Fighting COVID-19

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 outbreak will not only require political will and decisive actions of the government for economic stimulus, but also the fostering of social solidarity for community resilience.

Goal of Higher Education

Is the massification of higher education in India aimed at providing knowledge for its sake, or to facilitate the training of minds in a neo-liberal nationalist agenda of economic development?

Dynamics of Folk Music

An exploration of Assam's Goalpariya folk form reveals that the dynamism in folk music is rendered through its linkages with the themes of identity assertion, tradition, authenticity, and contexts of appropriation.

Devolution vs Reforms

When economic reforms triumph over democratic decentralisation, as evidenced in Gujarat, there arises a need for a minimum constitutionally guaranteed devolution to local governments to safeguard against the vicissitudes of state-level politics.
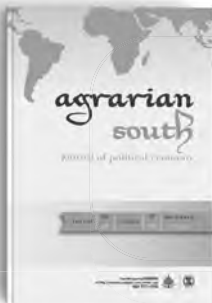
Right Approach for Adivasi Rights

With the rights-based approach failing to amend the historical injustice of exclusion of Adivasis from their forest lands and resources, it is high time to think of their collective rights beyond mere legal frameworks.

Economic&PoliticalWEEKLY

Vaccines to the Rescue

As the COVID-19 toll is rising, all the pharmaceutical companies in India and abroad have started testing their new drug candidates or the already existing antiviral drugs for their effects on the SARS-COV-2 virus. Also, some labs are trying to develop vaccines against it. The antiviral drugs may be essential in some scenarios like healthcare settings where the healthcare professionals need them to fight off the high load of viruses, as they deal with patient after patient affected with COVID-19. However, history demonstrates that, most often, antimicrobial resistance has risen from these very healthcare settings where the drugs have been used incessantly for treatment as well as prophylactic purposes. Antimicrobial resistant strains of the pathogens have also risen from immunocompromised patients who had been put on those antimicrobials to reduce the impact of the disease as their bodies were not capable enough to fight the pathogen.

It is only natural that a virus or, for that matter, any pathogen will evolve a resistance mechanism against any antimicrobial that is used against it. That is how our world has evolved. It is called host–parasite co-evolution, where the host, that is, the humans/animals try to devise mechanisms to kill the pathogen, but the parasite or the pathogen matches up to it by mutating its own genes. The sublethal doses of the antimicrobial drug select the mutant strains that are better able to survive even in the presence of the drug. That is the reason we are no longer able to contain the infections by using first-line drugs. We need as much as third-line drugs or combinations of those drugs in high doses to combat the diseases. Then why is it that there is so much emphasis on inventing/discovering an antimicrobial drug? The answer lies in the selfish greed of the pharma companies that want to make more money. In India, the total healthcare expenditure (THE) is just about 3% of the gross domestic product (GDP), whereas government health expenditure is just 1.1% of the GDP. About 30% of this THE is spent on pharmaceuticals. And all this

money is mostly out-of-pocket expenditure by the people of the country. Obviously, the poor bear the brunt of this most acutely. Still, the synthesis of these drugs is promoted and the use of such drugs is prescribed by the medical professionals. Instead of this, a stronger emphasis needs to be on vaccination strategies. Vaccine development is crucial to fight any disease, including COVID-19, as one of the public health measures.

Most of the diseases of the industrial revolution era were effectively controlled by good public health measures like adequate ventilation, hand hygiene practices, better drinking water supply and better standards of living. Antibiotics once discovered led to good control of the diseases because of which people forgot these public health measures. However, these very antibiotics gave rise to the menace of antimicrobial resistance. The case of tuberculosis (TB) is self-evident. Before the world could bask in the glory of successfully fighting TB, antibiotic resistance emerged and now the people most affected are the ones who are the poorest and have other morbidities. But pharmaceutical companies are still making money as they keep on synthesising newer and newer antibiotics pushing their capitalist interests. Some of these new drugs have serious side effects on the patients' bodies. This has been adequately evidenced and documented in scientific literature. A particular socio-economic impact of this is that healthcare no longer remains a domain of public discourse and community action but becomes an individualistic endeavour.

On the contrary, vaccines have been a great success story. Take polio and smallpox for example. Both the diseases were controlled by effective house to house outreach with vaccines that conferred immunity to the susceptible individuals and built herd immunity. It required both scientific endeavour and political will to implement these programmes.

In the current context of COVID-19, chloroquine and hydrochloroquine are being tested for action against the virus SARS-COV-2. It may be possible that these drugs are efficient in reducing the infection, but there is no guarantee that

the virus will not develop a resistance against them. Resistance will develop more often than not.

With the failed promises and new problems created by the antimicrobials, we need to rethink our health practices and re-emphasise our public health activities like herd immunity through vaccination programmes, potable water supply, nutrition security, hygiene and other primary healthcare services as a matter of fundamental rights and not as free-market commodities. This is the shortest and fastest way of combating pandemics like COVID-19.

Peehu Pardeshi
MUMBAI

Measures against COVID-19

The transmission of COVID-19 is increasing at a galloping speed, and it has infected more than nine lakh human lives. Hence, "social distancing" for a prolonged period is considered effective to combat this pandemic in many countries.

Now, responding to this outbreak entails significant financial and psychological support from the community, state, and market. As a policy measure, the blending of benefits in cash and kind has gained salience by revisiting or tweaking the monetary policies.

It is worth noting that the World Health Organization (WHO) partnering with the United Nations Organization and Swiss Philanthropy Foundation is leading, coordinating, and supporting the affected countries to prevent, detect, and respond to this pandemic. WHO has devised a Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan for funding support of at least $675 million (up to $1 trillion) to developed and developing countries which are severely affected by this pandemic.

The structure of the fund is a sort of blended finance, such as debt, grant, and equity, or philanthropic funds of venture capitalists or angel investors, development finance organisations, and other donor agencies.

The Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan aims to coordinate across regions to assess, respond, and mitigate the risks of the pandemic by improving a country's preparedness and accelerating the research and development. The plan is expected to utilise the solidarity response fund for the following activities:
(i) Putting in place activities to track and comprehend the spread of COVID-19;
(ii) Ensuring patients receive the care and nursing they need through training of medical and paramedical staff and facilities;
(iii) Buying and shipping essential supplies such as masks, gloves, and protective wear for front-line workers in production lines or shop floors;
(iv) Producing evidence-based guidelines and ensuring that health workers and responders get the information and capacity building to detect and treat affected patients;
(v) Disseminating guidance for the general public and for particular groups on measures to take to prevent the spread and protect themselves and others from the pandemic;
(vi) Accelerating efforts to develop vaccines, tests, and treatments.

Given the necessity of a response fund, India's Prime Minister proposed an emergency COVID-19 fund and pledged $10 million for helping the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries. Several policy measures are being taken in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and National Disaster Management authority.

First, an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal has been created to better trace possible virus carriers and the infected patients. ICMR is bestowed with coordination activities, with the SAARC Disaster Management Centre that could be used to pool best practices and suggest a unified platform to engage in timely research for the containment of COVID-19. Technology firms working with big data analytics and artificial intelligence can facilitate the detection process.

Second, some private equity and start-up firms such as Omidyar Network India have called for proposals in order to create a rapid response fund in the range of `5 lakh to `2 crore, while it has already committed `7.5 crore ($1 million) to this initiative. The fund raising effort intends to strengthen containment, detection, and treatment, improve support crisis management capabilities, enhance resilience and recovery, and unveil scalable solutions by leveraging technology. The time-bound solutions need to be implemented quickly to benefit a large section of the society, especially the lower 60% of India's income distribution. Solutions having initial tractions and based on evidence should be transferred through government or community commitments for complete pilots and co-funding.

Third, several states have created a pool of emergency response funds and short-term schemes to help the cash-starved workers of the unorganised sector. In parallel, the Finance Minister has announced an eight-point compliance relief package to individuals and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Fourth, response funds can utilise Corporate Social Responsibility funds that corporates maintain to comply with the statutory requirements along with `1.7 lakh crore of economic packages.

Though the nature or magnitude of financial support varies from developed to developing countries, the intention is to contain the outbreak of the pandemic.

Kushankur Dey
LUCKNOW

Corrigendum

In the article "From Feudalism to State Developmentalism: Changing Economic Formation of Himachal Pradesh" (*EPW*, 25 June 2016) by Yogesh Snehi, the year in the sentence "The establishment … peasant revolt" (p 102) should have read as 1864 instead of 1865.

The error has been corrected on the *EPW* website.

EPW Engage

The following articles have been published in the past week in the *EPW* Engage section (www.epw.in/engage).

(1) Decongest Jails: PUDR Issues Statement amid the COVID-19 Pandemic—*Radhika Chitkara and Vikas Kumar*

(2) The Non-enforcement of Singapore's Anti-gay Law Is Not a Good 'Compromise'—*Harsh Mahaseth*

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India's Public Health System on Trial?

A decentralised public health system that socialises the cost of healthcare is required.

The Prime Minister's announcement of a ₹15,000 crore package for emergency healthcare expenditure followed by an economic package of ₹1.7 lakh crore gives the impression of a two-pronged fight to face the crisis posed by COVID-19. But by having two separate allocations for health and economy, is the government trying to create an imaginary binary? We hope not.

When you care for health you also care for the economy and vice versa. But the successive regimes in India did not accept this close interconnection despite the decades-long work of philosopher–economist and Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, who championed, and continues to champion, for human-development-led growth. The people in India, especially the 90% of workers and their families, contributed to the unprecedented growth of the economy through their hard but cheap labour that resulted in a ninefold increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in dollar terms between 1990 and 2019. But the share of public expenditure in national income, though it increased from an abysmal 0.9% to 1.28%, continues to be one of the lowest in the world. In fact, this is less than the average of the poorest countries in the world at 1.6%.

One can then imagine what would be the nature of infrastructure and manpower available for public healthcare that has emerged as the vanguard in fighting the COVID-19 epidemic. A significant share of this expenditure is taken up by family welfare—a euphemism for population control measures—activities. Neither the state governments nor the union government have been sensitive enough to realise the significance of public expenditure on health and put in place appropriate policies, institutions and personnel. In fact, in the wholehearted embrace of neo-liberal economic policies the "social sector" is often the first to be targeted for reduction in the name of fiscal austerity. What is curiously interesting is that in the citadel of neo-liberalism, that is, the United States (US), the public expenditure on healthcare has been a solid 8% to 9% of the GDP for quite sometime now, though dominated by an aggressive insurance system. The European version of neo-liberalism, despite valiant attempts by conservative political interests, also witnesses an expenditure ratio varying from 6% to 7% of the GDP.

Despite being a member of the G-20, India's record in healthcare and health outcome is a matter of shame to the country and its people. Primary healthcare is one of the most neglected segments. Hospital beds per 10,000 people in India are in the vicinity of seven compared to its equally big neighbour China with 42, Vietnam with 26 and Bangladesh with 8 beds. An equally dismal picture emerges when one looks at the availability of physicians.

But India's low averages are deceptive given the extreme regional inequalities across states in healthcare as well as other basic survival indicators. In this time of crisis, one way to look at this is the availability of personnel that brings into sharp focus the helplessness of the majority of Indians with very little access to health. The Employment and Unemployment Survey of 2017–18 brings out that the total personnel in all human health activities working in institutions with some inpatient facility is around 26.3 lakh, of which 72% works in urban areas that account for a little less than one-third of the population. However, the public sector's share in this is only 44% or 11.6 lakh workers, who are now called upon to fight the COVID-19 epidemic. Even in the public sector the share of personnel in rural areas is a mere 31%. However, the neo-liberal policies opened up the healthcare sector to the corporates, which now accounts for a little more than 15% of all health workers or about four lakh personnel, but 86% of them are concentrated in urban areas. In fact, just eight states—five southern states along with Delhi, Maharashtra and Gujarat—account for 74% of the health personnel belonging to the corporate sector. It is not difficult to imagine that within these states most of them are in large cities.

The NITI Aayog released a report on the health index in June 2019 highlighting the extreme disparity across states and lamented that while the health situation in Kerala is comparable to Brazil or Argentina, the situation in Odisha is similar to that in Sierra Leone. The top five states are Kerala, Andhra Pradesh (undivided), Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Punjab, and the bottom five states are Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh in that order. The employment figures tell us that the average personnel available per 10,000 people is a mere 19.6 for all India; it however varies from 49 for Kerala to 26 for Punjab among the top states and 6.8 for Bihar and 8.9 for Uttar Pradesh (with Uttarakhand as an outlier with 36) among the bottom states.

But the regional inequality often hides the social inequality in healthcare, especially in policy formulation and planning, if there is any. The worst sufferers—both in access to and outcome in healthcare—are those belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) social categories.

The neo-liberal solution of lopsided and unregulated growth of private healthcare is not a panacea for India's massive health needs. It calls for a people-centred, decentralised public health system that socialises the cost of healthcare. If Kerala is often held as a model, one should remember that it has grown and evolved over a period of time through effective public demand, responsive government policies, and the institutionalisation of a relatively strong panchayati raj with functions including health, finance and functionaries. The presence of an active citizenry and a public sphere has added to its capacity to face collective health crises situations. But Kerala is also witnessing unregulated growth of a profit-oriented and tertiary-care-focused corporate health sector. It has to cover some more ground to fully equip and strengthen its public health system. But we are being reminded of the enormity of the challenge facing the country as a whole by COVID-19 in no uncertain terms. Will the national government ever learn?

Survival and Mobility in the Midst of a Pandemic

The working poor disproportionately bear the adverse impacts of the pandemic amidst the economic slowdown.

The proclamation of the national lockdown of 21 days, intended to break the chain of transmission of COVID-19 that had infected multitudes worldwide, however, led to an exodus of thousands of the working poor from Indian cities to villages. At the time of such an unexpected eventuality, what became obvious was that the socio-economic plight of the most vulnerable and poorest sections of the population was overlooked as no prior notice was given before the lockdown pronouncement. Is it not the responsibility of the government that, before any such drastic step is taken, the poorest are not forced to bear the brunt of the immediate impact of the lockdown, especially if it was intended for the greater common good? With the lockdown in place, a majority of the migrant workers in the cities, such as daily wage earners, who are bereft of any societal or government support, were left with the only option of returning to their villages for survival as they were rendered jobless overnight. Already living a hand-to-mouth existence, the announcement only led to heighten the sense of fear and panic, further confounding the agony of the multitudes of daily wage earners, contract and self-employed workers, and their families. This, as all means of transport was abruptly stopped while no alternative arrangements were immediately put in place. This led to overcrowding in railway stations and bus terminals at a time when social distancing was advocated by the government in order to avoid the spread of COVID-19. The capital city of Delhi witnessed heart-rending scenes of thousands of migrant workers walking back home as public transport had come to a halt. At a time when the government was organising flights for those stranded abroad, thousands of migrant workers were left to fend for themselves within the inter-state boundaries. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of coordination between the central and state governments regarding the handling of this unfolding humanitarian crisis.

Although some public transport was restored by state governments, much damage was already done. The Supreme Court, in order to halt the exodus, also directed the central government to ensure food, water, beds, medication and counselling in shelters for the migrants and their families. At the regional level, governments, especially that of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, spared no time to institute mechanisms such as direct benefit transfer and cash transfer schemes to help the poor tide over the crisis while other states announced partial relief measures. While an economic relief package of ₹1.7 lakh crore was announced by the central government, this amount, which is a little less than 1% of India's gross domestic product, would not be sufficient. How this package would be implemented effectively to reach the most vulnerable categories of workers also remains a question due to the inherent defects in the system. This is because most migrant workers, are not registered under any welfare boards nor do they possess bank accounts or ration cards.

The uncertainty in the time of the pandemic has also led to a worsening of the economic insecurity faced by the working poor, as about 89% of all workers in India fall under the category of informal workers. Of these workers about two-thirds are not covered by any minimum wage laws. This is especially the case with inter-state migrants who constitute the "footloose labourers" of the country. Between 2011 and 2016, the magnitude of inter-state migration in India was approximately nine million annually. According to the *Economic Survey, 2017,* workers mostly from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan migrate to states like Delhi, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu in search of jobs. In cities, usually employed in menial jobs, they lead a precarious existence working long hours for low wages, often in poor working conditions and living in squalid surroundings. These include agricultural labourers, coolies, street vendors, domestic servants, rickshaw pullers, garbage pickers, auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers, brick kiln workers, construction workers, workers in small way-side hotels and restaurants, watchmen, lift operators, delivery boys, and so on.

Most of these workers are also employed in very small and medium enterprises in the informal sector, in enterprises that are teetering at the edge of collapse, given the deepening economic slowdown. Preventing shutdowns of these enterprises in the informal sector in order to ensure their survival is also essential in testing times. These enterprises would also require special assistance, such as a special economic package from the government to stay afloat in drastic circumstances. Most importantly, the need of the hour is to ensure that adequate measures are taken to cushion the impacts of the pandemic on the working poor in the midst of a deepening economic slowdown. This has to be done by both the central and state governments working in tandem not only to ensure adequate resources, but also to implement schemes suited to the unfolding situation at the ground level.

COVID-19 and the Question of Taming Social Anxiety

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping oneself in complete isolation has become a dire necessity. Direness in the particular context of the pandemic has made it quite compelling on the part of the governments to regularly issue precautionary warnings to the people that they must maintain social distancing and stay at home. The direness of the corona crisis has also made it absolutely urgent on the part of every single individual to quarantine themselves. However, despite the advice and assurance given by the governments, people do not seem to contain their anxiety. The anxiety of people has taken two contradictory forms: rational and irrational.

Arguably, one may locate rational anxiety in the decision taken, for example, by the migrant labourers to leave the cities for their respective homes. The need to reach home is so acute among the stranded labourers that they have threatened to go on hunger strike if they are not allowed by the government to go home. The anxiety of how to reach home has been basically caused by two factors. First, the sudden abandonment of these labourers by their employers, and second, the desperation of the central government to enforce a lockdown without prudently thinking about these workers. In the absence of any initial support provided, these workers had every reason to become anxious as to how to keep themselves and their families safe in such a crisis.

It is this acute sense of anxiety that forced thousands of them to rush to the inter state bus terminals (ISBT) in Delhi risking their lives to a situation of severe vulnerability and helplessness. Many of these stranded labourers took grave risks and decided to walk several hundred kilometres back to their respective villages. Walking on the road without any help only led to high levels of anxiety. The "long march" home in some cases turned out to be fatal. Thus, in the conditions of helplessness, anxiety of these labourers had a definite element of rationality. Unfortunately, such rationality found its validity in the tragic death of some labourers. It is the complete sense of helplessness, that provided them the reason to leave the cities.

Fear-ridden anxiety leads people to step out, despite the fact that the government is trying to minimise people's sense of anxiety. On the other side of the spectrum of rationality, there are many who with "adequate" resources could take and exercise the decision to stay indoors. In such cases, rationality found, particularly during the lockdown, its validity in creatively and hence "meaningfully" organised life.

However, the manifestation of social anxiety can also be Janus-faced, which means that anxiety could manifest in both rational and irrational forms. This was evident in the collective behaviour of the people from many villages in Maharashtra. As was reported by the media, some villagers put irremovable barricades, thus blocking the roads leading to these villages. One may argue that this was a rational step to ward off their anxiety of getting infected, should outsiders walk into the village. However, the decision to block the roads also turned out to be irrational or short-sighted as the villagers did not factor in medical emergencies that may require immediate medical aid from outside. As a result, according to media reports, one person had to lose his life as he could not receive better medical attention. Similarly, it is equally irrational to bar the entry of those who have been medically certified as non-infected. The irrational anxiety is deeply influenced by a strong sense of self-preservation. It is this paramount sense of self-preservation that leads to irrational anxiety.

In this regard, it is also relevant to take into consideration the anxiety caused by the conditions of surveillance imposed by the governments. The technique of surveillance, in the present case, involves stamping suspected people on their forearms or using drones to bring people under supervision. Such techniques are used by the authorities to render human bodies legible, identifiable, and verifiable. The legible bodies, in view of inhospitable social attitude, become all the more anxious to hide these body markers. Members of the society, as reported by the media, have also been assigning derogatory words such as "dirty" to the doctors who are fighting the coronavirus. This can be termed as a kind of invisible stamping that has reduced the doctor to the level of moral dirt. Highly contagious diseases such as COVID-19 seem to have made the members of a "civil society" more anxious about their own lives. However, such anxiety suffers from irrationality when anxious people start treating medical service providers as a social menace.

Gopal Guru

How Poor Are the Poor

An interesting point with regard to income inequality has been made in a study, "A Configuration of Indian Poverty: Inequality and Levels of Living" by P D Ojha (Reserve Bank of India Bulletin, January 1970). The study suggests that income inequality is an insufficient measure of the levels of poverty in a society. This is because income inequality at best represents the relative position of a household in the aggregate income hierarchy. This type of relative poverty exists even in an affluent society. Moreover, while the state of relative poverty is largely a question of subjective judgment, conclusions on absolute levels of poverty can be based upon facts.

Since consumption of foodgrains (cereals and pulses) constitutes a significant proportion of total consumer expenditure, particularly at the lower levels, an absolute index of poverty is constructed using actual consumption data in quantity terms. The difference in terms of quantity between the minimum calorie requirements and the actual consumption for each expenditure group is taken to represent the nutritional gap. The percentage of deficiency to the estimated norm is taken to be an index of the absolute level of poverty; a deficiency of 10 per cent and less was ignored in the study.

Impact of COVID-19 and What Needs to Be Done

ARUN KUMAR

Tackling the COVID-19 outbreak will require political will and decisive actions from the government in terms of ramping up the healthcare infrastructure, ensuring public distribution of essentials to fulfil basic needs, and income transfers to the poor, among others. The government should not constrain such expenditures in view of maintaining the permissible limit of fiscal deficit. A higher fiscal deficit may not be inflationary now, since demand is drastically down.

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The spread of COVID-19 has rapidly spun out of control the world over and needs to be tackled urgently. Though the problem is global, there are national specificities that require nuanced approaches. The nations facing the virus outbreak can be grouped under three categories at present. In the first category of countries, like Italy and Spain, the outbreak has now reached an advanced stage. In the second category are nations like the United States (US) and India, where the disease is spreading fast. Populations in these countries are now coming under compulsory lockdown. In the third category are countries like China and South Korea, where it had first spread fast, but now seems to be under control. This category potentially offers the assurance that if nations act decisively, the disease can be brought under control. However, even so, the danger of the disease reasserting itself cannot be eliminated and vigilance becomes necessary.

Recovering Countries

Various reports from China suggest that production is being ramped up after it had declined drastically in January and February 2020. But, being the fulcrum of global supply chains, China cannot go back to full production of most items because other nations have cut back production and are importing much less from China. Therefore, Chinese exports will not recover unless other major economies, which are now in lockdown, recover. Chinese imports will also not go back to the pre-disease levels since production in the other major economies remains hampered. China can substitute some imports with internal production, though that will not be easy. If it was possible, then this would have already happened. China will have to boost internal demand to increase its production levels. South Korea and Japan will face similar issues since they are also large exporters. The Japanese economy was already close to recession before the onset of COVID-19 and the situation has only worsened.

Consumer and business sentiments are unlikely to recover fast in these economies and, because of that, purchases by a population that has suffered grievously in China are unlikely to resume soon. Especially, discretionary items purchases are not likely to recover to the pre-disease level any time soon. For instance, automobile sales in China have fallen by 80% and are unlikely to recover when the sentiment is poor. Investments will also not recover given that the Chinese economy contracted in January and February 2020 and businesses are not sure of an increase in demand. Production post March 2020 will remain below full capacity with exports and consumption unlikely to recover soon. The full year growth rate thus will be negative or close to zero.

Countries under Lockdown

In countries that are under lockdown now, production of some services can take place from homes via the internet. But, that may also be less than earlier since most people will be operating under anxiety and their efficiency will be low. This would be true in the case of legal services, teaching, finance, and so on. Most services that require people to be in the field or in offices and workshops, will be scaled down or completely stopped, such as transportation, tourism, repair and maintenance, retail shops and wholesale depots. Even the media will suffer due to reduced travel, and its finances will be affected due to loss of advertisement as profits of businesses plummet.

Health-related services will be massively scaled up globally. Public services to keep the population supplied with essentials and security services will also see an increase. But, most of the other public services will be curtailed. The net effect will be a contraction

in public services. Decision-making by governments, preoccupied with the crisis, will be postponed and public investment will be a casualty.

The impact on the manufacturing sector will be quite large because people are required to go to their workplaces and that has been curtailed due to the lockdown. Apart from essentials like, the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and medicines, the demand for almost everything else will fall, especially the big-ticket discretionary items. In such times, when the market sentiment is pessimistic, people reduce their demand for items like cars and homes. These have large backward linkages and all those linked businesses will also stall at this point of time.

The demand for essentials will rise temporarily since people are currently hoarding them in anticipation of lock-downs and given the uncertainty about the duration of the prevalence of the crisis. But, in a country like India, only the well-off can do this. For many poor people, who buy on a weekly or daily basis, this is not feasible. While hoarding may lead to an increase in FMCG production as the sector will find its inventories evaporating, this can only be temporary since the spike in demand is unlikely to persist. Depending on the duration of the crisis, demand may even plummet later, so one cannot be certain.

The small-scale sector will suffer more than the large-scale sector, as these businesses work with a limited amount of working capital and, as their sales will decline, they will exhaust it. They will retrench workers or if they are self-employed, they will lose work soon and that will reduce demand further. In India, because the small-scale sector is very large, both in number and employment, the impact will be substantial. It is here that the crisis will be the deepest since these workers have the least resilience to face a fall in incomes. This could lead to a societal crisis.

The fall in employment will also manifest itself in the organised sectors. The demand for energy falls with reduced travel and production. Consumer durables and capital goods industries will also shut down partially or fully as demand plummets. Airlines are already curtailing services, airports are running at reduced capacity; restaurants are being closed and demand for taxis, autos and buses has declined. They will all retrench contract labour to reduce losses.

Countries in Partial Lockdown

Many businesses that are highly leveraged (especially the financial sector) will face failure. So, the non-performing assets (NPA) of banks—which were already large—will rise dramatically—unless the government takes corrective action. In the Indian stock markets, the foreign portfolio investors and the Indian rich have taken the first mover advantage and withdrawn large sums of money, leaving the middle-class investors and public institutions, who are still invested in the mutual funds, to take most of the losses.

Countries in different stages of lockdown will have to ensure incomes for those losing employment. Otherwise their recession will deepen into a depression. Governments will have to do this directly, through direct cash transfers and this has been announced in countries like the US, Norway and the United Kingdom. However, due to the lockdown, the availability of essentials will be critical, and the government must ensure this via a public distribution system, perhaps with the help of the army and police.

For economies like India and the US, where the number of cases is rising and partial lockdown has been enforced, the priority has to be to prevent the disease from reaching the critical stage of community spread. So, wider testing is essential, as demonstrated by South Korea in controlling the spread of the disease. For this, forging discipline in the disease tracking and tackling systems is essential. In India, with the poor state of governance and widespread cynicism, superstition and lack of scientific temper, bringing in such discipline in managing the spread and consequently the after-effects of the outbreak may be difficult. There should be public stocking of essentials and assurance that it would be equitably available to all citizens. Production of essential health equipment, protective gear and required medicines needs to be accelerated.

The issue of business failure in India can be addressed by relaxing the (90 days) norm of declaration of NPAs. Expenditure on public works programmes needs to be speeded up so that people continue to get work. But this must be consistent with the health constraints of isolation. Urban employment generation via employment guarantee scheme is crucial. Work can be expedited on the existing infrastructure projects and on expanding medical infrastructure. Recruitment of doctors needs to be accelerated and retired medical practitioners should be encouraged to come back to work. Medical research on disease control also needs to be expedited.

Not the Usual Business Cycle

With the disruption of production continuing since mid-January 2020, all over the world, the world economy is bound to enter into recession, which will have a long-term impact. This is not the usual business cycle in which monetary and fiscal policies can deliver. Fiscal policies can only slow down the decline but not prevent it, while monetary policies must be accommodative.

The situation is worse than a wartime situation. Contrary to wartime when demand, especially of military equipment, rises, overall demand, as argued above, has collapsed now. Now, only the bare essential is produced and distributed, while all other production and distribution activities are halted due to the need to isolate people. In a war, activity increases, but now activity has largely stopped. So, the usual solutions will not work. The problem cannot be solved immediately, but society has to be prevented from going into a collapse.

Government intervention has become critical to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, especially in a poor country like India. Public distribution of essentials will have to be expanded to fulfill basic needs. Incomes will have to be transferred to the poor. Given the difficulties of identification, a universal basic income can be put into place. Public health infrastructure will have to be strengthened. Support to small and cottage sector is required so that they can recover when the situation eases.

Fiscal Deficits Will Rise

Markets cannot perform most of these functions, and it is the collective that will have to deliver. Thus, government expenditures will balloon, while tax collection will contract as economic activities decline. There is no possibility of raising additional taxes at this juncture. Indirect taxes will be inflationary and further burden the poor and reduce demand. Commodity prices will fall, and the government could raise taxes to absorb the fall in prices. But, that would only be counterproductive. Direct taxes cannot be raised since profits and incomes are already badly hit. Non-tax revenue, too, cannot be expected to contribute more since the public sector is also under stress.

Disinvestment in the present circumstances—of decline in the stock markets and negative sentiment in the markets—is unlikely to be successful. For instance, presently with the airline industry being in a state of collapse, who would buy Air India? The insurance sector will face lots of claims and its profitability will be hit. The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LICI) will take big losses in the stock markets that are collapsing, while the LICI is buying stocks to support the markets. So, the sale of its equity is unlikely to take place. The sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, pending for a while, is also unlikely to fructify since energy prices have collapsed, profitability has been hit and share prices have dropped globally. These were the three big-ticket items for raising additional non-tax revenue. The spectrum auction is also likely to be postponed given the problem of adjusted gross revenue faced by the telecom companies.

The fiscal deficit will rise because, as argued above, revenue will be short while expenditures to tackle the crisis will rise. But this should not be allowed to act as a constraint for increasing government expenditures to mitigate the crisis. Fiscal responsibility and budget management have become meaningless. A higher deficit will not be inflationary since demand is drastically down, and there is capacity to take care of any extra demand (even for most essentials) should it materialise. In fact, a higher deficit will help maintain some demand in the economy.

Conclusions

The problem will persist for a while since there can be phases of the spread of the disease. Historically, a century ago, the Spanish flu caused more deaths in the second round. We do not yet have a medicine to take care of the disease or a vaccine to protect individuals against the disease. Thus, a v-shaped recovery is unlikely, and production may remain curtailed for months, if not for more than a year, in all the three categories of countries. This implies that the global economy is staring at a depression.

In brief, the situation is worse than that during a war, since demand has collapsed. Businesses and finance companies are likely to fail and employment severely impacted. To deal with the health and economic crisis, governments have announced emergency and set up special task forces on the economy. In India too, the Prime Minister announced this in his address to the nation. The budget will have to be revamped, with resources focused to mitigate the crisis confronting the marginalised sections of society in the main, if a social breakdown is to be avoided. The moot question, however, is whether the crisis will bring about a fundamental change in societal thinking, with people realising that a lifestyle change is required and crucially, a well-functioning government and provision of public goods are needed at all times.

