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"*loha peet community*"- a study accommodating the ethnic consciousness in the contemporary era

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ABSTRACT

The following research project was carried out with an aim to study an originally nomadic community, called "loha peet" residing in a cluster near the bus stand of Kalyanpuri. The drill further proceeds by exploring how, despite of facing substantial impact from the urban culture and industrialisation, where they have taken migrated and taken to sedentary way of living, are trying to remain engage with their ethnic consciousness and I will also try to accommodate the variations observed in the responses with the help of two parameters called "integration" and "assimilation".

The report begins with introducing the "broader project" under which I interned, followed by a "larger introduction" about two main themes which have been used to initiate the discussion about the rise of urban centres and nomadism in order to provide a base to the entire research analysis. This is followed by "research question" providing a historical background of the community and then goes on to present the "research objective". It is then goes on to present "Methodology" and a section on "data analysis" discussing about four main parameters; language, learning, traditional occupation and finally culture. The project then dives into the final "conclusion" followed by sections on "limitations", "appendix I & II" and concludes with "bibliography".

BROADER PROJECT

I have been interning under a School of Development project on "Migration and Livelihood in the city of Delhi". This project initiate is funded by IGIDR, where the main aim is to capture the relationships persisting between migration and livelihoods and know about the experience of the migrants in the city of Delhi.

Census of India and the surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) are the two main sources of data collected on migration having two very different approaches on the understanding of migration. The former terms a person as a migrant with reference to "Place of birth" and "the place of immediate last residence with respect to the place of enumeration" while NSSO understands migration as "a movement which brings about a change in the usual place of residence". The definition that we were following was that of "place of birth" which meant that if the person we are interviewing is not born in Delhi then he would be counted as a part of the migrant lot (NSSO, 2010)

The areas that we were given to cover were Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Khichripur. The main area that I looked into was Kalyanpuri, situated at a distance of about 4 km from MayurVihar Phase-I with latitude coordinate as 29.619313 and longitude as 77.3137656 (MapsofIndia, 2014)

Kalyanpuri is a densely populated area which lies just opposite to Khichripur along the main

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road. It is a resettlement colony and is marked by the presence of a large number JJ clusters. The starting point of the locality is marked by a slum settlement of about 18 households where a blacksmith community resides, and whose main occupation was making tools and utensils out of iron. After crossing this, block 11, 12, 13, 14 and 18 were the other few areas that I mainly tried to cover along with the central market of Kalyanpuri for the questionnaire that we needed to canvass. These areas, as said before, were mainly a slum dominated sphere having people from varying castes background

The main questionnaire consisted of six broad themes under which questions on migrant identity, reason for migration, links with the village, work in the city, perceptions about Delhi were mainly probed. Since the questionnaire was based on a semi-structured pattern, we went ahead with mostly a narrative kind of an interaction and made sure that all the questions were directly or indirectly asked. It was a well framed questionnaire which was prepared by the project coordinators in consultation with the project director.

LARGER INTRODUCTION

***Rise of urban centres and rural-urban migration**

Human settlements and their changing dynamics on a global scale has been an important factor in changing the community. A better lifestyle has constantly played a crucial role in the emergence of city where sedentary people prefer staying which has over the years evolved as a complex settlement. The first major change in settlement patterns was the accumulation of hunter gatherers which started forming group for easy and effective hunting. But, agriculture was probably one of the first reasons for bringing people together to form a concentrated cluster giving rise to other activities like trading, defense, religious practices etc. further providing reasons for people to stay together. With such an evolution, management of this growing complexity also gave rise to further concentrating of various necessities leading to addition of diversifications in every sphere of life ranging from social, cultural to economic. This complexity was also kind of inevitable to maintain the evolving nature of the society and with the intensification of social dynamics this city gradually got transformed to what can be called an "urban settlement"(Goucher, Leguin & Walton, 1998).

But with the gradual yet impactful advent of urbanization, many growing dynamics of social world also slowly came in to provide employment opportunities in non-agriculture sector. This phenomenon thus provided one of the first boosts to people move out from rural set-up and try their hands in the works catering to the urban stretch. But this reason of urbanization has never been a major cause of concern until nineteenth and twentieth century, when not only did U.S and Western European urban areas grew, but also the percentage of population of the people living in these and other urban areas grew rapidly (Goucher, Leguin & Walton, 1998).

With the coming of this culture, extensive use of capital intensive mechanism also came into existence for improving growth in the urban centers. With such an unbalanced movement of people, destabilization of the agrarian economy further lead to high unemployment and crises like situation in the rural sphere. This further created a "push" factor for people to migrate. The "pull" factor of the urban sphere thus provided a good alternative for the people to earn a living.

