Understanding the positionality and fluidity of self and other: An Auto- Ethnographic account

Pragati Gupta

Abstract

The study conceptualises and lays out a set of invisibilities in daily life which in turn shape consciousnesses in a broader sense. The study analyses the underlying structures and the nexus of statuses emerging through time and history through the experience of religious pilgrimage I went on as a young child. Secondly, how the religious significance of the geographical area I lived in affected and shaped my consciousness and understanding of self and the other. Thirdly, how the stories I was narrated as a child and my experience of womanhood are shaped through various practices in the household, connect to the larger social whole. The intertwined nature of mythologies, legends, religious practice, experience of pilgrimage, rituals, with economic transactions, globalisation, gendered connotations will be assessed in this study in terms of the levels of hardship borne by different communities in these religious experiences, their portrayal in legends and myths and lastly the changes in their economic status over time in comparison to the communities holding the highest status. All these experiences are recounted in order to build an empirical basis for connecting religion, economic progression, caste and gender and explore the intersectionalities of stratification, keeping the focus on experience of stratification. All of this has been understood by the dichotomy of how the relationships ever so emphasised upon in academics remain so hidden in the daily lives of individuals. The connections between religious experience, spirituality, womanhood, household and economic systems will be augmented and compared to understand combinations and configurations of experience. The main aim is not to assess the validity or existence of these relationships. It is to use these interconnections to understand how their lack of visibility affects building of consciousnesses of individuals and communities, especially focusing on intermediary social caste-class, gender and religious affiliations, through my experiences. Finally, how this lack of awareness of interrelations combined with complexities of identity form the origin of bargaining with the beneficiaries of the status quo for power and identity and theorise the lack of solidarity within the exploited and the politics of separation.

"You are your stories. You are the product of all the stories you have heard and lived—and of many that you have never heard. They have shaped how you see yourself, the world, and your place in it. Your first great storytellers were home, school, popular culture, and perhaps, church." (Taylor 2001)

As one can note from the Performative Auto- ethnographic account of Robin M. Boylorn, one needs to theorise what they hear and witness, here we will assess, the compartmentalisation of the public and private, stories and reality, status quo and realms of the society through a spiritual journey on account of where and how I've lived and what I've experienced, but most importantly questioning what I have not learnt. Here we will analyse the underlying structures and the nexus of statuses emerging through time and history. The aim here, is to not assess the validity of interrelations between the realms of economy, household, religion and gender. The main aim of this essay is to put forth how the realms of Economy, Religion, Pilgrimage and household are seen in terms of binaries, which if put in terms of Barbara M. Cooper, a realm does not just connote either spiritual, cultural or economic capital, but it's interchangeability, to put in simpler terms, what happens if we combine two identities? How do we position this combination in the social hierarchy? Binaries here mean looking at something in terms of one or another. For example, as a frequent visitor of the Jagannath temple, I have witnessed very unique practices, such as the idea of "Daan Peti" or "Hundi" (donation boxes), which are placed everywhere in the temple. Where is this donation going? The question is despite the frequent trips to the wallet inside a temple, why does the popular perception about religion seem to be that it is away from material wealth? Secondly, one can't help but observe rituals where the Pandas (priests) standing at the inner gates of the temple, and various smaller temples inside the premises, hold wooden sticks and tap them on the heads of the devotees as they enter and exit. These experiences made me question the nature of religious conception and experience as a young adult. Whether religious experience is entirely spiritual or ritualistic or economic? Similarly, when we think of spaces of economic transaction, why are we just considering MNCs and conglomerates, not these Temple donation boxes? Why is it limited to the finiteness of something or the other? As a young child visiting these temples, I only related religion with divinity and spirituality, seeing "Daan" (donation) as a benevolent act, and a contribution to the underprivileged, without any knowledge of the whereabouts of the donations in the aftermath of the act of sliding the money down the box. I heard stories

of kings building these temples and the trusts running them now, but nobody in my family ever spoke of the commodified dimension and progression from historically accumulated disproportionate wealth to publicly visible Hundis. This argument should be a building block of how binaries are created and people are conditioned into believing that religion and economy are completely unrelated. The relationship between religion and economy, will be furthered in succeeding paragraphs.

It is important to understand the contradictions in the value systems and what they enforce such as the continuation of exclusionary practices, for example, women not being allowed inside temples during the menstruation period or boards outside temples saying that only Hindus are allowed to visit the temple which are public spaces in the political state's geographical territory. The temple is a part of the Indian territory where the law of the land, i.e., the Constitution of India, enforces equality, especially in public spaces. Then, why do marginalised communities have to fight long legal battles for entry into public spaces, which are supposedly open to all by the virtue of the law? This image of spirituality and divinity is propagated by the purposeful exclusion of religion, gender and economy from one another in daily lives of people leads to subtle but ever visible rationalisation of the lack of connection, to pertain to an iron curtain of commonality[1].

In this essay, I am questioning the popular narrative on Hindu religious pilgrimage and the values it embodies to unveil the politics of commodification and its evolution through the trajectory of my experiences and recollection. To focus on the relations between two arenas, i.e., religion and economy which are often separated from one another. Furthering the connection to gender and household, finally, breaking through the notion of religion as a false consciousness (Hacking, I., 1995). This theorisation can be very well explained

---

[1] According to Choudhury (2018), the genesis of the notion of conversion in Ambedkarite ideology developed from the urgency of emancipation given the milieu and theory of names. To begin with understanding the trajectory that followed we understand the politico- theological decision made by the Dalits as a community in the light of the social environment arising from the idea of Hindu (non)society which gave birth to the decision of being "away from Hindus" or annihilation of Caste. We have to take Ambedkarite ontology into understanding. This trajectory of challenging the illusion of commonality that masks the exclusion and violence through the institutionalized othering of the Mahar community is to be analysed. This generic terminology shadows the dark experience of othering. What this generalization of name hides is its consequences. It unveils only when we return to particular historical sites where this violence takes place. This is why it is important to understand the intricacies that follow in the understanding of the milieu and the theory of names.

through my experience as a young child visiting the Vaishno Devi shrine and as a resident of the East Indian state of Odisha growing up listening to the stories and witnessing the rituals of the Jagannath temple of Puri.

