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EDITORIAL OPEN ACCESS

Development Dynamics at the Margin

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The development paradigm in the last quarter of a century has largely been one of economic growth, increased global interactions among people, and aspirations (revealed or/and hidden) for political freedom and human rights. The advances and proliferation of information and communications technology (ICT) have removed many barriers and have redefined the nature of economic, political and social interactions. These developments have also created new haves and have-nots in the society. This division is more pronounced in developing countries like India where more than one-third of the population is still illiterate. In this new order, information is the source of economic, political and social power. The technology and its proliferation have created opportunities for a large number of people, even for those who would not stand a chance in the world that we used to know. However, the existing institutional framework needs a major overhaul for these changes to be beneficial to everyone in the society. Unfortunately, as we all know from history, such changes in institutions do not take place overnight.

In this new world, certain changes have swept across societies (and groups within the societies) and "convergence" seems to have been the buzzword. For casual observers, these trends may signify an inevitable death of the struggles of groups and people who are living at the margins of cultural, political and even economic identities. However, an attempt at understanding the fundamentals of these global changes would reveal a completely different picture – full of opportunities for these people. In this information age, the possibility of reducing information asymmetry and enhancing transparency is enormous and has created a chance for innate human goodness and compassion to bring hopes to those who live on the fringes of societies and have been struggling through the ages. On one hand, there are greater opportunities for marginal people to narrate their stories and articulate their aspirations in front of a larger audience. On the other hand, there have been greater initiatives by the people at the core (mainstream) to change the conditions of those at the margin for better.

The current issue of *Space and Culture, India* includes two reviews, two special articles and three research articles by authors from different disciplines. The issues and initiatives of the people living at the margin of societies are the main talking points of these essays. While some articles focus on understanding the issues, others delve deep into the struggles and initiatives surrounding these people.

In his review article "Making the Public Distribution System Work", Debarshi Das argues that PDS becomes more effective and successful in providing essential food items at government-determined low prices to the economically marginal group when it has universal coverage. The inclusion of everyone under its coverage limits the scope of corruption. This strategy may be very important when there is food inflation as the fair price shops have the incentive to divert PDS food supplies in order to make higher profit during such time. He also argues that restructuring the delivery mechanism and greater monitoring are important for PDS to be successful.

In the review of "The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013", Aparajita Baruah discusses India's constitutional obligations towards a marginal group – the *Dalits* (untouchables) who have traditionally been involved in manual scavenging. She also discusses the evolution of various measures that have led to the enactment of the law that seeks to completely eliminate manual

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scavenging and rehabilitate the *Dalits* in the mainstream of the society.

In a country as large and diverse as India with divergent histories, the relatively young nation-state has been often ruthless and brutal towards the people living on the fringes (both geographically and historically) in the name of nation-building. The use of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Manipur and other states of Northeast India is an example. Emboldened by this act, the Indian army personnel have been involved in gross violations of human rights by engaging in rapes, kidnappings, killings and fake encounters with no legal recourse for the victims. The political representation of these states in the parliamentary democracy is weak and inconsequential. Aparajita Sharma, in her special article, highlights the protest of Irom Chanu Sharmila against such violations. The hope and determination that her protest inspires are contrasted with the insurgency that manifests the rage of the young Manipuris against such atrocities.

The Tibetan refugees in Nepal and India are keeping their hopes of a free Tibet alive in the midst of the adversities they are facing in their host countries. In particular, the hostility of the Nepalese administration in the wake of a new geo-political realignment with the emerging superpower – China has created an environment of enhanced uncertainty for this marginal group of people. In their article, Venkat Pulla and Kanchan Prasad Kharel highlight the close association between the principles of *karma* as the guiding philosophy of life and the weaving of carpets as the main economic vocation among these refugees. This blending of spirituality with an earthly endeavour gives them the resilience and hope to move forward.

Esita Sur delves deep into the question of identity of Muslim women as a marginal group in the Indian society. The marginal identity of this group is not only confined to their socio-economic status but is also extended to the semantic representation in words like *veiled*, *passive*, *meek victim*, often used in political and academic discourses over Muslim women in India. The politics of constructing the "other" identity for this group ultimately leads to its alienation and deprivation, which have their impact on their socio-economic status.

The wind of "development" has also influenced the marginal hill areas of Uttarakhand where people's life and livelihood are intricately related to the eco-system that includes land, water and forest. As deforestation leads to environmental degradation, and migration of the menfolk in search of better economic opportunities in urban areas leads to demographic realignments of the society, the economic responsibility of women has become more prominent. In her research article, Suman Singh discusses how women's understanding of the importance of human-nature interactions for survival and their efforts to maintain the traditional agro-ecosystem have brought hope for environmental sustainability.

The rapid economic growth that India has experienced in last two decades has also brought rapid urbanization. The basic amenities of urban life are under tremendous pressure with this overgrowth of towns and cities. In their article, "Drinking Water in Guwahati City: Its Past, Present Status and Associated Problems", Prasanta Bhattacharya and Rajashree Borah discuss the challenges of drinking water in Guwahati, the largest city and the gateway to Northeast India. Their study shows that the problem of drinking water shortage is more acute in the peripheral areas (at the margin of urban-life) of the city. The article highlights the need for revamping the water supply system in Guwahati.

REVIEW OPEN ACCESS

Making the Public Distribution System Work

Dr Debarshi Das[†]

Abstract

Drawing on empirical observations of operation of public distribution system in different states of India, the paper constructs a preliminary game theoretic model. It argues that an effective public distribution must be as universal as possible, delivery mechanism of fair price shops should be re-formed, they should be make them commercially viable and that special attention should be paid to PDS at times of high food inflation.

Key words: universal public distribution system, fair price shop, expected utility, extensive game, India

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Introduction

The Indian parliament passed the National Food Security Bill in 2013. The passage of the bill was preceded and accompanied by animated debates in academic and policy circles. It is important to note that public distribution system has been the topic of debates in India for long. One suspects that the degree of intensity of the debate considerably went up after 1997, when universal public distribution system (UPDS) was discarded in favour of targeted public distribution system (TPDS). Detractors of TPDS have pointed out that the move towards targeting has not succeeded in reducing price volatility. Furthermore, after TPDS has been introduced per capita food availability has gone down. It has become more unstable as well (Sen and Himanshu, 2011).

Nonetheless, it is to be noted that discussions on many dimensions of the PDS went on as the food security bill was on its way. Probably these debates would continue, for the issues that underpin them are by no means settled. Some of the aspects of PDS which have been in discussion are introduction of cash transfer or coupons in lieu of food-in-kind, continuation of TPDS versus switching over to UPDS, extending the coverage of TPDS, identification of beneficiaries, introduction of "aadhar" cards which will collect biometric information of beneficiaries, non-traditional food security measures such as special provisions for lactating mothers, babies and the destitute. On each of these issues, different shades of opinion have circulated. For example, Kotwal et al. (2011) raised important points in favour of cash transfer, which may help in curbing corruption. Soares (2011) and Yanes (2011) discussed the phases which Brazil and Mexico went through while implementing targeted cash transfer. Svederberg (2012) like Kotwal et al. (2012) has argued for targeted cash transfer based on biometric identity validation, as it would curtail wasteful expenses. Khera (2011a) presents survey data of selected states of India pertaining to performance of PDS and argues that there are lessons one can learn from the states which have been successful in implementing PDS. Sen and Himanshu (2011) have presented the case for near-universal PDS whose costs according to them are not much higher than the existing system.

The present article does not intend to cover all, or even a majority, of these evidently salient issues. The aim here is to consider some empirical observations pertaining to the public distribution system. The paper would try to understand the logic behind the functioning of PDS in places it has been running satisfactorily. This would hopefully provide us some lessons on designing a less corrupt system. We shall concentrate on the microeconomic aspects of public distribution system here. A model on the distribution of food in a strategic decision-making framework (i.e., a game theoretic model) will be presented to understand the empirical observations. First, we shall discuss some prominent features of PDS as it has been functioning in different states of India. This would be useful to mould the basic contours of the model to be presented subsequently.

Observations

A notable observation of performance of PDS in India is that those states which are closer to universalising the PDS are more successful in delivering its benefits. In the nine states where Khera (2011a) conducted her survey four are either fully universal (Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh) or quasi-universal (Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, where about 80 per cent of the population are entitled to PDS commodities). In a different paper, Khera (2011b) has categorised major states of India into three groups: functioning, reforming and languishing, based on per capita purchase of PDS grains. Except Chhattisgarh, which tops in the category of "reforming" states, the other three of the above four states are "functioning" states. In other words, these four states are among the top performers of the country. States with universal PDS are also known to have low leakage or diversion of PDS food (Sen and Himanshu, 2011). A reason for this could

be that in UPDS everyone has a stake in the smooth functioning of PDS, because everyone is a potential or actual beneficiary (Basu and Das, 2013). For those officials and traders who are in between the release of food from government godowns and the actual point of sale, pilferage of PDS goods becomes difficult when the number of stakeholders rises. In TPDS, not everyone is a beneficiary. A large number of people do not have the incentive to keep it functional. This could be one of the possible explanations for the observed negative relation between universalisation and corruption. There might be others.

Second, to make the system functional the fair price shops (FPS), where PDS goods are distributed, should be commercially viable. After TPDS was introduced, the volume of grain handled by the fair price shops has gone down. The number of beneficiaries has also declined. Both these factors have adversely affected the earning of the dealer. It has been found that this has contributed to pilferage and diversion of PDS food to open market. In Khera's (2011a) survey the states where commission of the dealer has not been revised (Bihar, UP, Jharkhand) are some of the worst PDS performers. It thus appears that giving the dealer an economic incentive could be helpful.

The third observation is regarding monitoring. It has been found that the states which are more vigilant have less corruption. This is an obvious point which needs little elaboration. One may however note some features of pilferage. It is observed that the largest part of PDS grain diversion takes place between the lifting of the stock from Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns and the FPS. When the dealer is responsible for lifting the stock the chances of diversion rises. This is the reason why many states have taken over the responsibility of delivering the stock to the FPS. In such cases corruption has gone down. Corruption has also reduced when innovative ways to plug the leaks have been experimented and applied. Some of these include institutional changes such as running the FPS by cooperative societies instead of private shop owners. Or it could be the use of information technology, such as informing the beneficiaries directly through SMS via mobile phones about the availability of stock in the FPS (Khera, 2011a).

A Model

Collating the observations noted above we construct a schematic model. This is a simple game theoretic model involving two parties (or players, as they are called in game theory). We are constructing an extensive game, where the players take their action one after another in a sequential manner. The two players are: (1) the dealer in the FPS, denoted by *D*, (2) the beneficiary who is entitled to PDS commodities (let us suppose foodgrain), denoted by *B*. Besides these two players, there is a third party, the government, denoted by *G*. We are keeping this model simple, therefore *G* is not assumed to be a player. In other words, it does not take strategic decisions, nor does it get any payoff from the game. *G* randomly fixes some value of a variable (elaborated below) in a random manner. In game theory literature Nature is often assigned such roles.

We assume that variable which *G* decides in the beginning of the game is α. α is the proportion of the population of the country (or state) entitled to buy foodgrain at a rate cheaper than the open market price. α can take any value from 0 and 1, including the two limits. When $\alpha = 1$ PDS is universal. $\alpha = 0$ would mean complete dismantling of PDS in its present form. $0 < \alpha < 1$ implies TPDS.

After *G* has decided on a particular α, it sends corresponding amount of foodgrain to the fair price shops. We are considering the behaviour of a representative of these shops. The dealer of this shop is denoted by *D*. The game has now moved to stage 2, where it is the turn of *D* to decide what proportion of foodgrain entitlement he will divert, and sell in the open market. Let us assume that each beneficiary who is entitled to PDS foodgrain is entitled to *F* amount of foodgrain. *D* decides a proportion, let us say β, of *F* which he would actually sell to the beneficiary. Like α, β ranges between 0 and

1. $\beta = 0$ would imply complete corruption. $\beta = 1$ would mean zero corruption.

To avoid complications, the quality of grain distributed through PDS is assumed to be same as those available in open market. Once *D* has decided a particular β, it means that *B* would get $\beta.F$ food in the FPS, instead of his legal entitlement *F*. *B* has two choices, either to purchase it (the action is denoted by *P*), or not to purchase it (denoted by *NP*). Since the quality of PDS grain is same as that of open market, a consumer when offered $\beta.F$ of PDS grain would take it because the price in FPS is lower. Thus there would not be any excess unsold supply of PDS grain. It also means that given $\beta > 0$, *B* in our model would always choose *P*.[1]

As the choice made by the beneficiary is trivial here, we ignore it in the graphical representation of the game below (Figure 1). The payoff of the FPS dealer, *D*, is of special interest. His payoffs are $\beta.F.\pi_1 + (1 - \beta)[F.\pi_3(1 - p) - p.c]$ and $(1 - \beta)[F.\pi_3(1 - p) - p.c]$ in the diagram. We elaborate them below.

The payoff (or utility) of *D* assumed to be linear in the money he earns. This also implies that that *D* is risk neutral, a convenient assumption for this simple exposition. Let us denote his payoff function by U_d. The profit he makes by selling a unit of PDS grain to *B* is π_1. If he diverts this to open market, profit per unit rises to π_3 ($\pi_1 < \pi_3$). However selling PDS grain in the open market is a risky business and may attract punishment. The punishment may be meted out by the government. It could be more social in nature as well— social boycott for example. The magnitude of punishment when *D* is caught is given by *c*. Besides paying this fine, *D* loses the opportunity of making profit by selling the PDS grain. The stock he had assigned for sale in open market, $(1 - \beta)F$, is confiscated. Let us assume that the probability that the dealer is found out is given by *p*. Being a number representing probability, *p* lies between 0 and 1. We make the important assumption that *p* is a non-decreasing function of α. It is also assumed to be a function of *t*, where *t* represents anti-corruption measures such as switching over to cooperative society managed FPS, SMS alerts etc. Thus,

$$[1]\ p = g(\alpha, t), \text{ where } \frac{\partial g}{\partial \alpha} \geq 0, \frac{\partial g}{\partial t} \geq 0$$

[1] implies when more people have stake in the PDS (high α) it is easier to detect the corrupt dealer.

With the help of the assumptions made so far, we can write the payoff function of *D*, when *B* decides to purchase what *D* sells in the FPS, as,

$$[2]\ U_d = \beta.F.\pi_1 + (1 - \beta)[F.\pi_3(1 - p) - p.c]$$

The explanation is as follows. Since *D* has decided to sell $\beta.F$ through FPS and π_1 is the profit per unit, the first term in [2] is the profit from sale through FPS. By selling $(1 - \beta)$ of *F* in open market, *D* is entering an uncertain situation. With probability $(1 - p)$, he makes per unit profit of π_3. However, with probability *p* fine *c* is imposed. The terms in square brackets in [2] represent the expected payoff when *F* amount of food is diverted. This is multiplied with $(1 - \beta)$ because that is the proportion of *F* which is diverted.

When the consumer does not purchase FPS grain, the allotment assigned for FPS distribution (i.e., βF) is taken back. Thus, the first part becomes zero. *D* still earns money by diverting a part of the allotment. So, his payoff here is,

$$[3]\ U_d = (1 - \beta)[F.\pi_3(1 - p) - p.c]$$

Given that the beneficiary chooses *P* in equilibrium, [3] becomes irrelevant. In short, the dealer would concentrate on [2] and try to maximise it by choosing an appropriate β.

Notice that [2] is the weighted average of $F.\pi_1$ and $F.\pi_3(1 - p) - p.c$ with the weights β and $(1 - \beta)$. This implies that if

$$[4]\ F.\pi_1 > F.\pi_3(1 - p) - p.c$$

[1] An alternative justification could be as follows. Although the quality of PDS grain could be low compared to those available in open market at a higher price, the representative beneficiary *B* does not have the wherewithal to purchase the latter. Thus he buys $\beta.F$ even when it is not of the best quality.

D would choose $\beta = 1$. If,

[5] $F.\pi_1 < F.\pi_3 (1 - p) - p.c$

D would set $\beta = 0$. If,

[6] $F.\pi_1 = F.\pi_3 (1 - p) - p.c$

any value of β is optimal.

If the profit of selling the food entitlement through FPS is higher than the expected payoff of diverting it, the dealer does not divert any part of it: $\beta = 1$, or zero corruption. If the latter is greater than the former, he diverts all of it: $\beta = 0$, complete corruption. If the two are equal, he is indifferent between selling through FPS or diverting.

This simple model gives us corner solutions. That is, the dealer either diverts fully or he does not divert at all. In the third case he may divert partially (case [6]). But this would occur in a rare coincidence when $F.\pi_1 = F.\pi_3 (1 - p) - p.c$.

In spite of economy of results, the model has interesting and intuitive implications. As *p* or *c* rises the expected payoff of diverting falls. As a result, the payoff from sales through FPS may become higher, so case [4] becomes likely, corruption may fall. We recall that by [1] probability of detection tends to rise as proportion of people in PDS entitlement rises. Hence our model reflects the observation that greater universalisation implies less diversion of PDS grains.

Profit margins in FPS and open market are also found to be important. A high π_1, *ceteris paribus*, would go towards satisfaction of [4], implying no diversion. This is in line with the observation that financial viability of the PDS outlets is critical for a well-functioning PDS. We further observe that rising π_3 may allure the dealer towards diversion. Times of high food inflation are thus times of vulnerability for PDS.

Conclusion

The debate over public distribution system has taken many dimensions in recent decades. Although interesting arguments have been advanced from different sides, field studies suggest that delivering food through PDS is not as unviable a proposition as it is often made out to be. Many states have experimented with innovative measures which have proved to be successful. These include institutional changes, such as replacing the model of private shop owners with cooperative societies running the FPS. Or, by making use of technology such as mobile phones, which enhances the access of information of the beneficiary. In general, it appears that greater coverage of PDS has a salutary effect on the degree of corruption. The model presented here tries to capture these realities through a schematic model. Aside from extending the coverage of PDS, which is the first policy implication, the model cautions us about the fragility of the PDS at times when food price in open market is high. For the last few years food price inflation in India has been above 10 per cent per annum mark. Apart from exerting pressure on the living conditions of people whose income does not move with prices, high inflation may render PDS vulnerable. The second important policy implication therefore is that there is an urgent requirement to fix the PDS at times of high inflation. The third implication is the emphasis on the commercial viability of FPS. Low profits of distributing PDS foodgrain may allure many private shop owners to look for easy bucks through diversion. Until an alternative system of distribution is put in place matters of commercial incentive for the private shop owners cannot be overlooked. Finally, but very importantly, the element of monitoring is underscored. Monitoring can be achieved through institutional overhauls, for example, empowering the local community to oversee the functioning of PDS (this is related to the first point of extending the coverage; without ensuring greater participation of people at the grass roots simply extending PDS coverage may breed corruption). Monitoring could also be attained by taking the help of technology. Both these considerations should mould public policy.

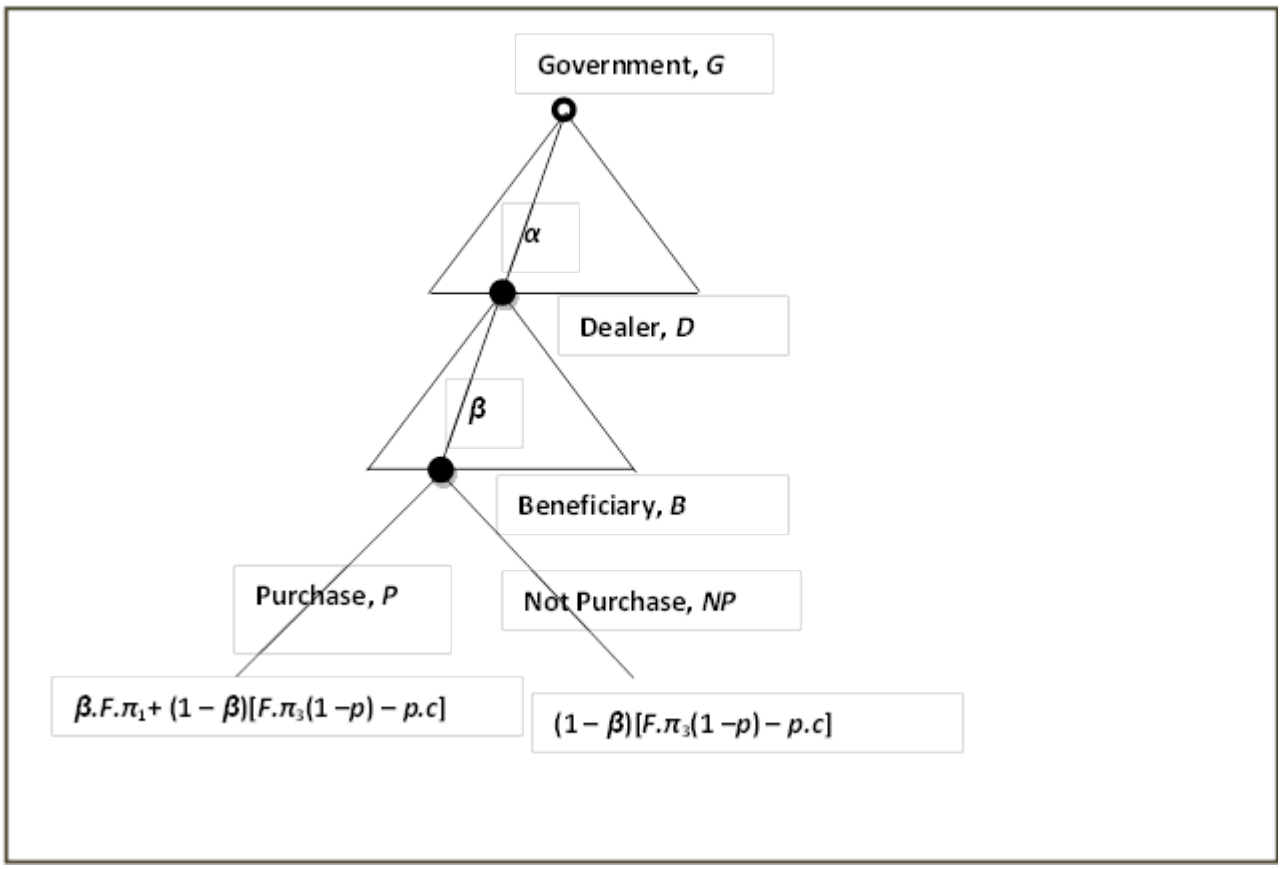

Figure 1: Game tree of the public distribution system, payoff of only D is given

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REVIEW OPEN ACCESS

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013: A Review

Dr Aparajita Baruah[†]

Abstract

Manual scavenging is a caste-based and hereditary occupation for Dalits (untouchables), which is predominantly linked with forced labour or slavery. In this article, an attempt has been made to trace out the brief history of the practice of manual scavenging in India. The author has also dwelt upon the constitutional commitment as well as measures taken up by the successive governments to improve the conditions of this class of people. The hallmark of the article lies in the detailed analysis along with some suitable suggestions on the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 recently enacted by the Parliament of India.

Key words: manual scavenging, dalits (untouchables), harijans, India

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Introduction

With the passing of the bill on Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation, 2012 in the Parliament of India on 7 September 2013, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore this pertinent issue. Concisely, as the name implies, manual scavenging entails the manual handling of human excreta from insanitary and manual or dry toilets, built without a flush system. Rather, this method involves the removal of such wastes using conventional brooms and tin plates. According to one of the latest publications of National Human Rights Commission, India, these wastes are piled into baskets, which are then carried by the scavengers on their heads to such locations that are sometimes several kilometres away from the scavenged toilets. These wastes, as already well-established are the cause of many notorious enteric diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid, infectious hepatitis, hookworm and other such deadly diseases. A number of studies reveal that majority of the infectious diseases are contagious and are responsible for causing nearly 80 per cent of the infections in developing countries (Srivastava, 1997).

Ironically, this task of scavenging is often caste-based and hereditary especially for the Dalits[1] who are linked traditionally with forced labour and (or) slavery. According to latest statistics published by the International Dalit Solidarity Network, approximately 1.3 million people, mostly women from the Dalit community are engaged in manual scavenging. In this article, an attempt has been made to first trace out the brief history of the practice of manual scavenging in India. Following this, I draw upon the constitutional commitment as well as measures taken up by the successive governments to improve the conditions of this class of people. However, the hallmark of the article lies in the detailed analysis along with some suitable suggestions on the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 recently enacted by the Parliament of India.

Brief History

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2012 that has become an Act on 19 September 2013 relates to the eradication of untouchables in India. In Indian society, the problem of untouchability can be traced to approximately to two thousand years ago based on a strictly defined division of labour. The origin of untouchability lies in the restrictions imposed on the lives of the depressed classes, which comprise the untouchables amongst other primitive and backward classes in various forms. The most obnoxious and shameful aspect of untouchability was that the touch or even the shadow of the untouchable was considered unclean by the upper caste people. The key reason for considering this class of people as untouchables originates from their vexatious and unclean professions such as scavenging, mending of shoes, hair cutting, and so on.

