

Beacon

THE NEWSLETTER

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Quote–Unquote

"I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning."

- Michel Foucault

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Editorial

"The way to do fieldwork is never to come up for air until it is all over."

-Margaret Mead

The tradition of fieldwork is a matter of disciplinary pride and a great source of excitement for students of sociology and social anthropology. Immersing oneself in the field, exploring lived realities and challenging the "book view" with the acquired "field-view" is a rite of passage here at the Department of Sociology, LSR. As a part of our curriculum for the final semester, third year students are required to take a field trip to any city across the country. As much as this experience prepares the graduating class for the more rigorous field work they may undertake in their careers, this trip is more than merely a pedagogical tool. It is a test of one's resilience, adaptability and patience.

This year, the location chosen for the trip was Lucknow. Armed with questionnaires and interview schedules, students approached their field with unbridled optimism. However, one must always be prepared to encounter surprises in the field. The little things are often those which end up being most challenging. Expectations are re-worked as we face the on-ground reality. As days pass, the initial awkwardness of approaching people gives way to a feeling of being at home in the field. If you ask the third year students, they now know Lucknow like the back of their hand. "Respondents" are no longer mere objects of her study, as she comes to identify a sort of kinship with them.

Field work is not merely a quest into the unknown, so to speak. It is also a rediscovery of the self. Although our experience was short, it was adequate to teach us new things about ourselves and our classmates. Cooperation became a coveted resource. Patience became an essential vaccine against the unpredictability of the field.

However, the true teachings of the field run deeper than mere discovery of the self and the so-called 'other'. What our experience in our field really taught us was that the threshold between what we understand to be familiar and unfamiliar is constantly shifting. After two weeks in Lucknow, the city that had seemed so alien had begun to feel like home. The objective of fieldwork is not to merely throw oneself into a strange city, amongst strange people and test one's mettle as a sociologist. In fact, one need not set one foot outside the confines of their own hometown to experience unfamiliarity. After all one of the most fundamental tenets of sociology – Mills' "making the familiar unfamiliar" – allows us to make the most comfortable sites into "fields". The human capacity to familiarise the unfamiliar and reverse this process is infinite, provided we are given a strong enough impetus. Field work acts as this impetus.

The charm of the city and the warm hospitality of the people of Lucknow made the city more than just a field. The field will change you, they had said. And we are glad it did.

National News

FLYING OFFICER AVANI CHATURVEDI BECOMES THE 1ST INDIAN WOMEN TO FLY FIGHTER AIRCRAFT SOLO

Flying officer Avani Chaturvedi became the first Indian women pilot of the Indian Air Force to complete a solo flight in a MiG-21 Bison fighter aircraft on 22nd of February 2018. She completed the half an hour solo flight in the Russian origin jet in the skies over Jamnagar air base. Chaturvedi is from the first batch of three women officers who were commissioned as fighter pilots in the IAF in June 2016. Sources in the IAF called this a significant moment as it signifies a breakthrough in providing a "real" combat role for women in defence services.

SANGMA VS. SANGMA FIGHT IN THE GARO HILLS

Purno Sangma, nine-time MP from Tura Lok Sabha constituency and the chief minister of Meghalaya from 1988-1990, died in March 2016. His younger Conrad replaced him as the MP in the by-election. Mr. Conrad Sangma also took over as president of the NPP, which his father had founded in January 2013 after taking over a virtually defunct Manipur-based party of the same name. Currently, the Garo hills are Sangma turf for the ruling Congress. For the principal rival, National People's Party (NPP), it is the domain of siblings James, Conrad and Agatha Sangma. Although there are 10 candidates in the North Tura constituency, it is likely that the contest will be between the Congress and NPP.

CAN COURTS ANNUL ADULT MARRIAGES?

