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Ezafus

Across-Region-Brides of Mewat: Exploring the Intersections of Power Relations and Lived Realities of Women at the Margins

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List of Acronyms:

ARBs   Across Region Brides

ARMs   Across Region Marriages

Acknowledgments

Abstract

This study adds an important dimension to the existing literature on across-region-brides (ARBs). The study applies a rigorous conceptual framework to underpin its analysis of the complex situation and extreme marginalisation of the ARBs; it further uses data collected through interviews with ARBs to bring out the lived realities and experiences of women, which is different from the stereotypical portrayal of ARBs that pervades the literature.

The study argues that grave structural inequalities and discrimination have led to situation of extreme oppression of ARBs. It further highlights that the existing literature and media and ngos narratives have fallen short in capturing the intricate and often contradictory position of ARBs. It argues that ARBs are not a homogenous group. Thus, erasing their voices and lived realities from the discourse about them, is a form of epistemic injustice that intensifies their marginalisation.

This study uses a cohesive conceptual framework of intersectionality and gender to analyse the social relations of power. I further highlight how intersection of power relations create situation of extreme marginalisation of the community and how the ARBs remain multiply oppressed within this intersection.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research contributes to knowledge production of women's voices and lived realities of across-region-brides that get silenced in the dominant narrative of trafficking. It highlights the structural inequalities and intersection of relations that create situations of extreme oppression for ARBs.

Keywords
Across Region Brides, Gender, Intersectionality, Institutions, Marriage, Power

Chapter 1 Introduction

This study aims to contribute to knowledge production of the voices of women which get marginalized in studies that explore cross-region-marriages (ARMs) through lenses of trafficking thus, homogenizing all women as victims. When I started working on the topic, I intended to use theories of agency to challenge the victimisation narrative. The fieldwork findings however, revealed that much complex socio-economic setting inform the practice of ARMs. Agency as a framework, thus, would be limiting in terms of capturing the lived realities and social injustices that people in this community are witnessing. Social and economic inequalities, extreme discrimination that the Meo community lives in, often get erased in the studies that look at ARMs through the lenses of trafficking. This research, through using intersectionality as a framework intends to analyse the intersection of dominant power relations and how they have produced the highly excluded community and extremely vulnerable situation for across region women.

1.1 Contextual Background

The state of Haryana[1] is located in Northern part of India, it is one of the most prosperous states of India but it lacks severely when it comes to social development. This fact is reflected clearly in the poor sex ratio of the state. "According to the 2011 Census, the number of females per 1000 males in Haryana stands at 879" (First Post: 2013) Historically the agrarian nature of the society has marked marriage as an "economic necessity" (Chowdhry 1987: 2061) due to the need for productive and reproductive female labour. The distorted sex ratio has made it difficult for men to find brides locally; as a result men have resorted to buy brides from far away (poorer) states. "In India, marriage predominantly remains a social obligation and important for social adulthood, as courtship and premarital relationships are socially not allowed. Marriage combined with the practice of dowry still determines the social status of families, and those who remain unmarried become socially excluded" (Kaur 2015, interview)[2]. It has been argued that the societal pressure on one hand and difficulty of finding brides locally have led men to 'import' brides from southern and eastern states of the country and in some instances from neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Nepal[3]. According to most researches the phenomenon is fuelled by low female sex ratio of the receiving states and poverty of the sending states (Kaur 2015, interview). What is astounding about these marriages is that they are happening in a society, which is traditionally known to very strictly monitor marital alliances and is rigorously ruled by norms of territorial exogamy and marital endogamy[4].

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[1] Haryana is the 20th state of India that came into being on 1st November 1966 and presently has 22 districts.

[2] An interview with Ravinder Kaur by Caroline Bertram on across region marriage migration, published online: https://www.boell.de/en/2015/02/18/brides-indias-north (18.02.2015)

[3] A field study on the impact of sex ratio on the pattern of marriages in Haryana by Drishti Stree Adhyayan Prabodhan Kendra covering over 10,000 households revealed that over 9,000 married women in Haryana were brought in from other states. In Haryana, one in every five males would stay unmarried unless he imported a bride from outside the state. Currently, many districts in the state have 5–6 out-of-state brides https://www.boell.de/en/2015/02/18/brides-indias-north

[4] "The present north Indian family is patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal. The marriage is generally outside the kin group and the local group. It is a joint family in which the brides are brought from outside and the girls are given away. The behaviour is strictly regulated according to generations, according to whether one is born in the family or married into the family and finally according to whether one is a man or a woman" (Ahlawat 2009:47)

According to Prem Chowdhry the effects of this female deficit are profound; while men belonging to the lower caste and class are facing a shortage of brides those at the top[5] of the societal strata have a surplus of brides and in fact have a commanding position in terms of choice of bride and dowry (Chowdhry 2005: 5191). Age is another determinant here, men who attain the age of 30 are usually the ones who find it difficult to find a bride locally and resort to buying brides from afar.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in Mewat region of Haryana, which is the most under-developed region of the otherwise prosperous state of Haryana. It is also the region, which has the best sex ratio; the 2011 census recorded 906 females per 1000 males in the district.[6] Most studies and newspapers reporting have cited skewed sex ratio as the main reason for getting brides from far away region, ironically despite having the best sex ratio Mewat has emerged to be a hub for across region brides. The findings of the fieldwork show that it is men who are poor, physically disabled or are beyond the marriageable age of 20 often sought brides from far away since no one from the local area wants to give them their daughters.

It is also important to locate the Meo population of Mewat historically, in order to understand the kinship and marriage patterns followed by this community. Meo's are originally Hindus that converted to Islam almost thousand years ago during the Muslim invasion of India. The marriage pattern and rules of arranging marriages between Meos is based on village exogamy and caste endogamy, which is very similar to Hindus (Chauhan 2003: 71). Marriage with a non-meo Muslim is recognised but not preferred. ARMs are accepted since they are seen as extension of bride price that existed historically within this community; these marriages however have a negative connotation since they imply a poor status of a bridegroom and his family (Chauhan 2003: 72).

1.4 Literature Review

In India the issue of ARMs has been addressed as an issue of trafficking mainly by the NGOs[7] and the media[8], which has framed the narrative as that of victimisation and leaves no space for further research exploring the socio-political and economic realities that create conditions for these marriages. It also forecloses any dialogue on the potential emancipatory nature of these marriages. This narrative has further had implications on policy solutions that have only a partial view of the situation (seeing all ARBs as victims of trafficking) and gets translated into a rescue approach adopted by the government.

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[5] According to Prem Chowdhry the deficit of brides faced by men is caste, class and body specific, it's only men who are poor, uneducated, disabled, aged and belonging to the lower caste are unable to find brides locally for marriage and therefore seek brides from far away region. Those men located at the top of the social ladder do not have difficulty in obtaining a bride locally and are also able to demand dowry. (Chowdhry 2011)

[6] https://indikosh.com/dist/66661/mewat

[7] Most NGO reports address across region brides as hapless victims of sex trafficking, the diversity of their experiences get erased under this dominant narrative. "Every year, thousands of young women and girls in northern India are lured or sold into involuntary marriage. They are bartered at prices that vary depending on their age, beauty and virginity, and exploited under conditions that amounts to a modern form of slavery" (Shakti Vahini 2013: 7); http://twocircles.net/2011feb27/empower_people_rescuing_girls_bride_trafficking.html

[8] The sensational media reporting's essentialises all across region brides as 'sexual slaves', thus framing all of them as victims of trafficking, by comparing their situation as akin to cattle's this kind of reporting dehumanises them as sexual objects. https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/11/cows-goats-india-slave-brides-161114084933017.html

Some scholars have tried to challenge this homogenisation of 'all brides as victims approach' and have explored the gender relations and social implications of such marriages. Earlier studies focused on the cause of the problem that is the skewed sex ratio that has led to unavailability of marriageable girls locally, others have studied the elements of differences – caste, culture, language, class and difficulties that brides from culturally distinct regions experience.

Most studies looking into across region purchased brides have been speculating on the consequences of ARMs would have on the social fabric of the society. Would it lead to a significant shift in social practices and patterns, would it have a positive impact on women's status and autonomy, would it lead to a change in sex selective behaviour and female discrimination? Would it lead to an alteration in existing patriarchal structures and patterns of dowry? Will it lead to reconstruction of gender and powers in the process are few of the speculations being made by demographers and researchers studying this movement. (Mishra 2013:71; Kaur 2004)

Paro Mishra (2013) explores the difference between spouses by focusing on the inter-caste nature of cross-region unions. Her ethnographic study questions why caste endogamy is an important consideration in marriage negotiations and what is the repercussions of caste norms on marital experiences of ARBs and whether ARMs signify a weakening of caste norms (Mishra 2013: 71)

In Haryana the long distance marriages are necessitated due to the need for female productive and reproductive labour, it is driven by the ideology that both production and reproduction needs to be controlled. This means that reproduction is inextricably linked not only to it's cultural life but also, importantly, to the political economy of communities and control of female sexuality and reproductive labour is central to maintenance of the prevailing patriarchal order (Chowdhry 2011:11). Belonging to a totally different region with different language and traditions the burden of adjustment lies on the incoming bride (Chowdhry 2011:15). For instance, the culture of observing a veil or 'Ghunghat' is not practised in the regions these women belong. In addition these women mostly belong to regions that eat rice as their staple diet; adjusting to a diet of wheat and learning to make chappatis again could be a difficult task (Chowdhry 2011:15). Prem Chowdhry's observations provide an in-depth understanding of the struggles the brides from far away region face in adjusting within a new community. However, they seem to generalise the experiences and struggles of all cross region brides as a homogenous, this view is restrictive as it silences the distinctive narratives of women belonging to different regions, cultures, age and caste.

