

CHAPTER 50

SOCIOLOGY

Doctoral Theses

01. BHATIA (Akriti)
Understanding Urban Informality and Exclusion: A Sociological Study.
Supervisors: Prof. Satish Deshpande and Prof. Rajni Palriwala
Th26906

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study in Delhi to understand the work and lives of three types of urban informal workers - street vendors, rickshaw pliers and app-based workers (Ola/ Uber cab drivers and Swiggy/Zomato delivery persons), the kinds of insecurities they are subjected to in urban spaces (economic, social, spatial, legal physical and psychological) and the role of actors and agents like local state/urban authorities (like MCD, NDMC, DMRC, police), contractors, employers, and platform companies (like Ola/Uber, Swiggy/Zomato) and their representatives, in producing this exclusionary experience of the workers. The extractive strategies of the state-capital nexus in the cities are traced, wherein I particularly found the operation of a deliberate ambiguity maintained around the spatial and legal structures that maximises rent-seeking and expropriation from the workers, thereby, producing, sustaining and reinforcing their precarity, illegality and insecurity. I observe the simultaneous coexistence of legality and illegality, where legality seems to operate at a more abstract level (through acts, guidelines, constitutional protections), while, simultaneous illegality operates at a material level, wherein its enactment and experience is spatialised, localised and personalised. These extractive strategies also entail specific modes of labour control and informalisation which are explored, such as processes of contractualisation and surveillance practices, producing a sense of disposability, and dislocation among the workers. While tracing the continuities and discontinuities through a comparison between these different types of workers, this thesis revisits, questions and even challenges several widely believed notions, theoretical and operational categories, and dichotomies around the scholarship on work - such as the idea of a self-employed worker, the formal/informal work divide, the distinctions between traditional and new forms of work and the promise of various technologies seeping into the world of work today. So, whether it is eviction in case of vendors, confiscation in case of rickshaw pliers or ID deactivation in case of app-based workers, one finds how it is an external actor that determines the fate of the worker in their respective fields, and not the "self-employed" worker alone. While informality is commonly understood as resulting from a lack of state regulation, in case of street vendors and rickshaw pliers, it is exacerbated with their over-regulation or state excesses, and in case of app-based workers, this informality is being produced by the sheer absence of this state regulation. Thus, the multiple strands studied attempt to contribute towards a new understanding to the sociology of work in India - with a careful analysis of workers' encounter with the everyday local state (political anthropology), their organisation of work and labour relations (economic and labour anthropology) and the constant backdrop of the neoliberal and postcolonial city space (urban anthropology).

Contents

1. Introduction 2. Background and review of literature 3. Street vendors: life, work and everyday negotiations with the city and state 4. Rickshaw pliers: life, work and everyday negotiations with city and state 5. Platform economy workers: life, work and everyday negotiations with the “digital boss” 6. P 7. Conclusion. Bibliography.

02. CHOPRA (Virien)

How do Comics Communicate; Analysing Semantic Formations in Comics.

Supervisors: Dr. Reema Bhatia and Prof. Roma Chatterjee

Th26907

Abstract

This thesis analyses how the hybrid textual and visual media of comics, cartoons, and graphic narratives generate meanings and interpretations within their readers and the social structure. The main questions of this research are on; How and what meanings are generated through the hybrid medium of comics and cartoons? How are these visual-textual structures created and operated through the mediascapes and habitus of their temporal sites? How do they operate within the broader structure of social, political, and cultural discourses? Do comics and cartoons generate semantic and semiotic linkages in a manner that is different from that of purely visual or purely textual representations? Three main themes were developed through the research; ‘semantics and language’; ‘humour and satire; and ‘power and authority’. The thesis traces comics and cartoons from the 19th century till present day under these three themes. The analysis shows that comics and cartoons operate as different forms of communication that are different from purely visual or textual media. Comics and cartoons are able to use humour, puns, satire, and jokes not only to evoke laughter by make new and funny semantic associations for the reader, but also operate as narratives that can challenge power and authority. Political cartoons and parody comics can break the established structure of how things should be ‘seen’ and generate a new way of counter-visuality for their readers. The chapters in the thesis are arranged chronologically, beginning from the coming of print to India during British colonial rule, where the interactions between colonized and colonizers were based not only on shifting power dynamics, but changes in language and meanings as well. The following chapters traces comics and cartoons in the political and cultural spaces of India, from files on cartoons archived at the National Archives of India, to graphic representations of Indian epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata in comics like Amar Chitra Katha. The final two chapters look at two artists, Maya Kamath and Appupen, each of whose style of cartooning and comics makes them unique in their own way. Kamath is one of the few women cartoonists of India, creating comics in the 1990s while Appupen is the creator of Rashtraman, the first pastiche superhero in India.

