social and physical illnesses that result from the production of home" (32). She returns to the homeland to interrogate the reception of diasporic cinema and the development of a diasporic-influenced transnational and cosmopolitan cinema in India. Turning to the relationship between diaspora and homeland, Desai explores the transnational gender and sexual politics of Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*. She argues that the responses to *Fire* raises questions regarding the transnational production, circulation and reception of the cultural politics of diasporic films within a global market. Very insightfully, she analyzes the controversial film and its infamous reception within the framework of a political economy of queerness.

Recent developments in Indian American diasporic cinema indicate the divergent directions emerging in the various parts of the Brown Atlantic and the homelands. Desai focuses on Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* to understand better the economic, cultural and political implications of its international popularity. She ties the increasing popularity of cross-cultural wedding films to "particular deployments of feminist sexual agency" (33). She argues that heteronormativity is significant to the success of films by Nair,

Mehta and Chadha and indicates further exploration in feminist and queer understandings of transnational cultural studies. By locating these films about heteronormative feminist Indian American migrants within the context of transnational feminist theories of migration and globalization, she postulates that the Indian American woman becomes the site of transnational desire for Western eyes.

I would conclude by pointing out that popular culture provides contexts in which ethnic, gendered, hybrid and hyphenated identities are formulated and negotiated. Moreover, popular culture does not simply provide a marker in a prestructured social and cultural space, but becomes the means by which this space can be transformed. In Indian American diasporic situations, popular culture transforms space in two ways. First, it unifies diaspora groups, in cultural contexts where the homeland is semiotically conjured through music, dance and film. It also provides a means of communication and social networking among members of the Indian American diasporic community. Secondly, popular culture empowers Indian Americans by staking out a unique cultural space in the host nation, providing a voice for the marginalized, minority community. Among young Indian Americans, popular culture is used to create a new interstitial space for reassertion and reaffirmation of their hyphenated identities.

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IS THERE AN INDIAN THEATRE? A LOOK BACK AT THE 'ROOTS' MOVEMENT

Tirthankar Sengupta

Soon after the political Independence achieved in 1947, there began a conscious effort by the government of India to discover, define and establish the authentic Indian identity with regards to various cultural spheres. This is distinctly discernable in the art-form of theatre, especially with the conception and establishment of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) in the 1950s.

Despite being the most discussed and documented form of theatre for one hundred years, it was generally accepted and believed that the predominantly urban theatre influenced by the Proscenium stage of Europe was not the authentic Indian theatre.

The foundations of authentic Indian theatre lay in the Sanskrit Theatre of the ancient times, influenced by the dramaturgy of the sage Bharat and his treatise--the *Natya Shastra*, which was as old as Aristotle's *Poetics*.

The other group of authentic Indian theatre included the several folk theatrical forms generally popular in pockets of rural India. Certain tools or aspects of the ancient Indian dramatic art survived in each of these. These folk forms had been prevalent and popular over centuries but had suffered a decline due to lack of patronage and support after the British occupation of the country. These included genres of various kinds spread across the length and breadth of the country. The most popular folk forms included Nautanki in and around Uttar Pradesh, Tamasha in Maharashtra and Jatra in Bengal. A number of forms were related to religion; these included the devotional forms Ram Leela and Raas Leela of north India, along with the classical Kutiyattam and ritualistic Teyyam of Kerala. Forms such as Kathakali and Chau are considered as belonging to both dance as well as drama.

At the epoch of independence, Indian theatre had found itself on a crossroads of sorts, with a distinct rural-urban dichotomy in its performative genres. Badal Sircar, the Bengali playwright, rightly noted:

“Theatre is one of the fields where this (rural-urban) dichotomy is manifested most. The city theatre today is not a natural development of the traditional or folk theatre in the urban setting as it should have been. Rather, it is a new theatre based on Western theatre...whereas the traditional village theatre has retained most of its indigenous characteristics...” (Sircar, 2009, p. 2).

One must remember that even before the independence, the Leftist Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), out of interest in the living traditions in folk culture, had utilized elements from several of these ethnic performative traditions by including them in their theatrical presentations (Mukherjee, 2013, p. 192). The result was a simultaneous awakening of political consciousness as well as a kind of democratization of the urban theatre (Mee, 2008, p. 72). However, the act of a sovereign national government formulating specific policies aiming to revive and support these arts was surely of enormous significance; it rejuvenated the discussion concerning these folk forms and brought them within the ambit of both practical as well as academic discourse.