From the middle of the 19th century, efforts were made to improve the lives of these untouchables in India. However, no spectacular improvements were achieved in the lives of these untouchables until the matter was seriously taken up by the philanthropists and social reformers. Evidently, in 1901, the then Census Commissioner, Sir Herbert Hope Risley classified the census data into seven key caste categories according to their social hierarchies, thereby ranking the *jatis* in the local hierarchy and *varna* affiliation of each (Srivastava, 1997; see also, Bhattacharyya, 2009, 2013). “The scavenging castes which were known by different names in different states like Bhangi, Balmiki, Chuhra, Mehtar, Mazhabi, Lal Begi, Halalkhor, etc. in northern India; Har, Hadi, Hela, Dom and Sanei, etc. in eastern India; Mukhiyar, Thoti, Chachati, Pakay, Relli, etc. in Southern India ; and Mehtar, Bhangias, Halalkhor, Ghasi, Olgana, Zadmalli, Barvashia,

[1] Dalits are socio-economically disadvantaged group of India who often suffer from social segregation. The obnoxious caste system of India considers the Dalits as untouchables and the members of the lowest rung of the caste system (Srivastava, 1997; Srividya, 2011).

Metariya, Jamphoda and Mela, etc. in Western and Central India, also made an effort to get united and have a common name. In 1911 census, some of them started returning as Adi Dharmi, Adi Dravida, Adi Karnataka and Adi Andhran." (Srivastava, 1997: 20)

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the father of Indian Constitution and the champion of human rights was the foremost amongst the backward classes to take this cause of social reform, who in 1927 launched a movement against untouchability (Keer, 1990; Srivastava, 1997; also, Bhattacharyya, 2009).

In the wake of this movement, on 16 August 1932, the British Prime Minister Mac Donald announced a communal award. The statement of the government's position on the communal issue granted separate electorate to the disadvantaged classes. At that time, when Mahatma Gandhiji, who was in jail heard of the award, he decided to resist it (even it) necessitated going fast unto death. The central logic of Gandhiji behind this decision was that granting of separate electorate for the disadvantaged and vulnerable classes would result in vivisection among the people of India. Consequently, this decision of Gandhiji alongside his declaration of fast unto death raised the red alarm. Following this alarm, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, known popularly as *Babasaheb* brought forward a separate proposal of joint electorate and greater representation of the backwards, including the depressed classes. This formula of Dr. Ambedkar however ended the imbroglio.

Nevertheless, following this imbroglio, Gandhiji began to devote himself to the cause of the Harijans whom he called the children of God. Gandhiji declared that it was a sin to treat the Harijans as untouchable as they have every right to live like other human beings. Through the efforts of Gandhiji and many others, wells and temples were opened to Harijans. Moreover, gradually, the age-old restrictions on their entry into such places began to crumble.

Notwithstanding, manual scavenging continues to survive in many parts of India— prevalent mostly in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Some municipalities in India still run public dry-toilets. The biggest violators of this law are the Railways. "[W]ith 172,000 open discharge toilets, the ministry continues to deny the practice of manual scavenging" and thereby to employ scavengers to clean it manually.[1]

Constitutional Commitment

After India's Independence in 1947, the problems and conditions of the disadvantaged classes were taken care of by the framers of the Constitution of India by making special provisions for them to protect their interests. A wide range of minority rights[2] were enshrined in the articles 14, 15, 16, 25, 26, 29, 341 and 342 of the Constitution. Articles 15(2), (4), (5), 16(3), (4), (4A), (4B), 17, 23 and 25(2) (b) seek to remove social and economic disabilities of the deprived classes of people.

Besides the fundamental rights, certain directive principles of the state policy[3] make it obligatory on the part of the State governments to ensure the welfare of the disadvantaged classes. Article 38 of the Constitution requires the state to promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order based on justice.

Measures Taken Up in the Post-Independence Period

In 1953, a Backward Classes Commission was constituted under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar. The Commission in its report described the condition of sweepers and scavengers. The recommendations of the Commission, which, *inter alia*, emphasised the need to introduce mechanical and up-to-date methods of cleansing latrines in order to do away with the existing system of manual scavenging, were brought to the notice of the State governments by the Ministry of Home Affairs in October 1956.

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[1] Manual Scavengers: Indian Railways in Denial (2013, February 25). *One World South Asia*, available at: http://southasia.oneworld.net/features/manual-scavengers-indian-railways-in-denial#.UsBj64UyPw5 (accessed on 12 December 2013).

[2] The Constitution of India

[3] Part III and IV of the Constitution of India

Following these recommendations, in 1956, a Central Advisory Board was further constituted under the chairmanship of Late Pandit Govind Ballav Pant, the then Home Minister to review the working and living conditions of the sweepers and scavengers, which recommended a centrally-sponsored scheme for the purpose.

Consequent upon, in October 1957, under the chairmanship of Professor N. R. Malkani the Board constituted a committee known as Scavenging Enquiry Committee to prepare a scheme to abolish this ignominious practice. The committee also suggested some measures to be taken to ameliorate the working and living conditions of the Harijans.

However, in 1965, the question of abolition of customary rights of the scavengers who acquired hereditary rights to clean latrines of particular individuals prevalent in some parts of the country further resurfaced the attention of the government. This led the Ministry of Labour, Government of India to constitute the National Commission on Labour under the chairmanship of Shri Bhanu Prasad Pandya, who examined the working and service conditions of sweepers and scavengers. The commission suggested that the Government of India should undertake a comprehensive legislation for regulating the working and service conditions of the sweepers and scavengers. It is unfortunate that the system of manual scavenging still exists in India even after 67 years of independence. Inspite of adequate provisions in the Constitution for the welfare of the disadvantaged classes, the eradication of manual scavenging remains a far cry in many parts of India.

In 1986, the plight of the manual scavengers again came into focus when a group of south Indian Dalit men and women started a campaign vigorously against this obnoxious practice (Raghunathan, 2009). The campaign gained momentum and snowballed into an all-India movement known as the Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA). It achieved a significant milestone after the honourable Supreme Court, heard their petition on 30 April and 8 May 1986 respectively and thereby decided to hold District Collectors of each districts accountable for any continuation of these banned acts of manual scavenging. The Supreme Court Bench comprising of the then Chief Justice K. G. Balakrishnan and Justices Arijit Pasayat and P. Sathasivam allowed the District Collectors six weeks' timeframe to discontinue these banned acts of scavenging by arguing on the ground that the State governments had more than six years to destroy all the dry latrines in their respective states (Zaidi, 2006).

In spite of the relaxed barrier to standing and direct involvement in the problem, the Court is able to confront manual scavenging head-on and to resolve the problem in flexible and creative ways.[1] [2] Indeed, in the case of *Safai Karmachari Andolan v. Union of India*,[3] the Court had begun the process by issuing orders that directed the Central and State governments to determine where manual scavengers work and find other jobs for them.[4]

In 1970, under the pioneership of Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, a follower of Gandhian ideology, Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, a non-profit voluntary social organisation was formed with an aim to emancipate the scavengers.[5] Since its inception, Sulabh has launched a sanitation movement and has been working for the removal of untouchability and social discrimination against

[1] Jamie Cassels (1989). Judicial activism and Public Interest Litigation in India: Attempting the Impossible?, *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 37 (3) 495, 505-07 as cited in Samuel D. Permutt (2011). The Manual Scavenging Problem: A Case for the Supreme Court of India, Cardozo J. of Int'l &Comp. Law, 20, 277-312, available at: http://www.cjicl.com/uploads/2/9/5/9/2959791/cjicl_20.1_permutt_note.pdf (accessed on 12 December 2013)

[2] Section 260, Code of Criminal Procedure

[3] Writ Petition (Civil) No. 583 of 2003

[4] Safai Karmachari Andolan, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 583 of 2003 (India) (Nov. 14, 2005) (interim order)

[5] Social Inclusion of Manual Scavengers (2012). A Report of National Round Table Discussion Organised by United Nations Development Programme and UN Solution Exchange (Gender Community of Practice), available at: http://www.in.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/pub-povertyreduction/Social-inclusion-of-Manual-Scavengers.pdf (accessed on 12 December 2013).

the scavengers. It is to be noted that Sulabh Movement is known for achieving success in the field of cost-effective sanitation, liberation of scavengers, social transformation of society, prevention of environmental pollution and development of non-conventional sources of energy.[1] The statistics of Sulabh reveals that until now, Sulabh has made 640 towns of India scavenging-free, where 15 million people use toilets based on Sulabh design. In addition, the movement has gained spectacular achievement in constructing 1.3 million household toilets and 54 million government toilets.

Notwithstanding, as per the house listing and housing census, 2011 there are still 0.794 million toilets in the country from which human excreta are being collected by scavengers and are manually disposed of.[2] While implementing the National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers, from 1992 to 2005, 0.7 million manual scavengers and their dependents were identified by the States and Union Territories. Later on, the self-employment scheme for rehabilitation of manual scavengers was launched in 2007. In course of implementation of the scheme, as many as 79454 eligible and willing beneficiaries were provided assistance. Ironically, all these figures indicate the seriousness of the problem, which remains to be eradicated in the 21st century modern India.

Unsurprisingly, in 2009 a study conducted by the Asian Development Bank unwraps that over 700,000 Indians are still engaged in manual scavenging, which by itself speaks about the lack of the value of human dignity on one hand and on the other hand, the continued challenges faced against sanitation in terms of its impacts on human health and environment (Koonan, 2013).

Thus, from the above discussions, it is apparent that inspite of various recommendations and suggestions by the committees to improve the working and service conditions of the sweepers and scavengers from time to time after independence, no concrete measures were initiated either by the State or the Central governments until 1993 when the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 was passed**,** which provides for the prohibition of employment of manual scavengers and construction or continuation of dry toilets. It is to be noted that Article 17 of the Constitution of India forbids the practice of manual scavenging.

Hence, the constitutional aspiration was given effect to through this 1993 Act. All the State governments were asked to frame rules under the Act. Accordingly, from 26 January 1997, the Act became applicable in Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tripura, West Bengal and the Union Territories In addition; the assemblies of Orissa, Punjab, Assam, Haryana, Bihar and Gujarat also had adopted the Act.

Despite efforts from the Government of India to rehabilitate the scavengers, the disgusting reality is that the struggles of the scavengers continue. Recently, the National Human Rights Commission, India and the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis further put efforts to eliminate this degrading practice (Trivedi, 2012). In the said context, the National Human Rights Commission, recommended, *inter alia*, that the presence of too many agencies is often delaying the elimination of the practice of manual scavenging and their rehabilitation work. It further recommended that both water scarcity and space scarcity in certain pockets of some states needs to be addressed by adopting appropriate technology and methodologies.[3]

[1]Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, available at: http://www.sulabhinternational.org/ (accessed on 12 December 2013)

[2]Rastriya Garima Abhiyan, Analysis and Recommendations in the Context of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2012 at p. 09, available at www.mailamukti.org (accessed on 15 October 2013)

[3]NHRC Recommendations on Manual Scavenging and Sanitation, National Human Rights Commission, available at: http://nhrc.nic.in/disparchive.asp?fno=1711 (accessed 30 November 2013)

Present Scenario

As stated above, The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 received assent of the President of India on 18 September 2013 and published in the Gazette of India on 19 September 2013. This Act replaced the existing "Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 as it appeared to be ineffectual. The key purpose of the 2013 Act is to freshly investigate the condition of the manual scavengers, as there were reports on existence of approximately 2.3 million pit (insanitary) toilets according to 2011-census report. This 2013 Act bears stricter provisions to abolish manual scavenging completely from the society. As such, the present Act has been framed in such a way that there is a wider scope and higher penalties than the 1993 Act.

The Salient Features of the Act and its Analysis

1. The preambular paragraph of the Act stipulates the dignity of the individuals as one of the goals, which is in tune with the goals enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India. It is important to note that work is worship and therefore it is necessary to remove the stigma attached to the profession. Instead, these people should be treated with full dignity.
2. The Act also highlights the Fundamental Rights conferred on the people irrespective of caste, creed and religion.
3. The Act has also referred to Article 46 of the Constitution, which, *inter alia,* provides that the state shall protect the weaker sections, and, particularly, the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes[1] from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
4. The Act prohibits the employment of manual scavengers, the manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment and the construction of insanitary latrines.
5. Section 2(1) (d) of the Act defines the term 'hazardous cleaning'.[2] It refers to the use of protective gear and other cleaning devices and ensuring observance of safety precautions. However, the type of protective gear and other cleaning devices is not at all defined under the Act.
6. Section 2(1) (e) define the term 'insanitary latrine'.[3] It is well known that the Indian Railway is the major promoter of manual scavengers and continues to practice manual scavenging inspite of the stringent provisions laid down in the Act. There may be certain difficulties for the railway to avoid manual scavenging in case of small latrines constructed inside the railway compartments. Rather the Railway Authority should devise a method to clean the latrines by way of constructing portable/removable small septic tanks beneath the small latrines inside the compartments, which may be cleared in the stations from time to time. This will do away with the practice of clean-

[1] Scheduled Castes, according to Article 366(24) read with Article 341, are those castes, races or tribes, or parts, thereof, as the President may notify. They are part of Hindu society. Similarly, Scheduled Tribes, according to Article 366(25) read with Article 342 are those tribes or tribal communities, or parts or groups thereof, as the President may notify. They are known as aborigines, are those backward sections of the Indian population who still observe their tribal ways, their own peculiar customs and cultural norms (Jain, 2012: 1524-1529; also Bhattacharyya, 2009; 2013).

[2] Section 2(1) (d) of the Act says: 'hazardous cleaning' by an employee, in relation to a sewer or septic tank, means its manual cleaning by such employee without the employer fulfilling his obligations to provide protective gear and other cleaning devices and ensuring observance of safety precautions, as may be prescribed or provided in any other law, for the time being in force or rules made thereunder.

[3] Section 2(1) (e) of the Act says: 'insanitary latrines' means a latrine which requires human excreta to be cleaned or otherwise handled manually, either in situ in an open drain or pit into which the excreta is discharged or flushed out, before the excreta fully decomposes: provided that a water flush latrine in a railway passenger coach, when cleaned by an employee with the help of such devices and using such protective gear, as the Central Government may notify in this behalf, shall not be deemed to be an insanitary latrine.

ing the railway tracks in and around the stations.[1]

7. The Act seeks to rehabilitate manual scavengers and to provide for their alternative employment. In view of the existing hereditary obnoxious and inhuman condition of manual scavengers, the government has formulated various schemes/programmes for their social and economic upliftment.[2] However, large-scale corruption was rampant in the rehabilitation scheme, which involved ₹ 7356 million at the time of implementation by the Government of India. Approximately, 76 per cent people outside the eligible criteria received benefits. This fact came to light in the public hearing of Rastriya Garima Abhiyan (National Campaign for Dignity and Eradication of Manual Scavenging) at New Delhi on 28 March 2012.

8. Under the Act, each local authority viz., Municipality, Municipal Corporation, Gaon Panchayats, village councils have respective jurisdictions to construct sanitary community latrines.

9. Section 4(1) of the Act says that every Local authority shall: (a) carry out a survey of insanitary latrines existing within its jurisdiction, and publish a list of insanitary latrines, in such manner as may be prescribed, within a period of two months from the date of commencement of this Act. It is observed that the Act refers to identification of only insanitary latrines. However, the Act does not mention about the identification of spots where open defecation is done and consequently someone has to clean manually these faeces from the open spaces in urban areas.

10. The owner or user of insanitary latrines shall be responsible for converting or dismantling of insanitary latrines at his or her own cost. In case of failure to do so the local authority will demolish the same and construct a sanitary latrine in its place and local authority is authorised to release the cost of demolition and construction from the person concerned.

    It is observed that financial assistance for demolition and construction of sanitary latrines will be necessary in case of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families and this class will constitute the majority. Such families should be exempted from penal provisions. Rather the local authority should be entrusted to construct sanitary or community latrines in such cases.

11. The District Magistrate and the local authority shall be the implementing authority. It is observed that often, the District Magistrate is a member of the civil services (and in states, the same person as the District Collector) and has powers of an Executive Magistrate. Several other Executive Magistrates would be in his chain of command. Granting the Executive Magistrate the power to try cases for non-implementation of provisions of the Act could lead to a situation where the judge is trying a case against himself or against a person who falls within the same administrative set-up. It is unclear

[1] The "Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2012" was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment. The Standing Committee presented its report in the Lok Sabha and tabled it in the Rajya Sabha on 4 March 2013. One of the major recommendations of the Committee was as follows: the Committee noted that under the new legislation, a great responsibility devolves on the Ministry of Railways as far as Manual Scavenging is concerned. There are reportedly about 7114 mail/express/ordinary trains, which have direct discharge or controlled discharge system type of toilets. The Committee had been informed that the railway tracks at important stations so that the *safai karamcharis* can clean the track with high-pressure water jet cleaning system, instead of doing it manually. The Committee recommended the construction of more such concrete aprons on all railway stations in a time-bound manner.

[2] The various schemes/programmes are: Valmiki Malin Basti Awas Yojna (VAMBAY), Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), Nirmal Gram Puraskar Yojna (NGPY), National Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (NSLRS), Pre-matric Scholarship for the Children of those engaged in Unclean Occupations, Integrated Low Cost Sanitation Scheme (ILCSS), Pay and Use Toilet Scheme, National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation(NSKFDC), Assistance to State Scheduled Castes Development Corporations (SCDCs), Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers.

how this conflict of interest will be resolved.[1]

12. Offences under the Act shall be cognizable and non-bailable and may be tried summarily. While the maximum punishment laid down in the 1993 Act was two years, it has been raised to five years in the 2012 Act. The concept of summary trials was introduced in India through an amendment to the Section 260, Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) in 2008. Summary trials were permitted for certain types of offences, particularly those of a minor nature for which the maximum imprisonment is two years. According to the CrPC, the maximum sentence of imprisonment for an offence that is tried summarily cannot exceed three months.[2] Given the nature of summary trials under the CrPC, it is unclear how offences carrying punishment of five years, as is the case in the Act, will fit into this framework.
13. The Act permits the state governments to empower the Executive magistrates to conduct trials for offences. This may lead to conflict of interest between the executive and the judiciary.[3]
14. As far as the constitution of the Vigilance Committees stipulated under the Chapter VII of the Act is concerned, there must be inclusion of at least one member who has adequate knowledge in the field of Human Rights.
15. Further, the Central Monitoring Committee should meet at least once in quarterly instead of once in every six months as stipulated under the Act.

Briefly, it can be concluded that the rehabilitation of the manual scavengers is a laudable feature of the Act, but it will have to adopt strict and focused strategy of prohibition and rehabilitation both. This is because despite the presence of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, there has not been even a single conviction and until date, the inhuman practice of manual scavenging continues.

Laws, however strongly worded and framed with a good intention, cannot bring about a change in the attitude of the people towards the less-fortunate brethren. It appears that the concepts of freedom, justice, equality and dignity, which find a place of pride in the Constitution of India, have not yet become ingrained in the hearts and minds of the people. The need of the hour is to educate the common people about the use of sanitary latrines and to inculcate the habit of hygienic sense after use of such latrines. With collective efforts, we need to completely eradicate manual scavenging.

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SPECIAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Irom Chanu Sharmila and the Movement against Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)

Aparajita Sharma[†]

Abstract

This paper, through the narratives of activists and Meira Paibis reiterates the slogan—repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which is draconian and anti-people in spirit. The atrocity, which has been meted out on the people of Manipur because of this Act, is a profound violation of human rights. Rape, mindless killings, kidnapping, fake encounters have been normalised by virtue of this Act. The youths have been badly affected due to the conflict emerging out of this Act which treats people in Manipur as 'objects' against the imagined boundaries of the Indian nation-state for security from the neighbouring nations. In this process, the lived experiences of the people have been pushed to the periphery against the massive motive of the state to protect borders and the imagined nation, which is a direct offshoot of the legacy of colonialism in India. The paper has tried to capture the history of Manipur on a capsule to concretise the struggle of Irom Sharmila and the 'hopes' she gives to the people of Manipur for 'peace' and 'justice'. Alongside, it makes a humble attempt to describe the 'life' of Irom Sharmila. In addition, it describes the rage of Manipuris, which have given rise to insurgency asking for 'freedom' through various platforms.

Key words: Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Irom Chanu Sharmila, Hope for peace, Meira Paibis, Malom massacre, Manipur, India

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Building Hopes: An Introduction

The annexation of Manipur into the Indian Territory in 1949 was not fully welcome to the people of Manipur. It was annexed through an accord signed between the King of Manipur Bodhchandra and the Indian state. The seeming discontent of the people was eventually expressed through various insurgent movements in the state. The militarisation of the state of Manipur was followed thereafter to curtail the voice of people for freedom and human rights. The armed forces of the state were stationed with special powers. Gradually the powers became a form of atrocity for the civilians and their rights. Horrifying stories of atrocity meted out by the armed forces became a regular feature of the lived experiences of the people. Mostly under the guise of an encounter, such atrocities took place and people bore the brunt without 'protest'. In the process a 'fear psychosis' was created in the minds of the people perpetuating a culture of silence towards the extreme form of violation of human rights and dignity (Laishramchan, 2014). In these existing conditions, the event, which triggered off the people's movement in Manipur, was the Malom massacre. Malom massacre took place in a small place called Malom where nine civilians were killed by the Army in broad daylight aftermath of a bomb attack on an AR convoy at Malom Makha Leikai (Manipuronline, 2014). As a witness to this incident, Irom Sharmila was deeply perturbed by the sufferings of the common people because of such heinous state policies and the rest is history. In this paper, Irom Sharmila's struggle would be discussed in the form of a 'hope' for change and transformation. Her form of struggle is concretised against the historical specificity of the state and its formation in postcolonial India. Further, it discusses how along with an individual transformation collective transformation is important in order to experience both praxis and poesis for peace.

Irom Sharmila's struggle began with the 'hope' for change (see also, Pulla and Kharel, 2014). The change from peacelessness to peace, from violence to violence-free society, from conflict to problematization is not a facile phenomenon (Pulla and Kharel, 2014). It is loaded with responsibility, rights, novelty and transformation of the culture of violence for forging mutual love and respect for the 'Other'. The trope of 'hope' (Pulla and Kharel, 2014) requires primarily a dialectical engagement in a committed, rigorous and humanising manner, which is more and more degrading in the current scenario. The concept of 'hope' has been theorised adequately by a number of renowned scholars (Desroche, 1979; Freire, 1994; Giroux, 1997 Gramsci, 1997; Kant, 1932 and many others). As Desroche (1979: 32) puts it:

> The sociology of Hope will better illustrate how a hope without an echo or viaticum, slides towards an empty hope, according to whether its springboards are absent or short lived.

Hope, as mentioned above, definitely cannot be grounded without concretising social relations and engaging it dialectically. Desroche (1979) further illustrates Hope, as an awakened dream, however it cannot be reduced to a daydream as understood by many. Giroux (1997: 84) in his *Pedagogy and Politics of Hope* states:

> Understanding the contemporary stages of capitalist development according to what they represented was a crucial step for both writers to avoid a sense of fatalism and keep alive the quest for working to attain a better world is driven by an anticipatory utopia prefigured not only by critique of the present but by an alternative pedagogical/cultural politics.

This is what is very close to Friere's (1994) notion of 'Critical Hope', which is simply hoping but building an understanding of both the past and contemporary issues to break the 'culture of silence'. This requires working towards transformation along with a hope for change. Such a hope is embedded in the entire process of dialogue and working with people for understanding hegemony, questioning it and eventually countering it. I began this paper with a note on

Hope because not only I, but also the youth of India (especially those from Manipur) finds Irom Sharmila as an epitome of hope and love. She has carved out spaces where she could live 'hope' and make '*others*' 'hopeful' by her life. Her body has surpassed from the narrow boundary of privacy and have transformed into a 'lived' ideology of non-violence, love and hope of Manipuri people. Anyone who meets her is touched by her relentless commitment and hope she lives with—"Repeal the AFSPA she started saying even before Malom Massacre, however henceforth she could no longer live for anything else but the cause, for justice of everyone who is living under the atrocities carried out in the name of security and defence" (Mehrotra, 2009: 13). She is a splendid example of using the human agency (especially the body) for transformation by building hopes through her unending commitments. Although sociology has not extensively looked at the 'body', in its theories, however Goffman, as early as 1949, writes:

> Our very ability to intervene in social life, to make a difference to the flow of daily affairs, is dependent on the management of the bodies through time and space. (21)

For the last 13 years, her body has become contentious due to her complete denial to take food and she is only surviving on forced diet fed by the state (Bhattacharyya, 2013). Her body has acted as the centre in her agency for transformation in an astounding manner varying from the usual mind and consciousness, which occupy centrality while discussing agency (Shilling, 1993). Kant (1932) viewed bodily passions and emotions as impediments to self-determining actions and looked at them suspiciously because of their lack of self-determining powers. However, in the context of struggle in Manipur, the use of body has played a significant role in building a culture of Hope in the region particularly in the context of the life of the 'Iron Lady', Irom Sharmila (Bhattacharyya, 2013).