Fig.1. This figure demarcates the geographical areas mentioned in this study. Yellow-Jammu and Kashmir, Pink- Uttarakhand, Blue- Uttar Pradesh and Green- Odisha.(Source: Author)Heritage and politics are often kept away from each other, in separate air tight compartments. This happens in the realm of pure thought, not material reality, as Karl Marx once commented as critique to the German ideology. Thought here represents popular consciousnesses, when I say popular, I strictly mean those belonging to intermediary caste-class- communities. Coming from a household where I wasn't in touch with my history, the positionality of my identity in the larger whole wasn't easy. I constantly found my identity mystified, when I did not know even after living my whole life in Odisha, having incorporated all the aspects of it in my life, if I could call myself an Odia person. This is because according to caste-classification I am a Mahawar- Marwadi, who hail from the state of Rajasthan. But being a third generation Mahawar2 living in Odisha, I was not sure how to identify myself, which part of India did I belong to? I cannot call myself a North-Indian entirely or in totality neither can I call myself an East-Indian, due to the area of residence and origin of my ancestors. When one cannot find a complete sense of belonging, there is an immediate urgency to normalise binaries, for example, erasure of one's own identity to belong and create an imaginary position for oneself in the hierarchy, which will be explained further in my explanation of my positionality and experience as a Mahawar

in the town of Bhadrak, Odisha, and how the community sees itself and emulates behaviours according to that sense of self. This separation of the known and unknown itself is a revelation of the politics behind how one inherits cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Home and heritage are linked together through culture and traditions. Culture and tradition are introduced and become a part of one's experience through the practice of rituals based on where they have taken birth, and that's how one inherits something and becomes a part of a social group and is ascribed a status through it. This group shapes and constructs an imagination we call "home". Secondly, to thorough my approach I want to present a clear picture on the creation of archaeology of knowledge (Foucault 1969) using the concept of pilgrimage through the historical evolution of sacred geographies. And how eventually economic progression to a capitalistic system has affected the religious pilgrimage in a way presenting the ever adapting and entrenched nature of economic systems into pilgrimage. How does one subtly separate the both from each other while the connection is visibly present? Home and politics aren't too far away from each other, to put it simply, to not associate these ideas with one another would be a feat of the functionalist spirit, where we associate authenticity and normality with structures and the status quo is justified as "right". My aim in this essay is to pave way through these ideas to my experiences as a brown woman in a Hindu household, who took various religious travels across various pilgrimage sites in India. One of the underlying and main aims is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of geography, religion, the notion of sacred and mystic, and how mythology ties them all together and builds a set of constructs and institutional loyalties, our identities and consciousnesses. To break everything down into a question, I would ask, why don't we relate somethings to one another, and why are we so discreet about it? Is this exclusiveness comprehensive of one's material reality?

[2] Mahawar community is one of the sub-castes in the larger Marwadi community. This sub-caste is lower than Agarwals, Khandelwals, and Maheshwaris, but still form a part of the caste system. They were considered impure but not the most impure, their status is still higher than the Dalits who are considered to be outside of the Caste framework and while Mahawars are a part of the system however are considered "choti jaat" (defiling caste).

As a young girl my first visit was to Vaishno Devi, situated in the mountainous terrain of Katra in Jammu and Kashmir, the northernmost state of India. The journey to this shrine is a peculiar one, because of the difficult terrain and because of its extreme climate for it being situated in the high mountains. I clearly remember the stories about the buses falling into ditches which are called "Khai" in Hindi. What is particularly important to note about these stories is how "rampant" and "common" they are, this shows how the geographical locations of these pilgrimages play an important role in embodying the value of "sacrifice" and "pain", here, what we are seeing is that, these sacred locations are placed in extreme terrains. For example, if we connect this understanding to Chaar Dhaam Yatra3 or Goverdhan Parvat Yatra4, we will notice one similarity, i.e., these locations are difficult to reach and have difficult climates, which makes pilgrims possess a memory of the hardship they go through and this is tied to the stories of the Gods that are narrated. Here, one can also take into account Donald A. Messerschmidt's work on the Janai Purnima in the Muktinath shrine located in Nepal, in particular when he talks about the terrain and difficulty of the trek to the shrine and how do devotees describe it:

"August is the monsoon season; travel is difficult and dangerous. Hindu pilgrims must trek to Muktinath from the south, a trip that, at this time of year, typically takes several weeks from the central hills (Pahar) and back considerably longer from the lowlands (terai) and from India. The pilgrim foot-track traverses the difficult mountain terrain, wet and leech-infested forests and raging rivers, directly through the main axis of the Himalaya almost to the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. Many pilgrims see this journey as a test for both body and soul and hence the trip is spiritually uplifting and meritorious adventure." (Messerschmidt 1989)

Secondly, how this hardship becomes cathartic5 in the most philosophical sense, in the way these accidents were talked about especially the linguistic use of certain particular words in this context. I heard a group of men saying "भक्तन को मोक्ष ममल गया" (the devotees have received a path to heaven). The use of these particular words intrigued me, as the concept of loss was lost in Bhakti. Similarly, Messerschmidt's notes from the field provide context to this argument when he describes an account from a Sadhu (an ascetic who follows strict

restrictions from worldly pleasures, wealth and lifestyle) who was trekking towards the shrine: "On the way to Muktinath we will suffer the wet forest and endure the windstorm and raging rivers. People who come so far and bear these elements are all fortunate, for only they are able to see the beauty of it all. Lord Krishna and Rama dwelled in the forest where they found peace and contentment. Rama and Krishna and other rishimunis (sages) who spent time in the forest have shown us the path leading to peace and tranquillity. They have shown us how to attain Karma by going through all the suffering of the trip." (Messerschmidt 1989).

