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Occasional Papers I-VI



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# Occasional Papers I-VI March 2014

Department of Education

Department of Education

Department of Education (C.I.E)  
University of Delhi

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University of Delhi

# Occasional Papers I-VI March 2014

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*Disha, Jyoti Sethi and Vishakha Kumar*  
Editors

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## **PREFACE**

We are pleased to launch the Occasional Papers Series as a CIE publication that will provide a forum for the dissemination and review of written work on a range of topics in the area of Education. *Occasional Papers* is expected to provide a platform for wider readership and critique that academics need and would appreciate.

The purpose of the Series is to

- disseminate research and experience on themes that are relevant to the Department's objective of advancing theory and practice of education including teacher education.
- help colleagues and research scholars write and receive feedback on initial versions of their developing ideas.

This Issue is a collection of six papers that our research scholars have contributed to, based on small studies they carried out as part of the course on Research Methodology on the M.Phil and Ph. D. programmes. We hope that the dialogue this will generate will keep all of us researchers motivated to do more (quality) research, share and critique each other's work. We intend to eventually enlarge the scope of this Series to give it the status of a full-fledged academic journal of the Department. To make this possible we invite articles from our colleagues and research scholars in the Department of Education and Colleges that offer B.Ed. and B.El.Ed. in the University of Delhi. This Volume is refereed in that it has gone through several drafts based on peer-reviews as part of the Research Methodology Course. It is hoped that the feedback authors receive will help to improve the quality of the papers in due course.

We are also happy to acknowledge the hard work that our young editors, Disha, Jyoti Sethi and Vishakha Kumar have put in to get this Issue see the light of day. We hope that other researchers will be motivated by the initiative and enthusiasm that the editors have shown and will write high-quality research articles for consideration in this journal. We are aware that it is only when researchers start writing that they learn to write. This forum should provide a supportive but critical environment for good research and writing to happen, given the research-climate that exists at the Department of Education.

We are happy that we are able to offer this inaugural issue as a hard copy to all our colleagues and research scholars. This is also being launched as an e-journal on CIE website with provision for comments and suggestions by all our readers. Please visit <http://cie.du.ac.in> for a full view of the journal which is also downloadable.

We wish all our readers a happy and rewarding research experience!

**Rama Mathew**

**Bharati Baveja**

**Shobha Sinha**

## ABOUT THIS VOLUME

The Department of Education releases its first series of Occasional Papers. Available both in print and online, this series ensures easy accessibility to researchers in Education. This series includes six papers that were written by the research scholars, both M.Phil. and Ph.D, from 2007 to 2013, as 'Mini-Studies' for the 'Descriptive Research' course. The series has papers on different topics; however, all the studies engage with the experiences of the researcher. It is the explication of the research process that ties this volume together. The focus here is not on the key findings of each paper, but rather on the approach; what was considered worthy of being researched upon and how it was pursued. The major thrust of the series is on sharing the challenges faced in the research projects such as serious discussions before choosing the topic, struggle to enter the field, the difficulty of recording data, feeling overwhelmed in the data-pool.

There were many studies undertaken during the period of 2007 to 2013 by the scholars. Each study had a different and unique research story to be told. However, for the first issue we identified six studies. These studies are arranged chronologically and not in order of any merit. They were shortlisted on the basis of the quality and the depth illustrated in documenting the research journeys undertaken.

The first paper by Gunjan Sharma is an ethnographic study of tea-stalls in Delhi University. This paper focuses on understanding the ethos of non-formal spaces and their role in campus life. The second paper by Ekta Goel looks at the professional and the personal life of teachers teaching in the government schools. The paper by Deepti Srivastava and Shobha aims at locating agency in children's voice by delving into the world of street children. Next in the series is the paper by Malvika, Nidhi and Sonika, which discusses the journey undertaken by the researchers to understand how IV graders perceive 'Reading'. The paper by Disha and Vishakha Kumar tries to look at the construction of gender in the folk songs sung in Sonipat district of Haryana. They have tried to study folk songs as a part of culture through which young girls in the community are socialised. The sixth paper by Jyoti, Nisha and Reemu is an autobiographical account that attempts to analyse their journeys as teachers through narrative enquiry. There is no first author in any of the papers. The names of researchers are arranged alphabetically in each study.

It was a sheer pleasure and an enriching experience to read all the studies; we hope our readers will enjoy them too. As it is the first volume, it would evolve with time and our readers' suggestions. We hope that it facilitates continuous dialogue among the researchers.

*Disha, Jyoti Sethi & Vishakha Kumar*

Editors

Department of Education

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## **OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. I**

### **Understanding Tea-stalls on Delhi University Campus**

#### **A Qualitative study**

**Gunjan Sharma**

#### **Abstract**

*This paper is based on a short qualitative study taken up during my doctoral coursework (2008-09) as a part of a research methods course. This study was aimed at understanding general ethos of tea-stalls on north campus of Delhi University. While the primary activity that goes on in the various institutions on campus is academic teaching-learning and research, the campus life or culture has many more constituents. Non-formal spaces (which are at times 'non-legal' as well) that exist outside the academic institutions (like tea-stalls) also play a role in constituting what may be called the campus culture. Thus, though the specific aim of the study was to understand what usually goes on at these tea-stalls, it was located in the broader interest in making sense of campus life. Through this study, it came across that these tea-stalls are understood by several stakeholders as being inseparable part of student culture on the campus and are perceived as having a non-conformist identity. They are understood as social spaces which allow thinking beyond institutional frameworks, articulating resistance, relating to others and feeling intellectually and ideologically unperturbed and safe. On the one hand, these spaces are perceived as being elemental in constituting campus life, on the other (as most of the stalls are not 'legal') they are constantly under the threat of being removed, relocated or replaced.*

#### **Context of the study**

There are a number of institutional spaces available within the north campus of Delhi University, including various colleges affiliated to the University, the various departments or faculties of the University, and the administrative centres. Along with these formal institutional places, there are certain other physical and social spaces which can be found within the north campus which include petty item stalls, eating joints and tea-stalls. Although it is the formal institutional structures which remain in focus in the University, the other spaces also significantly

constitute the everyday life on the University campus. This is specifically the case with the tea-stalls on the campus.

As a student-inhabitant of this campus over the past eight years or so, I have become used to the existence of these tea-stalls and experience an unarticulated discomfort whenever the issue of removing them has emerged in the past. As a routine visitor to these tea stalls; drinking tea, talking, sitting idly and even completing pending work at these tea-stalls has become a part of life. There are around ten tea-stalls on the campus which run on a regular basis, but as a routine visitor I go to one particular tea stall and visits only two other, occasionally. However, while consciously thinking about the reasons for this 'preference' nothing specific could be articulated, yet a feeling that there are some reasons which cannot be expressed was experienced. Some people might call it 'habitual' behaviour but being habitual doesn't seem to be the only reason for it. In informal discussions with people who regularly visit these tea-stalls and are acquainted to me, similar kinds of narratives were encountered<sup>1</sup>. From these experiences as a student emerged an interest in understanding tea-stalls situated in the north campus of Delhi University.

### **Formulation of the study**

It can be said that the idea of taking up a study to understand these tea-stalls did not emerge abruptly. The long pending interest in studying the tea-stalls was articulated while thinking over what could be the probable topics suited for a short qualitative inquiry – which was a compulsory requirement for the completion of the 'Descriptive Research' course I was studying as a part of my doctoral coursework. The idea concretely emerged when I visited a tea-stall as a part of general routine while I was pondering over the probable topic. However, it was only over two week's time that I could specifically formulate what I wanted to study. Initially, I felt that I should study discourse at tea-stalls but gradually, while putting up questions to myself, it became clear that I actually wanted to study the general ethos at the tea-stalls on the campus. This task had to be undertaken in groups. Thus, this study was planned with a fellow researcher<sup>2</sup>. Although, the topic was articulated by me, while discussing it, it was felt that it had the potential to unite both researchers' interests and commitment. However, due to some unavoidable circumstances my fellow researcher could accompany me to the field only thrice and shared

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1        *These included casual discussions with three acquaintances individually, in the phase when the researcher was pondering over this idea.*

2        *Ms. Garima Aggarwal.*

her feedback on the written draft which was valuable in revising the final write-up.

## **Research Questions**

There were innumerable questions that seemed to emerge while articulating the study in the very initial phase. However, while thinking about how these questions can be pursued, it was realized that all these were not many but one question .i.e. *what is the usual ethos of tea-stalls in Delhi University?* In pursuit to understand this ‘ethos’ as mentioned in this main question there were certain guiding questions which were necessary to put. So, the research questions that were framed were the following:

- What usually goes on at tea-stalls in Delhi University?
- Why so many tea-stalls are there in Delhi University?
- What meaning does a tea stall and tea hold for those who come to these joints?
- In the owners’ and customers’ view, how have these places changed over the years, if at all they have changed?
- What a tea-stall is as opposed a canteen/ cafe and other similar places?

## **About method, sample and field**

### **Method**

This study was a part of Descriptive Research course and hence, it was supposed to be qualitative in nature. However, even if this study was to be conducted outside the purview of this course then also I would have situated it in the within the tradition/conventions of ‘qualitative method’. The reason for this being that the major research quest in this case was to ‘understand’ tea-stalls on Delhi University campus.

The assignment was to conduct an inquiry in an ‘ethnographic’ mode of inquiry, with participant observation and in-depth interviews. However, it can at best be seen as an inquiry (not very systematic though) that involved collecting data through observations, interviews and conversations with peoples. The reason for not calling it an ethnography is that a key feature of ethnography is a prolonged ‘stay’ in the field with the aim of ‘being there’ in the field to participate in and/or observe the everyday happenings so as to understand the ‘local meanings’ (O’Reilly 2005, p. 12). The actual study was not a prolonged one and stretched



over only 15 days. The oxymoron inherent in the term ‘participant observation’<sup>3</sup> was resolved ‘somewhat’ in favour of observation rather than full and complete participation.

### **Selection of field**

For the purpose of this study, *three tea-stalls*<sup>4</sup> situated in *north campus of University of Delhi* were selected. The main reason for limiting the field to north campus was that the idea of this study was specific to this field and emerged from researcher’s experiences within this field. The secondary reason was that this study was supposed to be a smaller one as assigned to the researchers as a part of their M.Phil/PhD coursework. The three tea-stalls were chosen after an initial visit to all the tea-stalls in the campus area. There are around 10 tea-stalls in the campus which run on a regular basis; three of them were selected on the basis of their location and people visiting these places. Two of these three tea stalls are located within a circumference of two distinct faculties located in the campus (Site 1 and Site 2) and one of the tea-stalls is located by the side of a major street in the campus (Site 3). The guiding consideration while selecting these tea-stalls was that one should not land up studying tea-stalls with people coming from any one particular faculty or college. However, visits to each of these ten tea-stalls were made at least twice. It would also be relevant to mention that apart from the tea-stalls, visits were made to places where other vendors or hawkers, mostly selling food items, have set up their stalls in order to have a better understanding of the general environment at the non-institutionalised spaces on the campus. These visits were made as per convenience.

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3      *Oxymoron as per Cambridge Dictionary means two words used together, which means two different or opposite things, such as 'bitter-sweet' or 'smart casual'. 'Participation' has a sense of complete submergence in the field which means that the researcher is simply being there, hanging around, taking part and being no more than a participant. On the other hand, 'observation' embodies being mentally prepared to understand, notice and note things happening around, it has a sense of distancing oneself and understanding oneself as a researcher rather than just being a participant (Schutz, 1972). It seems to be a debate between 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' in qualitative research.*

4      *The identity and location of these tea stalls have been intentionally concealed because of the issue of confidentiality. Revealing identity might affect the site tea-stalls and their owners. Also, each of the stalls is visited by people from particular colleges and faculties and revealing identity of these faculties would raise confidentiality issues.*

## **Fieldwork**

Keeping in mind that this was a small study a fieldwork of 10 days was planned. However, later it was felt that there is a need to expand this duration by at least five days. Since, observation was seen as a main tool for this ethnographic inquiry, major time of the fieldwork was apportioned for field observation (10 days) at the three tea-stalls.

Apart from the observations, interviews were planned in order to corroborate the observations. Four participants were purposely identified for conversations/interviews. The selection was made such that the interviewees were those to whom I, as a participant, had access and who have been regular at these three tea-stalls so that they could speak from their experiences over a period of time. Two days time was allocated for interviews. Although, there were broad research questions in mind around which these conversations/interviews were to be conducted, no specific categories of questions were pre-decided for the interviews. Furthermore, own experiences of tea-stalls helped in triangulating the findings.

The fieldwork included being there at the sites at least for two hours at a stretch for observations. Observations included listening to the discussions taking place at the sites among the participants being covert (and for this reason the account of such discussions is not reproduced here). I also participated in general discussions at tea-stalls with those participants to whom I was acquainted. Furthermore, although the field observations carried over 15 days yet this was not done at a stretch, i.e. conversations/interviews and discussions were conducted in between as and when the opportunity was found. Field notes were maintained in no specific format, however, gradually it was felt that there was some refinement in the way notes were taken and maintained.

In the process of observations at field sites, a 'more-or-less' 'covert' mode was adopted. The invisibility in the field was not a challenge – as I was a student it was not difficult to mix in the milieu. [However, being a woman I did appear to be an outlier particularly when I visited the sites in the evenings or was there for a long time at a stretch]. Furthermore, routine participation was a medium of access to some of the participants at these tea-stalls. Being 'covert' in the field usually raises ethical questions on the research (O'Reilly 2005, p.59). However, it was not something that was decided in advance. It was felt that such a disclosure could lead to disturbance in the field, which could not have been settled by expanding the duration of fieldwork as this study had to be completed within a short time. Moreover, while in the field there was no option other than being covert, because there was no logical way in which I could have divulged the agenda to those at the tea-stalls. I could not have

‘announced’ or gone to each and every person at the tea stall to explicitly state the purpose of my visits. However, in the conversation/interview sessions, it was mentioned to the participants that I was interested in understanding tea-stalls in the campus and was doing a short study. After initial visits the research purpose was also shared with the tea stall owners/vendors. So, I was not completely covert and shared the intent to whatever extent it was possible. However, I cannot say with surety how much the tea stall vendors understand the idea and thus what their ‘consent’ meant. Similar concerns regarding consent have been debated by several researchers (Mulder, Rance, Saurez and Condori, 2000; O’Reilly 2005, p.107).

There were other problems that were faced. One of these related to recording the proceedings of the interviews. It was felt that using a recorder while conducting the first interview brought an element of formality in the interview and forced the interviewee to conceal certain things which he/she didn’t want to say on record. This interviewee later asked the researchers to delete the interview recorded and keeping the ethical considerations in mind the same was done. So, the recorders were not used subsequently. However, taking proper notes while conducting interview also was difficult because as I researcher I did not want to ask the interviewee to wait for me to complete the notes or to interrupt in the flow of ideas. Taking brief notes and later reconstructing them immediately after the interview seemed to be a better option.

The major part of observations emerged out as being common to all the three sites. However, there were certain observations peculiar to each of them and have been retained in the following account, yet the account has been sketched taking site one as a comprehensive site and other two as add on sites. This approach however, was not followed while observing in initial phases.

### **Observations from the Field**

The tea-stalls are located across the north campus of the University. There are tea-stalls which are located inside the walls of various departments, they also exist in the form of canteens and are also located at corners or by the side of streets in the campus. Physical distance from each other does not seem to be a guiding criterion for establishing them as one can find two or three tea-stalls located in close vicinity to each other, for example, the arts-law faculties which are neighbours with easy passages between them, enclose three tea-stalls in their circumference. These tea stalls are set up with minimum physical resources- a base and boxes to keep the material or a ‘*khokha*’ at the most, and all of them are situated under shade of a tree. For sitting simple rags are placed at the

skirting or small boundary walls or on heavy stones which have fallen apart from nearby structures.

About the actual activity of the tea-stall, it was found that tea is sold at a cost of Rs.3 (special tea costing Rs.4), is continuously prepared and is served in glasses. Biscuits and '*Matthis*' are the eatables that are available at a cost ranging from Rs.2 to Rs.3 to supplement tea. Lemon tea is also available at one of the tea-stalls that were taken as a site along with '*samosa*' and chips. None of the items, individually, costs more than Rs.10. For this reason most of the participants at these tea stalls don't mind sitting for hours and placing orders continuously. Also, because of this these tea-stalls have emerged as semi-informal kind of meeting places. From past experience it can be said that I was often called at a tea-stall for discussing a formal project whenever I working on one.

There were three people engaged in serving and making tea at sites 1 and 2 and at site 3 two were engaged. At site 1, a child serves tea in the evenings and on holidays and was also spotted washing utensils once (he is a relative of the owner). The *chai-walas* address the regular male visitors as '*bhaiya*' and the female visitors are addressed as '*madam*'. At site 1, it was found that the senior (in age) male visitors were being addressed as '*doc sahib*'. Here, the *chai-wala* gives a personal touch to his relation with regular customers by shouting aloud to serve '*doc-sahib wali special chai*'. However, the communication between the tea-takers and tea-makers is minimalist and very limited- they communicate only while placing order, making payments or passing by. Yet, the way they communicate, their tone, their body language and expression seem as if they are talking to a close friend. There is space for humour in whatever brief communication takes place between the tea-vendor and tea-takers, like, at site 1, one of the persons while clearing his account was heard saying to the tea vendor "brother, why do you charge me? You should pay me instead as I always praise you even though you make pathetic tea." The tea-vendor replied "*Bhaiya*, then I won't serve you tea from tomorrow, rather I will give you 2 rupees every day" (translated from Hindi).

The tea is served at orders at all the three sites selected; yet at two tea stalls apart from these sites to which visits were made, tea glasses are kept in a holder which a helper takes across for people to pick up at random mostly after every five to seven minutes. At the selected sites, it was observed that many visitors forgot to pay money at times but this did not seem intentional. Two such people at site 1 paid the money on their next visit. For some regular visitors the *chai-walas* maintains an account in a basic single-entry system of accounting, but over the years and during the visits the *chai-walas* were never found asking customers

to clear their accounts. There seems to be an unsaid mutual understanding and faith regarding money matters. This is also because the tea-vendors 'know' most of the visitors and the faculty from which they come and that they will come again<sup>5</sup>.

