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NOMADIC AND SEDENTARY IDENTITIES THROUGH CIVILIZATIONAL DISCOURSES

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ABSTRACT

This paper comes out from the literature review done on nomadism and the issues concerning it in modern democracy. Drawing from the nomadic v/s sedentary debate throughout human history, this paper attempts to point out to an inherently present hostility in civilizational discourses towards the nomadic existence through the chronological reading for the academic perceptions about nomadism since the origin of the modern state. This review paper attempts to take the reader through the academic discourses emerged over around a century on the issue of nomadism and what patterns does it show which helps formulating modern state its policies for the nomads. The objective is to be able to find the gaps in academic understanding of the issue which has lead to further marginalization of the nomadic people around the globe.

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INTRODUCTION

The very nature of their existence is the negation of building, which is the basis of civilization. (Khalidun 1377/1969)

Since the advent of civilization and the development of knowledge systems around it, nomadic lifestyle has majorly been viewed in an antagonistic position with respect to the sedentary lifestyle. Streams of knowledge have majorly emerged out of evolutionary theory and therefore fourteenth century historian and theorist Ibn Khaldun demarcates Nomads as necessarily dissimilar from the sedentary population. Despite the fact that nomads have played an important role of connecting people through the ancient times, the history has majorly ignored nomadic contribution in development of the civilization. For instance, several nomadic communities functioned as a lifeline of trade and economy in agrarian structures of the Thar desert in Indian subcontinent connecting, and in process formulating the social and economic realities of the region in several ways, yet they found no mention in the Rajputana history of the medieval times. (Kothiyal 2016) The constant interactions that itinerant communities had with the settled population, by mode of their cyclic and circular movements, had a major role in sustaining the village economy as well as in formulating the social and economic integrities of the settled population. (Bhattacharya 2003) The proposition integrates nomads into the process of civilization itself and instigates an academic indulgence into the history of nomadism

and its position with respect to the sedentary population. But this logical inference did not come before the emergence of anthropology in twentieth century. Emerging from the post modern philosophy, the anti-civilization school of thought questions the conventional ideals of civilization and the modern state's imposition of the same through concepts and categories of citizenship, rights, duties and the alike.

The philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari suggests a binary model of existence, where anything 'nomadic' exists in symbiosis with the 'settled' counterpart and existence of one is necessary for the growth of other. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/1987) Apart from this postmodern, post structuralism philosophy that is being criticised at several grounds, emergence of anthropology in 1970s gradually shifted the perspectives to look at lives of the nomads. Still most civilizational discourses and knowledge system built around it further pushes nomadic identities towards the peripheries of marginalization. Since the streams of inquiry and knowledge are modelled as per the requirements and fancies of the civilizational perspectives and discourses, the alternative identities like Nomads even remain marginalised in every knowledge sphere. For instance, while the history, being written from the sedentary point of view, does not consider the role played by the nomads in civilizational development, the policy concerned study too does not consider nomadic lifestyle as a possible alternative. Being settled, thus becomes, a mandatory prerequisite for the 'civilization' that we know synonym to the state's control over

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every aspect of people, wherein controlled movement and permanent location remains the primary tools.

Romanticisation of the nomadic life as an epitome of freedom and egalitarian system has remained a phenomenon for the world of literature in western societies. But the discourses emerging from the civilization has always remained vary of the nomadic existence. But despite the most hostile conditions, any field of inquiry goes through a gradual transformation of their principal terms and concepts. The critique of historiography especially after enlightenment and colonial interpretation provides an opportunity to go back to the concept and idea of nomadism. Is it necessarily associated with the backstage of evolutionary human lives? Is nomadism essentially a primitive and backward way of life born out of ignorance and aloofness from the knowledge of civilization? Do people remain nomads out of backwardness or willingness? These are some of the critical questions raised in the field of anthropological studies in recent years. While the most of the years were spent in rationalising the states coercive attempts to regulate human lives, the recently evolved perspectives on the historical studies called anarcho-primitivism suggest a going back to the roots approach. The whole purpose of a scientific knowledge system is a self critical inquiry that should ultimately help in elaboration, rationalization, adjustment, refurbishment and replacement of the basic concepts of the discipline. (Salzman 1980). Coming out from the literature review on nomadism and sedentarization, this paper attempts to point out to an inherently present hostility in civilizational discourses towards the nomadic existence through the chronological reading for the academic perceptions about nomadism since the origin of the modern state, which is to be utilized as the base and background for the ethnography of the said community. In other words, this paper attempts to take the reader through the academic discourses emerged over around a century on the issue of nomadism and what patterns does it show which helps formulating modern state its policies for the nomads. The objective is to be able to find the gaps in academic understanding of the issue which has lead to further marginalization of the nomadic people around the world.