India's Chief Justice, Dipak Misra, said in a statement on 23rd February that no court can annul voluntary marriages. With reference to 26-year-old Hadiya's case, the right to marriage through one's own free will has been questioned. Hadiya's

father had claimed that she had been entrapped in a scheme to traffic Indian Women to the Middle East when she married Shafin Jahan and converted to Islam. The Kerala bench where the issue was raised, deemed the marriage illegal despite Hadiya's protest. This is a case where personal choices have unfortunately come under the ambit of the court.

SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER EXPELLED

Satish Chaturvedi, a senior Congress leader was expelled from his party for getting involved in anti-party activities. The Maharashtra Congress Committee announced his expulsion from the party by addressing the press. The former Congress leader was accused of supporting rebel candidates and indulging in anti-party activities during the Nagpur Municipal Corporation Elections in 2017. This had resulted in the defeat of the Congress.

PNB SCAM HAS INSTILLED FEAR AMONG THE DIAMOND INDUSTRY IN SURAT

After the alleged crime committed by Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi in the PNB scam, diamond industries in Surat feel threatened. It is assumed that bank loans given to diamond sectors will take a hit especially affecting the small and medium-sized industries. There is also an air of skepticism regarding how big players like Modi and Choksi managed to avail huge loans whereas small-sized industries still struggle to get a loan of Rs.10 crores. Jatin Mehta, Winsome Diamond's prompter, had also defaulted on Rs. 4,500 crores a few years back which led him to flee the country. On further investigations, it was observed that there was no record of these loans taken under RBI.

Transparency International. The index ranks the countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business-people. Although India's ranking is better than that of Pakistan and Bangladesh (ranked at 117th and 143rd place respectively), it is still lagging far behind China and Bhutan (ranked at 77th and 26th place respectively). According to the report, New Zealand and Denmark top the list, while Syria, South Sudan and, Somalia are at the bottom. The best performing region is Western Europe and the worst performing regions are Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and, Central Asia.

GANG RAPES AND BEHEADINGS: UN REVEALS SOUTH SUDAN'S ABUSES

The latest report on human rights abuses in South Sudan's 5 year civil war, was released on 23rd of February 2018, by a United Nations commission. It includes many witness accounts of South Sudanese men and women who have been raped, beheaded, blinded, having hopes of finding justice. The findings also includes sufficient evidence against both president Salva Kiir's govt. forces and rebels, and identifies more than 40 senior military officials, including 3 state governors, 'who may bear individual responsibility for war crimes.' South Sudan's conflict is splintering into chaos, the new report says. What began as a 'power struggle' between Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar has fractured into an estimated 40 armed groups across the country, with many fighting each other.

NEPAL TO HOLD PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON MARCH 13

The tenure of the current President, Bidya Devi Bhandari, and Vice President, Nanda Bahadur Pun, are about to end. Nepal is about to hold its presidential election on 13th of March, 2018, as announced by the election commis-

International News

'PERCEIVED CORRUPTION' LIST RANKS INDIA AT 81 AMONG 180

India has been ranked 81st among 180 countries on a 'Corruption Perception Index', in a list released by Transpar-

sion on 23rd of February, 2018. The EC officials held separate meetings with political party leaders including Prime Minister, KP Sharma Oli, to set the date. The new President and the Vice-President are elected through voting by the Electoral College comprising parliamentarians of the Federal Parliament and Provincial Assemblies, a month after the formation of Federal Parliament as per the constitutional provisions.

DONALD TRUMP ADMIN MAKES H1-B VISA APPROVAL TOUGH; INDIAN FIRMS TO BE HIT

The US administration has announced a new policy that makes the procedure of issuing H-1B visas to those to be employed at one or more third-party worksites very tough, a move that will hugely impact Indian IT companies and their employees. The new move will mean H-1B visas may be issued only for the period for which an employee has work at a third party worksite. As such, the issuing of H-1B visas could be of less than 3 years. Indian IT companies, which are among the major beneficiaries of H-1B visas, has a significant number of its employees deployed at third-party worksites. A significant number of American banking, travel and commercial services depend on on-site IT workers from India to get their job done.