---

[3] In Hinduism, the journey to the four dhamas is considered highly auspicious, the four dhamas are located in Badrinath, Puri, Rameswaram and Dwarika.

Badrinath along with Yamunotri, Gangotri and Kedarnath can also be referred to as Char dham yatra. Here, in this study, Char Dham yatra refers to Badrinath clubbed with Yamunotri etc. These temples and origins of sacred rivers are located in mountainous regions of Uttarakhand,

[4] Govardhan Parvat, according to a legend on Lord Krishna, is considered to be the mountain he held on his little finger to save the residents of Gokul from the wrath of Indra (the God of rain and the king of devtas) . The journey to the temple in this particular location is considered to be auspicious and highly important to Hindus.

[5] The theory of tragedy in the Aristotelian line of argument connotes the purificatory nature of the tragic plot. It talks of emotional purification through the process of tragedy. On the theory of tragedy Plato and Aristotle differ, Plato on one hand believes in the divinity of the ruler and hence believes in censorship on the tragic plot. Choudhury is trying to display and correlate the idea of tragedy and symbolic violence against the Dalits through the practice of untouchability. This connection is the nexus in the argument of Aristotle and Ambedkar, i.e., importance of display of tragedy, revealing the illusion of commonality. While the Aristotelian idea of tragedy is that the character is neither pure nor evil but the plot based on her pain is purificatory, which gives it a very elitist notion of romanticising tragedy in a stratified society. This is related to the Aristotelian idea of who is a political being and who is an outcast, an outcast has a negative connotation attached to it and in Choudhury's words constitutes of women, slaves and the banished. This trajectory follows in the caste system, the Varna system institutionalised and normalizes the ostracising of the Dalits

Secondly this provides us a new facet to the concept of tourist gaze, as in one can look at pilgrimage as a tough journey leading up to the divine, where the pilgrim is seen as a brave and determined hero and even if this journey led up to their own death , they will be rewarded in their afterlife and rebirth, enunciating on the concepts of Karma and Dharma, the importance of these principles has been explained very well by M.N. Srinivas and are essential in understanding of what these values mean and enforce in Hinduism:

"Karma is a concept that justifies Caste hierarchy being based on the accident of birth; it justifies how birth is in fact not an accident, it is the result of the actions performed in the previous birth, this strengthens the very idea of hierarchy in the Caste system. Srinivas describes Caste hierarchy to be an index of the state of an individual's soul in Hinduism. Dharma which means morality or what is moral or right, this principle is used to justify the Caste rules as right and following them to be morally correct. Living according to Dharma is correct and violating Caste's code of conduct is violating Dharma which is punishable according to the said rules of Hinduism." (Srinivas, 1952)
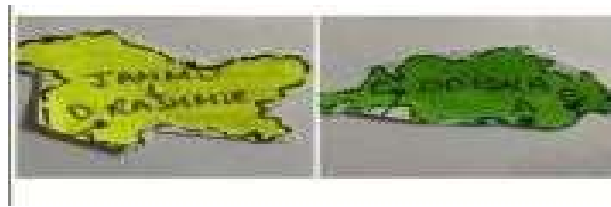

Fig.2. Points A, B and C marked are Puri (where the Jagannath temple is located), Bhadrak and Koraput respectively in the map of Odisha. Point D denotes the Katra region where Vaishno Devi shrine is located.(Source: Author)

from society. The question arises of who is capable of politics and who is not. This is very important to understand the constituent assembly debates on reservation and underlying notion behind the Poona pact, 1942, it is the very fact that the systematic and institutional violence against the Mahars was so inherent that the resources required to enter the arena of politics would be unfair if a Dalit and a dwija or Savarna are kept on the same pedestal. This very narrative led to the birth of the policy of affirmative action which is essential for so-called Aristotelian "outcasts' ' to become "political beings". (Choudhury 2018)

Similar to this incident lies one of my earliest memories of connection to religion which would be through stories my family members narrated to me as a child. Part of living in Odisha was constant mentions of Lord Jagannath's temple is situated in the city of Puri, people from different parts of the world come to worship the lord which a sacred geographical location for devout Hindus. My encounter is with rituals of "Rath Yatra" which is a yearly occurrence, where, the God, his sister Subhadra and his elder brother Lord Balabhadra fall ill after the Abhisheka (sacred bath) of 102 lottas (mugs) of water, and take a journey from the temple of Puri to Gundicha Ghai to their maternal aunt's home in three chariots. The chariot being pulled on a large scale calls for a lot of attention from crowds, people from all over India come to witness this ritual, every year several accidents happen when the heavy chariots have caused stampedes and crushed people. This again is seen as purificatory and not tragic as the people crushed upon by the chariot or who die in stampedes are seen as the true and brave Bhakts, who hailed on to heaven after achieving such an altruistic death shows keen similarities with the bus accidents and how people see these tragedies as essential in path of devotion. This is where it becomes essential to see the pain as a memory, in Malinowski's terms, this pain helps create memory of the fundamental values the Religion or the particular institution portrays to embody, which is shown in his study of the Trobrianders, in particular the conceptualisation of the ceremony of initiation. But this theory would be incomplete if one does not incorporate the role of technology and globalisation into it, as BarbaraM. Cooper did in her study of the Hausa women's performance of Hajj, where she argues Hajj doesn't just embody spiritual capital but this spiritual capital transcends from technology and globalisation, especially in the case of social classes whose participation in the spiritual journey is new. Also, this explains the concepts of Karma and Dharma in a new light, as we can see, there is a creation of hierarchy of hardship facilitated by commodification of pilgrimage. Since in the contemporary sense, the route to this shrine signifies something more than devotion, it is a juxtaposition to the question of economic and social status. Sitting in the dhaba (astreet restaurant) while eating Parathas (an Indian bread made of wheat dough) I heard men talking about how these Bhakts were " lucky" to lose their lives in such a heroic manner whilst not mentioning anything about people who visit the shrine through helicopters, this left a mark on what I imagine