This resulting trend of urbanization is thus influencing the size distribution of urban population along with changing the workforce nature and structure. Even the governance has not been left unaffected with these alterations in the social and economic situation and has

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also been evolving its system of governing and management. (Kundu, 2003)

***Nomadism- an important constituent of migration**

Nomadic community, which constitutes approximately 7% of India's total population, has also been a very crucial part of this whole process of migration. But this is only according to the informal statistics available since the formal census has never been conducted for these Nomads. They, from the very beginning of their origin, have been involved into this movement from one place to another in order to sustain their livelihood. Each nomadic tribe is characterised by their distinctive belief, culture and lifestyle and practicing a particular hereditary occupation. Nomads have a very important role of environment to play in their lives and hence, among the various ways these people relate to their environment, they can be categorised into "Hunter gatherers", "pastoral nomads" and the "peripatetic nomads" (Nomads, 2015).

The first amongst the categories of nomads, "hunter gatherers" have been involved in moving from one place to another in search of wild fruits and vegetables. This kind of a lifestyle has been an ancestral mode of subsistence for "Homo" which has been followed by every human until 10,000 years ago. This hence makes these people a group involved in regular movement and far away from sedentarization. But gradually, these people have been taking up settled lifestyle with the overall evolving nature of the society (Nomads, 2015.).

"Pastoralists" are usually those nomads which move along with their herds from place to place. They raise herds and have their economic dependencies on these. Their culture is also highly influenced by animals. The pastoralists do live a sedentary lifestyle in order to get engaged in their pastoral activities in an efficient way by providing pasture for their livestock, but they also move from one settled location to another to normally avoid depleting of the resources to an extent that it can't be recovered (Nomads, 2015).

The last in the categories is "peripatetic nomads" who are people involved in trade and commerce related activities. This population has a very mobile way of living, moving from place to place for providing services by. This also gives these people a decent exposure to various local cultures making them richer in their knowledge about the locals and also multilingual as compared to others in the overall nomadic communities (Nomads, 2015).

RESEARCH QUESTION: Historical background of "Gadulia Lohars"- the community studied



A Loha peet working on his workshop situated at the immediate entry of his jhuggi. Use of electric fan to keep the bhatti ignited can also be seen.

Going with this notion of mobility and settlements being the material consequences of human behavior, I have decided to study "gadulia/gaduliya lohar", a nomadic community belonging to "peripatetic" categories, and its

relation with the evolving dimensions and complexities of growing urban centers. This tribe

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is often referred to as "*Khanabadosh*" who migrated to Delhi in around 1965. This nomadic group has been analyzed by specialists from both India and Europe because of the various similarities that have been observed to exist in another nomadic community residing in latter, called "Roma or Romania" (Puente, 1984).

Known with various names like *Gaduliya Lohar* in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, *Bhuvariya* in Uttar Pradesh and *Bhubaliya Lohar* in Haryana, they claim to have *Rajput* origin. They are actually "wandering smiths" and Are quite different from the other blacksmiths having a settled lifestyle. People from this community say that their ancestors have been living in Chittorgarh, in Rajasthan, and have historically been making iron tools, an occupation that has always been a part of their life. However, they are able to work with any kind of metal and also make any object and not specifically tools. Their mother tongue has originally been Indo-Aryan called *Mewari*, but they are usually multilingual depending upon the local place they have settled in. Hindi is a language which most of them are conversant with (Puente, 1984).

The present groups of *Gadulia lohar* claim themselves to be descendent of those blacksmith who used to serve Maharana Pratap by making iron weapons for the rajput's army. They enjoyed a very special status until 1567-1568 when repeated assaults by Emperor Akbar lead to the end of *Rajput* Dynasty by overcoming of the defenders of the Fort of Chittorgarh. The defeat of their Maharana caused a severe blow to the reputation of these *Lohars*, who pledged to give up their traditional activity of making tools and the pleasures of a settled lifestyle until the dishonour was repaired. They, in the meantime, took to making utensils and other decorative materials which was more peaceful as compared to their initial job. A traditional cart called "*gadi*" also got introduced into their occupation to help them live a life of nomads, as per their pledge. This also helped them to avoid any kind of conflict with the already settled smiths who were established in the large centres of the populations. This use of *gadi* also provided the model for the *Gadulia* people and their non-sedentary lifestyle (Puente, 1984).

