

Hetukar Jha Memorial Lecture – 2



Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Patna Centre

The Unwanted Aspect: Normative Fetish and Epistemological Deceit

SAVYASAACHI

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A Tribute to Hetukar Jha

Hetukar Jha (1944-2017) was an indefatigable academic and educationist. His achievements as a sociologist and his efforts of developing the field of historical sociology is well known in academia and much appreciated. Jha who retired as Professor from Patna University was a prolific writer. Some of his notable works are *Social Structures and Alignments: A Study of Rural Bihar (1985)*, *Social Structures of Indian Villages: A Study of Rural Bihar (1991)*, *Historical Sociology in India (2015)*, etc. along with several journal articles. It is as a passionate and rigorous collector of historical documents and a builder of archives that Jha acquires even more significance and his contributions invaluable and unparalleled. His knowledge of documents on Bihar and its villages was surpassed by none. At the time of his demise, he had collected documents, which included village notes relating to 6000 villages in Bihar. He was in the process of writing a social history of villages in colonial Bihar and had collected documents that covered the entire period from 1894-1916. It is a task that needs to be taken up from where he left.

Hetukar Jha's association with Centre for Development Practice and Research, Patna began since its inception in 2016. He was part of the senior group of academics who provided valuable inputs to research scholars at the Centre on their respective research projects. Despite his failing health, Jha agreed to deliver the inaugural lecture at the First Orientation Programme on migration organized by the Centre in 2016-17.

As a mark of respect for Jha, the Centre has instituted a memorial lecture in his name. The first memorial lecture was delivered by Prof. Ratneshwar Mishra.



The Unwanted Aspect: Normative Fetish and Epistemological Deceit

– Savyasaachi

Of critical significance to the study of modernity are the growing number of ‘unwanted people.’ This includes people forcibly displaced on account of mega-infrastructure development projects; brutalized refugees from countries shattered by civil war and/or just wars; migrant labor perpetually on the move from one site to another; victims of ethnic-communal-racist hatred, revenge, genocide, rape; the poor; the not educated; those different in sexuality; self-righteous women; children and elderly; adivasis; untouchables; specially challenged; workers; forest dwellers; nomads; fishermen; prisoners under trial for several years; those afflicted by ailments and/or incurable diseases. These people are distributed in all walks of life, in families and households of the rich; in the middle and lower classes of all cultures; or in workplaces; in neighborhoods; on the pavements or in streets; in camps; in cities, towns and villages.

Some are unwanted either by economy or by society or polity. For instance, self-righteous women may be good for economy but not for society and polity. Others such as prisoners under trial are wanted by neither economy, nor polity nor society. Imagine what will happen to a neighborhood if sex workers were to live there or if there was a rehabilitation center for substance abusers!! Imagine what will become of a family if there was a rape victim or if they were to find one of the members enjoyed same sex relations!! Imagine what will happen to a city if migrants were allowed to inhabit the streets, pavements, and open spaces!!!

For unwanted people the modern promise of equality, liberty and fraternity is a vanishing point on the horizon. Those who are deeply pained with their (unwanted people’s) unjust condition are engaged in research, political discussion, and mobilization of public opinion and the creation of pressure groups. The volume of literature on injustice seems inadequate as inappropriate governmentality reinforces apathy and indifference towards these people on the one hand and makes an assault on an epistemological

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curiosity regarding the perpetuation of injustice. On the other, there is little assurance that more will not join the ranks of these people. There is little hope of a life of dignity for these people.

Is modernity equipped to listen to the million questions in their minds?

Are not democracy, polity, social structure and the promise of modern social justice in peril once individuals and collectives cannot, for whatever reason, negotiate normative(s) to mutual advantage? That the well-being of individuals cannot be at the expense of collective well-being and equally symmetrically the well-being of the collective cannot be at the expense of the well-being of individuals?

So long as they remain in their present condition they are 'unwanted beings in endless waiting' and the million questions remain unaddressed.

How are we to understand this phenomenon?

Stratified social structures work against this disposition by legitimizing either the well-being of individuals at the expense of the collective well-being or vice-versa. In this paper it is suggested that one significant factor amongst others that could explain this asymmetry is a normative fetish which privileges either the individual or the collective.

How does abiding by norms become a fetish?