bravery to be, as the journey towards the sacred cave had just begun.Not everyone has to hike the mountain if they do not visit via helicopters, there is an option to go on the back of a Pitthu or on a palanquin which we call Palki in Hindi with four men carrying the person. Who carries whom, the burden of whose self-sacrifice lies on whom is the biggest question here? These men who carry people on their back or shoulders are "locals" or "Pahadis" (residents of the hills/ mountains) who belong to a rather low socio-economic background, who often on their appearances "cannot be trusted". Due to our unfamiliarity with the region, my mother and me lost our way and had to wait with the Pitthu who was carrying me, my mother who always describes the man as "dangerous looking" and "eerie" person whenever she describes the situation, she was in. She always goes on to finish narrating the story with "thankfully he wasn't one of them", makes me wonder what does she mean when she mentions "them". This makes me realise that to understand the system of stratification and the patterns underlying what is called gross over- simplification of facts by Srinivas in his study of Caste; one needs to focus on biology, morality and hygiene being closely linked along with the idea of hierarchy in the Caste system. (Srinivas ,1952). But as time has progressed and so has the economic system, we should acknowledge we can apply this understanding of biology, morality and hygiene, to communities that fall in the lower rungs of socio- economic hierarchy. Coming from a socially mobilised Caste of Mahawars situated in the town of Bhadrak in Odisha, earlier, which experienced an ex- communication (stringent restrictions on food sharing and contact) from other upper sub- Caste of Marwadis such as the Agarwals and Khandelwals, after achieving a higher economic status did not have to go through similar ex-communication, ostracization and humiliation. This mobilisation has its own interesting features. Firstly, Mahawars, are a part of the Caste system, which Dalits are not, this is important to note, since mobility can be paved for dominant Castes[6] (highly demographic and geographic aspect of caste) or intermediary

[6] This is a concept introduced by M.N. Srinivas, according to him, dominant caste is the one which yields economic or political power in a particular geographical area. Previously, castes which were placed at a ritually higher status occupied this position.Due to the Mughal rule in India and advent of a bureaucratic system of administration also the beginning of large-scale commercial

Castes. Secondly, the role of technology and history in this economic status, shows how trading communities benefited from colonial know- how, and thirdly, importance of economic productivity in the capitalistic societies.

To talk about my social position in the Caste- class hierarchy is important to understand why Pitthus seemed dangerous to my mother and secondly to show how social mobility is very rare and only helps sustain the system. In the sense, firstly we see Caste divide, but as we go through the colonial period and documentation of Caste hierarchy, we see claims of various Castes in denial of their respective status, and, rivalry and untouchability practiced by these lower Castes towards some other Caste which has almost similar status, to portray their belongingness in the exclusionary Caste system based on the principles of hierarchy and purity and pollution.

Then through technological and colonial trajectory we can trace the growth of Caste- class nexus and inter mingling of identities and positions followed by the establishment of a capitalistic society in the contemporary globalised scenario. This shows a nexus of the new and old hierarchy as suggested by Parth Chatterjee in his theorisation of the "Passive Revolution", that there is an implicit revolution leading to creation of a nexus within the pre-colonial ruling class, and a post-independence elite. This brings us back to the notion of connection between pain, memory and experience. How this connection is related to social mobility and maintenance of the status quo.

---

activities in the British period. These changes in historical element of the political organisation led to the diversification of factors in the domination of caste. These factors according to Srinivas, first sizeable amount of land and population, high place in local hierarchy. But with the advent of western bureaucracy and education in India, jobs in the public sector, political popularity etc also played a huge rule in the determination of the dominant caste. (Srinivas 1987)

The memory of the Caste based discrimination is deemed forgotten by the Mahawars, as they mobilised upwards in the hierarchy, they started emulating behaviours of the Upper- Caste. This process in Srinivas's words would be called Sanskritization, but here this behaviour shows that even after gaining a higher status in the hierarchy, the continuous emulation of exploitative behaviour and following rules of purity and pollution. This shows how memory of humiliation is purposefully erased in the minds of intermediary communities, and, this new nexus of identities sustains the old hierarchy in some sense and inculcates the new hierarchy in some sense. This notion can be understood using the Hegelian idea of "Aufheben", which in his words means to cancel and to preserve, and forms a part of his Dialectical theory and method, where he explains, how through self-sublation of finite ideas, there is a definite nothingness, not, pure nothingness (reductio ad absurdum). This led to preservation and cancellation of the old idea and inculcating a new idea at the same time. Similarly, if we apply the same logic to the idea of Passive revolution, it preserves the old systems of hierarchy but not in its pure form but a slightly reformed framework with a new hierarchy. This creates a nexus of systems with an illusion of mobility, as if we look at the comparative status of the mobilised communities to the ruling class, the difference remains the same. Here what we see is a nexus of old and new identities, the ultra- entrenched nature of Capitalism. Even today the Mahawar community's economic status does not match the Agarwals (descendants of King Agrasen).