Contents

1. Introduction 2. Printed cartoons and graphic narratives in colonial India 3. Cartoons and comics in the political arena 4. Diving drawing 5 Drawing the subaltern; the oeuvre of maya kamath 6. Tunnelling into myths–appupen and rashtraman 7. Conclusion. Bibliography.

03. KATARA (Shivani)
Conceptualising Reproductive Health and Family Planning Practices: A Study Among Married Muslim Women in a Small Town of Uttar Pradesh.
 Supervisors: Prof. Janaki Abraham and Prof. Rajni Palriwala
Th26908

Abstract

Women's bodies are the site where individual, cultural and social conditions meet and are expressed in the form of bodily experiences of pleasure, pain, illness and health. Many women across history have been oppressed on the basis of cultural understandings that 'women are the weaker sex' owing to their biological capacity for bearing and rearing children. As a result, they have been denied economic independence and several legal, political and social rights as compared to men. The research findings reflect the ground realities of women's health and their reproductive rights, as they exist in India. Finally, through a study of reproductive health, this study has sought to emphasise a context-based approach to Muslim women's reproductive health and family planning practices. It offers significant insights into health and ill-health, and healthcare and health disparities. This study addresses supposed particularities of religious identity by demonstrating the inextricable ways that context, in a myriad of forms and as everyday relations and broader socio-cultural structures, is integral to understanding health and health behaviour outcomes. It emphasises the significance of gendered social relations and processes to understand the reproductive agency of women, particularly Muslim women. Future research could further explore the role of sexuality, gendered power relations, religious heterogeneity and variability in the field of women's reproductive health and family planning.

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1. Introduction 2. The Health System in India 3. Sexuality 4. Family Planning and fertility 5. Maternal Health 6. Ethno-medical condition: Dhat 7. Intersections of women's mental and reproductive health 8. Conclusion: Reproductive empowerment and reproductive right. Bibliography. Appendices.

04. MISRA (Abir)
Enquiry into the Structure and Process of Fan Activity.
 Supervisor: Prof. Anuja Agrawal
Th26910

Abstract

This thesis titled 'An Enquiry into the Structure and Process of Fan Activity' is a product of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in India over the course of eighteen months, between 2017-2019. It challenges the notion that 'affect' is the defining criteria of fan and fandom, and also offers a correction to mis-perceptions about (organised) fandom in India being essentially south-centric, male-centric and urban-poor centric. The thesis postulates a definition of fan and fandom, something 'fandom studies' has failed to produce. The definition is premised upon an irreducible criterion – a fundamental principle – termed as the 'Access Taboo'. The thesis also postulates a Structure of fandom - by which is meant that any fandom is composed of three essential elements: Ideal Fan, Dangerous Fan and Anti-Fan. These elements – which relate to each other in a specific manner in the structure - are found to be in the same relationship with each other in the 'activities' described in this thesis. The search for the fundamental principle and the structure of fandom

is accomplished through the analysis of Shah Rukh Khan fans in India. The choice of this particular fandom is informed by the fact that it is sufficiently organised, its activities are not restricted to any one region or state in India, it has participation by female fans and its membership is not restricted to urban poor fans. The transnational and transcultural nature of Shah Rukh Khan fandom helps in drawing conclusions that are susceptible to widest possible generalisation. The thesis is divided into five chapters: 1. The Fundamental Principle of Fandom 2. The Spirit of Fandom 3. The Fan and the Bhakt 4. The Signature of Fandom 5. Fandom and Cognition. The thesis dwells into Structuralism, German Idealism, Symbolic Interactionism, Anthropology of Art and Sociology of Film to highlight varied aspects of Shah Rukh Khan fandom, including its Spirit, its Politics, its Symbolism and its Intellectual/Cognitive nature.