I have tried to argue that this phenomenon is an expression of a modern fetish of 'unwanted otherness.' This discussion is in three parts. The first attempts to draw attention to some significant aspects of this fetish. The second discusses the cognitive component underlying these aspects. The third discusses what this fetish forsakes.

I

This fetish of 'unwanted otherness' I has three aspects: psychological, normative, and spatial.

The psychological aspect – the unhappy consciousness

First and foremost, the unwanted aspects are unpleasant sights and sites associated with excruciating thoughts and events from which all human beings want to be shielded. Second, they are ‘fixed’ with features, negative energies and power that do not belong to them, for they are innocent in so far as their condition is not of their making at all.

Fetish, Harpham points out:

In its original sixteenth century context William Pietz reports was an object to which West African people attributed magical or animated powers. This primitive belief in the power of the object distressed European Protestants, who associated Fetishes with idolatry, even with Catholics. In the modern usage, the fetish is held to be a function of subject's displaced fears and anxieties. On this definition, the fascinating fetish-object is constituted by the subject as a means of protection not from an illness or evil eye, but from an unpleasant sight and thus from a painful thought. In both original and modern usages, the concept of fetish involves the attribution or misattribution of energy and power to an object that, from another point of view does not contain or manifest them at all.¹

The unhappy conscience reflected in the fetish has the characteristics of what Lacan describes as the Ego's Era:

For us, whose concern is with present day man, that is man with a troubled conscience, it is in the ego that we meet inertia: we know it as resistance to the dialectical process of analysis, to the exact degree that it causes him distress, and reveals its nonsensical function. It is this very fact that has led us to evolve a technique which substitutes the strange detours of free association for the sequence of Dialogue.²

The three features stated here, I suggest, characterize the modern human agency – resistant to dialogue through dialectical process of analysis, preference for free association and a troubled conscience.

1. Geoffery Galt Harpham ([2002] 2013), *Language Alone–The Critical Fetish of Modernity*, New York: Routledge. pp.65-66
2. Quotes in Teresa Brennan (1993) *History After Lacan*. London & New York: Routledge. pp. 30

At the hands of this human agency (with a troubled conscience) the political arena is constituted with the fetish of traditional authority, legal rational authority and charismatic authority. The political becomes synonymous with 'contestations with no resolution.' Consequently, energy generated between contestants brings tension; anxiety is to a crescendo and is maintained to a point where it generates a consciousness of total annihilation in the event of a confrontation. Thus, the maintenance of this anxiety becomes the condition for social interaction.

Under these circumstances critical scrutiny is read as disobedience, expressions of differences are seen as disrespectful and in defiance and freedom of expression is treated as blasphemy and sedition. Human agency is compromised, open space and time is dismantled by governmentalities and space and time made available for negotiations is overdetermined with normative(s). There is no possibility of negotiation either by persuasion or through political action. The political arena loses its democratic sheen and becomes authoritarian. This non-negotiability undermines the play between self, subjectivity, conceptions of good life and its relations to actual ways of life.

What generalizes this troubled conscience into an Ego's Era?

Normative aspect – the finality of time

A close look suggests that the 'unwanted beings in endless waiting' are creations of a normative order that continues to regulate modern social life and polity by rendering irreconcilable differences between :

....modernity and tradition; civilization and savagery; us and them; center and margin; civilized and wild; humanity and barbarity; advance and backward; developed and underdeveloped; adult and childlike; nurturing and dependent; normal and abnormal; subject and object; human and sub-human; reason and passion; culture and nature; male and female; mind and body; objective and subjective; knowledge and ignorance; science and magic; truth and superstition; master and slave; moral and sinful; believer and pagan; pure and impure; order and disorder; law and uncontrolled; justice and arbitrariness; active and passive; wealthy and poor; nation-state and non-state processes; strong and weak; dominant and subordinate; conqueror and conquered.³

3. Quoted in Alexander Laban Hinton (Ed.) (2002) *Annihilating Difference-The Anthropology of Differences*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 8-9

This normative order has been carried forward from the twentieth century to become the basis of conflicts between the nation-state and its people; between and within communities; between patriarchy and women; between capital and labor; between nature and culture; and between development and human rights.