Secondly, Caste doesn't act alone in subordination and exclusion of communities, another aspect of Caste is region or territory.

---

[7] Marwadi community is popularly perceived as a trading community in India, which was not always so, this phenomenon largely took place in the aftermath of Industrial development in the post-colonial period, where, the colonial technological know-how of the previous employees of the British, now, turning to their cultural capital or networks of trade within families and personal loaning systems etc grew as a trading community. They hail mostly from the Indian state of Rajasthan, but are hugely settled in colonial cities like Kolkata (West Bengal) etc, mainly due to the colonial importance of the city of Kolkata previously called Calcutta.

The relationship between Marwadis7 in Bhadrak with the Odias is really important to understand. The Odias have their own caste hierarchy, even though some Marwadis might have same caste position as the Odias but they are at odds due the language and the regional divide in India. Odias are an Odia speaking community while, Marwadis are usually a Hindi speaking community. On the other hand, Marwadis are considered to be a completely trade based community only interested in profit in popular perception. This perception does not recognise the intra-caste divide and exploitation, and at the same time the unequal amounts of wealth they've as a pre-requisite in comparison to Marwadi lower sub-castes and Odia counterparts. This means that the lower-caste Marwadis and lower caste Odias have similar experiences but that doesn't unite them, the regional divide keeps them away from one another. My family, while recognising that the economic status of Mahawars even after mobilisation hasn't reached anywhere near in comparison to the economic status of upper caste Agarwal counterparts, harbour hostility towards Odia community, because of the sense of superiority they feel as North Indian descendants. This sense of superiority helps create a mirror image of discrimination they subjugate the East Indians to when they migrate to North India, this mirror image is the idea that they are being discriminated against as North Indians by the Odias in Odisha. On several occasions

my mother, who has addressed all the Odias using the pronoun: these, she by the use of this pronoun is trying to indicate that somehow the Odias are inferior and are "jealous" of the prosperity the Marwadis have. While she also has recognised that not all Marwadis are prosperous but her status as a North Indian has made her believe that she falls in the category of "prosperous", when in actuality she doesn't, by the virtue of her caste identity. Her identification as a so-called superior North Indian plays out to emulate the behaviours of an exploitative community, vis a vis, her position as a part of exploited community, and that's how intermediary lower castes are not able to show solidarity.

Similar to the notion of the treatment of a certain "them" what seemed very important to me was how the Ratha is built and who pulls on it, who can visit the God in the temple and who can't. The Dalits and lower Caste Hindus (now it is difficult to identify Caste status due to complex histories, documentation and Caste- class nexus along with the demography) and

people belonging to other Religions are not allowed inside the temple, this process is seen as God's sacrifice of his health to give Darshan (holy visitation) to his devotees who can't visit him inside the temple. Secondly the story of Nabakalebar, which is the ritual of god's death and rebirth, the process of his mourning, burial and a quest to go on to find particular wood to make his idol. Here comes the story of the origin of the deity, according to various legends and myths widely popular, I'll narrate the one I heard the most. It was how the Sabara tribe's idol of Nila Madhava was a quest of King Indradyumna due to the will of God, but the fact that God blessed only him with the credit of the creation of his temple and the Sabaras only the right to mourn his death. Not only that but the fact that only the Sabaras who were half Sabara and half Pati Brahmins could mourn Lord Jagannath's death. As a child I was constantly told and reminded of these stories not as directly I narrated them but through rituals and regular visits to the temple in Puri which was few hours away. This shaped my understanding of indigenous people. The relationship between Hinduism and Indigenous communities being a symbiotic relationship as portrayed in the legend, wasn't coherent to what I saw around me. My aunt and uncle had been on a trip to Koraput (South Odisha) and had been to various tourist sites, one of them being Bonda Hills to "see" the Bonda tribe as if they were objects, women and children were not allowed because of tourist protocols, which said that one is not allowed to "laugh" in front of the members of the Bonda community. Hence infantilising the "divine

womanhood" they worship in the form of Laxmi, Durga and Kaali by clubbing women and children in thesame category, and, deeming women incapable of being in control of their actions and body, which signalled to the inherent belief that women "needed" to be controlled. Due to these stories, practices and experiences throughout my childhood I had built various images in my mind of the "others" which were one sided and restrictive and only for me to realise the importance of asking the question: if the others really agreed to the imagination I had built, were they really present in my interaction with them?

To understand that the binary notions produced do not impact everyone in the same way and magnitude is an essential way of recounting why the concepts are considered ever- exclusive. To put it clearly, the structure and hierarchy, and one's position in it affects how one

experiences a phenomenon. In this essay, I will portray how the mode of commutation and access to resources shapes how one sees pilgrimage and religion. How one's journey and the levels of hardship is related to where they "belong" and what they are a part of. Hardship here means to indicate the several levels of stratification that lie underneath one classified paradigm which will be discussed in detail when we explore the intricacies of womanhood and homogeneity in households.Another important facet of the journey from the base to the sacred cave are the Bhajans (sacred song or hymns) that are sung on the path by the pilgrims on the hike, to understand this song and situate it in the narrative of Bhakti is important to create a memory of "hope" through the benevolent nature of the mother goddess and create a sense of cohesion within the pilgrims. These songs create a memory of togetherness and a sense of the path to divinity.

These performative features of pilgrimage create a sense of kinship between the pilgrims and the Mother Goddess, for the pilgrim to remember that the path of hardship leads to salvation. But this also poses a question of how hard the path is for a certain them, who cannot afford to take private cars to the base and Pitthus, Palkis or helicopters to the cave. In simpler words it is a way of showing that in the sacred space (Darbar) which belongs to the Mother Goddess is where everyone is equal. But is everyone really equal, is the Pitthu equal to the person they carry? Is the person visiting via buses equal to the person visiting via helicopter? Or do these modes of commuting show something more than just journey but different levels of hardships, these Bhajans erase these differences effectively by singing about the communal kinship shared by the devotees through their shared devotion for the mother Goddess.