The SNA united the artists who already showed intent and promise in the mission of experimenting with folk forms. It systematically tried to create an interest among younger theatre workers to do the same. Erin B. Mee (2008, p. 179) correctly comments that the Akademy “formalized, institutionalized and, later, prescribed” these creative and discursive strands concerning these folk traditions.

The Akademi was most active between 1955 and 1990 when it regularly organized events on theatre—including seminars for education, workshops for training, festivals for performance and ‘Round Tables’ where noted personalities in the field discussed the past, present and future of theatre in India.

For a long time, the educated urban elite had looked down upon these folk forms as being archaic and unsophisticated, unworthy of study or adoption. With a steady increase in research and dissemination of such knowledge, the attitude “shifted from scorn to curiosity and respect (Hansen, 1983, p. 77).

There developed a growing sense that the creative minds of the city needed to engage with and confront the traditional folk forms to create something new. The complicated central issue of the relation of the folk forms to west-influenced moral values of the urban author and urban audience was discussed in the Round Table on the Contemporary Relevance of Traditional Theatre, organized by the Akademi in 1971.

The Urdu playwright Habib Tanvir stated:

“It is in its villages that the dramatic tradition of India in all its pristine glory and vitality remains preserved even to this day. It is these rural drama groups that require real encouragement... it is not until the city youth is fully exposed to the influence of folk traditions in theatre that a truly Indian theatre, modern and universal in appeal and indigenous in form, can really be evolved” (Tanvir 1977, as cited in Hansen, 1983, p. 78).

Some of the agenda and task of the Sangeet Natak Akademi included researching and rediscovering these folk forms, reviving them with supporting funds, bringing them to the audience of the urban spaces, and causing mutual dialogue and exchange of ideas among the practitioners of these forms from several parts of the country.

There began a conscious process of encouraging and even funding researchers and theatre workers who sought to travel to the remote corners of rural India to acquaint themselves with and train themselves in these indigenous forms of folk art. The plays written or the productions created after such workshops and research, was consciously backed, advertised and popularized by the Akademy.

With time, these collective measures fittingly became categorized as a movement called the ‘Theatre of the Roots’.

The Roots movement impacted and transformed the contemporary Indian theatre in several ways. There was a preponderance of

choosing the subject matter from Indian history and mythological tales. There was an endeavour to incorporate and inculcate thematic and ideological, as well as formal and stylistic elements of the indigenous folk art forms. But most of all there was a conscious effort to capture and portray the Indian mind and spirit, with its complexity and contradictions. Directly or symbolically, most of these plays dealt with the crises that confronted the Indian existence— over centuries in general or of the post independence period in particular.

Further, this decision to consciously practice and re-use modes of Indian folk art as well as discourage West influenced theatre was seen as an act of Cultural Decolonization that must inevitably be practiced by a nation that has recently secured political independence. Aparna Dharwadker (2005, p. 144) observes:

“... “the return to tradition” in the post-independence period re-establishes forms and conventions that colonialism had disrupted, and that this restoration is (or should be) the most significant event in contemporary theatre, both in itself and as the instrument of cultural decolonization”.

Interestingly, most of the theatre workers, (which include both playwrights as well as directors) who pioneered this movement towards the roots generally belonged to the urban middle class. They had received Western education, grew up in a society governed by west- influenced sensibilities, and were exposed primarily to west-influenced urban, Proscenium theatre in their formative years.

As a result, ‘syncretism’, or the system of using material, stylistic and cultural aspects and tools from multiple traditions and art forms, becomes a defining feature in this body of theatre in post 1947 India. Consciously or unconsciously, by choice or by constraint, we witness the emergence of a series of new hybrid theatrical forms.

Dharwadker (2005, p. 43) further comments that “The Roots Movement strikes a middle ground between revivalism and imitative Westernization in its attempt to reconcile ‘pre-colonial traditions with the socio-cultural formations of a modern nation-state”.

Each playwright or director incorporated certain elements from different folk forms in different ways and to varied extents.

Some allowed it to influence the writing of new plays while others used tools of production and direction to create a new kind of performance text. Not everyone was, however, directly related or ideologically committed to the project of the Roots movement.

Today, in 2020, as one looks back on the Roots movement around three decades after it was at its peak, it is perhaps natural to discover that the plays that received the most critical acclaim and have retained their significance over time, are the ones which addressed the contemporary problems rather than merely imitating or flatly recreating some old folk text.