Fighting Fires
Migrant Workers in Mumbai

MAANSI PARPIANI

Migrant workers in one of Mumbai's most industrially dense areas with 3,500 small manufacturing and recycling units face a number of hazards, with fires being among the common ones. This article looks closely at the causes and aftermaths of these fires and notes how the workers cope with them even as their skills and knowledge prevent even bigger accidents.

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Fires are not new to Mumbai. News reports suggest that 97 serious fire accidents were reported in Mumbai in 2019 and 84 in 2018 (Panigrahi 2020). In 2018, the Mumbai Fire Brigade received a total of 4,899 calls. Of these, 1,020 were of fires affecting residential buildings including high-rises, while commercial establishments had 386 incidents and slums had 544 (Upadhyay 2019). Despite this general increase in fire incidents and a consensus around widespread flouting of fire norms across the city, this article shows how fires affecting poorer neighbourhoods in the city continue to be viewed with suspicions of arson, rather than as result of the sheer lack of urban planning, migrant housing, and safe working conditions in these neighbourhoods. Migrant workers, employed in small industrial units in the city, are forced to take on the responsibility of keeping themselves safe from not only regular incidents of fire, but also other occupational risks that unsafe working and living conditions expose them to.

The article is based on an ongoing qualitative research project on risk and safety, being undertaken by the Aajeevika Bureau in Kurla (L-ward in Central Mumbai). The ward is among those with the lowest human development indicators in the city with low levels of sanitation, health and education (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai 2010). The ward is also one of the densest given its industrial cluster of over 3,500 small manufacturing and recycling units. This includes not only metal works, but also waste sorting, garment manufacturing and packaging. The small-scale units are particularly attractive to migrant workers, as they double up as housing in the city. Workers come primarily from Uttar Pradesh, and the large majority of the working population of L-ward is Muslim. The units have an average of seven to eight workers who live and work in cramped spaces with no fire exits and surrounded by hazardous chemicals and machines. At least two big fires in the neighbourhood over the last four years, leading to the deaths of 12 and two workers respectively, have brought to light the high-risk environment that prevails at the heart of Mumbai (*India Today* 2017, 2019).

The last big fire occurred on 27 December 2019, and the immediate response was of suspicion. How did the fire occur? Could there have been any hidden motivations for it? Who stood to gain from the fire? Was a claim to insurance involved? A range of observers, from the workers themselves to government officials, middle-class residents of the neighbourhood and observers from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), asked these questions. Our ground research in the aftermath of the fire with police and fire officials indicates that the fire started in a chemical boiler, which, given its hazardous nature, is not in itself surprising. Furthermore, it spread widely across at least 54 other units, completely paralysing work for the weeks that were to follow. This diminishes the likelihood of any possible gains from the fire for either employers or workers. Lastly, our research indicates that they had no access to formal private insurance. As they lie outside the purview of the Factories Act, 1948, given their small scale and low volume of workers, they have no official industrial licences. Those operating units with hazardous chemicals need to get special permissions. However, in the absence of any strict regulations or inspections and given the additional costs involved in getting and renewing licences, they ignore these requirements, forfeiting access to private insurance.

There is merit then in positing that the suspicions around the fires do not most often emerge from a particular incident, but from a longer history of unexplainable fires in industrial neighbourhoods in Mumbai. For instance, fires in the city's textile mills were a common feature in the 1990s and 2000s as mill owners sought a rationale for the closure of the mills and retrenchment of workers (Whitehead 2014). The fires were meant to circumvent labour legislation

that disallowed mass retrenchment without prior permission of the state, which in itself depended on proving financial unviability of the mills (D'Monte 2005). During this period, Mumbai's real estate markets boomed, following the liberalisation of the economy, leading to Mumbai's emergence as a financial capital. In this context, even for financially profitable mills, selling the lands that the mills stood on became more attractive than running the mills (Finkelstein 2019). Similarly, fires in Mumbai's slums have been used by private developers and redevelopment authorities to circumvent politically contentious procedures of consensus and consent building around slum redevelopment (Sharma 2009). Slum dwellers have been particularly vocal in demanding *in situ* redevelopment and fires mandate that inhabitants evict their burned-down tenements with immediate effect and take residence in temporary allotments provided often at the peripheries of the city, away from their established sources of livelihood in the city.

In contrast to these episodes of what we term "property fires," the incidences in Kurla have had no property claims associated with them, and have also led to loss of life. There has not been any insurance protection for life or property. In this context, these fires emerge as what we term "occupational fires." They arise from the particularities of hazardous work in metal recycling and manufacturing, and have also been common in landfills (Gidwani 2013). In hazardous spaces like these, low-intensity fires are expected to be even more frequent than official figures suggest. There have been two low-intensity fires in January and February 2020, post the big fire of 27 December 2019. Against this background of fires being intermittently linked with the work, our research has sought to gauge the perceptions of fire safety among those who work and inhabit these spaces: workers, employers, contractors, and helpers. How do they see these fires and the other risks that are an everyday part of the work they do?

Inherent Risk

Workers interviewed for our research saw fires and risks as inherent components of metal recycling and manufacturing work. Much of the metal being used in the production units is already used, and includes metal pipes and sheets acquired from demolition sites. These are cleaned with chemical acid, cut and shaped according to the requirements of the new product. Machines are second-hand, often as old as 20 years, and tend to malfunction. Crush injuries of fingers are not unheard off. Cuts, bruises and burns are extremely common, and often render workers out of work for prolonged periods of time. A high level of skill and alertness is required to do the job and keep oneself safe in the process, workers conclude.

They lay great emphasis on learning, and an informal system of apprenticeship seems to anchor the safety endeavours in these units. Senior workers train new workers on how to be careful while working the machines. This is not skill training in a classroom or workshop, but learning on the job, with its own risks of trial and error. New workers migrate to the city, and learn from an *ustad* or senior worker. Senior workers lay emphasis on this training as the key to surviving the high-risk work environments of Kurla. "Helperi" (being a helper) moulds a young migrant into a skilled worker. If the relationship between the trainer and the helper is good, the worker will remain safe, a worker concluded. Workers pride themselves on the depth and breadth of their knowledge.

A worker of a lathe machine notes, "any metal thing can be made on this machine. I can literally take apart a motorcycle and make its every part on this machine." They know their work inside out, and take pride in it. "Bas paper ke engineer nahin hai, baaki toh lohe mein sab ki PhD hai" (We might be lacking a formal degree in engineering, but we have doctoral level of knowledge of everything metal), says another worker. With no state or employer responsibility, workers are thus forced to take charge of their own safety. Workers, however, also disagree on some aspects of this assumption of responsibility, particularly on the question of repairing machines. Some workers contend that it is the workers' own responsibility to fix the machines when they begin to malfunction or break down. They argue that as it is they who use these machines on an everyday level, and not the employer or an external mechanic, it is their responsibility to both be able to tell if a machine is "behaving oddly" and also to repair it. Others, however, regard employing *jugaad* (quick-fix, cheap) solutions to repair machines as potentially hazardous, and as leading to the accentuation of their already unsafe work.

Given the complex, open-ended and hazardous nature of metal work and the responsibility that it lays on the workers, the question poses itself: Why are there no state and institutional mechanisms for protecting them against workplace risks? Lorraine Daston (2016) in an article shows how the meanings of risk are not fixed and, in fact, shape decisions around what risks should be mitigated and who should be protected against them. Much of the public and media discourse around fires in migrant neighbourhoods tends to construct them as fundamentally unpreventable. Fire incidences are immediately linked to their "illegal" status, which completely shifts the blame of the fire to the residents themselves. While the Kurla fires did not receive as much coverage, one could see this debate play out in the media discussions in the aftermath of the fire in Delhi's Anaj Mandi in November 2019 that led to the loss of 43 lives (Trivedi 2019). The logic of illegality-caused-fires portrays an incomplete picture, given that there is no contemporary mechanism for these units to get access to a legal status. The latest Occupational Safety and Health code of the Ministry of Labour is limited to units employing 10 workers or more,[1] thereby itself excluding small-scale workers from the ambit of safety law and regulation. As mentioned earlier, small units like the one in Kurla are also not mandated to register under the Factories Act, which covers industrial units employing more than 100 workers. The only licence required for these units is one issued under the Maharashtra Shops and Establishment Act, and that has no legal provisions for the health and safety of the workers.

Out of Civic Purview

Migrant workers, in particular, are further illegalised by the removal of their work and living spaces from civic attention. The neighbourhood is left to its own, surrounded by fumes, electric overload and garbage accumulation, exposing the units to a larger tinderbox-like situation. A fire in one unit thus spreads fast and widely. Migrant workers are also made illegal by the de-legitimisation of their migration. "They shouldn't come to the city," some commentators noted in the aftermath of the Delhi incident. The state, by making them illegal, has put all the burden on migrant workers to both—justify their migration to work in the city, and to keep themselves safe as they undertake this work.

The state and public discourse has once in a while celebrated migrant work as entrepreneurial. The recycling industry has particularly been celebrated as a great service that workers perform for the circular economy. The state does not just need to legally recognise the work in terms of work hours, safety gear, inspections, etc. The void goes deeper. The state and society at large needs to also recognise their knowledge, their skills and their experience. For every fire that occurs, there are probably many that are avoided by the resourcefulness and commitment of these workers. Rather than building on their knowledge, the current policy environment for labour has instead fixated upon predictions of mass redundancy caused by automation in the "future of work." For the workers in these units, it is they themselves who operate the machines. They believe that they are smarter and more resourceful than the latter, and can make machines produce a variety of goods. They are not scared of a distant future when machines may take over their work totally. They are apprehensive about surviving the present, before the next fire comes to their doorstep.

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Reducing the Spread of COVID-19
Need for Creative and Long-term Measures

VIKALP SANGAM CORE GROUP

The unprecedented crisis emerging due to the spread of COVID-19 demands immediate as well as long-term measures. To address this crisis, the government should promote social solidarity and unity as well as citizens' networks working for the vulnerable. However, long-term measures are needed to reduce the possibility of the disastrous spread of more such diseases and to enhance the ability of communities to deal with such eventualities.

As India and the world face a completely unprecedented crisis due to the spread of COVID-19 virus, the first and immediate response must be towards ensuring health and treatment facilities, physical distancing, relief and basic-needs packages to workers, basic-needs services, and other such measures. These are required to both reduce the risk of spread and provide economic and survival security to those who are worst affected, not only by infection but also by the shutdown of ordinary life. Special attention needs to be given to the most vulnerable, including the elderly, the "disabled," women and children, daily wage workers, residents of crowded urban "slums," prisoners in crowded cells, sanitation and waste workers, transgender persons, sex workers, small farmers, pastoralists, fishers, and forest dwellers.

Promoting Social Solidarity

The submissions made by several forums and networks, including by the Working Peoples Charter, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, Coalition for Environmental Justice in India, and a large number of economists and other concerned citizens, need to be supported and reiterated. Several countries across the world and some states in India have already announced pay packets, food, and other essential deliveries, continued wages for out-of-work workers, etc. The central government ought to follow suit and as a national response should build on, and go much beyond the package announced by the finance minister on 26 March.[1] It must also promote social solidarity and unity, even as it promotes physical (and not "social") distancing, encouraging citizens' networks, many of which are spontaneously emerging across India, that can help the most vulnerable.

There is an immediate need to actively discourage the prejudiced, racist or classist responses that are unfortunately being seen in some areas, for example, against people of the North East, because their facial features are similar to those of the Chinese, or against waste pickers, or foreigners who happen to still be in India. The government must protect fundamental human rights against violations caused by increased state surveillance and interventions in citizens' lives, for it is easy to slip ints forms of authoritarianism in such situations (especially when we use metaphors like "we are in a war-like state"). Rather, we need to empower communities and collectives to enforce the social norms needed to deal with them, with government support. And finally, all of the government's resources that are going into expenses that are currently unnecessary or can be deferred[2] must go towards the response to COVID-19.

Long-term Measures

It is, at the same time, also important to initiate long-term measures now or when the immediate crisis is over, which will (i) significantly reduce the possibility of more such disastrous spread of diseases, and (ii) significantly enhance the ability of communities to deal with such eventualities. A few such measures are discussed here.[3]

It is to be recognised that the survival and sustainability of this planet lie in the adoption of values of dignity, equality and justice for all species, genders and social categories. This should reflect in the rejection of all policies and practices that cause destruction, exploitation, discrimination, and injustice against any living being. National strategies and frameworks in all sectors must be focused on human and environmental health.

A moratorium should be put on diversion of natural ecosystems for infrastructure, mining, and commercial purposes. There is a clear and scientifically established link between ecological destruction and the spread of diseases like COVID-19 (Vidal 2020). Even if COVID-19 originated in China, other such pathogens could originate in India, or spread more widely, due to the disruption of natural balances and interdependencies. An immediate moratorium on the diversion

of natural ecosystems, including forests and wetlands, for mining, infrastructure, and other "developmental" projects, is crucial. Other alternatives for meeting livelihood and development needs should be initiated.

Community health systems should be facilitated and the public health sector prioritised. Each settlement must have primary facilities combining multiple health systems, with barefoot caregivers and paramedics trained in essential care and cure, including in dealing with COVID-19-like situations. The highest priority must be given to strengthening public health, including district-level epidemiological units that can recognise and monitor local health problems and their determinants, as well as put back public sector medical services in the driving seat. Privatisation encouraged in recent times has had devastating consequences even in the "developed" countries like the United States, with millions unable to afford even basic check-ups.

Traditional health knowledge that has stood the test of time must be used optimally in the present crisis and long-term development of health services in the country. This includes AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy) and Amchi systems, and local health traditions to develop sound methods of prevention, such as the use of herbal immune-boosters. It is to be noted that China has been able to use Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) very effectively in both the prevention and treatment of cases in the COVID-19 crisis. [4]

Ecological Sustainability

A clear policy and programmatic direction are needed for ecologically sustainable and equitable ways of generating livelihoods and jobs, infrastructure, communications, etc. Orienting existing schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, housing, agriculture and others towards this is eminently possible. There are hundreds of examples to learn from, of people meeting their food, water, energy, housing, education, health and other basic needs, and securing dignified livelihoods. [5]

Given the clear connections of industrial-scale, chemical-intensive agriculture with

ecological disruption creating the conditions for such disease-related disasters (*Marx21* 2020), urgent measures are needed to support all farmers to shift to organic, biologically diverse farming (including by transferring the chemical fertiliser subsidy), with special assistance to small farmers, pastoralists, fishers, and forest dwellers. GMO (genetically modified organism) trials and releases, with their great potential for ecological disruption, must be stopped immediately.

There is a need to strengthen self-governance through *gram sabhas* and area/ward sabhas. Implementation of local self-governance to its fullest extent, and thus, realisation of a true people's democracy is crucial. Gram sabhas, area/ward sabhas, and other local government institutions need help to build capacity and generate resources so that they can govern their lands and ecosystems, their economic and community lives, and to do this in a manner that ensures representation and participation of marginalised sections to ensure social justice.

It is now evident that a global economy, with resources, labour, and products moving across the globe, is an extremely vulnerable system that is prone to collapse. Institutions of local self-governance must be provided with resources, skills, technical assistance and other forms of cooperation to grow their own local, self-reliant economies, catering first and foremost to local needs. Larger trade should build on this, and not undermine it. Through this, the necessity of mass mobility and trade could be reduced significantly. This could even help reduce and reverse rural–urban migration that is

caused by economic and social distress and leads to very high urban densities that are ripe for epidemics.

We must also focus on redesigning urban and semi-urban settlements in such ways that workplace and residence for most people are close by, self-governance through area sabhas is empowered, and urban natural ecosystems are regenerated and protected through citizens' forums.

NOTES

1 Which has been welcomed, but also pointed out as being late and very inadequate. See https://amitbasole.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/response-to-covid19-relief-package.pdf.
2 For instance, see Essa (2020).
3 These measures have been laid out in more detail in the People's Manifesto for a Just, Equitable and Sustainable India, issued by the Vikalp Sangam process in early 2019, available at http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/peoples-manifesto-for-a-just-equitable-and-sustainable-india-2019/.
4 We do not support either the fake claims being made by many in the name of traditional medicine, or the indiscriminate exploitation or slaughter of wild animals that some parts of TCM contain. See Jiang (2020).
5 See www.vikalpsangam.org.

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Politics of Scheduled Tribe Status in Assam

JAYANTA KRISHNA SARMAH, JOYJIT HAZARIKA

The trajectory of six communities of Assam in demanding a Scheduled Tribe status is traced. The history of these tribes is elaborated upon and the struggles they have faced in claiming the ST status are adescribed along with detailing the operations of the various government committees that were formed to look into the matter.

After the approval of the union cabinet on 8 January 2019, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 9 January 2019 by the Minister of Tribal Affairs, Jual Oram.[1] The bill intends to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, by inserting 41 entries for granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities in Assam.[2] Opposing the move of the government, the existing ST communities came out to the street as a sign of protest. The Coordination Committee of Tribal Organizations of Assam (CCTOA) called a statewide 12-hour *bandh* on 11 January 2019 to protest against the bill (*Outlook* 2019).[3] The CCTOA feared that the amendment bill would eliminate the "genuine tribal people" of the state by enlisting six new ethnic groups of Assam as STs (*Business Standard* 2019).

The CCTOA chief coordinator Aditya Khakhlari even alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government at the centre is anti-tribal. The BJP has introduced the bill only for power and short-term benefits (*Sentinel* 2019a). At the same time, the ST status seekers too are unhappy with the government as it introduced the bill at the fag end of Parliament and kept it hanging. All Assam Koch-Rajbongshi Sanmilani president Bireswar Saikia clearly expressed his dissatisfaction referring to the 2014 Lok Sabha poll campaign, where the BJP assured the six communities of according them ST status within six months of coming to power. But it was least bothered about introducing the bill in Parliament on time (*Sentinel* 2019a). Adivasi leader Rupesh Gowala also detected a poll-oriented design in the move identifying the bill as a lollipop being doled out to the six communities (Karmakar 2019). Moran community leader Arunjyoti Moran too was critical of the move ahead of the polls (Karmakar 2019).

Meanwhile, looking at the discontent of existing STs and also the ST status seekers, the government started to seek out a middle path to satisfy both. Within a week of the cabinet approval and introduction of the bill in Parliament, the government slightly shifted its position and on 13 January 2019, the union home minister asked the Government of Assam to prepare the modalities for granting ST status to six communities of Assam without harming the rights of existing STs in Assam. Immediately, the Government of Assam set up a Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by the finance minister to recommend measures for protection of rights of the existing tribal communities as well as to decide on the benefits to be given to new STs (*Sentinel* 2019b).

A Hanging Case

Among the six communities, the demand for ST status was first raised by the Koch-Rajbongshis in 1968 (Roy 2018). Since then the Koch-Rajbongshis along with five other communities, namely Tai-Ahom, Moran, Matak, Chutia and Adivasis have been demanding the ST status for themselves. Notably, on 2 July 1996, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill to provide for inclusion of Koch-Rajbongshi in the ST list was introduced in Lok Sabha. On 2 August 1996, during the discussion on the motion for consideration of the bill, the house authorised the speaker to refer the bill to a select committee of the Lok Sabha with instructions to report back to the house. Then the house referred the bill to a 15-member select committee with Amar Roy Pradhan as chairperson.[4]

Meanwhile, as Parliament was not in session, the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Ordinance 9 of 1996 was promulgated to give effect to the scheduling of the Koch-Rajbongshi community in the ST list of Assam. The ordinance was repromulgated three times, but not placed for voting. In this regard, the Assam Legislative Assembly too adopted a unanimous resolution urging the Government of India to include all these six communities in the ST (Plains) list.[5] However the decade-long issue is still

hanging in the floor of the house bringing in more complexity and discontent.

Politics of Discontent

The six communities seeking an ST status are currently enjoying either Other Backward Classes (OBC) or More Other Backward Classes (MOBC) status in Assam. Though, historically, most of them were ruling communities, they have been cornered in many ways in post-independence India and remained backward. Taking the case of Adivasis, Gohain (2007) argued that a certain segment of population has remained at the very bottom of the social ladder, thanks to the constraints of the plantation economy and the inability of those outside tea gardens to take advantage of a development process that takes no account of their social and cultural "backwardness." To him, the matter is of political, not anthropological interest. As is the case in all capitalist societies, such communities tend to get left behind unless the state resolves to come to their assistance with planned affirmative action.

The only affirmative action these communities can expect under the Constitution is advantages and opportunities granted to those with an ST status (Gohain 2007). The State, therefore, must come forward with planned affirmative actions for the development of the communities that are at the bottom of the social ladder, not limiting itself within the framework of granting an ST status. The deplorable state of health, education, sanitation, employment, etc, in most of the tea gardens reveals that they may not be in a position to reap the benefits even of the ST status without other affirmative actions at the grass-roots level. The struggle for the ST status of the communities, therefore, must be seen as a part of the larger struggle.

Select Committee's Observations

Against this backdrop, the investigation and observations of the Select Committee (1997) are noteworthy. Their field investigation reveals that the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam are backward in respect of social, economic and educational fields (Select Committee 1997). The Backward Class Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar, in 1953, recommended the

Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam for an OBC, and also the Report on the Socio-economic Survey of Koch-Rajbongshi Kshatriya Community of Goalpara District, 1969 clearly indicates that with the mounting pressure on agricultural land and lack of industrialisation, the Koch-Rajbongshis are not economically well-off than their previous generation.

At the same time, while the Select Committee (1996) conducted a study tour[6] and held discussions with the representatives of various associations, organisations and individuals, a number of contestations were also revealed. On being enquired by the Select Committee, Golap Borbora, the former chief minister of Assam, stated that there are several "tribals" in Assam who need to be included and the quota percentage of reservation might be increased to accommodate them. He advocated the cause of the Koch-Rajbongshi community and desired to include them immediately in the ST list. Borbora also referred to the committee that Chutias were once included in the ST list but later on they were excluded (Select Committee 1997).

On the other hand, a number of individuals and organisations opposed the process. The Dibrugarh Nagar Deori Unnayan Samittee stated before the committee that the Koch-Rajbongshi is an advantageous community having a contradictory historical existence and does not fulfil the criteria of the Government of India for being accorded the status of a tribe (Select Committee 1997). In their representation before the committee, the Sonowal Kachari Jatiya Parishad (SKJP), United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front, Darrang, etc, also have opposed the idea of inclusion. The SKJP analysed the developments in the reservation scenario in Assam during the President's ordinance in 1996 which included the Koch-Rajbongshis in the ST list for a very short time. The SKJP stated that most of the reserved seats for STs either in services or in admissions to educational institutions went to the Koch-Rajbongshis during that period, marginalising the existing tribals.

In Jorhat Engineering College, Jorhat eight tribal reserved seats are occupied by Koch Rajbanshi students out of ten seats of

STs. Similarly, twenty five out of forty two medical seats reserved for STs were occupied by Koch Rajbanshi students. (Select Committee 1997)

In this connection, the staging of a hunger strike[7] by the existing tribal groups under the banner of CCTOA against the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2019 must also carry a message of grass-roots realities to the policymakers.

Is There a Way Out?

The government is dealing with this long-standing issue in a very haphazard manner. This may be a tactic of the government to engage people with the issue and at the same time sideline it. This also reflects lack of seriousness and proper homework on the part of government. The government must take all the sections of the society, including existing STs, Scheduled Castes (SCs), OBCs, minorities, and other communities in confidence and formulate a concrete decision. In this regard, the GOM must have discussions with all the stakeholders to prepare modalities before submitting them to the central government.

If the six communities are granted an ST status, the state will approximately have over 50% population as STs. This may lead to the recognition of Assam as a tribal state. But this recognition will be unable to address the complex ethnic and identity issues. Given these complexities, political parties like the All India United Democratic Front state that this will threaten the general category population.

Assam is a land of diverse ethnic and cultural groups since time immemorial. To deal with the complex issues arising out of diversity, the colonial rulers coined the mechanism of "area restriction" or "territorial restriction," which was also adopted by the independent government in India in different formulations. This practice of "restriction" is not observed as a tool of "inclusion" to deal with the present problems of the state. There are 23 STs in the state, of which 14 are hill tribes and nine are plains tribes. It is an anomaly that those who have been accorded an ST status in the hills lose their status if they settle in the plains and vice versa (Misra 2007). In this

regard, the historical issue of recognition of the Bodo-Kachari as an ST in the hills may be taken into account. Confrontation over the issue is well reflected in Clause 8 of the Bodo Accord signed between the centre, the Government of Assam, and the Bodo Liberation Tigers in 2003:

> The government of India agrees to consider sympathetically the inclusion of the Bodo Kacharis living in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous Council area in the ST (hill) list of the state of Assam. (Clause 8, Bodo Accord)

Possible Solutions

The Lokur Committee too identifies area restriction as an "anomaly," which has its origin in the lists prepared under the Government of India Act, 1935. The territorial or area restrictions were then probably introduced because the social disabilities were attached to certain castes, or tribes were appreciably more distinctive in particular localities. Such area restrictions may check on social mobility as the community concerned would confine themselves to the specified areas as they lose the special privileges and benefits by moving out (Lokur 1965). Therefore, restricting STs within some territorial boundaries in the name of innovation will not solve the purpose; rather it will affect it adversely.

Looking at the complexities, de-scheduling the "'already advanced'" communities may be a way out. Against this backdrop, the observation of the Lokur Committee towards de-scheduling or complete integration may be taken as a long-term goal. Like the process of scheduling backwards, the more advanced communities in the lists are gradually to be de-scheduled. To accelerate the pace of de-scheduling, a deadline may perhaps be fixed when the lists of SCs and STs are totally dispensed with (Lokur 1965). The committee opines that this is the only process to bring about "complete integration" of the population (Lokur 1965). In this regard, a strict adherence to the economic status of the people in the creamy layer will pave the way towards progress within the tribals. The ST status for the six communities, against this backdrop, could be a significant means to establish a more equal and just society, but not an end in itself. All-round development of all the communities must be the first condition to enable the backward classes of citizens to move forward and join with other citizens of India on an equal basis.

NOTES

1 Bill No III of 2019.
2 Forty-one proposed entries include Chutia, Matak, Moran, Koch-Rajbongshi, Tai Ahom, Mal Paharia, Kawar, Lodha, Baiga, Nagasia, Bhil, Gorait, Halba, Majwar, Dhanwar, Asur, Khond, Korwa, Kherwar, Chero, Koya, Birhor, Parja, Mirdha, Kishan, Chik Baraik, Kol, Saora, Pradhan, Birjia, Damdari, Bonda, Mahli, Shabar, Kharia, Gond, Munda, Oraon, Bedia, Santal and Bhumij in Part II (Assam), in paragraph II, after entry No 14 to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 for granting the ST status. Besides Chutia, Matak, Moran, Koch Rajbongshi and Tai Ahom, all other 36 communities belong to the broad category of Adivasi.
3 Bandh supporters blocked National Highway-37 by burning tyres and laying tree trunks, disrupting the road traffic between lower and upper Assam for hours; trucks were stranded on NH-36 at Doboka, in Nagaon district. In Kokrajhar district, the *bandh* supporters burnt tyres at different places, including at Athiabari, Salakati, Fakiragram and Kokrajhar towns. The districts affected by the bandh included Morigaon, the BTAD districts of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Baksa and Chirang and Dima Hasao.
4 Select Committee on the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill; C B (II) No 426, presented to Lok Sabha on 14 August 1997; besides the chairperson, other members were: Dwaraka Nath Das, Lalit Oraon, Phagan Singh Kulaste, Paban Singh Ghatowar, P R Das Munshi, Pinaki Mishra, Uddhab Barman, P Kodande Ramaiah, S S Palanimanickam, Jayanta Rongpi, Arun Sharma, Prabin Chandra Surma, M Selvarasu and S K Kaarvendham.
5 Resolution adopted on 5 August 2004.
6 The Select Committee (1996) undertook a study tour to Kolkata and Dibrugarh from 4 February to 8 February 1996.
7 *Shillong Times*, 12 February 2019.

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The Idea of a University in India

SWATAHSIDDHA SARKAR

In colonial times, universities were established in India to produce graduates who would serve the interests of a colonial ruling elite. Fast-forwarding to the present times, India is witnessing a massification of higher education, with the establishment of more universities and an increase in enrolment. Under such circumstances, what merits examination is whether universities are producing knowledge for knowledge's sake, or training individuals to fall in line with a neo-liberal nationalist agenda of economic development.

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Speaking of the "idea of a university" at a juncture when universities in India are experiencing crucial changes, implies more than an attempt to tally the experiences of the university system in India in the light of this catchphrase—"the idea of a university"—coined by the British Catholic priest John Henry Newman (1996). The purpose is to use the "idea of a university" as a conceptual frame of analysis which would help us, on the one hand, to read the transformations of Indian universities, and, on the other, to reflect upon our expectations, which we may have as mindful citizens, of the universities in India.

The "idea of a university" in itself is an apophantic phrase that conceals meaning and gives us something as present-at-hand. The journey of Indian universities as such began as an apophantic statement—picked up from somewhere and implanted somewhere else—and was repeated without caring about the very fact that this trajectory also involves the risk in which both the real ready-to-hand meaning and the context of the universities may get lost. Consequently, India was fortunate to have universities as early as in 1857 (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras Universities were all established in the same year), which were premised neither on the Western prototype of a university nor even were they the alleviation of the historically-rooted *gurukula*[1]-vihara-madrasa tradition. The point is that unlike the West, universities in India emerged not to keep pace with the growth of knowledge, but to fulfil the interests handpicked earlier by colonial rulers, and now by the ruling cohorts in order to satisfy sectional interests, a politically calculated development agenda, and the interests of a neo-liberal regime.

The history of the "modern" institution—the university—in India, has been largely ahistorical in that it displaced in one go the remnants of the home-grown idea of a university as incapable of satisfying the requirement of the colonial state apparatus, while on the other hand the fusion of teaching and research (as was the case with Humboldt University since 1810) or the secular–liberal complex of a school of universal learning (*Studium Generale* as Henry Newman visualised it) were never encouraged to grow in Indian universities. The idea of a university was uprooted from its own context and was established in another context to fulfil the immediate interest of producing graduates to fill up the salaried positions emerging in the wake of colonial rule (Béteille 2010).

No wonder the universities in India largely failed to fuse teaching and research, to produce communities of scholars and scientists, but turned into graduate-producing institutions. Béteille (2010) reminds us that an institution finds it hard to free itself from its own history, and in the Indian case, it has been a history of both unlearning and forgetfulness. If the universities in colonial India were expected to be "graduate-producing institutions," universities in independent India came to complement the idea of state welfarism. The egalitarian imperative of a newly independent state to grant equal opportunities to its citizens in accessing national resources made university education not only accessible, but also converted it into a mass product.

The massification of higher education went on with the increase in the number of universities along with enrolments. In the wake of liberalisation, the number of universities and even the enrolment increased further.[2] Assessing these transformations in Indian universities, Apoorvanand (2018) metaphorically compared them to a stagnant pond and an expanding desert. Even though universities in India carry forward a legacy of 162 years, the desertification thesis of Indian universities (as enunciated by Apoorvanand) gains analytical purchase, especially when we fail to notice any fundamental change in the way independent India has conceived of the "idea of a university."