Fig. 3. This picture is taken inside the cave. The child on the left is me (Pragati) and the child on the right is my elder sister, in the middle lies the prototype of the three sacred rocks forming the shrine of Vaishno Devi as taking pictures where the original shrine is

located isn't permitted. (Source: Unknown)

Some verses of the Bhajan sung on the hike to the cave are:

zor se bolo jai mata di sare bolo jai mata di hum bhi bole jai mata di tum bhi bolo jai mata di milke bolo jai mata di saz ke bolo jai mata di

maa jhande wali jai mata di maa sher sawari jai mata di lagti pyari jai mata di

hai sabse nyari jai mata di meri maa hai bholi jai mata di

This song brings out a more gendered perspective of pilgrimage and the popular perception on the behavioural expectation out of a woman to be naive and pure, by using words like Pyaari (sweet) and Bholi (naive or "pure"). The Vaishno Devi shrine is related to one of the Avatar of Durga who according to the legends was a fierce goddess born to kill Mahishasura, to replace her fiery and praise a naïve image is to popularise the belief that women should always be calm and composed. Similarly, according to the legend of Kaali, both

being an avatar8 of goddess Parvati and the wife of lord Shiva, who can be the only one to "tame" the fury of the goddess signifies a great importance in the conception and notion of

husband being given a position of divine stature in the institution of marriage. Where the wife is beneath him, this can also be seen in the imagery of Laxmi and Vishnu's marital life, where the goddess of wealth is always seen massaging the feet of her husband. Secondly, it is interesting to look at the role that Laxmi, Jagannath's (an Avatar of Vishnu) wife played in the Ratha Yatra as she was supposed to be "jealous" of Subhadra and break one of the wheels of the Ratha or the carrier in which God travels to his maternal aunt's home. Very skilfully these stories were routineized in my childhood and defined various experiences of household politics, how mothers and sisters are sacred and more important than the outsider or the wife, in an exogamous community. I remember having heard stories from my grandmother, mother and all the married women of the family sitting in gatherings wearing special clothes on certain days of the week or month according to the Hindu calendar and reading out loud certain stories and breaking fasts. These stories were mostly about the definition of what makes a woman noble and the right way of womanhood, how women did certain things which are very important to maintain a balance, the balance being essentially the division of labour. This puts forward the question of intersectionality and difference in experience of womanhood, because, Hindu mythology only provides an elitist and binary account of femininity and masculinity. The concept of Dalit and lower Caste womanhood is lost from this perspective and this narrative has trickled down on the levels of household and has erased the concept of difference in womanhood paving a way to the popular narrative of the right way to be a woman and the inherent role of upper Caste-class women in upholding of the status quo. Which constantly weakens the feminist intersectionality and the normalisation of difference in the experience of womanhood. This also shows how important the regular Pooja (worship) regime is essential in the creation of the idea of the importance of God in routine and how certain spaces in the house are considered hygienic and pure whilst some are not. Who is allowed in the kitchen and in the Pooja Ghar (room of worship) is also an important aspect of sacred geography and architecture in a Hindu household. When my mother had hired a non-Hindu domestic help, my grandmother had demarcated spaces of the house that she could and couldn't enter, and one such space that she couldn't enter was the Pooja Ghar one can notice how my grandmother was emulating behaviour similar to the one witnessed in the Jagannath temple. The public and private hence cannot be entirely separate,

the household is a smaller prototype of the public domain. Again, the constitutional conception of abolition of discrimination on the basis religion, caste and gender is an illusion, when in material reality it doesn't exist. Here we see a concoction of underlying politics of separation, here the notion of an outsider is contextual and two faceted. Where we see daughter and mother as sacred, but in many cases, daughters are not considered to be a complete part of one household. Due to patrilocal kinship patterns being prevalent in most of North India, daughters (Beti) are called "Paraya Dhan" (someone else's property), here, we see an explicit objectification and exclusion of the daughter from the household.
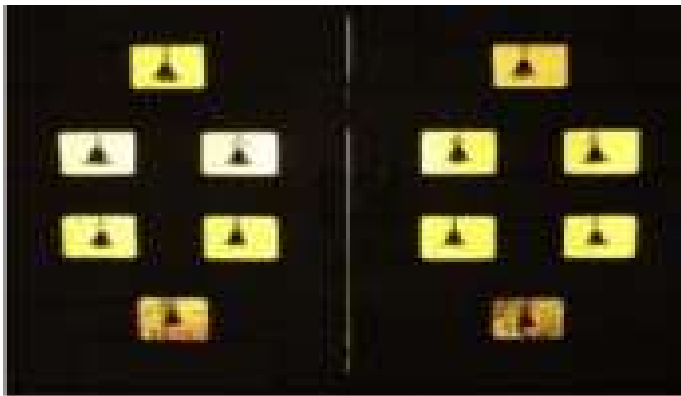
Fig.4. Picture of the Pooja cabinet in a rented home in Hyderabad, signifying the importance of the notion of us and them, also the importance of daily worship in Indian homes. Source: author (7th July,2020)

---

[8] In Hindu mythology there are many forms in which Gods take birth in human form or get into a particular character for a reason, these separate human forms and characters are called an Avatar.