Kathryn Hansen, in the article “Indian Folk Traditions and the Modern Theatre” (1983) recounts several of the significant endeavours that were undertaken in this regard. There were experiments to find new forms as well as efforts to revitalize the old ones. Habib Tanvir worked closely with folk performers from *Nacha* background, closely associated with oral culture of Chattisgarh. He endeavoured to revive the tribal traditions that were pushed to marginality by the more ‘sophisticated’ ‘high’ cultural forms. Ebrahim Alkazi, on the other hand, experimented with ‘performance-space’. He used his terrace in Bombay as a performance area in the late '50s and later, after moving to Delhi, he explored an array of location from closed studio to the open-air *Meghdoot* Theatre.

Several Hindi productions employed elements of the popular north Indian folk form Nautanki. Some of them invited and utilized professional singers of the Hathras or Svang folk genres. Shanta Gandhi's production of *Jasmd Odan*, based on a Gujarati Bhavai veshā (play) became one of the first acclaimed attempts at performing a folk drama for an urban audience. One of the closest formal approximations to pure Nautanki is found in the play *Ala Afsar* (Senior Officer)—the first production directed by Bansi Kaul at the Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad. Experimenting with the commonly used motif of a play-within-a-play, Lakshmi Narayan Lal's play, *Ek Satya Harishchandra*, directed by M. K. Raina, included a Nautanki within the play's structure. A number of features—the use of Ranga-figure or commentator, formal poetic meters, songs and dances (especially by courtesan-like

female characters), performance on an open stage, explicit satire and moralizing—can be linked directly to the folk theatre traditions of the region, especially to the secular Nautanki.

Similarly, in writing the plays like *Sari Ga Sari* (1964) and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), Vijay Tendulkar used the popular Marathi folk form Tamasha and its characteristic language patterns. The former contained the conventional gan (invocation to Ganapati), gaulan (scene between Krishna and the milkmaids), and povada (a song form), but characters were treated unconventionally and references to contemporary urban life filled the dialogues. He often uses several urban myths in his plays. They often examine the issue of identity within a sphere that emerges out of a colonial structure, yet includes the quest for the new Indian identity (Biswas, 2017, p. 80).

Utpal Dutt, the Bengali playwright and director well known as an ardent supporter of Marxist politics extensively use the Bengali folk form of Jatra to reach a wide audience of common people, both in urban and rural areas, to propagate his political doctrine. In his essay , *In Search of Form*, Dutt praises *jatra* (*yatra*) for having the potentials for a revolutionary theatre and defends its use, as he himself had done in plays like *Sanyasir Tarabari* (*The Crusade*), *Titu Meer* and the critically acclaimed *Tiner Toloar* (*The Tin Sword*). Jatra, as a form, remained alive and relevant over centuries because of its ability to adapt to and adopt from contemporary reality. It remained a potent tool of political theatre—for satirical or direct critique of the unwelcome elements of the social and political status quo. Dutt argues persuasively that this form, “has refused to die with the incursions of Capitalism into countryside”, unlike several other performative arts (as cited in Mukherjee, 2013, p. 191).

Badal Sircar, on the other hand, wished to take theatre to the rural masses but did not have any specific mission to revive or revitalize indigenous art forms (as cited in Mee 2008, p. 193). He sporadically used elements from certain folk traditions but never in a manner that the form attracted greater attention than content. He used them only for finding a medium to reach the common people; the content was always contemporary socio-political issues. In this mission, he disowned the proscenium set-up; his Third Theatre

prioritized physical movement of the actors over the spoken word.

Sircar's theatre used no definite props, costume or make-up, conventionally used in most folk forms. He relied upon only the simplest techniques of lighting, costuming and staging to build up the immediacy of communication between actors and audience.

It is impossible to find specific tools or elements typical of the rural performative genres in his work. However, it was aimed at establishing “within an urban context the same sense of communal involvement and ritualistic action often found in folk theatre” (Hansen, 1983, p. 80).

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar was born into a Keralite family who devoutly followed as well as believed in the religious ritual that is inseparable related with this type of theatre. The folk and ritualistic performative genres of the cultural and religious practices of Kerala had a distinct influence on Panikkar's aesthetics. He used the martial art form of Kalaripayattu and classical theatrical form Kathakali and Kutiyattam to create a new form of theatre. However, although he mastered the tools of such ritual and used it in his own work, he retained almost nothing of the beliefs and ideology of the religious tradition in which he grew up. His productions, like *Theyyatheyyam* (1991) used traditional performance to critique the values inherent in such practices (Mee 2008, p. 208).