Methodology

Drawing from the struggles of people in Manipur and further locating 'hope' for peace and people-centred development was an interesting journey for me. Engagement with the people who are so passionate about 'peace' in Manipur which more or less centres around the scrapping of AFSPA not only from Manipur but also from the whole of India was a learning experience for me. With much enthusiasm, I embarked on this research to initially speak to a comrade from Manipur based in New Delhi, when I first hoped to meet Irom Sharmila through him and write this article in the form of a biographical narrative. However, I was told that he himself has a dream of writing a biography on Iron Lady but his dream continues to be so because of the regimented nature of state policies imposed on her movement and mobility. Nevertheless, this did not diminish my curiosity and I contacted another comrade and activist working with Irom Sharmila. He also seemed reluctant and reiterated the same story. Therefore, my theoretical engagements and the research methodology changed keeping the objectives of the research similar if not the same. Therefore, the course and the respondents changed accordingly.

In this research, I have drawn my data from secondary sources like biographies written on Irom Sharmila, websites on the protests movement and on Manipur. In addition, for primary data I spoke to 10 Meira Paibis, 10 students and 10 activists, using pseudonyms (similar to Manipuri names) for all respondents. However, before discussing further, it is worth discussing who the Meira Paibis are? Meira Paiba is a collective of women in Manipur, which has been proactive in the process of transforming the culture of violence and silence. They mostly work at the grassroots level and act as signifiers for *peace* and *pluralism*. Such collectives are found everywhere in Manipur and even in Malom. Meira Paibis were born as early as 1980s because of the atrocities on innocent people.

Moreover, I also conducted three Focus Groups among these respondents in order to gain a

deeper perception about Hope for *peace* and the on-going struggle for peace. In order to meet these respondents, I visited Lai Haroaba. Lai Haroaba is a religious festival of Manipur, conducted annually in New Delhi where women and youths come to Delhi to attend the festival. Further, my association with the *Campaign for Peace and Democracy* made me write this paper with not only theoretical convictions but also with the reaffirmation of certain convictions on the basis of the field inquiry and engagements with people who are equally engaged with Sharmila's fight, and constantly problematizing and concretising their concerns for *peace* which is the beginning of people-centred development in Manipur.

Concretising the Forms of Struggle in Manipur

Manipur was formed as a constituent state of the Indian Union in 1972. There was a discontent among the Manipuris right from 1949, the widespread perception that the Indian state had forced the merger upon Manipur (Mehrotra, 2009). This was also a moving factor for insurgency in Manipur. In 1963, the Naga Hills district of Assam was made into a state; however, in case of Manipur, it remained a Union Territory for almost 10 years (Mehrotra, 2009). There was a serious discontentment surrounded around the dismantling of the indigenous system of economy by the colonial rulers and the imposition of the colonial capitalist system. As a result of this, the existing terms such as 'Manipuri' given to them by the foreigners (Mayangs: Manipuri word for foreigner) were cited to illustrate that the people of Manipur, irrespective of their caste, community, religion, regional and class backgrounds, defended Manipur from both external invasion and internal crisis (Ningthouja, 2014).

The systems introduced by the colonial rulers seemed to continue even under the jurisdiction of the Indian government. As Ningthouja (2004) writes, the One Nation theory and the colonial divisive policy were particularly designed to construct integrity through projections against the threat from external enemies, which the Indian state experienced from other nations. This was not the need of the Manipuri people *per se*. Nationalist feelings were also imposed on the indigenous people, which were gradually resisted by them through various means, both violent and non-violent. Colonialism, which was barbaric and violent, like Nazism and Fascism, decivilised the colonisers (Boise, cited in Cesaire, 1972) and led to the decivilisation of the indigenous culture. Education and other development policies were designed in a manner to make education as a privilege (Gramsci, 1997) which came to be associated with a particular group in the society. Violence, alterity, barbarism and exclusion embedded in colonialism penetrated into indigenous people's lives. In fact while trying to speak to Irom Sharmila, which did not happen, I met her fellow activist and neighbour who gave me a detailed interview. I could sense the deep anguish, when he spoke about the insensitivities of the state government towards Irom Sharmila and the cause. The barbarism displayed by the state, which is often justified in the name of justice and defence of the state, further aggravates when it tries to influence the direction of such movements. Irom Sharmila is fed, rather overfed, to use her weapon of fasting for the state, through false hopes, by sometimes calling it suicide, through imprisonments, threats and also persistent indoctrination by offering alternatives rather than a dialogue on repealing the draconian Act.

One of the major ramifications of the imposition of nationalist tendencies on the people with which they failed to identify was the rise of many resistant movements clamouring for separation from the state of India. The background to identity politics thus lies not only in ideological and cultural changes but also in transformation of social structure and social integration (Calhoun, 1995). Forceful integration, as in the case of Manipur, unleashed a series of movements for secession from the Indian Union. Various insurgent movements like those that the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) which was the first of its kind was followed by People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipa (PREPAK) and People's Liberation Army (PLA) aimed at consolidating the demand for independence. This happened during the 1970s and 1980s; however today there are an ever-

burgeoning number of underground groups in Manipur. The colonial legacy in terms of social and economic exclusion faced by the indigenous people was not accepted after some time. The ruling class is not exclusively responsible; it is rather a dominant group, which perpetuates social, political and cultural ideas, assumptions and habits. The worldview of the ruling class, in other words, was so thoroughly diffused by its intellectuals as to become the 'common sense' of the whole society. Gramsci (cited in McLellan, 1979: 200) writes about the notion of a *Historical Bloc* within which economic, social and ideological forces combine in a temporary unity to change society. This notion was central to many of Gramsci's analyses. A historical bloc implied something more than just an alliance:

> ….the dominant group is co-ordinated concretely with the general interest of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interest of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups-equilibria in which the interest of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interests. (Gramsci, 1977: 36)

The state in understanding hegemony becomes important as it plays a crucial role in reinforcing and reproducing the 'equilibria' as stated above. In Manipur, Irom Sharmila ruptured the equilibria through her struggle for love, peace and justice by questioning the hegemony of the Indian state and its strategies of oppression through AFSPA. Her 'worldview' emerges from her lived experiences, her deep understanding of people of Manipur and her belief of the innate goodness and empathy for all human beings. Writing about her, one thing that really struck me was what Dalton wrote about Gandhi: "[l]ocal struggles have been seem legitimizing collective agency in pursuing justice through human rights. Gandhi in his life have shown what it is to conceptualise a value and in his truly uncanny ability to put his theory into practice" (Dalton, 1993: 113). The philosophy of praxis propagated by Gramsci (1997) stand in good stead in the context of democratising public spaces conditioned by material relations where everyone has ownership of the common property. However, it is highly contested and in case of Sharmila's struggle, contestations are multi-layered and multidimensional.

Her Journey: Building Hopes for Transformation

Irom Sharmila was born on 14 March 1972, the same year Manipur got the status of a separate state. From her childhood, she used to listen to the tales of Manipur, its history and culture from her grandmother. She learned that Manipur was a home to a self-sufficient economy and grandeur of peace and non-violence, which she constantly looked for as she grew up and now, she has become an example for the youths of Manipur. Each Manipuri mother and grandmother talks about her courage, love and affection. As Mehotra (2009: 49) states:

> Sharmila grew up listening to the stories of Tonsija Devi told about the Nupilans. Tonsija was just a year old at the time of the first Nupilan in 1904. The 'women wars' against imperialism are still recalled with fierce pride. People were angry at their loss of sovereignty compounded by an alien judicial and administrative system. Women's rights of appeal honoured over the centuries, had been revoked. Such injustice was unacceptable to ordinary people like Tonsija Devi. Her family lived in Shinzamai Bazaar near the centre of Imphal city. It was an ordinary working class family fervently patriotic with strong women who participated in the Nupilans.

An Individual Protest for the Massive Collective Cause

Sharmila's protest was the protest of the common people. Her protest was not planned or organised. It was a reaction against the oppression, which she refused to take. The

Malom massacre was the deciding event, which acted as the precipitating factor for her to end the oppression, which was meted out to the civilians in the name of security and defence. The AFSPA act becomes draconian because of the following features, which have failed to understand and recognise the 'human rights' (see, Pulla and Kharel, 2014) of the people in Manipur.

- As the name suggests, the Act bestows undue (special) power to the armed forces to counter insurgency
- It led to militarisation of the state which questioned both equality before law and equal protection of law
- Due to this lack of clarity, common people mostly women, children and youth suffered tremendously
- It legitimised the superiority of the state over people which led to acute human rights violations and violence against women everyday of their lives
- Section 4 of AFSPA mentions:

> Any commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer or any other person of equivalent may, in a disturbed area,.... if he is of the opinion that it is necessary to do so for the maintenance of public order, after giving such due warning as he may consider necessary, fire upon or otherwise use force even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law and order for the time being in force in the disturbed area.

These features of the Act led to the happenings of Malom massacre where 10 civilians were gunned down without warning by Assam Rifles based on mere 'suspect'. This was not the first of its kind but as mentioned by one of the Meira Paibi had become a part of everyday affair of the indigenous people. In the words of Chanu Pakhangba (name changed), a Meira Paibi herself, "We came up as Meira Paibis to save Manipur [from being a land of blood and tears]".

As discussed above, these women collectives stand against the atrocities of Indian Army and violations of human rights. It was started in 1980 after the innocent killing of a boy by the Indian army. The words of these valiant collectives of women came true once again in the most powerful way, 24 years after the Meira Paibis first emerged—on 15 July 2004, when Chanu Pakhangba and 12 other women stripped in front of the Kangla to register their protest against the arrest, torture, rape and extra-judicial killing of Th. Manorama Devi, an act of defiance and courage that shook not only the Indian subcontinent but the entire world (Nepram, 2014).

The Malom massacre acted as reaffirming and legitimising the hegemony of the Indian state and Sharmila's voice echoed the voices of dissent of everyone. This is the strongest part of her struggle and the weakest part—strong, because it reflected the praxis and transformation of an individual and combined beautifully with poiesis.

At the same time, it was weakest because the collective transformations did not follow with equal verve and intensity as it should have been, which reduced this legend into a symbol of people's movement, non-violent protest, emancipation for women with her main demands still manipulated by the Indian state. Indeed, her body has become a mere symbol of protest which is getting caught with portrayal of her body with reference which are not only derogatory but a systematic plot of the state to implant seeds into people's mind which would deviate from the entire discourse of peace and emancipation of the people of Manipur for which she stand for. Today media discusses her 'body', its changes and personal life instead of the silent atrocities and forced consent created in the state. One of the villagers said:

> We are asked to forcefully sign by the Assam Rifles that everything is fine in the village and peace prevails.

Extreme human rights violations are taking place under the projected narrative of *peace* and *change.* Sharmila's image is deliberately distorted in the public through mainstream

media to shirk the demands laid down by the people of Manipur. The ethnic divisions created between the tribes and subtribes in Manipur similar to the other states of Northeast is aggravating the situations today and creating ruptures everywhere. In Manipur, one can witness increasing distrust among each other, which in turn, is wavering the core issues: mainly repealing of AFSPA and restoring the human rights of the people.

Following the Malom massacre, another incident, which gave further impetus to the movement, was the alleged rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama by Assam Rifles. There was a humongous protest against the incident and women stripped themselves in rage and desperate drive to repeal the Act and end atrocities. The body again resurfaced which displayed reaction against the Act in a different way from Sharmila has but bore similar commitment and rage against the inhuman mechanisms of the state. Sharmila's protest was further strengthened as this was followed by a nationwide protest. In fact, it treaded globally and the message was spread vehemently. Like always, the Meira Paibis went on a rally fasts and marathon fasts vigorously than before. One of the activists interviewed said:

> My mother is a Meira Paibi and has been on a marathon fast since 2000 onwards in solidarity to Sharmila. However, the state pays no attention. It is only when Anna Hazare or someone from India fasts it matters to the state. Except India, it nowhere happens in the world.

The feeling of alienation and dejection is looming large in every corner of Manipur. The state, instead of acting towards problematizing, is spreading its malicious plans today not only through AFSPA but also in the different ways in which development is planned for this region. Many indigenous people have been displaced or further pushed to the periphery. In fast-spreading neoliberalism, the state is now acting as agents of the multinational corporate for building trade relations with neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar. Thus the Indian state, which was formed after the colonisers left, was a seedbed of colonised ideas and hegemony. The impositions of the colonisers remain but have taken a different shape. However, in both systems, the Manipuri people faced challenges and devised counter-hegemonic ways to confront the Indian state. The Indian state, on the other hand, very courageously showed no sympathy to the voices and even relentless protests of Sharmila, who until today, is not considered a political prisoner. She is not allowed to meet visitors barring some, suspecting some anti-state action, which have considerably weakened the movement. However, Sharmila has been a layperson and until today, people who have experiences working with her have told me that she is like an angry child and without due attention, she would not budge. She is only asking for more love and peace, malice is the word unknown to her. She continues to be a symbol of non-violent protest and fasting, however the collective appears to be more and more dispersed.

Towards Collective Transformation: Strengthening Collectives like 'Meira Paibis'

Individually driven protests are not uncommon in India. We have always found movements spearheaded by an individual leader, however, in all such cases, mass support also played a very important role. In Manipur, politicisation of everyday life was invoked with the struggle of Sharmila and people came out to the streets demanding for human rights. Ethnicity and re-claiming the uniqueness of Manipuri identity also became very strong which found expressions in the form of so many insurgent movements. Another observation, if we flip through the history of the movement against AFSPA, is that, the state of Manipur like any other states of India have been entangled in the neoliberal trajectory of development, where there is a visible change in terms of developing infrastructure, roads and dams and also job creation for the youths, so on and so forth, and slowly creating a silence by withdrawing from the public sphere into private comforts. What remains

goes unsaid is that the AFSPA continues with its harsh provisions intact.

There were attempts made to amend the Act, however, no action plan has been chalked out until today. On repeated clamouring for amendment not only in Manipur but also in Jammu and Kashmir, there has been no action taken so far. The Minister of State for Home, Mr Mullappalli Ramachandran, said recently after Sharmila was again accused of suicide by the state:

> On such security-related issues, all factors, including the ground reality are taken into consideration before taking a decision and hence no time limit can be specified. (cited in Ningthouja, 2014)

Such repeated statement from the political rulers, irrespective of the party, is disturbing, and has weakened the movement and the morale of the people. With such an approach towards the Act, the state as well as the central government presents it as a lack of development and unemployment issue rather than the core issues of cultural invasion, superimposition of mainstream patriarchal values, and neoliberal incursion. These developments not only in Manipur but also throughout Northeast India have ruptured the collective spirit of the movement as the contested 'public' in the public spheres is also gradually withdrawing to the private spaces. The political community and the state is also providing leeway to the corporate in order to penetrate into the territories for profit and thus the 'people' and 'public' further gets marginalised. The massive displacement of people, which happened in Lie-Ingkhol, is an apt demonstration of this anti- people on-going development. The new political domination have capitalised upon one section of the society by securing their development and building consent around their idea of equality and peace. This process has been beautifully encapsulated in the words of Jane Mansfield (1990: 127):

> [T]he transformation of 'I' into 'we' brought about through political deliberation can easily mask subtle forms of control. Even the language people use as they reason together usually favours one way of seeing things and discourages others. Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. [They] are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say 'yes' when what they have said is 'no'.

Irom Sharmila's struggle today requires a process of rigorous conscientisation, dialogue, articulations compounded with organised action to counter this political domination through hegemony, combination of consent and subtle repression of 'public' rather 'people' voices. Meira Paibis have been doing this and is exemplary for the entire nation. However, the state has been successful to an extent in separating these collectives from the individual struggle of Sharmila. Not only these, even the frivolous media depictions of Sharmila and her life are adding fuel to the fire and deepening these ruptures.

Hope, as discussed, flows from concretising historical, political and cultural past of the region vis-a-vis the present developments. This would free hope from a daydream, which have already emerged from the lived experiences and the democratic aspirations of the people of Manipur. Individual transformation is incomplete; rather easily made inchoate without an organised collective transformation. For a new history to emerge, a dialectical engagement with multiple variant publics is indispensable.

About the Author

Aparajita Sharma is a professional social worker. She has the experience of working with different marginalised communities, NGOs, state and even corporate groups for the last 7-8 years. Her areas of expertise are popular culture, ideology, pedagogy (both vocational and school education), gender and inclusive development. Experts in this field of work have critically acclaimed her works on 'Hegemony

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SPECIAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

The Carpets and Karma: The Resilient Story of the Tibetan Community in Two Settlements in India and Nepal

Dr. Venkat Pulla [†] [*] and Kanchan Prasad Kharel [Ī]

Abstract

This paper is about the Tibetan people in two settlements, mainly in Nepal and India. Tibetan refugees started crossing the Himalayan range in April 1959, in the wake of the Dalai Lama's flight into exile and landed mostly in Nepal and India. Tibetans around the world do not know their future nor do they appear unduly worried. Most of them appear resilient and hopeful to see a 'free Tibet' a dream closer to their hearts, someday in the future. In this paper, we delve at their deep association between their philosophy of life based on the principles of 'karma' and their everyday economic avocation of weaving 'carpets'. We find that these people weave their lives around karma and the carpets. Karma embodies their philosophical and spiritual outlook while carpets, mats and paintings symbolise their day-to-day struggles, enterprises to cope, survive, thrive and flourish. The 'karma carpet' symbolises their journey into the future. The Tibetans although a refugee group do not have the same rights and privileges comparable to other refugees living in the world decreed under the United Nations Conventions. In this paper, we present the socio-economic situation of these refugees, their enterprise and their work ethic that makes them who they are in the Nepalese and in Indian societies. For this research, we have triangulated both desk studies and personal narratives from focus groups and interviews to present a discussion centred on the Tibetan struggle for human rights and their entrepreneurship through the carpet industry mainly in Nepal and India.

Key words: Tibetan refugees, carpet, karma, Tibetan resilience, Nepal, India

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Introduction

In recent times, the young Tibetan monks have sadly self-immolated themselves raising alarm about human rights and the Nepalese response has been described as being evenly heavy-handed. This response from the Nepalese government appears to be derived from self-interest and self-preservation that comes with a price of compromise with China.

The news of the young Tibetan monk, Drupchen Tsering, who self-immolated himself in Boudhhanath, Kathmandu, on 13 February 2013, recently ignited the long suppressed issues of the Tibetan refugees in Nepal (Republica, 2013). The event drew attention of the national and international political and non-political actors. Tibetan official agencies kept on demanding the body for commemorating the last rituals according to the Buddhist tradition. However, the body was kept for 41 days in mortuary, and was declared 'unclaimed' by the Nepalese Government on 25 March 2013. Following this, his mortal remains were cremated in Pashupati Aryaghat, the cremation grounds. Only handful of human rights activists' Kharel, Sivakoti and Bandi defied the act of Nepalese government and expressed serious concern about the Tibetan people's rights to practice their culture, tradition and religion.

On 15 April 2013, *International Herald Tribune*, the global edition of *New York Times*, published an article titled 'China curbs flow of Tibetans into Nepal' by Edward Wong. It mentioned the active role of China in subjugating the Tibetan refugees living in Nepal by supporting the Nepalese government through deliberate yet subtle means of assistance to various development projects through financial assistance (Wong, 2013). The report explicitly mentioned that Chinese officials were curtailing the flow of Tibetan refugees in Nepal-China borders and have been creating influence over Nepalese government in suppressing Tibetan refugees' anti-China activities.

Previous incident of self-immolation was one of a 16-year-old Tibetan girl residing in the village of Dageri in China's northwest province of Qinghai. This occurred coincidently on the 64th International Human Rights Day (Republica, 2012). While security failed in stopping such acts in China, Nepalese police forces, on the contrary, intensified its security systems in major places in Kathmandu-Bouddha and the Thapathali Bridge area where most Tibetan refugees reside. Thapathali Bridge connects Kathmandu and Lalitpur district. The Bouddha is the historical and religious place outside Ring-road in Kathmandu where majority of Nepalese Buddhist people live and preach the teachings of Buddha. The Tibetan refugees live in this place mainly for two reasons: first, there is a Tibetan refugee camp nearby Bouddha area; second, Tibetan refugees are co-religionists to Nepalese Buddhist communities like Lama, Tamang and Sherpa. This location is also the main entrance to reach the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Nepal, which is located at Pulchowk, Lalitpur, and barely a few metres away from the bridge, and the NHRC. A young human rights activist belonging to a Hyolmo community of Helambu region of Nepal has the following to say:

> Early morning of that day, I was on my way from Bouddha to NHRC. That day human rights community of Nepal gathered to mark 64th International Human Rights Day and to celebrate Human Rights jointly organised by coalition of human rights organisations working in Nepal. However, I was stopped three times by the Nepali police, near Bouddha, Pulchowk Bridge and few meters in front of the NHRC. I had a tough time while convincing them about my identity as a Nepali citizen and not a Tibetan refugee. I repeatedly showed them my ID card. I struggled because my physical appearance is similar to the Tibetan people and also I am a Buddhist. In addition, because many Tibetans have long been hiding in Nepal with Nepali citizenship changing their surname as Hyolmo, Tamang and Lama, at present, there is a level of suspicion growing towards original Nepali citizens like me. Moreover, we Hyolmo people are Buddhists.

Another human rights activists working closely with the Tibetan community in Nepal narrated as follows:

> On that day, many Tibetan people were forcefully held in custody at Bouddha Police Station without reason possibly to curb the possible anti-Chinese protests that Tibetan people might lead to…. Such actions from Nepalese government clearly indicate that the Government in Nepal does not concern itself with the rights of Tibetan refugees nor is committed to their freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful congregations.

The aforementioned narratives thus provide the Tibetan refugees and its effects on their communities' conditions of living in exile. Clearly, the Tibetans do not have any means to retaliate against China but to continue to cope, survive, nurture resilience and hope for free-Tibet, while facing strict measures from the Nepalese government. Hence, the key purpose of this research is to present the socio-economic situation of the Tibetan refugees, their enterprise and their work ethic that makes them who they are in the Nepalese society. Alongside, it also highlights the socio-economic condition of the Tibetan refugees taking refuge in India.

We begin with a brief description of the methodological approach deployed to gather data for the research. Following this, we provide a brief historical review of the Tibetan question. For Tibetans, the 'karma carpet' symbolises their journey into the future. Hence, in this research we delve at their deep association between their philosophy of life based on the principles of 'karma' and their everyday economic avocation of weaving 'carpets'.

Methodology

We conducted three focus group discussions and interviews with young people addressing three important questions: what does independence, democracy and human rights mean for the young Tibetan people living in Nepal? How do the Tibetan people maintain their livelihoods? How do they internalise the understanding of 'Karma' and 'suffering'? These three questions are put forward in this research with an aim to appreciate their political, economic and spiritual mindset with a view to describe their source for 'resilience' and their 'hopes' for the unknown future. These focus groups and interviews were conducted in November 2012. We had no preconceived logically deduced hypothesis and in our sampling too, we did not aim for population representation but for the possibility of finding some answers to our questions that may allow us to move towards some theoretical understanding. The first author has been researching in coping and resilience in the last few years and a collection of research-based papers was released in 2013. Although five intensive interviews were conducted, we have excerpted only relevant experiences that could be included in this paper.

We hypothesise that the Tibetan people weave their lives through 'Karma' and 'Carpets', where 'Karma' embodies their philosophical and spiritual stance while carpets, mats and paintings symbolise their day to day struggles, economic enterprises to cope, survive, thrive and flourish. Thus, we are using the 'karma carpet' as a binomial expression for Tibetan people to symbolise their journey into the future. Additionally, we have triangulated both desk studies and narratives acquired through focus groups, interviews, observation and authors' experience to present the foregoing analysis and discussion.