We see the politics of separation and hierarchisation of women in households, which is talked about by Irawati Karwe in her study of the kinship patterns in India. The contextual exclusion of daughter and daughter-in-law, creates a sense of hierarchy and rivalry in this relationship. Similarly, there is a hierarchy of women in the household, which explained both by Leela Dube in her study of Caste and Gender, and, Rajni Palriwala in her study on the concept of negotiating with patriliny, where they talk of hypergamous marriage unions, the kitchen and Pooja politics and intra- household consumption. What is essential to note from these works is that we see how women gain power and authority in the household, mainly through endogamous unions which facilitates entry to the heart of the kitchen, by seniority and lastly through producing a male heir. But due to the post-colonial emergence of cities and job opportunities, and later New Economic Policy9 of the Indian government through which migration became rampant. Globalisation helped women negotiate their status in the system, as argued by Palriwala in her work. Only proves Cooper's point of importance of technology which plays a major role in the evolution of structures. But this brings us to something crucial, do all women connote one class or as one? This question is asked by both Sylvia Walby and Sharmila Rege in their works, my answer to this question would be slightly different from what Walby and Rege theorise. I would like to bring this question down to the household and my social location, I am currently an unmarried teenage daughter in a household, my position as an incomplete outsider, makes my experience different from my Sister-in-Law (SIL) in that particular household which is my family of orientation, while my SIL's family of procreation. But my SIL's experience as a daughter in her family of orientation would be similar to mine. The question of womanhood in households is thus very contextual and positional. This is also affected by colonialism, capitalism, technology and globalisation, as a working wife's experience would be different from a homemaker. Hence, Walby's argument in terms of constituting women as a class is valid, that in terms of livelihood and profession, women can have separate class status. But, in the Indian context, in hypergamous and endogamous marriages two homemakers will have separate experiences and status, the marital union of a lower Caste woman to an upper Caste man will lead to her

status being lower in the hierarchy of women of the household, than a woman of the same Caste as her husband. So, the intermediary statuses and the connection between economy,

Caste and gender cannot be ignored or separated. Here Rege's arguments make sense as she argues that women from different castes experience womanhood differently. But in my opinion, it's important to note differences and similarities in the Indian subcontinent are highly configurational. In the sense, these differences do not mean that there can't be similarities and vice versa. But polarised theorisation of concepts of class and Caste, show a more binary image of what these realms constitute, making them seem exclusive. Womanhood is subject to various configurations within the same caste or household or caste,

let us assess this question by asking supplementary questions, do all working women who are married have the same experience as unmarried working women? Do all women from the Marwadi community have the same experience? The answer is no, as, it is extremely important to note and position marriage in these layers of stratification, in order to see marriage as an institution of oppression, and how it inflicts oppression and creates power dynamics within women and oftenis one of the reasons why women bargain with patriarchy, which has been rightly pointed out by Rajni Palriwala. Reza Masoudi in his book "The Rite of Urban Passage: The Spatial Ritualization of Iranian Urban Transformation" argues:

"In my chapter about Mumbai in Handbook of Religion and the Asian Cities, I have argued that urbanization is not simply about the migration of people to a city. It is intrinsically about encountering the diverse ethnic, religious and political groups that cohabit in a place and negotiate their social relations." (Masoudi 2018)

---

[9] NEP in India connotes the policy of Liberalization, Globalization and Privatisation. In this study we'll focus on the process of globalization and its social consequences. Rajni Palriwala (1999), focuses on how the increase in global interconnections and opening up of the Indian economy affected the lives of women living in rural India and how the so-called "economic reforms" had a significant role in changing the dynamics of household politics.

This argument here signifies the importance and relevance of the social impacts of the so-called economic by- product of colonialism and later globalisation. What is important to note in Masoudi's argument is that when urbanisation happened in India because of the New Economic Policy, its impacts were so profound and complex that it couldn't be just regarded as a mere demographic consequence of an economic process. While Palriwala explains the social impacts of globalisation which led to large scale migration, she emphasises on the fluidity of the rural household structure and women's negotiation with patriarchy as a result. But my argument is that if we combine the precursor of Masoudi's argument and Palriwala's emphasis on positionality, we get to know that economic progression is not only not an isolated event, and is highly gendered. Also, Masoudi's argument on negotiation of social relationships holds commonality with Palriwala's argument on changing social relationships in rural households due to urbanisation. Here, what we observe is the understanding of fluidity and multi-faceted nature of spaces and processes. So, we can ask, did NEP affect the urban and rural spaces in completely similar ways? The answer is no, but that doesn't necessarily make it devoid of sharing certain common features, such as negotiation of social relationships, which provides an impeccable proof for my argument on how similarity of one identity marker in the case of understanding experience of womanhood or common features of impacts of urbanisation in rural and urban spaces, doesn't determine complete homogeneity of experience.

To conclude the essay, I would like to point out how pain, memories and stories we hear are closely related to

what we experience in daily lives. These questions, transport and hardship, enduring pain and equality,

commonality and exclusiveness, pave way for us to look at how Pilgrimages are not just spiritual and religious. It tells us how economic systems dictate one's life and safety. We also see how deeply one's social position is related to what they remember and what they forget, how new nexuses are forged through the cancellation and preservation of new and old hierarchies and ruling classes. These nexuses have a combination of identities which build a permutation and combination of similarities and differences in experience. These similarities

