

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TOOLS AND PROCESSES OF
EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED
COMMUNITIES AS UNDER AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND THE EU
FRAMEWORK,
THE CASE OF THE ROMA OF HUNGARY AND THE DALITS OF
INDIA**

Malay Mishra

THESIS SUMMARY

a) Goal of work and background

This study aims at comparing the instruments and processes of empowerment and inclusion of two marginalized communities- the Roma of Hungary and Dalits of India. The objective of this study is to bring out the similarities between the two communities in their current state of marginalization despite contextual/spatial differences with a view to sharing their best practices in policy and community organization. The frameworks under which such sharing is deemed to take place are the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) in Hungary (EU) and ‘affirmative action’ in India. The background to this study have been,

- i) the historical linkage between the two communities with shared ethnic and cultural attributes,
- ii) conferences/study forums hosted in both Hungary and India to generate awareness to discover contemporary links, as contrasted with the lack of institutional and pedagogical presence on either side about these communities.

The larger purpose of this study is to give a positive thrust in studying contemporary linkages in the socio-economic and political areas so as to develop better understanding between the two marginalized communities. While on one hand it would devolve a certain responsibility on the marginalized communities to improve their lot, on the other, the state, being the medium as well as the executor of empowerment programmes, could take on the role of facilitator. This would open up opportunities for economic development and unleash the potential of their social and cultural strengths.

These strengths could be leveraged through various instruments deployed by the state, financial as well as social, in honest recognition of the acquired skills and residual knowledge within such communities. This could be further reinforced and supported with institutional deployments, viz. banks, community bodies, corporate sector, etc. In this the media, particularly the social media, as well civil society could serve as positive agents for change. This phenomenon has been clearly visible in the case of the Dalits in India who have achieved their own upward mobility within the power structure. This has not occurred so much in the Roma case; but these communities have also to some extent had recourse to advocacy and awareness drives to form their own leadership and reach out to power elites who have championed their cause.

The study thus takes a holistic view of the de-marginalization process of two important marginalized communities in not only deconstructing the system as it appears and has been observed, but also sending a useful message for all such marginalized communities to study their own empowerment processes and find ways and means of empowering them further.

The study argues that such a process enabling social integration could universalize the phenomenon of empowerment of marginalized communities while throwing open the doors for intra-community cooperation and understanding.

Having noted a distinct gap between rhetoric and reality, the study has examined in depth the ideas of four important social and political thinkers, namely, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Sen and Spivak, all those who have contributed towards the emancipation of marginalized communities in their respective ways. Linkages have been explored between their thought and action with contemporary issues of concern with a view to narrowing down the perceived gap.

This has induced a certain depth in the process of understanding not only of the causal factors of marginalization but also of the efforts made towards their resolution. The process of exploitation being a historical phenomenon, it is incumbent on social scientists, as the study suggests, to go into the roots as to finding ways of putting an end to such aberrant social behaviour leading to a perpetual disturbance in the society

b) Applied method and justification

Being a complex study dealing with two different systems, a broad range of methodologies has been applied as contextually relevant and to elicit best possible outcomes. While the standard tools of research such as critical observation, interviews, diary notes, etc. have been deployed to facilitate collection, analysis and inference of data, standpoint theory has been largely followed in triangulation of data while situating the researcher as a participant observer in an eco-system of built-in prejudices and oppression by certain groups against these communities. Thus, the observer, the researcher in this case, becomes a critical and essential component in not only being a part of the contemporary process of marginalization but more importantly acts as a lightning rod to stimulate changes as it were.

The interview has been specially used as an important means of generating data for the researcher both from the Roma on the field as well as elite in closed-door or one-on-one interviews. Interviews have also been potently used in the course of field surveys as well as with decision makers at the local, district, state and central government levels in Odisha (India) to establish useful links with the protagonists of marginalization and facilitators of social justice in real time, to understand and thereby link the phenomenon on the ground with the constitutional sanction and strength of affirmative action. The idea is to use the views of the interviewees in both contexts to test hypotheses drawn from the field after thorough participant observation in a qualitative research setting.