These carts were usually made from good quality woods called *Kikar*, to provide strength and long life to these carts as compared to others. These were fairly spacious to store not only the tools for making utensils but also things like clothes, daily use articles and even their valuable ornaments. But they did not practice this nomadic lifestyle throughout the year. In the very initial days, rainy season was probably one of the very common reasons for forcing people to put a stop to their nomadic lifestyle. In some other specified seasons, they also used to get engaged into livestock purchasing, buffalo trade, cows rearing etc. This also helped to elongate their stay at some specific places for long (Puente, 1984).

Hence it becomes quite clear that these people never believed in getting established at some concentrated centers or have very strong social bonds, though they did have to socialize and interact to certain level for their livelihood. In this manner, they have been able to preserve their culture in quite an authentic way for a very long time. Their locals traditions, their dressing style, use of tools types, language etc. are few of the many cultural aspects that they have been able to keep intact even after couple of centuries (Puente, 1984).

But with the growth of industrialization, this community also couldn't save itself from the alteration happening in the rest of the economy. The changed scenario not only posed severe threats to their occupational set up but also the kind of lifestyle they have been living. This has also severely impacted their culture and traditions with the ever evolving complexities.

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It was approximately 2 months long project drill for us. Here, along with the canvassing of the general project's questionnaire, exploration of the area and its analysis to search for individual project topic was done in the initial phase which later on became a process of devoting admirable amount of time to it. This entire drill was accompanied with decent reading materials throughout, which were regularly uploaded on the Dropbox.

The thing that caught my attention the most in the stretch of Kalyanpuri was the slum settlement situated near the bus stand of Kalyanpuri towards the side of the road, i.e., on the footpath. This community, called "*lohapeet*", is actually a nomadic community which got settled in Kalyanpuri some 30-40 years back


RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Now, after discussing above, it would not be wrong to say that worthier employment opportunities along with superior economic prospects have always been the most enchanting characteristic of an urban centre attracting hundreds and thousands of people to immigrate. For a majority of rural populace, it has been envisioned as a miraculous solution to the miseries and agonies of their rustic lifestyle. In tune with this conception, a Nomadic community called *Gadulia Lohar* has also migrated to the capital city in search of an environment which can help them to put an end to all their sufferings.

But with an exposure to the altered and more of an advanced environment of the urbanized area, this community has been facing a lot of changes and a movement away from their traditional circuit. Hence, I have decided to go for an exploratory research design to analyze how this community tries to hold on to their culture and keep themselves "engage with their aboriginal sphere". In the process of the research, I would also try to capture the "variations observed" within the responses obtained despite sharing a common identity. For this objective, the various sub-themes with the help of which I have tried to perceive community's views are-

1. Language
2. Understanding of learning
3. Traditional occupation
4. Culture looked through the lens of their dress up (dressing style, ornaments wore etc.)

LITERATURE REVIEW

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- Till 18th century, there hasn't been a major trend of migration observed. The estimated proportion of people who lived in towns and cities was about 3% of the total world's population. But with the advent of 19th century, the populace of the towns in parts of Europe, especially England began to grow quite rapidly. Hence there was a substantial shift observed with proportion of people in countryside declining steadily. Hence, urbanisation has been considered one of the most important reasons for migration...Urbanisation, like many other phenomena, too comes with some unwanted blossoming, like over-urbanisation, ill management of the scenario, urban bias etc. Hence, a major chunk of responsibilities lie on the part of government and related authorities to help eliminated management issues along with ensuring proper allocations of funds from central to various areas. Infrastructural betterment is another space that these authorities need to focus upon for efficient use of the resources for the mega cities to catch up and make the urban areas more liveable for all (Bhattacharya, 2002)
- Over the last two centuries, we have witnessed a phenomenon, most prominently in the West and then increasingly in the rest of the planet, of politicisation of ethnic identity, thereby transforming ethnic identity into something I will refer to as ethnic consciousness. Ethnic consciousness manifests itself in attempts to 'define' the ethnic group, establishing what it means to be a member of the group; in this way, ideas like language, dress, religion, history are used to define the group, and thus become both conscious and politicised- subject to debate both within the community itself and in the larger political arena (Noonam, n.d., p.1).
- Indigenous peoples live a life in urban areas that is moulded by the living conditions in the city but also by the social, economic and cultural life of the communities from which they have migrated...In some parts of the world, indigenous urban immigrants may try to hide their ethnic origin as a way of being accepted by the urban people or, at least, of being less openly discriminated against...There are situations whereby the longer the indigenous peoples have lived in the urban environment the less they tend to identify with their original indigenous group (Dahl & Jensen, 2003, pp.4-7).
- The annual growth rate (exponential) of the urban population in India has gone down from 3.1% during 1981-91 to 2.7% during 1991-2001. This reinforces the declining trends of urbanisation in the country since the rate had decelerated even during the 1980s, against all time high growth of 3.8% during 1971-81. The trend goes against not only the popular theories of 'urban explosion', 'over urbanisation' etc. but also questions the projections made by various expert groups set up by the government and international agencies (Kundu, 2003, p.2).
- Nomadic communities constitute approximately 7% of the India' population. Migration continues to characterize the nomadic experience and the phenomena such as urbanisation and environmental conservation schemes have contributed to the increasing impoverishment of these communities...State failure to provide the legal infrastructure to facilitate land holdings and protect tenure has exacerbated the vulnerability of the nomads (Lim, Anand, 2004, pp.1-2).
- Cities have witnessed significant in-migration of working population from agriculture hinterlands since colonial times (Chandravarkar, 2006), and this process has intensified further in recent decades. City spaces have also undergone rapid reconfigurations over the last two or three decades with the emergence of wealthy enclaves and new towns