and differences determine human relationships and their general nature. These relationships and their nature help build hierarchies within hierarchies, combinations within combinations. These complex hierarchies are hidden by the politics of commonality and portrayal of a binary image where there is less space for interconnection. These interconnections are erased subtly through household and stories we hear, portraying an image where loss is signified as purificatory, where loss of life in misery due to the accident of birth is accorded as a way to heaven. This Weberian ascetic heaven built to signify the belief that the after- life is equal and egalitarian, to embody hope for the hardship of communities at the lower rungs of hierarchical structure. The equality embodied by the unequal God whose stories have a smell of social constructivism in them, due to the embodiment of human traits by the divine, such as jealousy of Laxmi, anger of Kaali etc, this Durkheimian concept of the human element in the divine holds extremely true for the Indian context. These values and the illusion of Religion facilitates Economic progression, in the sense, people do not think twice before taking the bus, car or helicopter ride to visit the shrine, despite how dangerous it is. This exposure to hardship is not voluntary as it might seem, it is an internalisation of the divine and self-sacrifice as a path to spiritual enlightenment. Hierarchy is hidden in the degree of hardship one is exposed to. It is also hidden in who is described as what and who is allowed where. Who constitutes us and who constitutes them, and how does this keep shifting, and, how hierarchy and stratification progress together with who can afford what, who is expected to behave in which way based on their gender identities and ascribed statuses? Who is an outsider, and when and where are they considered an outsider, how this contextuality is eerily similar to all hierarchies, and hence creates a nexus of complex identities, where commonality of one identity marker may not signify complete homogeneity of experience.

References

1.Boylorn, Robin. 2014."Sit with Your Legs Closed!" and Other Sayin's from My Childhood" in International Review of Qualitative Research, Vol. 7, No. 3, Special Issue: The Bridge Building Power of Autoethnography, [pp.312-326]

2.Bourdieu, Pierre.1986. "The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education." Westport CT: Greenwood [pp. 241-258.]

3.Choudhury, Soumyabrata.2018. "On Conversion: Beyond Protective Discolouration" in Ambedkar and other immortals: an untouchable research programme. Navayana Publication. [pp.87-114]

4.Choudhury, Soumyabrata.2018. "Ambedkar Contra Aristotle: On a Possible Contention about who is Capable of Politics" in Ambedkar and other immortals: an untouchable research programme. Navayana Publication. [pp.199-232]

5.Cooper, Barbara. 1999. "The Strength in the Song: Muslim Personhood, Audible Capital, and Hausa Women's Performance of the Hajj" in Social Text, No. 60, Globalization? Duke University Press

6.Durkheim, Emile. 1995. The elementary forms of religious life. Translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: The Free Press, Book one, [pp. 27-33]

7.Eschmann, Anncharlott, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi. 1978. "The cult of Jagannath and the regional tradition of Orissa". New Delhi: Manohar Publications.

8.Foucault, Michael.1969. "The Archaeology of Knowledge". Editions Gallimard [pp.275]

9.Fuller, C.J. and V. Benei (Eds.), 2000. "The Indian state, the dominant classes and the "passive revolution" in The Everyday State and Society in Modern India. Social Science Press, [pp. 5-10]

10.Hacking, Ian. 1995. "Re-writing the soul: Multiple personality and the Science of Memory". Princeton University Press. [Pp. 8-38]

11.Hegel, Geogr. 1830.The Encyclopedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences [Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I], translated by T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991.

12.Karve, Iravati, 1994, "The Kinship Map of India", in P. Uberoi (ed.), Family, Kinship and Marriage in India. Delhi: Oxford University Press [pp.50-73]

13.Leela Dube 1996 "Caste and Women" in M.N. Srinivas (ed.) Caste: Its twentieth century avatar, New Delhi: Penguin [pp 1-27].

14.Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1948. Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays. Selected, and with an introduction by Robert Redfield. Boston: The Free Press, [pp. 37-50]

15.Marx, K. and F. Engels. 1969. Selected Works Vol. 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers. pp. 13-15, 16-80, 98- 106, 142-174, 502-506

16. Masoudi, Reza. 2018. "Chapter 1 Towards a Framework for Spatially Studying Religious Rituals". The Rite of Urban Passage: The Spatial Ritualization of Iranian Urban Transformation. Berghahn Books. [Pp. 9- 24]

17. Messerschmit, Donald. 1989."The Hindu Pilgrimage to Muktinath, Nepal. Part 2. Vaishnava Devotees and Status Reaffirmation". Mountain Research and Development, Vol. 9. No.2. [pp 105- 118]

18. Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. 'The limits of the State: Beyond Statist approaches and their critics', The American Political Science Review, Vol. 85, No.1 [pp. 77-96].

19. Palriwala, Rajni. 1999. "Negotiating Patriliny: Intra-household Consumption and Authority in Rajasthan (India)", in Rajni Palriwala and Carla Risseeuw (eds.), Shifting Circles of Support: Contextualising kinship and gender relations in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Delhi: Sage Publications [pp.190-220]

20. Rege, S. 1998. "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position." Economic and Political Weekly. 33, No. 44 [pp 39-48]

21. Srinivas, M. N. 1952. "Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India". Clarendon: Oxford [pp100- 122].

22. Srinivas, M.N. 1987. "Dominant Caste and other essays". Oxford University Press. [Pp. 195]

23. Taylor, D. 2001. "Tell me a story: The life-shaping power of our stories". New York: Bog Walk Press. Urry, John.1990. "Chapter 1: The Tourist Gaze" in Tourist Gaze. Sage Publications. [pp. 5-15]

24. Walby, Sylvia. 2002. "Gender, Class and Stratification: Towards a new approach" in S. Jackson and S. Scott (eds.) Gender: A Sociological Reader. London: Routledge [pp 93-96].

25. Weber, Max. 2001. "The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism". Translated by Stephen Kalberg. England: Roxbury Publishing Press, [pp103-126].

26. Whitehead, A. 1981, "I'm Hungry Mum: The Politics of Domestic Budgeting" in K. Young et al. (eds.) Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination Internationally and its Lessons. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul [pp. 93-116].

About the Author

Pragati Gupta is currently pursuing M.A. Social Anthropology at SOAS, London and has finished B.A.(HONS) Sociology from Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi. Her research interests lie in exploring various cross-contextual and cross temporal forms of social stratification such as caste, class, ethnicity along with analyzing their performance and experience in everyday lives.