People visiting these tea stalls are from nearby colleges and departments and include students, the administrative staff and faculty members (very rare). They are mostly in small groups of two to five. Rickshaw pullers, auto drivers are also regular participants at site 1, which is located by the roadside. They find passengers at this tea-stall and this street side tea-stall has also emerged as auto/rickshaw stands. However, they appeared uncomfortable as soon as the stall became crowded with large numbers of students and moved away to another corner at some distance. Maximum visitors to all these tea-stalls are males. Women visitors are accompanied by males – lone women visitors were spotted only twice during the course of fieldwork.

Over the entire course of fieldwork people were found engaged in following activities in the same order of frequency- discussing (critiquing classes, teachers, politics, "the system"; discussing social, historical or personal issues and gossiping), sitting idly, reading, waiting for someone (passengers in case of auto/rickshaw drivers), working on assignments or presentations, meeting for exchanging things or for some formal discussions, talking on mobiles. Drinking tea went simultaneously with all these activities. The language used at the tea-stalls is Hindi with some words lifted from English. Some of the discussions related to- King Ashoka and his ideology, the semester system as an instrument for student's oppression, the story of a candidate who contested the University elections, ills of globalization and some others.

Most of the visitors appeared to be relaxed – in the sense they did not look in a hurry. Whenever, people sitting at the site tea-stalls were observed, it seemed from their body language as if they were sitting there for hours and would continue sitting, even when they had arrived just a few moments ago and leave soon after. They come to these tea stalls when class breaks, early mornings or while returning home. In the evening the hostellers visit the tea-stalls. Cleanliness is not an issue at these tea-stalls. People themselves clean the place where they wish to sit and never complain about things. It was found that tea glasses are washed in a big drum containing diluted soap and then are dipped in plain water hurriedly and this goes on in front of the people at these

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5      *This emerged in a discussion with a tea-vendor who was not very keen to respond to researchers query. Probably, the gender of the researcher was the factor that limited this discussion.*

stalls. During the observations, nobody was seen complaining about this – vendors confirmed this in conversations.

At all the three sites it was observed that stray dogs are a regular feature. At site 2, there are as many as six dogs (a male, a female and four pups). These dogs are pampered by the *chai-walas* as well as the students visiting these stalls by touching and feeding biscuits. At this stall the vendor serves milk and biscuits to the dogs and pups early morning before beginning the day. Some students have made a small brick structure and placed rags for these dogs. This small home was made for dogs in winters to save them from the chill by a group of girls and boys who reside in a college hostel. The dogs immediately run to these people wagging their tails. These dogs had been given names.

Apart from this, it was observed that in the vicinity of sites 1 and 2 that parallel structures including a café and a renewed canteen have come into existence recently (around a year back). Both these structures are much more commercial (with higher pricing of products) and offer a variety of eatables along with tea. Both of these have much better infrastructure than the two tea-stalls which stand nearby with minimum resources. The peak visiting hour at these two structures is the lunch hour. Except for lunch hour these two newer places find few visitors, whereas, the tea-stalls are relatively more crowded. At least, five to six people can always be found at these tea-stall sites whatever time of day it may be. All the three tea-stalls open at around 8 am in the morning. One of these closes at 7 pm as that particular faculty campus in which it is located is locked by 7.30 pm. The other two sites close after 8 pm. The two commercial places which have come up at two of these sites open much later than the two tea-stalls

Although, the above account is not exhaustive, it includes majority of observations that can present a broad picture of the everyday life at the three tea-stalls. To maintain coherence and brevity all relevant observations have not been reproduced here. Due to the same considerations two of the four interviews have been appended as Appendix B. An instance of how rapport was built with the participant before beginning with the interview has also been appended (Appendix A).

### **Analysis and Understandings**

The purpose of qualitative studies is not to describe things and conclude. Yet, since the aim of the study was to ‘understand’ tea-stalls on Delhi University campus it seems that it would be meaningful to share the understanding developed from the field observations, interviews and one’s own experiences as a visitor to tea-stalls over the course of this

study. It was not that the study was conducted in a framework that would lead to certain specific understandings, yet it was felt that it would be worthwhile to give an account of what the researcher understood from the field. The account that follows presents the most salient understandings drawn from the study.

### **Gender and the clientele of the tea stalls**

One of the most striking features of the tea stalls was the gendered nature of its clientele. These tea-stalls are places where males in large numbers can be invariably spotted and very few women were found during the fieldwork and even during the past visits. This seemed peculiar, especially when the number of women students in Delhi University is fairly large in comparison to the male students – roughly 61 percent (Delhi University records 2007-08). The reasons for this skew in the clientele are not clear, but as a female visitor to these tea stalls when I reflect and introspect, it seems that women find it difficult to spend time leisurely at these sites where men are present in large numbers and are engaged in their leisurely pursuits.

### **Generalizing character of tea-talk**

The character surrounding the talk at the tea-stalls is another dimension. The discussions at tea-stalls begin from specific instances, which might be personal in nature but gradually as they proceed are generalized to some larger phenomenon that is going around. This is an invariable experience that came across while listening to or participating in discussions. It seems as if some struggle to understand a small instance in a larger framework goes on in these discussions (refer to the account of discussion that took place prior to conversation I, Appendix B).

### **Intertwined cultures**

The tea-stalls have a special place in the life in Delhi University campus. People identify and link these tea stalls to the life at University and believe that a tea stall in the campus is characteristically different from a tea stall situated anywhere else. To substantiate, we can refer to what a participant says, “It [tea stall] is not only a part but a culture in its own way which not only gives a feel of University culture but builds it up in some way” and when he says, “this [nature of discussions] is what differentiates tea in Delhi University from anywhere else (Conversation I, Appendix B). They understand the culture of the tea-stalls as a part of the University culture and at the same time believe that the ethos at these tea-stalls shape the culture of the University. Both these cultures seem to be inseparable.

### **Need to relate and tea-stalls**

It also appears that tea-stalls are 'home-like' places for the participants especially for hostel students. From, the way they relate to each other, to strangers (Conversation II), to tea vendors and even to the dogs, it seems, they have a need of relating to others at a deeper level. The 'home' made for dogs at one of the sites seems to be an explicit manifestation of this.

### **Identity of tea-stalls**

Although, it seems that tea-stalls are a social institution in themselves, from the casual, careless and relaxed behaviour of the inhabitants it seems as if they are de-institutionalizing themselves from the structured way of lives they go through in the institutional set-ups to which they belong. As instances, we may refer to what a participant says in this context, tea stall "is space to think outside given frameworks" and "they are used to shed the burdens which are piled on them in the family and work place" (Conversation II, Appendix B). These tea-stalls seem to have a non-conformist identity or nurture such an ethos where such identities can be built, in a sense that the participants feel that they are non-conformists and their coming to these places has some association with this characteristic (Conversation I and II, Appendix B).

### **Students, resistance and tea-stalls**

From the conversations and discussions at the tea-stalls, it emerges that these tea-stalls are places where students can 'vent-out' – which at times appeared to be one form of expressing resistance. The contents of the discussions usually consist of critiquing the system of University, nation and society. Discontent with the kind of world we are living in and recognition of the need to change can be heard and felt. There is recognition of the fact that the society in which we live is unequal and that this inequality has entered each and every system including the University. A participant while talking about nature of discussions that take place at tea stalls says, "while discussing over these problems or issues ["larger issues"] we tend to relate them to larger phenomenon around us in the society we live" (Conversation I, Appendix B) and this cannot be accepted as it is. This might be because the tea-stalls are the only physical and social spaces where students can talk outside the institutional framework.

### **Tea: Not just a beverage**

From own experiences, observations (see the topics of discussion) and conversations (Appendix B) it emerges that tea is much more than a beverage, it has a symbolic character. In words of a participant, "tea actually is an idea, an expression, an instrument and a necessity". It is a



symbol of the student culture in Delhi University from which the need of being recognised as ‘intellectuals’ cannot be removed. This idea of University intellectual has close connections with the Marxian ideology, in a sense that as ‘intellectuals’ students feel that they can generate the much needed student revolution. That it is their responsibility to fight against inequality in the society and in their struggle the entire ‘system’ or the ‘larger framework’ stands and conspires against them. Tea is a symbol of being a proletariat, for the students. Coffee is not a part of these tea-stalls. One of the older informants explained this by mapping how in his student life he has seen a gradual disappearance of almost all the coffee houses in the University. He said that it could be because of the elitist character of coffee. When compared to the plight of coffee houses, even the talk of removal of the tea-stalls generates a discomfort among the students. Probably, this is the reason for the ‘unarticulated discomfort’ which I talked about in the beginning of this write-up.

### **Class division and tea-stalls**

From the conversations (Appendix B) and observations it appeared that there is a pattern of socio-economic class embedded in the customers’ preferences for tea-stalls. The stalls located inside the faculties do not usually have non-student visitors – though they are open for all. In contrast to this, the tea-stalls located at the peripheries of the campus are frequented by people belonging to another economic class – mostly rickshaw pullers and other wage labourers working on the campus. Even when a tea stall is located in vicinity, rickshaw pullers, labourers and students prefer going to particular stalls only. This observation also made me think about the geo-spatial structure of the north campus and analysing how its centre and periphery are constituted.

### **Unperturbed spaces**

From observations and interviews it can be said that one of the places which has remained relatively unperturbed of the various changes that have happened on the campus has been these ‘tea-stalls’. Although, there are frequent challenges posed to the existence of these tea-stalls manifested in a legal form, yet they have been able to sustain and maintain their character. Challenges also come up in the form of parallel structures like more ‘customer friendly’ cafes that are coming up near these places (even within institutions) or the in-house canteens taking a more commercialized shape [these were the observations made at two of the sites]. However, they have not yet been able to make these tea stalls obsolete. This aspect needs to be probed further to be able to understand it better.

The above understanding presents only a sketchy picture of the ethos of the tea-stalls in the campus. It seems necessary that in order to better understand the ethos there would be a need to expand the study over a long period of time with a better understanding of the tools and techniques. It is also felt that there is a lot of scope for planning and organizing this study in a better manner.

### **Delimitations**

- Time and resources (for proper recording of the fieldwork) were the delimiting factors in this study as it was taken up for a small study assigned for partial fulfilment for an academic course-work.
- Since, this was supposed to be a small study the field of the study was mainly limited to three tea stalls<sup>6</sup> situated in north campus of Delhi University.

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<sup>6</sup> *However, visits were made to all tea stalls situated in Delhi University.*

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **An instance of rapport building before conversation/interview**

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2009, 10 a.m.

Following is an instance of how rapport was built or acceptance was gained with one of the subjects at a tea stall who was not known to the researchers. This is a reconstruction so some bits and pieces might be missing. However, while initiating the discussion the researcher was conscious of the fact that this interaction will have to be reconstructed, so, she was in that frame of mind and was registering and trying to remember the subject's reactions and words, as far as possible.

This conversation was with a female student who was usually spotted at a particular site with male friends. She was waiting for someone one morning when a researcher happened to be there. This conversation was followed up later but the person was not very keen to discuss and was very focussed on her own specific queries regarding Ph.D.

PO: Participant Observer    P: Participant

PO: Hi

P: Hi, do I know you?

PO: Not actually, but I think we have seen each other many times at this tea stall

P: That's why you seem familiar,

PO: I am Gunjan, I am doing Ph.D. in Education from DU

P: That's nice. I am <name concealed>. I did my M.A. from Department of <concealed> and now I am planning to enrol for Ph.D. Hey, did you enrol under the new scheme?

PO: Yes

P: Good that I met you, please tell me about the new procedure and how to go about it, no one in my department is clear about it [sudden change in voice intonation, expression as if S was looking for someone who has this information]

PO: Sure. I can mail you the ordinance if you have an email

P: If you do that it will be very kind of you. Please note my email <concealed>. Can I also have your number and email?

[Contact details exchanged]

P: Can you also help me in understanding how do we make a good proposal. I mean how do we structure it? By the way, what's your research topic?

PO: I will write about that in my mail to you

P: If you do that I will give you chai-samosa party here.

PO: I will accept that party. And this also reminds me that I walked up to you to know something about this tea stall. I have seen you many a times here and happened to hear some part of your discussions one day, when by chance I was sitting around and your group seemed to have a heated debate over something. I don't actually remember the whole of the debate, neither could I catch whole of it, but I was a bit intrigued to know what led to that debate. From whatever I remember I can say it was about a case of student protest in which they were lathicharged. Actually, it is not about the content of the debate rather why such a debate occurred at this tea stall?

P: Why did it intrigue you? It is so common at these tea stalls

PO: You are right, it did not attract my attention in earlier days but as a research student these things catch my interest. Like this event has inspired me to understand culture of tea stalls in DU...Probably, I might even undertake a small study on these tea stalls and what happens around here, at some point in time. At present, I only want to understand this place.

PO: Oh, this is nice. Now, it seems to interest me also.

P: Is it? Can you please share your thoughts with me? I hope you are not getting late?

PO: I am waiting for my Professor with whom I want to do my research. Till then we can talk, after that I will catch up with you on mail or when we meet next. We can also fix up a time and talk; we have each other's contacts.

## **Appendix B**

### **Two conversations/interviews translated and reproduced**

#### **Conversation I**

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009, 12:30 pm

This informant was acquainted to me and happened to be present at the tea stall on one of the field visits. He used to be a regular participant at these tea stalls and had met the researcher several times at the same or few other tea stalls located within North Campus.

In the process of initial rapport building he was told that I was interested in understanding the tea stalls in the campus and might plan to take up a small study on tea stall culture in Delhi University, which they want to publish later. And that this is a pilot discussion to get an understanding.

He was of the view that a study on such a subject will not be suitable as these days very few magazines and journals “give value to such non-typical ideas”. On being probed about what is meant by ‘non-typical’ ideas, he indicated that it has to do with the saleability, profitability and efficiency of the idea (although he did not explicitly say this). He was of the view that one cannot study “*such maverick spaces*” (having connotation- non-conformist; better English translation not found). It took a lot of time to bring this person to the topic and when he began with it he sort of extended it to territories which the researchers had not conceived of earlier. The researchers derived the questions from what the subject was speaking and did not intervene in his flow of ideas. The subject left after the discussion was over. However, the very next day he called up the researcher he knew and said that two of the questions that the researchers asked helped him in articulating something about the culture of Delhi University in a “*larger paradigm*”. He later changed his prior view and encouraged the researcher to take up this study and write this article. He proposed that through his contacts he could find sponsors for the study.

The interview was conducted in Hindi for subject’s comfort and in consideration of the fact that the atmosphere around is not disturbed, as most of the inhabitants at this stall are largely Hindi speaking. The researcher chose not to record the interview as it brings a great deal of formality to the discussion and preferred taking notes of key ideas. Immediately following the ideas the notes were reconstructed wherever the need was felt. In the following pages translated version of the interview has been reproduced:

PO: What according to you is tea, apart from its constituent elements- Tea leaves, milk, sugar and water?

P: Tea at the least is a mixture of tea leaves, milk, sugar and water. There is much more to it. Tea actually is an idea, an expression, an instrument and a necessity. I say this because most of the thoughts come to me while I am having tea. So much so that when I think about it I find that I feel like having tea whenever I want to think about my projects. I would be amused if you tell me that I am the only person who feels this way. I think if you talk to others in this University, only those who are regular tea drinkers, you might find most of them sharing this feeling. I would also say that tea is a necessity in this University because according to me despite a marked fall in the quality of work, this still is a place where people think. However, I don't say that only people in University think, I am talking about thinking about larger issues.

PO: Do you mean that while having tea with other people you discuss about "larger issues"...by the way what do you mean by "larger issues"?

P: Yes, by and large while taking tea the issues that come up are not individual. It is not to say that personal problems are not shared but while discussing over these problems or issues we tend to relate them to larger phenomenon around us in the society we live. So although we might begin from personal issues but in a larger sense these are related to all of us. Like although we might begin by discussing how a fellow's daughter reacted to the Taj Mahal terrorist incident, we might go on to identifying the problems in the way the media prioritizes happenings. I remember that this discussion ended in all of agreeing that the world in which we live is governed by the interests of the 'mainstream'. I remember you were also there with us on this day. So, I would say that this is what differentiates tea in Delhi University from anywhere else.

PO: If we take cue from your response it seems you feel that there is some kind of phenomenon around tea in Delhi University.

P: I would say that tea in itself is a phenomenon especially in Delhi University. It already is a commonality between people from all stratas, religions and backgrounds. It is a way of life. If you don't take tea at a tea stall here you can never truly understand what this University is like, what are the kinds of people it nurtures and what kind of ideas it generates.

PO: It means that it is a part of culture of this campus?

P: It is not only a part but a culture in its own way which not only gives a feel of University culture but builds it up in some way.

PO: What you are saying makes sense but this campus does not has one tea stall, it has many and so I am a bit confused whether they make up one culture or many cultures?

P: This is a very well articulated question and I am happy that you asked me this over a cup of tea which in a way gives strength to the assertion I made initially. I can say that all the tea stalls in this campus are different from each other mainly because of the people it is visited by, so if we visit these tea stalls we would find difference in what is going on. But these differences do not take away the similarity in the macro culture of a tea stall in this campus.

PO: You are talking about the tea stall culture but over the years have you seen any changes in this culture?

P: There have been a lot of changes especially with the change in the nature of entrants in this University. Earlier we used to find all kinds of people in this University and so all kinds of perspectives and ideas used to coexist. But recently this University, especially, the north-campus has become a place for only the middle class...who scores very high marks because the kind of schooling they have. The poor children have been pushed away to the correspondence school and strangely its location is such that these people do not even enter the campus. They are through with their work at the periphery of this campus like their status at the periphery of the society. Even if they make it to regular colleges they are the ones who won't be able to sustain for Masters and research degrees lest they walk up the economic ladder. The rich one's go abroad. Even in the middle class there is a specific class which comes to the University. Children of the technocrat class...engineers, doctors, professors, lawyers...go to professions as if in their lineage or join University and then go abroad for research degrees or whatever. This is you know the power structure in society reflecting in University culture. This has become starker over the years. Similarly, I feel there is a change in the aspirations of youth which also enters the Delhi University. So these changes are bound to show at the tea stalls as well. But still I would say, tea stalls are the places where the impact of these changes is least felt (although felt to a great extent). That is why people like me feel safe and at home at these tea stalls and you may find many like me wandering around.

PO: So, you don't find newer people becoming a part of this culture?

P: I did not say that, though younger ones prefer going to canteens, Nirula's and Mc.D's but if they stay here for further studies they automatically become a part of these tea stalls. And then they keep coming to these tea stalls even when they leave the University. Actually,

if I think over it I feel that those who stay for higher studies actually never leave the University and these tea stalls. Also, I would say that people like me whom you may call agents of these tea stalls bring many more to these places...that is how we reproduce this culture, rather any culture gets reproduced like this. If you remember, you came to this tea stall with me when we were working on a project and I introduced you to the tea stall person here.