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(Bhattacharya and Sanyal, 2011), which have tended to be located away from the older parts of the cities, viewed as the congested, mixed (for example, inters of income) and largely unplanned (or not amenable to modern planning) (Vakulabharanam, Motiram, 2013, p.1)

METHODOLOGY

The study of "*Loha peet community*", a Nomadic tribe called *Gadulia Lohar*, wasn't carried out for some specified number of day but was a more than one month long exercise. Regular interactions with and working on this community was a process which was carried out simultaneously with the broader project. In order to do an in-depth analysis, the research exercise focused more on the primary data, i.e, collection of data on the decided sub-themes from the on-ground exercise but it was well supported by secondary data to for a better understanding of the data collected and also to improve the on-field interactions.

*research tool

The study overall is a little more inclined towards the "qualitative analysis" of the *Loha peet* cluster. The research tool undertaken for capturing data for the selected topic is semi-structured interview guide with open ended questions to facilitate a narrative style of interaction.

*sampling technique

The type of sampling used in capturing data related to the study is "purposive sampling". This type of sampling technique is a part of non-probability sampling which represents a group of sampling technique where researcher is able to select units from population which they are interested in studying. Purposive sampling from this non-probability technique in a qualitative method provides a further strong theoretical reason for their choice of units as the selection is based on non- random way of sampling. The aim here, unlike in probabilistic sampling, is not to avoid any kind of bias or objectivity, but just to be structured for selecting a target sample to ease the study. This also helps aids in saving time and labor involved in the procedure (Trochim, 2006).

The study was conducted with a total sample size of 15, with whom an in-depth interaction took place with the help of the questionnaire prepared. It was again a narrative kind of a discussion on various topics making sure that almost all the questions were covered. Apart from in-depth interview, I also took two Group Discussions (GDs) in somewhat middle of the research drill; one of females and another one of children, both comprising of three members each. These GD's helped me in further improving upon my questioners.

DATA ANALYSIS

The slum cluster that I have been interacting and studying upon, as mentioned above, is a part of Nomadic community. As explained above, these people resided on the footpaths towards the two side of the Kalyanpuri bus station. The cluster towards the opposite side of the road where bus stand is situated was comparatively older and hence supported a denser population as compared to the cluster around the bus stop. The former had a descent mix of population with people of varying age groups working and living together. The younger cluster also consisted of populace from the same family tree but had little interaction with the people on the opposite side of the road.

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Some basic information regarding the 15 respondents canvassed-

Age groups	Frequency
25-30	6
30-35	3
35-40	1
40-45	2
50-60	3

Gender	Frequency
Male	10
Female	5

1st GD- a group of 3 females, all in the age group of 20-27

2nd GD- a group of 3 female children, all in the age group of 7-13

None of the working lot was educated and almost all have migrated from Chittorgarh except for one whose family has shifted from Aashram in Delhi to Kalyanpuri because of the demolition of the JJ cluster over there.

With such a population of Nomadic community, the element of ethnicity comes directly to hold a crucial role in the overall analysis. "**Ethnicity**" is an umbrella term which easily embraces groups differentiated by colour, language and religion; it covers tribes, races, nationalities and castes which sometimes can be really flexible (Chandra, n.d.). With migration, from one's culture to other, come the "incoming culture" and "the host culture" which becomes the two defining constituents of the process leading to the ethnicity playing its required role. But in Kalyanpuri, I could notice the role of more of "**ethnic consciousness**" than "**ethnic identity**" (which implies a very different meaning when compared to the word "identity").