If people of ethnic origin are denied the privileges to enjoy, develop and transmit their culture and language, whether collectively or individually, we surmise this to be a violation of human rights and, in particular, the right of ethnic groups to behold their practice and respect for their cultural identity. Grave or extreme forms of massive violation of human rights presuppose intent, which can be inferred to from the nature of the acts as denial of the rights to the community to offer the last rites to the monk who gave his life for the Tibetan

cause. The year 1989 when the Maoist insurgency surfaced in Nepal, it was amply clear that it had tacit support and approval from China and the Tibetan refugees could see a less humane approach by the government of Nepal towards them. The regimes before had seen the Tibetan refugees as being reasonably accepted, both in terms of recognition and facilities that they were able to access in this country of their asylum. Therefore, in the next section, we discuss a brief history of the Tibetan people; and then present the one China policy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its implications to Tibetan communities. Hence, as stated above, the key objective of the paper is to bring out the strong connection of Karma, the spiritual repository within the community, and their livelihoods on one hand and on the other hand, their everyday coping strategies with the realities of a refugee with limited or no privileges at all and building their resilient lives and not giving up hope for a free Tibet. A significant amount of research narratives enrich the discussion presented in this paper. Although not re-presented through the narratives of the respondents, the guiding definition of resilience that we have utilised as part of our theoretical framework is to relate resilience to the way in which people confront and deal with those stressors that one encounters throughout the lifespan, creating positive meaning and maintaining function (Bonnano, 2004:20). Resilience is constructed using coping strategies, which refer to those actions that people indulge in to alleviate, tolerate, and accept or minimise stressors that present (Pulla, 2013: b). Undeniably, for the Tibetans these stressors are many. They include religious persecution, eviction from homeland, separation from family, violence and poverty, forced adaptation to new cultures, challenges to identity and many more. Invariably, the Tibetans will have utilised a range of coping mechanisms and strategies in order to survive these stressors and by the very fact that their existence is continuing, with what appears to be a success, one can assume that some measure of resilience has been established from these strategies.

Brief History of the Tibetan People

In the year 1950, Mao's Red Army controlled the territory of Tibet by defeating Tibetan army. Nine years after, in 1959, Tibetans declared the Guerrilla War against Chinese troops. Ganguly (2001) notes that while the Chinese brutally suppressed the uprising, the Dalai Lama and his ministers fled across the Himalayas, to India. In this process, several thousand refugees also migrated to the Kingdom of Nepal.

In terms of Nepal-Tibet relationship, Nepalese historical annals confirm that Nepal's relations with Tibet has always been positive and were further strengthened in 639 AD when Nepalese King Amsu Verma gave his daughter Princess Vrikuti to the ruler of Tibet Strong-Tsam Gampo in marriage (Hamal, 2010).

In relation to Indo- Tibetan relationship, India certainly helped facilitate the temporary settlement of the first Tibetans through favourable domestic legislation that regulated entry of Tibetan nationals into India and allowed them to obtain a certificate of registration since December 1950. India also helped with the logistics of transit camps on the border and gave land to the refugees. In fact, it could be argued that India has gone out of its way to accommodate Tibetan refugees. Nepal has been a Tibetan refugees' destination ever since 1959 as it became a home to about 12,000 refugees who were mainly settled at camps at Jawalakhel in the Kathmandu valley, Chialsa in Solukhumbu district, Pokhara in the mid-west and at several smaller centres in the far West. The Tibetan communities and human rights activists believe that there could be at least 12 refugee camps in different parts of Nepal, which may not have been known to Nepalese authorities. However, no proper records are available which tells how many Tibetan refugees actually live in Nepal at present. References from random sources like newspapers and websites suggest that there are around 15000 Tibetan refugees residing in Nepal. According to the latest demographic survey conducted by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, which came out in November 2010,

there are 94,203 Tibetans in India, out of the 127,935 Tibetans who live outside (Bentz, 2012).

The Nepalese Government and the International Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross, the United Nations Human Rights Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society of Canada provided opportunities to begin their new life in camps. The introduction of carpet-weaving cottage industries within the Tibetan camps in Kathmandu and Pokhara and in McLeod Ganj, Dharmshala and Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi are milestones in the economic development of the Tibetan people. O'Neill (2005: 277) affirms the support of Swiss Aid and Technical Assistance (SATA) which "proposed that the refugees set up carpet weaving cottage industries in each of these camps to provide employment and an income". The reason why Swiss donors invested in Carpet industry is because of the traditional specialisation and sophistication that the Tibetan people had attained in carpet weaving. The carpet tradition appeared to have been running in their sinews and in their blood, something they handed over from one generation to the next since ages. The carpet industry led by the Tibetan community not only supported the livelihood of Tibetan exile community but also became one of the leading export industries of Nepal and made the government and Nepal private enterprise rich in its own way. Several Tibetans during those days were also allowed to obtain citizenship of Nepal so that they could own carpet companies and factories. The offering of naturalised citizenship to Tibetans by the Government of Nepal in 1970s meant "that naturalized Tibetans in Nepal could legally export goods across the border, and own property in Nepal" (O'Neill, 2005: 282). Such facilities made Tibetans economically stronger and many of them became even wealthier than the local Nepalese. Tibetan children went to better schools and their livelihood condition changed drastically.

In India, in addition to McLeod Ganj in Dharmshala, the Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi is rather unique Tibetan refugee camps. They are completely self-sustaining, are a tribute to the hard work and obstinate refusal to be daunted, and overwhelmed by the grinding poverty within the camp and in the surrounding areas. While Dharmshala is considered the heart of the Tibetan world, places like McLeod Ganj and Majnu Ka Tilla are commercial hubs of this exiled community.

The One China Policy

Since the Maoist insurgency in 1989 in Nepal, the situation changed for the Tibetan refugees. Chinese government entered into the scene and Nepalese government had no choice other than to follow the Mandarins of the Chinese Government. The Nepalese government commenced the process of non-recognition to Tibetan refugees who arrived in the country after 1989, which meant neither special status nor any civic privileges at par with the previous refugees. Even distributions of refugee's cards were stopped. This shifted in the asylum preference of the Tibetan refugees and Nepal became a transit point more than the final destination. Dharmshala in India became the final destination where Dalai Lama and Tibetan government in exile were located. Furthermore, after China heightened security along its border and increased restrictions on internal freedom of movement in 2008, the number of Tibetans who transited into Nepal has also dropped significantly (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour).

More recently, two prominent diplomats Bhek Bahadur Thapa and Kedar Bhakta Shrestha separately answered the question about the foundations of diplomatic relationship between Nepal and China and those that affect issues of Tibetan population in Nepal, at Kathmandu University symposium on 2 May and 9 May 2013. They emphasised the reasons to be Nepal's adherence to 'Principles of Panchasheel' and the acceptance of Nepal to 'One-China Policy'. Nepal-China relation is based upon the foundations enshrined in the five principles under Panchasheel, which regards respect for each other's sovereignty

and territorial integrity; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's political, economic and ideological affairs; peaceful coexistence, equality and mutual benefit (Aryal et al. 2010, Hamal, 2010). Likewise, under 'One-China' Policy, China would consider Nepal as equal nation and does not reserve any intention to influence internal affairs of Nepal. Nepal, in return, would adhere to One-China Policy and would not allow any force in Nepal to engage in anti-China activities, including pro-Tibetan independence activists (Lohani, 2010). Such understanding between these two nations is the reason why Tibetan refugees in Nepal are excluded from any discourse around human rights such as freedom of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly, celebration of their culture and religion. In addition, the Nepalese authorities have taken a pro-China posture of closely monitoring and suppressing what possibly are Tibetan sentiments that arise from the Tibetans in Nepal from time to time. In addition, sadly, any sentiment by the Tibetan people in Nepal is construed as an anti-Chinese activity. Certainly, Nepal has been successful in leveraging their geopolitical position from this Asian giant through economic rewards continuously offered to the Nepalese government via trade assistance, tourism improvements, investments and other development projects in recent years.

Buddhism, Asian Values and Democracy

It is interesting to see how Tibetans live in their settlements. Whether it is in Nepal or in Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi, the inhabitants keep their surroundings clean. By six in the morning, they are up and running and humming. They water the footpaths, sweep them voluntarily with brooms and keep their environment clean without any need for the workers of civic authorities to take care of. Their conscientiousness and civic sense is unparalleled. A communitarian outlook and caring they attribute to the Buddhist principles of caring for individuals and communities and about human interaction within the larger environment including all life forms of flora and fauna. These values have entered into their businesses too. Tibetan commerce spreads its limited prosperity along to other Tibetan communities in all directions of the Indian subcontinent and beyond. One does not see a resigned weariness of the refugee existence in these settlements. The transformation is not limited to the impressive new buildings that have sprung up in Majnu Ka Tilla. We see the transformation is one of change in the attitudes of the Tibetan people. These settlements today are beehives of industry, energy and enterprise, all laced by an attitude, which seems to suggest that these people are resilient. Today these settlements also use their limited space for tourism and allow western tourists to walk through the crowded lanes in Boudhhanath in Kathmandu, McLeod Ganj in Dharmshala and Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi.

There have been some suggestions in the literature about the nature of Dalai Lama doctrines and documents such as the constitution made for the government in exile that it is inspired by western elements (Frenchette, 2007). Dalai Lama rejects such notions that the Tibetan exile government is western inspired and instead he argues:

> The Buddha proclaimed that each individual is a master of his or her own destiny, highlighting the capacity that each person has to attain enlightenment. In this sense, the Buddhist worldview recognizes the fundamental sameness of all human beings. Like Buddhism, modern democracy is based on the principle that all human beings are essentially equal, and that each of us has an equal right to life, liberty, and happiness.... While it is true that no system of government is perfect, democracy is the closest to our essential human nature and allows us the greatest opportunity to cultivate a sense of universal responsibility.... Some Asian leaders say that democracy and the freedoms that have come with it are exclusive products of Western civilizations.... I do

> not share this viewpoint (cited in Frechette, 2007: 113).

Ever since Tibetan people have opted for refuge in other countries, their main political goal has been the independence of Tibet. After five decades in exile, Tibetan people are now scattered in many parts of the world, primarily in India, Nepal, United States, Switzerland and many other western nations. With the changing adaptation, the Tibetan refugees have taken advantage of the host nations' culture, opportunities and facilities. Even Dalai Lama has encouraged Tibetans to move to new locations mainly in western countries. Conway (1975) believes that such an outlook from Dalai Lama, himself has two major advantages "first, it will ensure that the Tibetan refugee community as a whole remains intact, gathered in sufficiently large groups to be able to maintain their own language and religion" (Conway, 1975:76). With Tibetans teaching their own language in schools, they have opportunity to maintain the essentials of their rich heritage. Second, "such a policy advantages the economic support and will prevent the Tibetans from becoming a depressed and dependent minority, existing solely from the handouts of a world community, which might so easily forget them, or ignore them in favour of more pressing claims elsewhere" (Conway , 1975 : 76).

The most significant change observed in the Tibetan community due to the foreign cultural adaptation is the introduction of democracy in the political structure of Tibetan exile administration and the changing determinants of independence. This perceived change in the traditionally considered feudal social fabric of Tibetans becomes amply clear when we hear what Dalai Lama said in 1987. Addressing the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington, the Dalai Lama spelt out his five-point peace plan for Tibet. In this he contemplated: the creation of a zone of peace and *ahimsa* (non-violence) covering the entire Tibetan ethnic area (which would include the present Tibet Autonomous Region as well as the erstwhile Tibetan provinces of Amdo and Kham); the abandonment of China's policy of population transfer (Han people moving into Tibet); fundamental human rights, democratic and electoral freedoms for the Tibetans; de-nuclearisation of Tibet and protection of its natural environment; finally, the commencement of earnest negotiations to determine the future status of Tibet. In subsequent statements at Strasbourg the following year, and later, the Dalai Lama clarified the last point: he was seeking "genuine autonomy: for Tibet within the ambit of the Chinese state, not independence, since his principle concern was survival of the Tibetan culture, religion and way of life" (Bhoothalingam, 2007: 3384).

The Tibetan intellectual scholarship and its leadership certainly took the advantages that came with the formation of an exile government in Dharmshala in India. These advantages, we argue, increased opportunities through to increased exposure to English informed education as available in India; to western contact via India; and many scholarships and grants that the Tibetan youths could receive particularly from Indian, American and also western nations. Consequently, the Tibetan youths continue to remain sensitive to their core traditional Buddhism while making the best possible examination of the growing western liberalism and in having an opportunity to appreciate the intrinsic additional value of the western thought to the Tibetan democratic precipice. However, the Western scholarship of growth of Tibetan democracy appears to overestimate the influence of western liberalism on Tibetan democracy and we posit that such views may be due to reviewing Tibetan democratic principles against the backdrop of the PRC ideologies. The PRC has its ideological position on Tibet's inalienability from the Chinese nation-state with while the Tibetan Government in Lhasa regards Tibet as an independent polity.

Paradoxically, Tibetan culture and Chinese state ideology both link religion to national identity, the foundation on which their conflict rests.

The state calls for religion and patriotism towards China to be intertwined, a condition that did not apply in pre-modern Tibet. The PRC policies consider the religious element in Tibetan culture in strategic terms, with a main battlefield, a target in the form of religious influence, and a goal of reducing the negative effects of religion on the region's development and stability. PRC names the Dalai Lama as a malefactor, destructive not only to national unity but also to Tibetan Buddhism itself—a portrayal deeply resented by the Tibetans (Cooke, 2007: 6). Such official statements, which bind the goal of "building socialist spiritual civilisation" with the anti-separatist struggle and religion's negative influence, implicate religion and its management by the state in the wider goal of nation-building through social re-engineering, a process to be effected both from within religious circles and society at large (Cooke, 2007: 6) .

We see that the Tibetan exiles are in a democratic transition, as they have embraced democracy as a normative ideal towards which they are reforming their political system (Frenchette, 2007: 98). It is said that when democracy was first introduced among the Tibetan exiles during the 1960s, it was interpreted as a gift that "enlightened" political leaders gave "from above" (Frenchette, 2007: 98). Since the establishment of the Tibetan exile administration, the Dalai Lama has publicly advocated the development of democracy. He proposed that Tibet should be restructured as a democracy, and, at the same time, he initiated a series of experiments with democracy in exile, both to prepare the Tibetans for a return to Tibet and to facilitate the exile administration's claims to legitimate governance of Tibet in international contexts (Frenchette, 2007).

Whatever the source is for Tibetan democracy in exile, but it has certainly ascertained the drawback of past Tibetan political structure before exile. Ganguly (2001: 11) notes that although Dalai Lama's "government in exile is a democracy; he has admitted that the feudal system he left behind in Tibet was unjust and exploitative".

Although democracy is being practiced in Tibetan exile government, but more than the power of democracy, Tibetans have faith in the holy power of the Dalai Lama in giving Tibet its freedom and independence. Tibetan belief establishes the Dalai Lama as "uniquely capable of supreme governance. As manifestations of the *bodhisattva* of compassion, called Chenrezig in Tibetan, they are superior beings who are capable of seeing the past, present and future within multiple realms of existence, and unlike normal beings, capable of choosing where to be reborn" (Frechette, 2007: 107). Ganguly (2001: 13) in her treatise highlights her conversation with one watery-eyed vegetable seller in Dharmshala who says, "[t]he Dalai Lama will lead us to freedom... if not the fourteenth Dalai Lama, then the fifteenth, or the sixteenth, or the one after that". The above assertion is even corroborated by the young Tibetans in Nepal. A 19-year-old Tibetan woman said:

> I do not understand what democracy is all about. We are not living in our land. However, my parents say that we need to be prepared for independence of Tibet. My mother says only the Dalai Lama can bring us our freedom. For us, Dalai Lama is a god. I do not know about his power because I have never met him and I understand very less Tibetan language. My uncle says that Dalai Lama, when gives speeches in Tibetan language, then only people would understand his power. According to my uncle, Dalai Lama has the ability to make us stand together and tell us where we are destined. In addition, now I feel, after every generation we are losing Tibetan culture. For example, whenever I speak, I use three languages: all at a time, Nepali, English and Tibetan. However, one thing is sure, we Tibetans are such religiously made that as long as Dalai Lama is there, and we will not really forget Tibet.

In Kathmandu, the capital city, there are two Tibetan camps, one in Jorpati and another in Jawalakhel in addition to the Tibetan refugee reception centre in the suburb of Ekantakuna. Interviews for this research were primarily conducted in these two areas.

An adult Tibetan woman who was selling 'Khapse', an ethnic Tibetan delicacy during Buddha Jayanti (25th May, 2013) nearby Boudhhanath Stupa says,

> I was born in Nepal and I do not even remember when my grandparents came here. I have never been to Dharmshala. However, someday I want to go just only to see Dalai Lama and Tibetan government there. Actually, I do not really know about our government too because I have not seen them nor have I received anything so far. I have been struggling on my own by selling Khapse and other Tibetan products in roads and busy markets. Nevertheless, I worship Dalai Lama. I have kept his photo in my room. When I see him, it gives me positive vibe. I can feel the Tibet, which I have never seen. My heart becomes heavy sometimes.

Likewise, a human rights activist closely working with Tibetan community in Nepal says,

> In my opinion, the Tibetan community in Nepal has far well-developed their understanding about the importance of democracy and what democracy can do to change the autocratic regimes. This is because of their encounter with the Nepalese political development. Nepalese Tibetans have seen the changing politics of Nepal from Kingship to democracy in 1990, from the 1990's democracy to decade long Maoist conflict and from the peace process until the recent Federal Republic of Nepal. One of the very interesting cases they have seen is how Maoist party in Nepal has been able to fit itself in the race of democratic parties. Therefore, the talk of Tibetan democracy is important because it can possibly give China insights to adopt democratic values to some extent. Again, since Tibetan democracy has its foundation on the strong faith over Dalai Lama, I personally feel that the Tibetan campaign will get more complex and hard in his absence.

Within the exiled Tibetan community as well, including many who live in the northern Indian city of Dharmshala, the unofficial capital of the Tibetan government-in-exile significant observations and debate over the issue of using violence or non-violence has been recorded in the last ten years or so (Ganguly 2001). Though the Dalai Lama and his officials have long been criticised for the use of nonviolence as a tactic and have chosen to embrace non-violence and peaceful struggle and passive resistance as viable alternatives, many younger Tibetans who have grown up in diaspora have also been openly questioning this policy. Ganguly (2001) in her interviews, in the pubs of Dharmshala wrote that the young men wistfully talked of violent resistance. One of them said that he wanted to go and blow up few bridges. "Even if it doesn't bring them freedom, at least as young men they would have hurt the Chinese" (Ganguly, 2001: 17). It is true that some of the young Tibetans are growing tired of pacifism. There is fear that in the long run if such attitudes keep growing, the young Tibetans may not subscribe to the non-violence path led by the Dalai Lama to mark their return to Tibet. A 17-year-old Tulsi Gurung participated in the Special International Tibet Support Groups meeting, held at Dharmshala, India in November 2012. The program was convened by Core Group for Tibetan cause-India and facilitated by the Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration. This 17-year-old boy, who resides in Nepal shares stories of his Tibetan friends some of whom do talk about self-immolation and violent protests as the only way-out.

> I have many Tibetan friends. We sometimes party together during Friday nights. They are actually very kind and

> nice people. They have good sense of humour. However, when it comes to Tibetan issues I have seen them getting too aggressive and angry. They prefer wearing 'Free Tibet' T-shirts but Nepalese police have made restrictions. More and more alcohol makes them more and more arrogant and volatile. I have seen them abusing the Nepali police and Chinese government with whatever slang words that come in their mouth during party. Few of them even say that they could even self-immolate themselves if the time demands. They are in fact very impatient when it comes to getting back to Tibet. However, they also share that they have profound respect for Dalai Lama.

Likewise, Nepalese government has been suppressing Tibetan community in Nepal by not allowing basic human rights. Sonali Yangzom shares her pain:

> Nepalese government and security forces are very strict these days. We cannot wear T-shirts like 'Free Tibet', 'I love Tibet' etc. In Bouddha, a few of my friends have also received beatings from thugs (we suspect them as Chinese spies). In addition, police forces take us to custody without any reasons. Even I have been into custody once when I was in class nine, the day we participated in Free Tibet Rally in front of the Chinese Embassy. During Buddhist festivals and occasions, huge numbers of Nepalese police come to our residential areas. Our right to speech, freedom to assemble and celebrate our culture have been curtailed.

We believe that the locus of the Tibetan democracy and independence lies in the faith of Tibetan people upon His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The entire hope is centred upon his philosophy, power and direction. Buddhism as the religion is the source for their political and spiritual struggle and Dalai Lama as their caretaker.

In an interview with the first author, Tseten Dhondup, born in Nepal, who is 32 years old, and a peace-loving Buddhist summarises his hope for peace and Tibetan solution as follows:

> Yeah…. I think we might get a chance to see my Tibet before I die…."

This interview also confirmed that he has children and when he devotes time for the Tibetan cause, he is actually working for his children so that one day they can see a free Tibet.

Karma, Suffering and Future Aspiration

Both in Buddhism and in Hinduism the concept of 'Karma' embodies people's philosophical and spiritual outlook towards life. Karma in Buddhism, connotes both action and effects (Goose, 2007), not very different from Hinduism, although one finds an average Tibetan a greater adherer to Karma and deliberately attempting to change the course of his Karma for greater good. In popular understanding, it means the fruit of our life depends upon the nature of actions that we undertake. It is a tribute to the Tibetan elders that even the many young Tibetan youngsters in Kathmandu behold and subscribe to such views. Likewise, suffering, in Buddhism, comes from actions. Freedom from suffering, it is said is inevitable. Dalai Lama has always been portrayed as the source of 'hope' and 'resilience' in the theocratic life of Tibetan people to take people from the journey of sufferings towards happiness. Dalai Lama's effort to consolidate Tibetan democracy is being considered as a precious gift for the Tibetan people. Our journey through the research process took an analytical break at this point to stop and reflect on an earlier rhetorical memo that the first author wrote a while ago reflecting on the suffering and on Dalai Lama, recalled what Kathy Charmaz wrote originally in 2006.

> Suffering is a moral status as well as a physical experience. A moral status confers relative human worth and thus, measures deserved value or devaluation. Stories of suffering, reflect,

> redefine, or resist such moral status…. Suffering can award an individual an elevated, even sacred, moral status. This is someone who has been in sacred places, who has seen and known what ordinary mortals have not. His or her stories are greeted with awe and wonder. (Charmaz, 2006: 77-79)

It is appropriate to utilise an earliest memo of the first author that offers a description to Dalai Lama in the context of the concept of suffering.

> Show me one man that has walked on this earth and is amidst us still that is an embodiment of resilience and hope together? It is a pure joy to see him. It is not easy for him to put his past. Yet when he cried as he did. It is not for himself it is for his people' Admittedly the entire people of Tibet—at least those who live beyond Tibet and those that live overseas have transformed themselves to *ahimsa*, nonviolence—an approach not liked by the leaders in mainland China. He is an inspiration to peace and this inspiration resounds in millions of refugees not just Tibetans around the world.

The Dalai Lama Phenomenon

The currently revered spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, the 14th Dalai Lama was born Lhamo Dhondup on 6 July 1935 to a farming family in the village of Taktser in North-Eastern Tibet. At the age of two, he was recognised as the 14th reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso. On 22 October 1940, he was formally enthroned at a ceremony in the Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet. As Buddhism offers liberation from suffering, democracy will provide the Tibetan people the means to attain freedom from injustice (Administration, 2013). This is their belief and their longing of a people that are violated culturally and leading to immolations and frenzy. One cannot gaze into crystal ball and say what future lies for these people, but as each day when sun rises around Boudhhanath Stupa, one would notice many beggars and even mendicants to continue to sit in the streets. One would also continue to see street vendors selling clothes, vegetables, etc. while keeping the surroundings clean and immaculate. People taking morning walks around the stupa would still be a sight. Even today, the crowd and their activities are worth a silent watch as they rekindle with piety the feelings of 'peace' and 'joy' that reverberate from the stupa atmosphere. Amidst all these happenings there are interesting and contrasting things to watch and learn. According to a Nepali and non-Tibetan shop owner in Boudhhanath:

> The most unique social values that Tibetans own and we (Nepalese) lack is 'altruism' and 'community support'. The street vendors, early morning and evening around Boudhhanath, majority are Tibetan people. Many middle income Tibetans earn their living this way. However, if you are wondering who would buy their clothes and products everyday and how they are sustaining their business then the answer is simple-it is because of rich Tibetans who buy. Tibetans are so community centric that they support their community members in whatever ways possible. Not only this, if one Tibetan reaches America or any other western country, then he/she takes many others in a few years. They are very supportive in that sense, may be because they have learned from their hardship and struggles. Hinduism too teaches charity, but more than the Hindu Nepali people, it is the Tibetans who give money to beggars and even donate at different charities and on all occasions irrespective of Nepali or Tibetan cause. 'Altruism' and 'Community-Centrism' are the few important aspects of Tibetans' lives. Many Tibetans hold views that altruism can purify anyone from his/her bad karma.

A Tibetan refugee at Khampa camp says:

> We Tibetans are very conscious about the teachings of Dalai Lama. We have his photos, audio and CDs of his lectures and teachings in our rooms. When we listen to him our pain and restlessness are all gone, the vacuum within us gets erased, and hearts fulfilled with more hope.