Background

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of point. But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinates to the paths they determine, the reverse is what happens with the sedentary. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/1987)

The basic difference between the nomadism and sedentary identity is difference between their perceptions regarding means and the end. While path remains the end for the nomad, they are mere means for the destinations for the sedentary identity. But that still doesn't define the extent of aloofness the two have. In fact, Nomadism vs. Sedentarization is an excellent example for one debate so existential to human lives, yet so oblivion to human understanding since it is located within the intrusive boundaries of civilization and evolutionary model of state's existence. No matter how small the number of nomads has remained in a region, the state has made all efforts either to suppress and eliminate or to acculturate and accommodate it

into the 'developmental' process. While this remained a reality for all sorts of states, the monarchs, authoritarians, most multicultural and liberal states have ironically been the most forceful in its approach towards the nomads, owing majorly, to the pressure created by decreasing land capacity and increasing population

The history has been framed and projected as per the requirements of the authority and thus excluded anything and everything exterior to the 'state-apparatus'. While the sociology interprets the development of specialization of occupations based on caste, it overlooks the role itinerant communities played in it. The itinerant communities with specialized services were integral part of the rural societies through the social and economic linkage and networking that they created but at the same time managed to be 'stateless' and 'self governed'. (Scott 2010). Anthropologists today reaffirm the role nomads played in framing the economic integrities as well as the tax and administration regimes within the civilizations around the world. (Barfield 1993) For instance while mongols, owing to their uncivilized governing techniques, remained the most despicable nomadic tribe in the history of the world, historians agree that Mongols had a lot to teach civilizations in managing trade routes, managing an egalitarian taxation system, and forming a better division of labour. (Barfield 1993)

Nomadism and sedentarization cannot be seen exclusively different categories with respect to the history of development of civilization. The recent literature does not treat nomadism as contradictory to the sedentarization, rather both sharing an organic relationship. (P. K. Misra 1986) The transformations around them influence both lifestyles equally and none actually keeps isolation from world. Settlements were a relatively recent transformation in the history of human civilization, brought in by two important factors. One is agriculture, which provided the source of food without the need of constant mobility and second is, trade, which provided better access to other goods and services without being on constant move. Thus the peripatetic nomads in traditional economies supported sedentarization by providing goods and services to the settled population.

The War Machine and Nomadology

While the science and history has majorly been antagonistic to nomadism, literature and philosophy has visibly been obsessed with the idea of nomadic life, since earliest of the times. While the literature remained mesmerised with the aesthetic beauty of the imagined ideals of freedom, unrestricted mobility, that nomads are presumed to have, being unbounded by the civilised societies' structures. Philosophy on the other hand kept exploring the definitions and parameters of good life through metaphors of nomadic identity

In the 'treatise on Nomadology-The War Machine', Deleuze and Guattari uses the term nomad space to define a space 'qualitatively different from the state space' in the sense of being gridded free, existing with an inherent absence of confinement and limiting factors, and a space with open-endedness. The state space on the contrary is regulated, confined, limited and its organs are 'strictly dependent on autonomy'. (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/1987) So while the 'nomad science' has a different thought process and a different

'relation to work' in comparison to the state science, it does not engage much with the state thought process and its problems with it. The state on the other hand considers the nomads, especially in associations, a threat to its own existence and autonomy. The anarcho-primitivist like James Scott has similar stances on the question of nomadism; the final part of this paper elaborates this newly emerged perspective. Meanwhile the following are the sequence of perspectives on the question of nomadism, broadly categorised here but are widely dispersed chronologically in literature concerning nomadism.

Theory of Peasantization

Historians believe that the disciplinary project started by the colonial government rejected and pushed a large number of nomadic and semi-nomadic groups to the fringes of the social order. The regulatory measures to discourage movements of the nomadic people forced were supposed to bring stability into their lives through the process of peasantization.

Many sociological studies indicate having several mythical stories with every nomadic community through which they try to justify, rationalize, their own way of life. Sometimes they even reason out their inability to settle down. Gadia Lohars blame it to the curse of Aie Mata, the just refuse to work in fields as farmers citing the same mythical story. Quite subtly they do make a choice but probably it is not presented and taken as rational enough by the rest of the world. These myths are specially attributed to the colonial period because of the strong imposition of the concepts of- racial differentiation, cultural superiority.