Besides the study has noted that though the tone of the interviewees as well as many of the policy documents were positive, the observable results in reality were, at times, not so. The gap could be ascribed to several systemic faults, least of all a miscommunication between the researcher and respondents which could generate an altogether false perception of social reality, that which is promoted as the 'new normal' by the neo-liberal state.

I have thus, as the researcher, tried to be both objective as well as subjective at the same time, objective in my meta-analysis of macro-factors and subjective in the micro-details weaving every detail observed into a coherent narrative for hypotheses generation and testing, and thus building paradigms for future action. These paradigms, it is hoped, would constitute the nodal points to take the study even beyond its stated parameters. Several of these paradigms were assessed to be organically related to societal development keeping the marginalized communities as an integral component of the society. Thus, the concepts of inclusive

community development and grassroots governance were exemplified as rooted at the centre of development for such communities where they could take their own action.

On the subjective side, I have largely made use of ethnography and reflexivity in using actual live-in experiences of interaction with marginalized communities to explain such phenomena while interpreting data thus generated as analytically and ethically as possible. Such reflexivity has also helped me immerse myself into the phenomena observed during the course of research. In a way this has been a life-changing experience for me, particularly in my position of having belonged to the power elite and now being part of the marginalized communities who were the objects of my study. While giving me the benefits of both perspectives it has also leveraged my past accumulated experience in understanding and analysing what I was observing in the present and making sense of it. This has been done best with an array of methodologies as relevant for a qualitative social science research. In the process, the study has become a useful compendium for social and political action by all stakeholders in the marginalization process and could be thus deemed useful for current as well as future research in this important area.

c) Main scientific findings and results of dissertation

Several important findings have emerged from this study, namely,

- i) marginalization is a socio-political reality and is visible amongst communities deemed marginalized, notwithstanding their geo-spatial/contextual differences, that being a historical phenomenon which has survived centuries and is intimately linked to poverty, depredation and a superficial superior-inferior construct based on race, religion, status and nationality,
- ii) marginalized communities (in this case the Roma and Dalits) could learn from each other's experiences with the facilitation of their respective governments, and that would go towards their greater empowerment and inclusion in the society,
- iii) a positive approach such that this study has taken could, while recognizing the strengths of these communities, respect them as equal and integrated members of the society,
- iv) inclusive community development and participatory grassroots governance are the most potent answers to develop the skills of these communities by themselves and provide them agency and advocacy, and thus greater legitimacy,
- v) Corruption and lack of proper management of disbursement of funds could hinder empowerment of marginalized communities unless they are dealt with suitably, this is all the more urgent as power elites tend to disregard such factors which result in jeopardising efforts made by civil society bodies and activists towards advocacy and awareness generation.
- vi) this study has sought to suggest an alternative knowledge path to the previously seen historical or anecdotal references to such marginalized communities. The path suggested here is to recognize and appreciate their cultural and social capital and provide them adequate, timely and well-conceived means for their economic sustenance where they could contribute to their own empowerment,
- vii) such an approach, focusing on 'identity' as an important marker for marginalized communities, could extend to all such communities wherever they are so disadvantageously placed, thus being a guide to working towards a 'marginalized international'. The fact of having studied the NRIS advocated by the EU in critical detail not only enhances the scope of this study but also builds a definitive framework for future comparative works in social science research.

viii) while several studies have come out on the historiography of narratives about the Roma in Europe, cross-cultural references to other similarly placed marginalized communities has been seriously lacking in social science research. This study has been a humble effort in that direction by assessing the ‘comparability’ of the Roma with the Dalits of India despite several geo-political differences while advocating their suitable contextualisation.

ix) Such an approach, it is believed, could encourage further understanding among marginalized communities in different parts of the world with approximate features, which condition them to a life of misery and suffering universally. This could further facilitate interculturalism as contrasted with the rising tendencies of authoritarianism and the concomitant spread of radicalism from both extreme left and extreme right forces.

x) The most important finding, and perhaps the most relevant, has been the impulse to integrate the needs and well-being of all sections of the society, and most particularly the marginalized communities who are the most vulnerable, and thus work towards a global rules-based system ensuring overall development, security and resilience as protection against divisive and inimical factors such as terrorism and forced migration which tend to rupture the stability of the global architecture and disrupt inter-state relations..

d) Observations relating to utilization of the dissertation

Carrying from the findings, this study, it is hoped, will add substantial value to the corpus of marginalization literature in both countries researched by way of completely bringing in a new orientation and approach and generating positive outcomes for empowerment and inclusion of marginalized communities. By implying that they are equally well endowed as the rest of the population and would just need to 'catch up' on lost time due to historical and circumstantial aberrations, it not only recognizes the worth of these communities in the future development of their societies but also assigns to the state, corporate sector, civil society and media a greater responsibility in working on them as 'social assets' leaving behind the 'delinquent culture' approach.