Massification of Education

Research indicates that in one form or the other, higher education across the world has been experiencing the massification phase, although in varying degrees

(Trow 2006). It is therefore not an exception if massification over the years has implicated higher education in India. Hence, an attempt to tease out the idea of massification and to situate it analytically in the Indian context seems to be worthwhile. A growing body of literature (Trow 2000; Guri-Rosenblit et al 2007; Mok et al 2013; Chan and Lin 2015; Varghese 2015; Ahmed 2016; Gandhi 2018) suggests that the massification of higher education is to be treated both as a process and a result. As a "process," massification of higher education happens through a processual triad constituted of changing policy perspectives (that guarantee rapid expansion of higher education institutions and enrolments), growing impact of democratic forces in politics (democratisation of higher education), and strong voices from the civil society (endorsing accessibility and spread of higher education).

On the other hand, as a "result," massification of higher education has to engage with questions of accessibility, equity and quality. Besides being a processual and thereby a highly normative issue, the extent of massification in higher education is measured usually in the light of the national enrolment ratio (variously called as the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in different country contexts, including India) and obviously by the increase in the number of institutions (central-state-aided universities, colleges and other institutes), enrolments in different socio-economic categories, etc. Based on the national enrolment ratio, scholars like Trow (2006) have developed a useful framework and convincingly argued that the massification of higher education usually takes place in three phases: elite, mass and universal. While the elite level implies a national enrolment ratio of (up to) 15%, the mass level ranges between 15% and 50%, and surpassing 50% enrolment is indicative of the universalisation of higher education. Higher education in India by these standards stands out to be in a stage of initial massification with 25.8% GER in 2018, while the provincial picture reveals a low web of massification (for example, GER in West Bengal increased from 17.5% during 2013–14 to 18.7% in 2017–18 [Samaddar 2019]).

Global trends in higher education, as also the volumes of research done so far in this field, pinpoint to a curious presumption: that massification of higher education is, in a certain sense, an obvious phenomenon, and irrespective of the economic condition or historical particularities, this will occur in the context of each country, although in varying degrees. Higher education is therefore to follow a trajectory in which it will transform from being the privilege of a few (elite phenomenon), to a resource of the majority, more as a right (mass phenomena), and finally a collective obligation (a universal phenomenon). It is in this sense that higher education throughout the world varies merely in terms of degree but not in content or form or its obviousness.

Scholars have identified two different modes of massification at the global level, namely an active mode and a passive and catching-up mode. The "active mode" is exemplified by economically solvent

countries, where the massification of higher education took place more as a natural outcome of economic development. The "passive and catching-up" mode on the other hand, can be experienced in developing countries where the massification of higher education is often pushed as a "leap forward" by the government, while the level of economic development might not have increased adequately. India is a classic case where the "passive and catching-up" mode of massification is in operation. Consequently, countries characterised by the "passive and catching-up" mode of massification have to rely more on private rather than government-aided institutions for obvious economic reasons.

The heavy dependence on privately-managed institutes as a means of massification has often resulted in debatable consequences, to the extent of perpetuating inequality in accessing higher education (Altbach 2010). The point here is not to argue against the massification of higher education but to call for a more realistic understanding of the implications of massification. In fact, enlarging the scope of accessing higher education—the fulcrum of the massification project—cannot simply be brushed aside in a country (like ours) that survives on the "politics of scarcity" (to use Myron Weiner's [1963] provocative provenance).[3] Massification as such is not incompatible with the "idea" of a university, provided the questions of "equity" and "accessibility" are not compromising the "quality" aspect of higher education.

University–Knowledge Coupling

Aristotle's (2004) three-tier knowledge protocol seems useful in understanding the university–knowledge coupling in the Indian situation. In *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle (2004) talks about three approaches to knowledge, namely episteme, techné and phronesis. While episteme concerns theoretical knowledge, implying the search for knowledge as an end in itself (epistemology—the science of knowledge—is derived from episteme), techné denotes technological know-how (it is about the set of principles or rational methods involved in the production of an object or the accomplishment of an

end) more in the sense technological knowledge; and phronesis refers to practical wisdom where knowledge becomes utilitarian and is guided by practical, instrumental rationality and governed by a chosen goal.

The search for knowledge is common to all these three types but it is only in the case of episteme that the search is not guided by any rational principle (like techné), nor does the quest for knowledge have any immediate goal to achieve (as is the case with phronesis). The germination of "the idea of a university" was premised in the search for episteme. However, in the course of its evolution, the "idea of a university" also responded to national concerns, state interests and ideological overhauls (aspects of techné and phronesis). Practical wisdom and technological know-how received due patronage, although the purposeless quest for the cultivation of knowledge by universities did not make way to oblivion completely.

In an attempt to situate our understanding of the Indian case, in the light of the fundamentals of knowledge vis-à-vis the idea of a university, it can be maintained that in India "the idea of a university" never emanated as a centre for the cultivation of episteme, even though some universities/departments are crowned with the tag of "centre for excellence." In other words, the "idea of a university" in India began with contradictions and the 162-year-long journey of Indian universities since 1857 has been a journey of ineptness and deviations. If "scientific racism" had convinced colonial rulers that the people of the East could not fulfil the mental and physical qualifications required for "original scientific research," as they were bred in a tropical climate (adapted from a letter written by Viceroy Lansdowne as quoted in Majumdar 2018: 10), the statespersons and planners of independent India thought it wise to direct universities to fulfill the "national agenda" of greater economic prosperity.

It is not that universities paying lip service to the "national agenda" are at odds with "the idea of a university." The argument is that serving the "national agenda" has lived on as the singular agenda, which has in fact worn out the

entire field of university activity in India. Further, a cursory glimpse into the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) Report (2009) might lead us to infer that knowledge has been primarily visualised as an application-oriented enterprise, directed towards translating scientific knowledge into innovation-oriented application, and thereby making the entire process a commercially exploitable property. In other words, the worth of knowledge by NKC's standards seems to lie in securing more of intellectual property rights by Indian scholars and scientists on the one hand, and in the functionality of knowledge as an instrument of transparent and effective governance on the other.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Consequently, universities in India more often than not failed to foresee education beyond the limits of training their incumbents in professional skills. With the massification of universities in India that started in the 1960s and with the mushrooming of private, state and even central universities in non-metropolitan zones which began since the new millennium—as Stefan Collini (2012: 7) suggests—the university which "furthers some form of advanced scholarship or research whose character is not wholly dictated by the need to solve immediate practical problems," is doomed to be at a loss. In the recent past, the subversion of "the idea of a university" in India came into limelight once again. The Ministry of Human Resource Development and the University Grants Commission (UGC), in their attempt to "governmentalise the research mind" (*EPW* 2019: 8), passed a resolution in the meeting of all vice chancellors of central universities on 15 December 2018 to make research in these universities fall in line with "national priorities."

It is significant to note that research and the cultivation of knowledge as a pursuit of purely non-instrumental human curiosity were never institutionalised in Indian universities during the colonial period. Immediately after independence, universities in India were directed towards the "national agenda" of greater economic development. And in the present-

day context, universities are dictated to fine-tune their research and teaching practices in consonance with "national priorities." No wonder one therefore finds that "the idea of a university" in the Indian context stands—if at all it stands—with a professed inclination towards phronesis and techné. The non-prioritisation of episteme in the structure of Indian universities has actually opened up space for many aberrations in the very "idea" of a university.

Of late, serious rethinking about the "idea of a university" has begun to take place,[4] particularly at that point of time when universities in India are gaining a more and more utilitarian focus. Even the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) or the UGC incentivise socially relevant, need-based, innovative policy research for universities (ICSSR's Impactful Policy Research in Social Science and UGC's Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy schemes are the cases in point). Be it the dictates of the state or of momentary nationalism or for that matter, of market fundamentalism, universities in India have to be responsive to the glaring contradictions that have mired the path of higher education. Given this reality, we have nothing but to anticipate whatever positive comes out of the phrasal template: "The University is dead, long live the University."

NOTES

1 A gurukula refers to a type of education system prevalent in ancient India, in which the students stayed near or in the same premises as their guru or teacher.

2 As per the 2018 All India Survey of Higher Education data, there are 903 universities, 37.98% of them are privately managed. The GER in higher education in India is 25.8% for the 18–23 years age group. The GER for the male population is 26.3%, and for female population it is 25.4% (Department of Higher Education 2018: i–ii).

3 The phraseology "politics of scarcity" was coined by Myron Weiner (1963) to pinpoint one of the grave concerns of India's democratic body polity. According to Weiner (1963), the "politics of scarcity" emerges out of the gap between government plans and decisions and the plethora of demands raised by organised groups.

4 In the recent past, significant researches on the idea of a university in India were made by a host of scholars from different disciplines. Besides these, several commentaries were also written on the university–state interface by distinguished personalities. Just to get a sense of how poignant the issue is one can pay

heed to the many volumes contributed by a variety of scholars such as Apoorvanand, Bhattacharya (2019a, 2019b), Chandra (2017), Kumar (2017), Majumdar (2018), Miri (2018), and Schreuder (2013) among others.

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The Injustice of Child Mortality

ANKUR VERMA

Over the last three decades, a large amount of scholarly work—cutting across disciplines such as demography, medical sciences, nutrition, history, and economics—has grappled with issues related to child mortality. Child mortality became a specific focus in the literature of human development as it was considered not only a measure of child health, but also an important indicator of overall development in the area of health. *A Shot of Justice: Priority-Setting for Addressing Child Mortality* by Ali Mehdi attempts to understand issues such as child mortality and child health through the lens of political philosophy. Mehdi lays out a very ambitious canvas on which he tries to present the problem of child mortality as a problem of justice. He argues that, although millions of children die every year for avoidable reasons, this has not been seen as a problem of injustice, and few theorists of justice have grappled with the problem of justice towards children.

An Injustice to Children

Mehdi states that, since children, and especially infants, cannot exercise informed personal choices, they cannot be held responsible for the outcomes. This renders many modern theories of justice that are based on distribution of resources and procedural fairness inapplicable to the problem of injustice faced by children. He finds Amartya Sen's (2001) capability approach more suited to the analysis of justice towards children since it does not give priority to resources and procedural fairness, but to the development of capabilities and freedoms. Mehdi argues that inequality between an individual's actual status and their optimal potential or "capability" is also an injustice to the individual and, in this sense, preventable child deaths are an injustice to children.

In 2017, 9.89 lakh children in India died before the age of five. India accounts for 18% of global under-five child mortality, highest for any country. China, which has more population than India, has a share of only 3% in the total under-five child mortality. Not only has China done much better than India, but many other neighbouring countries, including Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, have performed better than India.

The book classifies determinants of child mortality into three categories: structural, intermediate, and immediate. Mehdi looks at the correlation of child mortality with variables such as female literacy rate, percentage of population below poverty line, access to improved sanitation and safe drinking water, births attended by skilled health staff, vaccinations, and antenatal and postnatal care. At the inter-country level, he finds that decline in household poverty, youth female literacy, and vaccination coverage are correlated with improvement in child survival.

Using this analysis, the book argues that child mortality is not just a biomedical issue, and structural and intermediate determinants play a more important role. On the basis of a review of a large number of studies, Mehdi makes an interesting observation that biomedical variables such as antenatal care, postnatal care, and institutional deliveries are less important determinants of child mortality than socio-economic variables, such as household wealth, maternal education, sanitation practices, and air pollution. These findings are used in the book to question appropriateness of strategies that use biomedical interventions such as providing oral rehydration solution (ORS), antibiotics and anti-malaria tablets, and vaccinations to address child mortality without dealing with structural and intermediate causes. He argues that injustice towards children, reflected in high levels of child mortality, is directly linked to the social injustice that their parents face in the form of capability deprivation. The high levels of child mortality in the country are, therefore, a problem of persistent social injustice.

Mehdi then goes on to find which metric of justice would be most suitable for achieving distributive justice in the case of child survival as well as be sensitive to efficiency concerns. He argues that equality of opportunity in terms of access to healthcare and equality of resources are not solely suitable for child survival because some sections of the population may need more resources to achieve the same level of outcomes as others. He further argues that although equality of outcome may appear to be a natural choice, this would mean injustice to those with biological or cultural advantages. Using Sen's capability approach, the author suggests that the objective should be to ensure that the level of child survival for a section of the population reaches the maximal that is possible given its biological and cultural advantages, and that society should seek to ensure that the gap between the maximal potentials of different groups is reduced. He argues that,

> We could address inter-group inequalities in a positive way by trying to reduce the gap between respective maximal optimals as much as possible through supplementary focus on those whose maximal potentials are lower. In other words, there would be a double focus on the worse off in terms of the: (a) gap between their actual achievement and their maximal potential; and (b) the gap between their maximal potential and that of the better off. Both gaps should be addressed. (p 222)

Role of Social Injustice

Mehdi uses this framework to analyse the role of three axes of social injustice—gender, caste/tribe, and religion—in determining child mortality among different sections of the population in India. It is well-known that girls have a

biological advantage over boys in terms of probability of child survival. Unless this advantage is outweighed by other socio-economic disadvantages, rates of child mortality are expected to be lower among girls than among boys. Mehdi shows that, in 1958, female rural infant mortality rate (IMR) was lower than that of males in most parts of India. However, this changed over time as the child mortality rate among girls became higher than among boys. He uses this to argue that son preference and gender discrimination are a major causes of child mortality in India.

He then attempts to extend this argument to social discrimination, and this is where the book enters a slippery arena. There are two problems with the author's application of this framework to social and religious groups. First, the trends in child mortality are not as robust as the author claims them to be. For example, Mehdi argues that, historically, Scheduled Tribes (STs) had lower child mortality rates than upper castes, and Muslims had lower child mortality than Hindus, and that their relative positions have worsened over the years. He uses this observation to argue that STs and Muslims had "cultural or historical" advantages that have been lost over the years due to social injustice.

The empirical observations behind this argument are not well established. For instance, the claim that STs had a lower IMR than upper castes is made on the basis of three Sample Registration System (SRS) special surveys (conducted in 1978, 1984, and 1997). However, this claim is not supported by the data from the first National Family Health Survey, which shows that, in the case of child births between 1982 and 1992, STs had a higher IMR than the non-Scheduled Caste/ST population. Mehdi also does not rigorously explain what these historical and cultural advantages were, and how these advantages outweighed the material disadvantages these communities have faced historically.

Second, while it is arguable that girls have a biological advantage over boys and, in the absence of any discrimination, should have lower child mortality rates than among boys, the argument for social and religious groups is based on different cultural practices among social groups. It is not clear how these cultural differences can be given the same moral–philosophical sanctity as biological differences. Mehdi deals with this problem by introducing equality of potential as an additional social objective.

This, however, results in several analytical problems. First, empirically, the author uses the lowest level of child mortality achieved by a social group in any state as a proxy for the potential. This not only ignores the complexity of castes within the social groups across different states, it also confuses outcomes that are a result of various kinds of socio-economic conditions as "potential" that can be achieved. Second, if the social objective is to reduce the difference between actual outcomes and potentials as well as the gap between potentials of different social groups, one is essentially back to treating equality of outcomes as the social objective. Mehdi's argument against using equality of outcomes as the analytical metric for examining gender differences in child mortality holds also for the twin objectives as the potential child mortality for boys and girls cannot be equated.

Despite these limitations, Mehdi has dealt with a complex but important area of child mortality and has attempted to introduce a new perspective in the analysis of child mortality. The book should be an essential resource for readers interested in the application of theories of justice to human development as well as for those interested in understanding the problem of high child mortality in India. The book deals with many important issues, provides interesting analytical arguments, and throws open several questions for future research.

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Language and Translation in a Multilingual Nation

MITHILESH KUMAR JHA

Language, in modern times, with the growth of printing technology and formation of nation states, plays a central role in human society both symbolically as well as substantially. For innumerable communities, it has become a rallying point for identity formations. It holds the promises of enabling and empowering. It also becomes a tool for subordinations and marginalisation. Multiplicity of languages, their complex and dynamic nature could better explain our sociological and political realities. But, sadly, such dynamic roles of language have been hardly studied. In India, where these dynamics are even more complex and multilayered, languages are seen by many, even today, merely as tools of communication or part of "fissiparous tendencies." Only in the recent decades, scholars have begun to seriously study languages in order to explain the sociological, historical and political realities in India (see, for example, King 1994; Dalmia 1997; Rai 2001; Orsini 2002; Aquil and Chatterjee 2008; Sarangi 2009; Jha 2018a). In fact, I have argued elsewhere that various challenges and complexities of democratic politics and nation-building in India could be better understood by thoroughly exploring its languages (Jha 2018b). The book under review, *A Multilingual Nation: Translation and Language Dynamic in India*, edited by Rita Kothari, is a welcome and much needed collection of brilliant chapters in this direction. It comprehensively explores the language dynamics in India by focusing primarily on the im/possibility and even desirability of translation in a multilingual nation. This volume re-examines notions such as language, translation, meaning, and utterances by critically engaging with the everyday lived realities and performances of various linguistic communities in South Asia.

Various Methods to study Language

All 16 chapters, plus an introduction and an epilogue, are appropriately structured into four sections. Section 1 deals with the question of "translating in the times of devotion" while Section 2 is about making and breaking of the linguistic boundaries. Section 3 focuses on literary texts, variances in their performances and challenges in translating them, whereas Section 4 is aptly titled "re-imagining the time of translation." Together, these essays highlight the multiplicity of approaches and methods to study language dynamics in India and the im/possibility of their translation.

Rita Kothari in the introduction rightly argues about, and it echoes in other chapters too, the discrete nature of language. Language in this sense is seen not as a steady/stable entity, but a part of the larger network of languages which defines the multilingual scene as opposed to the supposedly "monolingual world" of advanced societies.[1] In a "monolingual world," while translating, it is easier to be truthful/authentic to the "source" and the "target" language. In this view, the translation is understood as "bridge/linkages/solution/integrating/joining" between two mutually incomprehensible and discrete languages.

However, Kothari, including many other contributors, challenges this understanding and argues that translation is an inherent and inalienable part of languages, particularly in South Asia. Hence, they are apprehensive about the desirability of official or formal translations. Translations in post-independence India have been officially used as a tool for "national integration" or for the promotion of Hindi. She asks a fundamental question: If "India is a linguistic nation, and an unbroken chain of communication characterises its linguistic network regardless of differences between languages, do we need translation?" (p 5). This provokes us to seriously rethink about the practices and desirability of translation in Indian languages, especially when the translation is done not directly between two languages, but with the help of a third language, mostly English but also Hindi. And, how meanings are lost in such translations is beautifully illustrated in Mini Chandran's chapter "Dancing in Hall of Mirrors: Translation between Indian Languages."

Language of Devotion

Linda Hess's bhakti poetry of Kabir (Chapter 1); Francesca Orsini's study of multiple and fluid renderings of "Na Hindu Na Turk" across the linguistic spheres (Chapter 2); and Neelima Shukla-Bhatt's "Songs on the Move" of Mirabai and Narasinha Mehta (Chapter 3) present a distinct and fascinating account of language use by different linguistic communities. They situate understanding and meaning of words or utterances; poems or songs in their locations in the larger social world, embodiments, literary movements and performances. Devotional literatures in India, prior to the coming of print, often transcended the linguistic boundaries. For instance, circulations of devotional poetries of Vidyapati in Mithila, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal, and Sankardev in Assam in 15th and 16th century across east India are wonderful examples of the ease with which literary works travelled across linguistic spheres even without their formal "translation."

Hess convincingly argues about the necessity to understand the embodiment of oral traditions and performances as well as social practices in order to construe meanings and understanding of bhakti poetry. Orsini's major argument is about the intersectionality and dialogical ways in which languages interact. This argument is further developed by Kurup Shah and Pooja Thomas by examining the multiple narratives of Jhaverchand Meghani and folk traditions in western India and linguistic scenes in the city of Ahmedabad respectively. Orsini argues about a shift in scholarships "from

single models of vernacularization … to a polyvocal, multivocal understanding that is not simply interested in the process of vernacularization (as a teleological, zero-sum game) but in the proliferation, trajectories, and indeed discontinuities of literary production and circulation in both high languages and vernaculars" (p 62–63).

This approach is apprehensive of the modernist understanding of language in singular often seen in a continuum of script, language, grammar, literature and community. However, one would like to argue that although it is true that languages in actual living spaces even now intersect and "borrow" from each other but over the three centuries "spheres" or "boundaries" of each language are more or less demarcated through/in which not only aesthetic, but political and material needs too are articulated and expressed. Thus, languages differ, or are made to differ, and therefore, one needs to examine the un/making of such differences sociologically, politically as well as historically.

Power and Language

Making of the linguistic boundaries in India was started by the colonial government. It was an arbitrary exercise of power. However, it set a pattern. Now, more and more communities construct their identities and make demands on the basis of their languages. Sanjukta Banerjee (Chapter 4) and Rita Kothari (Chapter 5) examine the "European gaze" on Indian language and the contentious nature of such classifications and demarcations. Kothari argues that Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* brought the imagination of language as a discrete entity to Indian soil (p 118). She critically examines the making of different categories of languages in colonial India as "mother tongue", "standard"/"non-standard languages" and their inherent contradictions. Classifications of Indian languages were started by the Britishers as a political tool to establish "order" in the otherwise chaotic linguistic spheres. It was also done to "fix" the languages and their boundaries, define nationhood, and translate their differences. This approach of classification and enumeration of the Indian languages continues to haunt postcolonial India as various communities cite these enumerative exercises and colonial records to further their demands.

However, social spaces of languages remain quite different from their official proclamations. Attempts to modernise one's language and record one's culture and idioms in print and their inherent contradictions are beautifully described in Sowmya Dechamma's "Three Languages and a Book." She captures such anxiety to "represent" and "standardise" in the context of Kodava speakers of Coorg/Kodagu area of Karnataka and the ways in which they negotiate with the linguistic hierarchy of English and Kannada. Similarly, Madhumita Sengupta raises important questions regarding the making of Assamese linguistic boundaries and what she calls "ideologies of grammar." She examines the inherent tensions in the making of modern "standard" Assamese and silences on the questions of Kamrupi and its other "dialects." However, one may find such challenges and contradictions in most, if not all modern Indian languages.

Rohini Mokashi Punekar (Chapter 7) and Veena Naregal (Chapter 9) connect the question of language and translation with the education policy of the state. Punekar's study of Jotirao Phule's *Gulamgiri* illustrates language as a vehicle of new and radical interpretations, which contests the dominant narratives and norms. She critically examines Phule's contributions in educational policies in colonial Maharashtra and the ways in which he subverted the upper castes' narratives of Indian nationalism. Phule also provided an emancipatory narrative to the Shudras and other excluded communities. His claims of Shudra as Kshatriya; Aryan as invader/outsider; or an ideology of a prosperous and peaceful Shudra kingdom are debatable. However, he did provide an alternative "subaltern" imagination.

Naregal questions the colonial bilingualism that created a hierarchy among the Indian languages. She argues that "relegation of vernaculars within the university system was a major landmark in the linguistic restructuring of colonial society" (p 202). She also points to the privileging of "nationalist paradigm"

over "regional" or "local" paradigms in post-independence India. It made *bhasha* spheres as the "realm of intellectual inferiority." The irony is that this continues to dictate the social sciences. How long will it continue this way?

Translating the 'Untranslatable'

Translation assumes certain modes of communication or literary production. It privileges written over the oral; languages with script and grammar over languages without script and grammar; languages with access to print over those with little or no access to print. Mitra Phukan points out the challenges inherent in translating India's North East into English. Here, she also explains the degree of hierarchy that exists between English and Assamese or the languages of Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram. She explains the dilemmas faced by translators when "varieties" of a language are used in the original text. In other words, she points to the challenges of translating "multiple tongues into a single one." Tridip Suhrud examines the political aspect of translating or not translating a text. Using the example of *Saraswatichandra*, a canonical text in modern Gujarati, which "remained untranslated in any Indian language till 2015" (p 245), he establishes the political aspect of translation. His deeper engagement with the Gujarati society and its literature allow him to critically examine the dichotomy of "self-imagining or lack of it" in modern Gujarat and its influences on non/translation of a literary text.

Madhava Chippali and Sundar Sarukkai's (Chapter 15) and G N Devy's (Chapter 10) arguments are thought-provoking and unsettle a number of assumptions about language and translation, orality and script, and their sequentiality. Chippali and Sarukkai question the understanding of language being "original and even unitary." They argue that "translation—as a concept—is prior to the notion of language" (p 310). Thus, they separate the notion of translation from the actual act of translating where translation is seen as inherent in a language. By regarding transliteration as a correct method of translation, they question the assumption that "concepts cannot be translated with total equivalence, and hence are untranslatable" (p 315). In their assessment, and rightly so, any expectation of complete equivalence in translation of any works is unrealistic, which is equally true in translating concepts.

G N Devy draws our attention to the close connection that exists between a language and human mind/brain. He also argues about the possibilities of "a translation time." He defines it as a time when "neither script nor speech comes first, nor is either of them subsequent. It will be an interesting time when all originals will be simultaneous with their translations, all translations already embedded within their originals" (p 336). It invites us to revisit many assumptions about oral and written, grammar and script, *sphota* and *dhwani*, original and its representation, print and translation and their sequentiality.

Summing Up

Methodologically speaking, there is simultaneous presence of pre/early-modern, modern, and postmodern approaches to study language and translation. Much of the analyses in the book are caught in between modernist search for truth and meaning in the singular and how to capture it through translation; and postmodernist approach to the very notion of truth and meaning in its multiplicity, plurality and relativity. It could be regarded as the strength of this volume, in a sense it brings multiple approaches together and thereby broadens our understanding of languages and translation.

This volume successfully problematises the idea of language and translation as a discrete entity and one tends to agree with their explanations of everyday communication and interactions across the linguistic boundaries in South Asia. Here, bilingualism or multilingualism is a lived reality where not just experts but everyone is involved in translation. This volume provides ample illustrations of these bilingual or multilingual interactions. However, language in modern print era—whether one likes it or not—has acquired an enormous power through its connections with emotive issues like nation and religion. And, there is hardly any serious analysis of ways in which language in modern India becomes the rallying point for various communities and how it influences the larger political processes.

A major concern regarding the language issue in modern India is its instrumental use on the one hand and its rootedness in the cultural and emotional repertoire of communities on the other from where it derives its infinite power and authority. All languages and their speakers do not possess these resources to the same degree. However, such variance could be explained historically in a specific political context of their emergence. This volume fell somewhat short of raising or highlighting these important issues, let alone critically engaging with them. Possibly, that could have been beyond the scope of this volume. Nonetheless, it remains a significant trope in any study of language dynamics and translation in modern societies.

Overall, this volume raises many fundamental questions. Its strength lies in the multiplicity of approaches and a range of inquiries that it offers to study various issues and challenges pertaining to the question of language and translation in a multilingual nation like India.

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NOTE

1   Read North America and Europe. Although, one can question the existence of such a "monolingual' world. A language carries within it multiple worlds, thoughts, and imagination to be reduced to a singular entity.

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Interrogating the Politics of Folk
Gender, Space and Identity in Goalpariya Folk Music of Assam

SIMONA SARMA

The analysis of *Goalpariya* folk music of Assam and its various facets helps deconstruct the conventional notion of "folk" as a neutral, static, historically continuous, and an unproblematic concept. The interconnections and linkages of folk music with the themes of identity assertion, tradition, authenticity, contexts of appropriation, and overall dynamism inherent within the concept of folk are also explored.

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Given that there are different forms of identity (be it social, cultural, economic, political, regional, etc),[1] my focus is solely on identities constituted in and through folk music. Such constructions, however, often lead to the constitution of an "inauthentic other" (labelling as inauthentic folk artists). By looking at the construction and assertion of identities through Goalpariya folk music and its changing nature (rather than its presumed stability), along with the function of folk music in creating dissent, I hope to engage in critically looking at the "politics of folk," so that the concept of "folk"[2] can be problematised.

In this article, I will first be looking at the connection between folk and identity politics and how this connection is further getting strengthened due to the current complexities of "new media." Then, I will be primarily focusing on the songs to derive the subversive potential that may be inherent within this folk. Understanding this paradox of folk will assist us to foreground "folk" as not-so-much an "innocent" category, but a dynamic category of analysis in itself.

Methodology

Since I am interested in analysing folk songs and its connection to gendered and political intricacies, I have used ethnomusicology as the broad methodological framework to locate my research. Ethnomusicology is a tradition of scholarship concerned with the social and cultural study of music and is rooted in ethnography, which is to say the study of musical practice in cultural context. Through the lens of ethnomusicology, I have been able to study *Goalpariya Lokageet* (folk song) in its cultural context, such that the ideology and politics surrounding it, the relationships between music, space, and identity, the ways in which language functions, the relation of music with gender and sexuality, and the construction of identities ranging from the smallest group to the most powerful nation in and through folk music, have become clear.

The tools/methods that I have used as part of this methodology are textual analysis of songs and in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders associated with the folk form like singers, musicians, people generally involved with the folk, etc. The use of both text-based as well as empirical research methods has helped me understand the textuality as well as the contextuality in the politics of folk music.

The study area for this research broadly consisted of two districts of Assam, that is, Kamrup and Dhubri. Within Kamrup, the majority of the interviews were conducted in the city of Guwahati, as most of the respondents now reside in Guwahati city. On the other hand, some of the interviews were conducted in Gauripur, a city in Dhubri district (earlier part of Goalpara district), the primary area where this folk tradition originated.

Whose 'Folk' Is It?

It is important to clarify at the outset that Goalpara, as it is known today, is an administrative district that has been carved out of the undivided Goalpara district of colonial Assam. It is this larger erstwhile Goalpara district, the westernmost district in Assam, from which the name Goalpariya Lokageet had emerged. Being the westernmost district, it was uniquely located on the border, bounded by the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in West Bengal and Rangpur in Bangladesh, to its west. Therefore, Goalpara was seen as a historically transitional area between proto-"Assam" and proto-"Bengal." This liminal position led to the people there being dubbed as "Prantobashi" or the "inhabitants of the Pranto, that is, frontier" (Misra 2006: 200). Politically as well, Goalpara has never been an independent political

entity. Hence, its history can be understood only in connection to the different dynasties that ruled it from time to time. Due to this unique form of political and spatial ambiguity, Goalpariya lokageet has a distinctive set of controversies associated with it. It, therefore, becomes an interesting genre to locate identity politics that may be enacted through the medium of folk traditions.

Goalpariya lokageet (presumably sung in the Rajbanshi language)[3] is mostly associated with the Koch Rajbanshi community who formed a major part of the total population of Goalpara. However, the diverse and contrasting narratives that were coming through my interviews problematise the straightforward link between the folk and the community. Because of the emergence of these songs from a space of liminality,[4] there are a lot of contentions over whose songs they are. There were some interviewees who made a conscious attempt to establish the Koch Rajbanshi community as the "folklore community," a term used by Joyce Flueckiger. "Folklore community" is one that "shares both the knowledge of a particular folklore repertoire and the rules by which its members communicate through those genres. Members of a folklore community know and agree upon who is traditionally permitted to perform particular genres and under what circumstances" (Flueckiger 1996: 178). She has argued that the "claiming" of the different folk forms itself shows an identification of a self-perceived regional identity (Appadurai et al 1991: 12–13). On the contrary, the disputes regarding the link between Koch Rajbanshis and Goalpariya lokageet, problematise the very idea of folklore community. Such contestations over the authentic folklore community bring out the way people try to ascertain their identity in and through a folk form. Interestingly, the anonymity of folk songs was also often utilised by many to opine about the uncertainty of its origin. The politics of authenticity, therefore, establishes the past connected to this folk music to be polyphonic and contested.