Contents

1. Introduction 2. The fundamental principle of fandom 3. The spirit of fandom 4. The fan and the bhakt 5. The signatur of fandom 6. Fandom and cognition Conclusion. Eplilogue: On structuralism. Bibliography.

05. MAHI (Seema)
Formation of Dalit Identity: the Case of Punjab.
 Supervisors: Dr. Kamei Aphun and Prof. Radhika Chopra
Th26909

Abstract

Caste, religion, and community identities are fundamental features of any social group in Indian society. This thesis attempts to understand the dynamics within communities based on their caste and religious affiliations. It presents a study that throws light on the everyday life of dalits in Punjab who struggle to negotiate their social and religious identities in the hope of a just society. Dalits are still finding ways to liberate themselves from the shackles of their past. Even though the Indian constitution has recognized them as scheduled castes and granted them some provisions, they cannot find a respectable and dignified place in the traditional structure of society, community consciousness starts emerging, often leading to questioning the existing notions of society. At both fieldwork sites, it was found out that Ravidassis are rejecting the traditional social order based on the varnashrama system by paving their unique path by formings a unique dalit identity. They do not subscribe to the usual methods of conversion and sanslritization to achieve social and religious. Mobility. Religion was the basis of the oppression of dalits, however, by adopting the Ravidassia identity Ravidassis are utilizing religion as an instrument to fight social oppression.

Contents

1. Introduction 2. Caste and Communities in Punjab 3. Religious life of dalits in Punjab 4. The case of ravidassis in Punjab 5. The panchayat election: an ethnographic study 6. Caste discrimination and formation of the ravidassia community in a transnational setting 7. Conclusion. Bibliography. Annexures.

06. RAMAKRISHNAN (Anupama)
Ethnography of Migrants in the Andaman Islands.
 Supervisor: Prof. Sudha Vasam
Th26911

Abstract

The Andaman Islands, a territory of the Indian nation state in the Bay of Bengal--- which witnessed the brutal genocide of large numbers of its indigenous inhabitants through colonialism---has been peopled by migrants from the Indian subcontinent for a century-and-a-half. In the mid-twentieth century, following the Partition of India, the independent Indian state selected and settled thousands of dispossessed agrarian refugee-settlers from East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), among other groups of landless agrarian settlers, across the Andaman Islands. In North Andaman, the focus of this study, there were no remaining indigenous Andaman Islanders when the settlements of refugee-settlers occurred, and the refugee-settlers successfully created an agrarian landscape out of the forest in this region. Since then, descendants of settlers, along with other migrant groups who arrived voluntarily in this region, live in an agrarian landscape surrounded by forests and the sea. This thesis is an ethnographic study of descendants of settlers' understanding of and sense of belonging to the environment of North Andaman. Academic and expert discourses on the Andaman Islands imagine migrant groups as being outsiders to the true environment of the Islands. However, this thesis shows that descendants of settlers believed that their community belonged to North Andaman. They had definite views on their material environment, on the land and landscape of North Andaman, on its forests and waterscapes, on their identity in relation to the environment, on their right to environmental resources of the Andaman Islands, and on the administration of resources in the Islands. Focusing on descendants of settlers' engagements with the environment of North Andaman, this thesis asks, how do descendants of settlers in North Andaman make sense of the environment in which they make their lives? Working with ethnographic data collected over eighteen months between June 2016 and January 2018, this thesis analyses four themes of descendants of settlers' sense of belonging to North Andaman-----land, agrarian landscape, social memory of settlement, political demands for resource access as a community who belong to this 2 region---and describes how the themes of descendants of settlers' sense of belonging to North Andaman constitute their situated environmental subjectivity. Using Tim Ingold's phenomenological-materialist theoretical framework, I show how descendants of settlers' environmental subjectivity continually forms from the sense they make sense of the process of producing their lives in the social and material circumstances of North Andaman. By arguing that descendants of settlers' environmental subjectivity emerges from the production of their lives rather than from any single source such as social identity, affective attachments to the environment, governmental practices or phenomenological experience, this thesis decenters discourses of power on migrants' engagements with the environment of the Andaman Islands. It also contributes to understandings of how migrants relate to their adopted environments, and to studies of the society, politics and environmental engagements of migrant groups in the Andaman Islands.

