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Report

This is the Report of the One day National Webinar organized by the Department of Sociology under the School of Social Sciences, NSOU in collaboration with the NSOU Centre for Social studies on 23.09.22 from 11.00 am to 4pm on the Theme: Giving voice to the voiceless? : The sociology of identity politics in Contemporary India on the occasion of the seventy fifth year of independence, *Amrit Mahotsav*.

The Seminar itinerary

The Inaugural session of the seminar was initiated by the Welcome address given by Professor, Chandan Basu, Director, School Of Social Sciences, NSOU. It was followed by the Inaugural Address by Professor Asit Baran Aich, The Registrar, NSOU. Thereafter the august keynote address was delivered by Professor Anand Kumar, Department Of Sociology, JNU. The address was succeeded by the illuminated Presidential Address delivered by Professor Abha Chauhan, Department Of Sociology, Jammu University and President, Indian Sociological Society. The inaugural session came to an end by the vote of thanks by the undersigned.

Key note address

Professor Kumar in his Key note address tried weaving the ideas of equality, freedom, justice and mobilization of the voiceless. He said, in an extremely stratified society like ours where constitutional equality has already been proclaimed, the significance of the voiceless becomes more nuanced over the time. Attempts had been made to treat the very concept of identity in terms of value perception and as a consequence of the social structure. It is necessary to taste democracy to understand the rule of freedom and the rule of law. Unless we understand this, we cannot gauge the trauma of the voiceless-ness. With the lumpenization of the public sphere, we have understood that the nation building



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is an important challenge for a great civilization like India which had been assaulted by two hundred years of imperialism that had bestowed it with a prolonged sense of voiceless-ness. The idea of India has gone through a paradigm shift and the successors of the this grand structure who bear the legacy of communalism, casteism and regionalism, tradition, modernity and social change had to continue their conversation with reality. Nation and nationalism are not the two sides of the same coin because nations are built on wee feeling which must be supported by political, economic and social justice. Hierarchies should not be converted into frozen steps of inclusion and social exclusion but instead they must remain fluid and fine by the judiciary system and common wisdom. This challenge of nation building is a serious challenge and if this is thwarted, it becomes consolidated into voiceless-ness. The vice of the British imperialism created more voicelessness than ever. The freedom struggle was fought because the right to speech was jeopardized and voice was the privilege of the elites and the ruled and the dominated. The struggle was made because the voicelessness was perpetuated by denying basic rights like expressing opinions and stand points. Great thinkers like Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi were arrested because they expressed their own convictions. People like Netaji and Jawaharlal Nehru and many others were arrested because they expressed their minds through public speeches that did not gel well with the imperialists. Our constitutional preamble says we have the basic rights to express our free thoughts, ideas and faith and these must not be denied.

We then started our voyage for democracy wherein we embarked on the journey from voiceless-ness to rights for representation. After few years of consolidation of our national democracy, since 1960s, we witness a new trend of politics of caste, region, ethnicity, religion which we call the fissiparous tendencies that were compared with tendencies of separatism. We thought these tendencies are seizing our political freedom and justice that were not congenial with national unity. Since 1970s we find the rise of regional parties governing various provinces that recognized the idea of federalization. We started acknowledging inevitability and importance of the ethnic and regional parties. We started appreciating the status and existence of such regional parties. Especially, Tamil Nadu became the focus of national debates and strife because Tamilians were organizing their regional parties in line with national



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parties like Congress and giving due recognition to regional parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). This was not to say that Tamil Separatism was growing but that plurality and multiculturalism was ushered in Tamil Nadu. The first Indian language that was used in parliament after Hindi was undoubtedly Kannad. Veerendra Patil who went on to become the chief Minister of Karnataka insisted that *Kannad* language be spoken in parliament since he was representing the *Kannad* people. Multilingualism was encouraged and it was made a point that regional languages other than Hindi was used copiously in the public sphere.