## **Conversation II**

26<sup>th</sup> March 2009, 2:30 p.m.

PO: What according to you is a tea-stall in Delhi University?

P: It is gossiping it is a momentary life which one can live without burden; it is a place where one can think with open mind. It is space to think outside given frameworks. It is a place where you land up sharing your secrets with an unknown strange man (not woman) sitting next to you.

PO: You seem to believe that there is some essence related to these tea-stalls

P: Of course it is...and I believe they are a home to a culture. A culture of coming out of tensed and monotonous lives. Many times a culture of quenching hunger in small money, which is rather difficult in metropolitan Delhi; a culture of comradeship.

PO: But Delhi University has many tea-stalls, do you believe all of them are home to this same culture?

P: DU tea culture has a range of tea cultures. Like <identity of the chai-wala concealed> tea stall is visited by '*baniyas*' of Kamla Nagar in morning and <chai-wala> is skilled at giving a false boost to the egos of these people by shouting out that make a special tea for Lalaji and dusting the rags where they sit. In afternoon, this tea stall is inhabited by students from <name of institution concealed>. In the evenings it is a place where the '*babus*' and hostellers come. This chai-wala is skilled at making customers. Then there is <location concealed> tea-stall where rickshaw pullers can be found [this is a tea stall almost outside the main campus area]. You see both of these are a bit different because of people who visit them. Now I wonder why rickshaw pullers don't visit some other tea-stalls inside the campus, probably they don't feel comfortable caught between these 'elitist' institutions. Rest other tea-stalls are very typical and very similar.

PO: Have you given a thought why there are so many tea-stalls in Delhi University?



P: No. But now if I think, I can say that University is a place where people have the opportunity to enjoy leisure. As it is you know the teaching staff hardly works, the administrative staff completes the formalities, and students also can afford leisure. These tea-stalls are physical manifestations of this leisure. Although, I don't know how these tea-stalls came into existence but now they are used to shed the burdens which are piled on them in the family and work place.

PO: Have these places been like this over the years? You have been in the University from the past 14 years, you might have an idea.

P: Look there is a creeping of the global market in the University. Like where you see Nirula's today, there existed a coffee shop earlier which used to sell coffee for Rs3. Can you tell me the difference between the price of a coffee at Nirula's and Rs.3? You don't need to be proficient in Maths for this! Similarly, there are other changes. You can see people asking for disposable cups even when they know how harmful they are. People passing by ask for cold-drinks. Profit-making has entered in the tea stalls and they have increased the items they sell. And you know capitalism and market do not come alone they come with a power and backing of the State. So you can see every now and then government attempting to uproot these tea-stalls and what will they do at these places? They will establish 'cafes' like the one in law faculty.

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## **OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. II**

### **How Professional and Personal Lives of Women Working as Primary Teachers in Government Schools are Intertwined**

A Qualitative study

**Ekta Goel**

#### **Abstract**

*The present study aims to look at the professional and personal life of teachers, teaching in government schools. The study took place in a qualitative framework. In-depth interviews, field notes and personal write-ups were used to collect data. Later, a cross-case analysis was done of the data based on the broad themes which had emerged. Some of the themes were marriage, role of men vs. women, choice of profession, role of family etc. The conclusion that could be drawn from the analysis is that it is still very difficult for women to balance their personal and professional lives. Society still favors men and equality is a myth, which is far from realization. It emerged in the study that teaching remains the favourite job for females because of lesser working hours.*

The thought of the study emerged from the daily school experiences and conversations with the colleagues in school where I teach. It has been two years since I began teaching in that school, and since then I have adjusted very well with my colleagues. I have learnt a lot from them and also shared new theories and practices, which I think are quite useful in the classroom. Apart from discussing professional issues, we discuss personal issues as well. We discuss family life, soap operas on TV, food, fashion, and current affairs. A major part of our conversation comprises of the discussion about our family life; what we want ideally and what actually happens, how life of a woman is so difficult? Most of the times, in the discussions with my colleagues, the idea that life is good only till the time one is unmarried came across. These thoughts kept revolving in my mind. When given a chance, I thought of converting my thoughts in a research study. It also gave me a chance to further explore the lives of teachers in school.

From the beginning, it was decided that I will take a qualitative approach to my study, as the very basic essence of our course was qualitative research. Now, the question came that how do I begin this research, which method should be employed for collection of data and what

techniques should be used to analyse the data which will do justice with the qualitative research framework. Keeping in mind the short span of time, I decided to go ahead with the in-depth-interviews. To triangulate the data I decided to take observations and field notes. I read a lot about in-depth, unstructured interviews. However, when it came to taking interviews actually for my research, a lot of questions started coming into my mind. After discussing them with my co-scholars and guide, some of the doubts were resolved. The basic idea which I realised was that I should not give any direction to the interview by putting thoughts in their mind or words in their mouth. After that, I had a larger concern that if I don't have any predefined questions in my mind, my studies might go haywire. Again, the issue was resolved by discussion with my co-scholars that the researcher should have broad themes in mind, but the questions should emerge spontaneously at the time of the interview, taking cue from the interviewee's responses. I was a little comfortable after taking some mock interviews but was a little scared before taking the first interview. On the first day when I went to school, with the thought of my research in mind, everything looked important and worth taking notes.

The main objectives of my study were not crystal clear at the beginning, but one of the issues I wanted to explore was how personal and professional life of teachers is intertwined. I wanted to understand the effect of one on the other and that why did they feel that unmarried life is better.

For the sample, I selected three of my colleagues. The criteria for deciding the sample was accessibility and convenience. They were of different age groups. They were also at different stages of their lives; this was to see how issues are different in different stages of a teacher's life.

Pooja (name changed) is twenty five (25) years old, recently married. It has been three years since she took up this job. She is very enthusiastic about taking initiatives and experimenting with new teaching methods.

Manju is twenty eight years old. It has been eight years since she got married. She is also teaching from the last eight years. She has two kids. She is a confident and helpful person and offers advice to everyone for a happy married life. Everybody seems to enjoy her company.

Veena is the senior-most teacher in my school. She is fun loving and supports every good cause. She is a feminist. She has been teaching since last thirty years and is about to retire in three years.

Initially, I started maintaining field notes which were taken in the staffroom or other group talks. I had informed the participants about the

nature and aim of my study beforehand. After one week of observations I decided to take the first interview.

The first interview was a short one because after asking some questions I reached a deadlock. So, I decided to stop that interview there only. The next day, I went to the second participant and took the interview and on the same day I took the interview of the third participant. After that, I took all the notes and recordings to my co-scholars to invite their suggestions on those interviews, such as my shortcoming in asking questions, the best way proceed further.

My biggest concern was that I became very conscious while asking questions, as I didn't want to lead the participants. The participants became very formal and conscious when the interview was being recorded. They usually talked very formally. When I was done with the first round of interviews with all the three participants, I started thinking about the second round of interviews. I was grappling with several doubts, such as shall I think of some new issues which should be covered, or focus on the issues which were talked about in the previous interview. The suggestions which came that day from the co-scholars really helped me in taking my study further. It was suggested that although the issues which were reflected from the interviews were interesting, but they were very common. To know more about my participants' thought processes I needed them to introspect. The conversations should be genuinely open and the biggest challenge was to persuade them to think more about their own selves. I needed to look at their deep underlying thoughts and feelings. In the mean time, I also referred to the study conducted by Veena Sharma on teachers working in a nursing institution. Sharma (2007) in her narrative enquiry tried to look at the development of pedagogical thinking of teachers in institutions of higher education. She reported five case studies. It intended at studying the development of pedagogical thinking of teachers. The data was collected mainly through long in-depth unstructured interviews. The analysis comprised of reporting the voices of participants in the form of case studies. Further, cross-case analysis was done to look at the common issues.

After, coming home I thought about taking my second interview. Now, it seemed a bit easy with all the suggestions which I had in my head. But, these were all suggestions. The next step had to be taken by me. So, I thought of five broad themes around which I will try to focus my next interview.

I took and recorded the interview, which were fairly longer this time. But, there was some hesitation on the part of participants. As soon as the tape recorder was switched off, they were more comfortable. Therefore, I

switched to field notes. Next, I thought of recording thoughts of my participants in written form. I asked them to pen down anything about themselves. I asked them to take their own time. By the end of next three days, I had data from all my participants. Now, it seemed to me that the data I needed for my small research is more or less collected. The next herculean task was to analyze the data. The question that emerged was that in what way can the data collected from multiple sources be analyzed. The major tussle was between reporting the case studies as they were and making a cross-case analysis. I decided to go with cross-case analysis because the case studies which had emerged were more or less similar. So, I thought of keeping the major themes which emerged as the baseline for my analysis. To chalk out the major themes from the data, I read the data several times. I looked at the themes that emerged from all the three cases. After that, I looked at the common themes and subthemes. I tried to take each and every theme even if it was unique for a single case.

The major themes and subthemes which emerged across all the cases were:

### **1. Importance of family's support in professional life**

All three participants felt that family's support is essential in a working woman's life. Veena felt that balancing family life and professional life is like travelling in two boats. Hence, the role of the family becomes quite important.

“Professional aur personal life dono ko saath lekar chalna bada mushkil hai. Dono me samanjasy baithana bhi mushkil hai kyunki dohari zindagi jeeni padti hai. Aise me agar gharwale cooperate kare to life aasan hoti hai nahi to mushkil. Mere case me mujhe family support thik dhang se nahi mila isliye shayad main apne bachho ko achhi parvarish nahi de paayi. Jisse wo dabe dabe sahme sahme se rehte hain.”

(It is really difficult to make proper balance between professional and personal life. It's really difficult because one has to live a dual life. In this situation, if family members cooperate with you then it is ok, otherwise it is difficult. In my case, I did not get proper family support. That is why I think I could not raise my children properly. They are timid.)

Pooja also felt the same that family is important, so that one can discuss one's issues and problems with them. There should be someone with whom one can share tensions and feel relieved.

“Family has an important role to play. It all depends on their thinking; that do they take your profession seriously or not??”

Manju said that the family should also be happy with the profession you are in.

“My family is happy with my profession as a teacher. So, I cannot think of changing my profession.”

### **1A. Role of the husband**

All three participants felt that although role of the family is crucial, yet husband plays the most important role in supporting working women.

Pooja felt that her husband plays a very important role in her life.

“Husband plays a key role. My husband tries to help me, but he speaks more and acts less. But, sometimes he really helps. He has little knowledge about my profession, but he is trying to learn”

Manju felt that main support system in married life is the husband. According to her, he is the source of encouragement and discouragement. In her case, her husband does all outdoor works, while she takes care of household chores and she is quite happy with that.

### **1B. Joint vs. nuclear families**

All the participants unanimously felt that joint families are better than nuclear families as they serve as a support system for working women. Although, both kind of family systems have their own advantages and disadvantages.

Manju felt that it depends on what kind of people are there in the family. Joint families are important for inculcating values in children.

“Kids get spoilt in nuclear families. Sense of respect for elders and etiquettes in children can only come from joint families. However, adjustment is a big issue in joint families”.

Veena also felt the same. “In joint families you get full support and the burden is less.”

Pooja felt that both type of families have their own advantages and disadvantages. She lives with the extended family and is happy with it.

“Both have their own pros and cons. In joint families work is divided and hence time management is possible. In nuclear families you have to do everything yourself”.

## **2. Define oneself**

When asked about what kind of persons they are, there were very interesting responses.

Pooja described herself as

“I am simple, emotional (a little bit) and the most careless person. I never took my life seriously. My life was completely unplanned. Whenever I planned anything it just did not happen that way. As the time comes I adjust according to that and life moves on”.

Veena described herself as

“Main ek bahut hi sadharan mahila hun. Aisa nahi hai ki main sada se hi aisi thi. Ache padhhe likhe parivaar me janm lene ke karan main bhi bahut mahatvaakanshi thi. Aur main bhi Sheela Dikshit ban sakti thi. Lekin maine zindagi ke anubhavo se jaana ki insaan ke kuchh banane me bahut jyada bhagya aur paristhitiyon ka saath hota hai. Isi khami yaaje ko bhugatate hue main ek sadharan mahila me parivartit ho gayi. Aur aaj main apne parivaar rishtedaaro yaa samaj ke alawwa kuchh nahi soch paati.”

(I am a very ordinary woman. I was not always like that. I was born into an educated family. I was ambitious. I could have become Sheela Dikshit. But, I have learnt from my life experiences that the progress of a human being depends on luck and circumstances. Because of all these I am now a very ordinary woman. And today I cannot think beyond my family, relatives, and society)

Manju defined herself as

“I am a bold lady and I can take decisions for myself. But, I stop because I think that these decisions should not affect my family in turn”.

### **2A. Teaching as the first choice for a profession**

All of them replied that teaching was not their first choice. It just came as a choice because of parental pressure.

Manju said that she wanted to be a lawyer. But, her parents wanted her to be a teacher. Now, she thinks that this profession is good as she can give adequate time to her family which she couldn't have given being a lawyer. It sometimes comes in her subconscious but there is no choice now as she is married and eight years after marriage she is almost settled in her married life.

("I am 90% happy with my present life. The 10% is in my subconscious. I think of being a lawyer but now I have adjusted. I know I cannot go back.")

Pooja said that she could have taken up a corporate job. She did not like teaching much. But, her parents thought that this profession suits women, so she took it. Now she feels good with it, although the stagnation in the present job haunts her sometimes. She feels that keeping in mind the family responsibilities this job is quite good.

("I could have finished my graduation from the good college in which I took admission. Then have done M.B.A or some course. I could have taken some corporate job. Given a chance to go back I would certainly take up some good corporate job.")

Veena said that there were limited choices of profession at that time. There were mostly government jobs. There were limited options of teaching, office work or nursing. Nobody wanted to take up a job with long working hours so she opted for teaching as a profession.

## **2B. What are you as a person detached from all the societal roles?**

It was difficult for the participants to initially think of themselves as persons who don't have responsibilities and social roles.

Veena felt that it would be good if she could be detached of roles, but it is just not possible because if everyone started running away from their roles then society will break down. Social roles and responsibilities form the skeleton of the society. And hence, we cannot think of our existence without society.

Pooja felt that it would be really cool if she can live a single day without her social roles and masks. She would then be free to take her decisions herself, roam anywhere, and wear clothes of her choice.

"I would have got a boyfriend, which I could not because of my parents"

Manju also felt that if there were no social roles she would certainly be a bold personality. She would have taken bold and good decisions for herself, without worrying about her husband and her family.

"I have a fear that my decisions will affect my husband and my children. So, I am afraid to take bold decisions as I have to think about them as well"



### **3. Relationship between personal and professional life**

All of the participants said that there is continuity between personal life in professional life. It means that professional life is most of the times limited to school timings whereas, when there is some tension in one's personal life one remains disturbed in school as well. Teachers rarely carry school tensions and work at home because they don't have time for that at home.

Pooja felt that if work load at home is more, then one would feel tired here in school as well.

"If we work hard at home, we feel tired at school also. We cannot teach with full enthusiasm. Second, is about emotional status. If you are happy at home, you are happy at school as well."

Manju also felt that if the environment at home is tensed due to some reasons one cannot give their best at school as well.

"The mood from which you come out to school is really important. If we are tense, then our energy and work efficiency decreases as well. I am not that enthusiastic and most of the times I give written work to students"

Veena felt that as the woman has to take care of kids at home one's mind is usually at home.

#### **3A. Women in earlier times vs. women in today's world**

It came out from the discussions and the observations that women are living a dual life in today's world. Although, they are working outside the home their responsibilities inside the home are still the same. In this case, they have to take care of both the things.

Veena said that women are taking dual responsibilities these days and hence they cannot sometimes do justice to any of them.

"Aaj ke zamane me ladkiyaan bahar nikalti hain par ye tabhi thik hai agar gharwale cooperate kare. Nahi to to unki zindagi pehle se bhi nark ho gayi hai, badtar ho gayi hai. Timings ka bhi khas dhyan rakhna chahiye."

(In today's world, girls go out but it is ok only if the family supports them. Otherwise, their life is worse than hell. They should keep the timings of the job in mind as well.)

### **3B. Scope for professional development**

All of the participants are working as primary teachers. The chances of promotion within the job are very less. They can either get promoted to T.G.T in coming years or get a post of headmaster after 20 years or so.

Veena is about to retire in next three years. She didn't take the post of headmistress as she thought that she won't be able to do justice with the increased responsibilities.

Pooja was very enthusiastic about going for a T.G.T post before marriage. But after marriage she too feels that the post of primary teacher is good as the timings are less as compared to that of T.G.T.

Manju also felt the same that as she has many responsibilities at her home she cannot think of changing the job. Now she is okay with the present job as it helps her to give proper time to her family and kids at home.

### **3C. Why they chose to be working women?**

It emerged that initially all of them wanted to be professionals in order to have a separate identity. Although, the choice of the profession was made by their parents, the decision to work was their own. It also came out that now even if they want to leave the job they cannot because it is now a necessity and a habit.

Veena said

“pehle shauk tha. Ab ye jarurat hai. Hame hi apne haath me paise chahiye aur koi nahi chahta ki hum apni job chhod de”

(It was a hobby earlier. Now, it has become a necessity. We also need money in our hand and nobody wants that we should leave our job.)

### **4. Men vs women**

All the participants felt that life of men is quite comfortable and simple as compared to that of women. They have to just take care of their profession and look at the economic aspect of the family. They have the main decision making power.

Veena said that men are stronger than women only in physical terms. However given a choice she would like to be a man and live life comfortably like them.

“hamari life bahut mushkil hai. Wo har haal me humse thik hain, kyunki wo sharirik roop se hamse jyada smarth hain. Wo apne decision khud le sakte hain. Hamari haar to bhagwaan ki taraf se jyada hai. Mansik roop se aurate jyada strong hoti hain.”

(Our life is very difficult. They are better than us in every aspect because they are stronger than us physically. They can take their decisions themselves. Our defeat is more due to God. Mentally women are stronger than males.)

#### **4A. Who is responsible for the difference?**

All the participants felt that society is responsible for creating the differences between men and women.

Veena said that the society inculcates the differences between man and woman by giving more onus to men.

“Society to bilkul hi aadmiyon ka saath deti hai. Aap kahin bhi chale jao to ladies ki baat koi nahi suntan. Society purush pradhan hai. Aurato ko suraksha nahi milti naa rat me naa din me.”