The Economic Logic

Civilization is being viewed by modern state as a product of increasing degree of economic development and the level of political differentiation that it kept on achieving with its natural evolution and progress. This discourse naturally puts nomadic people in the category of 'backward' and 'primitive' existence, who don't understand the complex mechanism of state formulation.

A number of ethnographical and anthropological accounts on various nomadic communities around the world appeared in 19th century but most of these researches continued to carry the biases generated against the mobile people in colonial times. Since colonial times and because of flawed colonial historiography of 18th century, civilizational discourses provided a set of guidelines to see any group of people located outside the 'state-form', hence most of these studies ended up trying 'reforming', 'mainstreaming' of the nomadic communities residing in the rugged territories of Arab world, Middle Asia or Eurasia. The studies on Indian nomadic communities also come from the similar tradition. Most of the 19th century anthropological studies on Indian nomads also come from the 'mainstreaming' approach, diverting the state's attention towards the poor state of nomads, examining the 'historical factors', relative 'isolation', etc. responsible for the nomadic behaviour. The similarities found in nomadic approach towards life and distinctly nomadic patterns still convinces the ethnoarcheologists and anthropologists alike that nomadism prevailed in certain geographical regions of the world due to its relative feasibility and sustainability as a way of livelihood.

This approach is problematic as it clearly attempts an appropriation of nomadic lifestyle in the civilization by giving an economic justification. These approaches attempt to 'internalise' the nomads just like the way state 'internalizes' and 'appropriates' everything else and in this process of 'internalizing' and 'appropriating', the nomad identity is lost. There is a particular way civilization habituates its subjects to envision things but only state forms are capable of being internalised like this. In Deluzian interpretation, 'Sovereignty of the state only reigns over what can be internalised and appropriated locally whereas the identity of nomadism, lying exterior to the state-form, exists in its own metamorphoses and 'does not really allow to be appropriated by the state.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/1987)

Therefore, most of the 19th century literature on nomadism carried a biasness created by the civilizational lenses and sustained a general negative attitude towards the nomads, as much as, that till 1950s, scholars assumed that nomadism and sedentarization are inherently opposite forces and the primary role of nomads is to destabilise the civilization. Later by 1980s, scholars like Khazanov and Salzman also proposed a symbiotic relationship between the settled and nomadic population, giving way to the earlier understanding of rigid antagonism, placing the two in a difficult situation. This was the time when pastoral nomads were studied the most, who used to alternate between the nomadism and sedentary lifestyles.

Further several of the 21st century studies come from Moral Relativist traditions which advocate for a multicultural existence of people belonging to different set of ideas concerning human life. The moral relativist tradition asserts that there is no global moral law that could apply to everyone around the world, in all time and places and thus it's natural to accommodate diverse ideas until it's not damaging to the existing ideas. This theory again is a synonym of the theory of scientific evolution advocating the view that everything evolves from the lesser to greater in qualitative senses in the area of ethics and morals.

Theory of Residue

The 'theory of residue' remained another popular logic amongst the 19th century anthropologists to provide an interpretation of the nomads other the pastoral ones. This theory believes that the present day nomadic people are the survivors of the most primitive tribes which remained, wandering in absence of civilization. As mentioned before in the introduction, 80s and 90s was the period when nomadism was majorly seen as pastoral nomadism as only that position could 'internalize' the idea of nomadism and make sense to the 'royal sciences' of the state; or in other words, nomadism made no sense to the civilizational discourses minus the slightest of economic element it could have. The 'theory of residue' just points out the nomads other than the pastoral and economic ones, to be seen as 'the primitive or segmentary societies' who do have distinct organs of power and are not economically and politically capable enough to create a state. (Ruhela 1968)

The reason why these communities and several other nomadic communities are put into the 'residue' category, is their anti agricultural stance and non-pastoral behaviour. One major problem with this understanding of 'primitiveness' is what Prathama Banerjee calls 'lack of imaginations' on part of the

historians who see 'primitiveness' as 'a paradoxical phenomenon which is at a transformative moment'. (Banerjee 2006)

Still the theory of residue is a step forward towards a new understanding regarding nomadic identity is their attempt to put nomadism at par with civilization. The proposition that these theories essentially make is that nomadism is an economic activity like any other economic activity in civilization and hence not to be located outside the civilization. Movement is natural and inevitable to keep the herds' alive and sustaining life for a pastoral nomad. Rather they were trying to diminish the category of nomadism by considering it a part of civilization. This becomes evident from the 'theory of residue' which refuses to buy any other justification behind the mobility of a community other than an economic activity.