However, it is disappointing to find that the official language to be used in the Supreme Court was only English that of course repressed the multi-linguist approach that we so far had been talking of. Soon after the constitution of the Mandal commission probed the status of the other back ward castes and classes and resolved to give them more visibility in the public forum. After the submission of the Mandal commission report, it was increasingly recognized that the other Back ward castes and classes must be given due attention. One of the most pertinent trends in the Indian democracy is the proliferation of the Dalit movement. The meaning of 'Dalit' had undoubtedly acquired newer political and ideological shades that had undoubtedly triggered newer debates of identity and identity formulation across the multiple conjunctions of reality.

It was interesting to note that the key note address that was delivered contained the key elements of voiceless-ness with which we must negotiate such as firstly, the need to eliminate the caste hierarchy that had been entrenched in the social order. Secondly, the deprived sections of the society especially those belonging to the primary sectors of the economy such as peasants, artisans, farmers and the *Adivasi*. Thirdly, the problem of linguistic plurality must be emphasized such that other than the grand languages, even regional languages must be also be given equal footage. Thousands of languages have perished away in dearth of proper sustenance and legislation. Though there are exceptions such as some Dalit writers who are very articulate and expressive. There are also some political leaders who are more articulate than the others However, exception does not make rule. Fourthly, it is gender which is still struggling as a category to claim voice for itself. There are again interesting exceptions like Mamta Banerjee in West Bengal, Rabri



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Devi in Bihar and Mayawati, the erstwhile chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. But the question of gender and its representation is still very mucky now. The poverty is the fifth factor contributing to voicelessness. Of course, the trade union movements in the remote agrarian states is still governed by the middle class leaders. But, of course such ideology do not get due place in policies and programmes drafted for the state. Sixthly, it is religion which suffers from the malady of voice-lessness. Only a few national religions get exposure while the restothers are drowned into the darkness of invisibility and morbidity. The minoritiesmust get their due place in the trajectory of social change towards the accreditation of their identity.

It is expected that ethnicization of mobility, religious heterogeneity and due recognition to the muffled voices coming from the unexposed corners of civilization must get their due place. In this struggle for freedom, rights and Swaraj, we must not forget to respect ourselves and our kinsmen as well as give reverence to those others struggling to acquire a footing on the socio-political panorama of the Indian civilization. We as sociologists must question the concept of voiceless-ness and strive hard to accommodate those voices by crafting a more inclusive space for them.

The Presidential address

The key note address was followed by the Presidential address delivered by Professor Abha Chowhan. She in her presidential address also mooted on the ideas of voicelessness, especially the ideas of cultural voice-lessness and its consequences for the Indian society. She gave resplendent examples from the everyday lives of Jammu's composite culture especially those enshrining the popular deity of *Vaishno Devi* to contextualize the theme in local parlance across a wide global backdrop. She said, 'plurality' is always a better word than 'diversity' because we are not just considering the other to be important but also at the same time accepting him or her on the same plane with enough resilience and accommodation, which is more important. She also discussed the theoretical paradigms and the paradigm change of deconstructing the meta-narratives to give voice to those on the margins. The inaugural session came to an end with Vote of Thanks delivered by the undersigned.



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The technical sessions I and II

The technical sessions I and II soon followed with paper presentations from twenty three presenters across the country (Appendix-1), making the webinar truly 'national' in its scope. They participated very actively with vibrant illustrations and absorbing analysis. The 1st technical session was presided over by Professor Abha Chowhan and Dr. Kumkum Sarkar, Associate Professor of Sociology, NSOU and coordinated by Sri Ajit Kumar Mondal, Associate Professor of Sociology, NSOU. The second session was coordinated by Sri Anupam Ray, Assistant Professor of Sociology, NSOU and chaired over by Sri Ajit Mondal. The technical sessions were coupled with an interactive session which made the Webinar even more enthralling and compelling. The day came to an end with a note of thanks to all the participants from the organizing secretary for making the Webinar a grand a success.