This normative order determines health, well-being and the human capacity in accordance with class status and power. This undermines the legitimacy of dealing with disagreements. As a consequence, to be in conflict unrelentingly has become the mark of normative politics and the marker of a sense of 'radicalism.' Of necessity, conflicting parties unflinchingly hold on to their respective norms in the manner of a fetish and the norm becomes 'to be in conflict.' In these conflicts there is a normative 'otherness' that is non-negotiable. It orients, guides and brings energy to the lives of the people. The teleology is to protect from the 'other' either by subduing it or by transforming it into the image of the self or to destroy its physical presence. This teleology is discernible in regimes of economic and political modernity as well as in religious, cultural and social fundamentalism.

It has diminished the possibility for critical scrutiny and self-reflection. This is tantamount to epistemological deceit.

Some extreme outcomes of this are genocide, terrorism, just wars, rapes, ethnic-communal violence, honor killings, market fundamentalism, ecological fundamentalism and the other extreme outcomes are fixation to constitutionalism, traditionalism and charismatic fundamentalism of godmen. The rate at which differences (between individuals, between collectives and between individual and collective) become the basis for conflict, the rapidity with which conflicts degenerate into violence and violent escalates into terror is several times faster than the rates at which means and methods can be invented to address the questions, control damages and heal wounds. Progressive policies, legislation, mass education, programs of social inclusion, poverty alleviation, etc. are not able to keep pace, as a result these conflicts have become intractable.

People engaged over long durations with intractable conflicts acquire fetishized habits of living. The intractability is a derivative of the fetish of the normative that governs the social interactions between people in public and

private life. Under these circumstances, either the well-being of the individual goes against the well-being of the collective or the well-being of the collective goes against the well-being of the individual. In an event of conflict, the norm followed is – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This contributes to the construction of the adversarial otherness. The 'other' is now a category expanded to include anyone who stands by the people on margins, critiques mainstream knowledge and proposes a different set of knowledge(s).

Further, the binaries fix the measure for time for shaping the world along the mainstream and the margins axis. In time everything moves – natural resources and human resources move from the margins to mainstream and modern ideas and technologies move from the mainstream to the margins. People, as they move from dwelling in landscapes to congested urban landmass, begin to internalize these binaries and in the process acquire the features of the troubled conscience. This is its finality, a closure to possibilities.

The finality is of time. Time is a measure socially constructed to mark things as existing. This measure brings into finite folds everything that is in the realm of the seamless. As a measure it is a normative of modernity. It is at one and the same time an epistemological and a political category. It is principle of knowledge and a means of control.

Time is a measure of value, the principle of classification and discrimination. This makes time linear and, of necessity, calibrated. To maximize the value of time it is necessary to refine time calibrations. The more time is calibrated the more speed is generated. This is necessary for rapid circulation of value in order that rates of social production and reproduction of goods and services can be sustained. Equally, as speed calibrates time, space shrinks and thus sorting, sequencing and queuing becomes imperative.

Calibrated time is measured by the clock. It is clock-abled time. It is the principle not only for production and reproduction of goods and services that troubles the conscience. These goods and services created in calibrated clock-time are internalized as sensibilities of the ego to affirm its existence and become part of the mindscape or the world view leaving no place for all that does not exist in clock time.

The worldview of human being is composed of all images of things of this world that fill up the head, the mind and the consciousness. These are goods and services reproduced in calibrated time. These are expressions of the binaries of modernity. These binaries are internalized by means of these objects. There is no place for elements that are not in clock time as these are 'unwanted.'

To internalize and function in obeisance to this measure of time is absolutely necessary for mainstreaming.

This can be described as deforestation of the mind, calibrated with objects in clock time. It looks at things in fragments, in isolation from the social context. Its sense of time is co-terminus with expiry dates/shelf life of goods and services. The mainstreaming of these goods and services into the mindscape is a mirror of the external world. These objects fragment the conscience with the binaries to determine 'the' mode of being in the world resistant to dialectical dialogue. This mind develops distrust of the 'word' and acquires a propensity to manufacturing consent, constructing lies, speaking half-truths, making deceptive statements and distorting facts. Thus, the conscience is afflicted and troubled.

Confronted with the accumulation of enormous quantum of specialized knowledge, this mind is unable to see the connection between this knowledge and the questions and predicaments of lived experiences. This afflicts the mind with illiteracy and deprives social relations of intellectual nourishment to create conditions where with great rapidity differences become the basis for conflict. Conflicts result in violence and violence degenerates into terror. This afflicts the social relation on account of which the individual and the collective are seldom in a reciprocal relation. Learning is de-theorized giving way to thinking in free association. As a result, the capability to make sound assessments and become intellectually self-reliant to make decisions is undermined and generates a confidence deficit.