Similar "politics of pastness" also occurs in relation to the place/space. In the case of Goalpariya folk music, the story of the past is told from a particular geopolitical space further exhibiting the regional politics of the folk form. Given Goalpara's unique position in the geopolitical scenario, I could visibly gauge at the ways people were trying to construct and reassert it as the "folklore region" for Goalpariya lokageet through various practices like nomenclature, call for "correct" pronunciation (given the similarity of Goalpariya dialect with both Assamese and Bengali), creating exclusive boundary as to who can perform or practise the folk "authentically," etc. This brings forth the aspect of how folk can often be utilised to develop a strong sense of identification with the space/place of its origin. In other words, folk music can therefore be employed to accentuate the spatial identity. This feeds into the larger theory of how certain musical practices tend to anchor identities (both personal and collective) into specific places, towns and territories. Biddle and Knights (2007: 2) have called this an idealisation of place, especially in the context of different music(s) moving away from their spaces of production or creation.

Reconstructing the 'Authentic'

With the impending changes in global cultural economy and incursions of newer forms of media, Goalpariya folk form has changed a lot. With these changes, the attempt to establish and preserve the folk in its "pure form" has become even stronger. Therefore, I would like to trace the changes in a way which brings forth how folk music too gets embroiled within the discourse of change, and how this results in efforts to retain the "original" folk in myriad ways.

Presentation to representation: When the folk form got transferred from the "natural setting" to the stage, changes started to take place, in terms of performance, lyrics, the manner of singing, instruments used, etc. Along with transformations in the norms of performativity, the stage brings in new stakeholders into the domain of folk, like organisers (who organise the various functions and *melas* where the folk is showcased) who are largely involved in the control of stage performances. These organisers usually play a very powerful role in the representation of the folk form. They especially control the stage performances by deciding who can sing what, how to dress up, how one should appear while performing folk on the stage, etc. Such controlling also suggests the ways folk can transform from being quotidian to being utilised as a cultural exhibit. My interviews with different members involved with the folk, revealed how certain changes are brought in to showcase the folk in a sanitised form. For instance, *Hudum* songs[5] that form an integral part of Goalpariya folk music have now been recontextualised because of the explicit sexual connotations in the songs.

Apart from these limitations, one of the crucial positive changes has been the way several of the women singers have now taken up the playing of instruments. During my interview, one of the research participants, Purbi Baruah, sang to me while at the same time played the *dotora*. Also, for many of the female folk artists, performances on stage have proved to be revolutionary, as it has given them the opportunity to come out and be who they are. In other words, some have taken this chance to showcase their embodied selves.

Fusion or confusion: In contemporary times, apart from public stages, Goalpariya folk music has long entered the medium of radio, cassettes, internet, etc, especially with the rise of mass media and information technologies. There has been a literal shift of the folk from the space of the villages to that of towns. One can notice that most of the cassettes and songs that have become popular through recordings have some amount of innovations in them. It is usually the music industry (which now includes the entire gamut of musicians, audiences, sound engineers, festival promoters, etc) that stimulates such stylistic variations. The change in audience aesthetics also pushes the performers to meet new demands. Peter Kvetko (2004) has talked about how with increasing levels of globalisation, there has been an eventual increase in Indi-pop, especially due to economic liberalisation which was mostly promoted by multinational labels like

Sony, BMG, etc. These changes and effects have led to the constitution of a new kind of music that often utilises folk music along with several other musical genres. This I prefer to call the fusion form of the folk.

Nevertheless, there are several layers of complexities that are knitted into the word fusion. My field interviews with some singers, who are into fusion music, highlighted how singers create an unambiguous categorisation in terms of deciding what elements of the folk can/should change with the influx of technology. Folk music, in this sense, appears to have different elements, where changes in some elements are considered okay as compared to some other elements. For instance, Kalpana Patowary, a celebrated folk singer of Assam, considered the change in rhythm acceptable in contrast to the change in the *gayaki/dhek* (the projection of voice or the style of singing). Through her constant elaborations of how not to sing, it was obvious how one tries to justify the use of fusion in very many ways. Her re-emphasising of the importance of keeping folk sentiment alive, speaks a lot of the fusion dynamics. Creating fusion music, therefore, did not take away the questions of authenticity from the larger discourse of folk politics.

Many also felt a need for the folk to change to take it on to the national level, so that everyone knows and gets the inspiration to take up the songs. So, unlike the often used term of appropriation to refer to new performance contexts and performers, it is crucial to recognise that in some of the cases, the "tradition" is *s*elf-consciously packaged for both Indian and international audiences to represent the region, which need not necessarily be called appropriation (Flueckiger 1996: 151). The availability of mass-media technologies like radio, television and the internet has now made such self-conscious endeavours possible and convenient.

Goalpariya lokageet is now performed and sung by different actors and is transmitted through media like YouTube and Facebook. Goalpariya folk has also entered the realm of Coke Studio,[6] which is a music television series featuring performances of various musicians ranging

from folk, classical, jazz, pop, etc. This could, however, be seen as a strategy for preserving or "producing locality" (Appadurai 1996: 178). The singers, however, often make adjustments to uphold the folk and, at the same time, manoeuvre their lives with it. This was an important contradiction in terms of how in spite of engaging themselves with fusion music, they always valorise the folk part of the hybrid culture and strategically deal with criticisms of being "inauthentic."

Who can take the stage? However, the emergence of these new forms of music brings us to some critical questions like who has visibility vis-à-vis those who are losing livelihoods. Also, who can even afford to switch livelihoods? In this light, one can understand the figure of Pratima Baruah Pandey from a very different vantage point. Pratima Pandey, one of the quintessential Goalpariya folk singers, who brought out the folk into the performative location, has several credits to her name. She was, undoubtedly, the flag-bearer of Goalpariya lokageet. However, it is important to critically look at her caste/class privileges (being an upper-class royal family girl), which enabled her to acquire the symbolic capital as the most "authentic" Goalpariya folk artist. Thus, one must be aware of the power differentials associated with becoming the "artist" she had become. Thus, it is important to recognise how caste, class, ethnicity, and other forms of social identity delimit the category of "folk artist."

It has been seen that for many of the folk performers, who have mostly stuck with the "original" folk form with the hope of "preserving" the culture, the profession is dwindling. Despite such tough living conditions, they want to stick to their profession, as, in their words, "they are in love" with what they are doing. However, after a point they also contradict themselves saying that it is not a good enough income generator. Now especially with the changes in audience perceptions and needs, their art has become even more difficult to "sell." So, within these changing circumstances, it becomes extremely necessary to locate

their desire for "performance" within the larger discourse of "power representation." Therefore, the changing trends of music-making have introduced a new form of dialectics in the life of some performers.

How to sing? Throughout all my interviews, the question posed about the changes/transformations of the folk unanimously brought out issues of "authenticity" and validity. Many of my interviewees often tend to construe and imagine a "correct" form of the folk. Such notions of the correct form inevitably leads to the politics of authenticity. Thus, such claims of authenticity frequently lead to the constitution of an "authentic artist." The "authentic artists" then try to justify their authenticity by pointing out the ways they are striving to keep the "folk feeling" alive. Notions of "folk distortion" also repeatedly brought up the importance of "preserving" the folk in its original form. Such notions of safekeeping are often connected to the act of self-identification, such that folk validity is seen as getting undermined by "objectification and potential de-contextualisation" (Friedman 1994: 104).

By connecting the folk to one's original identity, the act of preservation stands to become a political act. Interestingly, workshops and competitions have become an important medium of keeping up the preservation project. Such steps towards preservation bring forth the nostalgia for "cultural purity" that often exists among the people. One can also gather how the transition from "folk" to "modern" is therefore, time and again, seen as wrong or immoral. In discussing questions of authenticity, I could also notice a reiteration from most of the folk singers who then try to equate folk with tradition.

However, it is important to examine the fact that some of the traditions they have referred to, have only become traditions in a way that they have been constructed and constituted through several practices (like styles of singing, kinds of voices used, ways of performances, etc). This politics of authenticity can therefore be closely interlinked with Hobsbawm's theory of "invention of tradition," according to which tradition is a practice of formalisation and ritualisation, often referenced with respect to the "past" (Hobsbawm 1983). It then becomes extremely important to explore how the memory of pastness is used to bring about the validity of the folk. However, to quote from Appadurai et al (1991: 22–23)

the problem of pastness itself changes as the modes of cultural reproduction change. As traditions become mass-produced, as cultural artefacts become commodified, as intimate performances become available to large audiences, the pastness of the present becomes itself a plastic relationship.

Thus, one needs to recognise the "politics of pastness," that is, the fact that "the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present" (Coser 1992: 25), and that it is "collective memory" that strives to keep the cultural continuity intact (Coser 1992: 30). It is important to realise that in a postcolonial world it is almost impossible to think of an autonomous or an internally coherent "authentic culture," as all of us now live in a world marked by "porous cultural boundaries" (Rosaldo 1988: 87).

However, by critiquing such claims to authenticity, I do not mean to take the position of cultural relativism either, as I do understand the importance of their struggle for assertion, through which they could engage in constituting a sense of shared public. Instead, by bringing notice to their call for authenticity, I want to bring out the complex dynamics that surround the concept of folk. Goalpariya folk music here has become the object of several contestations and struggles. In the process, the voices of those who originally engaged with the folk have been silenced. Such silencing indicates the politics behind the contentions, which further blocks us

from drawing a linear relation between folk and identity.

Moving from the politics of identity assertion, the next section will delve into the songs in themselves and the dissenting aspect that can be attached to Goalpariya folk genre. Understanding both the aspects of folk will help to locate the paradox within which folk music may function.

Subversive Potential

Apart from being a political tool, folk songs can also become a tool of resistance for the marginalised sections of the society. From a feminist perspective, I have tried to look at these songs as resources that give us cues as to how individuals (here women, as I am specifically looking at the songs mostly sung by women) often resist and question the dominant power structures within which they are embedded. Such an understanding helps us look at feminist politics in a much broader way.

Goalpariya lokageet has within it several diverse varieties and themes. Major themes emerging from the songs are those of spirituality/longing/desire/ separation, etc. Based on these several themes, they are categorised into different genres. Two major categories of Goalpariya lokageet are called *Bhawaiya* and *Chatka*. Bhawaiya is a class of love songs whose lyrical compositions often express suppressed passion. The Chatka, on the other hand, is short and crisp (Dutta 2009). They are usually sarcastic and speedy and are similar to parody. Some of the basic instruments that are seen as essential for the performance of the folk are *dotora*, *sarinda*, *dhak/ dhol*, and flute.

Expressing the unexpressed: Most of the Bhawaiya (slow-paced) songs are tied to the theme of migration. They are solo songs portraying the love, pain and pleasure, union and separation of the men and women of the region. This theme of migration can be tied to the historical context within which Goalpara was positioned. Since erstwhile Goalpara was a feudal society, the socio-economic scenario of the region was characterised by the dominance of the land owning

classes like the jamindars. Working for these feudal lords, the peasants/serfs would migrate to different places for various kinds of work. It is then that the wives used to sing the Bhawaiya songs for their absentee husbands. An important figure that recurs in Goalpariya lokageet is that of the *mahout* (people involved in domesticating wild elephants). The fact that migration was a predominantly male affair, also comes forth through these folksongs because the songs are mainly in women's voice where they are expressing their melancholy as a result of their separation. Through their lamentation, they explicitly talk about how they had to leave their natal home and family and then find husbands who leave for work. A section of one such song is as follows:

Are Gouripuriya mahout kande o, Sokhi ghor bari chhariya sokhi o,
O mur sarin hatir mahout re jidin mahout Bhutan jai,
Narir mon mor juria rohoi re!
Akashe te nai re chondro, Tara kemon jole …
Je Narir Purush Nai O, O Tar Rupe Ki Kaam Kore Sokhi O,
O mur Makhna Hatir Mahout Re, Ji Din Mahout Shikar Jai
Narir Mon Mor kandia Rohoi Re
Ai charilong bhai charilong, charilong sonar puri
Biao kareya chariya asilong o, sakhi alpa bayaser nari sakhi o,
O more haay hastir kainya re, khaneko daya nai tor mahut okla giya re.[7]

(The Mahout from Gauripur cries, for he has left his home, O my friend,
My elephant girl, the day Mahout goes to Bhutan,
My mind as a woman becomes distressed!
Now that there is no moon in the sky, how will the stars glow?
The women whose husband is not nearby, oh! How will her beauty work?
O my friend, the day Mahout goes for hunting, My heart cries!
I left my mother, I left my brother, I left my golden house to marry you,
O Mahout, please have some pity for your young wife,
Whom you have left and gone to work).[8]

In the above passage, one can see the woman expressing her desires and longings for her love. But, at the same time, she is also showing sympathy for her lover and trying to express his feelings through her words. One can also notice the explicit symbolism that is prevalent in this section, where the

moon (a unitary element) represents the man, while the stars (signifying multiplicity) stand for woman. Such an analogy gives us an idea of the kind of power relationships that were inherent in the society.

The element of *biraha* or deep emotion comes out very strongly through such songs. It can be especially culled out from the elongated tones that the singers sing with, in a way that the last word of every line is lengthened with touching resonances. One can almost feel the throes of desperate passion throbbing with pain. As Margaret Trawick (1991) in her analysis of a song by an untouchable Tamil woman has also written that such songs, in a sense, elucidate and strengthen certain life events, like separation and suffering in human relationships. Such autobiographical narratives that distinctly elaborate the pain/passion can be seen as leading to a construction of the "experiential self" (Appadurai et al 1991: 10). In other words, as soon as it is sung through a song, the expression and tonality bring life into it and almost invisibilises the thin line between expressive genres and the real. Therefore, one can glimpse into the numerous struggles of the "lived body" through these songs. Such songs also take us back to Ramanujan's (1991) idea, where he argued that the very idea of a woman speaking through texts expresses or results in the construction of her self. An otherwise silent woman may therefore become a speaking woman (Appadurai et al 1991: 9).

As Kirin Narayan (1986) has written, "songs provide a medium for expressing emotions that are taboo topics in everyday conversations" (as cited in Jassal 2012: 2). It, hence, becomes extremely crucial to read those emotions within the songs. Since singing can play a critical role in venting emotions (Jassal 2012: 153), I have tried to capture the songs as discourses of emotions that allow for the free expression of one's feelings in socially acceptable ways. Such emotional discourses, however, are often shaped by the political economy of which they are a part. Such an exploration allows us to recognise expression of powerful emotions, particularly by those who are

lower in power hierarchies, as an act of resistance, a rupture of the normalisation of everyday power relations and hence as an inherently political act. We, as feminist researchers, often talk about bringing out the voices of the marginalised. Here, the songs in a very literal sense allow me to tap into those voices which remain critically unheard, in a sense that although almost everyone has listened to these songs in Assam, they do not generally consider them as epistemic resources that reflect women's "subaltern consciousness" (Jassal 2012: 4).

Gendered spaces of performance: Apart from Bhawaiya, I would like to elaborate on two other genres within this folk, which were of particular interest for this research. They are *Kati Puja* and *Hudum Puja* songs. These songs were especially interesting because, first, the women folk exclusively sing them and men are almost forbidden from entering. Thus, the relation between women and rituals is accentuated through such gendered performances. Second, although the songs are ritualistic or devotional in character, they along with their performances are filled with sexual/erotic imagery. I could not be a part of any such performance as the people today claim to have stopped its practice altogether. So, the interviews were my only source to understand what happened during such performances and the kind of songs sung during that time. An example of a Hudum *geet*:

> Hilhilyache kamorta mor sirsiryiache gao
> Konte kona geile aela mui hudumar nagal paon.
> Patani khan pareche khasia aisek re huduma dyaoa.
> Tur bade mui achong basiya.
>
> (My waist is eager to be clasped in your arms,
> My body is love sick to meet Hudum.
> My dress is dishevelled.
> O Hudum, I am waiting for you.
> Do come and embrace me).[9]

As already mentioned in the previous sections, these performances were a means to please the Hudum deity or the god of rain. When I interviewed the singers, they often tied their nakedness in performance to a kind of sacrifice they used to do for the betterment of the nature. However, I see them as more than just acts of sacrifice, and rather it

points out how such rituals may provide a space for women to blur the boundaries between the "normal" and the "abnormal." To cite from Narayan, "this emphasis on songs being sung from duty and from happiness (in this case from sacrifice) could be a form of 'feminist coding' (Radner and Lanser 1987), making for a 'hidden transcript' (Scott 1991) or 'veiled sentiments' (Abu-Lughod 1986) whereby women could exchange subversive messages" (Narayan 1997: 42). Now, on the other hand, most women are not allowed to indulge in such performances by their male companions. Henceforth, with the onset of modernity, it has become difficult for women to keep up with these traditional performances. This clearly resonates with Sumanta Banerjee's article on 19th-century Bengal where he discussed how the folk forms that speak explicitly of women's desires (which usually tend to originate from the lower class/ caste groups due to the "moral ethics" burdened upon the upper-caste/class women) tend to be marginalised with respect to other genres as part of the sanitisation process. She talks about how this marginalisation continued due to the conceited and persistent ideological campaigns of the *bhadralok*[10] against these cultural forms along with several socio-economic changes like the diminishing number of old patrons, rise of the book culture, etc (Banerjee 1990). Thus, the changes in the folk form often attempt to fit the desires of the upper- and middle-class elite's ideas of Victorian morality. Thus, it becomes extremely important to engage in what I call song conversations, which allow us to delve into the implicit sexual politics at work.

Such rituals and practices where women are separate from men and rituals and practices which exclude men, serve in themselves as a "means of resisting and setting limits to domination" (Jassal 2012: 14). In such a case, as Jassal has rightly mentioned, one must see agency as "capacity for action" created and enabled by specific relations of power, rather than narrowly seeing it as resistance to relations of domination.

Therefore, as long as we consider the context as equally enlightening as the text, it is extremely important to

analyse the songs in terms of not just who is singing what, but also who can be present during different performances. Such gendering of the spaces in which singing can happen becomes essentially crucial to the cause of my research. Such splitting majorly has to do with the kinds of songs sung and lyrics within them. The musical world is therefore gendered in terms of both genres of songs and also the spaces of their performances.

Thus, songs in itself provide us with an understanding of how women may operate their agency through diverse mediums, one being songs.

Conclusions

By looking at Goalpariya folk music and its various facets, I have tried to deconstruct the conventional notion of folk as a neutral, static, historically continuous, and an unproblematic concept. As detailed out in the previous sections, folk music can be and is often used to establish and assert identities of various kinds, such that they inherently become invested with identity politics. However, apart from the politics associated with the concept of folk, talking about Goalpariya folk music has also given me an opportunity to begin conversations about the traditions of a culture that has been almost marginalised in relation to other folk cultures of Assam. By bringing into light the explicit mentions of women's desires, sexuality, needs, etc, within the corpus of Goalpariya folk songs, I have also recognised the subversive potential inherent within these songs. This paradox of folk becoming both a tool for liberation as well as a political tool is something I have tried to capture through the research.

Hence, it is important to see how folk music is often used to assert identities based on community, space, or gender. This assertion often becomes problematic as it is fraught with the question of who does the folk belong to? At the same time, the emergence of new contexts has further reinforced this identity assertion, as people are now working more to preserve the folk in its "original" fashion. Such reinforcement has raised the question: "How should the folk be?" However, this movement of Goalpariya folk from one space to another must also be seen in the context of "who can sing the folk?" which will automatically draw us to the unequal relations of power based on caste and class that also envelop folk music. These contestations in their totality, I call the "politics of folk," that is often neglected within the larger discourse of Assamese cultural environment.

NOTES

1 I do not mean to see them independently and do recognise the interconnectedness between each of them.
2 I am using the word "folk" in double quotes as I do not want to essentialise the concept and understand it as it is understood in common terms. Throughout the article, I attempt to debunk the normative idea of "folk" as that which is inherently connected to a particular region/community in a perennial manner.
3 I have used the word "presumably," as there are a lot of contentions over whether the language is Rajbanshi at all.
4 Here, I borrow the term from Victor Turner, for whom "liminal" meant entities that are neither here nor there, or are "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969: 95).
5 This is an all-women ritual where no men were allowed to be present. This ritual was performed to please the *Hudum* deity or the god of rain. The women usually used to assemble in an uncultivated field, especially at night, with plough and seeds. Then they shed their clothes, untied their hair and danced passionately, all the while singing hymns to *Hudum*. Through these performances, the woman tried to depict their erotic desires as standing for the parched earth's desire for rain (Banerjee 1997:155–56).
6 A fusion form of Goalpariya lokageet along with a Punjabi folk song was produced in Coke Studio, Season 3 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDOFDwgXrew). Here, the main instrument of Goalpariya Lokageet that is, *Dotora,* has remained intact, while other instruments like drums, electric guitars, synthesisers have been used to present the song in a very different way.
7 The song is called *Hostir Kanya,* sung by the Goalpariya singer Pratima Baruah Pandey https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zykaYOfCqA. These songs have been taken from different albums of Pratima Pandey and uploaded on Youtube.
8 Translation by the author.
9 Both the song and the translation have been taken from Barma (2004: p 184)
10 It refers to a specific class of English-educated upper-caste men that arose in 19th-century colonial Bengal. They played an important role in developing certain common standards of behaviour along with their associated social and cultural aesthetics.

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The Troubled Ascent of a Marine Ring Seine Fishery in Tamil Nadu

MAARTEN BAVINCK

The transition to ring seine fishing in India is examined, paying special attention to the implications of legal pluralism. Ring seine fishing developed in niches and spread swiftly throughout the subcontinent, dividing the fisher population into fervent protagonists and antagonists. It is argued that sociotechnical innovations are often contested, and that rival parties apply alternative legal regimes to advance their rights. Fieldwork in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu suggests that regimes function as arenas for deliberating and battling alternative futures in fishing and mask deep sociolegal divides.

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This paper makes use of sociotechnical transition studies, and particularly, a multi-level perspective (Schot and Kanger 2018), to understand contemporary developments in Indian capture fisheries. This study adds the concept of legal pluralism (Bavinck and Gupta 2014) to transition literature and examines the complications that pluralism creates for innovation dynamics. A case study on the rise of ring seine fishing in southern India, it examines the implications of legal pluralism for sociotechnical transitions.

Capture fisheries are known not only for their diverse harvesting technologies, but also for their propensity to evolve over time (Valdemarsen 2001). Major collective changes to fishing technologies are, therefore, analysed as sociotechnical transitions (Geels 2004). The empirical focus of this paper is the emergence of a new, downsized form of purse seine technology in India, known locally as ring seine fishing. This practice has spread along the entire East Coast, replacing other forms of fishing, and it is now moving up the East Coast. However, this process of spatial dissemination is far from smooth, as the technology is heavily disputed by fishers and is even prohibited by state governments—for instance, in Tamil Nadu and parts of Odisha (Bavinck et al 2017; Nair and Mohammed 2015; Sridhar et al 2005). The district of Cuddalore, located in the upper reaches of Tamil Nadu, is a contemporary hotspot for ring seine fishing. I analyse the sociotechnical transition taking place there to build a general argument about the effects of legal pluralism on the "stability" of such transitions. Rather than viewing transitions as smooth processes, I view them as undetermined, contested, and occurring at multiple, yet linked, levels.

Theoretical Perspective on Sociotechnical Transitions

World fisheries are infamous for the crisis in which they are currently enveloped, generally known as "overfishing" (FAO 2018). Overfishing—the unsustainable exploitation of fish stocks—is the result of a process of technical modernisation that commenced in the 19th century (Bavinck 2011; Garcia et al 2014; Smith 2000). The transition to ring seining that is now occurring in South India is a related development.

Sociotechnical transition studies investigate patterns and mechanisms in technological change processes (Geels 2002), highlighting transition pathways (Geels and Schot 2007) as well as, for example, issues of space and scale (Raven et al 2012). Presented as a middle-range theory (Geels 2010), scholars in this field view tensions and mismatches that occur within

systems as "windows of opportunity" for innovation (Geels 2011: 29); here, "innovation" is generally perceived as a desirable phenomenon. In this paper, which centres on disputes, I take a more nuanced position, allowing for "unwanted" innovation and sociopolitical contestation.

Sociotechnical transition studies divide sociotechnical systems into three levels: niche, regime, and landscape (Geels 2004; Schot and Kanger 2018). Technical innovations, arguably, commence in "niches"—"protected space[s] where promising new technologies are developed" (Hermans et al 2013: 614). Niche activities develop in reference to "regimes," which are defined as the "semi-coherent rule sets directing the behaviour of a set of actors in a single sociotechnical system" (Schot and Kanger 2018: 1,055). Both niches and regimes are embedded in "landscapes," which include larger macro processes and conditions. Sociotechnical transition theory has been applied in a variety of settings, including fisheries (Haasnoot et al 2016).

For the purpose of analysis, and in line with contemporary sociolegal scholarship, we adjust the above framework and specifically allow for the pluralisation of regimes. Legal pluralism scholars point out that societies and societal sectors, rather than enjoying coherent legal systems, are frequently characterised by normative plurality (Benda-Beckmann 2002; Bavinck and Jyotishi 2014). Depending on the interactions that occur among legal systems and the pertinent power equations, a field may be characterised by fragmentation, conflict, or mutual support.

Legal pluralism prevails in many aquatic regimes (Bavinck and Gupta 2014). Fisheries in South India too have been fruitfully investigated from a legal pluralism angle (Bavinck 2001; Jentoft et al 2009; Bavinck et al 2013; Karnad 2017). Legal pluralism creates dilemmas for governors in charge of "steering" sociotechnical developments (Jentoft and Bavinck 2014), and for citizens who engage in forum shopping (Benda-Beckmann 1981).

In the following sections, I trace the transition to ring seine fishing in Tamil Nadu, distinguishing several phases in the change process. The data are from a two-year research project (2016–18), in which I led a team investigating fisheries in Cuddalore. In total, I spent four months in the region (August–September in 2016 and 2017), walking the coastline from north to south, joining a ring seine fishing trip, and talking to a variety of stakeholders about the issues affecting ring seine fishing.

History of Ring Seining: An Overview

The rise of ring seining in India must be viewed against the backdrop of fisheries development, which the Government of India took up with urgency after independence. Scholars note that marine fishing is an age-old occupation in India, and that countless fishing castes have specialised in the trade (Subramanian 2009). At the time of independence in 1947, the country had 5,00,000 marine fishers; according to the government, their main problem was low productivity (Chopra 1951). The Blue Revolution that the Government of India subsequently initiated hinged on the introduction of a new fishing technology. Fundamental to the effort was the Indo–Norwegian Project (INP),

which commenced in 1953 and continued until 1972; it introduced the modern techniques of bottom trawling and purse seining in India (Sandven 1959; Kurien 1985). Bottom trawling was the first of these techniques to catch on, especially after trawl operators discovered foreign markets for shrimp in the late 1960s and prices went up manifold (Kurien 1978). Semi-industrial trawl fishers, however, soon entered into a serious conflict with the large population of small-scale fishers, who felt that their livelihoods were under threat. This conflict prompted the rise of what became a national fisher movement (Sinha 2012) and the first round of legislation curbing trawling operations. Meanwhile, INP was experimenting with purse seine technology, the result of which was the development of a fleet of large purse seiners along the East Coast, which pursued schools of fish that travel up and down the coast (Edwin and Dhiju Das 2015; Pravin and Meenakumari 2016). A purse seine is a large surrounding net, the bottom of which closes after encircling a shoaling school of fish. The early fleet of purse seiners too came into conflict with small-scale fishers over resources (Nair and Jayaprakash 1983; D'Cruz 1998), thus triggering some attempts at government regulation (Pravin and Meenakumari 2016).

Bottom trawling and purse seining marginalised the small-scale fishing population in India, a process which was offset, to some extent, by the motorisation of small craft. Motorisation increased the range and speed of small-scale fishers, and provided them with countervailing power against trawlers and purse seiners (Bavinck 1997). While the fishing populations along many coastlines were already acquainted with encircling techniques (such as the shore seine), the motorisation of small craft facilitated the downsizing of purse seine technology. As such, the mini purse seine, also known as the ring seine, came into use among small-scale fishers along the Southeast Coast of India in the early 1980s (Edwin and Dhiju Das 2015).

There are two accounts of the genesis and subsequent spread of the ring seine. The first connects it to an initiative of the ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (ICAR-CIFT) in Kochi, Kerala, in 1982 (Edwin and Dhiju Das 2015; Pravin and Meenakumari 2016). The other more detailed account links the development of ring seining to ingenious small-scale fishers in various parts of Kerala. They were inspired by their new knowledge of large-scale purse seining, probably acquired from working on purse seiners, and by prevailing fishing practices in their native regions (D'Cruz 1998). Starting in Kerala, where it is now the dominant mode of fishing (Edwin and Dhiju Das 2015: 90), ring seining has veritably spread across the Northwest and East Coasts of the country (Pravin and Meenakumari 2016).

Cruz (1998) divides the rise of ring seining along the East Coast into three phases: the origin or innovation (1985–1986), growth, and development (1987–1990). A census by the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS) reveals that at the end of the latter period, there were 2,259 ring seine units in Kerala, equivalent to 4.5 ring seines per kilometre of coastline (Pravin and Meenakumari 2016: 14, 45). As ring seining spread along the coast of Kerala, so too did tensions

with small-scale fishers who were not party to this shift; I shall return to this in the next section.

Sociotechnical transitions, such as ring seining, occur in response to prevailing conditions in the marine environment, on the one hand, and the market, on the other. Inshore and offshore waters were relatively rich in demersal and pelagic species, so the various modernisations that occurred increased the fish catch spectacularly, in turn boosting marine fish production almost eightfold, from approximately 47,000 MT in 1948 to 35,83,000 MT in 2015 (Government of India 2017). In later decades, however, harvesting levels have stabilised, and catches per unit of effort have decreased; there is significant evidence of "fishing down the foodweb" (Bhathal and Pauly 2008). Indeed, the National Policy on Marine Fisheries recently concluded that "fisheries resources from near-shore waters are fully utilized" (Government of India 2017: 14) and that only the deep sea offers opportunities for intensification.

The decline of inshore fisheries, as noted in this recent policy document, was already evident to fishers in the 1990s (Bavinck 2001); indeed, scientists have occasionally issued warnings on the dangers of uncontrolled innovation. The respected fisheries scientists, Silas and colleagues (1980: 3), writing about the rise of purse seine fishing on the East Coast, argued that "[s]uch wasteful and destructive fishing could irreparably damage the fish resources," and strongly recommended better regulation. We encounter similar voices in our discussion on ring seining in Tamil Nadu.