(Society favours man. Wherever you go, people generally don't listen to ladies. Society is dominated by men. Women are not safe, neither in the day nor in the night)

#### **4B. What should be done to reduce this gap between men and women**

All the participants felt that society has to change to give proper place and freedom to women. From the beginning itself men should be taught to take responsibilities of their homes as well. Their work and responsibilities should not be restricted to outdoors only. They should be taught to treat women equally. Also, women should come forward and take collective decisions and measures to improve their status in the society. Manju felt that men should understand women and come forward to give them equal rights

“This scenario can only vanish by the efforts of men. They have to provide equality. What a plight it is that women have to beg for their human rights, right to eat, right to sleep, right to talk, and right to move freely.”

Pooja said that

“Men do accept that working women work a lot despite their illness, fatigue, unwillingness. But, acceptance is not everything. One should

help their wife in these household activities. Actually, they have never helped their mothers so how can they think of helping their wives? So, wake up guys and do something for your wives. As you say you think about your progress, achievements, office and your country give a thought to your home as well. Your wife also has some other aspirations so please wake up”.

## **5. Marriage**

All the participants felt that marriage is like a stage in life after which life changes drastically. They felt that life was quite easy before marriage. After marriage a lot of responsibilities come on one's shoulders. One gets tied to so many social roles and has to live up to everybody's expectations.

Pooja felt that her life before marriage was quite comfortable. Her mother helped her in most of the things. But after marriage she has to be responsible for herself and her family as well. There is no one in her family who knows much about her profession in order to discuss professional matters.

“When I was unmarried, my parents took care of me. From early morning to late night all my chores were their responsibility. Mom used to say that I should complete my assignment as the last date is approaching near. My life was quite cool. I used to think just about myself and used to do things as I wished to do them. As my mother was a teacher it helped me a lot in my profession. We use to share all our professional issues and helped each other in related matters. As my mother has good knowledge about teaching it really helped me.”

For her life changed after marriage as she now finds herself tied up in social roles.

“After marriage you become so much tied up in household chores that it is very difficult to take out time from the daily routine. But, I think everything will get normal with time. When I see other married teachers in my school, I think I will also adjust like them. And the main thing in a girl's life is adjustment. It's the key word.”

## **Conclusion**

The interpretations which I made after going through the data I presented here, my field notes, and my personal communication with them are as follows:

1. Women in my study give more priority to their responsibilities towards their home than their profession. All the participants felt

that they have a major role to play in the upbringing of their children and taking care of their families. So they cannot give all their time and energy to their profession. It also emerged that teaching was not their first choice, but they took it because their parents wanted them to. Now, they feel satisfied with the profession, as they can give adequate amount of time to their families. They don't see much scope of growth in their professional lives. But it is alright as they have to take care of the increasing family responsibilities.

2. All of them felt that marriage changes the life of girls a lot. The times have now changed. There was gender biased treatment for children in north Indian middle class families. Nowadays, daughters are treated just as sons in their parental homes in terms of upbringing or educational opportunities. However, as soon as they get married they are expected to take a lot of responsibilities and behave as good daughter-in-laws, wives and later mothers. The difference between roles of man and woman becomes quite evident. Women have to take up many roles and responsibilities and make every effort to keep their families happy. Most of the time, they are expected to take care of their professional and personal lives themselves. Again, from the discussion it came across the how roles of women have changed from ancient times. It also emerged from the data that although women are in a better financial position now, and they have freedom, yet they are oscillating between their homes and profession. They now have dual responsibilities. Inside the walls of the home women are still seen as home makers. It is much easier in these kinds of jobs where the job timings are less. The jobs where timings are long, women just can't make a proper balance between their homes and profession. They are doing the job more for the financial needs of the family rather than their interest or motivation.
3. It emerged that men are still at a better position than women. They still are expected to take responsibility of their jobs only. Their accountability towards home is secondary. They are the main decision makers. The reason is mainly the norms in the society which always ties up women with a lot of responsibilities. To change the scenario society has to change and the upbringing of boys should change as well. They should be taught to take responsibilities from the very beginning and help women in every sphere. The term 'equality' is still far from actually being practiced. Society expects women to take their roles towards their homes and behave as good and responsible homemakers. The main reason behind the plight of women is society which is primarily dominated by men.

4. Teaching remains the favourite option that the parents chose for their daughters as a profession, so that they can be good daughter-in-laws, spend few hours on their job, yet earn well and give all their time, attention and devotion to their family. Girls unwillingly enter this job due to parental pressure, but later on they too start liking the job because of lesser working hours which grants them time to spend with their families which is their major concern.

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### **About the author**

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## OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. III

### Locating Agency in Children's Voice

Deepti Srivastava and Shobha<sup>7</sup>

#### Abstract

*The study looked into the contested notion of childhood and its implications for research conducted with children. It located the view of childhood as socially constructed (James and Prout, 1997) and delved into the world of street children who stayed in a non-government, non-custodial, voluntary, and comprehensive care children's home in north Delhi. The objectives of the study were to grapple with the theoretical and methodological tensions of engaging in a non-invasive dialogue with the culturally different children in order to locate agency in children's voice. These voices were heard in the 'free spaces' within the institution to minimize the structural constraints imposed by formal spaces. The findings of the study revealed the methodological research problem which deals with children's ability to withdraw from situations due to the researcher's proclivity to under/or overestimate the choice of tools. It also showed how children constantly engaged, reflected, manipulated and guarded themselves in their social worlds and brought forth the need to understand these negotiations within similar spaces in the formal school context, in addition to observations within the classrooms, to locate agency in children's voice.*

#### Introduction

*"Mera bhai kehta hai ki u anaath hai. Mujhe hansi aati hai."* (My brother says I am an orphan. I feel like laughing.) This was an expression of 11 year old Ruksaar who was one among the seventy-five girls staying together in a children's home run by a non-government organization that works for the safety, security and education of the most vulnerable, urban-poor in Delhi. Ruksaar and many other girls like her decided to stay here, separated from their siblings and parents. Their decision to stay in a children's home (JJ Act 2012) reflected a larger problem on the oppressive social and economic hierarchies that children like her and their communities inhabited in the urban developments.

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<sup>7</sup> In this study, Deepti Srivastava is the first author.

These children under especially difficult circumstances (CEDC) were homeless, abandoned, orphaned, delinquents or in conflict with the law. Vulnerable, marginalized, destitute, neglected, and frequently deprived of their basic rights to family care, protection, shelter, food, health and education they were more prone to physical and mental abuse besides being involved in hazardous work in unsafe working conditions. Even in such difficulty, they have aspirations from education and want to study as shown in a survey which reported that of the 49% street children who were literate “23% had received some form of formal education (13% up to pre-primary, and 2.4% up to middle school)” (Save the Children 2011, p.8).

In this case, Ruksaar, along with other participants of the study, had aspirations from education, which is why they decided to live away from their families in the children’s home. Their ‘active exit’ from streets prompted us to understand how staying together in this home away from their homes. They took decisions for themselves and invented, understood and guarded their social worlds. We wanted to experience the inherent dynamism in the children’s social worlds through this study, by taking children’s voice as the starting point of our research. We engaged reflectively with three children spread over a period of one month in a unique setting where we immersed ourselves in the setting to understand the vocabularies and context of children and engaged in dialogue with children in a perspective display sequence (Rapley, 2007). This meant that we let the children talk and asked them questions relevant to our focus area wherever we found an opportunity to do so.

To explain how and why we engaged in dialogue with children and how it connected to agency in children’s voice we explicate the construct ‘children’ and reflect on our vantage point of the term. We then, look at the methodological and analytical aspects of ‘exploring the agency in children’s voice in a Home away from home’.<sup>8</sup>

### **Children – The Construct**

Viewed independently, children are conceptualized as bestial, savage, *tabula rasa* and, even innocent and pure by theorists. When juxtaposed with the term ‘adult’, the term ‘children’ becomes paradoxical, as on the one hand children are considered to be naïve, in need of constant adult supervision, and on the other they are considered to be sharp in looking

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8      *The term ‘Home’ is used for the home where children stay and the ‘home’ is for their parental homes.*



for alternatives. One reason why such paradox occurs is that we view children from an adult eye. (Alanen, 2010; Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; Jenks, 2005; Waksler, 1986)

One notices such paradoxical use of the term in readings about children. One such instance is Rousseau's *Emile* where he says, "Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately pervert this order, we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavored, and which soon decay..." (Rousseau cited in Jenks, 2005, p.3).

The reason why children are seen as children before they are men is because theorists conceptualizing children have normative concerns of how children become adults. Chris Jenks views such adult concerns as hegemonic. One can see such hegemony in education too, as education is informed by theories of socialization and developmental psychology which view the child as premature and dependent upon adults for psycho-social development (Parsons cited in Jenks, 1982; Piaget cited in Waksler, 1986). These normative concerns of the adults undermine the children's voice which emphasizes children's agency and participation in the social world.

Another point of concern is that children are taken to be natural and universal though they live and grow in particularistic socio-cultural contexts which are unique to them. The problem with naturalness is that adults have been children in the past themselves and they consider their own worldview of children to be as authentic as the world view of children themselves. There are theorists, who suggest that the 'processes with which children and adults make sense of the world are similar'. They believe that, "The different worlds do not teach lessons that are in conflict, but rather they co-operate to teach the skills, attitudes, values and beliefs that are appropriate for the life at the time and also are a good preparation for later on" (Sluckin cited in Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, p. 57). There are others, however, who emphasize that the sets of meanings and values of children are distinctly different from adults. "In addition to suggesting that children are competitive interpreters in the world" they suggest that, "they are in possession of their own culture or succession of cultures." (Robert MacKay cited in Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, p.57). These two stances represent the "fluctuations between the normative and analytical register" (Alanen, 2010, p. 5) and are common to researching children's voice. Though there are fluctuations between the analytical and normative approaches in research with children, the researchers commit (normatively) to improve children's position and valuation in the society by endorsing children's voice as a starting point of research (King, 2007).

## Doing Research

When listening to children's voice, the researchers have to take into account that children inhabit two sets of cultures: one that belongs to them and the other, created by adults. Also, children are quick to swap from one culture to another, as they are "highly fluid and capable of rapid change and creativity" (Davies cited in Tammivaara and Enright 1986, p. 234). Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to define his/her role in a study prior to entering children's social world. Since, in the present case, we were looking for agency in children's voice in the culture that belonged to them, we assumed the role of a friend (positive contact and low authority) and embedded ourselves into the setting to understand,

- how to engage in non-invasive dialogue with children, and to
- explore the agency in children's voice.

As we wanted to observe and study children closely, we chose a setting where children were a segregated social grouping and had more scope of mixing with each other. This was a children's Home in Delhi. It was easy for us to gain access into this setting, as we knew Junaid (one of the coordinators) of the NGO- *Zindagi*<sup>9</sup>. He referred us to Seema, coordinator of the North Delhi Home. We spoke with her over the phone. She told us to meet anyone from the organization to understand the nature of their work before meeting the children. We were, however, keen to meet the children. So, we asked her if we could go to get acquainted with them. She agreed saying that we will not be able to resist talking to the children, as 'they are free and not caged.' So, eagerly we went, the next day, to locate the Home in North Delhi. When we reached the metro station, we asked the locals about the address and spent some time reaching it, as it was located deep inside the market.

## Into a Home away from home

We reached there to find an old bungalow with a large courtyard in the front. The entrance had a large iron gate tied with a chain. We undid the chain and went inside to meet the house-manager. We told her we had talked to Seema and wanted to see the Home. She promptly took us around and showed us the office and the rooms upstairs. As she walked

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9      *The names of organization and persons have been changed to mask their identities.*

with us, children (4-11 year olds) huddled around her to see the strangers. As she was showing us around, she got a call from Meena (the other coordinator whom we had not spoken to before coming) who got suspicious of us and spoke to us sternly over the phone. It was when we told her we had sought permission before coming to the Home that she was agreeable and offered to meet us the next week when she told us about the North Delhi Home.

### **Sketch of North Delhi Home**



**Photo courtesy: Shabnam, a resident of North Delhi Home**

*Zindagi*, the NGO that runs this Home to provide care, protection and education to the children was a joint endeavor of the Delhi government under the broad umbrella of the government programme ‘*Bhagidari*’, and more specifically under the government enrolment drive, ‘*School Chale Hum*’ campaign, to ensure education as a matter of Right (MHRD 2008). The program, with its belief in equity, planned to work with the most vulnerable population in Delhi. This population was identified as the children on the streets of Delhi. This program was planned in two phases:

Phase 1: Building relationships with children, and

Phase 2: Working for their betterment in terms of providing a Home for security, protection and education.

The NGO appointed fieldworkers to map the city and prepare a profile of the population, community’s occupations and their problems to get a realistic picture of the magnitude of homeless children. After careful mapping, they identified the needy children, built trust with their parents, and talked to them to let their children stay in the homes. An MoU was signed with the Delhi government on the following three issues:

1. Buildings to serve as RBC (Residential Bridge Course)/ RSTC (Residential Special Training Centers) to be provided by the government.
2. Government would provide Rs. 6800 per child per year which was later raised to Rs. 19,200 per child per year, and
3. Government would provide help in case of problems in seeking formal admission to government/private schools

This 'Home' was one such building provided by the government. It had 75 girls, 2 coordinators, 3 house-mothers, 2 teachers, 1 security guard and 1 cleaner. Of the 75 girls, about 95% had parents, who came to take them home on holidays and festivals, which is why we called it 'a Home away from home'.

These children were brought in by the consent of parents (through a legal system) for security and education as they were beggars and rag pickers with little or no schooling. Some of them were rescued as domestic labour from homes through CWC (Child Welfare Committee).<sup>10</sup>

Some of the children (about 35) from this Home were attending formal schools. For those who are not enrolled in schools, they were enrolled in the residential bridge course under the SSA Scheme of the government; this being a legal commitment from the government for children who were out of school (SSA Policy Document 2004).

### **Knowing Children**

Once we knew about the Home, we were interested to know the children. As we wanted to understand the children's views in-depth, we decided to focus on three children (two 11 years old and one 12 years old). This was a preadolescent group. We chose this group as it was here that children began to explore the ways in which they could fit into the society. At one

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10 CWC is the sole authority to deal with matters concerning children in need of care and protection. A Committee has to be constituted for each district or group of districts, and consists of a chairperson and 4 other persons, one of whom at least should be a woman.

*The committee has the final authority to dispose of cases for the care, protection, treatment, development and rehabilitation of the children as well as to provide for their basic needs and human rights. A child rescued from hazardous occupation, brothel, abusive family or other such exploitative situation must be produced before the CWC who will conduct an inquiry to ensure optimum rehabilitation with minimal damage to the child. (source: <http://dpju.com>)*

level, they thought of who they were, and at the other, how people thought of them in a societal frame of reference. They were not closely monitored by their parents or guardians (more so in this case, where they had little parental control or constant adult supervision) (Weigert, Teitge and Teitge 1986).

We spoke to Ruksaar (11 years old), Rehaan (11 years old), and Pooja (12 years old). Before going into details of how we engaged in dialogue with them, we would like to give a portrait of the three participants, which was constructed after talking to Meena and the three children themselves.

### **The Three Children**

Ruksaar was eleven years of age. The fieldworkers came to know of her from Rehaan's mother (Rehaan was also a participant in this study). She had five sisters and four brothers. Her mother was ailing and her brothers consumed drugs. They abused her mother. Before joining this Home, she was engaged in rag-picking.

Rehaan was also eleven. She preferred to call herself Reena, as she did not like her name. She was in this Home since the last two years. Before coming here, she was with her mother in Bawana and was engaged in rag-picking. She was brought to this Home by the fieldworkers of *Zindagi*. Her own mother worked as a house-mother for sometime in the same Home, but was transferred later due to some reason. Rehaan was sent to the formal school (class II), but she was brought back after a few months as she could not adjust there. Rehaan's step-father had murdered her brother and was in jail for some time. She was not in touch with her mother for a month as her phone was switched off.

Pooja was probably from Bihar. She was rescued as a domestic labour from Noida by Sarathi (an NGO) and came through the CWC (Children's Welfare Committee). CWC tried to locate her house from the address she gave, but could not find it as she had a vague idea of where she came from.

These three children were not chosen in the strict sense of the term as one of them (Ruksaar) had huddled around Seema (house-manager) the first day we came to see the Home. That day, she brought to us a sketch of herself as a doctor. She talked to us the second day too when we went to meet them and became our key informant. This was crucial to us "to learn the ropes and gain acceptance by the group of informants." (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, p. 50). It was due to her that we came in touch with Pooja. Rehaan met us the day we were learning about *Zindagi* from Meena. She asked us our names and later in the day when we were

sitting in the courtyard, talking to Ruksaar, she came and joined us. We had not prepared any questions before going to the field and we did not carry any camera or tape-recorder initially, as we did not want to disturb their 'natural talk' though we do not deny that our presence would have set them thinking why we were there in the first place. We had explained the nature of our research to Meena and she permitted us to talk to children, but we had some glitches gaining consent of the children.

### **Gaining Consent**

We were not total strangers in the setting as the nature of the Home was such that volunteers came to work, talk, and spend time with the children regularly. We went and spoke to the children; told them that we were from the Department of Education. We did not seek their consent to be a part of our study straight away because as a part of our strategy we wanted to initially sense and analyze the children's culture through their talk. The first day we sat in the courtyard of the Home talking to Ruksaar. She said, "*Yahan sab log kaam se aaate hain. Humse milne koi nahin aata.*" (Everyone comes here for some work. They don't come to meet us.). We then thought that we would wait for some time and gain their trust before seeking consent for recording their voices or doing any activity specific to the research.

We could do so in our fifth meeting with them (on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2010), when we asked them if they knew who we were and why were we there. "*Humein maalum hai. humse milne aaye ho.*" (We know you have come to meet us.) said Rehaan. We then told them that we were there to understand how they lived together in the Home. Even before gaining consent we were engaged in a dialogue with children, where we were actively listening to them and asking questions wherever we found an opportunity in an ongoing interaction. It was when the children were free from their classes that we sat with them, played with them, and talked to them in the courtyard area and the area where they practiced dance for their function to be held on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2010.