Under such conditions there is surfeit of lies, deceptions, half-truths and an accumulation of unjust happenings. Epistemological trustworthiness is the casualty.

The 'unwanted' are not just excluded. They are abandoned from the worldview of the modern and they must continue to be there for the modern to

get a sense of its self-worth. To protect human beings from things unpleasant and painful thoughts the deforested mind puts in place a normative fetishism that endows objects with qualities pertaining to human relationships. By virtue of these qualities lifeless things come to life, beguile and fascinate people and in the process are composed as worldview.

This normative fetish is an aspect of anthropocentrism. Corresponding to these processes are constructions of place and space as these cognitive processes are at work in all walks of social life.

‘Not-place’ – the spatial aspect

The available lexicon on space, place and time include terms such as retreat, shelter, reserved, refuge, secure, open and closed. These do not capture the associated connotations of the ‘unwanted’ because the unwanted are not worthy of any of kind of care and concern, which this lexicon suggests.

I want to suggest that space, place and time associated with the ‘unwanted’ from the perspective of the normative fetish is ‘not-place’ the inverse of ‘non-place’ that characterizes ‘supermodernity.’

The notion of ‘non-place’ and ‘supermodernity’ is discussed by **Marc Augé**. He writes:

If place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity will be non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and whichdo not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position. A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus

surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral, offers an Anthropologist (and others) a new object, whose unprecedented dimensions might usefully be measured before we start wondering to what sort of gaze it may be amenable

Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. But non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified – with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance – by totaling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself.⁴

From the perspective of the normative of supermodernity the 'unwanted' is its inverse. It cannot be defined as "relational or historical or concerned with identity." It does *not* integrate either with the earlier places or with any place. These are listed and classified but *not* promoted to the status of 'places of memory.' They are assigned to a circumscribed out of bound position. A world where people are *not* born in the clinic and do *not* die in the hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating inhuman conditions alongside luxurious abodes, where inhabited spaces are developing outside dense network of means of transport; where "the habitue of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly through gestures with an abstract, unmediated commerce"; a world thus surrendered to non-individuality offers an "Anthropologist (and others) a new object whose unprecedented dimensions might usefully be measured before we start wondering to what sort of gaze it may be amenable."

In opposition to non-places the 'unwanted' are not places.

Not-place is relative to 'place and non-place.' The first is never completely recognized, the second never totally completed. Not-places instead of non-

4. Marc Augé (1995). *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. Trans John Howe. New York: Verso. pp. 77-78.

places are the real measure of our time. One that could be quantified with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance. By totaling the damages caused by all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself with a troubled conscience. The troubled conscience is contagious.

Can super modernity be possible without the making of the 'unwanted'? Is there not epistemological deceit in the creation of the 'unwanted'?

II

Epistemological deceit – the cognitive aspect

Muslims and forest dwellers are amongst the unwanted. The representation of their culture and social life is a shroud of 'fixations' that are now deeply etched in the deep structures of modern conscience. Very briefly, these 'fixations' are that the Muslims 'as such' are militantly disrespectful of other communities and the forest dwellers 'as such' are destructive of the forest. The perpetuation of these stereotypes is the epistemological deceit that underlies normative fetish.

Any amount of persuasion that Muslims are 'militantly disrespectful of other communities' and forest dwellers are 'destructive of the forest' are not just representations of Muslim and forest dwellers respectively. Epistemological deceit is discernible in the way it is assigned attributes, energy and power does not contain or manifest in them at all.

What is the social description and construction of them that does not contain or manifest in them?

The Hindu on 2nd April 2018 reported one such effort from Asansol, West Bengal:

The video circulating on a messaging application shows a crowd of men in white caps, carrying a coffin, covered with a red cloth. Imam's 16-year-old son, Md.

Sibghatullah, whose school leaving examination just got over, was lying inside the coffin. He was lynched last Wednesday when he and his elder brother had gone to the nearby OK Road mosque, about 500 metres south of the Noorani Mosque.

There was tension in the area over an “offensive song” being played from a Ram Navami rally and within hours clashes erupted. In the song, which *The Hindu* has a recording of, it was clearly said “Topiwale bhi sar jhukake Jai Sri Ram bolega...” [Men in caps will also lower head to say Jai Sri Ram]. Repeated playing of the song in an area with mixed population annoyed the Muslims, leading to an altercation and clashes.