The market too was receptive to the introduction of new fishing technologies in inshore waters. I have already mentioned the impetus of international demand, first for shrimp and later for other seafood products. The continual increase in seafood prices, both internationally (Delgado et al 2003) and locally (Government of India 2014: 152), has been a strong incentive for entrepreneurs in India to invest in fisheries.

Now, mention needs to be made of the state-based regulatory regime governing marine fisheries and its relation to technical innovation. I have already mentioned the Indian government's interest (at the central- and state-level) in modernising fisheries. The Constitution provided the foundation for this effort by assigning the regulation of fisheries in territorial waters (within 12 NM [nautical miles] from shore) to state governments; the central government is in charge of fisheries in the rest of the exclusive economic zone. Importantly, the Constitution (Article 19[g]) stipulates that every citizen of India is allowed to engage in any profession; this provision afforded non-fishers the opportunity to invest in fishing. Non-fisher investments took place frequently, especially during the early innovation phases of trawling and purse seining (Kurien 1978; Bavinck 2001).

Jurisdiction for regulating marine fisheries was established only in the 1980s, after violent conflict erupted along the entirety of the Indian coast. In response to a model bill circulated by the central government, state governments began to formulate legislations for regulating marine fisheries, with a focus on separating the two warring parties. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Regulation Act came into force in 1983; while it has repeatedly

been supplemented by government orders, it recently underwent a comprehensive revision in 2017.

For this paper, another government notification (GO No 40 of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, Tamil Nadu) is relevant. It states:

> In exercise of the powers conferred by […] the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1983 […], the Governor of Tamil Nadu hereby prohibits fishing […] with Purse-Seine nets by any fishing vessel/craft, whether country craft or mechanised boat, irrespective of their size, and power of the engine, in the entire coastal areas of Tamil Nadu in the territorial waters, as a measure to conserve the fishery.

Not only does this notification pertain to the entire coastline of the state, it also relates to all kinds of fishing activity, by small-scale and semi-industrial (or mechanised) vessels alike. It is motivated by conservation needs, which, as we shall see, are contested (as is the ring seine fishery as a whole).

State law is not the only source of regulation for Tamil Nadu fisheries, where legal pluralism is the rule. The fisheries on the Coromandel Coast, which stretches over approximately 400 km (kilometres), are well-known for their caste-based fisher councils, or *ur panchayats*, which have traditionally played a role in ensuring the well-being of hamlet populations (Bavinck and Vivekanandan 2017). Rooted in patrilineal kinship structures, and based on principles of equality, ur panchayats are strong, local decision-making platforms, handling dispute resolution, representation, community welfare, and fisheries management (Bavinck 2001). The last activity hinges on the widely-shared notion that adjacent land and water "belong" to the local ur panchayat, which is, therefore, in charge of making decisions on the acceptability of new fishing technologies and practices. Ur panchayats evaluate such technologies and practices according to their potential to cause three types of harm: to the marine environment, to the majority style of fishing, and to the community as a social entity. An unfavourable judgment by an ur panchayat could lead to the banning (*tadai*, in Tamil) of certain gear (Bavinck and Karunaharan 2006). Each fisher settlement along the Coromandel Coast has an ur panchayat in addition to a system of regional cooperation through panchayat circles or "head villages" (*talai nagar*, in Tamil).

Zooming in on Cuddalore

Cuddalore is situated halfway along the Coromandel Coast of Tamil Nadu (Figure 1, p 39)—this is an area notorious for natural and man-made disasters. While the former include cyclonic storms and rare tsunamis, the latter are often linked to the establishment in the 1980s of a large Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemicals Investment Region (PCPIR) that has been involved in multiple pollution scandals.

The Cuddalore coastline is 57 km long. It is dissected by two major rivers and extensive backwaters which separate the coastal belt from the interior. According to the fisheries department, there are 47 marine fishing hamlets here, partially clustered around three urbanising harbour locations (Cuddalore Old Town, Parangipettai, and Mudasal Odai) and otherwise spread out along the coast (Department of Fisheries 2010). It estimates the marine fishing population to be

Figure 1: Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu

Source: UvA-Kaartenmakers.

While most chemical industries in the region operate near the backwaters and not along the coast, coastal populations have nonetheless experienced negative side effects. For example, numerous jetties and pipelines have been constructed in order to import raw materials and discharge of waste. These infrastructures inevitably occupy coastal land and water, interfere physically with fishing operations, and affect the health of fish stocks and marine ecosystems. In order to compensate the fishing populations, ur panchayats have negotiated deals with industrial companies, whereby the latter make annual contributions to temple festivals and reserve a limited number of low-paying jobs for people from the adjacent hamlets.

The blue revolution, launched by the Government of Tamil Nadu, affected the fishers of Cuddalore in similar ways as in other parts of the country. While large-scale purse seining activities never developed as on the East Coast, two large trawling centres emerged in the district (Cuddalore Old Town and Mudasal Odai)—here, trawling activity centred on the resource-rich inshore zone, where small-scale fishers also plied their craft (Lawrence and Bhalla 2018). A section of the small-scale fishing population subsequently transitioned to trawl fishing, either as owners or, more frequently, as crew. Sometimes, they migrated permanently to harbour towns in or around the district for this purpose. The majority, however, continue to engage in small-scale fishing, making use of a range of drift netting technologies (Bavinck 2001). These small-scale fishers target the various, marketable species available in the Bay of Bengal in different seasons; it is important to note that the species that ring seines currently target are largely the same as those that regular small-scale fishers catch.

Many fisher respondents in Cuddalore expressed pessimism about the future of marine fisheries. Along this entire coastline, there is a strong drive to educate children, in the hope that the younger generation will abandon the dead-end occupation of fishing. Meanwhile, ongoing research indicates that many older fishers are currently spending a varying number of years in Gulf countries or in Singapore, having been "pushed out" by the poor conditions of the local fisheries, and "pulled" abroad by the opportunity to earn good money. In all, these developments show that Cuddalore fishers are broadening their perspectives beyond the hamlet, the coastal strip, and the fishing profession. Ring seine fishing has emerged in this reality.

Regulations governing ring seine fishing in Cuddalore come from two sources. The first is the district administration, headed by the collector, who depends strongly on the assistant director of fisheries and their small staff for matters concerning fisheries. Both are based in Cuddalore. Fisher law

approximately 45,000 individuals, the majority of whom belong to two fishing castes: Pattinavar and Parvatharajakulam. The latter are located primarily in the central part of the coast, and the former dominate settlements in the northern and southern reaches.

Several events and processes have left marks on the marine fishing population in Cuddalore: the tsunami of 2004, the rapid industrialisation of the coastal zone, and the ongoing modernisation of fisheries. The tsunami that swept the low-lying Cuddalore shore in December 2004 caused many deaths, particularly in the fishing population, and extensive material damage. Following the tsunami, the government relocated a number of fishing hamlets to the interior, while others were provided with seawalls and ecosystem-based protection measures.

also emanates from the ur panchayats in each hamlet. Although the ur panchayats still possess considerable power, recent research demonstrates variability with regard to structure, scope, and activity (Bavinck and Vivekanandan 2017); these factors are probably related to changes in the macro-environment, as sketched above.

Fishers in the district recognise two head villages that correspond with two caste groups: Devanampattinam (for the Pattinavar) and Samiyarpettai (for the Parvatharajakulam). Both villages figure in the transition to ring seine fishing, to which I now turn.

Contestations over Ring Seine Fishing

Ring seine fishing technology swept up the coast from southern Tamil Nadu, reaching the fishing port of Pazhayar, at the border of Cuddalore, in the late 1990s. United under the Devanampattinam flag, a large fleet of irate Cuddalore fishers travelled to Pazhayar and set fire to the ring seine nets (*surukkuvalai*, in Tamil*)* being used there. This incident demonstrated the widespread resistance to ring seine technology and temporarily put its adoption on hold. Respondents point out, however, that in the years that followed, fishers in Cuddalore became increasingly aware of the financial advantages associated with ring seine fishing. Thus, as a former official of the fisheries department pointed out, "other fishing methods were not generating big catches, and ring seining provided new opportunities for small-scale fishers" (anonymous personal communication, 15 September 2016). Interestingly, the fishers of Devanampattinam converted first—and wholeheartedly—to the technology, and those from other villages followed suit. Respondents agreed that this transition gained momentum especially after the tsunami of 2004.

Various encircling techniques for capturing passing schools of pelagic fish were, at the turn of the millennium, already in use along the Coromandel Coast. Ring seine gear, however, was an upgrade to these earlier techniques; small-scale fishers found it attractive as it was possible to share ownership. As the labour requirement for ring seining was high (normally 30–60 people), it made sense for fishers to form investment or labour groups. Thus, shareholder groups of 20–30 fishers purchased small ring seine nets (approximately 400 m long; Tamil: *adantavalai*)—either new or second-hand—and committed to collectively operating the gear. Members split the returns equally. The advantage of ring seine fishing was that it did not require the immediate purchase of a new vessel; instead, motorised crafts, which had become plentiful after the tsunami and were normally used for small-scale fishing, could be used for this purpose.

This form of collaborative fishing is still practised in several fishing villages along the Cuddalore coastline. Small ring seine nets cost between ₹5 lakh–₹7 lakh (second-hand) and ₹10 lakh (new), and a share normally costs less than ₹25,000 per member. In addition to this democratic and rather simple form of ring seining, however, new, more capital-intensive and harbour-based fishing forms have emerged; the pertinent core technology is, once again, being imported from Kerala.

The first so-called *kanaa* boat—a high-prowed vessel, 15–20 m long—fitted with winches and specifically designed for ring seine fishing, was probably brought to Cuddalore town in 2006 (personal communication Taniyavelu, 12 September 2016). The investment required was not large (a second-hand kanaa boat currently costs ₹20 lakh); this kind of vessel made offshore fishing for larger fish species possible, and allowed for more sizeable nets (1,500 m long). For kanaa fishing too, shareholdership is a regular phenomenon. Interestingly, respondents agree that the number of shareholders in a kanaa group has declined from an average of 20 to just 5–10. This is indicative of the increasing wealth of fishers involved in kanaa fishing. Cuddalore now counts among the major fishing ports, with a substantial number of kanaa boats in Cuddalore Old Town (an estimated 150 vessels) and Parangipettai (fewer than 20 vessels). The owners/operators of these vessels hail from fishing villages along the coast; respondents all agreed that Devanampattinam is the centre of trade. Kanaa boats operate both inshore and offshore, and, as such, come into conflict with small-scale fishers.

Recent additions to the ring seine fleet are the large steel boats that go on multi-day fishing trips to offshore waters—they can be considered regular purse seine vessels. These large boats target the most valuable pelagic species, such as tuna, and cost ₹12 lakh each, including gear. Operating costs are estimated at ₹3 lakh per voyage. Although shared ownership prevails in this case too, the original system of shareholder/crew participation has largely been abandoned. Workers now come from agricultural professions, and owners often do not personally go fishing. Moreover, wealthy shareholders seem to invest in more than one vessel.

The transition to ring seine fishing that occurred in Cuddalore has several defining features. First, there was a move from small-scale ring seine technology to larger, more capital-intensive forms; all these forms of fishing still coexist along the coast. Second, while collective shareholdership is still the norm, the size of ring seine operating groups is reducing as the wealth of individual fisher investors increases. Traders appear to have played a role in funding the initial shift to ring seining, but their role has declined over time. Although ring seine fleets largely operate in the same locations as the trawling fleets of Cuddalore, there seems to be limited interaction between these fleets; indeed, there is a certain degree of animosity between trawling and ring seine fishers. Third, ring seine fishing is now often considered to be the fishing populations' *mukkiyamaana tozhil* (primary work), in contrast to small-scale fishing (Tamil: *sinna tozhil*, or small-time work). In this, it differs from trawl fishing, which has always been regarded as a sector in which small-scale fishers cannot easily participate. Finally, I have shown how ring seine fishing has been contested by the fishing population, even from its inception.

I will return to this point after sketching the disparate and often emotionally charged opinions that fishers, government officials, scientists, and activists have about ring seining in Cuddalore and the region at large. Opponents of ring seine fishing in the district tended to emphasise two aspects. First,

ring seine fishing tends to result in the overall depletion of inshore fish stocks. Harvesting entire schools of fish (including juveniles and egg-bearing females) arguably causes overall fish stocks to decline. This might have other negative consequences; for instance, predator fish no longer come inshore. Second, ring seine fishing arguably benefits a certain segment of the fishing population to the exclusion of others. Small-scale fishers in the region, who use drift nets, have observed that their catches of sardine, mackerel, and other schooling species have reduced. Theirs is an argument of fairness and social justice. Meanwhile, proponents of ring seine fishing point to the extreme fecundity of many pelagic species and the lack of scientific evidence on overfishing. They also emphasise that there is a general crisis in the fishing sector and an unavailability of income-generating alternatives. Finally, they point out that other state governments in India, such as the one in Kerala, have even encouraged fishers to adopt ring seining.

Debates on the potential harmfulness of purse or ring seine fishing have been around for a long time; the counsels of Silas and co-authors (1980) were noted earlier. Such warnings, in addition to the vehement protests of fishers along the coast of Tamil Nadu, undoubtedly inspired the government notification banning ring seine fishing in the state. In Cuddalore, the effort to limit ring seine fishing was taken up by the chief administrator, Singh Bedi, who had gained popularity within fishing communities because of his excellent handling of the tsunami disaster. In the wake of his efforts, the Fisheries Department held a number of meetings in the district, warning fishers of the dire consequences associated with ring seine fishing (anonymous personal communication, ex-AD Fisheries, 15 September 2016). Today, fishers still talk about Bedi's spirited opposition to ring seining (personal communication Devaraj, 7 August 2016).

The fishers of Cuddalore also took remedial action. Once the Devanampattinam inhabitants and village council abruptly gave up on opposing ring seine fishing and joined the band wagon, the Samiyarpettai head village led the protest against incipient ring seine activity. This precipitated in a peace meeting (in the district collector's office on 12 March 2004), which fisher representatives from both sides and several government officials attended. The meeting ended with a resolution, signed by all those present, that ring seine nets should no longer be used.

While ring seine fishing in Cuddalore increased in the post-tsunami period, and many ur panchayats stopped opposing this technique, a group of 23 villages headed by Samiyarpettai persevered. They did not allow their members to engage in ring seining, and continued to lobby against the use of this technology with each ur panchayat sending a letter to the district collector asking for the government ban to be enforced. This led to another peace meeting on 21 June 2016; once again, fisher representatives from both sides and a number of government officials attended. The decision taken at the meeting was to limit the number of ring seine units employed in the district, and to terminate ring seining altogether within a year. The latter clause was added so as to allow those who had invested in ring seining to recover their investments. However, the decisions made during this meeting have not been honoured; indeed, at the time of my fieldwork in 2016, new ring seine units were being established. Moreover, fishers from Samiyarpettai complained that, in retribution for their opposition to ring seining, fish traders in Cuddalore had stopped purchasing their fish. A year later, a young fisher from Samiyarpettai voiced disappointment in the fact that the decisions made at the peace meeting had essentially been ignored, complaining that the government should have more actively ensured their implementation.

> The government should have restricted the use of ring seine nets much sooner. Now, they cannot do anything because people have invested large sums of money. Now, the only thing to be done is to raise awareness among fishers and inculcate change—a form of slow action. The government should be doing more now, as fishing practices are so poor. (personal communication, Saktivel, 3 September 2017)

Next, I reflect on the troubled transition to ring seine fishing, as it occurred in Cuddalore.

Discussion

The sociotechnical transition to ring seine fishing in India had several features. First, the technology—a radically modernised version of existing encircling techniques—was introduced and developed in "niches" along the East Coast of India. It subsequently spread to what might be termed "subordinate niches" along the East Coast, before it entered Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu.

The landscape of this transition was multidimensional, broad-based, and anchored in a policy of "innovation for growth" (Schot and Steinmueller 2018). The technology originated in Europe and was introduced in India through multilateral development cooperation projects. Indian governments embraced the technology in order to enhance fish production, as did individual fishers who were eager to offset the decline in catches, which was caused at least partly by overfishing.

The "regime" governing the introduction and practice of ring seine fishing, however, is not so straightforward. Subsequent governments in India, which have each claimed a monopoly over regulating fisheries in the country, have taken different standpoints, sometimes allowing ring seining, and sometimes not; in any case, the government failed to provide a nationwide regulation framework. Thus, while the Tamil Nadu government has officially prohibited ring seining, Kerala permits it. Therefore, much of the equipment used in Cuddalore was purchased legally in Kerala. Moreover, even though the Tamil Nadu government has officially banned ring seining, it makes no efforts to implement this regulation—the most glaring example is in the harbour of Cuddalore Old Town, which houses a large, active fleet of illegal ring seine vessels.

Parallel to the fractured and ineffectual nature of government regulation, there is a strong, but increasingly variable, system of customary law at the village level, which is anchored in ur panchayats. Panchayat members and ordinary fishers share the opinion that, based on historical precedence, they have a moral right to govern inshore fishing spaces. The main way in which ur panchayats do so is by banning harmful

fishing practices (Bavinck and Karunaharan 2006). Thus, at the inception of ring seining in the region, ur panchayats on this part of the coast joined for a punitive expedition against perpetrators in Pazhaiyar, a fishing town across the border in Nagapattinam district.

In subsequent years, however, fisher opinion in the Cuddalore district became divided; one group of panchayats was in favour of an overall ban of ring seines, while another group strongly supported the use of the technology. Peace meetings organised under the auspices of the district collector brought no solace. In fact, the number of ring seine units continued to rise, much to the dismay of a section of the fishing population and many members of government, scientists, and members of civil society.

In Conclusion

Besides the "niche" and the "landscape," sociotechnical transition studies emphasise the importance of the prevailing institutional "regime." The assumption is that regimes are semi-coherent, thereby "accounting for the stability of [sociotechnical] configurations" (Geels 2002: 1,260; Schot and Kanger 2018). The case of ring seine fishing in India demonstrates, however, that transitions sometimes occur in contexts of legal plurality. This paper questions the effects of legal pluralism on sociotechnical regimes and transition processes, with a focus on ring seine fishing.

Legal pluralism causes institutional fragmentation, which has an impact on ordinary citizens and authorities. Three points stand out. First, the quality of legal pluralism plays a role in the stability of sociotechnical transitions. Legal pluralism scholars distinguish between "weak" and "strong" (or "deep") forms of legal pluralism—the former falls under the umbrella of, for example, a state legal order, and the latter denotes the coexistence of distinct legal systems (Griffiths 1986). A strong legal pluralism perspective draws attention to fundamental tensions occurring in the very field in which a sociotechnical transition is taking place. Such tensions are evident in the case of ring seining in Tamil Nadu, particularly because of the differing stances of ur panchayats and government authorities.

Second, power equations and politics play important roles in the stability of any sociotechnical transition (Kenis et al 2016), as they do in conditions of legal pluralism (Jentoft and Bavinck 2014). If one legal system and its members dominate the field, long-term stability is more likely than when legal systems rival each other in strength. In the latter case, such as with ring seining in India, the stability of the transition is questionable. With the existence of many different perspectives, ring seining is currently shaky at best.

Finally, when societal systems, such as fisheries, rely heavily on ecological services for their existence (Costanza et al 2017), a degradation of these services may negatively affect whatever stability is supposed to exist in a sociotechnical transition. The changes that are occurring in the marine ecosystem as a result of multiple human interventions, including ring seining, may eventually limit its practice. The future of ring seining in India is, therefore, yet to be decided.

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Have Economic Reforms Trumped Democratic Decentralisation?
The Experience of Gujarat in India

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Can economic reforms and democratic devolution go together? Can the prevailing political-economy ensure a balance between the two forms of decentralisation? The paper attempts to examine these questions with reference to Gujarat in western India. Based on a critical analysis of the interrelationship between the nature of devolution and economic reforms, it is argued that the latter seems to have triumphed over democratic decentralisation. A minimum guaranteed devolution to local governments in the constitution is suggested as a safeguard against the vicissitudes of state-level politics.

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Since the early 1990s, India has embarked on constitutionally mandated reforms to institutionalise democratic structures of local governance. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments impelled central and state governments to create a third tier of government comprising panchayats and municipalities endowing them with relevant powers. Many hailed it as a profound stride towards realising the Gandhian dream of *gram swaraj.* After more than two decades of devolution, there is considerable agreement now that the project of democratic decentralisation may not have gone the distance in accomplishing the visualised goals (GOI 2013).

A major discontent is about the failure of local bodies to emerge as empowered institutions of self-government to pursue grassroots planning and development as envisioned under Article 243G. More so despite all the states having complied with the obligatory provisions like conducting regular elections for local governments and providing reservations to disadvantaged sections. Reluctance on the part of state governments to devolve much-needed powers is seen as a major hurdle towards empowering the local governments. Given their clear onus, why are the states unwilling to devolve powers to local governments? Assessments in this regard highlight a lack of political will within the ruling elite at the subnational level as a prominent cause hindering the devolution (IRMA 2008; Singh 2007). There have been instances of state governments even reversing some of the proactive steps taken towards decentralisation. It is an irony that the states at large which demand greater devolution from the centre remain apathetic when it comes to substate-level devolution.

Any attempt to answer the above impasse can afford to ignore the influence of the larger political economy that has unfolded since the 1990s in the wake of the ominous economic reforms adopted with the attendant processes of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG). There are compelling conceptual and policy driven reasons to explore the linkages between economic reforms and democratic devolution. Embarked almost simultaneously, both the strategies of decentralisation have recorded chequered progress. The ruling elite, both at the centre and state governments, notwithstanding political affiliations, have wholeheartedly supported economic reforms as a means to reverse the tenets of the *dirigisme* so as to integrate the economy with the global capitalist system. The votaries of reforms have found strong grounds to argue that

the reforms were a necessity owing to the prevailing macro-economic crisis and that they enabled the economy to overcome the crisis while achieving unprecedented rates of growth (Bhagwati and Panagariya 2013; Ahluwalia 2013). On the contrary, many have contested that reforms imposed from outside have not only failed to address the basic challenges of poverty and inequality, but have emerged paradoxically as a threat to democracy including for local governance decentralisation (Choudhary 2007; EPW 2018).

The paper is an attempt to examine specifically whether the goals of democratic decentralisation have been hampered by economic reforms and if so, in what ways. The analysis has been attempted with reference to Gujarat in western India depicting a stark contradiction between the outcomes of economic reforms and democratic decentralisation. Gujarat is hailed apparently as a state having its own unique "model of development" accomplished through vigorous economic reforms (Hirway 2014). As regards democratic decentralisation although Gujarat had made some remarkable progress before 1993, it is currently seen as a laggard having failed to devolve powers to local governments to the expected level (Alok 2014).

Divergent Paradigms

It is well-documented that decentralisation emerged as a common political and economic strategy of governance reforms for reversing the downside of centralisation across regimes (Manor 1999). However, the overall process of what drives decentralisation is seen as complex even though decisions are largely political in nature. Two issues relevant to the success of decentralisation are the motives it involves and the existence of pre-conditions. Both genuine and partisan motives have been identified as driving decentralisation (Manor 1999). Genuine motives could include goals like deepening democracy and enlarging citizens' opportunities for participation. In the latter case, it may become a mere substitute for centralisation preempting any local dissensions. In the Indian case, though the stated reason for democratic decentralisation was enabling the local bodies to emerge as responsive institutions, certain partisan motives were also attributed as the then ruling party with its strength eroded was trying to consolidate its base.

As regards pre-existing conditions, it is argued that effective decentralisation is a theoretical implausibility under conditions of rampant inequalities (Gurukkal 2006). Social and economic inequalities may preclude the weak from fully participating in decision-making, and the outcomes could be more acute exclusion defeating the basic purpose of decentralisation. Irrespective of preconditions, the success could also be influenced by the degree of devolution either given the ideological moorings of the ruling establishment or the incentives that may confront the governments and bureaucracy to decentralise. Generally, the devolution of adequate powers along with measures for accountability has been crucial to the success of decentralisation. While ideology may impel governments to adopt substantive or big-bang devolution, sustaining it could require suitable incentives (Ragunanadan 2012).

Figure 1: Divergent Paradigms
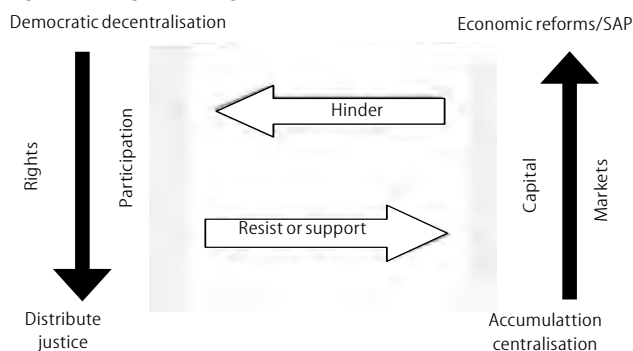
Recent theoretical arguments on decentralisation are more about incentivising different players to respond favourably to its needs (Oommen 2005). Incentives could be both political and economic. Politically speaking, decentralisation may be used by ruling parties, especially at the state level, to consolidate their base through grassroots politics while enhancing governance credibility by improved delivery of services. Various pressures including demand for decentralisation could influence states to consider diverse options for devolution (Rao 2012).

Designing suitable financial incentives for governments to devolve could be another alternative. Explicit financial incentives by way of tied or untied transfers have been proposed to make lower governments respond to the needs of effective devolution (GoI 2009). Yet, the results of such incentives could vary as the outcomes may depend on the degree of incentives at stake. Incentives based largely on economic rationale could turn out to be narrow having mere instrumental consequences. State governments are more likely to attach greater importance to political and not financial incentives depending on their ideological position (Rao 2012).

In terms of political influence, economic reforms could potentially turn out to be a major factor swaying the way states could perceive the benefits of decentralisation. For liberals, apparently, there is no dichotomy between democratic decentralisation and economic reforms as both can go together with their proclaimed common goals (Ragunanadan 2012). Decision-making in both cases is supposed to be more decentralised involving dispersed units having interface with market and civil society for synergetic outcomes. Even local governments could integrate economic reforms in their own domains by enabling efficient delivery of public services to become part of valuable markets.

Skeptics and radicals offer counter arguments suggesting that economic reforms are bound to create hazards for local governments. Many visualise reforms and democratic decentralisation working at cross purposes as the theoretical and developmental paradigms underpinning the two are fundamentally contradictory (Jayal 2007). Democratic decentralisation, while is based on a distributive justice paradigm, economic reforms which even come as a part of the project to expand global capitalism, are based on accumulation paradigm being essentially centralising in nature (Figure 1).

The outcomes of economic reforms would be growth of monopoly and oligopolistic tendencies accentuating the concentration of resources and inequalities. Primitive accumulation, joblessness, and neglect of social sectors due to contraction of the state's role are ways in which reforms deepen inequalities excluding the poor and weaker sections from governance and development (Patnaik 2014).

The neo-liberal moorings compel reforms to rely excessively on markets and finance capital while leaning towards centralisation (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2009). With global finance capital assuming prominence, the economic decisions of a nation are more likely to be taken at supra-national level weakening the position of the nation-state. Full-blown reforms pit the state against the market, wherein the state's role may be undermined severely. The state is then compelled to pander to the owners of global capital through various policy concessions to keep them invested (Patnaik 2014). A major consequence of such a development is the de-politicisation of decision-making as people are left with no major choices because of homogenised economic policies across the political spectrum. There could be a shift of class balance in society with neo-liberalism marginalising petty producers, peasants, and labourers. Though local governments and civil society may try and assert themselves (Alvares 1996), the state could suppress dissensions betraying its allegiance to the capital.

Reforms also introduce new principles of governance that could compromise the autonomy of local governments. Maintenance of sound fiscal balance becomes a trait of public finance under reforms curtailing the resources of governments at various levels. The fallout of such a framework is a major expenditure compression with social sectors feeling the pinch (Gupta and Muzumdar 2018). The market-based approach of reforms usher in new mechanisms like self-help groups or user-groups based on individual rationality for management of resources and services with the potential to turn citizens into consumers. Parallel bodies favouring such principles are likely to be preferred over local governments (Reddy 2007).

Scholars differ regarding how democratic decentralisation may be sustained in the event of economic reforms turning inimical. For liberals, local governments can sustain themselves by trying to complement the reform process using their own strengths of inclusive governance. (Ragunanadan 2012). Those with radical/populist views spotting an inherent contradiction advocate an alternative approach that is countervailing (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2009). The need is about democratising power structures at all levels—local to global—to reverse the predatory nature of reforms. Economic democracy may need balancing based on political democracy.

Brief Profile of Gujarat

Before we look at the interplay of reforms and devolution, an attempt is made in this section to understand the political-economy that has emerged in the state of Gujarat. Gujarat in its present form took shape in 1960 pursuant to the linguistic reorganisation of Indian states. With nearly 43% of its population in towns and cities, Gujarat figures among the highly urbanised states of India (Table 1). The sex ratio at 919 is much lower than the all-India ratio (942) indicating an adverse gender balance. Socially, the state presents a mix of diverse groups and communities with the Hindu population accounting for 89.1% in the total (GoG 2014). The weaker sections comprising Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) formed 21.5% of the population and Other Backward Castes (OBCs) about 52%. Despite this mix, the state showcases the socio-economic domination of forward castes with widespread discrimination prevailing against the weaker sections and minorities (Shah 2014).

Table 1: Socio-economic Profile of Gujarat

	Particulars	Gujarat	India
1	Total population (2011)	60.44 million	1,210.57 million
2	Sex Ratio	919	942
3	Rural population (%)	57.40	68.85
4	SC (%)	6.74	16.63
5	ST (%)	14.75	8.61
6	Literacy (%)	78.0	73.0
7	Per capita income (2012–13)	₹96,976	₹67,839
8	Forest Area (%)	9.62	22.89
9	Life Expectancy: Male Female	70.7	68.8
		73.7	71.1
10	IMR	38	42

Source: GoG (2014).

Economically, Gujarat is relatively an advanced state on several fronts with a higher per capita income against the all-India level. It recorded very high growth rates, especially post-2000. While the officially recorded poverty ratio is at 23% in 2009–10, Gujarat registered a relatively high inequality level (with a gini ratio of 0.343) (Hirway 2014). While the sectoral composition of GSDP in 2009–10 clearly depicts the domination of services and industrial sectors, the employment composition presents a skewed picture with agriculture accounting for the bulk of employment (53.4%).

Speaking of political profile, Gujarat portrays a major shift in recent decades. The Indian National Congress dominated the scenario from 1960 to 1995 with a few non-Congress parties assuming power briefly in between. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has come to dominate the political scene since 1995 having continuously won assembly elections aided by several factors (Shah 2014). The social bases of Congress and BJP have undergone significant changes. The Congress, despite support from diverse sections of caste and religious groups, has lost its base. The dominant caste groups, both in rural and urban areas, tilted towards the BJP, particularly in the wake of anti-reservation and communal movements spread over two decades (Yagnik 2002). To sustain itself in power, especially after 2002 communal violence, and to reciprocate the support base of industrialists, businesspersons, and middle-class, the ruling BJP hastened the reforms' process. It has tried to create a highly liberalised and market-oriented regime for industry and business through aggressive reforms. Helped by the combination of Hindutva and neo-liberalism, the BJP has established its dominance in Gujarat since the 1990s. Such a social formation has ushered in a

political economy that is inherently inimical to the deepening of democracy in the state.