An in-depth study conducted by Reena Kukreja on ARMs in North India reveals, "that the very nature of these marriages creates ripe conditions for the abuse and exploitation of migrant brides. The type of gender based violence that these brides face is qualitatively different than that experienced by local women in their marriages" (Kukreja and Kumar 2013:2). Another important observation made in this study is discrimination these women face based on race and colour, "oppression and discrimination experienced by the low caste groups and the Dalits from the dominant caste groups get similarly reproduced within the family bringing in wives from other parts of India. They are segregated, isolated and shunned primarily because of their 'unknown' caste status" (Kukreja and Kumar 2013:2).

Further research findings have revealed that while on the one hand there is tacit acceptance, there is also institutionalised rejection by defining the cross-region brides as the 'other', as lower caste and as inferior. This is experienced at many levels not just by them but also by the children born of such unions (Kukreja and Kumar 2013:2). In another study Kukreja looks at "agency displayed by the brides by whom they adopt a 'culture of

subversion' and practice concealed forms of rebelling" (Kukreja 2017:34). According to Kukreja (2013) "across-region-brides occupy a contradictory space, as these marriages foreclose their agency, yet provide them the space to challenge established patriarchal norms and power structures through hidden transcripts of everyday acts of resistance" (Kukreja 2017, no page). I find Kukreja's work very relevant to my own research, through probing questions on agency of cross region brides she has opened space for further research investigating the lived realities of ARBs.

Existing studies by NGOs see ARBs as victims of trafficking that need to be rescued from oppressive men. Other literature reviewed focuses on processes and structures mainly centring on the causes, marriage squeeze and poverty or highlighting the adjustment in terms of food, language and structures. Studies have also highlighted the need for further exploring the intersectionality of patriarchy, gender, caste and class.

Most literature focused on the receiving societies and explaining the structural process, and response/ reaction of this society towards these women and finding out how they are being accepted or discriminated against. Ravinder Kaur (2012) sees some positivity in this movement made by these women to avoid poverty and seek upward social and economic mobility; though Kaur recognizes that these brides face multiple vulnerabilities but is vary of labelling them as trafficked or purchased. According to Kaur (2015) this would be a much simplistic understanding of a phenomenon that is much more complex posed by demographic challenges and may in future challenge the rigidities of marriage systems in India (Kaur 2015, no page). ARMs may lead to shift in social patterns – altering the rigidities of dowry payments and marriage patterns in India. Kaur (2015) emphasizes the need to study cross-region marriages in all it's dimensions, which often remain under valued[9] (Kaur 2015, no page)

Review of literature revealed that all academic studies conducted on this issue focused on the northern part of Haryana, thus, no academic literature exists that studies the situation of cross region brides in Mewat specifically. Reena Kukreja's study "Tied in a Knot Cross region marriages in Haryana and Rajasthan: implications for gender rights and gender relations" (Kukreja and Kumar 2013) departs from the existing studies that has primarily focused on studying the exploitative nature of these marriages, it goes beyond to interrogate the everyday lives of across region brides and intra-gender relations. Mewat was included in fieldwork for this study, "Mewat was selected as Meo Muslims form the majority there and this district has been projected in print media as a hub for trafficking of women/ brides to other parts of Haryana. Considered the most 'underdeveloped' region of Haryana, it boasts the best Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in Haryana in the census of 2011" (Kukreja and Kumar 2013:10). This study however, fails to explain the reasons for this situation. The socio-political and economic distinctiveness of the region receive no further attention in this study. Hence, more consideration needs to be given to the structural inequalities that exist within the community and the intersection of relations of power that shape women's experiences. It also needs to be emphasized, how, in the dominant narrative framed by NGOs and the media the lived experiences of the women are suppressed and their voices get silenced. By foreclosing their agency this narrative leaves no room for exploring how these women negotiate the social norms and power structures, what are their strategies for everyday and coping mechanisms that they employ.

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[9] "The workload on many of these women is extreme, and I believe the cross-regional marriage migration always also reflects a form of labor migration. The women are providing productive labor, reproductive labor, sexual and emotional labor and domestic labor. Unfortunately the various dimensions of what women provide in a marriage are not highly valued" (Kaur 2015: Interview)

1.4   Main Research Question

How the state, ngos and community exercise their domination to marginalise the Meo community based on their religion? How the intersections of axes of power create situation of heavy oppression for across-region-brides and how despite their extreme vulnerability women go through their everyday lives?

1.5 Organization of the paper

The paper is organised into six chapters, the first chapter dealt with providing a background and contextualising the research problem. The second chapter is an in-depth discussion and reflection on my fieldwork process, I felt that it was important to talk about the ethical dilemmas and challenges that I witnessed during fieldwork as they played an important role in shaping this research. The third chapter is a discussion on the conceptual and analytical framework I have used for analysis. The fourth chapter intends to highlight what are the factors and power relations that have contributed to marginalisation of across region brides through using intersectionality as a conceptual framework. The fifth chapter contends the narrative of framing all across region brides as victims of trafficking through privileging lived realities of women and the complexities of their everyday life. Finally the paper concludes by drawing upon the research findings keeping in perspective the research question, highlighting the theoretical and analytical contributions and making suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 Reflections from the field

Introduction

The ethical dilemmas, critical self-questioning and negotiating identities in the field are some of the challenges that we all face but are rarely equipped to deal with. This chapter is a reflection on my fieldwork; I feel these reflections are important to understand how we do research and what is it that we intend to achieve through it. Here I speak about how my research evolved, I talk about the limitations, challenges, the ethical dilemmas and encounters in the field and how they have played an important role in shaping this research.

2.1 Methods of Collecting Data- Challenges and limitations

Preliminary data is the main source of information derived for this study; the data was collected through personal interviews, observations, and informal conversations. The research is informed by feminist standpoint theory, it emphasizes on the interconnections that shape peoples experiences and strong reflexivity of the researcher.

> "Feminist standpoint theory prioritizes thinking from women's or marginalized lives. The theory considers these lives as privileged sites of knowledge production. Hence, feminist standpoint theory focuses on the intersection of everyday practices of exercising power and the production of knowledge" (Tuin 2016:1)

According to Harding, position of privilege can become a useful resource. "Strong reflexivity is the manifestation of strong objectivity through method. It requires the researcher to be cognizant and critically reflective about the different ways her positionality can serve as both a hindrance and a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process" (as quoted in Brooks and Bieber 2007: 15)

The interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks, which was a very limited time, and only a few participants could be reached. I interviewed fourteen women and one man for this study, the age of the women ranged from 20 years to 55 years. I was aware of the sensitivity of the issue, getting a bride from another region is socially stigmatised. It reflects the poor, class and social status of the groom and his family. It's therefore not considered appropriate to ask questions pertaining to such marriages as it may be considered intrusive and disrespectful.

Given these limitations I was unable to talk to women more than once as I had originally planned and could conduct repeat interviews only with two women and one man. I also intended to interview family members especially mother in laws and husband but the same was not possible. The main strategy for fieldwork was based on observations and conducting interviews in the household settings. The research intended to study different forms of agency which required both discussions and observations; observing different points of the day, different situations, making sense of what these women in fact do and how they practice what they say they do. The intention was to understand how they engage with the complexities of the situation? This would help in understanding invisible or less visible forms of agency. However in the field I found that the families do not allow women to interact with outsiders, they are suspicious of people from NGOs and the cities.

Another limitation was inability to stay with the families, which could have provided rich insights into their daily lives. My host families were very poor households living in one-room houses with no proper sanitation and electricity. I felt that me staying with them

would burden them and therefore decide to commute each day. On an average I was travelling between 100-150 kms each day, it usually meant starting early from my place of residence to avoid traffic and returning by late evenings, I was lucky to have my parents car and driver to take me to the field each day.

2.2 Positionality

I am aware of the epistemological implications of my positionality and how this is key to production of knowledge. My education, personal beliefs, class and caste background influence how research is conducted and findings are presented. I informed my respondents that their identity will not be disclosed and that the research is governed by anonymity. The respondents showed no problem in using their real names, however as an ethical choice I decided to use pseudo names for presenting my research findings.

Conducting this research in my home country and also in a region known to me helped me in getting contacts and access to respondents much easily as compared to someone who is a complete outsider. Knowing the politics was helpful to make informed decision about the sources I wanted to use for data collection. Belonging to the same region and knowing the language proved helpful in understanding the local nuances often lost to an outsider. Being a woman, married and a mother helped me build trust with my respondents, during my conversation with Salma an across region bride from Bangladesh she said; *"Aap samjhte ho, aurat ko pata hota kaun pasand karta kaun nahin"* (you understand we women know who likes us and who doesn't). Similarly, they felt that being a mother I would understand the attachment and concern they felt for their children.

"Despite attempts at more participatory or interactive search, at best, it rarely disrupts the hierarchies in place. Despite good intentions of researchers, the research relationship itself may reinforce and reproduce existing inequalities and perhaps create ones" (Wolf 1993: 5). My upper middle class status, elite education and urban profile made me a complete outsider to their lived realities, it created false hopes among my respondents who believed that I could use my privileged position to resolve their problems in some way. I was trying hard to be one of them to make them feel comfortable but this resulted in them seeing in me someone who is more accessible, different from the other NGOs who had visited them earlier and thus, the hope that I will help them in some way.

2.3 Access to respondents

My focal point of contact was a local woman named Roza, who is an ARB from Hyderabad; she was married at the age of 11 and has been living in Mewat for 45 years. She has been working with survivors of trafficking and ARBs for almost 25 years. I was warned about the problematic role being played by the NGOs in distorting and manipulating the reality and was therefore, advised by a colleague, to avoid reaching out to women through them.

I was unable to visit the houses individually but was fortunate that my focal point of contact was a local woman. This helped me reach out to my respondents in a short time and was also a good icebreaker. It helped me build a rapport with respondents, which, otherwise would not have been possible in such limited time.

After arriving to India I knew I had very little time so I tried to get in touch with as many people I knew who can help me get in touch with the respondents. I called the NGO person first and explained the purpose of my research, I was a little taken aback by his casual response to the issue and his insisting on meeting in a café (coffee shop) instead of the research site. After two phone conversations I decided to not pursue him further and

started looking for Roza's contact details. I finally managed her contact number after two days, I spoke to her briefly over the phone and she invited me to visit her. During our meeting I explained her the purpose of my research, she informed me how she has been cheated by the same NGO who used her as a face to get recognition and funding and never gave her anything in return. In fact I later learned she has been quoted problematically as survivor of trafficking[10] when she very strongly denies being trafficked.