“Sibghatullah along with his brother went near the mosque to see what the commotion was about and was caught by the mob. His body was found late on Wednesday night,” said Mr. Imdadullah, the Imam of Noorani mosque on the northern edge of the city.

Following the incident, on Thursday afternoon, as the Janaza Namaz, or the funeral prayer began the crowd, which was estimated at 10,000 by the police, was seemingly turning restive. Realising that the situation was fast slipping out of control Imdadullah, father of Sibghatullah, asked for a microphone, which he usually never uses to deliver a sermon. He said: “If you love me then don't indulge in any violence and let peace prevail. I don't want any more lives to be lost. If you resort to any violence then I will leave the mosque and the city.”

On Saturday, as *The Hindu* reached the Noorani Mosque to meet Imam Imdadullah, he was busy talking to local residents in his second floor room. He explained why he had to calm the crowd down:

“I don't have words to express my feelings after having lost my younger son...” he said. “But I also didn't want any further violence to take away anyone's loved onesI realized that violence was imminent, so I had to speak up.” Locals said the Imam's speech calmed down the “enraged crowd” and prevented bloodshed. The police too confirmed that the Imam made their job easy.

Hindustan Times reported on 6 July, 2018:

“I did not witness my son's murder. He disappeared after the riots broke out in Asansol and I filed a missing complaint with the police. Police started a case of homicide after his body was identified four days ago,” the Imam told HT on Sunday.

“I have decided not to name anyone as suspect in my son's murder since I was not a witness. I cannot let any innocent person land in trouble. Let the police investigate and find out who is guilty,” Rashidi said.

“I have lost my son. But that cannot be the reason for peace being disturbed and people of two communities killing each other. Anyone who fears Allah and loves Allah cannot call for revenge. Forgiving is a lesson of Islam,” said the Imam.

“After Sibtullah's body was found some youth got furious. But we calmed them down. Not a single house, shop or the lone Shiva temple was attacked,” said Mehtab Alam, a local resident and an avid follower of Rashidi.

The Imam did not respond with ‘eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.’ In present times to expect people to emulate the Imam or respect for such equanimity will be foolish. In contemporary historical context the tradition upheld by the Imam and similar traditions have been pushed to the margins and invisibilised by the contemporary fetish for the normative. These traditions cannot be mainstreamed.

This Imam represents a Muslim tradition, which has stepped out of the politics of revenge and hatred. The authority of Imam's response is demonstrated from the intention to not perpetuate violence and to withstand the loss and pain for the well-being of all. This Imam is not an isolated random person. He represents a tradition of Muslims and Islam that uphold love and compassion as the basis of understanding social life. This exemplary Imam underlines this as the normative of epistemological trustworthiness for the construction of the political.

Different from the Imam but also invisibilised are the Koitors.

They live outside clock time in the midst the forestscape of Shringar Bhum in North Bastar, Chattisgarh alongside the life spans of things, attuned to landscape rhythms and in the midst of a variety of sentient being.

During my stay in Shringar Bhum from 1983-1987, my conversations with Koitors in general and particularly with *leski* (persons of knowledge) revealed that it requires fine attunement with the forest to understand plant life and to live with them. Its measure is being able to tune in to what the plants reveal themselves of their nature. To be tuned in involves not only listening to the forest soundscapes and walk across its terrains.

Some instances from the life of Koitors will show aspects of attunement.

One night sitting by the fireside I was sharing with Massiah, my Koitor friend from Shringar Bhum, an unfortunate happening with me. On my first forest visit I was being ferried across a flooded river in a dugout canoe. When we reached mid-stream there was a flash flood and the canoe turned upside down. Fortunately, I held on to the canoe and hit the shore after being carried away for some distance.

He was silent for a few moments. He then pointed out, “the wood will not sink. You can depend on it. It will not let you drown.”

Here epistemological trust is discernible in an attunement with the nature of things. In this case, wood and water are attuned to each other.

Nature-abiding people in reverence to the landscape propitiate trees, stones, hills, waterholes, rivers, earth, fire, wind, and sky. In this the abiding tenet is – to belong to the nature of things is an expression of faith.’ With this attunement in the landscape each element is in the safekeeping of everything as much as everything is in the safekeeping of each element. With this seamlessness, in a landscape every element – stone, dust, hills, water, plants, animals and whatever else is an expression of life. From each, everything acquires its ‘presence’. Each therefore belongs to the every, partakes of the every, absorbs the every. This makes it a living space.