This presence of "ethnic consciousness", which manifests itself in attempts to 'define' the ethnic group, establishing what it means to be a member of the group, was quite visible. Ideas like language, dress, religion, history are used to 'define' such a consciousness (Noonam, n.d.). This consciousness comes in whenever two or more different cultures coexist with each other. "Ethnic Identity", on the other hand is a more pristine form which doesn't need to be defined for a person to be a part of it.

This consciousness helps the migrants to engage with their culture and ethnicity despite all the changes in the surrounding. A similar stream was observed when I went to the field. However the responses of the *lohapeet* workers could not be generalised. On many themes, there were variations in replies of the community members ranging from marginal to a significant level. With this varying degree of responses on the various parameters used to analyse the consciousness, I could further observe a pattern of "**integration**" vs. "**assimilation**".

As far as integration is concerned, the migrants try to get socially adjusted into the culture of the host society while in the process of assimilation, the immigrants start losing the importance of one's own indigenous customs and its values in the new surroundings. The

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former allows the group to retain its culture, language and religious values simultaneously in the process of getting adjusted to the new culture while the latter, to a very large extent, doesn't (Gautam, 2013). These responses can be driven by a variety of factors out of which I found "urbanisation" and the "evolving culture" of the urban sphere to be one of the most crucial reasons for this sort of a variation that exists among the members of this society despite sharing a common identity.

It is widely accepted that the urbanisation is as equal a social process as it is an economical and a territorial process. The word "urbanisation" is derived from a Latin word "urbs" which is used by Romans to refer to a city. It is defined as a process by which there is an increase in the proportion of the population living in urban centres. But it captures not only the movement of people from rural to a well-defined urban places but also the overall change in the migration attitude, beliefs, values and behaviour patterns. The census of India defines some criteria for urbanisation which are-

*Population of the urban centre should be more than 5000

*Density of centre should be over 400 people per square km

*75% of the male population engages in non-agricultural occupation

*Cities are urban areas with population more than one lakh

*Metropolises are cities with a population of more than one million (Kundu, 2003)

With such complexities involved, it does results in the transformation of many kinds of societal believes, norms, organisation, demographic structures etc. The same has happened with the *Gadulialohars* community of Kalyanpuri as well, to a certain extent. This community, which has been able to keep its authentic c circuit intact for more than 400 years, is experiencing the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation to a noticeable extent now. Hence, I will try to present the responses highlighting the degree of engagement of the community members with their ethnic consciousness and bring in the variations observed through the concept of integration and assimilation.

LANGUAGE

One of the most crucial parameter which brings out the consciousness very well is "language". Language, which is the basic means of communication for any community, can act as the defining feature of many cultures. In *lohapeet* community as well, language has a very critical role to play. As mentioned above, this community's original -language is *Mewari*, having an Indo-Aryan origin. It is interesting to know that even after so many centuries, this community still prefers communicating in their own language amongst themselves. Not only the older in the family but even the younger ones take pride in keeping their language intact. But alongside, they are well versed with the local language used in the area, "Hindi", as well. They know this very well that language is essential to every aspect and interaction in our everyday life. Since, it is the best way for them to thrive in the market place and to share their feelings, desires and understand the environment around them efficiently, the worthiness of the language increases further. This is thus, a very clear case of "interaction" where in order to get socially, culturally and economically accepted in the society, the community members are not only interacting in the local language Hindi with their customers and the people around but are simultaneously using their own Mewari language to interact within the indigenous circuit. Also, without any deliberate attempt to ensure the passing on of this knowledge of both kinds of language, even the youngest of the family is getting a good exposure to such a cultivating atmosphere.

"tumhari language me tumse baat krenge aur hamari language me hum khud baat karte

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hai. Hamari lohar ki bhasha hoti hai. Hum usi me baat karenge"- (we prefer talking in our indigenous language amongst the community members and in local language with the others.)

LEARNING

Learning seemed to be another crucial factor in the lives of these people. But learning itself was met by two admirably different meanings. While getting "**formal education**" in schools was agreed by a majority of the settlement to be one of the most critical methods to achieve an upward mobility not only in income but also in societal status, "**gaining traditional knowledge**" about the work of *lohapeet* work was met with mixed responses. For some, this work was meant to be skill laudable enough to be taught to and carried out in the upcoming generations while for others, it was that chore whose knowledge might be good but whose absence will not be punishing.



Three members of a loha peet family working as a unit to make tools out of iron. Use of hand fan to keep the bhatti ignited can be located.

The women in the picture can be seen wearing lehenga choli and also some of her traditional jewelry.