Progress of Democratic Decentralisation

Prior to the enactment of constitutional amendment acts in 1993, Gujarat was among the pioneering states which nurtured the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) (GoG 1987). The Gujarat Panchayats Act (GPA), 1963 and the Gujarat Municipalities Act (GMA), 1963 provided the legal basis for ushering in democratic decentralisation (IRMA 2008a). The legislations had very clearly identified activities and subject matters to be transferred to the local governments. Both within and outside the provisions of the prevailing acts, the state government took proactive steps to strengthen the local governments. Holding regular elections and providing various types of institutional support to local governments were two prominent features of the period. The Gujarat Panchayat Service Selection Board, Statutory Development Funds, Social justice committees, District Planning Boards (DPB), Gujarat Municipal Finance Board (GMFB), and the State Advisory Council were certain key institutional mechanisms created to support the local governments. Thus, with its own enabling acts, Gujarat had made a fairly significant progress in creating a robust local government system prior to 1993.

Post 1993, Gujarat came up with confirmatory acts for rural and urban local governments. The GPA 1993, GMA 1993, and the Gujarat Provincial Municipal Corporation Act, 1949 were passed as per the new provisions of Part IX and IXA of the Constitution. The state has met all the mandatory requirements of the Constitution albeit in a staggered way. These include the constitution of the State Election Commission, reservation of seats for SC/ST and women, formation of state finance commission (SFC), creation of District Planning Committees (DPCs), and compliance with the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act. Gujarat also adopted or retained certain unique features besides the mandatory provisions. These include the *Samaras* Village Scheme, district planning boards (DPBs), equalisation funds, and the GMFB. While under the *Samaras* Village Scheme, panchayats get monetary incentives if they hold unanimous elections, the GMFB helps channelise grants to municipalities.

As regards Articles 243G and 243H of the Constitution requiring the state government to devolve adequate powers to local bodies to emerge as institutions of self-government, there has been at best mixed progress. According to the GPA 1993, the state government can transfer to district panchayats any powers, functions, funds, and functionaries of the state government. The district panchayats can also transfer to the taluka and village panchayats powers/functions it is delegated by the state government. Under the GPA 1993, 10 departments have been identified for transfers to panchayats. Of the 29 subject matters listed in the XI Schedule of the Constitution, the panchayat department claims 14 subject matters to have been fully transferred to the panchayats based on activity mapping carried out by the department. While five subject matters have been partially transferred, 10 are waiting in line (IRMA 2008a). The panchayats at various levels are expected to prepare plans

and forward them for progressive consolidation at the state level. However, in the absence of functional DPCs, there is no clarity on how such planning is being implemented. Regarding the transfer of functionaries, while all panchayats have basic functionaries assigned by the state government, the transfer of functionaries of 10 departments identified under the GPA 1993, there are no clear provisions in place yet. As regards finances of panchayats, though taxes, fee, and grants are the basic sources of revenue the grants received both from the central and state governments form a major source—about 70% of revenue for panchayats (GoG 2013).

About the urban local bodies (ULBs), as with panchayats, the GMA 1993 identified 10 departments for transfer to municipalities. Higher-level officials like municipal commissioners are appointed by the state government while for other officers the state government has created common cadres although their salaries are paid by ULBs. The ULBs have three sources of finance: sharable tax, own tax and fee, and grants. While municipal corporations can borrow, the municipalities have no such powers. The grants include those provided both by the central and state governments. The state governments have to constitute state finance commissions (SFCs) periodically to determine the basis for distribution of finance between the state government and local bodies. Gujarat has constituted three SFCs so far, apparently with much reluctance.

How Deep Is Decentralisation?

As described earlier, Gujarat did make some commendable progress in its devolution efforts prior to 1993. However, post 1993, the achievements of Gujarat under the new constitutional

Table 2: State-wise Panchayat Devolution Index (PDI)

	2013–14			2012–13	
Rank	States	PDI	Rank	States	PDI
1	Maharashtra	70.21	1	Maharashtra	64.04
2	Kerala	68.00	2	Karnataka	62.22
3	Karnataka	65.75	3	Kerala	55.41
4	Tamil Nadu	58.98	4	Rajasthan	52.10
5	Chhattisgarh	55.16	5	Tamil Nadu	52.05
6	Rajasthan	54.23	6	West Bengal	49.81
7	West Bengal	52.09	7	Madhya Pradesh	47.26
8	Madhya Pradesh	51.14	8	Chhattisgarh	44.61
9	Haryana	48.27	9	Haryana	43.63
10	Tripura	44.48	10	Gujarat	40.75
11	Sikkim	43.95	11	Odisha	40.01
12	Gujarat	42.61	12	Tripura	39.72
13	Andhra Pradesh	40.69	13	Uttarakhand	39.37
14	Assam	40.26	14	Sikkim	39.12
15	Odisha	39.95	15	Uttar Pradesh	37.34
16	Uttarakhand	37.87	16	Assam	36.89
17	Himachal Pradesh	36.96	17	Himachal Pradesh	36.83
18	Punjab	35.28	18	Goa	31.77
19	Uttar Pradesh	34.11	19	Punjab	31.23
20	Jammu & Kashmir	32.95	20	Bihar	29.90
21	Jharkhand	29.40	21	Jammu & Kashmir	28.85
22	Bihar	29.15	22	Jharkhand	27.25
23	Manipur	27.87	23	Manipur	25.91
24	Arunachal Pradesh	27.03	24	Arunachal Pradesh	23.67
25	Goa	24.75	25	Andhra Pradesh	NA
	All India	39.92		All India	38.52

Ranks worked out by the author based on Alok (2013 and 2014).

framework leave a lot to be desired. Except for complying with the mandatory provisions Gujarat has not made the expected efforts enabling emergence of local bodies as institutions of self-government as confirmed by available studies (IRMA 2008a; Bandi 2013). The unsatisfactory performance of Gujarat is corroborated by the multi-dimensional panchayat devolution index (PDI) as measured periodically by independent agencies for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj of Government of India. The inter-state comparative results of the composite PDI are presented in Table 2 (p 47). The PDI is measured along six dimensions of devolution, namely framework, functions, finances, functionaries, capacity building, and accountability.

While the PDI goes with several limitations (Oommen 2009), it may serve as an indicative proxy of the underlying depth of the devolution. Gujarat, with a composite score of 40.75 and 42.61 in 2012–13 and 2013–14 respectively, is categorised as a low performing state (Alok 2014). Of 25 states Gujarat was ranked 10th in 2012–13 and 12th in 2013–14 for achievements in devolution. Gujarat's PDI score is very close to the national-level average for both years. Reasons for the low score may be partly discerned from its performance in various sub-indices of PDI depicted in Table 3. Except for the transfer of functionaries, Gujarat scores fairly low on all the sub-indices. Under the sub-index on finance Gujarat scores only 28.43 and is ranked very low among the states (Appendix Table A1, p 52)

Table 3: PDI Score for Gujarat, 2013–14

	Sub-Indices	Score (Rank*)
1	Framework	54.12 (17)
2	Functions	40.24 (15)
3	Finances	28.43 (17)
4	Functionaries	56.50 (04)
5	Capacity Building	51.15 (12)
6	Accountability	43.26 (16)
	Gujarat	42.61 (12)
	All India	39.92

Source: Alok (2014); * Rank among 25 states (see Table A1).

The PDI has been estimated since 2006. For some initial PDI assessments, Gujarat was absent from the list of states having failed to meet eligibility parameters specified under the sub-index of framework like the constitution of DPCs and SFC (NCAER 2009). Undoubtedly, Gujarat has treated institutions like DPCs and SFC with utter disdain. Only after considerable persuasion from the central government did Gujarat pass an act for DPCs in 2008. This happened mainly because of a compulsion regarding seeking conditional funds under a central government scheme called the Backward Region Grant Fund under which DPCs were to be constituted in the districts falling under the scheme. But even with the DPC Act in place the DPCs have not been actually constituted. Gujarat continues to work with a parallel system of DPBs with an elaborate structure dominated by the state government's bureaucrats and representatives (GoG 2018). As a result, the decentralised planning process as visualised under the constitution has not evolved in Gujarat.

The approach towards SFC, a crucial constitutional mechanism for devolution of funds, has been even cavalier. Both with regard to the periodic constitution of the SFCs and in the follow-up of their recommendations, Gujarat has been highly lackadaisical to say the least. Although SFCs are to be appointed once in every five years, only three SFCs have been constituted so far with huge gaps between them. The follow-up effort is even more miserable. While for the first SFC the action taken report (ATR) was placed in the legislature soon after its submission, for the second SFC the government took nearly five years to place its ATR. For the third SFC report there is no clear information available in the public domain about the ATR. Overall, the state government has mostly failed to act on the acceptance and implementation of SFC recommendations with only about 40% of the recommendations of the first two SFCs having been accepted (GoG 2013).

For effective devolution, states have been advised to carry out activity mapping (AM) and accordingly transfer functions and functionaries to local bodies. Yet there are many gaps even in this domain (IRMA 2008a). GPA 1993 identifies certain departments and functions that may be transferred to the local bodies, but Gujarat has not acted on it logically. The panchayat department's claim that 14 of the 29 matters of the XI Schedule have been fully transferred is pretentious given the absence of any clear resolution or rule. Expectedly, Gujarat scores low under the sub-index of transfer of functions under PDI. However, among the six sub-indices (Table 3), Gujarat has done apparently well in devolving the functionaries. This is somewhat contradictory. The absence of AM does not clarify how functionaries have been transferred to the local bodies. In practice, the state government employees assigned to local bodies are treated as local bodies' functionaries. Because of the lack of recruitment the panchayats have limited own regular functionaries at their command.

Transfer of finance is an area where Gujarat figures worst on the PDI score. As indicated in the context of SFCs, Gujarat has failed to create a framework to implement financial decentralisation. Hence, local bodies remain at the mercy of the state government for resources. The state government has not come up with any objective criteria for allocation of sharable funds with panchayats and municipalities. The allocation remains ad hoc and discretionary. There are year-to-year fluctuations without reliable fund transfers (Table 4). No inter-se criteria exist for divisions within different tiers of local governments. The normative basis advocated for transfer of funds for equalisation of services is ignored. Only in the case of funds allotted by the central government, that state government follows the *inter-se* criteria suggested by central finance commissions.

While local bodies can have their own taxes and fees, certain factors have caused owned funds to constitute only a small proportion of total revenues. For village panchayats and municipalities, owned revenues accounted for about 30% and 31%, respectively, of total revenues in 2010–11. Only for the Municipal Corporations owned funds contributed a relatively higher share (44%) of revenue. All local bodies mainly depend upon grants for augmenting resources.

The absence of accepted objective devolution formulae is a major handicap for local governments. There are, consequently,

Table 4: Transfer of Funds to Local Bodies (₹ crore)

	Particulars	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
1	Grants to PRIs	3,765	6,896	4,106	6,525	15,811
2	Grants to ULBs	439	1,650	3,756	5,084	2,508
3	Total Grants (1+2)	4,204	8,546	7,862	11,609	18,319
4	% Share of 3 in total revenue of sState	10.85	19.16	15.99	20.66	26.39

Source: GoG (2013).

wide fluctuations in the flow of funds to local bodies from the state government. The Thirteenth Finance Commission based on its own analysis argued that there has even been a negative transfer of funds to local bodies in Gujarat after adjusting for the central transfers (GOI 2009).

Several other distortions have also been discerned in the working of local bodies. Gram sabhas, the key space for ensuring participation do not work effectively in Gujarat (IRMA 2008). In 2009, the state government made efforts to activate gram sabhas by passing new rules. While the state government has apparently complied with the PESA Act 1996, the real spirit of PESA has not been observed. Autonomy of the gram sabha has generally been compromised, particularly in the wake of large scale land acquisition and mineral allocation for industrial development (Hirway 2014). The state government, after considerable delay, framed the rules for PESA areas in 2017 with the intention of activating gram sabhas in tribal areas.

Gujarat continues administering the *Samras* village scheme despite objections from civil society which considers it as anti-democratic allowing for manipulation of elections by the elite (Bandi 2013). Like elsewhere, several parallel agencies are allowed to co-exist undermining the local bodies (Shylendra and Rajput 2010).

Thus, in multiple ways, the local governments in Gujarat have been constricted to emerge as empowered institutions of self-government.

Explaining the Decentralisation Deficit

What explains the reversal of fortunes of local bodies in Gujarat under two diverse regimes pre and post 1993? Institutionalising local governments is a complex and slow process with diverse factors impinging on their working. In our case study, we have tried to look at the enmeshing of political and economic factors as they have unfolded over the last quarter century in Gujarat. Politically, the rise of BJP as a dominant ruling force with communal undertones and leanings towards business and industrial class emerges as a strong factor having a bearing on the working of decentralisation in Gujarat. On the economic front, the whole hog roll out of economic reforms under the dictates of finance capital has unleashed forces inimical to the cause of local governments. Both the dimensions are explained below in terms of how they have worked.

Political predilections: The BJP's unassailable political dominance in Gujarat has largely coincided with the unfolding of democratic decentralisation and economic reforms. Alienation of dominant groups like Patidars and their tilt towards non-Congress parties, restive industrial and business classes seeking more patronages, and growing communal polarisation have compositely influenced the changing fortunes of the BJP (Yagnik 2002).The BJP has managed to sustain itself politically using rabid communal politics and hyper economic reforms as key strategies. The Congress, which introduced reforms at the national level in 1991, had no option but to offer its unqualified support allowing Gujarat to achieve a weird political unanimity for reforms.

Such a scenario has created many incompatibilities for democratic decentralisation. The majoritarian orientation of BJP privileges homogenisation over diversities that go with decentralisation. Although the national unit proclaimed support for democratic decentralisation in its manifesto of 2004, BJP's local unit remains silent over its approach to devolution. For example, the 2012 manifesto of BJP goes overboard in its commitment to reforms but says nothing about advancing the panchayati raj system (BJP 2012). The single party dominance has thus given continued leeway to the state leadership to ignore crucial issues like democratic decentralisation.

Incidentally, the Congress which lost power at the state level had dominated the grassroots politics well beyond 1995. To curtail the grassroots influence of Congress, BJP has resorted to suppressing local bodies to establish its sway over them. The strategy was to disempower local bodies to discourage the rival party from leveraging for any political gains (Joshi 2009). This is typical of Indian state-level politics that was played out in Gujarat too. By the time BJP managed to establish its dominance over the local bodies, compulsions of economic reforms had taken over the state policies denting the prospects of local bodies further.

Hyper reforms: Initiated at the national level, the reforms percolated to the states, down to the local governments. Being industrially advanced Gujarat more than willingly latched on to reforms and structural adjustment. The reforms in Gujarat were driven by external agencies like the Asian Development Bank that provided assistance with many conditionalities (Choudhary 2007). A major strategy for industrialisation involved attracting local and global investments. Since the beginning of reforms, Gujarat announced at least five major industrial policies, the 2015 policy being the latest. These policies specified various incentives that the state offered to the prospective industrialists besides attempting to create an environment conducive for investment in industries and businesses. The policies, projecting Gujarat as the ultimate destination for global investment, tried opening up diverse areas including agribusiness, health, education, and urban development. Additionally, industries were assured of availability of land, power, and water on highly onvenient and concessional terms. (Hirway et al 2014). In order to set up the infrastructure for a more focussed investment, new forms of industrial estates like industrial parks, special economic zones, and special investment regions were propagated backed by liberal rules and legislations.

The state government embraced several measures to improve public sector management and service delivery while complementing the larger reforms. Two significant measures include the enactment of the Gujarat Fiscal Responsibility Act (GFRA) in 2005 aimed at curtailing the fiscal deficit and the public sector unit (PSU) reforms by way of disinvestment and restructuring (Choudhary 2007). The agriculture sector too has been brought under the purview of reforms in fairly significant ways. The tenancy ban though remains for the land market yet reformations in the tenancy act progressively relaxed the sale of agricultural land to non-local and non-farm entities since 1995.

In 2005, a government resolution enabled industrialists and big farmers to acquire up to 2000 acres of common land on lease for 20 years to set up corporate farming. The state enacted its own land acquisition act relaxing many provisions of the Central Government Act of 2013 on land acquisition to ease land acquisition for industrial needs (GOG 2016). The step compromised the active role of panchayats, gram sabhas, and municipalities as specified in the 2013 Act. Allowing private players to buy produce of farmers and creation of water users' associations are other initiatives in the agriculture sector.

Comprehensive reforms have allowed Gujarat to reap considerable economic benefits. Gujarat has become one of the leading destinations of industrial investment in the country since 1991. Gujarat was ranked number one in the Ease-of-Doing-Business category by the World Bank in 2015 (GOI 2018). Between 2000 and 2017 Gujarat attracted considerable foreign direct investment (FDI) and major investment proposals resulting in creation of several mega projects and big industries across the state. The overall outcome was Gujarat's accelerated economic growth during the reforms' period (Table 5).

Table 5: Growth Rates % (CAGR) of GSDP by Sector in Gujarat (at 2004–05 prices)

Period	GSDP		Primary		Secondary		Tertiary	
	Gujarat	India	Gujarat	India	Gujarat	India	Gujarat	India
1 1994–95 to 1999–2000	6.16	6.50	-2.81	2.68	9.57	6.51	9.57	7.10
2 2001–02 to 2011–12	10.24	7.89	4.92	3.13	11.17	8.59	9.53	9.47
3 1994–95 to 2011–12	9.09	8.14	3.08	3.35	9.96	8.59	10.19	9.58

Source: Hirway et al (2014).

Growth has been accompanied by considerable reduction in absolute poverty as per official estimation. Absolute poverty in Gujarat was 23% in 2009–10 as against 31.6% in 2004–05. The 'model' pursued by Gujarat though was hailed by some (Bhagwati and Panagariya 2013) has simultaneously come under severe scrutiny. Dubbing it a myth, critics argue that a more holistic view needs to be adopted while assessing results achieved by Gujarat (Hirway 2014, Sood 2012). Despite higher growth rates, Gujarat has failed with regard to inclusiveness, inequality, and human development. The state was ranked 18th in human development among 20 major states with an HDI score of 0.527 in 2007–08. Many in-depth analyses of Gujarat's reform reflect contradictions afflicting the "model" having implications for development and democracy. It is in the light of these assessments that one can identify the specific fallouts for democratic decentralisation.

Undermining of local governments: While Gujarat has largely followed the pattern of reforms adopted at the national level, many unique features characterise its approach. Economic reforms increasingly assumed a centralised form as implementation progressed. Decision-making became concentrated fully with the state government and its bureaucracy in deference to the wishes of finance capital trying to invest in Gujarat. Reform measures have undermined the autonomous role visualised for the local governments and civil society. Given the circumstances unfolding during reforms, the state was neither keen nor was under any compulsion to devolve adequate powers and resources to the local bodies. This has happened despite incentives specified for devolution under central fund transfers to local governments. The above is corroborated by many evidence of the suppression of local governments in Gujarat some of which are highlighted below.

Since the state was keen on attracting investors through liberal incentives while being committed to sound fiscal management, local governments and social sectors had to bear the brunt of the state government's selective profligacy. The state government, under its declared policies, has given concessions and subsidies with implications for the fiscal position. A study estimated that the state forsook around 72.76% of sales tax revenue in 1999–2007. Total subsidies including capital subsidies to industry and infrastructure accounted for ₹56,538 crore in 1990–2011 (Hirway et al 2014). These incentives, provided on a sustained basis, deprived the state of considerable revenues. The state, in the meantime, managed to restrict its fiscal deficit to 2.46% of GSDP in 2012–13 (GOG 2014) as against the target of 3% under GFRA. Given its fiscal compulsion the state was not at all keen to adopt an assured revenue sharing mechanism favouring the local governments. Bhatt and Shah (2000), analysing the first Gujarat State Finance Commission's recommendations, had vehemently concluded that the Commission has tried to protect the interests of state government at the cost of panchayats.

Similar tendencies were noticed in other domains of devolution. As part of industrial development, as mentioned earlier, the Gujarat government set up dedicated industrial areas which ensure easy access to land and other infrastructural facilities to industries. These areas have overriding authority over resources like land and forest superseding the local governments (Shah 2014). With land acquisition liberalised in Gujarat, studies reveal that gram sabhas and village panchayats, which need to be consulted for land acquisition, are being bypassed by industries (Joshi 2009) undermining of the legitimate role of panchayats. In many places panchayats and farmers are co-opted or coerced for land acquisition.

For streamlining, the administration the Government of Gujarat recently created the post of revenue secretary at the village level who reports to the mamlatadar, a revenue department officer at the taluka level. The revenue secretaries handle all the papers regarding land transactions. While the revenue secretary's post was created with the apparent intention of reforming land administration, it has kept village panchayats totally away from the ambit of land transfers (IRMA 2017). It is a similar case regarding the use of own funds by panchayats: till recently, the Sarpanch and an authorised member of the panchayat were designated persons as per the provisions of GPA 1993. However, an amendment in 2017 made the panchayat secretary, a government staffer, the co-signatory along with the Sarpanch. Many village panchayats raised their voices as they felt it undermines their autonomy (Bhardwaj 2017). For downsizing the bureaucracy as part of reforms, the state government banned recruitments in many departments. This applies even to panchayats that now depend on casual workers for providing civic services. Given the inadequacy of funds, panchayats are compelled to either recruit inadequate staff or pay paltry wages affecting the quality of services (IRMA 2017).

Another domain where the role of panchayats has been found to be severely constrained is with regard to the implementation of the centrally sponsored schemes (CSS). A multi-state study of the major CSSs, including in Gujarat, revealed that the panchayats have been sidelined significantly with line departments playing a major role in their implementation (Shylendra and Rajput 2010).

The ULBs, too, have had to face many predicaments. The ULBs have been unable to assert their power vis-à-vis the violation of regulatory norms by the industry and business given their lobbying abilities and soft approach of the state government. Shah (2014) observed that many industries in Gujarat's industrial corridor pollute the environment through emissions and effluents. They blatantly link their effluent pipes to municipal sewages and water bodies.

With urban development assuming prominence, municipal corporations (MCs) have literally come under the state government's dominion. Municipal commissioners appointed by the state government exercise enormous clout in the planning and administration of MCs. The neglect of ward committees has led to the undermining of the roles of community and civil society in urban areas (Mahadevia 2014). The emergence of a parallel agency, namely Gujarat Urban Development Company has undermined the role of ULBs in town planning and development (GoG 2013) even as ULBs face difficulties in getting their plans approved from the urban development department. Further, the ULBs instead of pursuing their own development schemes are compelled to adopt the PPP model for slum development in the name of reforms. While slum-dwellers can ostensibly get houses free, the private developers are compensated by allocating surplus land causing considerable loss to ULBs (Mahadevia 2014). To conclude, the above evidence clearly highlights that reforms have compromised the role and autonomy of local bodies in multiple ways.

Conclusions

The paper tried to examine whether major contradictions have developed between economic reforms and democratic decentralisation leading to an irreconcilable hiatus between the two. The analysis focussed on the state of Gujarat, which has become a torch bearer of reforms pertinent to faster economic growth while displaying an apathetic approach to democratic decentralisation. As predicted through theoretical arguments, the paper clearly corroborates that reforms through their centralising tendency of serving the interests of global capital have seriously dented the working of democracy in general and grassroots devolution in particular.

The present regime while trying to take forward both the processes has shown greater appetite towards economic reforms over democratic decentralisation. While the reforms show some significant results regarding growth, the state has suffered in broad basing development. No doubt, the reforms have largely taken an expected trajectory yet, given its own context, Gujarat presents some uniqueness. The immediate past history and political contingencies unfolding in Gujarat have given a sustained thrust to reforms aided by favourable class formation. The attendant political economy has, in turn, unleashed excessive centralising tendencies deleterious to democratic decentralisation. It may be concluded that economic reforms have triumphed over democratic decentralisation in Gujarat.

Given the overarching reach of economic reforms, the analysis of Gujarat imparts insights regarding why democratic decentralisation has suffered at the national level. Even though a few states have made some headway in devolution during the reforms period, it could be possibly because of the local political compulsions playing out differently to the advantage of local governments. Unless attempts are made to reverse the situation, incongruities between reforms and devolution may widen further. Hoping for political classes in various states to empower the local governments by way of incentives can go only a certain distance. Given the enormous uncertainty involved in such a strategy and the inimical nature of political economy, the main way forward is to create necessary safeguards within the Constitution itself. The progress of decentralisation should not be left to the vicissitudes of state politics. Having created the basic constitutional framework for local governments in 1992 it is high time the second generation amendments be introduced so that minimum devolution on basic domains like functions, functionaries, and finances is guaranteed to local governments. Based on such a guaranteed devolution, local bodies can consolidate their gains and reach newer heights even to emerge as countervailing forces against the consequences of reforms.

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Appendix Table A1: Panchayat Devolution Index (PDI) and Sub-Indices, 2013–14

Rank	States	Framework D1	Functions D2	Finances D3	Functionaries D4	Capacity Building D5	Accountability D6	PDI
1	Maharashtra	74.01	63.26	59.03	78.91	78.24	80.24	70.21
2	Kerala	72.65	61.61	68.37	71.09	60.70	74.77	68.00
3	Karnataka	70.08	63.14	61.32	65.43	70.15	70.25	65.75
4	Tamil Nadu	66.14	53.71	56.88	55.63	60.06	65.99	58.98
5	Chhattisgarh	69.12	48.24	48.81	53.44	55.24	67.15	55.16
6	Rajasthan	66.82	51.99	45.41	40.23	69.15	64.82	54.23
7	West Bengal	62.96	54.67	39.09	38.82	79.24	54.42	52.09
8	Madhya Pradesh	62.93	50.22	41.43	46.01	57.15	62.77	51.14
9	Haryana	76.90	34.47	41.53	54.41	45.70	52.91	48.27
10	Tripura	57.37	47.49	32.53	47.69	45.52	52.53	44.48
11	Sikkim	63.97	45.72	44.87	36.19	36.82	41.9	43.95
12	Gujarat	54.12	40.24	28.43	56.50	51.15	43.26	42.61
13	Andhra Pradesh	50.53	11.44	31.97	50.38	62.70	49.11	40.69
14	Assam	51.77	42.83	26.69	30.86	62.06	44.76	40.26
15	Odisha	58.74	51.46	42.03	35.43	13.97	42.26	39.95
16	Uttarakhand	54.87	41.47	21.05	31.07	42.55	58.72	37.87
17	Himachal Pradesh	50.26	21.58	30.89	38.97	39.09	51.49	36.96
18	Punjab	60.58	28.08	23.80	30.31	38.76	50.09	35.28
19	Uttar Pradesh	55.20	41.04	35.74	18.68	29.67	29.73	34.11
20	Jammu & Kashmir	29.67	19.29	34.53	22.00	56.36	33.16	32.95
21	Jharkhand	56.61	20.36	12.30	36.4	44.91	31.97	29.40
22	Bihar	48.21	39.49	16.82	24.45	41.88	22.74	29.15
23	Manipur	52.73	14.17	17.64	22.59	39.24	39.34	27.87
24	Arunachal Pradesh	46.09	29.21	16.71	22.09	38.97	25.79	27.03
25	Goa	44.21	17.78	18.21	43.06	10.30	27.94	24.75
	All India	55.41	35.34	32.05	39.66	44.01	46.1	39.92

Source: Alok (2014). Ranks reworked by the author by combining all states.

The Lost Ground
The Fate of the Adivasi Collective Rights in Telangana under the Regimes of Property Rights

BHANGYA BHUKYA

The Adivasis of India have a long history of collective community rights over forest resources and land. The colonial state revenue and forest regulations replaced these community collective rights with the individual property rights, which ceased Adivasi free access to resources and evicted them from their land by force. To undo the historical wrongs, the postcolonial state had intervened with a programme of "right approach" under which Adivasi rights over forest resources and land was ensured. But, this was again stalled by its institutions and legal system. Thus, we need to think about Adivasi collective rights beyond the state legal framework which can ensure them free use of resources in forests and hills.

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The recent Supreme Court judgment on the Adivasi forest rights and the implementation of Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 has to be understood from a historical perspective. How once an autonomous and self-governing community was reduced to acute poverty is a matter of concern. The recent high-level committee report on the status of "tribes" of India chaired by Virginius Xaxa has ventilated how the Adivasis have been dispossessed systematically in postcolonial India. According to this report, the Adivasis stand at the bottom in all development indicators (Xaxa 2014). The Adivasis are reduced to such acute poverty because there is a mismatch between what is taken away from the Adivasis by the State and, in turn, what is offered to them. The state had first taken away Adivasis' land and forest rights and made them poor and now doing patch work to repair the wounds inflicted in the name of development. The fact that the modern state (the colonial state in case of India) had systematically replaced the collective community rights over land and forest resources with that of the individual property rights, made the communities vulnerable. To understand the present predicaments of the Adivasis, it is important to examine the trajectory of the dispossession of the Adivasis in history. It is in this background we examine the fate of Adivasi collective rights in the Telangana region of erstwhile Hyderabad state.

The Telangana region has primarily been a habitat of the forest-dwellers and nomads. It has occupied almost the centre of the Deccan plateau. The Sahyadri hills that run along the north were home to rich forests. Karimnagar, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam, Nalgonda and Mahbubnagar districts were particularly covered to a large extent by forest. These forests were found at the source of the rivers Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra, Manjira, Maner, Wardha, and Pranhita. Communities such as Gonds, Rajgonds, Kolams, Nayakpods, Kondareddis, Koyas, and Chenchus began their civilisation in these forests. The pastoral communities Lambadas and Mathuras who had occasionally been visiting these forests from the medieval period for cattle grazing and exchange of goods also settled down in these forests permanently over time, particularly from the late 19th century. The source of livelihood of these Adivasi communities was integrally linked to the forest world. Even their social, cultural, and ritual practices were articulated within the ecological milieu of the region. Every Adivasi community had

specific collective customary property rights in land and minor forest resources (Furer-Haimendorf 1948: 67–96).

The introduction of British colonial political rationality replaced these collective customary rights with an individual property right. The creation of an individual property right in the land was seen as a civilising mission by the colonial rulers. However, this project turned against the Adivasis and evicted a huge number of them from their land and livelihood practices. This process made Adivasis susceptible to all hardships including famine and epidemics, which took a huge toll on them. They were the worst victims of famine and epidemics; these were phenomenal during the colonial rule, and continue to this day (Rangarajan 1996).

A considerable amount of work has been done on the colonial forest policies. However, most of the studies were carried out from an environmental perspective (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Guha and Martinez-Alier 2000). This paper sets to look at the issue from a resource standpoint that allows us to examine the political economy of forest resource under colonial rule, and the power relations constituted around it. The paper also examines the ways in which colonial political rationality that destroyed the collective rights of communities was introduced in a princely state, and how the collective community rights were being replaced with individual property rights in land in Telangana, and in turn how this process took a heavy toll on Adivasis owing to famine and epidemics that were byproducts of the colonial rule in India. To put it in other words, this paper aims to examine how the state had taken away the resources of the Adivasis and made them poor and susceptible to all hazards. Before we take up these questions, it is important to discuss the Adivasi collective rights at some length.