### **Engaging in Dialogue with Children**

While it was normal for us investigators to come with certain values and cultural baggage to the field, it was imperative to realize that we did not impose these values on the investigation as it may be a cultural invasion for them (Freire, 1997). Therefore, we planned to blend into the setting and allowed the children to take any direction they chose and responded to the opportunity for questioning in an ongoing interaction. Though, this required more time and frequency of meetings with the participants, it yielded data in a natural setting (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). We realized this in the third meeting when we planned to show the picture of 'modes

of transportation' which they had done in EVS class. This picture had a cart puller, a motor cycle, a car and an airplane. We thought we would show this to the three participants and see how they interpret it (our assumption being that that they would see the social class differences). But, we did not do so, as bringing in material, though they were familiar with it would lead children to think such an exercise as a lesson to be learnt and they would tend to answer in a way that they think we would like to hear.

Instead, we went upstairs, to a room where Ruksaar and Rehaan were dancing with a group of girls. We sat down to see them dance. Ruksaar felt shy and sat down while the rest of the group danced on another dance number. One of the researchers got up and sat next to Ruksaar appreciating her dance and started talking to her about Lily (the elder girl who was teaching them all to dance). Meanwhile, the other (researcher) proposed Pooja to play game of pebbles with us. We made teams of two and during play we came to know that Ruksaar had fasted in Navratri with Pooja in order to regain her friendship. Here, is how the conversation took place:

Researcher: *Tum raat ko dost ke saath sotey hoge?* (Do you sleep with your friend at night?)

Ruksaar: *Pehle Pooja mere saath soti thi. Ab Sony ke saath soti hai.* (Earlier, Pooja slept with me. Now, she sleeps with Sony.)

Pooja: *Nahin to. Pehle soti thi. Ab to akele soti hun.* (No. I used to do so earlier. Now I sleep alone.)

(Later, when we were going down for lunch Ruksaar waited for Pooja to come along.)

In another instance, while we were sitting in the courtyard discussing when next do we come, Ruksaar said we should come on Tuesday as Monday was a PTM day. Then, we asked her:

Researcher: *PTM mein kya hota hai?* (What happens in the PTM?)

Ruksaar: *Mummy Papa ko bulaate hain.* (They call our parents.)

Researcher: *Kya baat karte hain?* (What do they talk about?)

Ruksaar: *Nahin maalum. Bacchon ko ander nahin aane detey.* (I don't know. They don't let us in.)

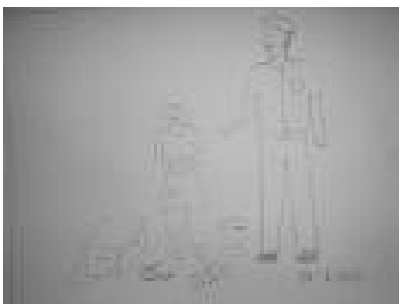
Researcher: *Kya tumhari mummy kabhi batati hai PTM mein kya hota hai?* (Does your mother ever tell you what happens in a PTM?)

Ruksaar (tight faced): *PTM mein mummy nahin aati. Ek baar aayee thi to maine Marriam ki shikayat lagayee thi. Mummy ne kuch nahin kiya to maine bhi batana chod diya.* (Mother doesn't come to PTMs. She came once and I complained about Marriam. She did not do anything about it. So, I stopped telling her anything.)

Though, we were careful to ask questions in a perspective display sequence (Rapley, 2007), we recognized these three children had a desire to be validated by us. So, it was easy to establish close friendship with them on their terms. We also realized that they had a fair degree of authority in this friendship as they decided how close we could get to them. They sometimes talked to each other in a code language in front of us and guarded their private worlds from us. Goody is one researcher who recognizes that such difficulties inherent in communicating adequately with children have kept researchers from examining the world of the child from the vantage point of the child for many years (Goody cited in Tammivaara and Enright, 1986) and this seems to be a tough challenge.

We faced another challenge after having observed the group over time, when we had discerned their interaction patterns (details given in the next section 'Exploring the Agency in Children's Voice') and the terms they used we tried to codify it and record their responses. We had codified the image keeping in mind that:

- It represented a situation familiar to them so they recognize the situation and
- It was simple (neither explicit nor enigmatic) and offered various decoding possibilities. (Freire, 2005)



We asked the children (Ruksaar, Rehaan and Pooja) to respond to the picture while we recorded their responses. They agreed and we took out the drawing and the tape recorder. All was well, until, Ruksaar refused to get her voice recorded. Instead, she asked Lily (an elder girl who taught them dance) to sing into it. They just walked off with the tape recorder saying they would not let us record their voices. The tape recorder was



like an invasion into her private world, which she rejected outright. So, we left the task unfinished and planned another activity for another day.

It was from the field notes of our conversations with children and their drawings that we analyzed the implicit themes about their own lives which are explicated below.

### **Exploring Agency in Children's Voice**

The standpoint of exploring 'agency' in children's voices was related to our concerns with children as active constructors of their social worlds. Having an agency, children acted and reflected, negotiated with others and made sense of themselves and those around them. Agency, therefore, meant free will and authority, but not complete autonomy as free will is exercised within social structures (Appiah, 2005). James, Jenks and Prout identified "two ways in which children and agency are brought together. First, there is the notion of the 'tribal child' whereby the children are active and formative within their own social world of the peer group. Second, the notion of social structural or 'minority group child' denotes that children's behaviour and ways of thinking needs to be located within the broader social structure. Children's action here is constrained by virtue of a marginal social grouping." (James, Jenks and Prout cited in Wyness, 2000, p.88)

The first approach was relativist as it argued for children as active subjects of social structures, rather than passive and in need of socialization. The second approach was structural, as it saw childhood as politically strategized as gender, race, caste etc. This approach argued for a structural overhaul of society, culture and politics for complete social recognition of the child.

From among the above two approaches, we were looking at agency in children's voice from the first approach. We were looking at children as agentive and formative within their own social world of peer group. Here, agentive meant how children constructed, checked, understood and transformed their lines of action in response to the actions of others. This was also one reason why we focused on children's Home for locating children voice; here, children were a segregated social grouping and more accessible to us as researchers and also, children had more scope to mix with children of their own age group. This enabled us to observe a whole range of strategies (negotiating, sharing, manipulating) which they employed to give meaning to their social world. While observing, we also questioned them on their role in shaping their own decisions and relationships with others as their reflective responses were the key to explore their agency. From our observations (for nine days, spread over a period of one month) our engagement with children and through their

drawings we elicited certain themes; the context of these themes were drawn from the vocabulary that children used. These themes are analyzed below.

## **Analysis of Themes**

### **Theme 1: Belongingness**

I: *Yahan tumhari friend kaun hai?* (Who is your friend here?)

Ruksaar: *friend thi. Ab meri friend kisi aur ki friend ban gayee hai.* (She was my friend. Now, she is friends with someone else.)

Ruksaar liked Pooja. She tried to gain her friendship back by keeping Navratri fasts with her. They both went to the temple together. They both used to sleep together before Pooja decided to sleep alone.

When she could, Ruksaar tried to call her within the group. Once, when we went downstairs for lunch, Ruksaar waited for Pooja. They bonded with each other and even shared a code language to guard their boundaries with us. Pooja too reciprocated belongingness with Ruksaar, as when Ruksaar was angry and rude to her she squeezed Shobha's hand indicating her not to intervene. They both liked each other, but Pooja's fear of taking responsibility for herself prevented her to form close relationships with others as she said, "*Mujhe apne aap se dar kyun lagta hai?*" (Why am I scared of myself?)

Later, one day when we asked them to draw '*Meri dost*' (My friend) for us, Rehaan drew the photo of her friend who stayed in the Home and was elder to her. Ruksaar refused to draw a friend. We did not force her to draw. In a while, she came and drew our photo. Later, when we went downstairs she told us she did not like Pooja. We said we thought Pooja liked her and asked her if Pooja had some problems adjusting in the Home. At this, she softened and said Pooja felt guilty of something she had done earlier and was scared of herself which was why she could not make friends.



**Photo courtesy: Ruksaar**



**Photo courtesy: Rehaan**

### **Theme 2: Fear of being exploited**

Rehaan and Ruksaar expressed their fear of exploitation due to their vulnerability when they said,

Rehaan: (to Sonica, health worker) *Tumhara mobile tod dena chahiye. Jb dekho batein karti rehti ho. Humare saath batein karne ka time nahin hai.* (I would rather break your mobile. You talk so much. You have no time left to talk to us.)

Ruksaar: *Yahan sab log kaam se aatey hain. Humse milne koi nahin aata.* (Everyone comes here for their own work. No one comes to meet us.)

### **Theme 3: Fear of being alone**

They also express fear of being alone in a crowd.

Researcher: *Kabhi ghar jaati ho?* (Do you visit home?)

Ruksaar: *Shuru shuru mein jab yahan aayee thi to mainne bhagne ki koshish ki thi. Phir mummy aayee thi. Meena didi ne bulaya tha. Ab to chuttiyon mein ghar jaati hun. Shuru mein itni ladkiyon ko dekh kar ghabra gayee thi.* (When I joined here initially, I tried to run away. Then, mummy came. She was called by Meena didi. Now, I go home during vacations. I got scared amidst so many girls.)

They also show they have to lose authority when staying together.

Ruksaar: *Ghar mein meri bahut zidd chalti hai. Yahan chup rehna padta hai.* (My obduracy is tolerated at home. here, I have to remain quiet.)

Yet they are assertive and show authority for their belongings.

Child: *Tuney jo dupatta pehna hai wo mummy maang rahi hai.* (Mummy is asking for the scarf you are wearing.)

Rehaan: *Kyon dun? Wo mera hai.* (Why should I? It belongs to me.)

They also realize that though they have to negotiate with so many children and adults. Though, they lose their authority in a group as compared to their houses, they are empowered as they endure hardships, and education helps them do so.

Ruksaar: *Mera bhai kehta hai ki tu anaath hai. Mujhe hansa aati hai. Main padhungi. Bas school mein ek baar naam likh jaaye.* (My brother says I am an orphan. I feel like laughing. I will study. I wish I get enrolled in school.)

## **Conclusion**

An analysis of the themes revealed that children's actions were intentional and reflexive. Even though, they chose to stay in a children's home to study, they expressed a longing for their family ties showing how agency was constrained within structural limitations. Their agency was revealed in their constant engagements, reflections, manipulation and in guarding themselves in their social spaces. It was their culturally different contexts that made them reveal a part of their self as such was the skill of survival they possessed (Aptekar 1994). It also revealed that the choice of methodology was crucial to elicit dialogue with children in different contexts as children are not a universal category. Contextualized as they are, researching with children required a conscious choice of taking the role of a complete observer and an observer as participant, in order to understand the intricacies of their voice. As we heard these voices in the 'free spaces' (playing area, lunch hour, dancing hall), what remains to be seen is whether and to what extent do they have an agency and voice in the bridge course and formal schooling (which are structured spaces), as these children expressed faith in education for empowering themselves.

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## **OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. IV**

### **Exploring Research with Reading: A study on nature of encounters with reading**

**Malvika Rai, Nidhi Kunwar and Sonika Kaushik**

#### **Abstract**

*Identifying the research problem, formulating the research question and employing the appropriate methods are the more visible and often talked about aspects of research. One can trace a variety of books, articles, lectures and workshops focusing and exploring this dimension of research. At the surface, research looks like a product-oriented exercise which yields knowledge. The experiences of struggle, dilemmas and the unfolding nature of research remain in the background because of its intangible nature. To document this aspect of research is the broad objective of this paper. The paper is written with the focus of capturing issues, problems, decisions and puzzlement faced by the researchers. The paper traces our journey of conducting a research, that is, from taking permission to conducting interviews. As the paper is written with this clear objective, hence the analysis section is limited. The decision to focus on the process of research is deliberately taken by the researchers hence no regrets for limited treatment to the analysis section. The analysis of the data, if not incidental, is certainly secondary to the process in the present paper. The paper discusses our journey of understanding how IV standard students understand 'Reading'.*

#### **Introduction**

The common discourse (if any) on reading has almost always focused on the reading habit. This has continued to be a much deliberated aspect of reading in our country. The role of media, traditionally the television and more currently, the computer and internet, are the often condemned culprits of the dwindling reading habit. Strangely, what constitutes reading or what factors influence reading has hardly been discussed, let alone researched. This scenario forms the research backdrop of our study.

## **Research Question**

The study undertaken by us attempts to describe what constitutes reading for grade IV children of a state-run primary school. We have tried to understand what four children make of ‘reading’ as it is presented to them in the form of naturally occurring encounters in the context of their classroom and outside the school.

## **The way to the question**

We must admit that the identification of this research problem was not guided by a systematic review of literature. Rather, it was motivated by our research interest, our previous research work and our professional experiences of a nature which put us in touch with children, teachers, schools and their pedagogic practices, textbooks and children’s literature.

Before we arrived at the question:

*What is the nature of encounters with reading for grade IV children?*

We struggled through two phases. The two phases were marked by a common objective to arrive at a ‘do-able’ and relevant and interesting research problem. But, in the second phase, we were more focused and directed because we were sure of the broad research area, i.e., reading.

During the first phase, even though reading was a concern, but now, on reflection, it seems it was more of a peripheral issue. The vague question we had centred variously on bilingual children’s literature and connections children draw between textbooks of first language and children’s literature. Both seemed to point at a final exercise of text-analysis, which did not seem exciting enough to us.

‘How do grade IV children perceive themselves as readers?’

‘What does reading mean to grade IV children?’

These are the two research questions we phrased, once we had passed through the first phase. The two questions almost acted as precursors to the final question, as we framed the two questions and later tried to make interview schedule for each, we realized that the questions were of a kind which could not be answered in a one time, face-to-face interaction, but a prolonged and intensive presence in the field was required. Therefore, the two questions did not seem ‘do-able’, given the constraints of time we had.

## **The Context**

This section provides a description of the setting in which our study took place. We have done that with the objective of placing our participants in their surroundings and context and later locating the data in the setting from which emerged. A thick description of the context adds to the richness of the data and understands the context better.

The school is situated in a corner of the green, sprawling campus of an educational institute in New Delhi. The immediate surroundings of the school are formed by a multi-storeyed residential complex which houses the employees of the educational institute, largely the ones on the lower rungs of the administrative hierarchy. The school draws a large number of its students from this residential complex.

The single-storeyed, rectangular building of the school stands neat and dignified. The iron gate of the school opens into a cemented space where large potted plants have been placed. A few steps lead into a lobby which would have opened into a courtyard, but, for the lattice-work partition which has been covered with a huge painting on canvas. The right wall of the lobby has a massive map of India painted on to it. Right under that sits a uniformed security guard and, inquires the purpose of visit of the visitors or responds to the bell from the headmistress' office. The lobby narrows down into corridors on the left and right. The staffroom and the computer room are lined on the right and the art room and the headmistress' office on the left.

The classrooms are placed along the three sides of the long, cemented courtyard. The classrooms open into a verandah which leads into the courtyard. The length of the school building is flanked on both sides by open spaces. The one on the side of the headmistress' office is a well-maintained garden with green grass, flower beds and, bottle-brush and other trees grown in rows on the fringes of the garden. This space is out of bounds for children. On the other side, it's a rather dusty and bare area with swings like the jungle gym and see-saw in one corner. This is the playground where children rush to as soon as the bell for recess goes.

The grade IV classroom is spacious and ventilated. The classroom furniture, which comprises of attached table and bench, has been set in rows. Each table is occupied by two to three children. The class library comprising of some 50 books, made available by the school, is hung on a string along the windows.



## **Settings for the interviews**

We were directed to the computer room for group interview by a teacher of the school. It was a large room with computers placed on tables along the two walls of the room. This room also serves as a TV room. A large grey *durrie* spreads across the central unoccupied area of the room. This is where we sat down for the group interview. Two of us, who were to conduct the interview sat together while the third sat slightly away from us (taking field notes), not directly facing the children. The four children sat in rows on either side of the tape recorder (kept on a stool), which stood facing the two of us.

The individual interviews with two children took place in the art room, which also became our 'den' for sitting and discussing things in the field. As one enters the room, there are two windows on the facing wall, which overlook the entrance of the school. The longer walls of the room have paintings posted on them. The art room is a small room occupied by an iron *almirah*, several low, small wooden tables, stacked one on top of the other. One such small table was made the central piece of furniture around which the participant student and one of us sat to take the interview. The tape recorder and the notebook for the field notes were kept on this table, in full view of the participant.

Making a shift from the context of our study to the concern about how to gather data, we would like to mention here that interview was the chosen and also the recommended tool.

The study had the additional objective of helping us gain insights into the research process, specifically in the use of interview as a research tool. The next section elaborates on our preparation for the interview and a detailed note on the methodological aspects.

## **Methodological issues**

Considering the open-ended nature of the question, interview seemed to be a very appropriate way of understanding how the participants described their encounters with reading. Not just the interview schedule, but, the interview situation itself needed some preparation. But, before we talk about the interviews- group and individual, a brief note on the sample has been presented.

## **Sample**

To avoid any delay or hassle in gaining entry into the field it was important to select a school which would allow an easy access. This particular school was unanimously chosen because of the acquaintance with the headmistress and the proximity to our residences. The

permission required just a chance meeting with the headmistress and a phone call to intimate her of our schedule and requirement.

We had to wait to begin our study as the school was closed after the final exams. This certainly gave us more time to work on our interview schedule.

For participants, we wanted children who would be able to articulate their experiences and opinions and have had exposure to a range of texts, narrative as well as expository. Therefore, grade III children, who are exposed to narrative structure in their language textbooks and to the informational texts in their science and social science textbooks, seemed appropriate in this context. Since, at the time of the study the new academic session had just begun and grade III children were promoted to grade IV, we decided to do the study with grade IV children.

It seemed a good idea to choose children from the same section because this would ensure that they are familiar with each other and feel comfortable with each other during the group interview. Also, shared experiences in the class would help them corroborate each other's response.

The next section explains the process of and preparation for the interviews.

### **Preparation for the interview**

We had been given the suggestion of meeting children before the interview so that they do not find the interview situation strange and feel at ease with us. This meeting seemed like a good opportunity to establish a rapport with them so that they are forthcoming during the interview. But, the question was, what should one do with the children?

We felt that literacy related exercise would be meaningful and not completely de-contextualized in the school context. But, since our area of study was reading, we felt any activity focusing on reading and writing in our first meeting with them would affect their responses during the interview. In other words, the nature of interaction in the first meeting would shape their responses to our presence in later meetings. So we could clearly see the possibility of that somehow affecting our data. Finally, we arrived at the idea of turning this meeting into a group interview.