Roza did not ask for any compensation in return for her help. However, given that she had spent considerable time with me during the fieldwork, I brought her sweets, clothes and a modest compensation of INR 5000 (60 Euros) on my last visit which she accepted after resisting initially.

The women interviewed belonged to three different villages of Mewat district Kansali[11], Chilla[12] and Ferozpur Namak[13]. The first set of interviews was held in Kansali village over a period of four days. The first day involved informal conversations and rapport building. I visited this village thrice and could conduct repeat interviews with Salma and Anwar who were my host in the village.

I interviewed total five women and one man from this village, the women from this village work in the mountains as labourers, their work includes cutting grass and picking sticks; their main source of livelihood. They usually leave very early in the morning and return by noon so this involved long waiting hours for them to return from their work. Also the interviews had to be squeezed between they coming back from work and attending to household chores. I mention this to highlight how women are tied up with duties that leave them little time for anything outside their daily chores. Given the sensitivity of the issue I was not able to visit other women's houses, so Roza would ask women to come to Salma's house, the in laws would allow them to come to meet Roza since she was helping them get labour card made (an official document that guarantees minimum wage under the Govt of India scheme).

One mistake I made during my first visit was to appreciate the handicraft work (making bed sheets and baskets) that these women did, it immediately gave them hope that I was interested in their work and would eventually help them get some livelihood. This was a damage I couldn't undo even after repeated clarifications that I am just a student who is doing research for academic purposes. This is one of the several ethical dilemmas that I faced, the hope people get when you as a researcher interview them, the hope that you will do something to improve their situation. I found myself conflicted with the feeling that these people are opening up their lives to me with trust that I am here to help them but I am only here extracting stories for my own benefit. It was a challenging emotion to deal with, especially because of the hospitality they bestowed upon me despite their destitute.

2.4 Encounters in the field

My host family Salma and Anwar have 11 children, Anwar is old so he doesn't work, Salma works as a labourer in the mountains cutting grass and picking sticks and this is their only source of livelihood. Her two daughters and three sons are married, the other children are young, the youngest one is a daughter, and she is two years old. The house is a thatched roof one room house, their only belongings, two cots a big iron trunk, few clothes and utensils. Despite their situation they made sure to offer me tea and cold drink on every visit, on my second visit Salma had prepared meat for me (for which she had to skip going

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[10] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30189014
[11] http://www.haryana21.com/distt-villages/village.php?villageid=3786
[12] https://villageinfo.in/haryana/mewat/taoru/chilla.html
[13] https://villageinfo.in/haryana/mewat/nuh/ferozepur-namak.html

to work that day I later realized thus, sacrificing one day of income). She fed not just me but other five women who had come to meet me. While leaving I gave her children 200 rupees (this is a custom in India where elders give some money to children in return when they visit). I was deeply perturbed by this episode, I felt indebted now to return the favour in someway but was not sure how, giving money was not appropriate, it was only temporary and would give them false expectations. In addition, I was a researcher travelling on a very limited budget. I was quite astounded by these acts of generosity and they were affecting me mentally more than I realised. As a practice I would take some juice boxes and biscuits for children this was the least I could do.

Salma proudly says that she never allows her daughters to work in the forest and made sure that they all get basic education till eighth standard; beyond which it is unsafe to send them to school. Her sons don't stay with her after marriage. On first visit I waited three hours to meet Salma, she was still in the forest when we arrived so it took her a while to finish her job and come. When I requested that I want to talk to her in private she took me to a small out-house which is supposedly the village dispensary- an open space with a thatched roof next to her house. Villages still have a huge electricity problem and in summers the scarcity is worse with increased consumption in the cities, and temperatures escalating to 40 degrees it gets particularly difficult. She was a little hesitant in the beginning but soon opened up, I went to the field with questions relating to their food habits and nostalgia relating to their natal families, which would help me get a sense of how they negotiate these spaces. But with my first question relating to her parents she broke down and started to cry I felt guilty of renewing her wounds and didn't ask any further questions relating to her family. Similarly the questions relating to food, shopping clothing, which were part of my questionnaire, couldn't be asked, I felt it was unethical to ask such questions to people who don't know where their next meal is coming from.

The second set of interviews were conducted in Chilla village, these were held over a period of six days I met eight women, first two visits were mostly informal conversations in group settings. An NGO who works in the region had been deceiving these women promising them jobs etc. They have done some problematic work giving manipulated stories in the media and to foreign journalists, due to which most of them were angry. It took Roza sometime to get them to agree to talk to me. Again the limitation was not getting to visit women in their houses. I conducted the interviews at Jamila's house a bride from Jharkhand, first day only four women came and they had questions about why I wanted to talk to them. They also narrated stories of how the people who came earlier through the NGO gave them false hopes. During the next visit another three women joined, but they eventually did not show up on the scheduled meeting the following day. I was finally able to interview Aliyah and Jamila on the second day, they talked to me together, they both are young women in their mid twenties. They were very vocal and aware of the discrimination they face. I was surprised by how they articulated their lives different from local women.

I was able to interview six other women over the period of next three days. In this village Jamila was my host and all interviews were conducted in her house. In fact, her husband received us at the main road and accompanied us to the house, which was located at a very interior location. I later came to know that Roza had told him that I am here to help these women get some livelihood and therefore he was willing to help (this was another setback for me I hated that these false hopes are being instilled in people unknowingly). The man however was reluctant to talk to me, I requested if he can talk to me briefly but he denied.

The third round of interviews included in-depth conversations with Roza in her village Ferozpur Namak, and visiting Salma and Anwar again for repeat interviews. I wrapped up

the fieldwork and did not reach out to further respondents because I realized that most respondents are giving the same information. This was mainly because I did not have enough time to spend with them, which would lead to new information to emerge from observing their daily lives and activities. I therefore decided to do repeat interviews and spend more time with respondents with whom I had built some rapport and familiarity.

2.5   Ethical dilemmas

Sandra Harding (2005) calls for using reflexivity as resource in doing research, using privilege in a critical way, 'strong objectivity' as epistemic privilege. These issues are critical in understanding why we do research, how we do research and what we want to present to the world. Reflexivity helps in outlining the ethical concerns, how they shaped and in turn impacted the research.

Power relations were evident and more difficult to transgress than I thought. The hope that people talked to me with, trusting that I would do something to make their situation better and their hospitality (providing me with drinks and food each time) was devastating. After the first two field visits I went through a bad burn out where I did not want to return to the field. At this point my friend from ISS who was also in field proved to be of much help, talking to her helped me vent out my conflicted feelings. It also provided strength to start again.

I had never witnessed such extreme poverty so closely in life; I felt that we live in our own bubble never realizing the difficult situations that people live their lives with. The children had no clothes and shoes; the families had no belongings and were living in extreme destitute. Every time I was talking to them I felt this ethical dilemma that I am only here extracting stories from them and they are opening their lives to me, trusting that I will do something for them.

During an interview with Hina an ARB from Calcutta, her husband came outside the house and started inquiring about why she is here and why she is talking to me. Hina stopped talking to me when she realised her husband was outside, she changed the topic and started talking about livelihood issues and need for employment in the area. At this point I realized that women are taking a risk by coming and talking me. If their families come to know they might receive some punishment or beating.

I went to the field with clear theoretical framework that intended to investigate operation of human agency within structures of subordination. In the field I found that situation was completely different. These women are living in extreme destitute and poverty thus; agency will be a very limited theoretical approach to capture the lived realities of the women's lives. I went to field trying to generate data that answers my research questions and honestly this struggle continued till one month after I returned from the field. Until I finally realized that I need to break out of this framework, to work on the realities of the field and let the data speak to me.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched my reflections from the field, the ethical dilemmas and how they impacted and shaped my research. Recognising the contradictions and limitations are important elements of a research process. Reflecting on research journey helped me understand the importance of reflexivity in research and I hope that these reflections are useful for new researchers and can offer some methodological insights into the complexities of the field.

Chapter 3 Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Introduction

This chapter explores the concepts that guide this paper and how they have been used in analysis of the fieldwork findings. Intersectionality is the major framework guiding this paper; it helps in analysing the intersection of institutions as axes of domination and social relations of power based on color, gender, language, socio-economic status, region and religion. Power relations are embedded in social norms and gender roles that constitute social identities, thus Gender is another essential concept used in this research. The last section of this chapter presents the analytical framework, explaining how these concepts will be used in the analysis.

3.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a concept was coined by Crenshaw in 1989; "Intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power." (Davis 2008: 68). Today, intersectionality is proclaimed as one of the most important contributions of feminist theories. It's mainly because it helps us to move beyond the obvious, and see various ways in which multiple oppressions and power relations interact to shape various dimensions of women's experience. "Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (Pelak 2007), Patricia Hill Collins refers to 'interlocking system of inequality' to highlight that systems of inequality are not exclusive but operate in intersection and simultaneously with one another (Pelak 2007, no page). "Collins (2000) identifies the interlocking systems of inequalities as a "matrix of domination," which is a model of interlocking rather than additive connections between inequalities and statuses" (Collins 2000 cited in Pelak 2007, no page). According to Collins this system operates at three levels, the personal/ individual level, groups or community level and at the level of social institutions (Collins 1993: 557). "Replacing additive models of oppression with interlocking ones create possibilities for new paradigms. The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach, fosters paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity" (Collins 1993: 555). Thus, Collins (1993) sees intersectionality as 'matrix of domination' operating through intersecting system of social relations of domination. Her conceptualisation is based in black feminist thought that puts black women's experience at the centre of analysis and sees black women as agents of knowledge. According to this view "knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance" (Collins 1993: 555).