The takeaways from the webinar

- We are celebrating the seventy-fifth year of independence with much pomp and show and the extravagance is steeped in every layer of the society we take stride of. The papers reminded us that we should not forget that we live in a severely stratified society where almost every socket has its own ethno-graph to narrate. The narration becomes even so striking since the very last decade of the 20th century that witnessed galvanizing and far sighted changes. It had redefined the Indian polity through an interesting yet intensifying interface between caste, class, gender and ethnic identities.
- The presentations pointed out that the liberalization and the concomitant economic reforms championed a new phase of development which made India embark on a new journey since the 1990s with its own promises and challenges. The period remained entrenched with many strains, some of which were manipulated by the political system itself for extra electoral leverages. The era saw an unprecedented rise of diverse plural categories and backward classes which had already lost voices for decades.
- The webinar pointed out that the society was myopic of such groups and so was the polity which refused to accommodate such plural but undermined



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Groups. Their voices went unheard and drowned in the cacophony of political rhetoric and shrill meta-narratives.

• The papers devised ways so that that the unvoiced were represented and patted with concern, at least the polity must hear their murmurs. They showed that the muffled voices were beginning to marshal some identity though smeared by the accourrements of crafty politics. Hence we can visualize an era which automated the dispensations of identity politics that is soon to radicalize the socio-political landscape of the Indian society with the shades of social inclusion and adaptation.

However, whether the new regime would bring any solace to the emaciated is doubtful and that is what we were debating in this webinar. We didn't start with any presumption but only presented the timeline of the reorganization of the state and the polity to record the morphed picture of the backward and the minority categories. We dialogued incessantly that whether at all the excluded groups have carved out some niche for themselves or is it only a cosmetic change pretending ostentatious welfare.

The questions that we had left behind

- Is new Indian polity and society facilitating social inclusion or is it a farce after all?
- Is the very process of politicizing the identity formations help bring some relief to those teetering on the margin?
- Or is it all illusion for the masses and optimization for the handful? These are some of the basic questions we left behind as the food of thought.

Outcomes of the Webinar:

- 1. We sensitized the young minds with very relevant themes concerning Indian polity and society. The deliberations made them more resourceful and conscious as well as judiciously responsible scholars as well as citizens. We were successful in producing a handful of sensitive and conscientious citizens, which is an emergent need of the hour. The themes we touched were the vibrant topics of Indian polity such as:
- Identity Politics in India



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- Indian polity and rights of women
- Gender, caste and minority
- Coalition politics and electoral mileage
- Sociology of identity politics
- Tribal rights and the question of identity
- Politicizing the social saxophone of multiple voices
- Literature depicting the sites of multiplicity
- Structured and situated history of social exclusion
- Policies for social inclusion
- 2. We will soon be publishing an Edited volume with an ISBN to commemorate the seventy five years of our independence and as a memoir of our National Webinar that was staged on this occasion. This will be done on the basis of the papers we have received so far.

Reported by Dr. Srabanti Choudhuri, Assistant Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, NSOU and Organizing Secretary of the National Webinar through the Director, SSS.



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Appendix-1

One Day National Webinar Organized By The Department Of Sociology Under The School Of Social Sciences, NSOU In Collaboration With The NSOU Centre For Social Studies On 23.09.22 From 11.00am to 4pm On Giving Voice To The Voiceless? : The Sociology of Identity Politics in Contemporary India.

Webinar Schedule that was followed

- 11.00 Am-Welcome Address by Professor, Chandan Bose, Director, School Of Social Sciences, NSOU.
- 11.05-Inaugural Address by Professor Asit Baran Aich, the Registrar, NSOU
- 11.10-Key Note Address by Professor Anand Kumar, Department Of Sociology, JNU
- 11.40-Presidential Address by Professor Abha Chauhan, Department Of Sociology, Jammu University. President, Indian Sociological Society.
- 11.50-Vote Of Thanks By Dr. Srabanti Choudhuri, Assistant Professor Of Sociology, School Of Social Sciences, NSOU



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1st Technical Session 12-2.10 pm

Chair Person: Professor Abha Chauhan, Department Of Sociology, Jammu University and Dr. Kumkum Sarkar, Associate Professor of Sociology, NSOU.