### **Nature of the interview**

Keeping in mind that we will be interviewing young children, we reached the consensus that the semi structured interview would be the best

option for us. Our inexperience as researchers would have made conversation little difficult to handle and a structured interview might not have given us the flexibility to add probing question. As interviewers, our concern was that with children we need to probe further so that they are able to describe their experiences and encounters more vividly.

### **Making good questions**

Developing the interview schedule was not only a time taking process but challenging too. There were a few criteria that we kept in sight to make 'good' questions. Questions that were open-ended, not leading the participant into giving a certain response and were relatively free from assumptions or values, were considered good by us. Also, we had to keep monitoring for asking questions focused on our research question. This helped us to gain more clarity about the research question and consequently, to revisit and redefine our research question. We avoided long, winding questions and did not combine two queries together.

### **THE INTERVIEWS**

This section focuses on the field experience of conducting interviews and our reflections on interviewing children.

#### **Group Interview**

Having a group interview suited the demand of the study and gave us an opportunity to document the collective experiences of the children about reading. It served the dual purpose, to focus on the collective experience of reading in the school and to identify the articulate children for the interview.

What was needed was to differentiate between the focus areas. The focus area for the group interview was 'nature of reading across subjects' and 'reading in library'.

E.g., *“Ma’am is paath ko kaise padhyengee?”*

*“Class mein padhne ke baad kya hota hai?”*

For the individual interview, it was decided to know about the experiences and encounters with reading which were more personal in nature, for instance, reading outside school, at home or elsewhere.

E.g., *“Jab kitaab ghar le jaati ho to kya karti ho?”*

## **Individual interviews**

Before the interview we had to work on the interview schedule in the light of the responses gathered during the group interview. To make sure that participants do not find the process repetitive, we picked leads from the group interview. Tuitions were one such cue that we picked which was not a part of our initial interview schedule. The group interview provided us with a reference point and we could start the individual interviews from where we had left. For the individual interview, the two students we chose were the ones who mentioned tuitions. This criterion was used because the experiences at the tuition class would bring a new angle to our understanding and make the data richer.

At the time of the interview only two of us remained in the room. One person was sitting across the child to take the interview. The other person sat at a little distance from the child to take notes made sure that she was unobtrusive. Child had her back to her and did not seem bothered about her presence. The idea was to make sure that the child did not feel intimidated in any way.

Here, we would like to mention the dilemma we faced about who is going to take field notes. Unlike the group interview, where one of us took over the task of taking only field notes and did not participate in the interview, we wanted to use the individual interviews as an opportunity to experience and learn to take field notes while interviewing. At the same time, we did not feel confident of doing the two simultaneously, for fear of losing data. We resolved this with a decision to have the field notes taken by two of us – one the interviewer and the other who took only field notes.

It is interesting to note that the field notes taken by the interviewer and the other were different in nature. The interviewer noted the key words or phrases in the responses and observable behaviors like eye-contact, movement of hands and long pauses. The one taking only the field notes tried to get the conversation verbatim; to the extent it was possible.

## **Interviewing children**

Interviewing children requires different skills. One has to be alert to not to let the child lose focus of the questions posed to them. The participants of our study were eager to tell and share, but, in spite of reminders children tended to talk over each other. For instance, there were constant references to class dynamics and hierarchy within students (they kept labeling certain students), though the nature of questions did not demand such responses. Sometimes, we had to

communicate this verbally and at times with non verbal gestures like a wave of the hand.

One remarkable contrast with adults was that they did not seem suspicious of the purpose of interview. They were more interested in knowing if they can hear their tape-recorded voices at the end. They seemed to be quite enthusiastic in responding to our questions. Towards the end of the group interview they expressed their boredom. Interestingly, they were reluctant to go back to their class, once we announced the end of the interview session.

As far as their consent for the interview is concerned, we are not sure if we can call it informed consent. We stated the purpose to them briefly and asked for their permission to record the interaction. They agreed readily and looked rather fascinated with the whole arrangement of recording but, the effect wore off quickly. Also, for them, it was spending time away from usual class routine, therefore, interesting.

### **Making Sense of the Data**

Four major themes were identified and used as the basis for reporting the research findings. Following section provides a brief note on the meaning we tried to achieve from our data.

1. Reading is considered a product-oriented activity.

A good reader is described as one who can read fluently, loudly and clearly without errors. Any child who is able to read like this is considered as the 'best reader'. The aspect of comprehension was not pointed by any student.

2. The notions about reading.

Students mainly related reading with 'textbook reading'. Reading beyond textbook does not exist according to them. Reading means reading chapter loudly in class on the instructions of teacher

3. The description of the nature of encounters with reading.

Reading appeared as an activity which is done in the class on instruction of the teacher or in the tuition centre on the command of their 'tuition didi'. Reading is not shared as activity which can be done with own free will.

4. Meaning in reading has to be provided by somebody like a teacher or an elder and cannot be gained independently.

Personal interpretation of meaning is not considered as an acceptable practice. The 'meaning' has to be verified by the teacher. Adult assistance is considered as an indispensable component in reading.

## **The Learning**

Our journey of exploring research with reading was full of certain expected and unexpected experiences. We knew that our entry in the school will be easy and we 'assumed' that, because of our prior experiences of dealing with primary school children, collecting data will be a simple task.

However, the reality was completely in contrast to our assumptions. In the field, things did not appear as clear and as quick as we expected it to be. The actual field offers unlimited questions, issues and challenges which are to be solved on every day basis.

The entry into the field was easy for us due to our prior acquaintance with the headmistress, but just the entry does not ensure smooth functioning of the entire research process. How to present oneself to the prospective sample was a tough challenge. This challenge becomes harder when your prospective sample is primary school children. Right from introducing ourselves, to selecting few, to taking them to the place of interview, every step appeared difficult. Even while interviewing, children tend to get affected by their own classroom issues and often divert the entire interview in that direction. The non verbal gestures of the researcher hardly affect them and they will say whatever they wished to say. For us, interviewing children was the most difficult task in which we three of us many times felt helpless.

Designing our tool, that is, framing questions for interview was a challenging task for us. We decided to use semi structured interviews for our study. We wanted to make questions simple, clear and yet not to provide a 'lead' question. The questions must fulfill the objective of our study yet in no way should lead the sample to predict the answers. The questions of the interview were drafted after lot of discussions and arguments. The importance of sharing and discussion is well understood by all of us in this phase. These discussions gave us an opportunity to understand issues from different perspectives.

Taking 'field notes' and analyzing those notes was another difficulty faced by us. We took very different field notes of the same interview (see section individual interviews). It again highlights the differences in perspective. Combining different field notes of the same interview and identifying

major themes for analysis from those notes was a tedious yet exciting exercise. Designing the entire picture with field notes provides detailed insights later on. Answers that earlier appeared obvious, on later analysis offered detailed themes.

The attempt to understand research with the field of reading offered deep insights to us about the research process. It's an exploration where expected can become unexpected and unexpected can become obvious. Things are not predictable rather meaning is derived by joining different aspects together. But, irrespective of different confusions and puzzlements, our exploration of research enabled us to understand that research is search for knowledge and this search helps in developing new perspectives and visions.

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## **OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. V**

### **Construction of Gender: An Analysis of Folksongs Sung at Weddings in Haryana**

**Disha and Vishakha Kumar**

#### **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to analyse everyday realities, depicted in folksongs, from a gender perspective. Taking songs as an artifact of culture, we have delved into their subtext to understand the embedded notions of patriarchy and gender. With the help of three folksongs, sung in two different villages in the Sonipat district, we have made an attempt to understand the worldview of the community. More specifically, we have discussed issues such as the position of women, close knit kinship patterns and the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law.*

#### **Introduction**

As natives of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi (both are North Indian states) we (the researchers) have seen marriages as occasions where music and dance acquire special significance. Marriage in a collectivist society like ours reflects much more than a bond between two people. The web of family relatives and several customs give the ceremony of marriage a unique position in the lives of people. This paper is an attempt to study the songs, sung on the occasion of marriage, in North India from a sociological perspective. We have tried to identify the subtext that emerges from reading the fine print of the lyrics of these songs.

Songs, like any other practice, originate and sustain in a socio-historic and cultural context. Songs are not just a collection of rhyming words; rather they have a shared meaning for the community in which they are sung. They may be seen as reflecting the values, beliefs, superstitions, customs and practices of the community. Sometimes, songs may also trace the history of the development of the community in which they are sung. With these assumptions, we started talking to different people who are acquainted with and parts of the communities where wedding songs are sung by women.



## **Rationale of the Study**

In our initial scouting task we found that it may be very difficult to trace the authorship of these songs, as they constitute the collective memory of the community. We found that it is mostly the women who sing these songs, in spaces which are not accessible to men. Singing in a group, comprising of both elder women and younger ones, enables the transfer of tradition and values from one generation to another. From this we can assume that the women of the community were the probable composers of the songs and have presumably shared their authentic experiences through these songs. The language of these songs is vernacular, the language in which women speak.

Taking inspiration from the works of French feminist critics, writing during the 1970s, who focused on language as a tool of male domination we have also tried to decipher the underlying shared meanings with the help of these songs. This study is an attempt to analyse the patriarchal ideologies that may be inscribed in the oral literature of a particular community. According to Judith Fetterley, "Feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read. [The first act of a feminist critic is] to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us." (Fetterley, 1978).

## **Methodology**

Our criterion of song selection was that they should be sung by women at home and not the recorded songs available on CDs in the market. This helped us in keeping our data authentic. Our first phase of scouting task was to find out people who remember songs verbatim and can help us understand their literal meaning. After asking several people within our reach we got a cue in Seema who is the wife of one of the researcher's family friend and hails from a village in Sonipat. Seema became an enthusiastic participant in our research. She first got some music CDs that had most of the songs that are played during a wedding. Later, she told us that these songs were mainly dance numbers and not sung at homes. After some research, she asked her own sister-in-law who lives in her native village to send songs that she sings at family weddings. Our main focus was on literary analysis of the songs. We relied on our participants to help us understand the context and meaning of those songs. In our interviews with the participants we realised that there was a difference between the denotative and connotative meaning of words. For instance, the literary translation of the word 'gherya' would mean a group of people sitting in a circular formation, but in the context of a

village in Haryana it would mean a place, where only men sit when they come back from work. Women are excluded from this group.

The participation of men in ceremonies where songs are sung is subject to social sanctions and customs prevalent in a particular cultural context. There are variations in these customs sometimes even within the same district and state as well. These variations can be due to several factors, such as the regard for hierarchy, conventions that segregate men and women, proximity to metropolitan cities, and their culture, education, caste and class considerations.

There are several genres of songs sung before, at the time of marriage ceremony, and also after marriage. We have collected some songs sung a few days before the marriage ceremony called *banna banni*, and another genre of songs called *seetne* and *jhikdi* which are sung at the time of marriage or even afterwards. Both of our participants wrote seven to eight most popular songs for us. From these we selected three songs for this study. As a representation of three issues – expected role of the daughter-in-law in the family, property rights of the girl, position of a woman vis-a-vis her male counterparts- three songs were selected from a collection of thirty songs. After going through several songs a number of time, these three issues emerged as key concerns in understanding how gender is understood in a context and how identity of an individual gets shaped by the cultural expectations. Some more concerns raised by other songs are discussed in the conclusion.

There are different songs for the bride called as *banni*, and separate for the groom called *banna*. The *banni* are sung at the bride's side before the marriage ceremony and the major themes that surface are about the difficulty in finding the groom, prospective life of the girl, her future relationships and what can she expect from her maternal house. The *banna* songs, on the other hand, are sung by the groom's family before the wedding ceremony; and usually talk of the eagerness of the boy to get married and what kind of girl does the boy's family value.

The second theme that is evident is the kinship pattern. It is not just the couple, who has a role to play in the wedding, but their entire family is important. *Dada, Tau, Baba, Jeth, Devar, Phupha, bhai, dadi, jethani, ma, bhabhi, chachi, devarani, nand* find mention in most of the songs(all of them are not included here). Even though all these people may not dwell together, yet their participation in the wedding ceremony is of great importance.

In the process of analysing the songs, we realised that there were some gaps in our understanding. These gaps were mainly related to inability to understand the exact meaning of the words used in the songs and how to

situate the text of the songs. We went back to our participants to share our analysis, seek clarification and get an insider's perspective on our interpretation. We engaged in an informal conversation with them. This was especially helpful in understanding some words that make reference to implicit values such as why is the girl refusing to take anything from the male relatives in her family or why going out to fetch water in the afternoon is a taboo. This was an important step in our study that helped to validate our analysis.

## **About the Participants**

### **Participant 1**

Sunita is 45 years of age and has been married for past 30 years. She was born in Gadh-Mirakpur, a Jat village in Sonapat district of Haryana. She is a homemaker and a mother of two. She has a 26 years old daughter and a 24 years old son. When she reached class 7<sup>th</sup> her family decided that she shouldn't go to the school anymore and should be married off, as there was no secondary school in the close vicinity. She was married at the age of 15.

She read to us the songs that she had written in collaboration with her sister-in-law and explained the meanings as well. She said that many songs are still the same; as were during the time of her wedding. But, new songs have emerged with time as well, such as the 'Banne tu college jana' (groom you complete your college studies) song. This also suggests that the composition of these songs is a dynamic process that incorporates the cultural transitions as well.

### **Participant 2**

Seema is a 31 years of age. She is a home maker, married to a lawyer in Delhi, and has two children. Her natal home is a village Vhatgaon, in Sonapat, Haryana, about 60 km from

New Delhi. The village is inhabited by thirty six communities, and among these *Jats* constitute the majority population. Seema too, like the previous participant, belongs to the Jat community. There are two Government schools in the village and 4-5 private schools. For higher education, girls and boys have to go to the nearby city. Seema relocated to Delhi after her marriage almost nine years back. She stays with her husband and his parents. The elder brothers of her father-in-law with their respective families stay in close vicinity. When the researchers asked her about the songs sung at the weddings, she told us that in Delhi mostly CDs are played. She did not remember the complete lyrics of folksongs that were sung in Sonipat. So, she asked her sister-in-law to

write some of the songs. She explained the meaning of those songs in great detail.

Both of the participants are residents, but not natives of Delhi. However, they did not remember the complete lyrics of folksongs, despite the fact that they had heard the songs and have also participated in singing them on various occasions. They attributed this to the culture of Delhi, where such practices are not carried out in the way they were done at their native places.

### **Song – I**

Listen carefully to my advice

Don't let your mother's name get defamed

Don't split the branches using your head as a pivot

Don't smash the cow-dung cakes against each other

Don't remove the empty pan from the flames

Don't bring disgrace to your family

Don't swing around the empty sieve

Don't purposelessly visit anybody's house

Don't have bath on the terrace

Don't bring disgrace to your family

Do not speak in presence of your father-in-law

Do not unveil yourself in presence of your elder brother-in-law

Do not tell work to your mother-in-law

Don't bring disgrace to your family

The water that flows in the drains

Is not really water

The wife that speaks in presence of her husband

Is not a real wife

Listen carefully to my advice

Don't let your mother's name get defamed

## Commentary

This song is called a *jhikadi*, and is sung before the *Vidai*, i.e. the farewell of the bride from her father's home after the completion of the wedding ceremony, though it is also sung at some other occasions as well, such as *jachha*, i.e. the birth of a child. Here, the mother of the bride is giving her advice on how to be a good wife and daughter-in-law. She seems to be giving advice from her own experience. Instead of telling her what to do, the focus here is on what not to do. She repeatedly reminds her daughter not to sully her mother's name.

The song can be divided in 4 stanzas. The first stanza talks about the tasks that a girl is supposed to carry out in her marital home. She is supposed to carry out all the tasks with expertise and efficacy, failing which she will bring dishonour to her natal family. The mother will be held responsible, if the husband or the in-laws are not happy with the conduct of the bride. Here, the mother can be seen as an agent of patriarchy, as she is acculturating her daughter into a particular kind of living and thinking, which is deemed best for married women. The woman, thus, bears the burden of maintaining the 'izzat'(family honour) of both the natal home and the marital home.

She thinks that the mother-in-law might abuse her daughter for not taking care of the household chores. It is expected that girls would be given sufficient training to conduct household work by their parents. Thereby, she is under constant assessment. If the girl does something wrong, the in-laws might question her parents' upbringing, especially the mother who is solely responsible for training her daughter in household tasks.

According to Leela Dube (2001), the education of girls begins at home under the supervision and company of elder female relatives. The songs indicate that people who may humiliate the bride are generally the female relatives, as the male relatives do not talk much to the '*bahu*' (daughter-in-law) of the house. So, it is the women who are perpetuating patriarchy. The vicious cycle of the oppressed becoming the oppressor continues like this. The oppressed reinforce and reproduce the oppression, which they suffered earlier.

The conception behind the treatment of such issues as something which can cause trouble to the bride is that she is treated as someone who is replaceable. It reduces the worth of the bride to someone who is supposed to be unquestioningly subservient. Her labour is unrecognised as long as it continues to do it as per the expectations of her family. The work entails duty and obligation, and seems to have no scope for choice, fulfilment and reimbursement. It sounds more like servitude than

service. When we talked to Sunita about the roles of a woman after marriage, she said that it is important for a girl to know how to run a household. She said that it doesn't matter if the in-laws are supportive or that the girl is working outside, she will still have to carry out her responsibilities at home.

The bride is advised not to expose her face to the elder relatives. She is asked to cover her face all the time. Thus, further pushing her away into the realm of oblivion and turning her existence into a non-existence. The concept of *purdah* also has a connotation that a girl is not even safe if exposed even in a family setting. The last stanza talks about her *patni-dharma* (conduct of a good wife). She cannot even expect intimacy and support in her relationship with her husband. She is advised not to speak in front of her husband. It may mean that the mother is telling her not to argue with her husband and carry out his orders dutifully.

This song can also be compared to a popular verse from Neeti Shastra '*Karyeshu Dasi, Karaneshu Manthri; Bhojeshu Mata, Shayaneshu Rambha, Roopeshu lakshmi, Kshamayeshu Dharitri, Shat dharmayukta, Kuladharma Pathni*'. This verse states the 6 noble qualities of a good wife. It means that a wife should work like a servant, advise like a minister, feed like a mother, please in the bed like the heavenly beauty Rambha, beautiful like Goddess Lakshmi, and have patience like Earth. Ironically, the conception of an ideal wife in this song is not much different from that of the 13th century. This kind of relationship is not the one based on equality. Here, the husband obviously has an upper-hand over the wife. He is referred to as 'swami', which means 'owner'. It can also suggest that she should give in to her husband's demands, sexual or otherwise, without any question. Thus, suggesting the wife is a commodity, which can be owned. The ownership of the girl gets transferred to the husband from the father of the bride. This song constructs the identity of the married woman as the sexual object in the bedroom and the servant in the household. The woman is supposed to have no voice, even if she has one she is supposed to submerge/silent it, in order to not bring 'shame' to her mother's name.