The section believing in giving the **traditional know-how an utter importance** who saw this work as an expertise considered it to be a 'spine' of their overall livelihood scenario. For them it was their "*hath ka kaam*" which could very well not only be taken as the main occupation but also can act as a backup plan for all the times when any member of the community is jobless or is in search for an inflow of some extra money. This section of people took pride in their job and such contemplation was not restricted to the mind-set of older generation but was also prevalent amongst many new generations' people. Though, considering education to be a magical pill, these people believed in giving equal importance to the indigenous knowledge. This, again very clearly, can be categorised under the "**integrating**" mechanism where social adjustment does not mean an entire giving up of the traditional know-how.

"ye apna khud ka kaam hai. Isme kisi ko kuc den nahi, kisi se kuc lena nahi"- (this is our own work and we are not obligated to act and live in a particular way)

But on the other hand, there were few people in the community who believed that the knowledge about community's work held very little importance now and **education has the exclusive power** to help this community escape the poverty and its ill effect. There were thus many parents in the community believing that it would be best for their children to go to

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school and then be a part of a job not related to this traditional occupation. The children of the present generation are themselves not really acting as an active member in the work, unlike the previous generations. Hence, this attitude of dismissing the value that one's aboriginal knowledge holds to become a part of the host culture is simply an act to get "assimilated". However, it needs to be notice that urbanisation and the evolving industrialisation are taking a significant place in the reason behind such a 'disloyal' attitude towards one's own culture.

"hum to chahenge hamare bache padhai kare, naukri kare"- (we would want our children to get educated and undertake some other job)

But in some households, there were also presence of cases where people, despite knowing and accepting the importance of education, took their children out of school due to some issues like safety, non-welcoming environment of the classroom etc.

TRADITIONAL OCCUPATION

Changing dimensions of the city and rapid undertaking of most of the sector's work, especially in urban places, by capital-intensive industries is becoming a threat to the livelihood of many people. It not only overpowers the labour intensive employment opportunities but the culture which comes attached with this process is also responsible for the decreasing space and evolving working sphere. Hence, coming to an urban centre to escape the not so working environment of the rural space, also has its costs. In order to improve their economic conditions, these people have got engaged in a sedentary lifestyle in an urban sphere, Delhi but the place has not been yielding enough as per their expectation. Hence they have gradually started adapting to the evolving circumstances of the urbanised space to keep them engaged with the indigenous occupation of this community.



This is how loha peet worker display both the hand-made and market bought goods, usually adjacent to their workshops. It makes it convenient for both the customers and the worker to buy and sell respectively.

Threat by machines is supposed to cause the most degrading effect of industrialisation and

urbanisation on the traditional occupation of this community. The work of making utensils and tools out iron, an occupation that has defined the *loha peet* community for centuries now, is facing a severe menace from cheap and bulk production of their tools and utensils by machines.

Initially every item that the *loha peet* workers used to sell were hand made. Starting from simple to heavy metal works, everything was shaped and built with hands with the family

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working as a unit. The production of this good strength possessing items was further met with a good demand from the customers because of it, most probably, being the only option available with the locals. But with the growing use of machines for past few decades, this work has been subjected to a severe loss and almost all the members of the community were forced to shift to making only light weighted pieces. The machine made heavy ones were brought from the cheaply available options and sold in the markets by the community workers. This did help them to make some money by ensuring the inflow of customers but the profit definitely lied more in casting these heavy ones by hand only. This thus can be categorised into the act of "integration" where, with the coming of big machines and technologies, these people adapted to the most common adopted alternative to now sell both hands and machine produced items

"**Further coping mechanism**" again varied from people to people.

- While some started considering the introduction of machines to be the cause of all losses they were facing in their livelihood while many others saw it as a chance to improve the efficiency of their work. Many relatives and friends of the settlement that I was studying and who were relatively better off, have installed these big machines at their enclosed workshops by arranging money from various sources like banks, families etc. which highlighted their act of "integration" in the changing world. But it needs to be noticed that not only the deprivation of money but also the lack of space acted as a restraining factor for the conscious ones to think and act in a certain way. The workshops of this community comprising of some 20 households are always located outside and just in front of the entrance of the house. This usual location makes it even more difficult for the setting up of any machines which are generally very heavy and space consuming.