The Manipuri theatre director Ratan Thiyam probably has the most complex and problematic relation with the ethos of the Roots movement. His works have received international recognition as classical embodiment of the theatre of the Roots.

However, he belongs to a state whose people have long complained of being alienated from the unifying spirit of being treated as equal citizens, persecuted by repressive state machinery, treated as outsiders. The majority of Manipuris still feel that they are struggling against the might of the "Indian state". The way Thiyam's work uses traditional cultural elements is an assertion of regional culture in contradistinction to national culture (Mee 2008, p. 223).

Thiyam masterfully revitalizes the element of Manipuri culture—devotional dance, acrobatics as well as martial arts. In multiple productions like *Karnabharam* (1979) and *Chakravyuha*

(1984), he reinterprets the classical Indian epics, especially the Mahabharata. Yet, when he shows the dark intricacies of an oppressive power structure, one might become uncomfortable in locating its significance within the Indian context.

Girish Karnad has used Indian myths, legends and folklore more than any other dramatist. However, his invocation and use of myths is experimental, critical and almost subversive. Of all his plays, this is best seen in *Hayavadana* (1971).

He uses several elements of the Kannada folk form Yakshagana such as the half-curtain which is carried onstage to introduce new characters, and the Bhagavata or narrator, who introduces the story and comments on the action throughout the play. The main plot of his tale is based on an ancient Indian story of transposed heads from the Kathasaritsagara.

However, through all the characters, and especially that of Hayavadana, the half-man half-horse, he raises the issue of multiple and split identity, self-conflict and hybridization. In the peripheral part of the play-within-a-play structure, Karnad masterfully touches upon the tensions that plague the consciousness of citizens of a newly independent country. Torn between a cultural past and more recent colonial legacy, Hayavadana is neither western nor Indian. To be integrated into the society as a complete, contemporary man, he participates in a range of “material, institutional and cultural practices of the newly emergent Nation” (Mukherjee, 2013, p. 190).

Like every other cultural movement, the Theatre of Roots has its fair share of contributions that draw appreciation and problems that invite criticisms. While it did revive an interest in the folk forms and stimulated much needed research and documentation, it has been accused of sidelining and marginalizing the other conventional theatre forms (Mee, 2008, p. 180).

There were frequent complaints that groups practicing urban theatre using the proscenium stage were being ostracized for no reason or lack of merit. This was most common with regards to theatre in English. The theatre workers who work in the conventional mode still form the majority; similarly, a number of

such productions are extremely well-crafted performances that have raised several relevant issues. These efforts too deserved support from the establishment. It is unfair and unwise not to appreciate good quality theatre just because they use the language or a set-up brought into the country by the colonizers.

Though the SNA's encouragement helped produce a large body of work, the quality was not always consistent. While gathering information for documenting the history of a folk art was possible within the short stipulated time, it was almost impossible to fully imbibe and learn the tradition of such art forms or understand the complicated socio-cultural dynamics that govern their philosophies. There were multiple instances of the usage of tools, tropes or ideas of folk forms, which seemed superficial, ornamental and out of context. Such cases revealed a lack of deep understanding of the ethics and philosophies intricately related to these art-forms. Hence, the quality of a major portion of the work or productions was generally inferior. M. K. Raina (1985, as cited in Mee, 2008, p. 214) observed that this process resembled picking up a 'product' while ignoring the aspects of its genesis, its link with the past. Such an endeavour can only be a superficial, exploitative search.

One sees today that a kind of synthesis has now been achieved in the latest and most commonly practiced versions of both the city based urban Proscenium theatre as well as the popular folk forms in the district and rural areas.

In a city, it is generally difficult to create the performance space typical of these rural folk performances; and perhaps it is impossible to create the authentic, necessary ambience. Also, most of these plays, while performed in urban spaces, inevitable end up using the same old Proscenium stage and auditorium.

In a similar manner, though not only for aesthetic purposes, the traditional folk forms have also been forced to use tools of the urban theatre in order to retain the commercial viability of their own work. In order to carry on the performance late into the evening, they now use modern lighting system including spotlights. They use modern sound systems to afford accommodate and reach a vast audience. As already mentioned with regards to Jatra, the texts of different folk forms now use contemporary social and political matters in

order to strike a chord with the audience. These can be considered examples of “reverse influence” (Biswas 2017, p.78).

The complex semiotics of any theatrical performance always depends on its audience for the final results. The difference in the attitude, value system and expectations between the rural and urban masses ensures that it becomes impossible to recreate the same atmosphere in the different cultural and spatial contexts.