Contents

1. Introduction: Environment and belonging among descendants of settlers in North Andaman
 2. The indigenous and migrants in the Andaman Islands: Governmental, expert and academic discourses on the Andaman Islands
 3. Our father's land: Land and belonging among descendants of settlers in North Andaman
 4. There Wasn't so Much Supari Earlier: Agrarian Landscape and belonging among descendants of settlers in North Andaman
 5. Andamaner kotha: The social memory of settlement among descendants of settlers in North Andaman
 6. The Islander card: Resource politics and claim-making in the Andaman Islands
 7. Conclusion: Producing life/subjectivity. Glossary. Appendices. Bibliography.

07. SARITA KUMARI
Untouchables as Custodians of Salvation: A Study of Doms in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
 Supervisors: Dr. Sunil Babu and Prof. Abhijit Dasgupta
Th26912

Abstract

Untouchables as Custodians of Salvation: A Study of the Doms in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh This thesis attempts to understand the untouchable's role as custodians of salvation in Varanasi City. In many region roles of the Dom is limited to arranging pyres or remaining a keeper of the cremation ground. But the religious aspect, firm belief in the idea of moksha, and the role of Kashi in bestowing salvation to the deceased provide an important position to the Dom caste, and their role becomes important in the last rites requiring an ethnographic understanding. This study investigates how the ritual aspects methodologically and theoretically constructed a kind of discourse, and how the caste question in their everyday life reproduces the same circumstances. Here, different service castes are indulged on the basis of their respective turn systems in earning a livelihood. The spectrum of these service caste workers is broad, including Mahapatra, Dom, Barbers, and Mallha castes. Hence, investigating this daily interaction among these service castes becomes important to explore the structure and dynamics of cremation ghat. This research further understands how the technological aspect of modernity has been intervening with the old tradition of wood cremation, and if the former has succeeded in replacing the existing religion-based ritual aspects. If so, it impacts the caste groups earning a livelihood from this work. Lastly, as this research tries to analyse alterations in the prescribed Hindu rites and rituals during the normlessness of the pandemic to understand how people adapted to the 'new normal' in death rites. Lastly, the effect of the pandemic on the Dom caste, the mourner and the role of the State in dealing with the catastrophe.

Contents

1. Contextualising research 2. In search of dom: Story of untouchable Raja of cremation ghat 3. Moksha in death industry 4. Tradition versus technology: conflict and convergence of beliefs in death rituals 5. Coronavirus and cremation ground: the transition from normal to pathological conditions. References. Appendices

08. SINGH (Yaduvendra Pratap)
Changing Status of a Scheduled Caste: A Study of the Jatavs of Meerut City.
 Supervisor: Prof. Janaki Abraham
Th26913

Abstract

Although I did not study dalit movements, but I am aware that jatavs resist in their everyday life in several ways. Jagpal singh (1998:2612) argues that resistance reflect in the everyday practices of dalits, through informal means, litigation, searching alternative organisations, leaders, political parties, and emulation of Ambedkaris. Nandu ram mentioned several types of dalit activism: movements against exploitation and atrocities on the dalits, movements for better access to the opportunities and movements for gaining self-respect and dignified social identity (Quoted in Webster 1996). Badri Narayan (2001: 156-7) stated that subaltern groups in Utter Pradesh developing counter narratives for identity and political purpose, they search their own heroes and related narratives in written form. He further

argues that in Uttar Pradesh for remembrance new melas were sponsored by the government, these melas organised to contest existing Brahmnic melas

Contents

1. Introduction 2. Caste and neighbourhood sociality 3. Caste and electoral politics
4. Work and the experience of caste 5. Everyday religion and the experiences of
caste 6. Conclusion. Bibliography. Appendices.