Collins (1993) view is based on the rejection of a binary opposition between oppressor and the oppressed and on the recognition that individuals can be simultaneously "privileged and disadvantaged" (Palek 2007, no page) based on their location.

In this research paper I intend to contribute to knowledge production of voices of women that get erased in the dominant narrative of trafficking, for this purpose I find Collins theory of 'matrix of domination' useful. I adapt to this framework for my analysis of the lived experiences of across region brides. In this study by putting women's experiences at the centre of analysis I start by looking at 'intersecting system of oppressions'; so at the first level I look at intersections of institutions; state, civil society

and community as axis of oppression. Community is complex and social relations of domination within the community are constituted by intersection of gender, socio-economic status, color and region. I look at these intersections within the community to understand how they shape women's experience and constitute to their marginalisation.

The research argues for giving space to women's voices, and criticises the trafficking narrative that see's all women as victims "By shifting our understanding of power relations based on a hierarchical, vertical model to a more fluid model of interrelatedness, intersectionality theorists argue that we can begin to analyse the dynamics of domination and resistance in new ways" (Palek 2007, no page). This approach helps to look at less visible forms of everyday activity that women use to survive in situations of extreme oppression. According to Pelak (2007, no page) "Intersectionality also highlights the interplay between social structures and human agency. The importance of recognizing the interplay of social structures and human agency is that it allows for the possibility of social change" (Pelak 2007, no page). I find this useful in understanding the lives of women and also arguing for diversity of women's experience. I use this lens to analyse the narratives and emphasize that even though this group is totally marginalised hierarchies exist within them. This privileging of differences and lived realities helps in critiquing the victimisation narrative.

3.2 Gender

Gender is socially constructed and embedded throughout social life, "gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life" (Lorber 1994:54). According to West and 'Zimmerman (1987) "Gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly "doing gender" (West and 'Zimmerman 1987 cited in Lorber 1994:54). Gender as an organizing principle of social life plays a key role in determining experiences of individuals that are in turn determined by Gender. Risman (2004) conceptualises gender as 'social structure' (Risman 2004), according to this approach by conceptualising gender as a 'social structure' "we can better analyse the ways in which gender is embedded in the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society" (Risman 2004:429). According to Lorber (1994) and Risman (2004) gender differences are constituted and maintained to justify inequality to maintain 'subordination of women by men' (Lorber 1994, Risman 2004). Gender as a social structure helps in identifying how and under what conditions gender inequality is being produced. It further helps understand how gender as a social structure reproduces inequality and how these structures intersect with other axis of domination.

Joan Scott (1986) defines gender as a way to "decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction" (Scott 1986:1070). Gender in this view is both ideological and structural; it plays a key role in defining sexual practices and social roles. According to Scott, in order to understand how "gender works in human relationships" and how it gives "meaning to the organization and perception of historical knowledge" we need look at gender as an "analytical category" (Scott 1986:1055). Scott argues for recognising gender as a system of power relations that operates within and across four interrelated social levels, the level of subjective identities, level of institutions, level of ideologies and level of symbols.

Identities: gender identities are constructed through "range of activities, social organizations and historically specific cultural representation" (Scott 1986:1068).

Institutions: refer not only to kinship and marriage but also to economic and political institutions and organizations through which social relations are regulated (Scott 2011: 1068)

Ideologies: set of values, ideas that are used to justify structural inequalities. Ideologies maintain and sustain power through normalising and naturalising dominant discourses. "These concepts are expressed in religious, educational, scientific, legal, and political doctrines and typically take the form of a fixed binary opposition" (Scott 2011:1067).

Symbols: gendered cultural symbols and metaphors reinforce the reproduce gender hierarchies and binaries.

Thus, according to Scott, "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated" (Scott 2011: 1068). In this paper I look at the level of institutions. I look at the role of developmental state, NGOs and community as institutions of dominance. I further elucidate how intersection of these institutions create situation of maximised vulnerability for ARBs. In the following section I look at relevant literature to highlight how I understand institutions and use them in my analysis.

3.2.1 Institutions

Institutions are systems that connect individuals together (Tang 2011:3). "Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" (North 1990 as quoted in Tang 2011:3). According to Durkheim "Institutions are embodiments of (social) knowledge or solidified ideas" (Durkheim cited in Tang 2011:11). Giddens emphasizes that institutions both constrain and enable agents (Giddens cited in Tang 2011:3). For Tang institutions are not always constraining they do act as social provisions and act as safety nets (Tang 2011:3). According to Scott (2011), social institutions are important cites where 'gender-binary representation' takes place (Scott 2011: 1068). According to this view institutions are a specific set of structural relations or system of organization through which social norms are maintained and regulated in a society. In this paper I look at institutions as axes of domination that produce highly excluded community.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The above concepts are useful in my analysis, here I offer a brief outline on how I will analyse these concepts. I elucidated earlier, I will look at state, ngos and community as institutions. In my analysis I intend to understand that how the intersection of these institutions create situation of extreme oppression for ARBs. The analysis is constituted at two levels; the first level looks at intersection of institutions (state, ngos and community) as axis of domination. Community is complex and constituted by intersections within. Thus, the next level looks at intersections within community, which are constituted by power relations based on color, gender, language, region and socio-economic background. In the following section I briefly explain how I understand these institutions in my analysis.

3.3.1 State

Feminists' have theorised state as "as a key site of struggles over class and gendered divisions of power in society" (Chouinard 2004: 230). Liberal feminists conceptualised state as a set of institutions, as a "neutral site through which to promote equality between men and women" (Chouinard 2004: 230). Marxist feminist insisted that state played an important role in perpetuating "gender divisions of power sustained social relations and practices oppressive to women" (Chouinard 2004: 230). Shirin Rai critiques the western

centeredness in theorising of the state that ignore the lived realities of 'third world' women and "does not take into account particular features of the post-colonial states that affect the lives of Third World women" (Rai 2013:26). In the 'third world' feminist perspective state is regarded to be of "critical importance in women's lives both public and private" (Rai 2013:31). Shirin Rai insists on the need to approach state "as a hierarchically arranged multiplicity of power relations (Rai 2013:33), such an approach allows exploring different roles played by the state and related organizations and different times and within different context (Rai 2013:33). According to Rai, "From local government officials to social services, from the police to the judges, women experience the power of the state differently as their demands and struggles develop" (Rai 2013:33). In this paper I look at developmental state and police as institutions constituted by multiplicity of power relations. Using intersectionality as a framework I analyse how intersection of these axes of power creates situation of extreme subjugation for a community.

3.2.2 Non Governmental Organization's (NGOs)

Ngos are valued as a growing part of a vibrant civil society. Michael Bratton (1989) argued, "NGOs are significant bolsterers of civil society by virtue of their participatory and democratic approach" (Bratton 1989 quoted in Mercer 2002:6). Ngos are considered the 'magic bullets', the one-stop solution for all problems of developing societies like India. "NGOs are idealized as organizations through which people help others for reasons other than profit or politics" (Fisher 1997: 442). According to the World Bank (1991) "NGOs have become an important force in the development process [mitigating] the costs of developing countries institutional weakness" (World Bank 1991:135 quoted in Fisher 1997: 444). Fisher (1997) argues that NGOs are not 'fixed and generalizable entities' (Fisher 1997: 442); their role needs to be understood within the particular context in which they are situated.

Ngos are heralded as catalyst of societal change, within developing societies, the conditions of extreme poverty, failure of state to deliver economic development often leaves Ngos as the only alternative for the marginalised groups. Women and poor are most often the targets of NGO intervention. "At the international level, NGOs are perceived as vehicles for providing democratization and economic growth in Third World countries. Within Third World countries, NGOs are increasingly considered good substitutes for weak states and markets in the promotion of economic development and the provision of basic services to most people" (Makoba 2002, no page). In this paper I look at Ngos as another axes of power. I analyse their role in creating a discourse and knowledge about the lives of the marginalised.

3.2.3 Community

I look at community not as a fixed entity but comprising of various actors. The community is not an uncontested space; it is constituted by power relations based on gender, color, region, language, caste and socio-economic background. In this paper I look at community as an institution constituted by intersection of these power relations. The across region brides within the community are discriminated based on their color, gender, region, language and socio-economic background. I understand these elements as discriminatory norms, which constitute to the 'Othering' of ARBs.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the main concepts guiding this research namely, intersectionality and gender. I have then given a review of Scott's theory of gender as an

analytical category and briefly discussed the four interrelated social levels. The next section, I have outlined the analytical framework. This section explained how the institutions of state, ngos and community are understood for analysis in this paper. The next chapter elaborates on the intersection of institutions and how it creates precarious situation of ARBs within these intersections.

Chapter 4 Intersections of Institutions

Introduction

In this chapter I use intersectionality as a concept to understand the intersection of various institutions as axes of domination that contribute to marginalisation of the community under study. The intention is to highlight how within this intersection of institutional power the situation of ARBs becomes more precarious because of their gender, skin color, socio-economic status and their identity of being a 'Paro'. This is different from the feminist conceptualization of intersectionality where the point of analysis is an individual. The first section of the chapter looks at the institution of state and how it marginalises the Mewat community based on its religion. Second section looks at the intersection of institutions (Ngos, media and the community); here I will highlight how the ARBs remain multiply marginalised within this intersection.

4.1 Mewat: trajectory of denied opportunities

It is important to locate Mewat geo-politically, socially and economically within the Indian context. This section uses data revealed in state reports on employment, education, discrepancies in fund allocation and implementation of policies as indicators of development to highlight the structural inequalities. It provides a background to help understand the trajectory of underdevelopment of Mewat as a region.