UNICEF DEPUTY DIRECTOR JUSTIN FORSYTH RESIGNS AFTER INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR CLAIMS

Justin Forsyth has resigned as Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF following accusations of inappropriate behavior toward female staff while he was Chief Executive of Save the Children. Forsyth said that he was not resigning because of the mistakes he had made while at the charity, but because of the attempts to damage aid organisations and the humanitarian sector. He said that UNICEF and Save The Children are two organisations he truly loves and therefore cannot let anyone damage its reputation. UNICEF said it had

accepted Forsyth's resignation and thanked him for his work over the past 2 years. Forsyth and Save The Children apologized to the female employees who had complained about the inappropriate behavior.

The Economy

U.S TELLS INDIA TO CUT DOWN TARIFFS ON TRADE

The 'Make-in-India' drive has led to an increase in custom duties on various products leading to massive fluctuations in the arena of trade and commerce. In response to such fluctuations, the U.S State Department has 'advised' India to lower trade barriers to prevent holding back economic ties. President Trump has already called out India for its duties on Harley-Davidson motorbikes and has stated that he would push for a "reciprocal tax" against countries, including US allies, that levy tariffs on American products. U.S is acting more vigilant and is in 'bulldog mode' under the Trump administration. The Indian commerce ministry has not responded to the U.S criticism regarding import taxes but a senior ministry official is defending the decision to raise duties.

SENSEX SURGES 200 POINTS, NIFTY ABOVE 10,400- LEVEL

The benchmark BSE SENSEX rose over 200 points due to a sustained buying in key areas mainly metal, healthcare, telecom, banks and finance stocks. The BSE SENSEX rose 227.56 points or 0.67 per cent to 34,047.06 at 1200 hours. A gain of 0.76 per cent or 79.10 points from 10,400 level to 10,461.80 was also witnessed in the broader Nifty 50 index. Tata Steel, Yes Bank, Bharti Airtel, SBI and Dr. Reddy benefited greatly from this surge. Provisional data also reveals that foreign portfolio investors sold shares worth Rs.2,335.34 crores and DIIs bought equities of around Rs. 1059.42 crores.

REGULATORY MEASURES TO BE TAKEN IN THE PNB FRAUD CASE

The Finance Ministry is putting in place

many regulatory measures to contain the damages caused by the PNB fraud case. The ministry is said to have written to the Hong Kong branches of four banks that received LOUs from PNB, as stated by news agency, ANI. SBI, Axis bank, Allahabad bank and Bank of India have been asked to re-evaluate accounts and to keep track of all irregularities. Additionally, the ministry will be appointing a special representative agency to monitor loans above Rs.250 crores. Data compiled by the FBISU has revealed that traders who had dealt with gems and diamonds had defaulted banks of more than Rs. 5,000 crores. Of all banks, PNB was most severely affected- incurring a loss of Rs.1,709 crores.

SALIL PAREKH, APPOINTED AS THE CEO OF INFOSYS

Salil Parekh has been appointed as the CEO of Infosys after getting the approval of the Infosys shareholders on 22nd February 2018. Parekh managed to secure the confidence of 97.96 per cent of the shareholders who voted through a physical ballot and electronic mode. Parekh claims his immediate priorities are to be connected with employees and clients and to build a 'road map for the future'. After the abrupt resignation of Vishal Sikka in August, Parekh was finally brought on board and is expected to take the company to greater heights.

Arts & Entertainment

MUNDI- THE MOST EXPENSIVE ART WORK IN THE WORLD

The last painting attributed to Leonardo Da Vinci, Salvator Mundi (Saviour of the World), was sold at a price of \$450,312,500 recently at an auction held by Christie's in New York. This painting is considered to be the most expensive one to be sold at any auction ever. The bidding for the painting started at

\$100 million in a room consisting of millions of art collectors, dealers, advisors and journalists. At the same time, there was also a live-streaming of the event. It has broken the world record for being the most expensive painting ever sold at auction.