The uniqueness of Tibetan refugees comes from their resilience, their coping and the way they see their future and the inspiration they receive from their spiritual master, the Dalai Lama. We believe it is pertinent to sprinkle a few of his teachings here to illustrate how they assist with individual and community transformation. Issues that we have chosen here have to deal with the suffering, happiness, resilience and hope as illustrated below:

> You must not consider tolerance and patience to be signs of weakness. I consider them signs of strength. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 39)
>
> From the moment of our birth, every human being wants happiness and avoids suffering. In this we are all same. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 87)
>
> Human happiness and human satisfaction must ultimately come from within oneself. It is wrong to expect some final satisfaction to come from money or from a computer. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 104)
>
> Whether one believes in religion or not and whether one believes in rebirth or not, there is not anyone who does not appreciate kindness and compassion. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 116)
>
> Unlike an external enemy, the inner enemy cannot regroup and launch a comeback once it has been destroyed from within. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 119)
>
> The main cause of depression is not lack of material necessities but deprivation of other's affection. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 137)
>
> It is necessary to help others, not only in our prayers, but also in our daily lives. If we cannot help others, the least we can do is to desist from harming them. (Dalai Lama, 2012: 151)

His teachings have positioned the role of 'self' and 'within' at the supreme level. Dalai Lama has advocated for the inner strengths approach that needs to be awakened in order to free ourselves from sufferings. Dalai Lama's teachings direct people to shift their struggles from materialistic sufferings to spiritual well-being. 'Love' and 'Compassion' are so highlighted that happiness 'within' and happiness 'outside', both are fundamentals for life.

A Buddhist monk at Tibetan section office at Jorpati in conversation with the second author said:

> Although due to changing culture and values, different adaption, Tibetan youngsters are seen little deviated from spiritual knowledge, but their family values and tradition are still alive. If you go to houses of Tibetan people you can see big 'temple' constructed inside the room with lots of investment. Everywhere Dalai Lama's photos, teachings are posted. Children basically learn from what they see every day, every time. They will not totally deviate from Buddhist culture, values and ways of life.

The elderly and the frail-aged Tibetan refugees within camps, they appear to have conceded that the Tibetan issues belong to the young generation. As elders, they have lived their lives in hope to return to Tibet with strong belief in the teachings of Dalai Lama and Buddhism. These elderly often confess that they may not see a free Tibet and the freedom in their life. Economically, they confirm life is not difficult in Kathmandu because they have located their sources of income within the markets in Nepal and India but also in foreign and distant markets. In addition, few elderly Tibetan families receive remittances from their children who have settled abroad: Europe, Australia and

in the USA. As one of the elders in Nepal narrated:

> Free Tibet will continue to be a dream for many generations to come but remaining hopeful is the best way to lead life.

However, the younger generation thinks in different ways. They think that times have changed and the Tibetan issue must change along with the course of time. A daughter of a Tibetan refugee in Khampa camp who studies in Namgyal, a Tibetan school says:

> I do not know where my future takes but I want to go to Tibet once not as a Tibetan refugee but as a professional. It is difficult for Tibetans to study technical subjects here in Nepal for so many reasons. Therefore, I am planning to go to India where I can study with scholarship. My school sends good Tibetan students to India for technical studies. In my school, thrice a week, political discussions are organised among students regarding Tibetan issues. However, I rarely participate. That does not mean I do not like Tibetan issues, I do. Nevertheless, I believe for children it is time to study and read new things. There are so many things to learn and discuss.

While it is a fact that Tibetan modernism is currently shaping under global influence, it is absurd to think that western thought has influenced to make the Tibetan spirituality more compassionate and non-violent. *Karuna* (compassion) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) are the two main tenets of spiritual master the Buddha.

Carpet and Livelihood

With the advent of carpet production within Tibetan camps in Nepal during the 1960s, the entire livelihood aspects of the Tibetan refugees received sustenance. The carpet weaving appears to have become "the basis for an assertion of cultural and political autonomy in exile" (O'Neill, 2005: 275). In the last four decades, the Tibetan carpet penetrated international market turning cottage industry into the major leading export industry of Nepal. It established the position of Tibetan refugee community into the centre of Nepal's economy. This carpet industry has "transformed the lives of both refugees and indigenous Tibetans living in Nepal" (O'Neill, 2005: 276). For instance, in 1995 alone, there were altogether 295 carpet-weaving operations out of which 80 belonged to the Tibetan owners while 159 belonged to the local Nepalese (O'Neill, 2005). However, in recent years, many Tibetans have shut down their industries due to the decade long Maoist conflict in Nepal. One of the local shopkeepers on the main line of the Boudhhanath gate has the following to say:

> Tibetan carpet made Tibetans immensely rich. Many of them are the richest businesspersons in Bouddha; even Nepali local people cannot compete their business. They made huge money because Tibetan carpets were very expensive and are still the same. A single carpet (small size) costs more than thirty thousand Nepali rupees. The carpet goes up to three to four hundred thousand or even more than that. However, during Maoist conflict, many such operations got shut down because of labour disputes. However, Tibetans have not completely left the business. The only difference between then and now is that before the 1990 Tibetan refugees used to work in the carpet industry but now they own them. Not many Tibetans work as labour in industries. At present, low caste Nepali people who are considered lower in caste hierarchy especially their children and their women work in such carpet factories. Tibetan owners just export the products in high value and earn money.

Be it Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi that flourishes today with booming business that outsources Tibetan flags and poster making to the Punjabi basthi next door, or the Boudhhanath in Kathmandu with an ambience of piousness and

serenity—these settlements are the hope building centres of all economic prosperity of the Tibetan community. In these uncertain times, they are also the only sources of making money. Singled out, as the number one economic activity the carpet weaving alone gave them every aspect of livelihood including food, shelter, business, security, and above all a discipline that nurtured their spiritual practice as well. Chanting and meditation while weaving improved their individual and collective psyche. Comparing stories and telling tales of the family during recess allowed them to share concerns and build compassion. Adaptation to western colours and making mosaics of Tibetan cultural and modern aesthetics and genuine partnerships with traders and governments both in Nepal and India and in international platform gave them the finesse required to progress as a community at the same time build their families. Tibetan children receive higher education, are in good health and appear to be leading a decent life. Many local Nepalese living in Boudhhanath area for generations say that Tibetans have major role in changing the economy of Bouddha area. They say that Tibetans brought the strong flavour of Buddhist religion along with them and spread it over Boudhhanath Stupa region. Previously, in their grandfathers' time, there used to be very less economic activities around Boudhhanath stupa. Now, the Stupa has become the major tourist destination. Similarly, in Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi, India and in McLeod Ganj in Dharmshala, the Tibetans introduced new Buddhists ornaments, flags, cultural foods and strong religious beliefs, which provided new set of economic activities for people around their settlements. Just as Bouddha area has transformed rapidly into a Buddhist spot in Kathmandu surrounded with attractive tourism for ornaments, flags, restaurants, hotels, guesthouse, monasteries, Majnu Ka Tilla, gives the same cosmopolitan air of commercial activities accompanied by rigorous spiritual pursuits. In keeping with its growth, the languages in these settlements are: Tibetan, Hindi, English and Nepalese. There are restaurants that have their menu translated into Chinese.

A teenage college-going Tibetan woman talks about the Tibetan people:

> Tibetan people are able to make it well through their hard work. Carpet is the primary source. Besides, Tibetans' changing lifestyle is also being reflected with the changing refugee camp atmosphere. In Jorpati's Khampa Camp, in Nepal the housing structures are changing. In Majnu Ka Tila we have impressive buildings. Many though in their refugee status are able to indulge in building modern houses.

In comparison to the local Nepalese one would find that the Tibetan live better than the local people and it is also our observation that their lifestyle is related to their enterprise and cultural factors. Despite their political status within Nepalese society as refugees they do not lag behind economically and have demonstrated capacity to even employ co-religionists from Nepal and continue to assist Nepal and its economy every way, similar to the outsourcing to the inhabitants of the Punjabi basthi in Delhi.

Conclusion

From this research, it is clear that Tibetans around the world do not know their future nor do they appear unduly worried. Most of them appear resilient and hopeful to see a 'free Tibet' a dream closer to their hearts, someday in the future. Thus, in this research, after examining their deep association between the philosophy of life based on the principles of 'karma' and their everyday economic avocation of weaving 'carpets', we unfold that these people weave their lives around karma and the carpets. Karma embodies their philosophical and spiritual outlook while carpets, mats and paintings symbolise their day-to-day struggles, enterprises to cope, survive, thrive and flourish. Hence, the 'karma carpet' symbolises their journey into the future. However, it is ironical to note that the Tibetans although a refugee group do not enjoy the same rights and

privileges in Nepal, when compared to other refugees living in the world decreed under the United Nations Conventions.

Finally, we wish to end this article with two short quotes. The first one is an excerpt from a poem:

> I have an aim that some day
>
> Our children will stand atop the plateau of a free Tibet
>
> In addition, wash away the ravages the Chinese left behind
>
> (Tsoltim N. Shakabpa – 2011)

The second is a self-explanatory quote from the website of Majnu Ka Tila

It reads:

> The young all have the same dream: to free Tibet. Some quickly forget this dream, convinced that there are some important things to do, like having a family, earning money, career, etc. Others, though, decide that it really is possible to make a difference in society and to shape the Nation we will hand on to future generations.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Revisiting the Marginal Locations of Muslim Women on Various Sites in India

Esita Sur[†]

Abstract

Dominant discourses on Muslim women have revolved around their marginal locations in community as well as in society. It has mainly been subjected to socio-economic and political structures and conditions as well. However, it is worth mentioning that marginality is not only a lived experience but it also has metaphoric dimensions. The state of marginality relates not only to the poor socio-economic status of Muslim women but the politics of representation of their identities like *veiled*, *passive* as well as *meek victims* in various discourses also constructs the core of their marginal location in the larger society. Therefore, the marginalisation of Muslim women seems to be visible in various discourses in India. Briefly, the paper will attempt to comprehend the undercurrents functioning behind the construction of the very concept of marginality and locate Muslim women in popular and academic discourses on marginality.

Key words: Metaphors, Representation, Discourse, Marginality, Muslim Women, India

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Introduction

The question of marginality is far from a novel topic. Moreover, locating the question of Muslim women's[1] marginality in the popular development discourse is not an easy task. The concept of marginality is multidimensional. The Webster dictionary defines 'marginal' pertaining to a margin situated on the border or edge. Marginality can also be defined in terms of social exclusion from a dominant social order and it forms an institutionalised system of material and symbolic exchange. However, marginality is best understood as state or series of situations between social exclusion and social integration (Lovell, 2004). Dominant discourses[2] on Muslim women in India have attempted to define and locate their marginal location in terms of socio-economic backwardness such as lack of education, poverty, lack of employment opportunities and their invisibility in the labour force, etc. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) has highlighted the varied dimensions of marginality of Muslim community (Sachar, 2006). Muslim women as the member of the minority community suffer from all the symptoms of backwardness. However, the popular discourses rarely stereotype Muslim women as 'less educated' or 'unemployed' rather concentrates more on their 'veiled', 'victim' or 'passive' images.

There is no denial of the established fact that the marginal location of Muslim women in the mainstream society has been integrally associated with overall socio-economic backwardness of the community and the policies of the derelict Indian state as well. However, in case of Muslim women, what needs to be argued is that the state of marginality not only constitutes the core of their lived experiences but the very state itself goes through a process of construction involving a wide range of factors and agents in power structures. It becomes possible by constructing a context with deliberation and purpose of creating one's identity. Therefore, the marginal location of Muslim women in our society can also be viewed in the politics of representation of identities and knowledge production. For example, in dominant discourses, metaphors[3] like *talaq*,[4] *hijab* and *burqa*,[5] *fatwa* have played quite significant roles to stereotype their identities as 'passive' 'fragile', and so on. The politics of representation lies in the fact that it is not only Muslim women but women from other communities also lack access to education and employment and are subject to several challenges. Sarkar (2008) argues that Muslim women have already been established discursively as backward and hence incapable of progressive thinking.

[1]Muslim women in India should not be considered as a homogenous entity. Differences in their experiences are shaped by their location in class, region and family as well. Educational attainment and employment opportunities or lack of it, are also important indicators to mould their experiences. Therefore, the issue of heterogeneity needs to be mentioned. However, for the theoretical requirement I am addressing the equality question of Muslim women by considering them as a unitary category.

[2]The category of discourse refers to historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects. Meanings are always dependent upon a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences. The concept of discourse has also been extended to a wider range of social practices and phenomena. Michel Foucault has discussed about the ways discursive practices form the objects and subjects of *discursive formations.* Discourses are thus practices, which systematically form the objects, which we speak. It also raises questions about the historical construction of systems and the exclusion of human subjectivity and agency from the social world (Howarth, 2002).

[3]A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes a subject by asserting that it is, on some point of comparison, the same as another otherwise unrelated object. Metaphor is a type of analogy and is closely related to other rhetorical figures of speech that achieve their effects via association, comparison or resemblance.

[4] Triple *talaq* is a form of divorce, which can take place in one setting by pronouncing *talaq* for three times. This practice is a male monopoly. The holy Quran does not support this but it is a product of male-dominated society.

[5] *Hijab* and *burqa* are two different kinds of clothing that are available to Islamic women. A *hijab* or *hejab* actually refers to the rules of covering up. However, in the usual everyday context, the word is used to refer to a scarf, which covers the head. A *burqa*, on the other hand, is a loose outer garment that covers the whole body head-to-toe.

It is also true that Muslim women's subjugation cannot be understood without referring to the politics of intersectionality[1] of gender, class and community identity. Rather than looking at sameness approach, it is better to recognise the politics of difference. It is also important to understand that Muslim women themselves do not constitute a homogenous group. Their lived experiences vary on grounds of class, educational attainment and regional location, etc. Muslim women like women from other communities, are under-represented in workforce as well as in politics and their educational attainment is also meagre. However, these issues are not solely responsible which attributes difference to their issues. Rather the prevalence of religious patriarchy as well as personal laws contributes largely to the issue of difference. It also shows that intersection of gender, class as well as community not only form their identity but also controls their embeddedness in social structures as well as in relations of power (Sur, 2013).

It is because of the fact that metaphors like *talaq* and *burqa* have been perceived in a negative sense, which signals the victimhood of Muslim women and reinforces their marginality in popular discourses. For example, observing *purdah* or *burqa* has closely been associated with cultural pressure but it may not always be oppressive in nature. The practice may be an expression of cultural identity and a choice too. In the same manner, the practice of triple *talaq* may be relevant for a particular section of the community but in reality, it stigmatises the entire community and projects the victimhood of Muslim women. The reference to the issue of declaring *fatwa*s by religious leaders also portrays the community as conservative especially for women, but the presence of a microscopic liberal progressive section within the community and their voices has hardly received attention in dominant discourses. This sort of representation of identities and bodies of knowledge on Muslim women and the community labels them as marginal and reproduces their victimhood in several discourses. Therefore, this entire process has ignited an enquiry to what extent the marginality question of Muslim women has been constructed by these dominant social forces.

In this venture, rather than addressing the question of rights and gender justice, the essay will try to highlight the complexities inherent in the construction process of the marginality question of Muslim women in India. Hence, the argument of the essay is that gendered marginality not only results from socio-economic and political policies and conditions, but it also exists in various discourses, representations and bodies of knowledge that are being constructed and generated about Muslim women in India. Therefore, the essay will try to locate various posts and discourses where the marginality questions of Muslim women have been constructed.

Community and Marginalisation: On Politics of Representation

Dominant discourses[2] on Muslim community have represented them as homogenous community spelled with a capital C. It not only upholds the ideals of unity and common experience of marginality but has also generated stereotypes. For example, Hindu nationalists have always levelled the community as 'terrorists', 'anti-nationals', 'suspicious' and Muslim males are labelled as 'husbands of four wives' and many of these stereotyping are more political creations and as

[1]Intersectionality seemed ideally suited to the task of exploring how categories of class, community and gender are intertwined and mutually constitutive, giving centrality to questions like how community is 'gendered' and how gender is 'class and community-based', and how both are linked to the continuities and transformations of social structures and cultural discourses (Collins, 2000).

[2]Dominant discourses also include discourse analysis. It incorporates a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic material-speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organisations and institutions—as 'texts' or 'writings' that enable the subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices.

far away from the reality as possible (Shaban, 2012: 19). However, the overall impact of this on the Muslim community is grave. It affects their psyche and confidence to assert their rights (Shaban, 2012). This sort of representation overlooks the fact that Muslims are deeply divided on the lines of caste, class and gender. Even on ideological standpoints, community is divided. Moreover, this homogeneous representation seems to be problematic for Muslim women as well. On the one hand, the hegemonic representation of the community as 'backward' or 'conservative' tends to fix women's identity in larger society; on the other hand, it also overlooks internal conflicts on the women's question within the community. The *conservative, progressive* as well as *fundamentalist* groups within the community have conflicting standpoints on women's rights in Islam. In India, the yardstick of defining an Islamic group or school as *conservative* depends not only on their unwillingness to accept western values but also on their rigid stand to accept women's rights, already guaranteed within the Islamic framework. Moreover, fundamentalists are those who always dodge to change their standpoint on women's rights. Several schools like Jafari, Hanafi, Maliki, Safai'i, Hanbali support men's right to triple *talaq* (*talaq* in one sitting), and polygamy as these are embedded in religion. Conservative interpretations also justify wife beating and impose several restrictions on women in the name of religion. Moreover, their perceptions and interpretations on women's role in society are based on rigid demarcations between men and women. On the contrary, progressiveness of an Islamic group in India cannot be defined in terms of their inclination for western values; rather progressive groups uphold the gender-just nature of Islam, which gives them extra mileage to fight for women's rights. Progressives like late Ashgar Ali Engineer have always argued that women's rights are inherent in Islam but the patriarchal society has taken the rights away from women. Progressive groups have not only relentlessly challenged the conservative interpretations but also exhorted for reinterpretations of the Quranic verses. However, in reality, progressive voices hardly are represented in larger society because the progressive voices constitute a microscopic minority and they do not seem to be lucrative as vote banks for the Indian State. The conservative section of the community is more powerful in terms of its authority and the women question is mainly handled by the conservative sections within the community. It has also been argued that the discursive[1] representation of Muslim women as backward, victimised and silenced, and eventually invisible has undergirded the construction of other identity categories, and the politics of representation is based on difference among women rather than identity as crucial for understanding gender oppression and marginality. It also highlights the ways in which gender and racially defined community and class ideologies worked simultaneously to deny even middle-class Muslim women the limited visibility (Sarkar, 2008). Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon have pointed out that recent interventions on Muslim women in postcolonial India are caught up in misconceptions that usually leave Muslim women invisible. Two sets of misunderstandings seem to plague discussions of Muslim women: the tendency to see Muslims, particularly Muslim women, as a monolithic category; and the overwhelming importance attached to Islam, especially the Muslim personal law in defining Muslim women's status (Menon, 2004). The making of the *category* of Muslim in India has been typically influenced by popular discourses, which are characterised by attitudes prevalent in the larger social milieu about the conservatism and ingrained backwardness of the community. The marginal status of Muslim

[1]Discourse can be defined as entity, which is composed of sequences, signs and relations among objects, subjects and statements. It is the generation of the concept of the conversation within all modalities and contexts. It signifies the totality of codified language used in a given field of intellectual enquiry and of social practice. Therefore, discursive production means the production and prevalence of a particular knowledge by the dominant groups in society.

women has also been closely associated with stereotypes, entrenched by triple *talaq*, multiple marriages and purdah. Such stereotypes in both popular and academic domains are further reinforced by the systematic scholarship and information on the unequal access to resources and opportunities experienced by different groups of women in India today. It is also important to highlight that the stereotyped images of the Muslim community colour the understanding about the community and affect even the policies formulated for them. Stereotypes also cause discrimination in the labour market as well as public and private institutions (Shaban, 2012).

Religion and Culture: Constructing Women's Marginality through Knowledge Production

Muslim community is considered the *community of interpretations*. Being the minority community adds on a huge responsibility on their part to protect identity and culture, and women's identity is not beyond the monopoly of community. Therefore, women's role and status cannot be comprehended through bypassing the purview of religious and cultural discourses. These are the sites, which have been reproducing and reinforcing their marginality within the community through interpretations of the Quranic verses, which ultimately result in knowledge production. This knowledge production is not at all free from the dynamics of power. The essence of patriarchy and the interests of male-dominated society have always shaped women's rights in society (Engineer, 1999). Women's rights in marriage, divorce, property in Islam have been interpreted by different schools like Hanibal, Malikh from different angles. Asghar Ali Engineer said that Islam is an egalitarian religion but the interpretation of verses has subverted Muslim women's rights (Engineer, 1994).

The art of interpretation is not free from the influence of patriarchal society and culture. Certain verses relating to polygamy, triple *talaq*, veiling, and wife beating constitute the core of the Muslim personal law and not free from the politics of interpretations. It is important to take a holistic or 'contextual' approach to the analysis of women's question in Muslim society. It is a way of clarifying the meaning of a text by interpreting it historically, and this method revolves around the text, the author and the context (E.McNabb, 2004).

While discussing about the impact of Muslim personal laws on the lives of Muslim women, it can be illustrated by taking up the question of the polygamy and divorce. It has been said that Muslim men can have wives up to four (Engineer, 2013). However, it is important to say that polygamy has been permitted by the Quran in a concrete social context in order to do justice to the weak and it is subjected to the condition that equality of treatment would be ensured. It is very clear from the wordings of the Prophet on polygamy that in order to ensure justice to the orphans, war-widows Muslim men can have four wives (Ahmed, 2011). Another issue, which constitutes the core of Muslim personal law, is divorce or triple *talaq*. According to a precept of the Prophet, divorce is condemned as the most reprehensible of all things permitted. There is nothing more displeasing to God than divorce. The right to dissolve a marriage is given to the husband as well as to the wife. Women have to observe *iddat*[1] for three months to ascertain paternity. The Quran does not permit any outsider to separate a couple who want to live together even if one of them has a physical defect, though this can be a legitimate cause for divorce. The Quran emphasises that divorce should not be a hasty impulsive act but should be finalised only after a period of waiting during which time the couple is counseled and given a chance to rethink on the decision. *Talaq* is a procedure that can be initiated by the husband alone without the consent of his wife. Besides, the exercise of *talaq* is extra-judicial and in no way subject to external check. Technically, therefore, the power of the husband to divorce is absolute.

[1] *Iddat* has been defined as the waiting period for a widow or divorced. In Shariat terminology, it is the waiting period for a woman when her *nikkah* with a man is no more extant for one reason or the other; the waiting period means that after the cessation of *nikkah* the woman has to restrain herself for another *nikkah* till the prescribed period is over (Engineer, 1994).

Talaq may be pronounced in a number of ways, e.g., (1) *ahsan* (2) *hasan* (3) *bid' ah*.

The *ahsan* form of *talaq* is *talaq-i-sunna*. The repudiation does not take place at a single sitting nor can it take place during menstruation. *Iddat* is observed during the period following menstruation that is *tuhr* or the purity period. Two arbitrators from both sides are appointed to bring about reconciliation. During the *iddah* period the marriage is not dissolved. If reconciliation takes place, the marriage is saved and no *nikkah* is needed. In *ahsan talaq*, even after the third pronouncement of *talaq*, after the *'iddah* period, the marriage is revocable. The man can remarry his divorced wife. This practice is in accordance with the teaching of the Quran and according to *Sunna* Rules. Both Sunni and Shia[1] schools approve of *talaq-a-ahsan*. The *hasan* form is *talaq-a-sunna* but is not as commonly accepted as *talaq-a-ahsan*. The man is supposed to pronounce *talaq* during the successive periods of purity or *tuhr*. A couple can live together as husband and wife if the husband so desires before he pronounces the third *talaq*. On the third talaq*,* the marriage is dissolved and the *talaq* is irrevocable. Therefore, he cannot remarry her. If she wants to remarry, she has to perform *halala*, that is, marry another man, consummate the marriage, consequently dissolve it, and only then remarry her divorced husband. Prophets and Caliph Ali condemn this process of *halala*. All Shia and Sunni schools of thought have approved of *talaq-a-hasan*. Since it is not irrevocable, it is not very popular; yet, the Hanbali Sunni School gives it more importance than to other types of *talaq*. *Talaq-a-bidah* is a form of divorce, which is severely criticised since it goes against the rules laid down by the Quran. However, the Sunna approves it. In this form of *talaq*, the husband unilaterally, without the consent or knowledge of the wife, pronounces *talaq*. Husband can pronounce *talaq* once or three times simultaneously, without paying attention to the fact whether wife is in a state of *tuhr.* The Prophet did clearly not approve of this form of divorce (Baxamusa, 1994).