Mewat is a district in the southern part of Haryana; it lies on the fringes of the National Capital Region of Delhi. "Mewat was carved out from erstwhile Gurgaon and Faridabad districts, on 4th April 2005 as the 20th district of Haryana State" (Narang 2014,13). It needs to be mentioned here that Haryana is one of the most prosperous state's of India, therefore the situation of Mewat in terms of it's underdevelopment both social and economic reveals the biases of the state towards this community. Meo Muslims account for 70.9 per cent of the total population; they are recognized as part of the 'other backward classes' (OBC)[14] category. The categorising of certain groups based on their caste has been a subject of much debate in India, also the criteria through which certain groups get recognised, as being 'disadvantaged or backward' is a contentious issue. The question of identity based politics and affirmative action in India is complex, and thus, beyond the scope of this paper. Hereafter, I intend to only focus on the discourse of 'backwardness' that identifies and labels certain groups as 'backward[15]' and it's impact on government policies and practices.

"Whether people are identified and how they are identified by their governments have an impact on the allocation of opportunities and also on the politicization of identity based groups"(Jenkins 2003:2). The construction of identities is done through contrasting 'self' with the 'other', where the other is accorded a lower status than the self. This is similar to the dichotomy of 'Otherising' used by the colonisers to construct the image of the

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[14] In the Indian Constitution, OBCs are described as "socially and educationally backward classes", and the Government of India is enjoined to ensure their social and educational development — for example, the OBCs are entitled to 27% reservations in public sector employment and higher education see more- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other_Backward_Class

[15] When contesting the term 'backward' I only intent to critique it's discursive use, I understand the politics around it being a caste category is quite complex and beyond the scope of this paper. When using the term 'backward' I don't use it uncritically and therefore put it within quotation mark before using it.

'backward' third world. Apart from being derogatory it reeks of the same colonial logic that accords subordinate status to the colonised, viewing them as 'backward' and thus, worthy of no respect.

The discourse of 'backwardness' of a particular community reinforces the stereotypes and puts this population in a type they cannot break away from. According to Foucault, "this production of knowledge about economically disadvantaged people plays a significant role in maintaining them in this position" (Mills 2003:70). 'Backwardness' is constituted to maintain power and dominance over a certain population, in this particular case it is attributed to the 'backward' status of Muslims against their Hindu counterparts. The following section highlights how this discourse of 'backwardness' becomes the lens through which the state views this population and the same gets translated in it's policies and practices.

Official classification that leads to categorising of certain groups fails to take into account the intersection of caste, class, color, religion and region that are important in shaping ones social identity. 'Backwardness' is understood as lack of social and economic mobility. Various researches have been done to interrogate the 'backwardness' of Muslims in India. Unfortunately most studies essentialize Muslims as a community thus attributing their 'backwardness' to their culture (more in the next section). For instance, lack of education among girls is explained to Muslim beings hesitant to embrace modern education, similarly poverty is explained through high fertility rates and religion. The problem with such essentialist approaches is that they homogenise the experiences of a community. 'Backwardness' here becomes a prism through which the community is viewed and this generalisation gets worse when it comes to women within this community.

Haryana's literacy rate of 75.55 per cent is higher than the national average of 74.04 per cent. Appallingly, the literacy rate of Mewat according to 2011 census is 56.14 per cent, which is much lower than the state average and the national average. According to 2011 census the population of Mewat is over 1 million, the economically active population is just 0.4 million, which is 40 per cent of the total population (as quoted in Narang 2014:14). "Muslims earn only 33 per cent of what Hindus earn, partly because of the poor condition of Muslim-dominated districts like Mewat and, in contrast, the affluence of the adjacent Hindu-dominated district of Gurgaon" (Jafferlot and Kalaiyarasan 2018). Despite being closer to the country's capital and being located in one of the most prosperous state's in India these figures reveal the marginalisation of Mewat within the state's development agenda.

According to the statistics revealed by a recent report published by Policy Commission of India Mewat is the 'most backward region of the country'[16]. According to Narang (2014) "Mewat has the largest concentration of Muslims, since, religion and caste have important bearing on the socio-economic status of households, the high concentration of Meo Muslims, minorities classified as OBCs, also indicates a higher level of denied opportunities for socio-economic development" (Narang 2014: 15).

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[16] The Aayog released the baseline ranking for 101 aspirational districts based on 49 indicators across final sectors that includes health and nutrition (30% weightage), education (30%), agriculture and water resources (20%), financial inclusion and skill development (10%) and basic infrastructure (10%) Read more at: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/63524304.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

The findings of the report further reveal that 11 out of 20 most 'backward districts'[17] are Muslim dominated. According to Jafferlot and Kalaiyarasan (2018) "the problem lies in the continued focus on districts, when the relevant units of analysis are communities" (Jafferlot and Kalaiyarasan 2018). Though flaws in budgetary allocation, planning and implementation are central to the continuing underdevelopment of the region, it's imperative to interrogate the biases based on religion towards a community that has led to their continuous marginalization from the development loop.

4.2 Religion, Social Exclusion and Development

I conducted my fieldwork in the Mewat district of Haryana, which is officially known as Nuh district. Mewat is a two-hour drive from Gurgaon, which has become the leading financial and industrial hub of the country, having the third highest per capita income in India. Located only at distance of 52 kms from Gurgaon and 66 kms from the National capital of Delhi the situation of Mewat is a paradox in the development story of India.

I intended to interview ARBs with questions relating to their everyday lives but through my experiences in the field and conversations with women I felt that it's pertinent that this research highlights the structural inequalities and neglect by the state the community has been witnessing. All my respondents were ARBs who were married between the ages of 11-15; each couple has between 2-12 children. My respondent and host in the village, Salma has 11 children the youngest is a daughter aged 2.5 years old the eldest son is around 25 years old. Lack of contraception and sexual and reproductive health services is a critical issue, which needs immediate attention. Most women had their first child at the age of 15; another respondent Nisha from Jharkhand has 9 children the oldest is above 25 and youngest 6 child months old. Salma informed that she doesn't want her daughters to work like her in the mountains so she sent them to school till eight standard (mainly till they attain puberty). Following that it's not safe, boys hang out outside schools in groups so it is scary for girls. Lack of public transport, increasing cases of violence and rape are other reasons why they feel it's better to keep the daughters at home. Dearth of infrastructure at schools is a huge issue that has led to huge illiteracy, "People in Mewat face a considerable deprivation of both personal and community assets. As far as educational infrastructure is concerned, Mewat has hardly any higher educational institutions and displays a precarious situation of educational facilities" (Narang 2014:19). According to 2011 census the female literacy rate is 36 per cent, which is way below the literacy rate of females in Haryana at 65.94 per cent (2011 census)

The second village I visited was Chilla located in Taoru tehsil of Mewat, the village has a population of 3755 of which 1941 are males and 1814 are females as per the 2011 census[18]. During the conversations it emerged that only two men in the entire village have a government job, all others are seasonal labourers with no fixed source of livelihood.

The inequality and extreme poverty within which this community lives is gut wrenching. It was absolutely devastating to witness the destitute and misery to see young children without food and clothes. The story of Mewat is of neglect and marginalization from the state developmental agenda. On my return to Gurgaon while discussing the situation the most common response I would get was "*oh they are Muslims they produce too many children*" these kinds of stereotypes serve to justify the injustice that this community faces.

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[17] As quoted in the planning commission's report of baseline ranking for 101 aspirational districts see more: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/muslims-socio-economic-development-5144318/

[18] https://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/63059-chilla-haryana.html

Haryana is one of the most developed states of India; it's also the state with the worst sex ratio. Mewat the most underdeveloped region of the state has the best sex ratio 932 compared to Haryana's average of 871 per 1000 males (2011 census). Haryana government has launched hugely funded campaigns to 'save the girl child' in the state. I was talking to an activist who had received a project to study the implications of low sex ratio in the state, when I spoke of Mewat she said "but Mewat has no sex selection problem the sex ratio is fine so including Mewat in our study was not important"

Under the Indian Govt flagship campaign Beti Bachao Beti Padhao[19] which when translated means 'save the daughter, educate the daughter' the proposed allocation in 2018-19 has been increased to 280 crore rupees for the fiscal year 2018-19 (as quoted in the economic times), the problems with implementation and failure of the scheme is separate issue. The point is that since, Mewat does not have a 'sex-ratio problem' it remains excluded from these projects. "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao programme has been implemented through campaigns with the objective of improvement in sex ratio through societal change. The programme was launched on 22nd January 2015 by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, it has been implemented in all districts of Haryana except Mewat" (as mentioned in the website of Women & Child Development Department, Govt. of Haryana). Given these narratives it appears that having a good sex ratio has proved to be disadvantageous to Mewat and has led to it's further marginalisation in the Govt schemes. The state in it's drive to achieve some 'ideal ratio' of men and women neglects the fate and future of the girls who are living in extreme poverty and lack basic resources of well-being. This puts them at a risk of early child marriage; early pregnancy and higher fertility rate thus, putting them in a never-ending loop of destitution and discrimination.

It needs to be noted that the campaign was launched to promote overall development and protection of the girl child, but it somehow remains fixated with improving the numbers in sex ratio. The overall development and well being of girls remain neglected and communities like Mewat get further marginalized firstly because of their minority status and secondly because they "don't have a problem" as far as the numbers are concerned.

On my first visit to Mewat my father-in-law who is a upper caste Jat[20] from Haryana accompanied me since he wanted to make sure that I am all safe as Mewat as a region is infamous for violence and loots[21]. Looking at men on the streets wearing their traditional clothing –ankle length pants, kurta and a cap, he commented, "what kind of an outfit is this why do these people want to stay in this kind of 'backward' religion", his resentment towards the community echoes the shared hostility of the upper caste, affluent Jats towards the Meo community. These prejudices are reflected in the marginalisation of the

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[19] BBBPS is a centrally sponsored scheme that provides 100% financial assistance to state governments to encourage girl child education. Haryana has 20 districts that are in the gender critical district list. See more- https://thewire.in/education/beti-bachao-beti-padhao-scheme-failed

[20] Hindus are divided into a number of castes like Jats, **Brahmins**, Ahirs, Gujars, Aggarwals, Arora Khatris, **Sainis**, **Rajputs** and Rors. Among them all, the Jats occupy a pre-eminent position in Haryana, being the largest group in the state see more- https://www.jatland.com/home/Haryana

[21] From various documented accounts (not directly connected to the Meos) it is apparent that Meos were perceived as a problem for the state in Delhi as well as at Ulwar (present day Alwar in Rajasthan). They were known to indulge in "criminal" activities like looting and maintain a rebellious stance towards the state and were looked upon as the "other." (Chawla 2016) These stereotypes have become ahistoric over time and continue to influence the attitude towards the community. See more:
https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/10/web-exclusives/how-meos-shape-their-identity.html?0=ip_login_no_cache%3D8e8baa105b06b534a79d53a0afb8d6d1

community in the state developmental agenda and in increased cases of violence's being witnessed under the current right wing Government[22].