THE BYOFF – A UNIQUE FILM EXTRAVAGANZA

The Bring Your Own Film Festival (BYOFF) that was recently organized in Puri is a unique film festival for not only filmmakers; but also artists from fields like music, theatre, culture, dance, painting and so on. It is an independent forum for film makers who can bring their films and screen it, without any formal processes or qualifications. This year, BYOFF will be celebrating their fifteenth edition at Odisha, from the 21st to 25th February where they plan to conduct a workshop by Revulocinema, a Heritage photo walk by GrassRoutes and a Children's film festival in schools along with the yearly tradition of screening films.

THE GLOBAL ISAI FESTIVAL

The Global Isai Festival, which promotes French punk rock and Maloya rhythm, will be held in Chennai this weekend. This is a global festival which began in 2012 and is a confluence of diverse music genres from all over the world. A number of artists with unique talents, coming up with distinct and unique sounds usually perform here. This year, there will be some amazing musicians along with the presence of graffiti, cyphers, B-boying and even a flash mob.

SEXUAL HARRASSMENT IN HOLLYWOOD ON THE RISE

A recent study conducted by USA Today in collaboration with the Creative Coalition, Women in Film and Television and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, has stated that around 94% of women working in Hollywood are victims of sexual harassment. This included "unwelcoming sexual comments,

jokes or gestures" and so on. The survey included approximately 850 women who were working in Hollywood including directors, actors, editors and others and has been a shocking revelation and immense cause for worry for many.

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY CELEBRATIONS IN BENGAL

The state of West Bengal recently celebrated Language Martyr's day; now celebrated as "International Mother Language Day", to pay respect to all those brave hearts who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the Bengali language in Dhaka in 1952. This was initiated by the Honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee who stated the importance of respecting and loving all languages. The event included processions, cultural programmes with plays and music as well as a lighting of torches. A large number of people, including students from Bangladesh, joined in to mark the occasion and celebrate the Bengali language.

Sports

ROGER FEDERER BECOMES OLDEST WORLD NO.1

After a spectacular season, Switzerland's Roger Federer is set to become the world's oldest number one tennis player at the age of 36. He put Rafael Nadal aside on reaching the semi-finals of the Rotterdam Cup. He finished off his perfect week by beating Dmitrov to win the 97th title of his career. Federer held the first rank last in October 2012. He also managed to win the Australian Open this year. The number one rank was unprecedented for him according to a statement for he had just made a comeback from an injury.

FIGURE SKATER YUZURU HANYU WINS GOLD AT PYEONGCHANG

Grand Prix champion, Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu, took home the gold medal at the men's figure skating tournament at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. Fellow Japanese, Shoma Uno, took the

silver while Spain's Javier Fernandez came in third. With this win, Hanyu became the first man in 66 years to win two consecutive Olympic figure skating golds. After recovering from a serious injury and beginning training publicly in Toronto just a month before the Olympics, Hanyu showcased his true spirit of sportsmanship.

MAHARASHTRA AND KARNATAKA MOVE TO HAZARE TROPHY SEMIS

On 21st February, Maharashtra and Karnataka made it to the semi-finals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy (or the Ranji One Day Trophy). Karnataka won by 103 runs against Hyderabad while Maharashtra managed a seven-wicket victory against Mumbai city's team. Arguably, the best players of the two matches were Samarth and Mayank from Karnataka who scored a century against their opponents. The Hazare Trophy was started as a limited overs series to allow participation to regional teams.

INDIAN PLAYERS AT THE ALL ENGLAND CHAMPIONSHIP

World No. 11, Saina Nehwal, is set to face off against Taiwan's Tai Tzu Ying at the All England Championship in Birmingham. Saina met her nemesis Ying at the Indonesia Open, where the former lost. On the other hand PV Sindhu would get a chance to meet America's Zhang Zhang once again. Kidambi Srikanth, seeded three in the men's category would be up against Frenchman Brice Leverdez. However BS Praneeth and HS Pranoy will face tougher competition in the initial rounds.

"Not everyone's comfort zone is made up of closed walls and fancy mattresses."

A Thousand Words



THE ERA OF POST-MODERN, POST-TRUTH... AND NOW POST-LOVE?

