Introduction

The Social Reproduction of Relational Space in South Asia

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In a relational framework space does not have an objective existence of its own without regard to the people it encompasses.[1] Relational space hinges upon community relations. But what makes communities enter into relation in the first place? Who or what intermediary agencies foment the continuing social reproduction of space relations over extended periods of time? How do these intermediary agencies relate to their own functioning through myth and identitarianism? Moreover, what conception of space emerges when one pays attention to these intermediaries who foster relationships?

The second *Nidan* volume on relational ontologies of space in South Asia throws the spotlight on the social reproduction of relationality, with a particular emphasis on intermediary communities, particularly elite groups of intermediaries, institutions and instruments that galvanize relationality. As some of the essays in this issue indicate, what appears initially as an effort on the part of such intermediaries to bring communities into relation emerges upon deeper scrutiny as their striving to come into presence and identity. The more pressing demand, these essays suggest, is to not only study relationality in its own right but also to comprehend it as a means for elite groups and technocracies to autonomize themselves and to reproduce their own controlling power.

These essays contribute to a longer history of reflections on the part played by elite intermediaries in dominating the social reproduction of relationality in South Asia. C.A. Bayly's *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (1998), is instructive. He emphasized for instance, the ability of 18th century commercial groups in North India to imagine the scale of their territorial operations beyond that of the specific regions with which they had financial dealings. By bringing regional markets into relation with a wider trans-regional frame through the means of such complex arrangements of all-India creditworthiness as the *Hundi*, commercial groups could exercise greater command on financial dealings at the local level and therefore manipulate the fortunes of local rulers (Ibid.: 218). The rulers' sense of sovereignty over regional space and their dealings with landholders and cultivators, in essence, became contingent upon the writ of trader and banker intermediaries who drew monetary muscle-power from trans-regional networks and resources.

Bayly also simultaneously drew attention to collectivizing tendencies among these intermediary groups of bankers and traders.[2] Solidarities within these groups could emerge for any number of reasons; they could arise not only on the basis of the shared caste identities, marriage and kinship, but also on account of bonds of trust, credit-worthiness, common religious observances, the ability to reside together in residential areas such as *haveli*s and financial alliances (ibid.: 217-222). In the particular case of Benaras in the 1750s, for instance,

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[1] This theme emerged in conversation with Preeti Sampat whose forthcoming edited volume discusses land as a relational category.
[2] To read more recent writing on collectivizing tendencies among these intermediary groups see Vinay Gidwani (2008), and Ritu Birla (2013).

Bayly wrote about the manner in which the *Naupatti* or the society of nine sharers or burghers coming from different caste backgrounds assumed a powerful collective moral and custumal relationship with the ruler and other land-owning magnates (ibid.: 215-217). The association which emerged initially to provide a loan to the ruler of Awadh during a campaign in Benaras went on eventually to wield considerable authority and autonomy in both political and financial matters in the region (ibid.).

Bayly's attempt at historicizing the rise of a sense of the autonomy of corporate group identity among intermediaries, is a good place to begin building an ontology of relational space in South Asia. In the previous *Nidan* issue on the ontologies of relational space we discussed "socially codified space" as "a social landscape that is at once sustained or reproduced by dominant groups, and resisted or trans-valued by those who are dominated by them" (Maddipati 2023: 11).[3]

This issue continues the conversation on socially codified space, and pays particular attention to the instigators of the mediation between dominant and dominated groups. Some of the articles in this issue specifically scrutinize the exertions of elites and the instrumentality of 'intermediary' institutional frameworks such as planning apparatuses and educational aspirations. Isha Chouksey's cartographic exploration of urbanization in Colonial Nagpur demonstrates the ways in which a sense of spatial boundedness or territoriality can sometimes derive from solidarities and porosities between elite groups. Devanand Kamat's essay shows how the emergence of *Maithil* exceptionalism in colonial and post-colonial India was predicated on the continuing social reproduction of the dominance of elite caste identities in the Mithila region. Pritpal Randhawa and Rachna Mehra's essay on the post-colonial history of Ghaziabad shows how master-planning stratagems rather than being dynamically responsive to the actual needs of the communities they are tasked with serving, only end up reinforcing normative institutional framings of developmentalist aspirations. Similarly, Bhawna Parmar's reflections on aspirations for *Aage Badhna* (moving ahead) through classroom education among Adivasi communities draws attention to how educational apparatuses, not unlike intermediary commercial groups and elites, often end up reproducing existing hierarchies.