According to Naila Kabeer "disadvantage results in social exclusion when the various institutional mechanisms through which resources are allocated and value assigned operate in such a way as to systematically deny particular groups of people the resources and recognition which would allow them to participate fully in the life of that society" (Kabeer 2000:86). The kind of social exclusion and marginalization faced by this community is representative of the tyranny of the state and lop sided development policies. The politically induced conditions of maximized vulnerability exposes this community to arbitrary violence by the state (both direct and indirect) further the intersection of caste, socio-economic status and religion exacerbates their marginalization in the state developmental agenda.

4.3 Intersection of institutions and across region brides:

While talking about the community it is important to elucidate that community here is not understood as a fixed unit. I am aware that it's pertinent to look into various actors and groups that are part of the community. The research therefore in no way intends to homogenous the experiences of different groups and actors, which are diverse, based on their location. The Meo community though totally marginalized is still hierarchical; the discrimination based on color, gender, religion and socio-economic status is prevalent within the community. Since I had limited time for conducting the fieldwork I only look at one specific group, the women, who are ARBs in Mewat. The above section highlighted the marginalisation of the Meo community based on religion. In this section I intend to emphasize how the intersection of institutions create situation of extreme oppression for across region women in Mewat. I mainly look at intersection of civil society, state, media and the community as institutions.

4.3.1 NGOs, Media and the State

While looking for sources to help establish contacts for fieldwork I came across some occurrences through which I learnt about the problematic role that NGOs are playing in distorting the reality of ARBs in Mewat. I therefore decided to use a local woman, Roza, who had previously worked with NGOs but now has parted given some differences. I later learnt during my conversations with her and other women that how they have been deceived by people from NGOs. The NGOs has been cheating women under the pretext of promising them livelihood and selling their stories to the international media.

After conducting my first set of interviews with Salma and other women from Kansali village I was doing desk research on the media reporting on the issue. I came across a story in the Guardian newspaper titled 'I was bought for 50,000 rupees: India's trafficked brides'[23] (Estal 2018, no page) which along with other women's narratives also talked about

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[22] Cow protection homes- *The Wire*'s investigations revealed how 16 people lost their lives in extra-judicial killings by the police on the suspicion of smuggling cows in this region in recent years, 13 of them after 2014. Most victims were young Muslim men from weaker socio-economic castes such as Qureshis and Meos, with marginal assets or land. Most among the slain were truck drivers, partially dependent on farming, animal husbandry, dairy and meat supply for livelihood See more- http://neha-dixit.blogspot.com/2018/08/for-haryana-police-holy-cow-is-excuse.html

[23]The full article can read here, the title itself frames across-region women as trafficked and slaves thus presenting them all as victims. See more: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/mar/07/india-girls-women-trafficked-brides-sexual-domestic-slavery

Salma, one of my respondents and my host in the Kansali village. According to the report, Salma was married to a widower, Anwar, who already had six children from his first wife.

> "She was sold to Anwar[24], a widower 20 years older who already had six children by his first wife. She says she was beaten by her husband and his family they wanted me to obey them, and if I objected they always had the same words for me: 'we own you because we bought you." (Estal 2018, no page)

It further says that after the NGOs intervention the husband named property after her and now her home has become a shelter home for other *Paros* in the village. (Estal 2018, no page)

> "She was visited by activists from Empower People who told her what rights she had as a wife and mother. Now, her husband has agreed to give her a property in her name, which means that she and her children are secure if Anwar dies before she does…. Her home has become a meeting place and refuge for the other *paro* women living in her village, and she also helps others in her wider community who have been trafficked into marriage" (Estal 2018, no page).

This report came as a shock to me I had just visited Salma and spent a long time talking to her and her husband, the story that Salma told me was completely different. Salma was married to Anwar at the age of 11, she was bought from Calcutta because Anwar's mother had died and they needed a woman to take care of his siblings who were still very young. Salma also told me how Anwar stood by her side and refused to leave her when her father in-law would beat her and ask her to leave because of her dark skin colour. Further she informed that family was very poor and Anwar cannot work because of old age. She has been working and supporting her family, in fact, their current home she has built it through her own earnings. She has 11 children with Anwar. In addition no shelter home was there, in fact Anwar and Salma had already narrated to me the deception they had received through this NGO. This incident was an eye-opener to me, it made me realise how through such stories the realities of innocent people are distorted and traded by the media for sensational reporting and by NGOs to pursue the funder's agenda.

The dominant narrative of framing all across region brides as victims of trafficking that need to be rescued ignores the histories and complexities of their lives. It forecloses any conversation about the lived realities, experiences and structural inequalities that they as a community face. Most NGO projects are driven by the priorities of their international funding agencies, maintaining of the trafficking narrative is essential to their survival and for justifying their intervention. This is also reflective of the power and dominance of the imperialistic framework and ideologies over the lives of the marginalised. Media plays a dominant role in reproduction of the stereotypes and construction of all 'third world' women as hapless victims. The western Ngo's construct third world women as 'damaged' to justify their own "interventionist impulse" (Doezema 2001:17)

It's no denying that often these marriages are conducted in dubious ways and this research in no way intends to romanticise the lives of these women. The emphasis is to highlight the systemic injustices that often get silenced and erased under the dominant narratives and sensationalised reporting.

Another issue that needs attention here is the narrative of sex selection and how this is taking away resources and attention from critical issues that women in this community are facing. Most NGOs working in the region, are either working to 'save the girl child' or to 'save the victims of trafficking'. The issues of exclusion and poverty get marginalized in this dominant narrative of sex selection and bride trafficking. According to Abu Lughod (2002)

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[24] Name changed since I have not used real names of my respondents in this research paper

"representations of the unfreedom of others that blame the chains of culture insight rescue missions by outsiders. Such representations mask the histories of internal debate and institutional struggles over justices that have occurred in every nation. They also deflect attention from the social and political forces that are responsible for the ways people live" (Abu Lughod 2002: 20).

The women I interviewed came to Mewat as brides or got married after coming to Mewat. They have been living in the region for 35-45 years, there concern was not that they were married so far off and that they wanted to be rescued and sent back. Their lives are now here in Mewat, with their husband and children. Thus, their main concern is livelihood, food, clothing, education and medical facilities for their children. Labelling them as victim of trafficking puts the state in a rescue mission, deflecting attention from the structural issues and perpetuating the stigma of being an outsider.

"Women in the region had expertise in handicraft work like weaving of daris, gudari, shawls and other traditional craft, but the State government had not promoted handicraft industry in Nuh" (Kumar 2018, no page). When I first visited Salma's house I was surprised by the beautiful handicraft work that they did, I then came to know that women here make beautiful bed sheets and baskets. An NGO had set up a sewing centre in Salma's courtyard, several sewing machines were brought, pictures taken and women were asked to make samples for them. They promised them livelihood and made them work on producing samples without any remuneration. This went on for a few years after which, they abruptly took away all the setup and never came back. Roza says that after this particular incident she decided to stop working with the NGO. She says that she was the one who got women together to work at the sewing centre, thus, feels answerable for this scam.

According to Sara Salem "For many women in postcolonial societies, the aim is not to challenge men, but rather to challenge the system and structures that allow men to become dominant. There can be no feminism without anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, and so on, because patriarchy does not exist in isolation from imperialism, capitalism and other structures" (Salem 2014, no page). I find this perspective very relevant in analysing the role played by the NGOs and the media in framing the all cross-region brides as victims of trafficking and "sexual slaves"[25] This narrative not only harms women but also frames all men as perpetrators and sexual offenders. In plotting men as the real enemies, the attention is diverted from the structural inequalities that necessitate ARMs and create conditions of exploitation within these marriages.

Framing all ARBs as victims of trafficking highlights the need to interrogate how knowledge is produced and individual subjectivities constructed. All the women I interviewed critiqued the work done by NGOs. They narrated the deception they have received and the problematic role of the police and local authorities. The failure of state in assuring the well being of this community creates space for exploitation by the NGOs. Poverty and lack of livelihood is a huge issue in the region followed by lack of contraception, hospitals and schools. In absence of any state support the NGOs are often the only hope. In most cases across region women are either married to men who are either old or addicted, which puts the burden of earning for the family and children on the woman. From the interviews it emerged that the intervention made by NGOs is mostly on the pretext of promising women livelihood that is the reason why women share their stories with them. However, analyses of reporting show that in the media the interventions

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[25] **"**Paros: Brides Who Are Sold To Have Children, Be Sex Slaves, And Serve As Domestic Help" **See more-** https://thelogicalindian.com/story-feed/awareness/paros/

are justified as rescue missions thus reinstating the stigma of being trafficked and purchased.

> "I like cooking for people, I cooked a lot when people from NGO visited, and they would come with foreigners and stay in our house. I called him brother but he cheated on me – I have never seen such a fraudster like him. They come talk to us, take notes and then tell that we are bad, if I am bad tell me. I don't want to go back, this is my life. I will only go to god's house now" - Salma, Bangladesh

Women said that police never helps them; they are refused help saying that they are Paro's and this is their fate. They also said how police sees them as "loose" or characterless women and therefore doesn't take cases of their abuse seriously. During a conversation I was told that the police never give them any protection in cases of domestic violence. Nisha a woman from Jharkhand was facing a lot of violence from her husband and in laws; her neighbours (Salma and Asma) tried to intervene at times but never reached out to the police because they knew that their complaints wont be registered. In fact, the police will harass them. Finally after Roza Khan's intervention the violence has stopped for nearly a year now. They said that police also sees them as prostitutes having no fidelities. The identity of Paro thus has implications on women being able to access their rights and protections that should be guaranteed to them as citizens of a state.