(An afterthought to Valentine's Day)

All the mushiness surrounding Valentine's Day last week got me thinking about "LOVE" as known to us, the Post-Modern, Post-Truth millennials. I define "love", here, as that innate, intuitive, untutored need to pair-bond, i.e. the "love instinct". In this context, therefore, I ask, how organic are the drives behind the romanticism that flourishes in a world that is marketing the idea of love in mass consumer products? With post-modern books and movies with manicured content, as well as the plethora of internet appendages such as social media and dating apps to morph our natural inclinations, how alive is this spontaneous and inherent 'love instinct'? How has the need for love in the human race changed in a time period when we are Post Truth?

In my opinion, in the 21st century, we love less by intuitive emotion and more by our cognitive schemas of "knowledge about love" acquired through secondary media-informed sources. We may actually be in the process of an organic evolution at the societal level where we may be POST-LOVE (a word published in the daily "Mint" quite recently).

In the pre-internet era, the pairing of two single people was a consequence of meeting at social gatherings. Single participants never lost sight of the end goal of courting— the formation of a relationship (whether short-term or long-term). In the internet era, there is access to a large 'single'/ 'available' community on social media platforms and dating apps. The paradox, however, is that the ultimate goal for the individuals is no longer just the establishment of a relationship. Social media gratification, sexting, posturing, managing one's appearances as an online persona to a virtual community of "suits/competitors" is not a means to an end. It is an end in itself. Increasing research suggests that engaging in online dating isn't just a method to a goal, it is an attainment in itself.

The social climate has always had the power to determine individual needs and priorities in terms of "what they hold most dear" in each stage of history. As inhabitants of the post-modern era, I feel that our innate needs, motivations, and desires are prioritized quite differently from those of our forefathers in previous eras.

The internet-revolution and the subsequent mass production and availability of secondary information, as well as alternate virtual secondary communities, have changed the very nature of the Darwinian 'love instinct' in humans.

A common parallel we can see is the alteration of social behaviour after the arrival of the Post-Truth era, when mass hysteria, rage, and reaction have been generated following mere social media rumours. In the Post-Truth era, individual behaviour seems to have been modified to cognitively privilege secondary available information over "truth" as perceived through our primary senses.

Similarly, in the area of love and relationships, we may be in an intermediate stage of social evolution. As per the 'Survival of the Fittest' principle, every individual of a species is aspiring to obtain what is most dear to the entire social community of that species in that historical time period. In the secure Modern Era when major wars had abated, securing lasting relationships was an approved social goal and therefore, most aspired for by the individual.

However, in the Post-Modern Era, the social group under consideration is (more often than not) an online community, as opposed to a real-world community in previous eras. The approved social goals are therefore those approved by this online community, i.e., measured by the number of followers on IG, swipes on Tinder or likes on FB.

Firstly, at the social level, there is an intense competition among people participating in these online communities. Each person on Tinder, FB or Instagram is reduced, merely, either to a potential suitor or to a competitor. Even though it is a community, a social space, the online social space is a unique one, the latest and the newest, inherently different from any previously known one. It is a community of intensely individual personalities practically pitted against each other, ostensibly connected by the same end goal. Only the goal post has shifted.

This is a function of social evolution. Quoting Emile Durkheim from *The Division of Labour in Society*, with excessive specialization “if division of labour joins interests together, it leaves them distinct and in competition with one another. Each contracting party tries to gain the widest possible rights in exchange for the least possible obligations.” The same extends to the bonding needs of post-modern humans whose fundamental emotional behaviour has been altered.

Secondly, the nature of the interaction provided on online/ virtual communities is devoid of sympathetic contact (wherein whole personalities of individuals are perceived). Mere categorical contact on social media platforms is becoming the primary interaction form of post-modern youth. In categorical contact, only certain aspects of the other’s personality are taken into consideration. Therefore, I ask, how can we love if we have reduced potential lovers in our minds to their mere social media profile? This is analogous to the proverbial description of the elephant by the five blind men.