One may, thus, observe an amusing irony in this project/mission of discovering and re-creating archaic folk forms authentically when they themselves have evolved to accommodate contemporary life.

It is possible to get an idea of today's theatre-scene with the consideration of some examples and facts; I mention here about a dramatist and a theatre group.

Mahesh Dattani, who writes plays only in English, is now one of the most appreciated and followed playwrights in the country. He has been awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademy award. Not only are his plays widely performed and discussed, they are included in academic curriculum in educational institutions, along with the works of Tendulkar, Karnad, Tanvir and Sircar.

Nandikar, one of the oldest group-theatre groups of Kolkata, have established themselves as an institution, thanks to their rigorous workshops and an annual pan-Indian theatre festival that they organize. Their most famous works in the 1970s and 1980s were Indianized adaptations on western classics, including the works of Pirandello, Chekhov, Brecht and Arthur Miller. While some of their recent plays continue with this trend (*Anto Adi Anto*), some others deal with mythical tales (*Madhabi*), the lives of rural performing artists (*Naachni*), the usage of folk forms (*Panchajanya*) and so on.

This principle to explore variety of plays with different content and form is revealed in the choice of plays in the Theatre festival as well. They invite groups from different states who perform texts of varied languages and formal traditions.

The instances of Dattani as an individual and dramatist, and Nandikar as a group show the direction in which Indian theatre has proceeded in the last couple of decades.

At the heart of the Roots movement, one can find several

paradoxical self-contradictions. The cultural landscape of India is filled with numerous forms—too heterogeneous in kind, rich in variety and pluralistic in ethos, to be brought under even a wide umbrella of homogeneity. The project to define a National theatre can succeed by accepting to be constantly inclusive and accommodating, rather than being limited and exclusive. A syncretic approach to theatre as observed in the recent times is a positive development. Biswas (2017, p. 78) observes that besides creating a harmony that resists the colonial structure, syncretism ensures progression and leads to assessment of contemporary cultural condition.

Thus, while no single form can claim exclusive rights to be ‘the’ national form; similarly, no form can be relegated out of the body of modes that comprise the Indian theatre. The current scenario of theatre produced in different parts of the country bears testimony to this recognition.

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SECTION – II
BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW:

The Socialist Opposition in Nehruvian India 1947-1964, by BORIS NICLAS-TÖLLE, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Edition, 2015, 257 pp., ISBN 978-3-631-66573-2

Reviewed by Bibek Talukder

Before the market liberalization process began in the 1990s, socialism was the dominant politico-economic ideology in post-1947 India. It used to be a positive attribute. Its appeal was so pervading that most of the political parties in India claimed adherence to one form of socialism or the other. And yet, the history of this political idea was mostly unexplored until recently. Most scholars of contemporary Indian history have bypassed a discussion of socialism claiming it as a largely rhetorical musing on the part of the political parties. Hari Kishore Singh's *A History of the Praja Socialist Party*- which was written in 1959 and Sonal Shah's *Indian Socialists: Search for Identity* (1994) were some of the exceptions in this regard. Boris Niclas-Tölle's *The Socialist Opposition in Nehruvian India 1947-1964* surpassed these earlier accounts by its ambitious take on the subject from a novel internationalist perspective in the context of Cold War power bloc politics and the sources it covered.

The book, divided in six chapters, traced the origin of socialism in India in the 1930s; its development as a political ideology in the next two decades in the background of anti-colonial struggle; and its disintegration in the late-1970s. It correctly defined socialism as a 'web of belief' in the 1940s and 1950s with which various individuals and parties identify themselves.

In the second chapter, Niclas-Tölle wrote brief biographies of some of the leading socialist leaders which highlighted their intellectual training in their youth and how this training shaped

their ideas about socialism. They defined socialism according to their own beliefs and intellectual trainings. And thus, socialism remained a highly heterogenous and open concept.

In the third chapter, Niclas-Tölle discussed about the Congress Socialist Party transforming into the Socialist Party (SP) in the aftermath of the independence. In these years, the socialists- now independent of the Congress- tried to build their own party machinery capable of taking on the Congress in the elections. The author very meticulously highlighted the hardships the socialists faced in contesting the elections of 1951-52 against such powerful adversaries as the Congress and the Communists. Niclas-Tölle's formulation of the pre-1947 Congress as a movement and post-1947 Congress as a Party is quite provoking.