## **Song- II**

Give the old house and the courtyard to the banni (bride)

Banni you may ask for anything.

What should I ask my rich grandfather/father/ maternal uncle/ brother

Whatever you give me willingly and my destiny will go with me.

(Note: There are four stanzas in this song. Each song is constructed in the same way, only the name of male relatives change in each stanza.)

## Commentary

In this song many male relatives of the bride are offering her property as a wedding gift, as she is about to leave her parents' home for her husband's house. These relatives include the grandfather, father, maternal uncle and brother of the bride. All these relatives are addressed as '*hazari*', which means very rich. The bride repeatedly says that she doesn't need to ask for anything, as what they give her willingly and her destiny will accompany her to her new home. The idea of destiny needs to be critically explored here. If the girl will suffer from widowhood or any other bad experiences all the blame will be shifted to her bad luck and destiny. It is a mechanism in which the real culprits are absolved of their crimes by blaming the luck of the victim.

There are no female relatives offering the property. Two major issues emerge in this song, between the bride and her male relatives. The first is that possibly women in this community do not own property. Thus, they have no right to offer it as a gift to anyone. And, the second is that women do not think that they need to own property in their names. Since childhood, girls are indoctrinated into believing that men are supposed to have the places of authority, the power of decision making and the ownership of the family property. Thus, a woman who demands a share in her paternal property is looked down upon, and even boycotted in many families. She is seen as someone who is not grateful to her parents for her upbringing and tries to bring bad name for her family's honour. In a way, the woman is demonised for raising her voice and putting up a fight for her rights.

A 'good woman' is expected to politely refuse what rightfully belongs to her, even if she has been asked to have it. Although, it is the legal right of a girl to have an equal share in her paternal/ ancestral property along with her other male or female siblings, women don't even think about claiming what belongs to them. And, if that is the case, then how can the bride's brother offer her the property, in which she has a rightful share? Women are made to believe that they must not claim that property. Their minds are acculturated in such a way that they abdicate their right to property, in order to be seen as 'good women'.

This can be analysed from the perspective of Marxist feminism. Erasure of women from the ownership of property leads to their further submission and exploitation. It is a mechanism which aids men to control and regulate women and their behaviour. If the husband decides to leave his wife, she has no place to go. As it is her father, brother and husband who are the owners of property which makes her a dependent. Thus, she must live in accordance to one of these men in order to have a home.

We later on, discussed the issue of a girl's right to ancestral property with Seema and Sunita. Sunita said that it is right for a girl to claim her share in her ancestral property, if her brother/s are not taking care of her. She told us that it is a custom to provide gifts to the girl, her husband and her husband's relatives, on various festivals and occasions. If the girl's parents are old or dead, and the brother fails to do so, only then the girl is given social sanction to claim her right. Otherwise, such girls who claim their legal rights are looked down upon in the community. Seema told us that nowadays girls do claim their rights and do not care about the reaction of their respective communities.

### **Song- III**

My husband's elder brother wears a sheer *tehmad*  
And sits in the middle of the house  
He looks at the faces of the daughter-in-laws of the house  
My husband who is in army had come back on leave,  
So I got all dressed up to fetch water  
When I came back I caught my mother-in-law backbiting about me to my husband  
(Mother-in-law sings)  
Son your wife is wicked  
as she goes out to fetch water in the middle of the afternoon  
(Daughter-in-law sings)  
Hearing this, my husband took out the cane  
And struck in the middle of my waist  
Save me my mother-in-law  
Your son is beating me up  
(Mother-in-law sings)  
My son beat her even more  
As she abuses me  
(Daughter-in-law sings)  
You can continue to be jealous my mother-in-law  
Because your son is hitting the wall and not me  
He loves me twice as much as he pretends to beat me



## Commentary

This particular song is sung at the time of marriage when the groom arrives at the door step of the bride's house, or when the ceremony of marriage is taking place. This song belongs to a genre of marriage songs that are called 'seetne'. This category of songs are sung and received in lighter spirit, and use abusive and condescending language for the grooms' family. Various relationships, that will come into existence as a result of the union, find mention in these songs. One relationship that finds special mention is that of the mother-in-law.

This particular song tells something about the structure of the house in which the grooms' family lives and also about some tasks that people in the house are engaged in. The houses have a courtyard in the centre where people can sit and observe the routine activities of the house. The main participants in the household chores are the women. The song begins by telling that the eldest brother of her husband sits in the middle of the house (probably the courtyard) on a *khat*. *Khat* is used for sitting in villages and towns. It is in the form of a single bed with four legs serving as the base and a wooden frame. The middle portion or the seat is made with the help of a jute rope.

The eldest brother sits on the *khat*, in the centre of the house, wearing a sheer *tehmad*. *Tehmad* is a piece of cloth that is draped around the waist and is used to cover the lower part of the body by men. It stretches from the waist to the ankle. Here, the brother-in-law is sitting and watching the daughter-in-laws of the house, while they are engaged in the daily household chores. The face of daughter-in-laws is generally covered with the help of a veil. So it might be difficult to see their faces, except when they are working. This line conveys that men, no matter what relationship they share with women, look at them as objects. It also tells that when women are engaged in household chores men can sit around without participating in the process. There is very little or no sharing of household work between men and women. The mention of a sheer cloth draped around the waist also has a sexual connotation. It can be seen as a sexual overture that the man is making towards other woman irrespective of the relationship she shares with him.

In the next line, the girl says that she dressed up to fetch water. This line conveys that in villages girls go out to fetch water from the well or any other source of water such as the hand pump. This is an important part of her task. In one line the girl states that she got dressed up to fetch water and in the other line she mentions that her husband has come home on leave. Dressing up can also be linked with the home coming of her husband. Her husband is in the armed forces and has come back for a few days.

Dressing up on one hand can express her happiness because her husband is back, and it can also be seen as an act to please her husband. Then she says that as she entered the house after filling water she noticed that her mother-in-law was saying something to her son, i.e. the girl's husband. She noticed that her mother-in-law was bad-mouthing about her. The mother was telling her son that your wife is so mischievous that she goes to fetch water in the afternoon. The women who go to fetch water in the afternoon are looked down upon. The person who narrated these songs said that generally 'loose character' girls were out in the afternoon. This 'look down upon' and 'loose character' can be because of several reasons. Women who don't follow rules are generally not liked. Afternoon is also that part of the day when men are out for work. The streets are generally deserted and there are no women outside. Here, men should be seen as predators. This indicates the unwritten rules that restrict the free movement of women outside their house. Her movement within the sanctioned boundaries, of both space and time, is used as a criterion to judge her character.

The song also conveys that the mother-in-law is constantly nitpicking the daughter-in-law. Both of them (the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law) have to share the love and affection of a man who is so central to their identity. It is in this nexus of relationships, where women situate their identity. The reason for this attachment can be attributed to the status that a girl attains after she gets married and after she becomes a mother of a male child. The man becomes the reason for her status and respect in the family. Even though it appears that it is women who are in a state of conflict but on finer analysis it becomes evident that both are operating under the mechanism of patriarchal order (Thapan, 2002).

This song also tells how violence against women is naturalised and perpetuated. The mother is the one who encourages her son to beat his wife. The mother-in-law is ensuring that men have an upper hand in relationships. She must have suffered similar treatment at the hands of her husband; and is now promoting the same act against her daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law then says that her mother-in-law is jealous of her. She says that her husband loves her more than he beats her. In Freudian sense, this reply can be seen as a defence mechanism that the daughter-in-law uses to justify the act of violence against her. She rationalises the act by saying that the love that her husband bestows upon her gives him the licence to beat her.

We later asked the participants whether this song approximates the reality in their respective villages. To this, Sunita responded that there are instances of domestic violence, but they have reduced now. She attributed this to the changing educational and economic status of the girls that has given them voice and agency. Citing the example of her

neighbour in Shahpurjat, she said that the daughter of her neighbour came back to her natal home even though she was pregnant because her husband used to physically abuse her. She is now a mother and has decided that she will never get married. She is working as a teacher and is able to sustain herself. Matters of divorce are rare, but nevertheless they are not unheard of. Divorce is, however, seen as a last resort. What Sunita told us was substantiated by Seema's statement, that most matters of marital discord are settled at the level of Panchayats. The decision of Panchayat is binding for families on both sides. Only men participate in the discussions in the Panchayat. Women themselves justify their silence at such important meetings. They feel that if women speak, then the matters will never be resolved. Sunita also said that there is no need for women to interfere when there are elders (men), who are wise and experienced, to sort out the issues.

Seema, however, disagrees that women in the village have started looking at divorce as the recourse to physical abuse. The issues are either resolved within the house or by the members of panchayat. She also said that women do participate in the process of decision making in the Panchayat. She said that the previous panchayat in her village had a woman *sarpanch* (head). We asked our participants that do women fight back when they are assaulted by either the mother-in-law or the husband. To this Sunita replied that it is not ethically right for a girl to retaliate against elders in the family. A husband is worthy of respect and any act of physical retaliation against him is unacceptable. She kept repeating that 'yeh toh galat ho jayegaa' (this would be wrong).

## **Conclusion**

We have tried to analyse the songs on the basis of our understanding of gender roles and the process of socialisation. After reading the songs several times, we could identify some threads that ran across the songs. It is evident that women have an inferior status in comparison to men. A complete dichotomy in the construction of gender roles is evident from these songs. Men perform roles that are different from those of women. The only mention of men in these songs is at the time of decision making. In those scenarios women go into the background and men come to the fore. In decision making women's opinions are considered secondary; if ever they are taken under consideration. One of the songs, which we have not discussed here, states that the boy was so eager to get married that in desperation he left without the female relatives. In another song, the girl and the boy are keen to get married, but they do not get the approval from any of the male members in the family. All the ladies in the house are ready for the alliance, but they have little say. The disagreement of the male members makes the choice of the female relatives irrelevant.

As one enters the household, especially in matters related to household chores, men are nowhere to be seen and women take the front seat. The proficiency in household chores adds to the status of the woman in the family. On the contrary, her inability to prove her efficiency in such tasks threatens to bring down the honour of her natal home. She also stands the risk of verbal and even physical abuse. The violence may not be perpetrated directly by the mother-in-law, but she may be instrumental in instigating her son against his wife. The household thus becomes a centre of a woman's identity because she is bound by the four walls of her house. Her primary role is limited to that of taking care of the family members. This role takes the form of a mechanised routine characterised by several tasks that she performs throughout the day.

The service that a woman renders to her family, sometimes comes close to servitude, with several 'thou shall not' attached to it. The association between the manner in which she does the chores and family honour makes it more of a burden than a satisfying experience. The girl may live in perpetual fear of making mistakes, as it may bring disgrace to her family. It is the girl who carries the burden of upholding the prestige of her family. She is also bound by conventions, which when crossed put her on the radar of suspicion. These conventions can be as simple as going out in the afternoon to fetch water. The girl, especially immediately after her marriage, is constantly under surveillance. The eagle eyes of the relatives follow her everywhere she goes.

The character of a woman is also questioned if she ever breaks the social conventions. There is an instance in one of the songs, not discussed here, where the mother-in-law casts an aspersion on her daughter-in-law, that she is stopping the jeeps of army officers. This may be seen as a reference to sexual overtures that her daughter-in-law might be making to men other than her husband. She is also raising her son's suspicion about the fidelity of his wife. She prompts her son to even use violence against his wife in case she disobeys his authority. This act on one hand conveys that the son is the decision maker and that violence is justified as a means of maintaining his authority. In this way the mother-in-law acts as the agent of patriarchy. She uses her son as a pawn to perpetuate patriarchal conventions. She continues the treatment that she received at the hands of her mother-in-law. Thus, the subjugation of women continues generation after generation.

There is also very little interaction between the daughter-in-law and other men in the house besides her husband. The strict hierarchy is maintained in the process of communication. A young bride is supposed to cover her face in front of all the male members in the family. This veil, supposedly a mark of respect, symbolises the silence that she is supposed to observe. The veil not only covers up her physical identity by

making all the women look alike, but also hides her existence as an individual. It pushes the woman into the realm of non-existence, where she becomes a replaceable entity.

As we read more and more songs and discussed the shared meaning with the members of the community we realised that songs can be a pertinent source to understand cultural values and beliefs. They carry not just values, but value judgements as well. They reflect the shared world view of a community. The practices may change over a period of time, but taking forward Sudhir Kakar's argument we can also state that folksongs like myths and folktales may represent what constitutes the inner world of the members of a community (Kakar, 1978).

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## APPENDICES

### Song I

Itni di samjha ai beti, ma ne gaal dawiye matna.  
Sardhar laakdi toriye matna,  
Gosay pai gosaa fodiye matna,  
Khali tawa taariye matna,  
Beti ulahana laiye matna  
Itni di samjha ai beti, ma ne gaal dawiye matna.

Khadi-khadi chaaj fatakiye matna,  
Ghar-ghar handni kehweiye matna,  
Upar chadh ke nahaiye matna,  
Beti ulahana laiye matna  
Itni di samjha ai beti, ma ne gaal dawiye matna.

Susaray ke syami boliye matna,  
Jaythey tai ghoonghta kholiye matna,  
Saasu tai kaam bataiye matna,  
Beti ulahana laiye matna  
Itni di samjha ai beti, ma ne gaal dawiye matna.  
Naali mai kai neer behwe,  
Asli neer nahi howay-sai  
Apne pati ke syami baulay,  
Asli beer nahi ho sai  
Itni di samjha ai beti, ma ne gaal dawiye matna.

### Song II

Banni di do kothi dalaan, banni tanne mangna ho so mang  
Kya maangu mere dada hazari  
Hath ka diya, karma ka likha, chalega mere sath  
Banni di do kothi dalaan, banni tanne mangna ho so mang  
Kya maangu mere papa hazari  
Hath ka diya, karma ka likha, chalega mere sath

Banni di do kothi dalaan, banni tanne mangna ho so mang  
Kya maangu mere mama hazari  
Hath ka diya, karma ka likha, chalega mere sath  
Banni di do kothi dalaan, banni tanne mangna ho so mang.  
Kya maangu mere bhai hazari,  
Hath ka diya, karma ka likha, chalega mere sath

### **Song III**

Mera bada jeth badhmash, jaali ki tehmed badh se  
Woh ghale bahad beech khat bahua ke mukhde dekai sei  
Main odh pahar padi ja ai, fauji chutti aavai sei  
Main padi bhar kei aayee aie maa bête nei sikhawai  
Beta teri bahu badhmash, dopahari mein padi lawai sei  
Khutti tei tarya bait, meri kadh kei beech jachawe sei  
Chudwa le meri saas, tera lal bahu nai marai sei

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## **OCCASIONAL PAPER NO. VI**

### **We the Teachers: Narrative Analysis of Our Journey as Teachers**

**Jyoti Sethi, Reemu Verma and Nisha**

#### **Abstract**

*This study is an autobiographical account of three teachers, their journeys starting from the day they thought of being teachers. Through this study they took the opportunity to reflect, introspect, and analyze their journeys as teachers. They studied and wrote about their own selves, their own experiences, their own observations of this world and significant people around them. Understanding their own experiences by situating themselves in a context, inquiring about how they perceive themselves and how society perceives them was the main focus behind their inquiry. Their context comprises school, profession of teaching, immediate society and significant people in their lives. Mutual construction of the research, in which three of them felt cared for and had a voice with which to tell the stories made the study special for them. This exercise also turned out to be cathartic for them. They did the task of experiencing the experience, interpreting the interpretations of each other's life. The whole act was of affirming and entering into some one's thinking or perception. By doing so, they could relate to each other's feelings. They could identify the feeling of 'burnt out and stress' they were going through. They all concurred that the reasons behind such feelings are the low public image of their profession and loss of power and autonomy in teaching. The hidden emotions got a channelized vent through rationale thinking and they felt empowered and at peace with themselves and as teachers.*

#### **Introduction**

This study is an autobiographical work of Aditi, Mansi and Ruchi (pseudonyms\*). We are teachers from past 7 to 9 years and with this study we have taken the opportunity to retrospect and analyze our journeys as teachers. During our day to day interactions, we often used to come across issues which bothered us at personal as well as professional fronts. We used to listen to each other and offer suggestions



to each other. But, many a times we used to wonder, why such a thing was happening to us.

When given an opportunity to decide on our research topic we chose ourselves as the subjects of our study. We wanted to study our own self, our own experiences, our own observation of this world and significant people around us. Understanding our own experiences by situating ourselves in a context, inquiring about how we perceive ourselves and how society perceives us is our main interest of inquiry. Our context is 'school', our profession 'teaching', 'immediate society' and 'significant people' in our lives.

## **Background**

One of us (Mansi\*) suggested the methodology of self-inquiry as she had taken up this task twice before as a graduate student. She did a 'Dream analysis' to unveil the hidden desires and emotions on the basis of Freud and Jung's framework, where she recorded her dreams daily for three months and made diary entries. It was a successful study as she could manage to identify her fears, hidden desires and ambitions which were suppressed somewhere in the subconscious. The inner journey, inquiry through the stories of dreams helped her construct knowledge of herself as an individual. She also did 'Journal writing' for a year as a student-teacher about her everyday classroom experiences. The narratives in the journal were used by the supervisor to comment and give suggestions. It helped her great deal in her future lesson planning. These journals meant a lot more to her, they were like memoirs of classroom experiences. Those narratives were also the medium of dialogue between the supervisor and student-teacher. Supervisor's interpretation of the writings used to give insights about issues which probably she herself couldn't notice. On understanding the strength of this methodology we decided to use narrative analysis but this time in a collaborative manner with a better understanding of the technique involved and in a more rigorous manner.

## **Why narrative analysis**

Human race understands this world better through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). There is an intuitive urge to tell about one's past life experiences through mediums like informal talks, formal conversations. Sharing of experience is an important factor in the field of education. Role of Experience in education realm was proposed by Dewey. Idea of experience gives fundamental grounding to this kind of inquiry.