That brings me to repeat my earlier statement. I feel in the 21st century we love less by intuitive emotion and more by our cognitive schemas of “knowledge about love” acquired through secondary media-informed sources. I feel one of the biggest catastrophes of our age is mass-produced secondary information on everything. Words, words, and more words are always attempting to represent our primal emotions and passion. This phenomenon, of generating so much secondary information and having social media to quickly disseminate it, is somewhere changing the nature of affective functions and needs in the humans as a race. It is as if our expression of ‘love’ in relationships is guided less by ‘love-driven impulses’ and more through mental representations informed by media culture of “what love is”. In this digitized age, has “knowledge about love” inserted an intermediate logical stop to the trains of thought, in our brains, which were once purely made of emotional and affective links?

No, I am not saying that the true emotion of love has been eradicated at a personal level. All I’m saying is, on the large scale, all our emotions pertaining to romantic scenarios over and above those physiologically triggered – the “hurt” caused by a betrayal, the “happiness” caused by an affectionate gesture, etc., are, to a greater extent, triggered because we subconsciously cognitively compare these stimuli to the “idea of love” engendered in us in this age of information. We seem to have, embedded in our psyche, cognitive schemas containing “prototype” reactions for each of the common ‘feelings’ or experiences “in Love”.

If someone asked you (a post-truth era woman) “are you in love?”, you might not intuitively be able to give a reply right away. You might subconsciously check boxes of “symptoms of Love” as stored in your cognitive schemas and then reply. Interestingly, many people Google “Signs you have found The One” before proposing for marriage!

Social climates have the power to change and “evolve” needs of humans. I feel that now in the post-modern, post-truth century the ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ proposed by Abraham Maslow needs to be readjusted. The ‘Need for Love and Belongingness’ needs to be separated into “Needs for Love” and “Needs for Belongingness”. ‘Needs for Love’ mean needs for companionship and intimacy with a small inner circle of people. Needs for Belongingness now mean Needs for Self-Expression and validation of that self-expression, by a large number of people. What is this innately new need to have one’s thoughts constantly corroborated and validated? I feel that the need for Self-expression and wanting to project a particular image of ‘self’ is increasingly superseding the need for love and companionship at a global level.

Man is still a social animal but in a fundamentally different sense. A more narcissistic social animal? No longer one, who craves intimate relationships with a few people who provide companionship and love. Each person wants to be the nucleus of his own life, and have others standing on a mentally perceived periphery validating his sense of self. Guided by the general perception, individuals want to be deified by society. And scarily, with Instagram, each man is emotionally alienated and yet his needs of belongingness are being fulfilled since validation is provided by a ‘like’ button.

Is Love an afterthought? What do you think, Post-Modern, Post-Truth and now POST-LOVE?

INDULEKHA – BOOK REVIEW

Indulekha is one of the phenomenal works in Malayalam literature which has remained both influential and path breaking in the discourse of family and kinship. The novel, written by the renowned Malayalam novelist Oyyarathu Chandu Menon, in 1889, brings together the Nair household- its history, its everyday life including the family arrangement, its strong women characters and the crisis faced, in an interesting way. The motive behind writing this book, as Chandu Menon describes in his preface, was to create through Indulekha, a work that is akin to an English novel, while appealing closely to Malayali population.

The popularity which the novel gained after its publication, and its continued relevance till date could be due to it centering around the three major intertwined institutions- family, marriage and kinship. Set amidst the traditional background of the Nairs of South India, the plot elaborates upon the institution of polyandrous marriage. At a close glance, the novel is budding with sociological lens. It was written at a time when the Nair's of Malabar were being exposed to education, western ideals and as a result were rising to eminent positions in British India. The newly educated Indians were torn between western ideals and tradition. The informal and temporary marriage alliance between Nair women and Namboothiri (Brahmins and principle owners of temple and private lands) men (the alliance known as *Sambandham*) were also being challenged.