The first general elections was a debacle for the SP. It failed to win a large number of seats. And this forced the socialists to introspect. The fourth chapter discussed this period of socialist introspection between 1952 and 1964 highlighting the socialists' increasing embrace of Gandhian ideologies; JP's retirement from party politics and his search for a spiritual path towards socialism largely inspired by, again, Gandhian ideologies; the oppositional socialists' ambiguous position towards Nehruvian socialism; and most importantly, the Indian socialists' experiments with an Asian Socialism as distinct form its European counterpart. The attempts to adopt Gandhian ideologies went so far that the SP merged with the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party- a Gandhian party and became the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). However, this 'Gandhist turn' was not an adoption of the Gandhian policies in toto. For example, the socialists' idea of village and Gandhi's idea of village had considerable differences. Similarly, the socialists and Gandhi approached the crucial issue of caste system completely differently. The search for a spiritual variety of socialism was not peculiar to JP alone. Several Congressmen, most notably Sampurnanand were also leading proponents of socialism with a spiritual aspect.

In a bid to develop an Asian variety of socialism, the PSP met the other Asian socialist parties in Rangoon in the Asian Socialist Conference (ASC) of 1953. This section of Niclas-Tölle's book is particularly rich as he extensively used archival materials of the PSP

preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in Delhi and the Socialist International papers in the archives of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam in writing this part. His analysis of the debates between the Socialist International and the ASC on the issue of anti-colonial nationalist struggles provides helpful insights in understanding the peculiar relationship between nationalism and socialism in Asia. He also discussed about the Avadi revolution of Congress and its impact on the oppositional socialists.

The rest of the book discussed the decline and the disintegration of both the Congress and the oppositional socialists in the 1970s and the importance of the socialists in Indian political history. In ascertaining the causes behind the disintegration of the oppositional socialists, the author claimed that after the Gandhist turn and the experiments with Asian socialism- which failed by 1956- 'India's oppositional socialists lost the ability to develop new appealing approaches or theories during the second half of the 1950s'. This conclusion, however, appears misleading once we move from the internationalist perspective towards a more domestic one. It is, in fact, the later half of the 1950s which saw interesting developments in the domestic front of the socialist thinking. Rammanohar Lohia's increasing agitations relating to caste and language questions are example of such developments. This journey from socialism to social justice remain undiscussed in this book. Interestingly, Lohia who quit PSP in 1955 and formed his own Socialist Party, too, accused PSP of 'paralysed socialism' for their alleged inability to innovate. In retrospect, these are the very issues which became the lasting legacies of the socialists in Indian politics. After all, today's various Samajwadi and Janata parties which claim their origin in the earlier socialist movement are mostly known for their caste based politics and not for any politics related to decentralized state or economy.

The decline and disintegration of the Congress which has been described in terms of a tussle between the left wing and the conservative right wing failed to take into account the impact of the Green Revolution which created a powerful rich middle-peasant group in the North Indian countryside. Charan Singh, the leader of this OBC peasant group, was instrumental in the fall of the Congress

organization in Uttar Pradesh- politically the most important state in India.

The author seems to have a particularly unpleasant view about Rammanohar Lohia. Highlighting Lohia's electoral adjustments with the right wing Jan Sangh and his emphasis on Hindi language policies, Niclas-Tölle asked whether Lohia's 'political philosophy qualifies to be regarded as socialist' at all. But then, unlike Marxist communism, socialism has no set model. Niclas-Tölle himself explored the disparate receptions of socialism in various Asian countries- some fusing it with Buddhism and others with Islam according to their own national cultural requirements. Also accusing Lohia of being a 'narcissistic patriarch' based on four personal letters to his lover and ignoring the whole Lohiaite corpus which can be regarded as one of the earliest examples of intersectional feminist (in this case, I admit, an anachronistic term) writings in India which took class, caste, linguistic and gender identities together into consideration is completely absurd.

Niclas-Tölle's repeated characterization of Nehru as an autocrat and his government as an autocratic government is spurious. After all, Nehru's 'main political accomplishment' was not establishing just a 'stable unified nation' as he claimed but also a stable democracy in a Third World country.

There are some factual errors in the book which could have been avoided with a more careful editing. Roma Mitra is incorrectly described as the spouse of Rammanohar Lohia (p. 171). They were lifelong partners but never married as none of them had any fancy for such formalities. The labor front AITUC has been wrongly described as 'All Indian Trade Union Congress' (p. 36) and 'All India Trade Union Confederation' (p. 115); but it is correctly described as All India Trade Union Congress in the 'list of used acronyms' (p. 11). Similar error has been committed in the case of INTUC as well (p. 115).