The socio-economic status, gender and marginalisation within the community (more in the next section) makes across region brides further vulnerable to the exploitation by the NGOs and the state. This narrative has implications on the attitude of the state towards across region brides, the constant framing of them as being trafficked and waiting to be rescued forecloses any possibility of them being recognised as citizens of the state, demanding protection and rights. This narrative also has implications of reinforcing the stereotype of Mewat society as being 'backward', and puts the blame back on the community for the situation.

4.3.2 Power relations and multiplicity of oppressions

The fourth institution is the community itself; marginalisation faced within the community is complex and constituted by the intersection of gender, skin colour, socio-economic status and identity of being an outsider. Dominant assumption of femininity, monogamy, color, class, loyalty – constitute to 'Othering' of across region brides. They are shunned for their dark skin colour, inability to understand the language and for being purchased. Their subordination is maintained and sustained through creation of 'Paro' as an identity- the distinct 'other' (more in the next chapter). This Othering is also evident in how they are treated in comparison to local brides.

Salma an across-region-bride from Bangladesh was married to Anwar at the age of 11; her husband was around 25 years of age at the time of marriage. She has been living here for 45 years now and has never visited her parents again. Salma has 11 children the youngest one is a daughter who is 2.5 years old. Her husband is too old to work now so she works as a daily wage labourer in the mountains cutting grass and picking sticks. Salma's earnings are the only source of livelihood for the family. She explained how after few years her father-in-law would beat her and ask her to leave because of her dark skin. They also called her dumb because she didn't understand the local language and could not follow instructions. He did not want Anwar to continue living with her and wanted Anwar to get another bride.

> "My father in law used to beat me because of my skin color, he said I was dark skinned and they cant keep me"- Salma, Bangladesh

Domestic violence and subordinate status of women is a reality for women across Haryana, the lack of family support however makes the across region brides further vulnerable to incidences of violence. So while for local women the subordination is largely based on gender, for women from far away region it's the intersection of skin color, their socio-economic status, inability to understand local language and stigma of being purchased that adds to their vulnerability and creates conditions of increased exploitation of their labour and violence.

> "If there is some dispute happening over water or any other discussion and we try to give an opinion they taunt on us saying – "Ae Paro Tu bhi bole hai" meaning Oh the Paro will also talk now- it really hurts to hear such things we are also human beings."- Aliyah, Calcutta

> "My sister in law, (a local bride from Mewat) if she fights with my mother in law it is acceptable, but if I answer back they all gang up against me."- Jamila Jharkhand

While local women face same kind of discrimination within the community based on gender, they are privileged by their socio-economic status and colour in relation to ARBs. A local bride has support of a family who can intervene on her behalf, also the families are socially related so the in laws fear being shamed in the community if the women reports ill-treatment. For women from across region this local support is missing which makes them further vulnerable.

> "No one respects us here. If we had our brother or father around they wont dare behave like this with us" –Jamila, Jharkhand

Fidelity and Chastity are other determinants that constitute to the Othering of ARBs. The local stereotypes about women from across region related to their loyalty chastity create conditions of hostility.

> "*Paro marti nahin, inka Kabristaan nahin yeh sab bhag jaati hai budhape mein*" local saying that they don't make graveyards for Paros since they don't die they all run away in old age it shows the lack of respect and trust towards them.

Women emphasized that they are called prostitutes. This is embedded in how female sexuality is understood and the subsequent construction of their identity as 'Paro' as someone who is impure. I delve into this issue in further detail in the next chapter. Most ARMs are arranged through brokers who are mostly male. The women travel from their native region to Haryana with a broker, thus, the element of sexual abuse is a given and uncertainties about her chastity lead to the labelling of being a prostitute. The socio-economic status of a across region bride (belonging to a poor family) and been 'sold'[26] to a stranger creates her identity as a 'Paro' a term when translated means someone from far away but is increasingly used as akin to being a prostitute. The position of across region brides has been made more precarious through reinforced image of 'Paro' as an outsider in the media, through NGO narratives and supposed stigma they should feel about their social situation.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how across region brides are multiply marginalized, in some instances it's based on their gender, in others it is their skin color but almost in all instances the socio-economic positioning is the strongest. This shows how the disadvantage and lack of development in the region has created conditions of maximized vulnerability for the

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[26] I put this in quotes as most of my respondents said they were not sold, the parents did not receive any money. The groom only paid for the wedding expenses, however the larger perception sees all across region brides as sold.

marginalized within which ARBs are worst affected given their positioning within the community. The role of Ngos and the state highlighted how the totalizing narrative is a form of epistemic injustice, which erases the lived realities, and voices of the concerned population. The consequences of this narrative is devastating, it has exacerbated the social injustice that women from across region are witnessing in Mewat.

Chapter 5 Multiple burden of 'Othering'- structural constraints and individual subjectivities

Introduction

This chapter contends the overarching trafficking narrative by privileging the everyday lives and experiences of across-region brides. The intention is not to romanticise the situation but look at less visible forms of actions that women employ to survive within structures of subordination. I feel this emphasis is important to breakaway from the binary of the 'oppressed and free'. Such an approach erases individual experiences and knowledge by privileging the dominant narrative. According to Collins (1993) "dominant groups aim to replace subjugated knowledge with their own specialised thought because they realise that gaining control over this dimension of subordinate groups' lives simplifies control" (Collins 1993:557). In this chapter through narratives of women I explore the position and participation of women in across region marriages. In the second section I explain the construction of 'Paro' as an identity. The last section explores the diversity of experiences and lived realities of across-region-brides through highlighting multiplicity in their experiences.

5.1 Understanding participation of Men and Women in across region Marriages

All women interviewed cited poverty as the most compelling reason for entering these marriages. The parents cannot afford to pay the dowry demanded by grooms in local marriage. Furthermore, to avoid the stigma that having an unmarried daughter would bring to the family, parents think it is better to marry their daughter to a man from far away region. In most cases parents did not receive any money, the grooms family only paid for the wedding expenses.

Most women belong to families with 6-7 daughters; given the poverty it is impossible to get them married thus a man from far away region willing to marry their daughter and also pay for all the wedding expenses is the best available option given their situation.

"My parents were extremely poor they couldn't get me married to a local man" – Fiza Jharkhand

"My parents didn't take any money, my husband paid for the wedding expenses" – Jamila Jharkhand

While for women the main trigger for marriage was poverty followed by stigma to their parents, for men range of factors influenced their decision to seek an across-region-bride. It emerged from the interviews that men who are have exceeded the age of marriage, which are old, poor, physically disabled or widowed are the ones seek women from another region.

"My son is 24 so people say his age is more so cannot get a bride locally, here ideal age is 17-18 above this need to give money to get a bride – it's cheaper to get a woman from other state" – Anwar, Kansali village, Mewat

These narratives highlight differential experiences of poverty based on gender. While for women, marrying a man from far away region was the only option available for men, seeking an ARB is often the last resort when he has exhausted all possibilities of marrying a local woman. In terms of power though men who enter these marriages are marginalized

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within the community on the basis of their socio-economic status, caste, bodily status and age but within the marriage they are privileged by gender in relation to their ARB. The position of women remains multiply marginalized both within the community and within the household.

Marriage as an institution plays an important role in shaping individual experiences. In India marriage is seen to be the final recourse for a 'good woman'. Being married at an acceptable age is also linked to family honour. A woman's social status is associated with her male counterpart, which is a father before marriage and husband after marriage. Thus, marriage becomes a social necessity to avoid stigma and shame. Women internalise these virtues and gender norms, they consider it their duty to marry a man to relieve her family of this 'burden'.

For men too marriage remains to be an important determinant of attaining social adulthood (Kaur 2015, no page). However, in this case most men are comparatively much older, they have been unable to find a bride locally and thus "in the absence of social security and old-age provision systems, reproduction and a family become a natural survival strategy" (Kaur 2015, no page). We see that even though for both men and women marriages becomes a survival strategy the triggers are influenced by gender roles, for women it is necessitated by internalising a role of a good daughter and a good woman. For men the need for getting a wife is influenced by the gender role of seeing woman as a 'natural' caregiver. An ARB thus, becomes someone who can provide care and comfort.

5.2 'Paro' the distinct 'Other'- social norms and identity construction

Premarital virginity and monogamy are considered virtues of a chaste and good woman in Indian society. Chastity is a quintessential part of women's identity, this chastity and purity is maintained and regulated through endogamous marriage system [27]. Women are considered the bearers of family honour, thus controlling her sexuality and reproduction is essential to maintenance of male dominance and caste purity. In ARMs both these rules are being transgressed, in most cases the caste of across-region-bride is unknown which leads to questioning of caste purity of the progenies of such marriages (something I will return to later). Second are the assumptions about their sexual fidelity. Women reported that they called out as being prostitutes and seen as characterless women.

> "Haryana is the worst place, people here are bad they mock on small children calling their mother prostitute and Paro. It's their parents who teach them, children don't know these things. Yesterday one small kid was passing and called me 'Paro-randi' (paro, prostitute)" – Salma, Bangladesh

The construction of Paro as someone impure and thus, akin to a concubine is embedded on how female sexuality is understood within the society. This discourse of difference on the basis of 'purity' is anchored in opposition to chastity and purity as virtues of a good woman. Thus the identity of a 'Paro' is constructed in opposition to the local woman, who is pure both in terms of caste and fidelity. Construction of this dichotomy positing a good woman against the 'Paro' serves to legitimize social dominance and control of women's bodies and sexuality. In my fieldwork discrimination based on caste did not emerge as a major concern, slurs on sexual promiscuity were most common and were reported by all women. Apprehensions about fidelity of 'Paro' as a wife leads to restricted

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[27] In prescribing endogamy, the caste system ensures it's own reproduction. This is because marriage is particularly associated with procreation. The practice of marrying and having children within one's own caste group ensures that both the group and the hierarchy among groups remain in place (Mishra 2013:72)

mobility and more control especially for younger women. This representation of 'Paro' also has bearing on how women see themselves (I deal with this in detail in the next section).