Genealogy of Collective Rights

Collective rights are long established in Adivasi society. The Chenchu Adivasis who were historically hunter and food gatherers, live in small *pentas* (hamlets) consisting of three to ten families. Community collective rights were very strong among the Chenchus as most of their livelihood practices were based on collective labour (Furer-Haimendorf 1943: 57). Till recent times, the Chenchus lived on edible fruits, bulbs, rhizomes and hunting mostly hares and pigs. A section of them also depended on *Podu* or shifting cultivation. These practices involve the collective labour of the families living in a Penta. Thus a Penta was treated as a unit for the collective right. A boundary was drawn for hunting and collecting fruits for each Penta. The members of a Penta had to hunt and collect fruits only within the designated boundaries. Sometimes, these boundaries led to conflict between two Pentas when a wounded animal fled across the boundary into the hunting ground of another Penta. However, the hunter was allowed to take away the hunted animal. Garelamaisama, who was offered the meat of the hunted animal, neutralise the tension between Pentas and unite the Chenchus as they celebrate the goddess collectively (Furer-Haimendorf 1943: 66–70).

The property rights in Chenchu society were of two kinds, individual and communal. Individual rights were mainly over the movable properties, whereas the communal rights were over non-movable properties. Each Penta community owns a tract of land, which is named after the first settler of the village. The Penta land was bounded by surrounding natural features such as rivers, valleys, and ridges, sometimes also large trees. The neighbouring Pentas recognise and honour these boundaries. In the distant past, these tracts were much bigger, and the ownership was shared by a group of Pentas. As time passed, the size of the tracts became smaller, and ownership became more Penta-centric. These led to serious conflicts when a Penta member crossed another Penta boundary for hunting and collecting minor forest produce. One can collect fruits for their immediate need, but they were not allowed to carry them outside the boundary of the Penta. The collective right in Penta land was established through both the male and female line. The Chenchu community does not recognise an individual right in land and fruit-bearing trees. All land was communal property. However, collective community rights transform into individual rights through labour. As long as the fruit was standing on a tree, it was a collective right, but when someone reaped it, would become the individual property of that person. Likewise, the hunting and household items were individual property; even the family member could not claim right over an item made or acquired by another member of the family (Furer-Haimendorf 1943: 60–65).

The Gond Adivasis have a different rule of property in Land. A large section of them was settled, agriculturists. Particularly their emergence as ruling class in medieval times had brought changes in property rights. A tract of land was ruled by Gond chiefs called Mokashi under the Gond king. The Mokashi used to recognise land rights. Whoever brought forest land into cultivation was considered as the owner of that land. Gond chiefs encouraged common Gonds to develop agriculture in their respective territory by offering some concession (Chatterton 1916: 64). However, some Gonds continued to practice podu or shifting cultivation until recently using plough and bullocks. But unlike other primitive groups, they would not change places more frequently. The Gonds had shifted their fields in a definite cycle of rotation, staying at one gudem or hamlet for 10 to 15 years. This cultivation practice was based on the communitarian collective right. There is no place for individual land rights in this mode of cultivation (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 97). Although individual property rights in the land adhered from the late 19th century in Telangana, there was no reference to property rights in land in Gond myths and legends. Only the Rajas or chiefs had individual rights over a tract which they passed on to their sons. But in general, the soil was common property for the Gonds which could be used for cultivation and relinquished (Furer-Haimendorf 1979: 344).

Kolams and Naikpods who largely inhabited the Adilabad district are akin Adivasi groups. They purely survived on podu cultivation with hoes and hunting. The Kolams, who are said to be the earliest people in the district, functioned as pujaris or priests in the worship of the local deities. Three to four families formed a hamlet on hill slopes where they practiced podu cultivation, collectively burning a small piece of forest and then hoeing and

broadcasting the seeds in the soil which was fertilised by the ashes. Naikpods who possessed neither cattle nor ploughs had also practiced hoe cultivation purely on hill slopes collectively and lived in the vicinity of Kolam gudem. In both the Adivasi groups, there was no concept of individual property right (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 138–41). The Hill Reddis of Warangal and Khammam districts also led a similar mode of life. Rather the Hill Reddis were materially more backward than the other two groups, as they used bamboo sticks or iron-tipped digging stick for dibbling jawari instead of hoes in the 1940s (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 2–5).

The other important Adivasi community in Telangana is Koyas or Koitor or Kois who share racially Gond traits and are spread mainly in Khammam and Warangal districts. A large section of Koyas depended on settled agriculture and hunting (Hassan 1989: 230–31). However, a considerable number of them practiced podu cultivation and cattle breeding. Hunting and forest produce were the main source of food during the summer. A group of them also depended on basket-making and weaving of mats with bamboo and *thunga* or grass straw. Except the settled agriculture, all other means of livelihood were based on collective communitarian rights (Aiyappan 1948: 62; Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 51–56).

The Lambadas who are spread across Telangana are numerically the largest pastoral community in the region. Their pastoral life involved migration, and they migrated to the Telangana region in the medieval period as food grain transporters. They also served as food grain transporters to imperial armies. As their nature of trade demands collective labour, all their possessions were based on communitarian rights. *Thanda* or hamlet was the main social unit in Lambada society, which constituted about fifteen to twenty families from the same clan. Thus, clan was fundamental in forming the *Thanda*. The cattle wealth was the collective property of the *Thanda*. The chief of the *Thanda* would have absolute rights on its members, who makes transport deals with customers and led the caravan. The transport goods, routes and areas of supply as well as grazing areas in the forest were distributed and earmarked between the main four clans of the community. After their permanent settlement as agriculturalists from the late 19th century in the forest of Telangana, every Thanda asserted its collective rights on the commons and forest areas and water bodies of its vicinity (Bhukya 2010).

For the Adivasis, forest was not only the main source of livelihood but also an inspiring force. Their philosophy, epistemology and theological and natural virtues had been shaped by their forest world (Umamaheshwari 2014). The fact that the Adivasis had historically chosen to live in the fringes and forest signified a resistance to the larger normative caste-Hindu society. But soon their life had intrinsically linked to the forest. There are many mythological stories in circulation among the Adivasi communities which narrate their origin in forests and hills. The Hindu *Puranas* or epics also describe that the Pulindas called *dasyus* who are now identified as the Gonds lived in the Vindhya and Satpura hills. Such places are worshiped by them (Bhukya 2017: 25–26).

There were, thus, many sacred places for Adivasis in the forest. The sacred forest where a local deity was placed on a hilltop was generally located in the deep forest and away from their settlements. The surrounding vegetation of the hill was regarded with great respect by the community (Thaha 2009: 30). The Chenchus worship Garelamaisamma who was a deity of the chase and controlled the wild animals with utmost rituality near their village erecting a stone on her name (Furer-Haimendorf 1943: 187–190). The Gonds have many sacred places in the forest of Adilabad district. Mesaram clan of Gonds worship the *Nagoba* or snake god whose shrine is located near Kesalapur hamlet in deep Asifabad forests (Furer-Haimendorf 1948: 240–306). Papi Kondalu hills in Khammam district were full of sacred places worshipped by Konda Reddis and Koyas. The Koyas had a metaphor of *Konda Devata* or mountain deities in which mountain was equated with the goddess (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 25–27).

The concept of sacred places and hills/mountains was historically very crucial in maintaining ecological balance in the region. Every goddess and god of the Adivasis was associated with a particular animals and plants. Importantly, each clan of an Adivasi community had its goddess and god, and the follower of that goddess and god would not hunt or cut the animal and plant associated with their clan. Also, the Adivasi clans were named after animals and plants. The rule was that the clan associated with that particular animal and plant would not kill or harm them (Bhukya 2017: 26; Furer-Haimendorf 1948: 240–68). The protection of forest and animals, thus, was very much part of the Adivasi social, religious tradition. On top of all these the Adivasi communities maintained a self-imposed customary restriction on the use of forest resources which conserved the forest historically. The institutionalisation of forest use through social and cultural practices is strongly rooted in the Indian society. It has been brought out in recent studies how the communities had been conserving forest through religion, customs and folklores in Indian history (Murali 1995: 86–122).

The age-old symbiotic ecological relations of the Adivasis began to erode when the British colonial rulers introduced new political rationality in forest administration. The introduction of new forest policy by the colonial rulers was indeed detrimental to millions of Adivasis who had been living in the forest for centuries. It has been established in many recent studies that the pre-colonial imperial powers had very symbolic control over forest and forest resources. Forest was largely left to the Adivasi and nomadic pastoral communities. Telangana constitutes today the largest Adivasi population because it had a huge forest area till the end of the 19th century, which was ruined fast with the intervention of the state in forest management (Thaha 2009: 22–25).

Fencing Forest

Before the fencing of forest under the new forest policy, there are scanty sources on the extent of forest, and its management by the state in Telangana. Enugula Veeraswamy who travelled on a pilgrimage from Madras to Kasi in the early 19th century through Hyderabad state starting from Srisailam (the

southern point of the state) to Adilabad (the northern point of the state) gives a very informative account on the dense forest of Telangana. Describing the Utnur forests in Adilabad, he said that "the forest here is very thick so that even a spear thrown into the forest cannot make much headway" (Sitapati 1973: 38). Thus the region was known for its dense forest historically. Telangana is basically an upland plateau with sandy soils and rocky landscapes. These hill ranges not only gave birth to rivers mentioned above but were also covered with rich forest which provided shelter and food to the Adivasis.[1] The most important trees in Telangana forest were teak, ebony, black-wood, *nallamaddi* or Terminalia Tmentosa, *eppa* or Hardwickia binata, *bijasal* or Pterocarpus marsupium, *tarvar* or Cassia auriculata, custard-apple, mango, and tamarind.[2] The forest began to be regulated by the Hyderabad state from the last quarter of the 19th century on the line of British India which axed long-established rights of the Adivasis over forest resources and land.

Forest conservation is a modern phenomenon developed in 19th-century Europe. It was imported to India during the rule of British colonialism. The British after conquering plains of India had extended their power over forest and hills. Initially, these areas were considered as waste, rugged and worthless to administer. But soon, the commercial value of the wood was realised. This led the British to declare the forest as the property of the state. In general, all the unoccupied land which was used by the communities collectively was treated as government land under the colonial rule. And this was later parcelled to dominant cultivators under various revenue systems. It was a new phenomenon. In pre-British India, forest and common land were used by local communities. However, the colonial state checked these practices by controlling forest systematically through a series of the forest acts and regulations. Forest was governed, measured, exploited, and conserved under this policy (Rangarajan 1996: 1–9).

The Telangana region of the Hyderabad state was ruled under the British Paramount power, becoming what was called a "princely state." Under this indirect rule, the colonial political rationality that aimed to systematise, stabilise, and regularise power relations was deployed in the state systematically. This process had serious effects on the use of forest resources. As mentioned above, Telangana had rich forestry which occupied almost the centre of the Deccan plateau. At the middle of the 19th century, half of the total area of the region was covered with forest. It was reduced to one-fourth by the first decade of the 20th century (Bhukya 2010: xii–xiv).

The state's intention to move towards the forests was to modernise forest management and extract resources in a scientific way. It was with this motive that the Prime Minister Sir Salarjung I created the Forest Department in 1277F (1867).[3] Initially, under this department, there were eight valuable species of trees. The rest of the forest produce and administration remained in the hands of the district revenue officials. But later, through the services of trained European forest officers, the state brought in rigorous reforms in forest policy. Ballantiza, a British forest officer, brought in radical reforms in forest management during 1887 and 1892 in the state through which

he showed new avenues to extract forest resources. On his advice forest was exclusively kept under the forest department putting an end to the dual system of forest management. The Forest department controlled an area of 3,490 square miles forest in 1,892 spreading in Amarabad, Pakhal, and Kankgiri, Mahadeopur. His successor, Biscoe laid down more effective methods to forest management. The most important step towards this direction was the enactment of Forest Act No II of 1309 F (1900) on the line of Indian Forest Act of 1878. All the provisions of the British Indian Forest Act were inserted in this act. Under this act, the forest was surveyed and classified into reserved, protected, and open or unclassified forest.[4]

The state control over the forest in Telangana increased rapidly. The state forest increased from 3,490 sq miles to 16,575 sq miles between 1892 and 1901, which constitutes 38.66% of the total area (42,873 sq miles) of Telangana.[5] However, the state forest management and conservation project was dubiously implemented, which sunk the forest area fast. By the end of 1939, the state-controlled forest in Telangana decreased to 8,399.6 sq miles or 20.20%.[6]

Losing the Ground

The rapid ruining of forest hampered livelihood practices of forest, nomadic and pastoral communities which had subsisted on shifting cultivation and forest produce. Under the Forest Act, shifting-cultivation, grazing, collecting of wood for domestic purpose and the collection of minor forest produce were banned, and the breaching of the law was punishable. This condition led to a series of famines in the state from the last decades of the 19th century, which resulted in massive human and cattle loss. Hyderabad state was known for its cattle wealth. The regulation and enclosure of forest lands took a particularly huge toll on cattle during famines for the want of fodder.[7]

Gonds were the main victims of the forest enclosures, but their condition was somewhat better compared to that of most Kolams who mainly depended on shifting cultivation. At the time of the demarcation of reserve forests, many Kolam and Gond villages were disbanded and the inhabitants compelled to leave their houses in many talukas of Asifabad district. Though nominally shifting cultivation was allowed to continue in some areas which were formed as enclaves, these were exhausted soon. They were, on the other hand, prevented from felling trees with the implementation of the new laws. Their traditional economy virtually ended. Consequently, the Kolam and Gond communities migrated to other places to work where the land included hill slopes, and where they were permitted to cultivate in their old style (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 96–99). However, this led to a ferocious revolt by the Adivasis against the state in the district in 1940.[8]

Auctioning of forest produce virtually prohibited the Gonds and Kolams from entering the forest. Forest produce such as grass, *mahua, chironji* (berries), and bamboo was brought under the public auction system and was usually grabbed by outsiders as auctions took place only in towns. Furer-Haimendorft reported that many contractors would take grass, chironji and mahua for lease, not with a view to export these articles for

sale, but only with a view to levying a tax from Adivasis. Contractors largely exploited the dependence of Adivasis on the forest. They toured the village sometime after the fruit seasons and charged the Adivasis either per house or per tree for the fruit which they assumed Adivasis and their children to have eaten. The charges varied between 2 *annas* to 8 annas per house or as ₹4 to ₹1 per tree. Sometimes contractors compelled them to collect fruits without paying them any wages. The grass was also auctioned, and contractors acted on the same principles. Adivasis used grass for thatching houses. Export of grass was unprofitable to the contractor, so they toured the villages and collected between 8 annas to ₹1 per house from Adivasis, irrespective of their utilisation. Bamboo was auctioned only in some localities, and the contractors collected annual fees from the Adivasis for bamboo used for fences, platforms, and cattle shed walls, as was done in the case of grass (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 105–07).

The Lambadas also had a similar encounter with the forest officials. After they broke with the army as commissariat transporters, the Lambadas started moving deeper into the forests in search of grazing pastures. Once their cattle had finished grazing, they set fire to the withered grass and fallen dry leaves in the hot season, with the objective of securing a fresh growth of green grass with the advent of the monsoon.[9] However, these wide, free grazing pastures were seized when the state brought the grazing land under its control.[10] Although the state, its agent-contractors, and the jagirdars openly plundered the forests, the forest officials pointed the finger at the cattle grazers.[11]

The forest officials adopted this view right from the beginning when the department was set up, which severely affected the Lambadas' cattle. Grazing tax was collected through the forest and the revenue departments and contractors. One aim of this move was to check nomadic cattle. In the beginning, grazing revenue was collected by the revenue officials at the rate of one anna per cattle head in the form of a cess called the *bancharai* or permit pass system, and the amount was credited to the forest department.[12] The forest department started collecting grazing tax from 1894 at the rate of two-and-a-half annas per cattle head, in both the reserved and protected forests. However, the revenue department continued to collect bancharai in the open forests.[13] Henceforth, the grazing tax in reserved and protected forest areas was under the control of the forest department and in the open forest under the revenue department.

As mentioned above, another source from whom grazing taxes were extracted was the contractors who occupied huge forest areas on the lease.[14] The forest contractors allowed the cattle to graze in their leased area and collected tax at the end of the year from the graziers at the rate of 25 paisa per cow, 27 paisa per buffalo, and 12 paise per goat. These were official rates and varied from place to place. The government had no control over the malpractices committed at the local level. No proper record was maintained of taxes collected, and no comparison made between official rates and actual collection. The grazing tax was enhanced drastically in the early 20th century,

₹1 per cow or bull (Furer-Haimendorf 1945: 106–10). This led to illicit grazing and evasion of laws by the cattle breeders.[15]

The formation of *shikargahs* (hunting blocks) also decreased grazing land in the forest, as grazing was strictly prohibited in these blocks.[16] The regulation and enclosure of forest lands took a particularly huge toll of cattle during famines when lakhs of cattle died for want of fodder. The Hyderabad state witnessed devastating famines in 1876–78, 1899–1900 and 1918–19. The Lambadas' cattle were the worst affected in famine due to the callous attitude of the Forest Department officials in particular and the state in general. Indeed, the forest officials were happy about the loss of nomadic-cattle that were presumed to be the destroyers of the forest. The famine was greatly exacerbated by both the forest policy and rapid decrease of forest cover in the state. This resulted in a huge loss of cattle wealth in the state (Dunlop 1901: 26; Ali 1923: 22). Particularly during the famine, it was reported that the Lambadas sold their cattle to butchers at rates so cheap that it sometimes just fetched the cost of the skin.[17]

Whom to Blame

The Hyderabad Forest Conference proclaimed that

> our foremost aim should be to organise the forest and popularise our noble work of forest conservancy, among the ignorant rural population, who were, till lately enjoying free access to the forest.[18]

Adivasis and cattle-raisers thus were held responsible for the declining forest cover, but in reality, the destruction of the forests actually began when it was brought under the state control. It is proved from this study how the Adivasis maintained ecological balance through self-regulated practices. As has been brought out in recent studies that the forests of South Asia have a wide variety of historical meaning and usages. They served as homes and sources of livelihood for their inhabitants, as well as of fuel, building materials, famine foods, and medicines for neighbouring people. They provided a home for bandits and rebels, and equally an obstacle to invasion and expansionist ambitions of the state. They accommodated wild animals and nurtured disease environments that were often fatally inhospitable to outsiders (Arnold 1996: 10).

The state saw the forests as just quasi-economic entities that earned revenue for the treasury, and by the time it realised their social importance a great many things had disappeared.[19] This decrease was brought about above all through the commercial exploitation of forest resources, the state land tenure system and the commercialisation of agriculture. The major (both green and dry timber and fuel) and minor (fruits and grass) produce of forests used to be sold from the reserved and open forests on the permit system given on public auction. When the contractors cleared vast forests within short periods, it was decided to auction only dry timber. This encouraged the contractors and purchasers to create deadwood by girdling the green trees, with a view to cut them shortly. Those contractors who were given permission only for minor produce also extracted large amounts of timber from their permitted areas, with the connivance of the forest officials.[20] The contract system in jagir and Samasthan territories was worse. The

contractors used to exploit the forest irresponsibly and unrestrictedly, and the jagirdar and the samasthandar could not say no to their exploitation as they used to borrow money from the contractors.[21] The total revenue collected from forest produce in 1937–1938 was ₹16,11,749 as against ₹2,88,337 in 1899–1900.[22] The Nizam's attempt to enclose the forests was not different from the British colonial exploitation in other parts of India.

Construction of railway lines and industrial development in the state led to rapid destruction of forest. The government land revenue policy also encouraged the clearing of forest land. From the beginning of the 20th century, the forests were extensively cleared for cultivation under the *ijara* and *banjar* systems.[23] With the commercialisation of agriculture, peasant communities from plains infiltrated into the forest in huge number which brought tremendous pressure on land in forest areas.

Thus the state's dubious conservation project itself caused a rapid decline in the forests. The Forest Survey and Settlement Department, maintained from 1903, spent all its time handing over the forest land to big landlords and village officials rather than protecting and helping regenerate the forest.[24] An attempt was made to replant the forests and allow the regeneration of coppice shoots from 1903, but very little was achieved in this respect at that time (Mason 1938: 9). But, it again worked against the cattle-raisers' interests, as a lot of grazing land was brought under this project, with grazing being strictly prohibited on this territory (Iyengar 1951: 127). Due to the opposition by peasants and Adivasis to their loss of forest resources, the state came out with a policy in 1920 to form village forests to provide grazing and fuel for Adivasis.[25] Had the forest officials acted promptly on this plan, the Adivasis would have benefited a lot, and they might have been able to protect their life and cattle wealth. The dubious conservation project thus neither protected forest nor the Adivasis but benefited state treasury and elite in society.

Becoming Diseased

The fencing of the forest had severe consequences not only for their cattle wealth but also on their health conditions. Both the Adivasis and their cattle became susceptible to many diseases under the colonial rule as their source of food was taken away by the state. The chief disease amongst bovine animals in the state was *bara-rog* (rinderpest). The other relatively less important diseases were *galla ghont* (haemorrhagic septicaemia), *zaharabad* (black quarters), *gilti* (anthrax) and *mook-khor* (foot and mouth) disease. Rinderpest was the most devastating disease in the state.[26] There was a steady increase in cattle deaths due to contagious diseases in the state from the 1920s.[27]

A similar trend was also witnessed in the health condition of Adivasis who were exclusively depending on forest resources for their livelihood. We have no exact statistics of Adivasi death toll due to contiguous diseases. But, the low growth rate of population of the Adivasis in the region indicates the huge death toll. The decades of growth pattern shows that the Adivasi population growth rate was very low (Grigson 1947: 5). During the 1911-–21 decade, the Adivasi population decreased.

The epidemics followed by 1918–19 famine must have taken huge tolls on the Adivasis. The census report recorded that "the epidemics which visited the country during the decade claimed heavy tolls, as is evident from the fact that the number of deaths increased by over 70%."[28]

Cholera, malaria, and yaws were widespread in Adivasi areas of Telangana. Particularly, Adilabad and Amrabad forests were seen as notoriously malarial. Yaws was more widespread across the region. The person who gets affected by this disease gets ulcers all over the body even on tongue and anus leading to rapid physical weakening and killing the person eventually. There was some mechanism to treat yaws in Adilabad, but it was insufficient (Furer-Haimendorf 1946: 30–31; Grigson 1947: 15, 28). Particularly, cholera and malaria epidemics created havoc in Adivasi communities during the rainy seasons. If an Adivasi gudem was affected by cholera or malaria, it would kill off half of the people of the gudem. Even the medical department did not dare to go into these areas (Grigson 1947: 66).

The ill health of the Adivasis was generally attributed to their tradition and cultural practices. It was said that the venereal diseases were common among the Adivasis because of their crude marital relations and promiscuity in sexual matters. Heavy tolls in Adivasi society were mainly due to their ignorance and crude treatment of diseases (Thakkar 1941: 18). But, as has been discussed here, it was an impoverishment of Adivasis caused by the restriction of their movement in forest resulted in the heavy toll on Adivasis and their cattle.

Postcolonial Predicament

The denial of forest rights to Adivasis continued further even in postcolonial India. Rather, a more stringent system was practiced to check Adivasi movements in the forest. There was some intervention by the Indian government to restore Adivasi rights over forest resources through joint-forest management project, but this project was failed in many respects. Importantly, the legal protective mechanism turned against the Adivasis as it promised only restricted freedom or restricted use of forest resources. The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 had brought further pressure on the Adivasis. Particularly the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 1982 criminalised the Adivasis by decreeing them as illegal inhabitants. Under this act, a large number of Adivasis were driven out of the forest, being evicted from their land (Sahu 2017: 44–47; Sarin 2016: 383–405).

This had further made the Adivasis vulnerable. This is evident from a study on *Diet and Nutritional Status of Tribal Population Report* carried out by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau in 1998–99 which suggested that about 70% of Adivasi children were suffering from underweight and undernutrition.[29] During the 1980s and 1990s, some sociological studies indeed ventilated the acute impoverishment of the Adivasis. Particularly newspapers highlighted the starving deaths in Adivasi areas. These glaring facts led the Indian government to enact the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (Radhakrishna 2012: 145–55).

However, the enactment of the FRA and its implementation in the last 10 years has raised several issues regarding the question of Adivasi collective rights over the forest resources and forest land. The FRA is aimed at ensuring Adivasi collective forest resource rights, habitation rights for most "primitive" groups and conversion of forest villages into revenue villages in their respective areas spreading over 85.6 million acres of Indian forests. However, the act saw its implementation over only 3% of the proposed area. The poor implementation of the act is largely because of the apathetic attitude of the state towards the Adivasis. It is evident from the recent studies that the FRA utterly failed because it offered only restricted use of forest resources (Kumar 2017: 40–43). Importantly, the legality of the act is being questioned by the civil society organisations and the wildlife protection NGOs. The recent Supreme Court judgment to evict the Adivasis from reserved forest to protect wildlife has axed the Adivasis' hope to realise the demand for forest rights (Chauhan 2019).

The postcolonial state failed to address the Adivasi question because of its legalistic approach to their cause which is rooted in the colonial political rationality. Both the state and Adivasis are now caught in this legal frame which often goes against the latter. The Adivasi question is basically political, and it demands a political settlement within the Indian federal system, which would ensure the Adivasi autonomy and freedom in the forest. Restoring the lost ground to Adivasis is important to overcome their postcolonial predicaments.

NOTES

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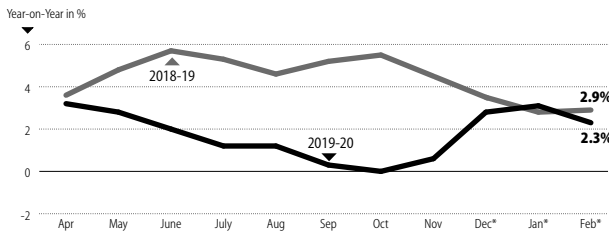
Wholesale Price Index

The year-on-year (y-o-y) WPI inflation rate decreased to 2.3% in February 2020 from 2.9% reported a year ago and 3.1% a month ago. The index for primary articles increased by 6.7% compared to 4.8% registered a year ago but was lower than 10.0% a month ago. The index for food articles rose by 7.8% compared to 4.2% recorded a year ago but, was lower than 11.5% reported a month ago. The index for fuel and power increased by 3.4% compared to 1.7% recorded a year ago while the index for manufactured products decreased by 0.4% compared to 2.3%.

Consumer Price Index

The CPI Inflation rate increased to 6.6% in February 2020 from 2.6% registered a year ago but eased in comparison to 7.6% reported a month ago. The consumer food price index rose by 10.8% against -0.7% reported a year ago but was lower than 13.6% registered a month ago. The CPI-rural inflation rate increased to 6.7% and the urban inflation rate to 6.6% from 1.8% and 3.4%, respectively, reported a year ago. As per Labour Bureau data, the CPI-inflation rate of agricultural labourers (CPI–AL) increased to 10.1% in February 2020 from 3.1% registered a year ago and that of industrial workers (CPI–IW) to 7.5% in January 2020 from 6.6%.
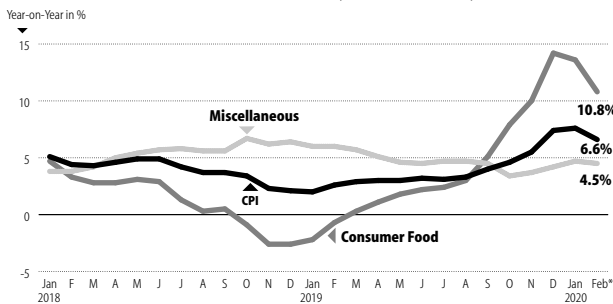
Foreign Trade

The trade deficit widened to $9.9 bn in February 2020 from $9.7 bn reported a year ago. Exports increased by 2.9% to $27.7 bn and imports by 2.5% to $37.5 bn from $26.9 bn and $36.6 bn, respectively, reported a year ago. Oil imports were higher by 14.3% at $10.8 bn while non-oil imports were lower by 1.6% at $26.7 bn from $9.4 bn and $27.2 bn, respectively. During April–February 2019–20, cumulative exports declined by (-)1.5% to $292.9 bn and imports by (-)7.3% to $436.0 bn from their respective values of $297.4 bn and $470.4 bn reported during the corresponding period of last year.

Index of Industrial Production

The y-o-y growth rate of IIP inched up to 2.0% in January 2020 from 1.6% reported a year ago. Growth in manufacturing segment inched up to 1.5% from 1.3% registered a year ago. Production in the mining sector grew by 4.4% and electricity generation by 3.1% compared to 3.8% and 0.9%, respectively. As per use-based classification, growth in capital goods segment declined to -4.3% and infrastructure goods to -2.2% from their respective growth rates of -3.6% and 6.4% registered a year ago. Production of consumer durables decreased by (-)4.0% and of non-durables by (-)0.3% compared to 2.5% and 3.8%, respectively.

Movement of WPI Inflation April–February

Year-on-Year in %

2018-19

2019-20

2.9%

2.3%

* Data is provisional; Base: 2011–12 = 100.

Merchandise Trade February 2020

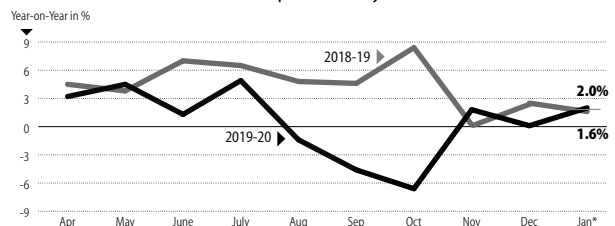|	February 2020 ($ bn)	Over Month (%)	Over Year (%)	April–February (2019–20 over 2018–19) (%)
Exports	27.7	6.5	2.9	-1.5
Imports	37.5	-8.8	2.5	-7.3
Trade deficit	9.9	-35.1	1.3	-17.3

Data is provisional. Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Components of Trade February 2019 and February 2020
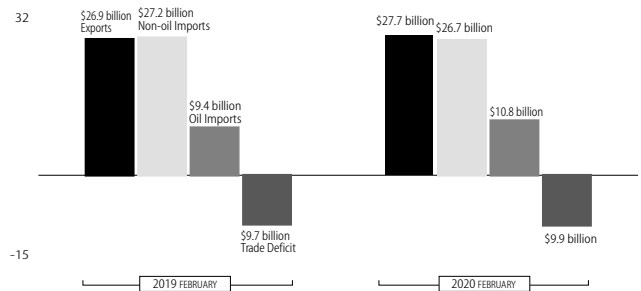
Oil refers to crude petroleum and petroleum products, while non-oil refers to all other commodities.

Trends in WPI and Its Components February 2020* (%)

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Averages) 2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
All commodities	100	-0.57	2.26	1.73	2.92	4.28
Primary articles	22.6	-2.79	6.71	3.42	1.38	2.74
Food articles	15.3	-3.67	7.79	4.03	2.05	0.32
Fuel and power	13.2	1.17	3.38	-0.26	8.16	11.50
Manufactured products	64.2	0.17	0.42	1.34	2.75	3.66

* Data is provisional; Base: 2011–12=100; Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Movement of CPI Inflation January 2018–February 2020

Year-on-Year in %

Miscellaneous

10.8%

6.6%

4.5%

CPI

Consumer Food

* Data is provisional.
Source: National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Base: 2012=100.