There is no ‘other’. This attunement to life processes is trustworthy.

On one occasion there was a dispute between two villages regarding to whom does a patch of forest belong? To resolve this issue people from both villages discussed for two days. The first stage of the discussion focused on the registrations with the government. Documents were scrutinized. It emerged that the map was inaccurate. The second stage of the discussion recounted how and by whom was the forest used. It emerged that this forest patch was accessible to both villages and it was not possible to determine to which village it belonged. Recollections could not go beyond three generations. In the third stage the *leski* was consulted. He went into a trance to recall forest use patterns before the third generation. It emerged that shared access to the forest was in practice for eight generations. The *leski* was then requested to find out if there was any precedence for resolving such disputes. It emerged

that there was one instance, when the care takers of the altars of Talurmuttee (mother earth) were requested to eat the earth.⁵ It was pointed out that 'one who spoke the truth would digest the earth and the one who did not would either fall ill or may even die.' It must be stated here that when children eat earth they are discouraged. It is considered unhealthy.

Caretakers from both villages then ate earth in front of the gathering. One of them vomited blood and the dispute was resolved.

This is a mode of ascertaining truth by the trustworthiness of attunement to earth.

This attunement to earth comes with labor.

Childbirth labor is attuned to mother earth. When labor pain begins women have to move across earth from one spot to another until they reach one where the child comes into the universe of the forest. Where you do not belong, there is no attunement and birthing will not happen. To belong is to be attuned to. Like childbirth labor, all forms of labor are modes of attunement. Labor attunes the imaginations to the width and depth of the universe of the forest.

According to a folklore, goddess Danteshwari told the king of Bastar – 'mark your ground, by walking as much as you can, while I follow you. Your ground would be no more than where you turn to look back.' Having walked all terrains there came a moment when the king was not sure if the goddess was there behind him. He turned back to look and here his ground was complete.

This walk is an attunement. Accordingly, the landscape traversed is not territory but the ground the imagination is attuned to and internalized. The forestscape is attuned to life cycles and processes. Here moments extend and shrink, in rhythms unfolding the nature of things as an expression of faith.

When an entity is attuned it is ready to present itself along the width and depth of the forest universe. Such attunement comes with extending the imagination to include landscapes in the worldview. Talurmutte brings this out. Literally, it

5. For modern rational people eating earth is known as geophagia. It is associated with a range of problems such as iron-deficiency, low potassium, etc. See <http://www.berkeleywellness.com/healthy-eating/nutrition/article/geophagia-what-earth>

means old mother. In its social expression it is a tenet for social life – ‘everything that is not the product of one's labor is to be revered and cannot be possessed or owned.’ All of the natural landscape is thus to be revered.

Talurmutte decorates Shrinagar Bhum. At her altar, which is made at the base of a *sal* tree (*Shorea Robusta*) in the forest, Koitors annually come together to celebrate the beginning and the completion of their livelihood cycle. Collectively they make meals, eat and leave behind leaf plates for her to see and know their attunement to her work. To belong here is their faith. With this they acquire a presence in the forest.

There is faith in the tree nature – its propensity to reach out into the sky, give fruits, flowers as well as shade, shelter and be firmly grounded. Its groundedness brings to it all life forms – animals, birds, human beings – to rest and nest in its shade. Trees contour a sheltering landscape, therefore, they are worthy of reverence and veneration. The ‘becoming and being’ of people is cast in the image of a tree. Such belonging is an expression being tuned-in.

On account of being attuned to living alongside the life rhythm and rhyme of this universe, Koitors' belongings are no more than what they can bring along the forest paths. This attunes Koitors' life to this forest universe. Further, these belongings are also ceremonial offerings made on different occasions to forest paths, to the trees, plants, animals, birds, the stones, the hills and whatever there is. These attune their mode of belonging to the forest universe.

In the village, Talurmutte resides in the *ghotul*. This is a hut space in a village where under her shelter the boys and girls grow-up to become responsible mature members of society. As soon as a boy or a girl begins to understand household work they are sent to the *ghotul*. Here they are given a *ghotul* name which defines their membership to an age group and inaugurates their socialization into the ways of living in society. A *ghotul* member learns all aspects of social life. The *ghotul* comes alive after sunset as households prepare to rest and nest. Boys and girls dance, sing, and exchange conversations around a fire.