Furthermore, this study, in contributing to greater social cohesion and harmony and a balanced economic development, could be a valuable work for policy makers and leaders of societies where marginalized communities have hitherto been subjected to social stigma and prejudices which have been unjustly targeted at them all this time. That can, and should, change, the study affirms.

Besides, this study would go towards filling the lacuna in pedagogical discourse on such marginalized communities in reverse contexts, the Roma in India and the Dalits in Europe. This is essential not only to promote educational exchanges and cooperation among students and academics, but also promote such studies in each other's educational institutions which have been at best cursory. This, contrary to conventional thinking, could be an important element to 'build bridges' with nations in the area of social justice and promote better harmony and brotherhood among peoples across the social divide, the downtrodden as well as the 'exploiters'.

On the academic front, in addition, by bringing in more marginalization literature into curriculum building the state could help promote in the younger generation the ideas of rational thinking, freedom of expression and thought and promotion of human rights, quintessential elements to condition modern-day thinking.

On all accounts this study could find an important place over the long term and in areas not hitherto systematically touched where they could be greater interface between the marginalized communities and the present generation of would-be decision makers. In that

respect, this study could lay the foundation for futuristic studies advocating better governance.

Though the study has been centred on a comparative study of two marginalized communities, it has aimed at raising the bar in not only universalizing its meta-paradigms but also utilising them in future for much broader perspectives.

e) The author's publications in the given topic

- i) Mishra, M. (2015), "Feasibility of Applying the Indian Dalit (Underprivileged) Empowerment and Poverty alleviation Models to the Roma Situation in Central and Eastern Europe", *Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Budapest: University of Corvinus
- ii) Mishra, M. and Karunanithi, G. (2016), "The Roma Response to Development Strategies: A Replicate Model for Collective Action and Inclusive Development in a Hungarian Village", *Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Budapest: University of Corvinus, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1556/204.2016.003>
- iii) Mishra, M. (2017), "Romani Identity: Reinforcement of Ethnic Sovereignty as Asset for Strengthening Minority Culture", a paper presented at the International Conference on 'Marginalities, Minority Cultures and Identities' organized by the *Centre for the Study of Discrimination and Exclusion*, School of Social Sciences, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University
- iv) Mishra, M. (2018), "Social Development and Economic Transformation of Marginalized Communities", *Journal of Development Research*, Mumbai: Vivekanand Education Society Institute of Management, Vol.11, Issue 2, ISSN No. 2229-7561, April-June, pp 01-12
- v) Mishra, M. (2019a), "Strategizing Roma Identity for India-EU collaboration: Strengthening the NRIS", *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Budapest: University of Corvinus, Vol. 10, pp 47-64, DOI:10.14267/CJSSP.2019.1.3
- vi) Mishra, M. (2019b), "Measuring Underdevelopment: a qualitative approach to the methodology of studying marginal communities", *Journal of Development Research*, Mumbai: Vivekanand Education Society Institute of management, Vol.12, Issue 2, April-June (under publication)
- vii) Mishra, M. (2019c), "Globalization and the Rise of Social Capitalism: Case for Empowerment of the Marginalized", *The Fourth World: Journal of the Marginalized People*, Bhubaneswar: National Institute of Social Work and Social Sciences, Vols. 41-42, Oct 2017 & April 2018, ISSN No. 0971-6653, pp 09-32
- viii) Mishra, M. (2019d), *Dalits and Roma- A Study of Marginalized Communities in Illiberal Societies*, New Delhi: India Empire, ISBN No 978-81-942549-0-4 (under publication)

i to vii are journal articles

viii is a monograph