Apart from this, women's right to inheritance have also been violated in practice. As for property, movable or immovable, generally very few Muslim women work and earn. Islam does not prohibit them from working at all. The Quran allows her to earn. She has the right to own property in her own right. Thus, Islam recognises her individuality and her being as a legal entity. In Islam, there is no concept that she has to confine herself to domestic duties alone. This clearly shows that bringing up children is not her responsibility alone but is a joint one. The husband is equally obliged to arrange for rearing children. However, in traditional society, a man usually expects his wife to confine herself to domestic duties and disapproves of her working in order to earn. It is only in some enlightened families where she is allowed to work. Therefore, the way Islam ensures rights to women and the way it has been interpreted shows huge difference. It is quite clear that the status of women has deteriorated because the legal interpretations have always remained subject to patriarchal influences (Engineer, 1995). Moreover, this art of interpretations has created the core of marginality from within. It is worth mentioning that Muslim women's location in minority community also shapes their experiences. Their minority community identity not only marginalises them within the community but also makes their citizen identity as secondary. Even their access to the government institutions becomes restricted due to their community identity. Therefore, it is not easy to understand their marginality in terms of socio-economic indicators rather power dynamics

[1] Sunni and Shia Islam are the two major denominations of Islam. The demographic breakdown between the two denominations is difficult to assess and varies by source, but a good approximation is that greater than 75% of the world's Muslims are Sunni and 10–20% are Shia, with most Shias belonging to the twelve traditions and the rest divided between several other groups. Sunnis are a majority in most Muslim communities: in Southeast Asia, China, South Asia, Africa, and some of the Arab world. Shia community constitutes the majority of the citizen population in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain, as well as being a politically significant minority in Lebanon. Pakistan has the largest Sunni and second-largest Shia Muslim population in the world (Engineer, 1994).

within the community constructs the marginality question of Muslim women in India.

State and Political Leadership: Constructing Marginality and Muslim as 'Other'

Revisiting the marginal locations of Muslim women will remain incomplete without reviewing the role of the political leadership and the state to construct the marginality of Muslim women as 'other'. The Indian State has always represented its own claim on Muslim women's marginality. Since independence, the Indian State has tried to protect the identity and culture of the minority groups by not intervening into their private domain, especially in personal laws. This is one of the reasons, which has given rise to the self-legislating Muslim community where religious leaders had played a significant role to define Muslim identity. The application of the law is often a complex matter and the interpretation of the Sharia is the monopoly of Ulemas. Through these principal mechanisms, Ulemas and Mullahs maintain control over Islamic society. Here the purpose is not to blame the State but to understand the puzzle for which women fail to access laws and justice and become marginal. This was visible in the case of 73-year-old Shah Bano (1986).[1] While all other Indian women may claim the legal right to spousal support after divorce, Muslim women may not. While other women criminally prosecute their husbands for bigamy, Muslim women may not. According to the Sharia Act, a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a reasonable and fair provision of maintenance within the period of *iddat*; two years of maintenance for her children; *mehr* and all the properties given to her by her relatives, friends' husband and husband's relatives. If she does not get it at the time of divorce then she can apply to the Magistrate to direct her husband to follow the order. In response to this, Shah Bano filed a case against her husband and the Supreme Court granted her appeal for lifelong maintenance from her husband.

Nevertheless, this judgment was not a simple one and rather opened the floodgates of debates and discussions on the tricky relationship between gender, community and the state. In response to the Shah Bano case and the subsequent legislation, Muslim community leaders split broadly into two camps. Conservative leaders considered the judgement as an attack to Muslim identity as well as Muslim personal law. Progressive leaders felt that the Supreme Court judgement was in accordance with the basic tenents of Islam and thus it was not an intrusion in Muslim personal law.

Although they did not agree with everything the judgment said, they supported the substantive conclusion: that Muslim man should provide adequate maintenance for destitute, divorced women beyond the period of *iddat*. Constitutional scholar Granville Austin has argued that conservative opposition was not only imbued with ideological factors but economic and political factors. The judgement, if it stood, threatened not only the sacred text of Islam but economic interests of Muslim men who might otherwise be faced with maintenance payment to ex-wives. Additionally, the political interests of the conservative Muslim leadership were threatened as well. If personal laws were codified, the religious leaders would lose their power to interpret the Quran. To soothe ruffled feelings, the Rajiv Gandhi Government enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, 1986. This bill explicitly excluded Muslim women from the right to maintenance

[1] According to Shariat Act (1937), Muslim women cannot demand lifelong maintenance after *talaq*. It is generally supported on the ground of minority community identity, religion and culture. In 1986, when Shah Bano went to the Supreme Court for demanding her lifelong maintenance, it gave rise to a clash between the collective rights of the community and individual rights and identity. The Supreme Court gave its verdict in favour of Shah Bano. However, Muslim fundamentalists protested this move vehemently on the ground that any change in Shariat Act by the state is against the identity of Muslim community. So the Shah Bano case (1986) shows that women's claim to equal rights is treated as a betrayal to community, the culture and the religion. In addition, the Indian State very consciously institutionalises gender inequality in personal laws on the ground of minority identity and culture (Hasan, 2000).

available under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)[1] (Hasan, 2000).

The government's response to this judgement was also very crucial as it rests on the need to provide protection of minority identity defined in religious and cultural terms. The government argued that it was against imposing a single pattern on all. It also argued in favour of differentiated criteria of citizenship as against universalistic criteria. It is important to mention that differentiated citizenship is mainly concerned with the inter-group equality, not with intra-group equality. That is why it leaves many structures of discrimination untouched. The government also asserted that the impetus for change must come from within the Muslim community. Therefore, the government championed community rights, which gives priority to community's self-defining and self-determining character (Jayal, 2002).

Indian state very deliberately never intervened in the private sphere of minority community. It is not only because of preserving their culture and identity but also for maintaining its own vote bank. It was quite clear in Shah Bano case (1986). The state could not guarantee the right to maintenance after divorce because the Muslim fundamentalists perceived it as an intrusion into their culture and religion. Muslim religious leaders and ulemas issued a *fatwa* (proclamation) that guaranteeing maintenance right was against the teachings of Islam. Within few months, the whole issue took the form of communal agitation claiming that Islam was in danger. Modern Indian State intervened in the religion of the majority community through Hindu Code Bill[2] but it has never intervened in the religion of minority. There are two problems behind this issue. First, the Indian interpretation of secularism based on which Indian State devised policies premises on a 'principled distance' between the government and religion. Second is the conflict between the claims of cultural communities and women's rights of equal citizenship. The State never tried to reform Muslim personal law for guaranteeing citizenship rights to all communities but the political leadership realised that respecting religious sensibilities was more important.

In postcolonial India, the role of the state to create minority identity is unavoidable. The State did this not only by maintaining a 'principled distance' from minorities but also by refusing to intervene in the domain of personal law. The modern state has become the institution through which personal laws have to be negotiated and gender has become the site on which they were negotiated. In the 1980s, the State had an important role in cementing a particular perception of the Muslim community as inherently conservative, resistant to reform and oppressive of women's rights by accepting the conservative position on this issue. The progressive interpretation would have granted greater rights of maintenance to Indian Muslim women within the framework of Islam. In this case, the role of the State was critical in sanctioning one set of views as representing the view of all, even the most Indian Muslims. In addition, far from protecting and enabling the

[1]The Code of Criminal Procedure is the main legislation on procedure for administration of substantive criminal law in India. It was enacted in 1973 and came into force on 1 April 1974. It provides the machinery for the investigation of crime, apprehension of suspected criminals, collection of evidence, determination of guilt or innocence of the accused person and the determination of punishment of the guilty. Additionally, it also deals with public nuisance, prevention of offences and maintenance of wife, child(ren) and parents (Hasan, 2000).

[2]Following India's independence in 1947, the postcolonial government led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru completed the codification and reform of Hindu personal law, a process started by the British. According to the British policy of non-interference, reform of personal law should have arisen from a demand from the Hindu community. This was not the case, as there was significant opposition from various Hindu politicians, organisations and devotees who saw themselves unjustly singled out as the sole religious community whose laws were to be reformed. However, the Nehru administration saw such codification as necessary in order to unify the Hindu community, which ideally would be a first step towards unifying the nation. They succeeded in passing four Hindu code bills in 1955–56: the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act. These continue to be controversial to the present day among women's organisations, religious, and nationalist groups (Hasan, 2000).

dissident, vulnerable voices within the Muslim community, the state sanctioned and authorised the voices of and an androcentric interpretation of the Muslim personal law of maintenance. Instead of responding to the socio-economic marginality of Muslim community, the state has constructed its own version of marginality for Muslim women.

Not only the state, but also the role of women's movement towards Muslim women's issues like triple talaq, polygamy as well as burqa has remained crucial in post-independence India. If the 1970s and 1980s were an age of exploration, the 1990s was an age of doubt and reflection. The political polarisation over Mandal-Masjid unsettled the discursive context within which questions of women's rights and gender equality had been formulated. The evidence of upper-caste and middle-class women's opposition to affirmative action for disadvantaged castes came as evidence of the caste-class figures among women and was a challenge to the political possibilities of a singular feminist gender-speak (Banerjee et al., 2011). After 1980s, the question of Muslim women's identity and difference became very significant with the Shah Bano case. This is the case, which ultimately resulted in the victory of Muslim personal law, and made the connection between women and religious personal laws very significant. In fact, this case further escalated one of the major demands by women's movement, that is, Uniform Civil Code to replace the religion-based personal laws, which govern issues of family, that is, marriage, divorce, property inheritance custody and guardianship of children. The judgment was widely criticised by feminists, liberals as well as secularists on the simple ground that it violates women's rights. Where Muslim religious leader found the judgment as an intrusion into their community as well as an attack to their identity, Muslim liberals, feminists and social reformers began campaigns all over India. They were in favour of upholding of section 125[1] and demanded improvements in the legal rights of Muslim women against polygamy and to maintenance. During this time, the autonomous women's groups came together to organise a demonstration, demanding that a uniform civil code must be framed.

Conclusion

The essay in conclusion highlights that the state of marginality is not only embedded in socio-economic conditions but also in their representation of identities in several discourses and bodies of knowledge. It can be generated either by the state institutions or by the religious authority of the community, which ultimately results in producing discourses on marginality of Muslim women. The dominant instrument of alienating Muslims from mainstream Indian society and the majority community is through the construction of the 'other'. This politics behind the representation of 'other' constructs their identity, which ultimately affects the 'equity' issues. The discrimination in and exclusion from government-run welfare programmes for employment and political representation, in effect, has led to the collective alienation and deprivation of the community. This, at the end of the day, influences the status of Muslim women at socio-economic level as well as at various sites including discourses and bodies of knowledge. Therefore, it is important to mention Muslim women's marginality is not only socio-economic but also discursive and it cannot be understood without the comprehending the politics of intersections of gender, religion, class and community in India. Therefore, structures as well as discourses shape Muslim women's experiences of marginality in our society.

[1] Under section 125 CrPC, every woman can claim to maintenance and it applies to all religions, castes and creeds. Maintenance can also be claimed under the respective personal laws of people following different faiths and proceedings under such personal laws are civil in nature. The issue of maintenance became debatable in Shah Bano case (1986) in which the Supreme Court tried to uphold section 125 but the government could not materialise verdict of the court due to vociferous opposition from the minority community.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Women, Environment and Sustainable Development: A Case Study of *Khul Gad* Micro Watershed of Kumoun Himalaya

Dr Suman Singh [†]

Abstract

Women in the marginal areas of Uttarakhand have always played and continue to play a significant role in managing and operating most of the household and agricultural activities. They are the main subsistence provider in the hills and considered the backbone of hill agriculture. Their lives are intrinsically related to land, water, forest, which are the main components and integral parts of an eco-system. An adverse effect on any one of these components disturbs the other components due to strong linkages and interrelationship with each other and creates havoc on the life of people, especially women in the region. However, in recent years, environmental degradation, poor resource management and increased migration of men to the plains have deteriorated the livelihood options and added more workload to women of the region. The sufferings of the communities in these hilly areas are gradually increasing and their standard of living is declining because they have been neglected at both policy and practice levels by the government. The nexus between women, environment degradation and poverty are poorly understood and rarely treated in an integrated way. Therefore, the key objective of the present paper is to analyse the work participation of women operating at different sub-systems, impact of environmental degradation and role of women in sustaining the traditional agro-ecosystem in *Khul Gad* micro-watershed of Kumoun Himalaya.

Key words: Kumoun Himalaya, environment, sustainable development, questionnaire survey, women, Uttarakhand

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Introduction

A considerable amount of literature all over the world have established that women are involved in agricultural activities alongside other domestic works (Boserup, 1970; Momsen, 1991; Sarma, 2009; also, Bhattacharyya et al., 2010; Bhattacharyya et al., 2011; Bhattacharyya and Vauquline, 2013). Data provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 1999 revealed that in developed countries, women's contribution to agricultural labour force was 30.7 per cent while for developing countries it was 43.6 per cent. This high work-participation rate of women in the labour force is determined by the nature of the economy of the area (FAO, 2011; Elborgh-Woytek, 2013). Though there are enough literatures that focus on the importance and contribution of Indian women to both agricultural and household activities (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Bhattacharyya et al., 2010, 2011; Bhattacharyya and Vauquline, 2013; Sen Gupta, 1969; Desai and Krishnaraj, 1987; Biswas, 1990; Samal, 1993), yet, the information regarding the role of hill women in central Himalayan region is lacking in terms of its functioning at different sub-system levels of development (Pokhriyal, 1994; Tyagi, 2006).

Therefore, one of the key objectives of this paper is to analyse the work participation of the women of the marginal areas of *Khul Gad* micro-watershed, Kumoun Himalaya region of Uttarakhand, operating at different sub-systems—impact of environmental degradation and the role of women in sustaining the traditional agro-ecosystem. The paper begins by outlining the workforce participation of women in Uttarakhand. Following this, I draw a sketch of the area where this research was undertaken. This follows a description of the methodological issues. Then I go on to discuss the findings of the study area where women, especially a daughter-in-law, remain the nucleus of the household followed by a discussion of the conservation and management of the hill ecosystem in the light of the *Chipko* movement. Then I discuss a 'way forward', where I argue that the relationship between women, environment and poverty needs to be better understood at the policy level and thereby, this nexus should be treated in an integrated way.

Workforce Participation of Women in Uttarakhand

The women in the study area play a predominent role in operating and managing most agricultural and household activities (such as working in the agricultural fields, cattle care, fuelwood, fodder and water collection, including cooking and childcare) and therefore, they are considered as the backbone of agricultural and domestic pursuits. Their lives are primarily related to land, water, forest, which are the main components and integral parts of an ecosystem (FAO, 1999, 2011; also Pokhriyal, 1994; Tyagi, 2006). Degradation of these resources, in turn, has a disproportionate effect on women. The notion of the *Himalayan Dilemma*[1] by Ives and Messerli (1989) is regarded as a major geographical contribution to the theory of the Himalayan environmental degradation. It refers to "deforestation, land sliding, and large-scale downstream flooding, coupled with statements about uncontrolled population growth, increasing poverty, and malnutrition. These processes physical, human, socioeconomic, and political—are frequently linked together into a gigantic cause-and-effect drama which is claimed to be pushing both the Himalaya and the northern plains of the Indian subcontinent to the brink of environmental and socio-economic collapse" (Ives and Messerli, 1989: 15). By meticulous examination of the disturbing symptoms of environmental degradation, Ives and Messerli (1989) conclude that the central causes of the Himalayan Dilemma are not solely environmental rather it attributes to socio-economic and political factors. The Himalayan Tsunami of June 2013 that damaged the eco-sensitive areas of Uttarakhand: Sonaprayag, the *Char Dham* areas of Gangotri, Yamnotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath by triggering flash floods and land-

[1] Himalayan Dilemma by Ives and Messerli (1989) is the basis of the widely supported prediction that the Himalayan region is inevitably drifting into a situation of environmental supercrisis and collapse, a process of thought to which we refer as the theory of Himalayan environmental degradation.

slides, and leading to hundreds of deaths, while hundreds more were missing (Agarwal, 2013). This tsunami can be referred to as an offshoot of the Himalayan Dilemma, which is mainly man-made, albeit partly environmental. Therefore, it can be argued that the notion of the Himalayan Dilemma can further push the debate on maintaining an ecological balance in this sub-Himalayan region by bringing home the centrality of the environmental role of the women, both as cause and consequence of the environmental degradation as well as agency of environmental protection and regeneration.

In a slightly different context, feminists like Vandana Shiva argue that there is an intimate link between women and nature in contemporary society for women are identified as being close to nature (*prakriti*) and men as close to culture (*sanskriti*). As nature is seen inferior to culture so women are seen as inferiors to men (Shiva, 1988). This research however does not engage the debate of inferiority and superiority between men and women. Nevertheless, Vandana Shiva is one of the first feminists from India who embraced and intertwined both the principles of feminism and ecology by protesting against the continued ecological disaster. She was one of the first women to be involved with the *Chipko* movement. The term *Chipko* in Hindi means 'to hug'— a movement to save the ecology of the Himalayas through preservation of the forests, and thereby, balances the sub-Himalayan ecosystem. Notwithstanding, the research aims to study the women's activities and its impact on environment and the ways to sustain development in *Khul Gad* micro watershed of the Kumoun Himalaya.

It is in the said context, the research unravels that there is a massive male out-migration in Uttarakhand due to lack of farm activities. In the past, male migration was mainly during the seasonal forest-felling operation but over the years, after attaining the required educational qualification, most men migrate to Almora, Haldwani and Nainital for regular employment. Currently, it is the case that most families send their male child(ren) for better education to the towns. Hence, the entire agriculture and household burden falls upon the women. The 2011 Census of India (provisional) does record fairly high female work-participation rates (WPR) in various districts of Uttarakhand (see also, Table 1, which is based on 2008 data of Government of Uttarakhand).

Table 1: Female Work Participation Rates in Districts of Uttarakhand, 2008 (%)

Districts	Female Work Participation Rates
Almora	49.6
Pithoragarh	49.5
Uttarkashi	49.2
Chamoli	47.7
Tehari- Garhwal	46.2
Garhwal	44.8
Nainital	22.6
Dehradun	24.8

Source: **GoU, 2008, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Planning Department, the Government of Uttarakhand (accessed 15 July 2013)**

However, the Census of India considers women as marginal workers. These women in no way work less than their professional counterparts: their primary activity is agricultural work and not domestic work. On an average, these hill women work 15-16 hours a day. Their tasks include weeding, harvesting, home gardening, livestock and poultry rearing, and fuel and water collection. However, these activities are not considered as 'economic activities', and are therefore excluded from the labour force surveys (Momsen, 1991). What is even more pathetic is that these women although unpaid are the main workers and work full-time but are still considered as marginal workers (Sarma, 2009). In the said context, Venkateswaran (1992) stated that in Indian Himalayas, a pair of bullock works 1,064 hours, a man 1,212 hours and a woman 3,485 hours in a year on a hectare farm. Yet sadly, these women are officially perceived and recorded as only 'family helpers', and not as economic contributors to agricultural products and productivity (Momsen, 1991; Sarma, 2009; Shahzad, 2004).

Study Area: A Prologue

The study area, *Khul Gad* watershed ($29^0$34'30.20''–$29^0$38'48.03''N latitude and $79^0$32'20.71''–$79^0$37'11.19''E longitude), which consists of 28 revenue villages, lies 25 kms west of the Almora town in the Hawalbagh Devel-

opment Block of Almora district in the Uttarakhand. Khulgad is a tributary of the river Kosi, which joins the western Ramganga in the plains of Uttar Pradesh. Its peculiar spatial location has been one of the negative factors in the matter of development planning. Even otherwise, the area has been greatly exposed to the natural processes of slope insatiability and soil-erosion. Out of the total population, 68.23 per cent people are literates and the percentage of male and female literacy is 55.11 per cent and 44.59 per cent respectively. It is interesting to note that significant population of the study area, that is, 30.59 per cent of the total population is Scheduled Caste.[1]

Methods

In this research, I use Women in Development (WID) approach to examine the hilly women's contribution to everyday activities. The origin of WID dates back to the 1970s, when a network of female professional developments in Washington coined it. In 1970, Ester Boserup evaluated this debate based on the division of work between men and women and recognised that women's activities are largely unpaid and therefore, remains unrecognised in economic development. In short, this approach focuses on increasing women's independence and their empowerment. This debate resurfaced the argument among feminists and other scholars that women's both domestic and paid activities must be considered to have contributed towards the national economy (Boserup, 1970). Taking this argument, the findings from our village-based questionnaire survey in 505 households show that although hilly women of the study region bear the brunt of household and agricultural activities, as mentioned above, they are still considered as marginal workers by the Census of India and other labour force survey and hence, their activities are not considered as 'economic' (Momsen, 1991). In the following section, I discuss the findings from the field survey.

[1] The Constitution of India recognises Scheduled Caste as a marginalised group of peoples, who are both economically and socially backward (Bhattacharyya, 2009, 2013).

Findings from the Field Survey

The notable demographic feature of the surveyed villages, which is related to the migration phenomenon, is the seemingly progressive sex ratio (Table 2). The total population of the watershed is 2,572, consisting of 1238 males and 1334 females, that is, the female accounts for 51.87 per cent of the total population. The females exceeded the male only in the age group 15-59 years, whereas the male outnumbered the females in 0-5 years and 60 and above age groups. This corroborates with our observation that in all villages, the male members are either children or the aged, implying that the whole household responsibility, including caring for the children and the aged, lies on the women. Overall, the occupational structure presents a murky picture. The percentage of total worker and non-workers is 48.55 per cent and 51.45 per cent respectively. In terms of total workers, the percentage of the main workers is 31.22 per cent and marginal workers are 68.78 per cent. Out of the total main workers, 79.03 per cent are engaged in cultivation while 20.97 per cent are engaged in other activities. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of workers engaged in household industries is nil. While in the case of females, the work participation rates are computed as 52.07 per cent (Table 3), which is almost double when compared to the female work participation rate at national average, which stands at 25.6 per cent.

Out of the total female workers, the main and marginal workers constitute 27.24 per cent and 72.76 per cent respectively—that the proportion of female marginal workers are much higher than the main workers could be due to the technical definition of the Census of India. However, from our research, we witnessed that on an average these hilly women worked for more hours than their male counterparts did.

Women: The Nucleus of the Hill Society

As stated elsewhere, women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies of all regions of the world. However, the exact contribution both in terms of the magnitude and the nature of the work is often difficult to assess and shows a high degree of

variation across countries and regions. Likewise, in the study area too, women equally share the bread-earning responsibility of the family and work shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk in various agricultural and animal husbandry operations in everyday life. Both the activities necessitate a high degree of involvement of human power. In other words, women are the main subsistence provider in the area and their participation was found in almost all the rural occupations. However, I repeat again that their everyday hard work both as farmers and as homemakers remain invisible with no rights over their agricultural lands.

Most male members of the households have migrated elsewhere in search of livelihood because the local economy scarcely offered any work opportunity outside the subsistence farming, and the only opening was to venture out into the plains. While this trend has increased manifold in the last five decades, the nature of the hill economy remains the same, and still maintains the conventional gender-based divisions of labour. Based on the field survey 2013, Table 4 presents women's contribution in various activities: women are engaged in 86 per cent of agricultural activities; 84 per cent in

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of *Khul Gad* Watershed

Villages	Households	Total Population	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Literacy (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Batgal Routela	35	162	74	88	1189	61.11	55.56	44.44
Adhar Muafi	12	60	28	32	1143	60.01	52.78	47.22
Bimola	104	534	276	258	935	70.97	59.1	40.9
Jyoli	104	495	227	268	1181	58.85	63.06	36.94
Khunt	79	467	232	235	1013	60.81	59.86	40.14
Naula	78	349	154	195	1266	64.76	47.79	52.21
Salla Rautela	93	505	247	258	957	77.62	54.08	45.92
Total	**505**	**2572**	**1238**	**1334**	**1077**	**68.23**	**55.11**	**44.59**

Source: Field Investigators Survey, June 2013

Table 3: *Khul Gad* Watershed: Female Occupational Structure (in percentages)

Villages	Total Worker	Main Worker	Marginal Worker	Non Worker
Batgal Routela	58.06	21.6	78.4	41.94
Adhar Muafi	56.82	33.8	66.2	43.18
Bimola	54.57	44.3	55.7	45.43
Jyoli	51.97	22.1	77.9	48.03
Khunt	49.75	24.8	75.2	50.25
Naula	57.45	14.8	85.2	42.55
Salla Rautela	53.41	37.9	62.1	46.59
Total	**52.07**	**27.24**	**72.76**	**47.93**

Source: Field Investigators Survey, June 2013

Table 4: Women's Contribution in Various Activities in *Khul Gad* Watershed (%)

Activities	Women's contribution
Agriculture	85.7
Cattle care	83.5
Fuel-wood collection	90.6
Fodder collection	94.7
Water collection	90.8
Cooking	96.9
Child care	95.0

Source: Field Investigators Survey, June 2013

cattle rearing; 91 and 95 percent respectively in fuel and fodder collections; while 91 per cent are engaged in water collection, and 97 and 95 per cent are respectively engaged in cooking and childcare. However, the struggle for survival has become more difficult for those households, where the women receive no remittance from the migrant male members of the family. Our findings thus unfold that women perform the bulk of the activities in the precarious mountain where they are engaged in the aforementioned activities from dawn to dusk (Table 4). This finding is similar to the studies made elsewhere by Bhattacharyya et al., (2010), Bhattacharyya et al. (2011) Bhattacharyya and Vauquline (2013) and Sharma (2008). Detailed analysis of the everyday work and the different activities performed by the women and the time devoted towards each activity has been made to unpack the extent of everyday drudgery in a difficult hilly environment. When their routine work were cross-tabulated with independent variables such as caste, religion, class, head of household, male and female, we did not find any significant differences rather these activities depended on the social status of these women, that is, daughter(s), daughter(s)-in-law, or a mother in law. In other words, one can say that the marital status of a woman play an important role in the amount of work she does. This finding bears resonance to the study conducted by Bhattacharyya (2009; 2013) on the changing status of middle class Assamese women in Assam. Table 5 illustrates the average time spent on daily activities by the family members of the study area.