The story is centred in the social milieu of 19th century Malabar, revolving around the love story of the male and female protagonists, Madhavan and Indulekha. In doing so, Chandu Menon has strategically looked through the gaze of westernisation and modernisation that prevailed in British India. Our protagonists in the story have been portrayed as the 'ideal man and woman' to the reader. The author writes of them in a spirit of grandeur, as Madhavan is described as a handsome, intelligent and well educated youth or to put it simply, the most eligible bachelor in town. Indulekha too, is spoken of as a magnificent young lady, whose personal charm and skills in a multitude of arenas along with her breath-taking beauty and grace make her a very desirable woman. The two characters are in love with each other and have conceptualised their marriage. But like all Indian weddings, we see that an alliance is not solely on the discretion of those immediately involved, rather it involves a host of different actors, especially the families.

In a traditional Nair household, around which the story revolves, known as the *puvalli theravad*, the eldest male member of the family functions as the head, or the *karnavar*, and makes all major decisions. It is here that the third main character of the story plays his part, Panchu Menon, the *karnavar* of the family. The reader on flipping the first page is introduced to an ongoing heated discussion between Madhavan and his uncle Chattara Menon who is furious with him for speaking in a discourteous manner to the *karnavar* of the family. Madhavan wished to take the initiative of educating his nephew, the little boy, Shinnan. But the 70 year old, narrow minded Panchu Menon doesn't agree with him and is unwilling to spend a single penny for this purpose and wishes for him to join an agricultural occupation instead.

In a state of wrath following this quarrel, the former despite being well aware of their love towards each other and clearly knowing their inclination to marry each other, takes an oath in the name of the family Goddess that he would not allow Madhavan to marry Indulekha. In his apprehension for their alliance to be actualised nevertheless and the rage to prevent the same, he fixes a *sambandham* for her with Suri Namboothiri, a licentious, foolish man of 45 from the Nambuthiri Brahmin lineage. Meanwhile, Madhavan too, in his insistence to educate Shinnan has left with him for Madras for his future prospects. Menon in his satirical undertone here has then showed the interplay of familial (one of the major agents of socialisation) control over individual choices and the generation gap that existed between the youngsters and the elders over exposure to modern English education and the forces of modernisation. So while the younger generation perceived it in the light of reason and rationality, the elders viewed it as an evil, something that has distorted their cultural values of respect for elders, proper conduct, faith in God, etc. This generation gap is exemplified in the discussion between Madhavan, Govindakutty and their father

Govindamenon, on their way back from Calcutta, which inevitably revolves around westernised ways of thinking and how it has impacted them on personal levels too.

As the story carries on, the readers witness the entry of Suri Namboothiri visiting the *theravad* to bond with Indulekha, who remains completely displeased by his personality. He, on the other hand too is awestruck by her beauty and talents and desires her greatly. However, Panchu Menon is upset over Suri Namboothiripad's behaviour as he discovers that while confessing to his love for Indulekha, he was doing the same to some other ladies of the house, including the former's very own daughter. Suri Namboothiri finally settles with the idea of marrying Panchu Menon's niece, Kalyani Kutty who he considers to be superior to Indulekha for he believes the latter has been spoiled by the western influences on her, particularly her English education.

We are here presented thus, with the trend of temporary hypergamous alliances, known as *sambandham*, that not only grant a sense of power and control to the high caste Brahmin men over Nair women, but also inculcated the popular belief that Nair women were unchaste and polyandrous. Kathleen Gough's work on the Nayar community enables a better understanding of the *sambandham* union. While the biological father holds no obligations or rights towards the child, fatherhood continues to hold a social relevance. The mother's partners must come to claim possible paternity and pay the delivery expenses or it is assumed that the woman has been involved with a man of a lower caste, in an 'unpermissible' relation and both the woman and the child are ex-communicated from the caste. Only when the social fatherhood of the child is established, is the child of a *sambandham* union fully accepted in his/her mother's caste. However on the flipside one can also argue that Nair women have considerable freedom as compared to the situation of women from other castes. The Nairs of Malabar present a case of matrilineal family structure. In the absence of the determinate role of the father considering the temporary nature of the *sambandham* relation, the woman holds a relatively stronger position in the household. At the same time nevertheless, it is quite evident from the novel about the sufficient freedom enjoyed by male members of Namboothiri community. While they considered alliances with Brahman women real marriages, a union with Nair women was mere concubinage for them. The reader is also awakened by the materialistic mentality of the families. Their sole value is often placed on money and this can be recounted across the novel in a number of instances.