Coordinator-Sri Ajit Kumar Mondal, Associate Professor of Sociology, NSOU

List of Presenters

Sl.No	Name	Designation	Title Of The Paper
1.	Dr. Srabanti Choudhuri	Assistant Professor In Sociology, NSOU	Accessing Digital education in Singabad Tilason, a border village of Habibpur Block of Malda district: Facilitating social inclusion?
2.	Dr. Shohini Chakraborty	Assistant Professor In Political Science, Swami Niswambalananda Girls'college	Infanticide And Foeticide In India: A Critical Analysis Of The Legal Framework
3.	Dr Sudarshana Sen	Assistant Professor In Sociology, Gourbango University	'The Social Identity Of The Anglo-Indian Community And Its Women In India'
4.	Sathi Naik	SACT-1 Women's	Building New Identities And Fighting Social



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		Christian College, Kolkata. Research Scholar Burdwan University.	Stigma: A Study Among Transgender Persons In Kolkata, West Bengal
5.	Mili Mishra	Assistant Professor In Education, Women's Christian College, Kolkata.	Socio Economic Status And Substance Abuse Among College Students In India
6.	Sayanti Dutta	State Aided College Teacher (S.A.C.T) Vivekananda College For Women, Barisha, Kolkata -08	Children Of Subalternity And Their Non- Hegemonic Voice Against Their Subordination
7.	Keshab Chandra Dey	Research Scholar, NSOU	A Sociological Study On Education Among The Muslim Women Of Metiabruz Area In Kolkata In West Bengal, India
8.	Sazid Equbal Akhtar	Research Scholar,	The Rise Of Muslim Women



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		Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi,	In India: Interrogating The Established Idioms Of Politics
9.	Srija Chakraborty	Content Writer	Intersectional Subjectivity On Gendered Parlance; Though Eyes Of Modernity
10.	Dr. Titir Chatterjee	Assistant Professor In Sociology, West Bengal State University	Politicizing Gender Identity: A Film Narrative
11.	Dr. Suchandra Ghosh	Assistant Professor In Sociology, Jhargram Raj Government College, Girls' Wing	From Shah Bano To Shayara Bano: Judicial Activism, Judicial Praxis And Muslim Personal Law Reform In India
12.	Anwesha Bhattacharya	Research Scholar, TISS.	Liminal Bodies Having Partial Treatment! IllustratingThe Relationship Between Health And Sexuality In The Everyday Life



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			Of Hijras In Kolkata
Interaction		2pm-2.10pm	
Break		2.10pm-2.30pm	
	2 nd Technical Session (2.30-4.25)		
Chair Person: Sri Ajit Kumar Mondal, Associate Professor of Sociology, NSOU. Coordinator: Sri Anupam Roy, Assistant Professor of Sociology, NSOU			
List of Presenter			
13.	Dr. Runa Das Chaudhuri	Assistant Professor In Sociology, Bamanpukur Humayun Kabir Mahavidyalaya.	Looking Through The Marginalities Of Homosexuals: A Case Study Of The Film 'Aligarh'
14.	Amrita Midde	Assistant Professor In Sociology, Pakuahat Degree College, Malda	Space and its Discontents: A Study on the Growth and Decadence of Chitpur
15.	Debarshi Khamrui	Assistant Professor In Political Science, Asutosh College	Politics Of Religious Minorities, TRIBAL And Other Backward Communities In



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			The Indian Context
16.	Orion De	Post Graduate Student In History	Giving Voice To The Voiceless?: The Sociology Of Identity Politics In Contemporary India
17.	Parijat Sarkar	Research Assistant, ICSSR Funded Project	Women In Tribal Community And Their Educational Rights
18.	Lara Chiang K Sangma	Research Scholar, WILLIAM CARET UNIVERSITY	The Role And Duties Of Nokkrom
19.	Seema Mahi	Research Scholar, University Of Delhi	Social Identity And Panchayat Elections: Voices Of The Voiceless
20.	Pinki Biswas	Post Graduate Student, NSOU	Gender, Caste AndMinority
21.	Dr. Shakun Sharma	Assistant Professor, Govt. Degree College, Marh, University Of Jammu	From Private To Public Sphere: Role Of Elected Women Representatives In Jammu Municipal Corporation.



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22.	Anirban Banerjee	Professor, Department Of Sociology, Burdwan University.	Property RightsOf Hindus And Muslim Women In 21st Century India: A Comparative Study
23.	Sonali Roy Chowdhury Ghosh	Assistant Professor, Institute Of Education, Haldia.	Gender Inequality In Our Society: Sociological Analysis
Interaction		4.15-4.25 pm	