It is apparent from the findings (Table 5) that a man works only 9.5 hours in a day, where he spends most of his time in paid activities. He does not perform any agricultural activities except for ploughing. A plough is a large farming tool, which is pulled across the soil to turn it over usually before the seeds are planted, and in the study area, there is a common belief that only the men are supposed to plough the field. This is the only heavy work that a man of the house usually performs and that too occasionally. Notwithstanding, on an average, a daughter spends 8 hours performing mostly lighter household tasks like cutting vegetables, cleaning pots and sometimes even (and whenever needed) fetches water and collects fuel-woods, while a daughter-in-law works 16 hours a day with only one hour of leisure. Their everyday tasks mainly involve carrying out all the backbreaking heavy work—mostly fetching water, fuel-wood and fodder alongside other agricultural activities. These findings support the previous findings of Momsen (1991). They work for longer hours than their mothers-in-law do and unmarried girls, these findings again bear resonance to the studies made by Bhattacharyya (2009; 2013).

Mothers-in-law in the study area usually enjoy all the privilege and perform much lighter tasks. However, in the absence of a daughter-in-law, she needs to engage in activities like collection of fuel, fodder and even work in the agricultural field(s). Otherwise, the work of mother-in-law remains confined to the kitchen garden, taking care of her grandchildren and distribution of food within the household.

In the study area due to rapid exhaustion of forest, everyday women have to travel approximately 9 to 10 kms in search of water, fuel, fodder and for various other minor forest products. Thus, from our findings, one can say that a woman covers a distance of 3,250 to 3,750 kms in a year. Therefore, in these traditional peasant communities, there used to be a common perception that *ghass lakdi ka sukh*, that is, 'biomass reward' (which literally means easy availability of livelihood resources),

and this was considered as one of the key factors while finding suitable grooms for their daughters. However, today the parents of a daughter search for a groom who has a service or a white collar or a green collar job.

Table 5: Average Time Spent (in hours) on Daily Activities by the Family Members in Khul Gad Watershed

Activities	Man	Mother-In-law	Daughter	Daughter-In- law
Daily household tasks and care activities	0.5	2.0	2.5	5.0
Animal husbandry	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.5
Collection/ fetching activities	-	-	3.0	6.0
Agricultural/ on-farm activities	-	2.5	-	2.5
Work in paid activities	8.0	-	-	-
Visit to market places and gossiping	2.0	-	1.5	-
Leisure activities	5.5	3.0	4.0	1.0
Total time	**17.0**	**8.5**	**12.0**	**17.0**
Time excluding leisure and visit to market place and gossiping	9.5	5.5	8.0	16.0

Source: Field Investigators Survey, June 2013

Understanding the Linkages between Women, Environment and Sustainable Development

Women play a vital role in the conservation and management of sustainable eco-system in the region. Since time immemorial, women are traditionally involved in protecting and conserving their natural resources in these mountain areas. As stated above, it is pertinent to note that the study area has provided the most interesting case study for documenting the relationship between the rural women and natural resource endowment, in the process of the popular *Chipko* movement for the protection of forests and forest-based ecology. It is also relevant to note that the local women, the major victims of the destruction of the forests and forest-based ecology of the region, mainly led the movement.

The Chipko movement, which was launched in 1971 by the local people under the leadership of Mr. Chandi Prasad Bhatt of Dashauli Gram Swaraja Sangh (DGSS) in the Garhwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand, aimed at growing awareness towards rapid deforestation (Guha, 2000, 2002; Routledge, 1993; Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, 1986). This movement practiced the Gandhian methods of Satyagraha and non-violent re-sistance, through the act of hugging trees to protect them from being felled. This movement is, primarily a livelihood protection movement rather than a forest conservation movement. However, 26 March 1974 is a historical day for the *Chipko* movement: on this day, in a small village of Reni in Uttarakhand, women were alone, as all the men had gone for work. Taking advantage of the absence of men, the forest officials accompanied by labourers came to chop the trees (Guha, 2000, 2002; Routledge, 1993; Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, 1986). However, Srimati Gaura Devi gathered 27 women and young girls—all stood in front of the trees that had been marked for felling, and addressed the forest officials and lumbermen, “Brothers! the forests are our maternal home and the source of our livelihood also. If you destroy it, the mountain will come tumbling down onto our village” (see, Küchli, 1999: 13; Agarwal, 2013; also read Sharma, 2013).

Srimati Gaura Devi continued to stand before these officials and said, "This forest nurtures us like a mother; you will only be able to use your axes on it if you shoot me first" (see, Küchli, 1999: 13; Agarwal, 2013). All these women under the leadership of Srimati Gaura Devi stood vigilant for three days and nights to prevent the lumbermen from felling the trees. This led all the officials and labourers to relent and go away because they had failed to reckon the ‘women power’. This was indeed a historic victory of the *Chipko* movement. After this landmark incident, the government of Uttar Pradesh passed a legislation, which banned felling of trees for commercial exploitation within 1200 sq. km of the river catchment. Notwithstanding, a considerable research and documentation activities, generated by the movement, contributed significantly to redefine the issues of women and

environment, and the debates and discourse on the subject. It has been realised even at the policy level, both nationally and internationally (e.g., the United Nations) that deterioration in the natural environment has a direct impact on women's lives, but women have traditionally been excluded from the decision-making process governing environmental resource exploitations. It has thus been recognised that involving women in the decision-making process in the planning of natural resources use, protection and generation will yield double dividends; it will improve their status and ensure that such schemes will lead towards sustainable development.

The Way Ahead

Women continue to play a crucial role in mountain societies as a very significant proportion of the work force in food production (FAO, 2011) and as key players in managing and sustaining their natural resources and environment. As stated above, over the years, poverty, increasing population and inappropriate development interventions in the Himalayas has led to adverse effects on the environment, although according to Ives and Messerli (1989), the deleterious effects are socio-economic and political rather than environmental. Nonetheless, this Himalyan Dilemma indeed calls for greater attention: perhaps "a long-term approach, based on defining multiple solutions in which uncertainty is likely to be a continuing reality. This, they [Ives and Messerli (1989)] argue, will require fundamentally new and different thinking about the development of the region and the critical role of the indigenous subsistence farmer. They [Ives and Messerli (1989)] argue cogently for the kind of policies and programmes that are sensitively attuned to, and supportive of, these people who are the prime actors at the interface of the man-nature relationship on which the region's future depends" (Ives and Messerli, 1989: 4).

In the said context, I argue that gradually in the study area, the contribution of women in natural resource management are being recognised but still special attention must be given in order to make them an equal partner in the policy framing or in program implementation. Here, I would like to mention about one Mahila Mangal Dal presently working in the study area under the guidance of Srimati Manju Kunjwal. Her husband died in 1962 in the Indo-China war, after which she returned to her native village and started working for environment conservation and women's livelihood security and their rights. She developed a large group of women from 17 villages and started plantation on the community lands and uncultivable wastelands. After few years, they developed their own forest in order to fulfil their requirement of fuel and fodder. From their practical experiences and managerial skills, they have acquired immense knowledge of the various types of plants, grass, medicinal plants, kind of fuel wood and various species of fodder plants. They always preferred a mixed forest, which can meet their demands of fuel, fodder, fruits and food as well as maintain the bio-diversity of the mountains. They are perfect in making an optimum use and conservation of natural resources.

Thus, the long association of women with environment is being gradually utilised in the process of solving major environmental problems, by using their traditionally acquired skills and integrating them with scientifically studied and developed techniques. Women are now seen as the solution of the development-environment crisis—as major assets to be harnessed in initiatives to conserve resources and as fixers of ecological problems (Pati, 2000). In this context, women have several roles to play: producers, users, consumers and administrators of water, energy, agricultural products, and natural resources; and as educators of their children, through whom they can encourage rational and farsighted attitudes towards food, water and energy consumption.

Today, various major forest acts and environment policies are being formulated but hardly any attention and recognition has been given to these women groups. Especial efforts are needed to strengthen and promote these

women groups at grassroots level. We should accelerate our efforts not only at policy level to pressurise the Government to include women's participation in decision making but also promote environmental education and activism at local level. Thus, the perfect ecosystem can be maintained only when women will be recognised as the manager of eco-system in the region because the inter-relationship of land, water, forest, and animals can be best understood only by women in a broader and more holistic way than anyone else.

Further, environmental education and activism are the priority areas where women should be given opportunities to enhance their capabilities. Women have less opportunities of exposure to new ideas and technologies, thus a movement to empower women must become a major focus of any policy and development programmes. Women's views, opinion, their needs, problems and priorities must be addressed in the national and international agenda. The successful and innovative efforts of women in every region must be highlighted to sensitise the planners and policy makers. The learning of these successful case studies, indigenous knowledge of women must be incorporated in the sustainable development programmes. As women have deep relationship with all the components of the ecosystem, they should be given opportunity to participate in the village eco-system planning trainings (Tyagi, 2006).

Conclusion

This research adopted the WID approach. I thereby urge that women's unpaid activities must be counted for in the official statistics. In addition, I urge that the role of hill women needs to be certified in various programme that improve their capacities in addressing the issues pertinent to rural development and village ecosystem management. However, a woman is not fully considered as a potential human resource, and has been marginalised in terms of benefits from the development policies and programmes. Any type of technological and economic reformation will not be successful until the effective involvement and the active participation of women are not attained in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of any agricultural development strategy. There are two important facets of agricultural development strategy: first, appropriate farm technology must be identified and developed with the effective participation of women, then the phenomenon of environmental sustainability will automatically emerge. Second, to provide the institutional incentives and generate the socio-political efficacy to the rural women, which will lead to the improvement in the efficiency of the women work force (Pokhriyal, 1994).

In addition, it is important to enhance the social security of these women by setting up processing industries and management of natural resources, cultivation of medicinal plants, etc. that can increase employment opportunities both for men and women in this region. This might reduce the migration of the men folk.

Nevertheless, I reiterate again that the female of the hilly region of the country are not marginal workers rather they are the main workers. Unfortunately, these women do not possess the status of farmer. If these women are given the status of farmer, they will get their right over their respective lands, which will go a long way in empowering them and improving their status. Nonetheless, in the midst of all these worries, a hill woman remains firmly devoted to her work, keeps her composure and are simply honest.

About the Author

Dr. Suman Singh obtained her M.A. in 1996 and Ph.D in 2000 from Banaras Hindu University. She now teaches at the Department of Geography, Banaras Hindu University. She has completed two research projects: one as a Co-Principle Investigator, Department of Science and Technology project titled "Community Participation in Natural Resources Management in Chopan Block of District Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh" and the other, a University Grants Commission project entitled "Participatory Integrated Watershed

Management for Rudra Gad and Gadmola Gad of Garhwal District, Uttrakhand". She is also a Principle Investigator of a UGC Sponsored project, entitled "Evolving Women's Participation for Integrated Area Development of Khul Gad Micro-Watershed, Kumaon Himalaya, Uttrakhand". She visited Bhutan and Japan for international conferences and has published several articles in national and international journals.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Drinking Water in Guwahati City: Its Past, Present Status and Associated Problems

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Abstract

Guwahati is one of the fastest growing cities of Northeast India. The haphazard growth of the city has resulted in a chaotic situation, giving rise to circumstances not favourable to its residents in many aspects. Amongst these, drinking water is the most crucial problem confronting the residents. In this paper, an attempt has been made to assess the availability of drinking water over a period of time in the city. In addition, it also attempts to understand the challenges of drinking water availability at present. Apart from consultation of secondary sources like archival data, local municipality body, primary data has been collected from three selected municipality wards based on their core, periphery and midpoint locations among the 60 wards of the city.

Key words: drinking water, availability, Guwahati, Assam

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Introduction

Throughout history, civilisations have thrived in regions of abundant availability of water resources. Historical evidence shows that during the Roman civilisation, issues like purity of water, turbidity, groundwater, slope of aqueducts, pipes, wells, etc. were points of discourse of the urban water supply systems (Biswas, 1985). History further tells us that in many kingdoms man-made ponds were dug out to serve the needs of water. Even in Assam too, the Ahom kings (1228-1826) dug out ponds, especially in eastern and central Assam, which served the purpose of drinking water and water for ritualistic purposes. Care was taken to maintain the hygienic aspects of water in such lakes and ponds. Apart from it, 'wet point' locations of the villages or townships on the bank of rivers/streams also served the need of drinking water along with a navigable medium for movement of men and materials. However, with increased population and associated pressure on resources led to over-exploitation of water resources and water scarcity, which have become a nightmare to a huge section of population all over the globe, more specially in the developing countries (Borah, 2013). In similar context, the all-India scenario of drinking water supply continues to be deficient (Ghosh Mitra, 2010; Mckenzie and Ray, 2005; 2009; Vishwanath, 2013).[1] "No Indian city receives piped water 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."[2] According to WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation, in 2011, 92 per cent of the total population of India had access to improved source of water (96%-urban/89%-rural).[3] However, the water supply systems in most cities of India are poorly operated with weak infrastructure and poor resource management (Ananthakrishnan, 2007; Ghosh Mitra, 2010; Mckenzie and Ray, 2005; 2009; Vishwanath, 2013) and the city of Guwahati is no exception (Borah, 2013).

Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, is located on the crescent-shaped south bank of the river Brahmaputra, in the Kamrup Metropolitan District (Fig 1). The foothills of the Shillong plateau lies to its south, with LGB International Airport to the west and town of Narengi to the east. The core of the city is surrounded by hillocks of varying altitude between 100 to 300 meters. The average altitude of the city is 54 meters from the mean sea level. The city extends from 26.5/N to 26.12/ N latitude and 91.24/E to 91.51/E longitude. The stretch of the river Brahmaputra within the city area is 12.78 km. The river has been satisfying the basic needs of the people being the only major source of water, mode of riverine transportation and add-on scenic constituents. Guwahati city experiences mild subtropical climate. The average rainfall at Guwahati is 2272.37 mm and about 90 per cent of it occurs between May and September. In the following section, we draw a brief background on the drinking water availability in Guwahati.

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Brief Background

In Assam, availability of drinking water began to hit the people hard more specially in the urban areas due to rapid increase of population and unreliable nature of public water supply in most cities (Ananthakrishnan, 2007; Ghosh Mitra, 2010; Mckenzie and Ray, 2005; 2009; Vishwanath, 2013) including Guwahati, people

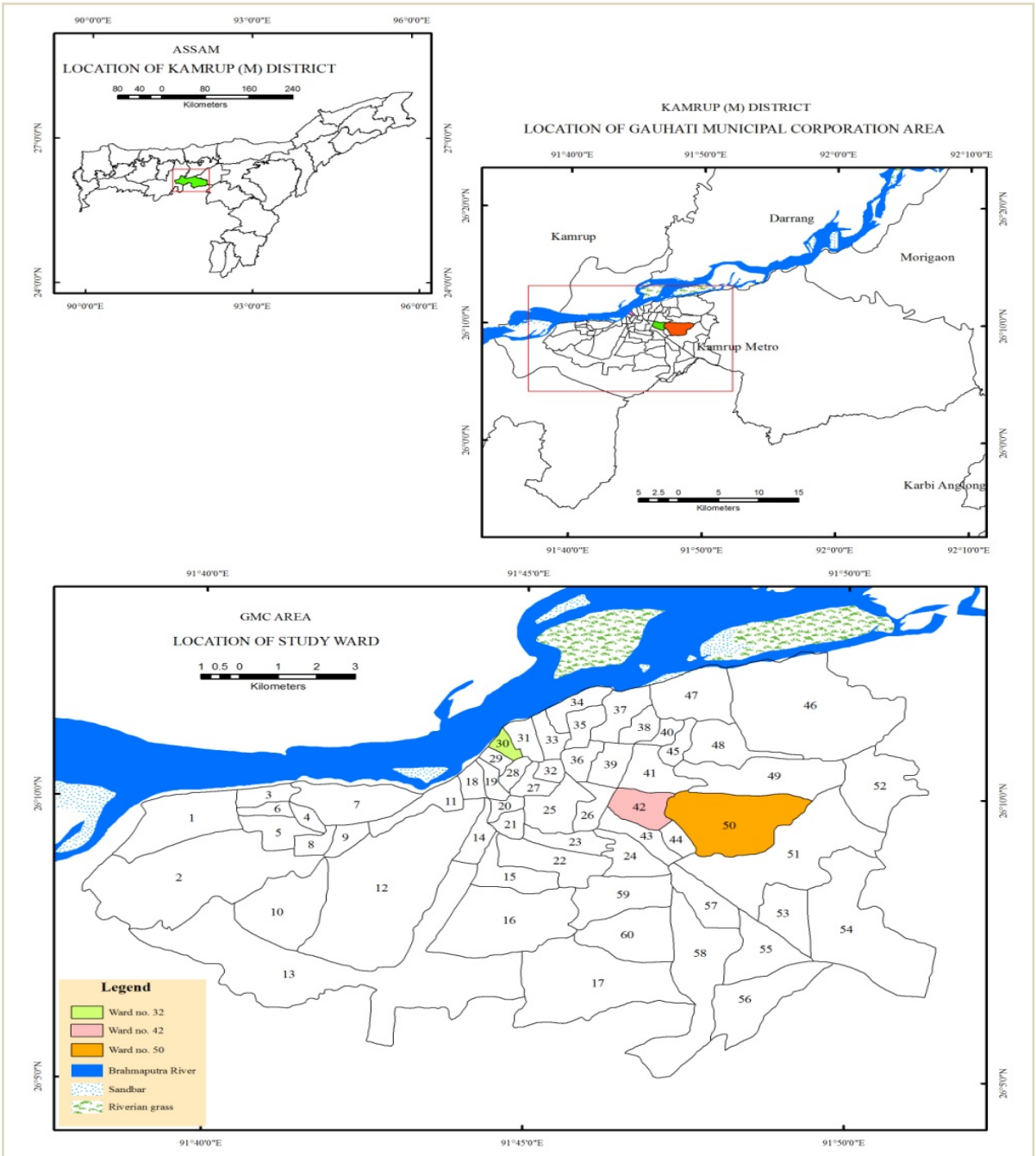


Figure 1: Location of the Study Area (Courtesy of the Authors)

unplanned development of urban areas (Devi, 1998). After India's independence in 1947, the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) was established in 1956 by the government of Assam to fulfil the requirement of drinking water. This department was entrusted with the responsibility of providing safe drinking water (Bakshi and Roy, 2010). However, due to have to depend either on their own sources, or on some commercial agencies and (or) on water vendors, which is in fact not possible for all the dwellers on a regular basis. Therefore, these areas need immediate attention to understand the issues relevant to drinking water and the scarcity of safe drinking water in

the city environment along with understanding the problem in spatio-temporal dimension.

This research attempts to understand the availability of drinking water for the city, based on secondary database from relevant government agencies. However, primary data on issues associated with drinking water availability has been generated from three selected wards targeted for the study. These three wards represent the core, the peripheries and the intermediate locations of the city. Ward No. 30 falls on the core of the city area, where the main water supply plant is located. An intermediate location of the city is selected through the Ward No. 50, where a water treatment plant is located at Hengrabari. A peripheral ward, No. 42, is also selected for the purpose, based on the investigator's personal acquaintance with the problems of the area. The primary investigation tries to highlight issues regarding availability of potable water, its proper use and management, as well as identification of problems pertaining to drinking water.

Objectives and Methodology

Evaluation of the availability of drinking water in the city environment of Guwahati continues to be the main objective of this research—the specific objectives are:

- To evaluate the public water supply provisions in the city environment,
- To identify the present sources and availability of drinking water amongst the city residents, and
- To identify the present problems related to drinking water in the city.

For attaining the objectives, the research follows an exploratory as well as explanatory approach based on the analysis and interpretation of both primary and secondary data. Both empirical and descriptive method has been sought for the purpose. While the empirical method focuses on obtaining findings numerically from primary data and use of descriptive statistics, the interview of the authorities associated with water supply, perception study of the resident community and evaluation of urban water generation mechanism through archival record also provide a space for using qualitative as well as descriptive method in the study.

The data has been collected in sequential stages. In the first stage, secondary data has been collected from the official records, annual records of the office of Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) along with State Archive to gather historical records relevant to the problem. E-publications and websites are also browsed in the process to gather relevant information. In the second stage, primary data has been collected by conducting field surveys based on purposively designed questionnaire targeting the user segment of water. Household survey was conducted to assess the status of available drinking water, their sources, gaps between demand and supply and relevant data pertaining to the topic. Random sampling method is adopted for data collection at household level. Since the area is heterogeneous in terms of socio-economic status of the resident community, this technique is used so that each household has an equal opportunity to be a part of the representative sample. Personal interviews constituted one of the most important and valuable sources of information. Such interactions helped in examining the social reality and understanding what is significant and important aspect of the problem from their perspective. Altogether 324 households have been covered in the survey (Table 1). Samples have been collected according to the population size of the respective wards and considering diverse economic background to produce a more accurate picture regarding the availability of water among different segments of the society. In the second stage of primary data collection, a survey of the public water supply plants and commercial agencies or private suppliers was conducted, in order to capture the idea of water availability from suppliers' point of view. This was done based on questionnaire and personal interviews with persons responsible for the management of the water supply plants.

Analysis

Water Availability in the Pre and Post-Independence Era

The development of public water supply system in an area bears a long history. It is also often the result of requirement and reflection of a

social aspiration of communities in the concerned areas. Although, there were not any well-planned public supply systems in Guwahati in the historic past, however, a few big tanks: Digholi *pukhuri* (tank), Zor (pair) *pukhuri* in Ujanbazar and Nak-kota *pukhuri* in Panbazar along with Kamala Kuwari *pukhuri* in Chandmari reflected the aspiration of Ahom rulers for ensuring the availability of drinking water for the then resident community of the area. There was also prevalence of small water tanks and wells excavated at various localities to collect water. Besides these wells and tanks, the river Brahmaputra and the river Bharalu (a small river passing through the city) also served as a source of water for the people in the city.

The study of archival data on the drinking water sources of the area reveals that different sources like concrete ring well, stone well, Ranee Ganj pipe well, Borpeta ring well and tanks served the needs of the people during the pre-Independence era. In the past, Barpeta ring well was extensively used. The rings of the well were made with soft mud and its construction cost was ₹ 50. As the construction procedures were prevalent at Barpeta and rings were made in that locality, this type of ring well was commonly referred to as 'Barpeta ring well'. This type of well still exists in remote areas of Barpeta. The construction and maintenances of such wells in the city was under the municipality board. A register was maintained by the board for any new well constructions or excavation of public tanks for water supply. People from the higher section of the society, railway buildings and other high administrative authorities had their own sources of drinking water and did not rely on the public sources.

Since 1911, water tax was liable in the town of Guwahati, irrespective of the usage of water supplied. It was fixed at the rate of ₹ 83 quarterly, per household (State Archive, Local Self Govt, June 1925, file No.336). However, the charge was not according to the consumption.