Movement of IIP Growth April–January

Year-on-Year in %

2018-19

2019-20

2.0%

1.6%

* January 2020 are quick estimates; Base: 2011–12=100.

Industrial Growth: Sector-wise January 2019* (%)

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs) 2017–18	2018–19
General index	100	2.3	2.0	4.4	3.8
Mining	14.4	2.8	4.4	2.3	2.9
Manufacturing	77.6	2.1	1.5	4.6	3.9
Electricity	8.0	3.5	3.1	5.4	5.2

Industrial Growth: Use-based

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	2017–18	2018–19
Primary goods	34.0	2.9	1.8	3.7	3.5
Capital goods	8.2	8.9	-4.3	4.0	2.7
Intermediate goods	17.2	-0.1	15.8	2.3	0.9
Infrastructure/Construction goods	12.3	0.6	-2.2	5.6	7.3
Consumer durables	12.8	5.2	-4.0	0.8	5.5
Consumer non-durables	15.3	1.1	-0.3	10.6	4.0

*January 2020 are quick estimates; Base: 2011-12=100;
Source: NSO, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

CPI: Rural and Urban February 2020* (%)

	Latest Month Index	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs) 2017–18	2018–19
CPI Combined	149.1	-0.7	6.6	3.59	3.41
Rural (2012=100)	150.4	-1.0	6.7	3.60	2.99
Urban (2012=100)	147.7	-0.3	6.6	3.58	3.92

CPI: Occupation-wise

Industrial workers (2001=100)#	330.0	0.0	7.5	3.1	5.4
Agricultural labourers (1986–87=100)	1010.0	-0.6	10.1	2.2	2.1

* Provisional; # January 2020 ; Source: NSO (rural & urban); Labour Bureau (IW and AL).

Comprehensive current economic statistics with regular weekly updates are available at: http://www.epwrf.in/currentstat.aspx.

■ India's Quarterly Estimates of Final Expenditures on GDP

₹ crore	at 2011–12 Prices	2017–18				2018–19				2019–20		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Private final consumption expenditure	1769688 (9.3)	1750056 (5.5)	1911901 (5.3)	1948174 (7.7)	1889008 (6.7)	1903853 (8.8)	2046415 (7.0)	2068781 (6.2)	1983491 (5.0)	2010993 (5.6)	2166235 (5.9)
Government final consumption expenditure	362769 (21.6)	367882 (10.5)	319547 (10.5)	293024 (8.9)	393709 (8.5)	407780 (10.8)	341988 (7.0)	335088 (14.4)	428390 (8.8)	461585 (13.2)	382338 (11.8)
Gross fixed capital formation	958859 (0.7)	967190 (5.9)	1014300 (8.8)	1120846 (13.7)	1082670 (12.9)	1077942 (11.5)	1130201 (11.4)	1170154 (4.4)	1129470 (4.3)	1033344 (-4.1)	1071887 (-5.2)
Change in stocks	49996 (61.7)	54050 (75.8)	52497 (78.3)	59252 (79.6)	64131 (28.3)	66159 (22.4)	63999 (21.9)	70126 (18.4)	66411 (3.6)	66732 (0.9)	64668 (-1.0)
Valuables	62905 (80.1)	46317 (25.0)	39512 (11.2)	43927 (1.5)	41080 (-34.7)	44629 (-3.6)	39252 (-0.7)	44773 (1.9)	49519 (20.5)	49919 (11.9)	41824 (6.6)
Net trade (Export–import)	-137041	-85422	-128661	-125231	-122238	-141491	-104580	-51925	-117247	-76415	-50489
Exports	627176 (3.9)	639543 (4.5)	646620 (4.4)	688438 (5.0)	686695 (9.5)	719352 (12.5)	748505 (15.8)	767991 (11.6)	708771 (3.2)	703973 (-2.1)	707407 (-5.5)
Less imports	764217 (21.8)	724965 (10.5)	775281 (14.1)	813669 (23.6)	808933 (5.9)	860843 (18.7)	853085 (10.0)	819916 (0.8)	826018 (2.1)	780388 (-9.3)	757896 (-11.2)
Discrepancies	69397	132000	105705	151721	10803	73679	-17242	52683	7482	61000	-11460
Gross domestic product (GDP)	3136572 (5.1)	3232072 (7.3)	3314801 (8.7)	3491715 (7.4)	3359162 (7.1)	3432553 (6.2)	3500033 (5.6)	3689678 (5.7)	3547516 (5.6)	3607157 (5.1)	3665003 (4.7)

■ India's Overall Balance of Payments (Net): Quarterly

	2018–19 ($ mn)				2019–20 ($ mn)			2018–19 (₹ bn)				2019–20 (₹ bn)		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Current account	-15803	-19054	-17752	-4647	-14417	-6512	-1417	-1059 [-2.3]	-1337 [-2.9]	-1279 [-2.7]	-328 [-0.7]	-1003 [-2.0]	-459 [-0.9]	-101 [-0.2]
Merchandise	-45751	-50037	-49281	-35214	-46182	-38085	-34625	-3065	-3510	-3552	-2482	-3212	-2682	-2466
Invisibles	29947	30984	31529	30567	31765	31573	33208	2006	2174	2272	2154	2209	2224	2365
Services	18676	20256	21678	21331	20076	20444	21880	1251	1421	1562	1503	1396	1440	1558
of which: Software services	18605	19286	19895	19868	20998	21064	21455	1246	1353	1434	1400	1460	1484	1528
Transfers	17031	19331	17424	16160	17964	19952	18693	1141	1356	1256	1139	1249	1405	1331
of which: Private	17216	19511	17558	16317	18224	20188	18932	1153	1369	1265	1150	1267	1422	1349
Income	-5760	-8603	-7573	-6925	-6275	-8822	-7364	-386	-604	-546	-488	-436	-621	-525
Capital account	4787	16604	13770	19241	28208	12283	22355	321 [0.7]	1165 [2.5]	992 [12.1]	1356 [2.7]	1962 [4.0]	865 [1.7]	1592 [3.1]
of which: Foreign investment	1427	7612	5199	15856	19041	10389	17802	96	534	375	1117	1324	732	1268
Overall balance	-11338	-1868	-4296	14162	13984	5118	21601	-760 [-1.7]	-131 [-0.3]	-310 [-0.6]	998 [2.0]	973 [2.0]	360 [0.7]	1539 [3.0]

Figures in square brackets are percentage to GDP.

■ Foreign Exchange Reserves

	20 March 2020	22 March 2019	31 March 2019	Over Month	Over Year	Variation			Financial Year				
						Financial Year So Far							
Excluding gold but including revaluation effects						2018–19	2019–20	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
₹ crore	3293804	2610930	2675640	121615	682874	3340	618165	322660	218620	25300	353270	68050
$ mn	438511	380265	386814	-4373	58245	-20717	51697	40486	16297	10160	53217	-14168

■ Monetary Aggregates

₹ crore	Outstanding 2020	Over Month	Over Year	Variation						
				Financial Year So Far		Financial Year			
				2018–19	2019–20	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
Money supply (M₃) as on 13 March	16526566	156543 (1.0)	1439478 (9.5)	1124501 (8.1)	1094499 (7.1)	1174310 (10.1)	1170657 (9.2)	1469480 (10.5)
Components								
Currency with public	2308312	50040 (2.2)	244523 (11.8)	304076 (17.3)	256102 (12.5)	-333130 (-20.9)	495583 (39.2)	292497 (16.6)
Demand deposits	1576035	94830 (6.4)	171171 (12.2)	-78849 (-5.3)	-50478 (-3.1)	406920 (41.1)	86963 (6.2)	142800 (9.6)
Time deposits	12606045	8926 (0.1)	1015371 (8.8)	895418 (8.4)	884441 (7.5)	1094920 (12.1)	585266 (5.8)	1026348 (9.6)
Other deposits with RBI	36175	2748 (8.2)	8412 (30.3)	3856 (16.1)	4433 (14.0)	5640 (36.5)	2817 (13.4)	7835 (32.8)
Sources								
Net bank credit to government	5038798	38532 (0.8)	516780 (11.4)	520618 (13.0)	650308 (14.8)	618120 (19.1)	144800 (3.8)	387090 (9.7)
Bank credit to commercial sector	10796486	102365 (1.0)	639641 (6.3)	943129 (10.2)	413767 (4.0)	608420 (7.8)	802226 (9.5)	1169003 (12.7)
Net foreign exchange assets	3761465	147097 (4.1)	824940 (28.1)	14229 (0.5)	690625 (22.5)	24510 (1.0)	364066 (14.2)	148544 (5.1)
Banking sector's net non-monetary liabilities	3096498	131486 (4.4)	542357 (21.2)	353665 (16.1)	660627 (27.1)	79910 (4.0)	140996 (6.8)	235395 (10.7)
Reserve money as on 20 March	3080356	102885 (3.5)	379913 (14.1)	281663 (11.6)	309874 (11.2)	-280260 (-12.9)	518300 (27.3)	351702 (14.5)
Components								
Currency in circulation	2409593	51891 (2.2)	261629 (12.2)	318616 (17.4)	272822 (12.8)	-328193 (-19.7)	494078 (37.0)	307423 (16.8)
Bankers' deposits with RBI	633339	47009 (8.0)	107833 (20.5)	-40019 (-7.1)	31370 (5.2)	42290 (8.4)	21405 (3.9)	36444 (6.4)
Other deposits with RBI	37424	3985 (11.9)	10451 (38.7)	3066 (12.8)	5682 (17.9)	5640 (36.5)	2817 (13.4)	7835 (32.8)
Sources								
Net RBI credit to Government	996015	61563 (6.6)	116802 (13.3)	403249 (84.7)	194064 (24.2)	195810 (46.1)	-144836 (-23.3)	325987 (68.5)
of which: Centre	993718	60451 (6.5)	114988 (13.1)	404444 (85.3)	193245 (24.1)	195030 (45.9)	-145304 (-23.5)	326187 (68.8)
RBI credit to banks & commercial sector	-164643	63953 (-28.0)	-231622 (-345.8)	3606 (5.7)	-317494 (-207.7)	-613810 (-201.6)	372643 (0.0)	89478 (0.0)
Net foreign exchange assets of RBI	3518215	109684 (3.2)	727369 (26.1)	30065 (1.1)	669628 (23.5)	13730 (0.6)	363571 (15.2)	87806 (3.2)
Govt's currency liabilities to the public	26315	35 (0.1)	473 (1.7)	190 (0.7)	427 (1.6)	3170 (14.5)	572 (2.3)	236 (0.9)
Net non-monetary liabilities of RBI	1295546	132350 (11.4)	233109 (21.9)	155447 (17.1)	236751 (22.4)	-120840 (-12.7)	73650 (8.8)	151805 (16.7)

■ Scheduled Commercial Banks' Indicators (₹ crore)

(As on 13 March)	Outstanding 2020	Over Month	Over Year	Variation						
				Financial Year So Far		Financial Year			
				2018–19	2019–20	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
Aggregate deposits	13339089	103551 (0.8)	1111634 (9.1)	801405 (7.0)	765317 (6.1)	1430370 (15.3)	668390 (6.2)	1147722 (10.0)
Demand	1457507	94471 (6.9)	166539 (12.9)	-79314 (-5.8)	-53780 (-3.6)	392440 (44.1)	88842 (6.9)	141005 (10.3)
Time	11881582	9081 (0.1)	945095 (8.6)	880720 (8.8)	819098 (7.4)	1037920 (12.3)	579547 (6.1)	1006717 (10.0)
Cash in hand	81526	3346 (4.3)	13438 (19.7)	8023 (13.4)	6649 (8.9)	3920 (6.8)	-1295 (-2.1)	14812 (24.7)
Balance with RBI	551020	-5162 (-0.9)	-8966 (-1.6)	34300 (6.5)	-14687 (-2.6)	121330 (31.3)	16906 (3.3)	40021 (7.6)
Investments	3795013	9241 (0.2)	400870 (11.8)	75690 (2.3)	413957 (12.2)	405440 (15.4)	287493 (9.5)	62603 (1.9)
of which: Government securities	3787016	9071 (0.2)	393881 (11.6)	75729 (2.3)	408014 (12.1)	405820 (15.5)	287656 (9.5)	61596 (1.9)
Bank credit	10140493	98804 (1.0)	584251 (6.1)	930817 (10.8)	368771 (3.8)	591840 (8.2)	783965 (10.0)	1146297 (13.3)
of which: Non-food credit	10080101	111736 (1.1)	576533 (6.1)	920132 (10.7)	349989 (3.6)	643170 (9.0)	795906 (10.2)	1146676 (13.4)

■ Capital Markets

	27 March 2020	Month Ago	Year Ago	Financial Year So Far		2018–19		End of Financial Year		
				Trough	Peak	Trough	Peak	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
S&P BSE SENSEX (Base: 1978–79=100)	29816 (-21.8)	39746	38133 (14.9)	25981	41953	33019	38897	29621 (16.9)	32969 (12.1)	38673 (17.3)
S&P BSE-100 (Base: 1983–84=100)	8693 (-25.2)	11730	11618 (10.0)	7683	12456	10266	12036	9494 (21.2)	10503 (11.5)	11809 (12.4)
S&P BSE-200 (1989–90=100)	3614 (-25.1)	4898	4828 (8.2)	3209	5185	4273	5043	3992 (22.5)	4433 (12.0)	4908 (10.7)
CNX Nifty-50 (Base: 3 Nov 1995=1000)	8660 (-24.3)	11633	11445 (12.4)	7610	12362	10030	11739	9174 (18.5)	10114 (11.1)	11624 (14.9)
CNX Nifty-500	7003 (-26.3)	9579	9502 (5.8)	6243	10119	8417	9992	7995 (3.5)	8912 (12.6)	9664 (8.4)

Figures in brackets are percentage variations over the specified or over the comparable period of the previous year. | *(-) = not relevant* | *- = not available* | *NS = new series* | *PE = provisional estimates*

■ Comprehensive current economic statistics with regular weekly updates are available at: http://www.epwrf.in/currentstat.aspx.

Delayed Recognition
South Korean Cinephilia and the Oscars

Parasite's sweep at the 92nd Academy Awards is a long-overdue recognition of a film industry that has consistently been provocative and edgy, encouraging prodigious talent like the auteur Bong Joon-ho.

NANDANA BOSE

Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite/Gisaengchung* (2019) won four Oscars for Best Picture, Best Director, Best International Feature Film, and Best Original Screenplay on the historic night of 9 February 2020. Its unexpected sweep at the 92nd Academy Awards was significant for not just being the first non-English language film to win the coveted Best Picture award, but, quite surprisingly, also the first South Korean film ever to have been nominated in any category in its century-old cinematic history.

As a teacher of contemporary Korean cinema at film departments in the United States (US) and India, I can attest to the fact that this recognition was long-overdue. An underrated, overlooked film industry had finally stepped out of the shadows of the more established and internationally celebrated cinemas of Japan, Mainland China, and Hong Kong. This perplexingly delayed recognition of a consistently dynamic industry could be traced to the post-1990s New Wave that encouraged the emergence of "commercial auteurism" of prodigiously talented film-makers such as Bong Joon-ho on to the international scene as it transformed an insular national film industry into a global cinematic powerhouse.

The sense of an industry finally getting what it deserves was reflected in the congratulatory tweet posted by Darcy Paquet, eminent film critic, author, and English subtitler of *Parasite*: "I hope that all Korean filmmakers can share in this moment and be proud, because it's the tremendous hard work and professionalism of the industry as a whole that makes a movie like PARASITE [sic] possible."

Multiple cinephiles were invoked and celebrated on the night of the Oscars. It is particularly noteworthy that Miky Lee, vice-chair and scion of the mighty South Korean conglomerate (aka *chaebol*) CJ Group, and executive producer of *Parasite*, made it a point to thank the South Korean film audience for pushing them. Considered the grandmother of South Korean entertainment, Lee built the country's first movie multiplex, invested in DreamWorks and has since nurtured a diverse $4.1 billion entertainment empire that helped launch a generation of film-makers, including Bong Joon-ho. She drew attention to one of the most distinctive and significant aspects of Korean cinema of the last two decades—an audience that was driven by cine-literate youth who were bred on a non-linear, interactive video gaming culture. This audience demanded diverse, edgy, provocative film content that consistently challenged, if not exceeded, their expectations and fed their insatiable desire for cutting edge, technically sophisticated film narratives featuring high production values and unpredictable plot points.

It would be remiss not to mention producer Lee's own cinephilia. In Bong Joon-ho's words, "Vice-chair Lee herself is a huge fan of film, TV and music … She's a true cinephile who's watched so many films and managed to bring over that fanatic passion to the world of business." Lee herself has spoken about carrying Korean film DVDs to big production houses like Warner Bros, Universal, Fox—anybody she had a chance with—to "pitch Korean film, Korean film, Korean film." This persistence paid rich dividends on Oscar night.

Typical of auteurs, Bong, a graduate of the prestigious Korean Academy of Film Arts (KAFA) —established in 1984 by the Korean Film Council as a cradle for highly trained and creative professionals—is a self-proclaimed cinephile and an avid student of film history. In his childhood, and as a youth obsessed with movies, he would watch Hollywood and "B" genre movies at night, when his family was asleep, on American Forces Korea Network, the US military's television channel broadcast for American troops stationed in bases across South Korea, including Daegu, Bong's birthplace. Therefore, it came as no surprise when, on winning the Academy Award for Best Director, he graciously gestured towards two of his co-nominees in the audience, two masters of film-making: Martin Scorsese, whose films Bong had grown up admiring, and Quentin Tarantino, who had over the years played a catalytic role in popularising East Asian Cinema, specifically Korean Cinema, among niche North American audiences and film schools.

In 2007, Scorsese had founded the World Cinema Project whose mission was to "expand the horizons of moviegoers everywhere … to preserve and present marginalized and infrequently screened films from regions generally ill equipped to preserve their own cinema history." One such restoration project undertaken was of the 1960s classic Golden Age film by the legendary South Korean film-maker Kim Ki-young (1921–98), titled *The Housemaid* (and released by the exclusive Blu-ray/DVD label Criterion Collection),

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whose visual and narrative influences on *Parasite* Bong repeatedly mentions in interviews, and is a reason for its recently released black and white version.

Much like his illustrious American compatriot and cinephile, Tarantino too played his part in the promotion of Korean cinema overseas. Under his aegis as chairperson of the Grand Jury Prize at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, Bong's close friend and New Wave contemporary, Park Chan-wook was awarded the Grand Prix for *Oldboy* (2003), which became a crucial turning point in the history of contemporary Korean Cinema. In the years thereafter, Tarantino would share the stage with Bong in an hour-long Open Talk session at the 2013 Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) simply because Tarantino had been "blown away" by Bong's disaster monster movie *The Host* (2006) and wanted to meet him.

BIFF is East Asia's most high-profile international film festival that had, over the years, showcased many New Wave film-makers, better known as the "386 Generation," that included Lee Chang-dong, Hong Sang-soo, Park Chan-wook, Kim Ki-duk, Kim Jee-woon, and Bong Joon-ho. They had begun their directorial careers when they were in their 30s, attended college in the turbulent 1980s, and were born in the 1960s, hence the acronym "386." According to *Meniscus* magazine, Tarantino made the following prescient observation: "I felt that of all the filmmakers out there that I've seen in the last 20 years, Bong has that thing that '70s [Steven] Spielberg had where he can do many different types of stories. But no matter the type of story, there's always this level of comedy and entertainment that is there." This is quite ironic in hindsight because it could so easily have been a comment on *Parasite,* the film that seven years later would deny Tarantino his first Academy Awards for Best Director and Best Picture!

South Korean cinema has officially arrived on the global stage for mainstream audiences who may have struggled to "overcome the one-inch tall barrier of subtitles," to cite Bong's acceptance speech at the Golden Globe award for Best Foreign Language Film. One hopes that the Academy shall continue to broaden its horizon and champion excellence in the cinematic arts, irrespective of nationality, language, geography, and gender. Otherwise, the Oscars shall revert to being, in Bong's damning words, "very local."

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Who Did It?

MAAZ BIN BILAL

[This poem is written in response to the current COVID-19 crisis, and the targeted killings following the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act.]

The call of the lapwing sounds at night, "who did it!"
  On which detection must we alight, "who did it?"

The whole town was witness to the crime, nonetheless,
  the *haakim* forces the victim: "write—who did it!"

A plague is afoot sifting through humanity,
Who spread it? Where'd it come?—Isn't it trite: who did it?

Where we go from here may scream to the skies
  of the bravery of all those who fight who did it.

Nature's self-correction, the sins of the fathers,
  Did a god will this to set aright who did it?

I am drunk on wine, and they are on power,
Who'll adjudge who is wrong, who is right, who did it?

The rich live in isolation in large bungalows,
  Abdul who built that house must fight who did it.

Deserts of loneliness, and ghettoes and camps,
  Who put them there and set them alight, who did it?

Birds still chirp, humour persists, there's laughter, oh, Maaz,
  Do not write poetry from pain to spite who did it.

haakim: ruler, judge, master, chief.
Abdul: A given name, literally meaning "servant/slave of" and often followed by a name for god—Allah, Rehman, Rahim, and so on.

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Political Consciousness in the Diaspora
Beyond Yoga and Pop Culture

To effect political change in the diaspora, the conversation needs to move beyond cultural appropriation and representation in pop culture.

RENA S KULKARNI

Characterising the "Indian American diaspora" is difficult. It encompasses many classes, castes, religions, and immigration statuses, from the many taxi drivers who keep cities running, to the charismatic surgeon correspondent on CNN. Nevertheless, there still exists an idea of the typical Indian American; hegemony flattens this population into a colour ("brown") and from a continent ("Asian," or for the slightly more discerning, "South Asian"). Many of the Indian Americans who have gained visibility or power are champions of their culture, devotees to the mythology of the exceptional immigrant "in a nation of immigrants."

Often, when these visible Indian Americans are asked to speak about "issues faced by the Indian community," the topics raised are those of representation politics and cultural appropriation. I am a consumer of pop content—I'd like to see Dev Patel in more movies too. And, I also understand that it is possible to care about more than one thing. But as a first-generation immigrant and a community organiser, I have become frustrated with conversations beginning and ending with whether white people can practise yoga. To quote the Kardashians, the first family of United States (US) pop culture, "Kim, there's people that are dying!"—that is to say, there are more pressing issues. That being said, I think that it's necessary to put this irritation aside while building a movement. It is important to realise that these plaintive demands for media representation often come from people who feel unmoored, looking for acceptance through assimilation instead of community. What can we do about it?

Since there is no universal diasporic experience, I'm going to create a soft straw man of the Indian American, called Adarsh USAkar. Adarsh is like several people I know, and his beliefs are not dissimilar to the ones I held as recently as four years ago. He is a self-described comfortable, but not rich, liberal who claims Satya Nadella and Indra Nooyi ("more women CEOs!") as his own. He decries Americans who say "chai tea," and bristles at being mistaken for a person who speaks English as a second language. Adarsh can acknowledge his adversaries—ignorance and racism—

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but often, only to speak of his (or his parents') ability to work hard and learn the system.

In my experience, highlighting the hidden history of civil rights movements in the US is a good way to begin to engage with Adarsh, who is looking for a sense of belonging, and can already see that something about society is wrong and unequal. Since so much of Adarsh's identity comes from his family's recent immigration story, it's good to begin by letting him know that Indians have lived in North America longer than most people think.

The first South Asians who arrived on the continent were coolies and indentured servants, brought in by the East India Company in the late 1800s. In the 20th century, Sikh male labourers moved to the continent to work on the railroads and farms on the Pacific Coast of North America. Their numbers were tiny, but xenophobia was a regular feature in the newspapers decrying the "dusky peril." As anti-Asian racism mounted, the Immigration Act of 1917 was passed—stopping all immigration from "the Asiatic barred zone." An act in the 1940s allowed the few South Asians in the US to become naturalised citizens, but it was only in the wake of the Civil Rights revolution, led by Black Americans, that a substantial reform to American law occurred.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national origin quota and discrimination based on race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence. Instead, visas were given to those who would be reunited with family already in the US, or preferentially given out based on the profession of the applicants. This law led to the first wave of Indian academics, doctors, and engineers to immigrate. A few years later, many students of colour led a strike at San Francisco State University, demanding the establishment of an Ethnic Studies department. The strike was headed by the university's Black Student Union (BSU) who formed a coalition with other minority student groups deemed the Third World Liberation Front. After four and a half months of their sustained activism, and many student arrests, the university established a college of Ethnic Studies. This led to a ripple effect in scholarship across the country.

There were other attempts by Indian Americans to gain citizenship for the many years in which American law only provided citizenship to "free white persons" and "aliens of African descent." In a famous case in 1923, Bhagat Singh Thind petitioned the US Supreme Court to classify "high caste" Indians as white persons; the court unanimously decided that Indians were not white, and ineligible for citizenship. Thind was an activist and scholar, who belonged to the Ghadar party, an organisation of Indians living on the Pacific Coast that agitated against British rule. It is striking that this attempt by Indians to align themselves

with whiteness and highlight their caste failed spectacularly, while coalitions of Asian, Latin, and Black people were able to bring about change. In other words, Adarsh needs only to look to our histories in the US to see that our struggles have always had a place of belonging in Black-led movement work.

Instead of applauding network television shows about India-origin FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents who are wrongly accused of terrorism, Adarsh can turn to Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), an organisation based in New York City created in response to police brutality and racial profiling in 2000. Adarsh needs to realise that the goal is justice, not gaining the same privileges as wealthy white men, and leverage the historical precedent that exists for civil rights being gained through mass mobilisation and coalition building. Draconian immigration laws threaten entire communities, and xenophobic hate crimes by white supremacists have killed and injured many.

Therefore, having a conversation that leads to Adarsh's politicisation feels more necessary and urgent than ever. But, sometimes, these conversations lead to him being defensive or dismissive, and sometimes he will detachedly play the devil's advocate. I am not advocating coddling him, especially in instances where he refuses to see the humanity of the people being marginalised.

Suppose Adarsh is ranting about how unfair it is that *Love Is Blind*, a popular matchmaking show on Netflix, is currently being embraced in the US while he grew up being teased for belonging to a community that prizes arranged marriage. I ask, "Why do you think arranged marriage is worth defending? Can you pinpoint where the irritation you have right now is coming from?" After understanding that arranged marriages preserve caste hegemony and a strategy for consolidating wealth, Adarsh concedes the point and states, "Well, I don't think it's something white people should be reprimanding us for." In response, I ask if Adarsh is feeling irritated and uncomfortable. "Is it discomfort with being Orientalised and othered?" "Yes, exactly!"

Then I steer the conversation to the following line of questioning: "Can you name a consequence of being othered, that's more deadly than discomfort? What communities are more vulnerable than yours because they are dehumanised? How are these communities materially affected, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic?" Adarsh brings up the facts that he has learned from reading the *New York Times* regularly.

To ground the conversation in something that isn't an abstraction or statistic, I ask, "How is your family, your wider community, complicit in narratives that dehumanise other communities?" When he demurs, I ask again, "How do they talk about Black people, about Muslims, about Dalits?" And then, finally "How is their pain seen as less real; how are issues they face like poverty, hunger, incarceration, or detention minimised?"

When Adarsh comes to the conclusions, he expresses guilt or hopelessness. This is where I save my most passionate pitch, for how he might get involved in impactful activism and mutual aid, because there is so much left to be done! Having these conversations with ourselves, and the Adarshes in our life, can be a catalyst for meaningful political involvement in the diaspora.

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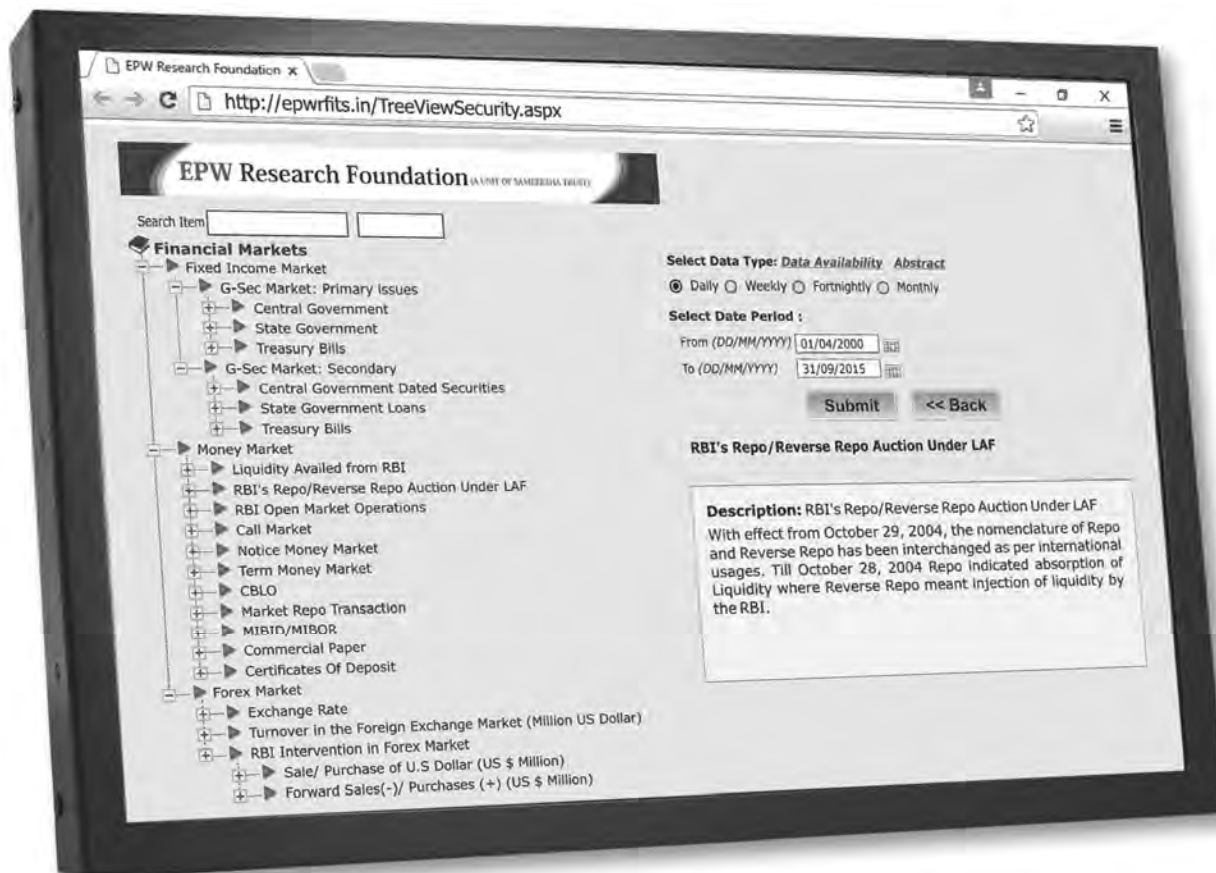
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