Experience is both personal and social. Learning takes place with other children, teachers, parents, in a classroom, at home, in a community. So, there is a larger context in which our lives are situated. Experience is in continuum, one experience is born out of the past experience and present experiences tend to shape the future experience. Wherever one may stand on this continuum there is always a lived past, an imagined now and an imagined future. This approach allows one to move back and forth between the personal and social simultaneously thinking about past, present and future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

This approach therefore helps in capturing the transformations as it views life experiences in a continuum. It acknowledges the role of continuity and change in the life experiences. Geertz (as quoted in Clandinin & Connelly 2000) advocates that change is the hallmark of life. Not just the towns and countries change; even the researchers change, discipline changes, intellectual settings change. The evolution of experiences can be understood through this approach. It is unlike the question answer form in qualitative research where respondent's response is fragmented and not seen in the continuity.

## **Methodology**

Narrative is both phenomena under study and method of study (Clandinin& Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry object of investigation is a story itself (Riessman, 1993).The procedures for implementing this research consist of focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences and chronologically ordering (or using life course stages) the meaning of those experiences. Cortazzi suggests that the chronology of narrative research, with an emphasis on sequence, sets narrative apart from other genres of research.

Narrative Studies can be of various types. One such type is 'A life History' narrative. It portrays an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations or communal folklore . The present study that we wish to conduct would follow similar approach.

Bruner's approach (also called as functional approach) of doing narrative analysis focuses on what particular stories do in people's lives. In this approach, narratives are viewed as the way in which individuals construct and make sense of reality as well as the ways in which meanings are created and shared. This is considered a functional approach to narrative analysis because the emphasis of the analysis is focused on the work that the narrative serves in helping individuals make sense of their lives. The focus of this form of analysis is on the interpretations of events related in the narratives by the individual telling

the story. We will be also following Bruner's approach to understand each other's stories and its impact on our lives.

## **The Study**

This study uses the methodology of narrative analysis to understand the journey of three teachers. This is an autobiographical work; therefore, subjects are the researchers themselves. The following table gives a detailed profile of the subjects.

### **Profiles of the Subjects**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age (Years)</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Experience</b>
<i>Aditi*</i>	31	B.A Eco(Hons.), M.A (Eco), B.Ed., M.Ed.	PGT Economics	*Suwarna School	Unmarried	7 years
<i>Mansi*</i>	31	B.El.Ed M.Ed	Assistant Teacher	*Diamond School	Married with a young child	9 yrs
<i>Ruchi*</i>	33	B.Sc, B.Ed M.Sc Maths M.Ed	TGT Mathematics	*Pearl School	Married	9 yrs

\* Pseudonyms.

## **Process**

Phase 1- In the very first stage three of us wrote personal narratives in which we decided to write about our life stories as teachers. We wrote our accounts in first person. We used the 'critical event' technique to write our narratives instead of sticking to the calendar chronology.

Phase 2- We then exchanged our narratives. Each one of us read other's narrative. We tried to capture the trajectory in the narratives to overcome the issue of chronological sequencing. We then tried to give meaning to the narratives, the probable interpretation.

Phase 3- After that, we sat together to discuss how we felt on reading the others' narrative, what all came across our minds, concerns, revelations about each other's life. There were many aspects which we didn't know about each other. The first meeting culminated to be more of cathartic in nature, in which we got the platform to vent out all our emotions.

Phase 4- The very next day we met again. In the second meeting, we categorically discussed what meanings we attached to others' narrative and we together came up with the emerging themes.

Phase 5- We did our analysis under those common themes which we found to be dominant and that emerged clearly. Our analysis rested on our present conceptual understanding about the contemporary discourse in the field of education.

### **What we did as Narrative Inquirers**

We as narrative inquirers did the task of experiencing the experience, interpreting the interpretations of each other. The whole act was of affirming and entering into someone's thinking or perception. We tried to interpret each other's narrative by using the criteria of personal-social, past-present and future, and the place within the environment.

It was challenging to be both the researcher and the subject. In the phase 1, we were solely subjects. We were writing about our life stories, penning down all our emotions. We all have a story grammar in our minds which seeks a plot having a beginning, middle and an end. So, while writing we probably missed out significant experiences in urge of writing our experience in the form of a story with a specific plot. There was a constant concern that readers might treat our narrative as fiction due to the language involved. However, we were not concerned how the 'other' member will perceive 'my' story. It was this comfort level that helped us to open up in front of each other. In narrative inquiry relationship between researcher and the subject is crucial. Here, it is noteworthy that we were able to conduct this study because of the comfort level we shared with each other.

In the phase 2, we looked at the other member as the researcher and remained subject for one's own self. We shared our narratives through email. We tried to make probable interpretations of the narrative, paragraph wise.

We think we couldn't do the role of a researcher strictly as while reading the life story of the other member, we felt sad that my 'friend' had to go through all this. We were empathetic towards each other; we couldn't distant ourselves from the emotional upheaval it caused. For instance, Mansi had narrated an experience which was contagious in nature, it disturbed the other two members and they felt the need to meet and talk. The phase 3 actually culminated out of the phase 2, where we felt we needed to meet and talk to each other. Hence, phase 3 resulted more into a cathartic session, where we talked at length about the experiences we had written about.

In the next meeting, we had already read each other's interpretation; we then discussed what we interpreted out of it. There were points of disagreement, sometimes the person said that they didn't mean to say something, probably the need to restructure the sentence was felt, and sometimes we were amazed by the interpretation ourselves. We had never thought of it the way it was interpreted. For instance, *Ruchi acknowledged after reading the interpretation that enjoyment and time are not dependent to each other. Today, she has time but her spouse is living abroad, and she can't enjoy the life the way she speculated.*

While discussing our interpretation, we realized in the beginning of all our narratives we are talking about how we got into this career so we converged at this point and came up with a theme on career choice. Then, in the middle we are talking about different schools, in which we have worked, leading us to converge again on the theme of schools. After that, we are at length talking about our experiences in school with our heads and colleagues; therefore, we came up with colleagues and fraternity. Then, marriage came up to be a common theme between two of us and the role of spouse. Since it was not a part of Aditi's experience, we left it out as a theme. We did so because it was not easy to prepare our narratives for analysis meant for public readership. One voice was getting strength from the other voice. We felt more secured as subjects on the themes which were common in our lives. Hence, it was an unconscious act which when reflected upon made us to decide that we will converge through themes and will do the analysis together as collaborative researchers. This also helped us to distance from the identities of the subjects at the time of analysis. Then, we started dealing with the interpretations and started discussing categorically through themes. There were agreements and disagreements, we resolved the disagreements through discussions and sometimes even by telling the other to read the literature on it. We arrived at a shared understanding which became the part of our analysis.

Themes that emerged were:           

- On Career
- The Field- School
- Teacher's Professional Growth
- Colleagues and Teaching Fraternity
- Public Image of the Teacher
- Personal Image of the Teacher

## **Analysis**

### **On career**

According to our experience, making a career choice is an important decision. The present school system is framed in such a way that the students lack the decision making skills at one hand and on the other hand parents do not allow the children to make independent decisions. *“.....Like many Parents, my parents also had aspirations for me. Doctor, was their first choice for me.”*

The school system doesn't help the students to recognise their area of interest and does not help the student to develop love for any particular discipline. As a result, one generally goes by ad-hoc advices coming from here and there, friends, elder peers, family, and relatives etc. Generally, youth tend to follow the herd mentality and go in for lucrative career options,

*“ .....But after graduation all my friends went on to pursue MBA. I like my other friends went on to preparing for competitive exams for MBA”.*

We also felt streamlining of courses as early as in class X also makes a difference. Making a career choice as early as in class X is unfair to a student. At that stage, your thoughts and choices are open to manipulation by parents and significant people,

*“On one hand it was different from all my friends whose parents were always behind them to pursue either medical or engineering, but on the other hand I was in great confusion as what to do because of the open platform left in front of me”.*

We felt that the Career counsellors should be appointed in all the schools at higher classes. They can help children to recognize their interest and help the parents to understand their child's interest. They can guide them about newer fields according to the child's interest.

Informal chat sessions can be organized for senior secondary children by inviting the professionals from varied walks of life like, Painter, Dancer, Radio jockey, Doctor, Engineer, Teacher etc.; and also the alumni of the same school can be called to share their life stories and anecdotes. Their experiences, then and now, can help children a great deal in making choice about their careers.

### **The field – schools**

Schools have influenced our lives in a major way, even as students and now as teachers. We could see how the stratification of society is

mirrored through the stratified school systems. The same government schools which are seen as 'bad' for a student to enter in are seen as the 'best' opportunity for a 'teacher'. For families of female teachers, securing a government job is the security to devote more time at personal front.

*"... I wondered; government school which was seen as a punishment for a student is now viewed rewarding for being a teacher there".*

Even those teachers working in government schools are not happy with the education imparted in these schools, as they themselves send their children to private schools.

There is wide and apparent stratification in our school systems. On one hand, there are elite schools doing business, schools with AC, high fee structure, luxurious classrooms with high tech multimedia options, providing meals from five star hotels; and on the other hand there are schools where ceiling leaks during rainy season and there is no electricity to run even a fan, no toilets, non-availability of safe drinking water.

There are self-acclaimed elite schools which have activity rooms, language labs, computer room, resource rooms etc. as part of their infrastructure. The concept of activity based learning seems to be restricted to the luxurious infrastructure provided by these schools in the form of activity rooms and labs. But, this kind of industrialized module doesn't really approve of the individual differences among learners. The uniqueness of the child thus is ignored.

"Common school system" as proposed by Kothari commission is the only solution to this problem. To achieve an egalitarian society, schools which in itself is a mini society, needs to be egalitarian in its very nature.

### **On teacher's professional growth**

Teaching is a profession where knowledge is never stagnant, but ever evolving. A teacher has to keep pace with the contemporary developments in the field of education, and at the same time she should be able to apply it in her own classroom context. Failing to do so, the profession becomes monotonous and teacher loses rigor and interest in her profession.

Our experience reflects that the system doesn't allow the teachers to work in this spirit, thus leading to frustration and making even a passionate teacher to think of quitting which we also experienced at one point of time,

*".....but sadly a truly passionate teacher can ever ponder over the question that can I survive here or the teacher inside me will be killed and only a professional would remain who has compromised with the system and decided to sit back and just work without questioning?"*

Also, the rigidities of the system impose hurdles in the path of career enhancement of teachers who may be highly motivated but then repressed by the lethargic system,

*"No good university allowed B.El.Eds to take up higher education in mathematics".*

It may surface either in the form of reluctance on the part of authorities to cooperate or the nagging and sarcastic analysis of your decision to pursue higher education by the colleagues.

*"I wanted to join M.Ed part time from the very first year I joined teaching and even bought the form, but the Principal denied me the permission to join the course that time".*

The very fact that the image of a teacher entails or the way her profession is treated, her point of view to think of professional development is always under scanner. It is really sad to bring home the fact that qualifications mainly geared towards preparing teachers at primary level do not offer enough flexibility to pursue their career ahead, as if it is the lowest in the hierarchy of our so called school system. It is highly contradictory that the profession which demands development on a continuous basis doesn't really offer much flexibility. Thus, denying the very basic premise i.e. professional growth, on which a profession like teaching thrives on.

### **Colleagues and teaching fraternity**

Our colleagues constitute the significant others at professional front. The perceptions and beliefs held by them tend to cast influences, directly or indirectly, the degree of which might be high enough to cause unrest. Our experiences guide us that there is major competitiveness amongst teachers which is injected by the employers. This kind of feeling goes against the growth of teachers as a fraternity. Instead of learning from each other's experience, the counterparts feel jealous and wish to pull you down.

*"Colleagues / seniors who taunt you for being showy or wanting to come into limelight or just thinking that you will gradually learn that it is futile to make that effort (which I don't consider extra rather necessary) and fall into line gradually".*



This attitude, we are sure is not uncommon in other professions where people are target and goal centric. However, in our profession where our targets are not numbers but are living students, it is very unhealthy and unprofessional.

The conversations that take place in the staff room needs another mention that is the most important place where informal discussions take place in the absence of the students. It is the place from where the hidden messages are conveyed.

*‘...The staff room chats and discussions bring home the fact that very less was discussed on improving the teaching approach. Rather as a fresher the first thing you notice is being observed by people/seniors as a potential threat to their existing ways of working if you try to do something innovative or take extra efforts’.*

We experienced that the juniors or freshers who just join the system with great zeal and innovative ideas are not welcomed by the seniors or fellow colleagues who are in the system from past couple of years. It suggests that juniors irrespective of their capability to bring about positive changes in the system are in a way threatened by the existing perceptions and beliefs of their seniors which is really sad. Through our present study, we are not attempting to generalize our experience. But, at least we could figure out that with time (dominated with negative experiences) even great enthusiastic teachers get frustrated.

### **Public image of teachers**

Public image of our profession is very disturbing and annoying to us. People view our profession as an easy profession where no intellectual skills are required.

*“Since childhood or for that matter even now the perception that people tend to hold i.e. teaching being viewed as a profession which is just half days job and less engaging and less burdensome as compared to other professions makes me feel sad”.*

We could make out that this image has its roots deep down in gender. School teaching is highly gendered with most of the females taking up this profession.

*“one of the boy said, (to girls), ‘...tumhara kya hai, tum to teaching karlogi par hame dekho kitni tension hai, acha career nahi bana to koi shadi bhi nahi karega. Teacher - wife to phir bhi chal jati hai par teacher - husband nahi chalta’. I thought, is it that ‘teaching’ is not an ‘acha’ career”*

Image of a woman in our society is interwoven with the image of a teacher. A woman's identity in our society is largely embedded in her family and her role as that of a mother, wife, sister, and daughter. The demands of these stereotypical roles go in coherence with the nature of a teacher's duty i.e. lesser working hours, frequent holidays which even match with her own child's holidays are all seen compatible with her family roles. Primary teachers' job is also viewed as a paid babysitter's job, something that she does at home in an efficient manner.

*"Assistant teachers were treated as teachers who had no work to do in school. They were given absentee periods in middle school and their own class was left to monitors. They had no say in staff meetings; many times they were not even invited to attend the staff meeting. There was an unsaid current, which conveyed that only TGTs and PGTs mean business in school and PRTs are just doing the job of babysitting".*

Also, interaction of women is restricted largely to females or children compared to other jobs where you have male colleagues and public dealing. This is the reason why teachers are the most sorted for in the marriage market.

This whole picture suggests that teaching is seen as a domestic profession by many. Just like women's labour in household work goes unrecognized, similarly the labour she puts in at the professional front goes unrecognized.

### **Personal (our own) image of teachers**

This study helped us to question the image we carry for ourselves as teachers and how we see ourselves situated in this profession. Three of us have developed love and passion for this profession irrespective of our entry level feelings towards it in a gradual manner.

*"Despite the challenges that my profession entails, the teacher in me is somehow not ready to die."*

*"I know there are a lot of passionate teachers who are trying to fight back, trying to make a change, and I believe together we can. Change will definitely come however slow it may be".*

Our own image of a teacher is that of somebody who is not a puppet in the hands of the employer. We believe that we have the right to question our employers and should not behave 'meekly' in the system. We believe our professional call is equally important as that of our spouse.

*‘...he has career aspirations as I do. He is working hard for that and he knows I am doing the same for myself. He doesn’t want me to leave my dreams and so do I.’*

*‘...Thankfully, my husband shows respect for my profession and doesn’t view it as a routine job.’*

And we strongly believe that we don't have to pass any I.Q. test to prove our intelligence to the public. However, we all have made compromises when our voices were rejected by the employer or by any senior. We compromised, but we haven't left hope.

*‘....if I myself resolve that I don’t care what people think or someday I get that respect, I will definitely choose to teach the young minds because that is what I love to do’.*

Three of us see our profession instrumental in bringing change. Aditi's image is that of a teacher who can bring about transformation in the lives of students in the way they think and enquire. Mansi's image of a teacher is that of somebody who has an important voice in the education system through active participant in activities such as content writing, resource development etc. Ruchi's image is that of somebody who can bring revolutionary changes in the teaching learning process through pedagogical innovations.

*‘.....I learned a lot there and got many platforms to learn new things – integrating technology in teaching. My school gave me a platform to evolve as a teacher’.*

### **Afterthoughts**

This narrative study has not only provided us a reason for introspective explorations as far as the perceptions and beliefs about being a teacher is concerned, but has also paved way for us to raise certain questions, the answer to which is not easy to seek. It has helped us seek answers to some unanswered questions which had always been there, but got a medium of expression by way of this narrative which has turned out to be a medium of self-introspection as well.

We could relate to each other's feelings, specifically we could identify the feeling of 'burnout and stress' we were going through. We could categorically discuss and reflect that the reasons behind such feelings are the low public image of our profession and loss of power and autonomy in teaching. The hidden emotions got a channelized vent through rational thinking and we felt empowered and at peace with ourselves and as teachers.

Mutual construction of the research in which three of us felt cared for and had a voice with which to tell the stories, makes it special. The fact that three people in the similar role, with their individual experiences in somewhat different school settings were able to develop a common understanding that calls for a true fraternity working towards a common goal. We wish that such kind of experiences should be part of teaching experiences, so that there is mutual learning and bonding amongst the teachers.

This exercise also turned out to be cathartic. We did the task of experiencing the experience, interpreting the interpretations of each other's lives. The whole act was of affirming and entering into someone's thinking or perception. By doing so, we could relate to each other as professionals. This study infused us with the freshly charged rigour to meet the challenges of our career. And now, since our emotions have got a channelized vent we are at peace with ourselves which will probably help us to be at peace with our lives as teachers.

We as researchers felt the strength of this methodology. We felt if teachers are given the chance to retrospect through various forms of narrative inquiry like journal writing, diary writing, they can feel empowered the way we are feeling. Teachers can become self-reliant by taking the charge of their own problems/issues, and resolving them systematically on their own. So, we believe by making an attempt to do this narrative we are actually making a step in this direction where the introspective inquiry in our mind will guide through our efforts to make teaching more enquiry oriented, and hence satisfying.

### **Postscript**

We realized that nowhere in our narratives there was a mention of our students. We somewhat felt guilty about it and shared it with our supervisor. She helped us in resolving this guilt. She gave us the analogy of a new mother, whose life just revolves around the child but who has all the right to think about herself. We also felt that now after 7 to 9 years of teaching we are no more like new mothers who think only about the students and classroom situations. There is a lot within us which needed inquiry and our present study achieved that for each one of us. She introduced us to the recent researches in the field of teacher development, where feeling of burnout amongst the teachers is acknowledged and analyzed. We look forward to read the suggested literature for our future inquiry.

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