In both places, the forest and the *ghotul*, self-activity of earth is celebrated. Its seamlessness shelters all life forms. This seamlessness is attuned to the rhythm of life processes. It is a condition, for the nature of things to manifest as an expression of faith.

Attunement brings with it the propensity for forgetting and remembering one's path. The seamlessness of forest landscapes shelters, disguises, conceals, covers up, masks, obscures everything from everything only for each to rest and to nest with everything. It is like having a sense of one's own presence while at the same time not foregoing the sense of togetherness with everything else.

Leski is a term used to describe the dialectics of memory and forgetting. Literally, the term means to lose track of, to forget, to not be able to recall. In the worldview of Koitors, there is a tenet that says it is not necessary to remember everything and not everything can be forgotten. In other words, absolute memory and total forgetting makes social life impossible. The social question is how is one to know what is worth of remembering and worth of forgetting?

This is significant for grasping attunement. That is to say, the tendency for absolute memory and total forgetting block attunement. The art and science of recognizing what to remember and what to forget require a grasping of the seamlessness of life over and above its discontinuities.

This seamlessness draws attention to mutuality in the face of rumors, blind faith, deception and lies; induces parsimony of thinking to overcome the trust deficit from either overstatement or understatement. It enables the recognition and respect for the rhythm of ideas, their time span for maturation and with this it enables everyone to see the adequate and appropriate value of views, facts, and observations. It shows attunement is a significant element of reasonable thinking which is not a pursuit of logic and verification of empirical evidence and a turning away from emotions, feelings and passion. It recognizes that both contribute to the making of the world of phenomenon. This makes it wholesome as it brings forth the organic relation of part to the whole. It gives meaning to the pursuit of freedom and prevents it from degenerating into terror.

Attunement to life processes requires worldview categories to shift from finite/infinite to seamlessness, from human/non-human/living non-living to sentient beings, and from horizon to dwellings. This shift is necessary for the imagination to be attuned to reverence for life. This is basis for trust in theory and method for knowing the truth. Attunement looks beyond specific context

to 'reverence for life' as a tenet. It defuses the mainstream-margin axis and prevents pluralism from degenerating into uncontrolled irreverent relativism.

III

Coming to terms with the fetish?

Human capacity for rapacity, destruction, or cruelty and for the perpetuation of the 'unwanted' as 'being in endless waiting' is manifest in the killing of the Imam's son and in deforestation.

Killing of the son and other similar phenomena are more than Agamben's "state of exception" because these phenomenon are denial of life itself as these have not been curtailed by either public law or by judicial order or by social order.

Likewise, deforestation of the mind denies acknowledgement to people's understanding of medicinal use of these plants even when it is verified in the laboratory. The intellectual property rights regime gives no credit to the people for having identified these plants and for discovering their properties. It is argued that there is no method here and that by mere hit-and-trial this information has been gathered. Ethno-botany collects forest dwellers plant knowledge to make it available as molecules to the mainstream industry for culturing genetic diversity of plants for food and medicine.

There are volumes of research to show the harmonious relation of people with nature and how these people are pushed into the mainstream where they have to wait for a habitat. With this there is a loss of a very different way of observing the natural landscapes than the one practiced in the closed rooms of laboratories. What is the method of this knowledge? The language of social science and natural sciences mystified with binaries is perhaps ill equipped for this. This is an expression of an anthropocentrism that belongs to Ego's Era.

This epistemological deceit that underlies the normative fetish of constructing these people is disrespectful to life of the other community and nature, respectively. Is the normative fetish and this deceit associated with not-places (and not just non-places) a feature of the 'critical aspect of modernity?'