The story is gripping and succeeds to offer to its readers a wonderful glimpse of the lives and times of 19th century Malabar. While, at one level it is a quintessential love story, it also brings forth the myriad forces of social upheaval especially issues of marital relations, social stratification in society, cultural conflicts, differential family structures across the terrain of India and a host of others. While Indulekha remains a very context specific narration that may appeal closely to the Malayali culture, a translation somewhere fails to connect the true essence to the layperson. However, it indeed is an important piece of Indian literature that would surely be loved by its readers, giving them an opportunity to reflect on the society they live in, presenting a distinct culture, with all its complex social processes and relations.

LOST IN THE WORLD

Modern society scares me, I think as I attend a Political Science GE lecture. I live in it, yet I cannot comprehend it. To study simpler societies is one thing. To extrapolate this understanding across that invisible line that the globe tripped over, catapulting us into this ongoing historical mess is quite another. I fail to wrap my head around it. Yet the girl sitting on the first bench nods her head in affirmation as we are taught about the World Bank, economies of scale, fiscal deficits, globalisation. She is assured. This is her reality. The concepts are tangible, like her definite nod. She not only owns up to the burden of the world, she wields it.

As a general practice I maintain that I got very lucky with Sociology. I've had plenty of people around with an understanding of it potent enough to animate it for me. They showed me how to inject life into the words so they weren't just words anymore. They gave us all tools to think with. The jump that we've all made in terms of analytical thinking in the last year and a half has been tremendous. Despite the awe for the discipline that characterised my first year at college, Sociology has not been all that easy to digest.

The other day a friend from back home told me how attacked he felt by the discipline. All the subject does is find problems, he said, without any hint of a solution. Moreover, I know I come from a place of privilege, but is there really no beauty in the world? In his words I sensed a deep discomfort. I knew exactly where he came from, having grappled with it myself. The conclusion I came to was this: The discipline is supposed to make one feel uncomfortable about their privilege, and hand tools to those without. The challenge becomes how to reconcile yourself with this tension. If you take yourself seriously enough, you find yourself stuck in a moral dilemma: Should you remain where you are - comfortable in your social context? Or should you be giving your privileges up? And to what? Ascetism? Revolution? Staying with the discipline means finding peace with this discomfort. Own it. Be frustrated by it, but also know when to frustrate it.

Apart from being political in this way, Sociology is also explanatory. The logic of the semester makes it hard to devote all your energy to the courses you study. Despite this I often find myself thinking in terms of family, stratification, the economy. For example, a recurring thought is how after graduating, most of us are likely to fall into the same pattern of our communities. How extricating ourselves from them will entail tremendous sacrifice, turmoil. We study history, as they say, to rid ourselves of it. Looking at the world around with such detachment fills me with an excitement very different from my first year. It is less at the level of how society works, more to do with the course all these social forces and institutions and ideologies will take. It's like watching a suspense film and anticipating what comes next, just with the future. The excitement is at the level of being part of history.

There's a lot to figure out. The smallest of things I find hardest to fathom sometimes. This constant need to doubt myself, qualify my thoughts - is this what a liberal arts education does to you? Or does it have something to do with that thin, gendered line between humility and docility? The questions are endless, but I'm sure I'm not the first one to have asked them. I wonder sometimes if our professors find their past selves in the things we say, the ways in which we react to their knowledge. At other times it's easy to just wait for class to end, put on my earphones, and walk home to Kendrick rapping from a thousand miles away.

The line that started it all but ended in nothing



Line Of Control

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