Essay Descriptions

Isha Chouksey undertakes a critical cartographic exploration of urbanization in Colonial Nagpur, contesting prevailing notions of segregation and duality between European built environments and the medieval city. Her study calls for a widening of the tapestry of Nagpur's colonial history to incorporate narratives related to the emerging interdependencies between indigenous and western agencies. In particular, Chouksey draws to the fore the transformation of the buffer space in Nagpur that initially emerged as a boundary between the old city and the colonial station on account of a lack of trust between the two settlements in the aftermath of two Anglo-Maratha wars. Chouksey demonstrates the ways in which the emergence of cotton mills in this buffer zone precipitated the in-migration of labourers, leading, eventually, to the emergence of housing provisions in the mill-surrounding areas. The subsequent consolidation of the boundaries of the three microcosms, that is, the colonial station, the mill-area/buffer zone and the medieval city in Nagpur was premised on the rise of groups of elites including former ruling members, traders, immigrant Parsi industrialists, and English-educated individuals. The interdependencies between these elite groups, in turn, contributed to the social reproduction of the urban boundaries of these microcosms.

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[3] See, "Ontologies of Relational Space in South Asia," Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies (https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/nidan/article/view/22220/21643), accessed 09.01.2024.

Elite assertions similarly inform Devanand Kamat's "The Voice of *Mithila Mihir*: The Making of Idea of Mithila." He initially draws attention to the part played by the journal *Mithila Mihir* in the upliftment and promotion of the Maithili language as a separate language in colonial and post-colonial India. Kamat writes about the emergence of Maithili linguistic nationalism in the context of debates preceding the State Reorganisation Commission report that was submitted in September 1955. Drawing on *Mithila Mihir's* article in 1953 on Maheshwar Prasad Singh's speech arguing for a separate Mithila in a Rajya Sabha (the upper house of bicameral parliament of India) session, Kamat foregrounds the manner in which *Maithil* regionalism or conceptions of Mithila as a separate province came to be predicated on an emerging sense of linguistic relationality. However, while Maithili language was promoted as the grounds for the formation of a separate spatial identity among the region's intellectuals in *Mithila Mihir*, the language itself, pace Kamath, received little support publicly. As the mouthpiece of the *Maithil* Mahasabha, *Mithila Mihir* prominently brought to the fore issues that principally related to the concerns of *Maithil* Brahmins and *Maithil Kayastha*s. As a result, *Maithil* identity began to be consolidated as a Brahmin and *Kayastha* identity. It follows therefore, that Mithila as a region was principally the imagined homeland of elite groups such as *Maithil* Brahmins and *Kayastha*s.

Concerns over the social reproduction of normative planning frameworks is at the centre of Pritpal Randhawa and Rachna Mehra's essay on the transformation of the city of Ghaziabad located adjacent to Delhi in Northern India. The city has undergone many changes on account of planned industrialization and residentialisation in the post-Indian-independence period. Randhawa and Mehra chronicle the emergence of a substantial planning apparatus in Ghaziabad, beginning with the Uttar Pradesh Town and Country Planning Office in 1961 and the Ghaziabad Improvement Trust in 1962, through the formation of the Ghaziabad Development authority in 1977. The authors demonstrate how the three Ghaziabad masterplans that were drafted through the auspices of these institutions in the post-independence period in India have not been entirely responsive to the working and living circumstances of the town's burgeoning groups of industrial and migrant workers. Rather, these plans have principally emphasized the establishment of new industrial and urban development areas. Moreover, Ghaziabad's masterplans cannot be studied in isolation; they have to be examined in relation to the history of the planning process in Delhi. Both Delhi and Ghaziabad's masterplans in the post-independence period tilt significantly in the favour of responding to a repeatedly expressed need to systematically apportion Delhi's pressure of urbanization. Ghaziabad's existence as a master-planned city, in that sense, is demonstrably predicated on its contiguity to its most immediate metropolitan neighbour and to its responsiveness to this neighbour's developmental and demographic concerns. In other words, the continuing life of planning processes and planning instrumentality in Ghaziabad hinges on the city's continual social reproduction as an "adjoining urban area" of the city of Delhi.

Bhawna Parmar's essay draws out sharp contrasts between the aspirations and the lived realities of Santhali students in two schools in two villages in the Dumka Sadar subdivision of Dumka district in the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand in Eastern India. Parmar builds on the experiences of Rueben and Sunita, both Santhali students, along with others studying in the schools of Dumka, to explore themes related to indigeneity and education. In particular, she critically engages with scholarship centred around a relational comprehension of the formulation of aspirations for *Aage Badhna* (moving ahead) among *Adivasi* communities. While aspirations for *Aage Badhna* may be shaped or proportioned by apprehensions among Adivasi groups over their marginality being reinforced or over their "falling behind," the irony is that the idea of *Aage Badhna* eventually serves to socially reproduce their marginalization. Far from enabling Adivasi students to surge forward, the classroom space delegitimizes *Adivasi* culture,

language, everyday practices, and epistemologies and therefore engineers their eventual withdrawal from education.

References

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Online Resources

Maddipati V., (2023). "Introduction: Ontologies of Relational Space in South Asia." *Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies* 8(1): 10-14 (https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/nidan/article/view/22220/21643), accessed 09.01.2024.