Harpham ([2002] 2013) argues that language has fetish objects and in this language itself emerges as a fetish. This has three aspects. Our use of language is a way of:

....reassuring ourselves, albeit indirectly, of our special place in the order of things, our singular endowments and high destiny (p 66). We can believe that the secrets of the universe and our place in it are nearly within our grasp. (67)⁶

In this reassuring there is a fetish:

In one sense, then, language-as-fetish takes into itself a capacity for agency that relieves human beings of a certain measure of responsibility for their actions; but in the other, the fetish-object of language stands as the most brilliant evidence of human uniqueness.(66)

....In directing our regard at language, we are refusing to confront not just the human capacity for rapacity, destruction, or cruelty, but also the disturbing possibility that there is “nothing” there, that there is no special human being or character, no divine species dispensation, no metaphysical difference between human nature and the rest of nature.(66)

As I see it, these three aspects can be discerned in the perpetuation of 'fixations' to the fetish. That is to say, 'fixations' reflect an adherence to language as the means to grasp the secrets of the universe. With this a language-as-fetish takes into itself a capacity for agency that relieves human beings of a certain measure of responsibility for their actions; a refusal to confront not only the human capacity for rapacity, destruction, or cruelty but also that there is no metaphysical difference between human nature and rest of the nature.

However, there is more to this fetish than mere psychological phenomenon.

There is a fixation to an epistemological stance that there is substance to 'objective existence,' which is graspable in and through the self-perpetuating structure of language alone. Those who attempt to get to the root of this human capacity for rapacity, destruction, or cruelty are led to see that the

6. Harpham op. cit.

deceit underlying this stance is expressed in the fetish of a critical reason that shuns the subjective-affect. The structures of its language are not able to grasp this human capacity because they perpetuated it. For this reason, reverence for life cannot be the basis for creating trustworthy knowledge because of the pursuit. For instance, equanimity in the response of the Imam and the forest dwellers attunement are seen as instances of subjective-affect and cannot be the basis of knowledge. This is the normative fetish of this stance.

If the adherence to ‘language as the means to grasp the secrets of the universe’ displays language-as-fetish then equally, the adherence to the ‘promise of reason to dispel the darkness of lies, disbelief and superstition’ displays reason-as-fetish?

There is an epistemological deceit in this adherence. A manifestation of this deceit is prolongation of ‘being in endless waiting’. Such prolongation is on account of absence of attunement and equanimity in the constructions of modern law, political facts, judicial order and social order.

Here, I will draw your attention to the attributes of ‘equanimity and attunement’ demonstrated by the Imam and the forest dwellers to open discussion for their significance in the relation between reason and modernity.

This relation has generated four modes of comprehending phenomenon based on self, based on the other, based on self and the other and causeless (based on neither self nor the other) for instance the rising of the sun. Each of these is on the basis of fetish because these are mutually exclusive. Each one is destructive, promotes excesses, increases vulnerability, fragments and homogenizes. Each and all of them together generate distrust and deceit.

It is worth examining if these mutually exclusive modes underlie the creation of ‘unwanted being in waiting’. That is to say, a deliberation of unwanted being and the not-place where they are situated are excluded from these four modes.

All that runs against this normative fetish are equanimity and attunement. Each has five powers – to shelter, to ensure parsimony, to build resilience, to uphold wholesomeness and to endorse plurality. Together they embolden interdependence on the ground that everything contributes to the making of each, everything has nothing of its own. This acknowledgement generates a

normative order that is tempered with the discretion to know what is worth of forgetting and worth remembering.

These five qualities are present in the Imam's words, "If you love me then don't indulge in any violence and let peace prevail. I don't want any more lives to be lost. If you resort to any violence then I will leave the mosque and the city."

These qualities are also present in the worldview of Koitors that holds it is not necessary to remember everything and not everything can be forgotten.

IV

Questions for Reflection

The notion of 'unwanted' need not be seen as the counterpoint of 'being wanted'. This is because to be wanted by people who in the course of abiding by norms have made a fetish of them is not likely to bring them justice.

Modernity as we know of today protects the collective well-being of the people and of nature from 'unwanted' individuals. From the point of view of the Imam and the Koitors abiding by the norm becomes a fetish on account of the fact that equanimity and attunement have no value. These are unwanted and shunned in modern modes negotiating the relation between the individual and the collective. One possible reason is that stratified social structures have no legitimate place for them.

On the understanding that the promise of modernity is grounded in reason is it that when drawing upon reason to create the promise equanimity and attunement were left out? Or is it because equanimity and attunement had to be exiled in the process of creating reason? The question that how does abiding by the norm become a fetish is intended to draw attention to what becomes of reason in the context of these structures. In the above discussion it emerged that these social structures assemble a regime of epistemological deceit. Here reason's promise to bring light to resist the impulses and obligations of stratified social structures is lost.



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