Extreme scarcity of drinking water existed even during that period and quality of water was very poor. There were instances of widespread water borne diseases like Cholera and Kala-Ajar. In 1938, many typhoid cases were registered from the towns and rural areas of Kamrup District (State Archive: Local Self Govt., September 1938, file No.231-234). Higher number of deaths was registered from towns because the causes of death were more correctly classified and recorded than the villages. Such deaths were brought about by the perennial contamination of water supplies. People were ignorant of the contagious nature as well as the agents of contaminations (State Archive: Public Health, B, June 1938, File nos. 529-530). Many wells, which were constructed, had no provision against contamination—infections often rolled over from the neighbourhood or even from the dipping of

Table 1: Sample Size of the Study

Ward No.	Population	No. of Households	No. of Sample per Households	% of Sample
30	7564	1350	72	5
42	12181	3013	144	5
50	10933	2732	108	4

Source: **Population Data based on Census of India, 2001**

dirty and infected private buckets. The concerned authorities took the task of disinfecting the wells only when Cholera or other contagious diseases broke out in the form of an epidemic.

Although the tanks and wells were excavated at various places but the numbers were very few and could no longer meet the demands of water and many a times the water was so dirty and contaminated that it was no more fit for human consumption. Owing to the extreme scarcity of water, all the prevailing tanks and wells were used, but from the sanitary point of view, at least 30 per cent of the tanks and wells were quite unsafe for human consumption (Table 2). According to a report prepared by Guwahati Local Board in 1924, at least 200

tanks and wells were required to be constructed with properly sloped platforms without any delay to provide drinking water to the people who urgently required it and to save the people from diseases like typhoid and cholera.

Table 2: Number of Tanks and Wells in Guwahati during 1924-1925

Source of water	No. of Tanks and Wells
Number of tanks	109
Number of wells	37
Number of tanks fit for use	76
Number of wells fit for use	26

Source: State Archive, Gauhati Local Board, 1924-25

However, owing to the lack of funds no such programmes or schemes were undertaken. The only way to tackle the water supply problem was to ask the government for an adequate grant. A yearly contribution of at least ₹ 3000 was required. Simultaneously, Guwahati Local Board was supposed to pay an equal amount of money every year towards the construction of wells; however, it was handicapped by the government's massive cuts on water supply grants. In the absence of any assurance from the government, the board could not make an extensive scheme, but together with limited funding and voluntary contributions from the residents, who contributed one-third of the required cash, it constructed as many wells as possible.

After the declaration of Municipal Body in 1873, the first water treatment plant was constructed in Guwahati in 1887 at Panbazar. Later, the Municipal Body was renamed as Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC). The first modern water treatment plant under GMC was established in 1960 at the initial Panbazar site which is still functioning. Later on, two public water supply systems were established at Satpukhuri, Ujan Bazar (1984) and Kamakhya (1992). In the beginning, there was only one public water supply system to meet the needs of drinking water in the city. Although, the development of a water plant initially fulfilled the demand of the residents, other operating system like community water tanks or reservoirs were also placed according to the population density at core localities of the city. Some people have their own dug wells. Moreover, public wells were also constructed by the GMC from which people used to collect water. From the water plants, drinking water was supplied to households through pipelines and mobile tankers. Later, Assam Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board (AUWSSB) were also constituted in 1996 to cater the demand for drinking water in the area.

Present Status of Water Supply

The drinking water needs of the majority of the population in the study area are at present fulfilled by the municipality through piped supply or water supplying tankers. However, the quantum of supplied water is quite limited and irregular and there is a mismatch between demand and supply. The local residents need to face the worst situation, especially during the dry winter season in the city. Under such circumstances, many private initiatives have also come up to cater to the ever-increasing demand of water for the growing population of the city. Although, these supply agencies fulfil the demand to a great extent but most of them operate illegally. Over-exploitation of ground water by such agencies caused public resentments in some localities of the city. Under such circumstances, reliance on ground water should be minimised by giving emphasis on the use of the river Brahmaputra as the main source of drinking water. Moreover, rainwater harvesting may also be encouraged among city residents to face the challenge of water deficiency.

Nonetheless, the GMC has been playing a very important role by supplying drinking water for the people of the city. The main source of water for their three water-treatment plants is the river Brahmaputra. However, GMC also has ground water as its source for some areas. For this purpose, it dug 20 deep tube wells scattered all over the city. From these tube wells, water is supplied directly to the consumers in and around the location of the respective wells. According to 2012 statistics, water supply from the plants under the GMC served approximately 30,000 households. It has

a total supply capacity of 430 million litres per day. Out of the 60 city wards, altogether 27 wards are covered under these plants and some wards are partly covered. Thus, it has been able to meet the demands of drinking water only up to a very limited extent (Table 3 and Figure 2). As the installation capacities of the plants are meagre, it can only cover approximately 30 per cent of the total population of the city (GMC, 2012); the provisional population total of Guwahati city according to 2011 Census of India is 963,429.[1]

Although, the Panbazar water-supply plant continues to be the most important in relation to the supply of drinking water for the entire city, it has serious defects in many areas of its management as well as infrastructure. Nothing much has been done by the government for the development of the plant. The installation capacity is far below its actual requirement and therefore, it has been able to serve only 30 per cent of the total population. The quantity of water supplied to per household each day is very limited. It has also been facing shortage of manpower due to non-recruitment. For power supply, the plant has to depend upon the Assam State Electricity Board for all its operations due to the absence of its own source of power or any such backup. In such situations, long and frequent power cuts make all the operations of the plant come to a halt resulting in intermittent water supply.

Moreover, at the time of floods, especially during the summer seasons, polluted water enters through the leakages of the old pipes and fittings and consumers are often supplied with such polluted water. Replacements of the pipelines have rarely been made.

To meet the need of water, three new water supply schemes have already been undertaken by the state Government for the entire Guwahati city. For this purpose, the whole city has been divided into three parts, that is, eastern, central and western Guwahati. The management and operation of each area will be under three different agencies, that is, JICA (Japan International Cooperative Agency), ADB (Asian Development Bank) and JnNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal mission. So far, 80 per cent works of these projects have been completed. At present, laying of pipelines is going on in the city. It is expected that the project will be operational by 2015 (Table 4). The existing drinking water supply departments will come under single authority and all the present operating plants will be closed down. It is anticipated that such development may provide major relief for the Guwahatians as they are expected to provide 24x7 pre-paid metered water supply. However, public resentment regarding the commercialisation of civic amenities like drinking water has also been in the city, expressed through different forum of civil societies.

Status of Public Water Supply Provisions in Selected Wards

The public water supply system of the selected wards (30, 42 and 50) depend both on water from the river Brahmaputra as well as on ground water. Overall, 69 per cent households of these wards have surface water as their main source and 31 per cent depend on groundwater. Households that have both surface and groundwater consist of 27 per cent. Drinking water supplies in the study area are under the management of two different authorities—GMC and AUWSSB (Assam Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board) (Table 5).

The field investigation reveals that out of the total of 324 households covered by our survey, 225 households have municipality-supplied water as the major source of drinking water—58 households out of 72 (in ward 30), 110 out of 144 (in ward 42), and 57 out of 108 (in ward No. 50), avail public water supply connections.

[1] Guwahati City Census 2011 data, Population Census 2011, available at: http://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/191-guwahati.html (accessed 30 December 2013)

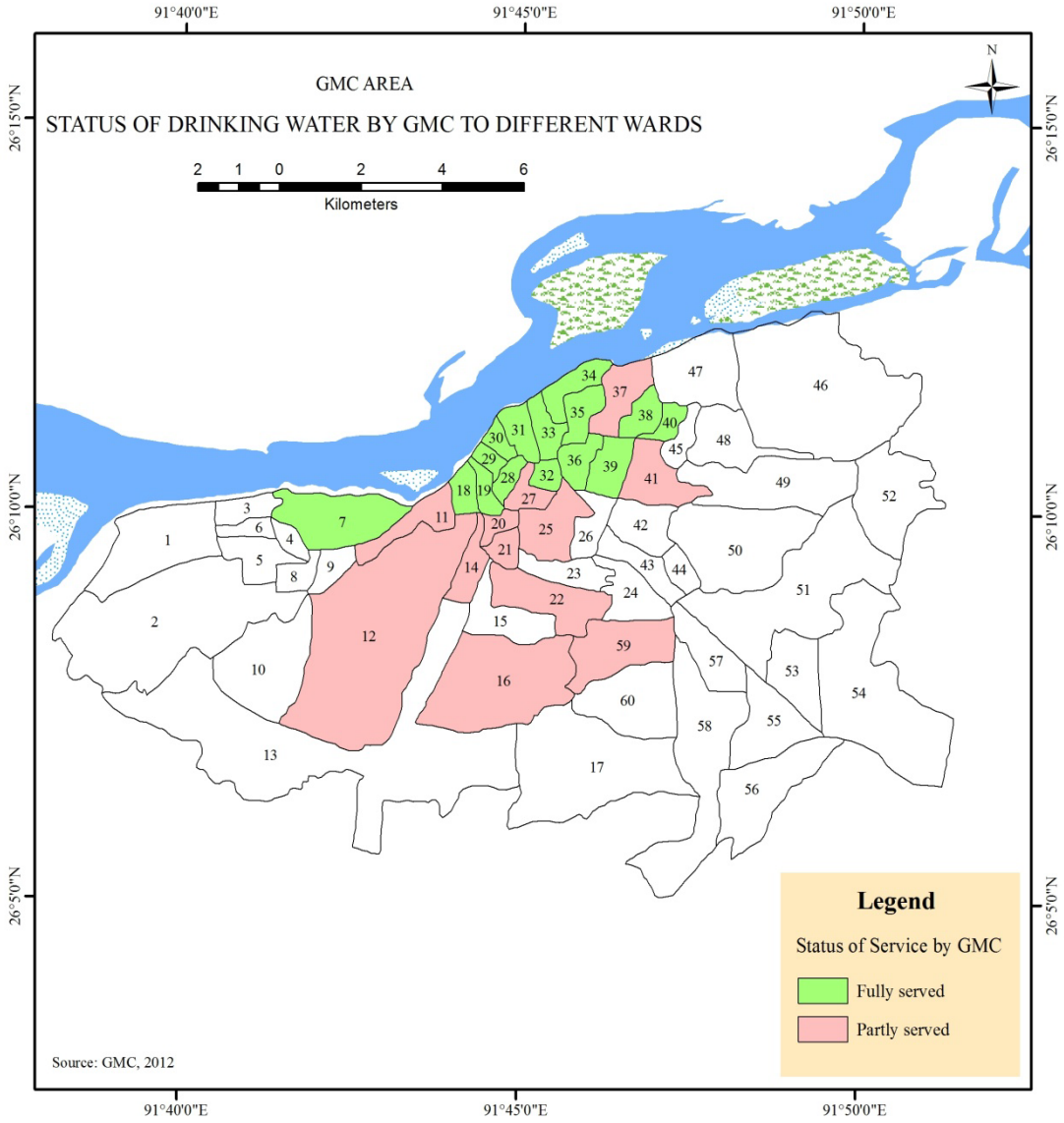


Figure 2: City Wards served by GMC, 2012 (Courtesy of the Authors)

Table 3: Wards Served by GMC, 2012

Status of service	Ward No.														
Fully served	7	18	19	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	38	39	40
Partly served	11	12	14	16	20	21	22	25	27	37	41	59	-	-	-

Source: GMC, 2012

Table 4: Areas to be Served by the Proposed Projects

Area	Agency
East Guwahati	ADB
Central Guwahati	JICA
West Guwahati	JnNURM

Source: GMC, 2012

Table 5: Authority Responsible for the Supply of Drinking Water

Ward No.	Authority
30	GMC
42	AUWSSB
50	AUWSSB

Source: GMC, 2012

Regularity and Frequency of Supply

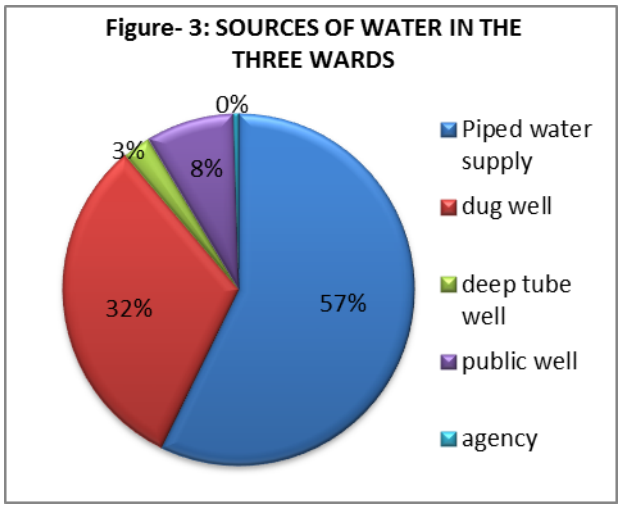
Interestingly, our survey reveals that there is a vast difference among the three wards in terms of regularity and supply of drinking water (Table 6). During the monsoon season, water supply condition stays fairly. However, during the dry season (September to March) the frequency of supply becomes highly intermittent. Thus during the dry season in ward no. 42, 96 per cent of the households face the problem of highly irregular water supply. Similarly, in ward No. 30, the share of irregularity is around 40

per cent and in ward No. 50, it is around 33 per cent. Among the wards, supply scenario is comparatively impressive in ward number 30, as the Panbazar water-treatment plant of GMC is located in this ward. In terms of frequency of supply, it is limited to just one time per day and supply duration ranges from two to four hours.

Generally, water and sanitation projects experience their most serious problems with operation and maintenance and with cost recovery aspects due to which the consumers have to face the problem (Biswas, 1979). In this said context, the water supply system operating under the two different authorities of the city too have faced this problem and runs in a chaotic situation without any proper management. Therefore, it is imperative for these authorities to plan for smooth operation and maintenance, in order to ensure sustainability of all the water supply plants of the city, at least until the new water supply project, which is currently undergoing construction, comes into operation.

Sources of Drinking Water

While conducting any studies on water, it is essential to identify the source of drinking water available for the users. The study showed that the need of water is fulfilled by different sources according to the affordability and conveniences of the users. The major sources of drinking water in the study area are municipality water through piped water supply (57%), individually dug wells (32%), deep tube wells (3%) and 8% public wells (Figure 3 and Table 7). However, for a certain section of people (especially in ward No. 42), the only source of drinking water is the commercial water supplying agencies.



The data regarding the sources of water reflects that the municipality water is the primary source in ward no. 30, which covers 77 per cent of the households. As the city's main public water, distribution system is located in this ward, therefore, availability and reliance on public water system is found to be more here. However, 20 per cent of the households rely on individually owned wells and 3 per cent depends on deep tube wells. Nevertheless, as one move from the city core to the intermediate zones of Guwahati, reliance on public water system is found to decrease. In the wards no. 42 and 50, piped water supports 40 and 39 per cent of the households respectively. Apart from it, wells meet the need of 20 per cent households in ward no. 42, followed by deep tube well (3 per cent), private agency (2 per cent), etc. In ward no. 50, share of piped water reduced to 39 per cent of households and share of public wells (29 per cent) are found to be an important source of water. Among the wards, share of deep tube well as a source of water is found to be limited, as it involves more cost and generally beyond affordable limit of a middleclass family. Apart from it, these wells are also found to be responsible for over-exploitation and consequent ground water reduction in respective localities.

In ward no. 50, the percentage of households having piped water supply is 39. In this ward, the water is supplied by the Hengrabari water plant, which is under the authority of AUWSSB. It is seen that another major source of drinking water for this ward is public wells, which serves about 29 per cent of households. These wells

have come to play a very crucial role on meeting the demands of drinking water in the absence of a proper reliable public water supply system. Another reason for the dependence on public wells is due to the high cost involved in taking a new water supply connection. Besides these, the area is hilly and many households living in the upper slopes do not have any connections of piped water supply. Even the households having piped water supply connection, the quantity of supplied water is very less. Around 19 per cent households of the area are having individual wells as supply water fails to fulfil their demand.

Table 6: Regularity of Municipality Water Supply

Ward No.	Monsoon season		Dry season	
	Regular (No. and % of House-holds)	Irregular (No. and % of Households)	Regular (No. and % of Households)	Irregular (No. and % of Households)
30	58/99	-	35/60	23/40
42	108/98	1/0.9	4/3	105/96
50	57/99	-	48/56	19/33

Source: Field survey, 2012

Table 7: Ward-wise Sources of Drinking Water, 2012

Ward	Source	No. and % of House-holds	Source	No. and % of House-holds	Source	No. and % of House-holds
30	Piped water supply	58/77	Individual well	15/20	Deep tube well	2/3
42	Piped water supply	58/40	Individual well	29/20	Deep tube well	5/3
42	Agency	2/1	Both Piped and well	47/33	Piped and deep tube well	3/2
50	Piped water supply	42/39	Individual well	19/17	Deep tube well	1/1
50	Public well	32/29	Both piped and well	14/13	-	-

Source: Field survey, 2012

Daily Water Use

The study reveals that the average water consumption rate per day/per household is found to be 444.6 litres while the average water consumption per head is found to be 90.6 litres in Guwahati city. Thus, per capita water consumption is found to be less than Indian urban standard of 135 litres (Vishwanath, 2013).

Role of Private Suppliers

Increasing gap between demand and supply and subsequent failure of any planned efforts of the government to meet the basic need of drinking water has added much to the woes of the people. Such situation has in turn led to many private entrepreneurs make business out of it. For the last few years, private mobile water tankers are a common sight in the study area operating mostly without any legal framework. However, the private agencies played a very important role when it comes to meeting the needs, especially in winter seasons, when the scarcity of water goes up. Altogether 164 households out of 324 studied households are dependent partly on the private agencies for their water need. Percentage of households dependent on the private agencies in each specified wards are 30 per cent in ward No. 30, 76 per cent in ward No. 42 and 29 per cent in ward No. 50. It has been observed that from the core wards to the peripheries, the irregularity in supply goes on increasing due to faulty and outdated pipelines and leaks in the distribution network. The study also reveals that the number of households buying water from private agencies turns out to be comparatively higher in ward no. 42 than the other two wards. Approximately 76 per cent depend on agencies in times of the need of water. This is because water scarcity is highest in this ward owing to the intermittent water supply and groundwater level reduction.

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Dependence on more than one source of water can be attributed to the unreliability of the piped water supply and reduction of groundwater level in the dry season. Such conditions have made the people to opt for the only alternative source of drinking water available, which are the private suppliers. Therefore, during dry seasons when water supply becomes intermittent, it affects about 65 per cent (147 out of 225) of the households and with no other options left, except for depending on the private water suppliers. In fact, the private suppliers support about 51 per cent of the total households in these wards. Households used to spend a good amount ranging from ₹180 to 250 to the agencies for a tanker with a capacity of 600 litres, if hired from vicinity.

Situation of Groundwater

There has been a perceptible reduction in the ground water level during the last 10 to 12 years affecting 79 per cent of households. The problem is far more acute for those households, who have either dug well or deep tube well as the source of potable water (Table 8). In ward no. 30, the average depth of dug well is found to be 25 ft. whereas, the average depth of deep tube well is found to be 150 ft. In ward no. 42, the average depth of dug well is 35ft and of deep tube well is found to be 200 ft. In ward 50, the average depth of dug well and deep tube well is 20 ft. and 200ft. respectively.

From a comparative analysis of the three wards in relation to the ground water level conditions, it is found that the number of people affected by the problem of water level reduction is more in ward no. 42. This can be attributed to the over-exploitation of ground water through haphazard growth of apartments, alongside other associated vertical growth. These apartments fail to provide the required amount of uninterrupted running water to its customers. To overcome the scarcity, the owners of the apartments prefer to go for boring wells for the extraction of ground water. In most of the apartments, it has been observed that these deep tube wells are the only source of water. However, such over-extractions of ground water from a limited parcel of land have led to the reduction of ground water level of ring as well as tube wells around the neighbouring areas.

Problems of Drinking Water

Attempt has also been made to identify the problems relating to potable water based on data collected from the field survey and personal observations. Water scarcity was found to be a major problem in all the three wards. As mentioned above, the problem is more severe in the dry season when water supply becomes irregular and water level of the wells goes down. Approximately, 51 per cent of the population remains heavily dependent on private suppliers due to the scarcity of water (Table 9). Highest scarcity of water was found in ward no. 42 where 76 per cent of the respondents perceived a water scarcity situation. Against this, ward no. 50 suffers from lesser water scarcity, which has been perceived by the respondents as 31 per cent. Again, here too the most common reasons for the water scarcity are found to be irregular water supply and water level reduction, especially during the winter season. Under such circumstances, reliance on ground water should be minimised by giving emphasis on the use of river Brahmaputra as the main source of water for the city. Rainwater harvesting may also be encouraged among city residents to face the challenge of water deficiency.

Table 8: Groundwater Condition as Perceived by the Users

Ward No.	Level decreased	Level remained same	No comment
30	77%	22%	1%
42	99%	0%	1%
50	70%	19%	11%

Source: Field survey, 2012

Table 9: Water Availability and Scarcity as Perceived by the Users

Ward No.	Households Facing Scarcity	Households Facing No Scarcity
30	34%	66%
42	76%	24%
50	31%	69%
Total	52%	48%

Source: Field survey, 2012

related to the rapid and haphazard growth of the wards alongside unplanned urbanisation process. In the case of the municipality water, as stated above, there is inadequacy of water supply, more especially during the dry winter seasons. Moreover, the existing public water supply facilities are running well below their capacity and require urgent investments and expansion. The Panbazar water treatment plant has already been suffering in relation to its outdated design and is in a very poor state, which requires immediate renovation and augmentation, at least until the time the on-going modern drinking water supply projects are completed.

The area also faces several problems in respect to water supplied by the municipality and water shortage due to deteriorating groundwater conditions. Some of the problems related to the ground water are—water level reduction, waterlogging during monsoon period, pollution from sewerage, unplanned extraction of ground water, high iron (Fe) content, etc. All these problems, except the high iron content of groundwater, can be

The distribution of water is sufficient to some extent to meet the demand of the area. However, there is transmission loss at certain places caused by leakages in the pipelines, which are hardly replaced with the new ones. The problem becomes more acute during the summer season. Due to leakages in the pipelines, muddy and polluted water enter these leakages and the water that reaches the consumers are very poor in quality and unfit for use. The network of pipelines can be said to be sufficient to reach the destinations, except for ward no. 50, where the supply is very poor in comparison to the other two wards (ward no. 30 and 42). This is the result of the hilly topography of the ward no. 50. People living in lower elevation get adequate water, while flow of water is found to be almost nil at the higher elevation.

Thus, it can be said that the status of drinking water in the study area is below the average standards set for India urban environment, which requires immediate attention. Although the city is growing very rapidly in many aspects in the name of external face-lift and

modernisation of infrastructure, it can be said that in terms of the growth of necessities the picture remains gloomy. The very basic necessities of life of the city dwellers are deteriorating over the years in its both quality and quantum. People are made to compromise with the basic needs of their existence.

Conclusion

Water plays a crucial role in the improvement of the socio-cultural and economic endowment of man. As such, access to clean and protected drinking water has been treated as a fundamental right for the people in India. Although, there was not any well-planned public supply systems in the cities like Guwahati in the past, prevalence of small water tanks and wells excavated by the Ahom rulers emphasised the public welfare measures taken. Besides these wells and tanks, the river Brahmaputra and Bharalu also served as important sources of water for the people of the city in the past as well as now. Scarcity of drinking water also existed in Guwahati even in the historic past. Poor water quality often leads to widespread of water-borne diseases among the residents like Cholera and Kala-Ajar. However, nature and magnitude of the problems relating to drinking water changed over time. After Independence, initiative for public water supply took a shape through the formation of Guwahati local board and subsequent development of Guwahati Municipality Corporation. At present, the major source of drinking water in the city is municipality water. Individual well, deep tube well and public wells are found to be the convenient sources of water for the city dwellers. However, for a certain section of people the only sources of their drinking water is the commercial water supplying agencies.

Municipality water supply scheme covers 69 per cent of the households of the city. Supply is found to be more or less regular, except in dry season, when water supply becomes intermittent. The condition seems to be worse in the peripheral areas of the city where households receive water supply only once or twice in a month despite having municipal water connections. Insufficiency of public water supply affects about 65 per cent users of the area that left with no option other than depending on the private water suppliers. Private water suppliers support around half of the households in the area. However, in the core area of city supply of water is found to be regular because it lies adjacent to water supply plants. The study shows that on an average 52 per cent of households face scarcity of water and highest scarcity is reported by 76 per cent households located at the peripheries. Briefly, it can be said that the status of drinking water availability in the Guwahati city is below the average Indian urban situation. Per capita water consumption is found to be 90.6 litres against Indian urban standard of 135 litres. The city is growing very rapidly in many aspects in the name of external face-lift and modernisation of infrastructure, but it can be said that in terms of the growth of basic necessities the picture remains abysmal and needs immediate attention. However, amidst the prevalence of the dreadful water supply facilities, with the on-going construction of the new water supply system, the Guwahatians continue to anticipate that 24x7 affordable, clean and reliable water supply service with adequate pressure would be achieved in near future, which would significantly improve their current standard of living.

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