09. SINHA (Soumodip)

Social Location and Political Assertion: An Ethnography of Everyday Student Activism in Delhi.

Supervisor: Prof. Satish Deshpande

Th27163

Abstract

The thesis presents a study of student politics in the sphere of higher education. It takes one of India's premier universities – the University of Delhi – as its research site. It begins by collating the key debates on the theme from the 1950s to the contemporary times, both globally and in the Indian context. The thesis goes on to discuss the social history of student mobilizations; the nuances of political socialization; and the role of identities and ideologies in shaping the range and depth of protests and dissent. Its main aim is to explore the processes by which political capital is produced and reproduced among student activists and student organizations. While examining some of the larger socio-political issues on which students exercise their political agency in the present times, it tries to explain how questions of nationalism and nation-building, citizenship and even secularism have become important within student politics over the last five years or so. Theoretically, the thesis is built around a Bourdieusian conception of political capital. While existing studies have used Bourdieu's framework of capital to demonstrate the production and reproduction of class inequalities, the main contribution of this study is in foregrounding the production of students as a political class via the lens of political capital. With the advent of the 'network society' and new forms of communicative action both the public sphere as well as the ways of doing politics has been transformed by the emergence of social media. A second contribution of the study lies in analyzing the significance of digital activism and social media for student organizations and individual activists in student politics at a historical juncture when the rise of global movements has been associated with new communication technologies. By analyzing the interlinkages between political participation and social capital, this study attempts to describe how they contribute to the making of careers in politics. It maps the journeys of individuals within organizations who begin with student activism and seek to make a mark in full-time electoral politics. The thesis also tries to understand the relationship between social location and political assertion. Here, social location represents the interactions between identities such as caste, gender, socio-economic class, religion and geographic location and individual experiences that include life chances and worldviews. Identities, ideologies and various forms of social location combine with individual aspirations to shape a career in electoral politics, which is understood here as a form of self-making among student activists within DU.

Contents

1. Introduction 2. The definitive debates and decades of student politics 3. Higher education and political socialization 4. Ideology, identity and making of the 'SELF':

Delhi university' distinct student politics 5. Political captical and its forms: indide and outside the university 6. The cultures of dissent in the university 7. Re-inventing student politics via digital activism amid the covid-19 pandemic. Conclusion. Bibliography.

10. YOUNG (KH. Neil)

Eroding Island, Shifting Lives: Socio-Ecological Change on Majuli Island Assam.

Supervisor: Prof. Sudha Vasana

Th26914

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of hydrosocial relations producing the social ecological landscape of the marginal Mishing community living on the edges of Majuli. Majuli is one of the world's largest river islands formed by the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries in Assam, India. The Mishing I studied live and cultivate on sand bars called chapories that are continually formed, reshaped and eroded by the cycle of annual floods. More than half the land and households in Missamora village are located on colonized chapories that are not on any cadastral revenue records. My research objective is to understand Mishing ways of perceiving, engaging and living with chronic floods on Majuli. Floods have attracted considerable attention of the state since the colonial period and the current state, policy makers, media, developmentalists, and environmentalists continue to produce floods as a dramatic event, a hazard and a disaster. Majuli is constructed in this influential discourse as a vulnerable landscape, subject to destructive floods and needing powerful external techno-social intervention to save Majuli. I compare this high modernist vision to Mishing ways of living with chronic floods and social marginality. I show how the Mishing understand both flood and marginality as processes which they mould to their relative benefit rather than problems that can be 'fixed'. Mishing engagements with the river, floods and constantly forming chapories in the context of powerful discourses and flood control interventions are an example of the hydrosocial cycle where natural and social processes not just interact and influence each other but co-evolve dialectically. From this political ecological perspective, I show how Mishing ways of living with the flood are shaped and transformed by social power relations and development desires. In elaborating on Mishing ways of living with the flood, this thesis also contributes to the possibilities of imagining a dynamic social ecology at a time of planetary environmental crisis.

Contents

1. Introduction 2. Fixing the flood: saving majuli 3. Property in fluid nature 4. Heritage infrastructures and intangibles heritage 5. Drifting with the river: we go where the river makes us go. Conclusion. Bibliography.