"mera beta to printing ka kaam karta hai"- (my son is not a part of this traditional occupation and works with some printing press shop)

- Many from the group who perceived the introduction of the machines to be dangerous for their indigenous work, started considering it bane of their life but still continued to be a part of it because of the lack of any alternate option available. They started diversifying their options of selling by going to weekly markets, by selling products to big shops and by also accepting order from people managing construction works. Though these actions which came in response to the introduction of machines were not a perfect solution to the devastating effects of machines and were not-so-succeeding alternatives to the issue, but were still a mechanism to get engaged with their traditional work. This act along with installing dyes and cutting machines were highly related to the act of "integration" where people were finding ways to remain connected to their traditional work despite all the changes occurring in the urbanised sphere.

"roj ka kuan khodna, roj ka pani pina"- (there is no consistency in the earning from this work.)

"ab to hum badi dukano me bhi jake thok me saman bechte hai"- (we also supply in bulk to big shops)

- This diversifying option undertaken does not guarantee a continuation of the integration process in the upcoming years. This might as well lead to situation where people

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start moving out of their traditional sphere and loose engagement with their ethnic group. This hence will lead to a shift from integration to assimilation process which seemed to be already happening in many of the households as told by the respondents. Some informed that there were members from the households, usually the younger ones, who have taken up jobs like drivers of auto rickshaws, mechanics, salesman at some local shops etc.

"*mera beta to printing ka kaam karta hai*"- (my son is not a part of this traditional occupation and works with some printing press shop)

One of reasons for opting for such **odd jobs** is that the these people are not getting required access and substantial support to carry out the work they have knowledge about. Not being able to produce utensils and tools has already been explained but there are other works like buffalo trading and cow-rearing that these people hold knowledge about, but are not permitted to engage with now. This is not only because of lack of space and resources to maintain the work but it is also not supported by the government. Buffalo trading is further banned, as told by the respondents. This is, thus creating a crisis like situation where community members are driven to move out of the ethnic work sphere and be a part of that occupation which they have marginal knowledge about.

CULTURE

The presence of ethnic consciousness can also be easily captured through the cultural transformation that these community members are faced with. Though here are some customs and practices that the community have discontinued following but then there are many other traditions that these people are still trying to engage with, in the changing scenario.

This community has taken vows of not to live in a house, not to sleep in a bed, not to use lamps, not to use ropes for drawing water along with following a simple lifestyle of non-sedentary people (Puente, 1984). Nothing of this seems to be the case now. Not only these people have made *jhuggis* on the pavements of the roads but are also availing the facilities of fan, light, beds and even televisions to ease their living.

The initial use of "**bullock carts**", which supported their nomadic lifestyle, is also not prevalent anymore. The cart, which for a very long time was used for moving from one place to another and storing things for day-to-day use, seems to be losing its importance because of the settled lifestyle this community is following. The *jhuggi* now, is safer place for them to store all their belongings and valuable things. The lack of space for parking these carts and also the comparatively higher cost of living a Nomadic lifestyle were the other factors stated by the respondents for not using these carts now.

As far as "**dressing**" is concerned, it was well accepted by many of the respondents that the traditional attire was not worn anymore, not even during traditional ceremonies in most of the cases. Females now prefer wearing *suit* and *salwar* while the males wear trousers and shirts or t-shirts just like any other person living in the area which very well corresponded to the concept of assimilation. But on the other hand, there were many others from the settlement who showed pride in wearing their traditional *dhoti kurta* or *pyjama kurta* with a turban, in case of men, and *lehengacholi*, in case of women. For them, it is their language, their clothes and ornaments that defines them. It was interesting to note the presence of the process of integration in which not only the older generation people, who were wearing their ethnic attire on a regular basis, but also a good number of younger lot believing in this

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ethnicity driven belief.

"*Hamare zamane ke nai pehentaē*"- (our generation people don't really wear such traditional attires)

Not only dresses but also the wearing of "**ornaments**" and its kind also presented varying responses of the community. It was possible to find both men and women wearing ornaments as per their defined culture. Though, a majority of women were seen wearing earrings, bangles, nose-rings etc. but few of them corresponded to the traditional ones. It was interesting to note how, in order to adhere to the original code of dressings up, these women were wearing the plastic imitations of the metal ornaments which, in many other cases were also hollow, as the solid ones couldn't be afforded by the lot. As far as the case of males is concerned, earrings in one or even both ear lobes were common sights but there were few who also wore rings around their wrists and legs (especially the old ones). Hence, in an overall sense, it was a case of integration where both males and females were trying to engage with their ethnic wear in some ways or the other.

"*sone ka pani chadhe jevar hi kharid pate hai*"- (it's not possible to buy ornaments made entirely of costly metals)



A female of loha peet community with her daughter.

Traditional ornaments like silver rings (hollow ones) can be seen around her wrists and in her leg. The traditional nose rings can also be located.