The discrimination experienced by ARBs is intergenerational and is experienced by their children. The stigma of being a child of a Paro is worse for daughters who are shunned for their mother's identity in their affinal home.

> "When they know their mother is a Paro why they marry my daughters, they shouldn't if they have a problem. They come to my house asking for their hand in marriage, they already know that I am a Paro so why they discriminate against them after marriage – they don't keep my daughters well -They discriminate against my daughters since their mother is a Paro- they insult them saying your mother didn't teach you anything and your mother is a prostitute" Salma, Bangladesh

The ideology of female chastity is deep rooted in the society and gives primacy to sexual 'purity' and stigmatises across region women as 'impure'. It leads to construction of 'Paro' as an identity. This stigmatisation is further reinforced through media narratives that address them as 'sexual slaves' in their reporting.

5.3 Across Region Brides- self representation

When talking of discrimination and abuse I no way intend to homogenise the experiences of all ARBs. During my conversation with women I learnt that their experiences are diverse and even within this group that is totally marginalised hierarchies exist. I could see clear distinction in attitude of women who said they were rightfully married by their parents and given away in a marriage ceremony compared to those who came to Mewat with a broker. Further their experiences are also influenced by their relationship with their husband, lighter skin color and proximity to their natal families and ability to work outside the household. Access to mobile phones among younger brides also had influence on their position within the marriage.

> According to Salma her daughter in law Daisha's life (a bride she purchased from a village in neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh) is much better compared to what she went through, "she talks to her family on phone (have access to mobile) which is not the same as me – I never saw my family again I have no one to call"- Salma, Bangladesh

I was shown this comparatively big house in village Kansali and told that it belongs to a Paro. Women said that she is fair in color and has control over her husband; she was therefore able to create a better life for her and her children. This incident showed that not all across-region-women have the same life; some have been able to make it through. It also made me realise how women are self aware of what they lack (in this case fair skin color) which puts them on a lower pedestal compared to women with lighter skin color. They further told me that Paro's who have a better life don't want to associate with other Paros. This shows the hierarchies within this group, women who are able to make it through internalise and reproduce the dominant biases of color and socio-economic status. They start to identify themselves more with the dominant group, in this case the local women given their lighter skin and better socio-economic status.

Women who were older and working outside the house had more mobility and showed more autonomy in decision-making within the household.

> "When I came I was not allowed to go anywhere but after having children I started working and doing everything myself… I don't depend on anyone I do everything myself" Salma, Bangladesh

These narratives show that experiences of ARBs are diverse and influenced by a range of factors. Women who work outside showed more confidence compared to younger women who were not allowed to work outside the house. Economic independence gives them better control over their lives. Even though they realise that local women are never required to work outside and extra demands on their labour is due to their outsider status. They internalise these perceptions and use this as an opportunity to provide for their children and also take pride in their hard work.

5.4 Burden of dual belonging

"One who knows hunger values the food and needs roti (bread)"- discrimination depends on the woman", if she is adjusting and values her family then they live happily but if she is not hardworking and wastes money then no one likes her. So it depends on a woman her future after marriage. – Anwar, Kansali Village

The discrimination faced by the wife and children also impacts the man, marrying an ARB implies subordinate social and economic status within the community however within the household he is still privileged by his gender. In the interviews it emerged that couples develop affinity towards each other and often are each other's only support system.

Salma spoke about how her husband stood by her side when her father-in-law wanted him to leave her and marry another woman. Such instances show that the relations people develop within this process are complex and cannot be understood only through the lenses of victims and perpetrators. Women's experiences are further influenced by their conjugal relationships; these bonds are intrinsic and serve as support systems for surviving oppression. They recognize that their husband may be kind hearted; the conjugal bond they develop is often their only support.

"My brother in laws also beat me, my husband is a nice man he is not like other men he has a soft heart he doesn't beat me but when his brothers beat me is unable to stand up against them since he is scared of them and respects them" Jamila, Jharkhand

The burden of adjustment and creating the space for her depends on the women. ARBs are sought for their reproductive and productive labour, mainly men who are old get a young bride from far away region to ensure he is taken care of in old age. Thus, an across-region-woman has to work harder to not just fulfil the stereotypical role of a good wife but also a strong breadwinner for the family. The burden of belonging, therefore, lies on the woman and her ability to perform these roles.

5.5 Coping mechanisms

An analysis of narratives about everyday lives of across region brides shows how they are multiply marginalized but it also makes possible further interrogation into the coping mechanism that women have developed in absence of any state or outside support. No human being completely surrenders to the situation and instead tries to survive despite the situation. An analysis of narratives that emerged from the interviews gives interesting insights into everyday activities that women employ to thrive even in situations of extreme oppression. Husband and children is all that women have and the future of their children is the hope they live with. Within this extreme oppression, there are small aspects of these lives through which they make their everyday liveable.

Self-inflicted solitude can be said to be a survival strategy to avoid the discrimination. They avoid interacting with other villagers and avoid social gatherings because they know

that they don't get the same respect. They also feel vulnerable in such spaces, and therefore, try to evade such spaces.

> "Villagers never invited me to any weddings or celebrations; I know they don't want me there so I don't go I keep to myself. I am happy in my house" Salma, Bangladesh

> "Villagers invite us but we don't get the same respect – we feel that even if they don't say it's evident"- Aliyah, Calcutta

Through working outside women get more mobility, they are able to create networks with other women.

> "Meeting women from our village feels nice, we share rice with each other when we can here people only eat Roti"- Aliyah, Calcutta

In absence of support from the state, women have created informal networks among themselves that provide safe spaces of talking to each other, sharing experiences and also reaching out to other women like Roza Khan, who they can approach in cases of violence and abuse.

Roza khan has been working to help ARBs for over 19 years now; she said that after marriage she faced a lot of violence from brothers of her husband, they used to beat her up. However, since she started working with the NGOs and has respect among the police and judiciary the power dynamics have changed. They now come to her for help when their daughters face problems and abuse. On the question that how she thinks the situation can improve Roza says-

> "People should stop calling them Paros and put an end to Paro culture- even kings need to marry their daughters cant feed them to life so what's wrong with their parents marrying them off"

Conclusion

This chapter by privileging the everyday lives of ARBs contended the homogenising narrative of trafficking. It highlighted the diversities in women's experiences and everyday realities and practices. In this chapter I have argued for giving more attention to the complexities of the situation of ARBs. Creating knowledge about the lives of women through their narratives is important in understanding the densities of their situation. Such an approach opens space for further interrogation into the complexities, which will lead to more nuanced policy solutions.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the findings by revisiting the main research question. It highlights the theoretical and analytical contributions made to the current studies on ARBs. The chapter concludes by offering suggestions for further research on the issue.

The aim of the study was to contribute to knowledge production of the voices and lived realities of ARBs that often that silenced in the dominant narrative of trafficking. With the use of analytical concepts of intersectionality and gender I have attempted to highlight how the state, ngos, and community exercise their domination. How this intersection of axes of domination creates situation of heavy oppression for ARBs and how despite their extreme vulnerability women go through their everyday lives. I have used interviews, participant observation and informal conversations as methods to understand the complexities of everyday lives of ARBs.

Chapter one highlighted the research problem through providing a contextual background, reviewing the existing literature and framing the main research question. The second chapter I have elucidated my research process, this chapter is a reflexive exercise, I have talked in detail about the challenges, ethical dilemmas, field encounters that shaped my research. I hope that my field reflections can provide methodological insights for first time researchers. In the third chapter I have explained the conceptual and analytical framework used for this research.

In the fourth chapter, I developed my argument by highlighting the structural inequalities and marginalisation of the Meo community in the state developmental agenda. The analysis is done on two levels; in the first part I have used the concept of intersectionality to illustrate how intersection of institutions as axes of domination has resulted in extreme exclusion of a community. This is different from the feminist conceptualisation of intersectionality where the point of analysis is an individual. The next section highlighted intersection of ngos, media and community as axes of power relations how this creates situation of extreme oppression for across region brides. The community is complex and there exists intersections within community. Thus, I have elucidated in this section the intersection of power relations within community, based on gender, skin color, language, socio-economic background and outsider status. The chapter concluded by highlighting the multiply marginalised position of across region brides within these intersections.

In chapter five, I contended the homogenising narrative of trafficking put forth by the ngos and the media. In this chapter I highlighted through narratives of women the complexity of their lives and lived realities. I use gender to deepen my analysis and understand how the identity of Paro is constructed. The chapter builds an understanding on the position and participation of women in ARMs, how their experiences are shaped through the social norms. It challenges dehumanising narrative of 'sexual slaves' by highlighting the diversity of women's experiences. Being differently placed in terms of status (in this case skin color), conjugal relations, ability to work all shape experiences of across-region-brides. This chapter through giving attention to small elements of everyday life opens space for further interrogation to the complexity of the lives of women. I conclude the chapter by arguing that structural inequalities and social injustices that women are witnessing get silenced under the dominant narrative of trafficking, thus, the lived realities of women need to be given more attention.

I use intersectionality of institutions to highlight the operation of axes of domination and how they act together to marginalise a community. This I believe is the main

contribution of this research. This framework helps in challenging the trafficking narrative; it also brings to attention the structural inequalities that lead to exclusion of a community and increased vulnerability of women. This intersection of the power relations exposes the limitation of viewing such marriages through the lens of trafficking. It opens space for further interrogation into the lives of the marginalised, thus exposing the social injustices and discrimination.

In this research I only look at one group within the community, the ARBs. The discrimination faced by ARBs also affects their husband, thus an in-depth study on masculinity understanding the role of men would be useful. Another important dimension is the role of caste and religion, thus in future a more in-depth study focusing on these issues will be relevant to deepen understanding on the complexity of ARMs.

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