It was interesting to note how the community members referred themselves as *loha peet* and not *Gadulia Lohar* in their introduction. This might very well be accounted to the fact that keeping the *Gaadi*, the defining feature of *Gadulia lohars*, was not feasible in the urban sphere. This example very well brings out the how this community, though facing substantial changes in their traditional circuit, is trying to hold on to their aboriginality. This might be through remodeling or other diversification taken with either a passive mind set or unknowingly even. But whatever may be the case, their attempt to remain loyal to their indigenous circle is worth appreciating.

CONCLUSION

The analysis thus attempts to bring forth that though, it is inevitable for any community to

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lose its ethnicity in the way of getting adjusted to any urban society acting as a host, this community tries to hold on to the engagement with their ethnic consciousness to a very large extent. With the parameters like language, learning, culture etc. the degree of attachment is probed and in the process, the variations in the responses are also factored in with the help of two concepts called "integration" and "assimilation". But it needs to be noticed that both these mechanisms are not simply an outcome of one's choices but, many a times, these choices are actually driven by the prevailing social, economic and political conditions of the host culture. If proper environment is not provided for the community, the integration mechanism can very well get converted to assimilation in the upcoming years. This might not very well be appreciated in the long term as it would be beneficial, to a large extent, for the society as a whole for these ethnic groups to prosper and remain engaged with their ethnic consciousness. However, nowhere in the report, I am trying to draw a line of comparison between what were the occupational conditions in the native village of this community and how it is now, in the urban space. Whatever, may be the scenario in the urbanized environment of Delhi, people from this community still claim to have a better life and comparatively more prospering economic opportunities here as compared to the death due to starvation kind of a situation prevailing in Chittorgarh specifically for the work of this Nomadic community

LIMITATION

- A census conducted by some authorities few days before I started with my interview sessions, acted as an obstacle.
- Since the members of the community did not have any specified working hours, it became difficult to judge the perfect time to approach them.
- Demand of money for letting me talk to them or click their picture became a major hindrance to the on-field exercise
- Limited time to interact with the cluster did prove to be another restraining factor on field.

Questionnaire

a) GENERAL INFORMATION

- a.1) What is your name?
- a.2) How old are you?
- a.3) Till where have you studied?
- a.4) Are you married?
- a.5) What caste do you belong to? (If you are a Gadiya/ Gaduliya Lohar, then can you tell me a little about the history related to this caste?)
- a.6) Since when have you been living in Delhi?
- a.7) What all assets do you have at home in Delhi?
- a.8) Do you own any land in Delhi or in the village?

b) WORK RELATED

- b.1) Why do you refer to your work as "loha peet"?
- b.2) What all iron items do you make?
- b.3) From where do you buy the iron required for your work?
- b.4) Do you also buy some ready-made iron items? If so, why and from where?

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b.5) What all equipment do you used to create the final metal items?

b.6) Do you encounter any seasonal variation in the selling of the items made?

c) GENDER BASED

c.1) In what all ways do females of your community aid in your work of creating iron articles?(if female: do you also take part in any work related to creating iron articles?)

c.2) Do they also take part in performing the heavy metal works which are physically exhausting? (if female: do you also take part in all the heavy metal works carried out in creating iron tools and utensils?)

d) HEALTH RELATED

d.1) Do you feel that a constant exposure to smoke from the "*bhatti*" and heavy metal work is leading to or has already led to any health related issue?

d.2) What are your views on the work safety involved in your occupation?

e) CULTURE RELATED

e.1) What do you usually wear at home? Do you wear any traditional dresses on special occasions?

e.2) What kind of ornaments do you wear? Is it like traditional metal made or some other material imitation?

e.3) What kind of utensils do you use?

e.4) Has any change occurred in the kind of tools you make, from past?

e.5) Do you domesticate animals? If so, why/ why not?

f) OCCUPATIONAL AND INCOME MOBILITY

f.1) Do you prefer working this way only or want to include enhanced forms of technologies to make work convenient?

f.2) Are you aware of the various equipment and their operations to ease your work? Is so, what is the constraining factor for not having one?

f.3) Do you undertake any other work as well apart from your present occupation? If so, why?

f.4) Do you aspire to change your work to something more in tune with the present scenario and yielding better earning opportunity with much more stability?

f.5) Do you want your children also to be a part of your ancestral occupation or take up some other options of earning a livelihood?

g) RELATIONSHIP BASED

g.1) Why do you people prefer living in a cluster? Why not spread out and enjoy the benefit of less competition?

g.2) How are your relationships with the other locals who are not a part of your community?

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