Newer Perspectives- Anti Civilization or Alternative Civilization

As Komal Kothari puts it, 'Each society creates its own nomads'. (Bharucha 2003) The recent literature on the so called 'primitive anarchism', 'anti-civilization' discourse rejects the permanent and established structures of government also indicates that there has always been a set of people keeping away from being governed. The civilization naturally proceeded with the expansion of its social and economic necessities, transforming primitive systems first into simple village economies and then complex capitalist setup. But at every transitional state, there remained people who chose to be the carrier of the process but not the part of it. That is to say that every civilization has had a set of population which wanted to keep away from the state's authority but some also had a major part in transformation of the economies¹ and every civilization in contrast, attempted to expand its authority to each of its imagined population.

The project of civilization, therefore is not something peculiar to the colonial empire' every state like authority, be it the empires of medieval world, the colonial rule or the modern nation state has its own definition of civilization and every civilization used its own methods to bring people under the ambit of its authority. And such population, for the sake of convenience for the authority, necessarily need to be settled, countable and legible for surveillance. Sedentarization is also a necessary condition to 'visibly' be able to contribute to the 'visible' growth of the economy. This in turn has a major influence on how the events of history turned up for majority of these nomadic communities with respect to the civilized counterpart. The ever expanding civilizations flourished under the ever static resource base present on earth, making it impossible for the 'uncivilized' counterpart to sustain what came most natural to it, that is the 'statelessness'.

CONCLUSION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'nomad' as, 'a member of a people that travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home'. This definition provides the reason behind the movement of nomadic people, which is to find new pastures for its animals

which purportedly is also the major source of livelihood for the pastoral nomads. The 'khanabadosh' or the peripatetic nomads on the other hand are the petty merchants on wheels. Indian peripatetic communities were of two types, one who were small or marginal farmers who did part time small scale peddling in nearby villages, selling handicrafts or cattle in fairs or going door to door in nearby villages.

In traditional agrarian societies, these communities were sharing a symbiotic relationship with the agrarian population. Farmers were dependent on their seasonal arrival for many services and some peddlers sustained the everyday needs of the villagers. The *Gadiya Lohars* for example were awaited by the farmers to repair their farming tools. But *Gadiya Lohars* rarely shared a social relationship with the villagers; they used to live into their carts outside the village and maintained a safe distance from the villagers. This social distance was quite natural phenomenon, despite having interdependency in economic sphere, partly because the sedentary and nomadic lifestyles have always been in contradictory position to each other. Since the dawn of mankind there has been a violent confrontation between these two lifestyles majorly on the sharing of territorial land and natural resources. The 'expansionary states' and 'self-governing' people have always been in opposition to each other, differencing on the very basic principles on the purpose of human life. (Scott 2010) The two have a worldwide history of encounters which has always been seen as the clash between the wild and the tamed, barbarian and civilised, backward and modern, the free and the bound, the people without history and the people with history. (Scott 2010) The modern day nation state gives validity only to the sedentary way of life which in turn resulted in gradual marginalisation of the people with non-sedentary way of life.

We see the very basis of western nation states weaved around sedenterization but many sociologists and anthropologists would disagree with this position with substantial arguments. Contemporary anthropologists like James Scott puts forward the argument that behind sedenterizing the whole population, there has been a larger objective of the modern nation state, to fulfil the demands of capital market. The process of internal colonisation, civilization carried in various parts of the world during colonisation is rather a cultural and administrative process to generate more and more labour and capital. The demolition and replacement of traditional market structures in pre-colonial India can be understood under the same light. The penetration of global market forces has not been as easy as it might seem, it literally replaced the self-economies while leaving no independent spaces where these peripatetic economies could survive.

So the history of the market shows no simple, smooth transition from the world of exchange dominated by peddlers to one controlled by trading companies and agency houses, from the localised and fragmented exchange to international trade. It reveals more complicated story of a combined existence of various universe of traders, itinerants, merchants and companies, and of their mutual struggle for control and survival. (Bhattacharya 2003)

An alternative approach which appears new but has been existing unspoken in the art and literature and metaphorically in the philosophical discourse introduced at the beginning of

¹ Especially the simple village agrarian economies where the only connection between villages were the itinerant people exchanging goods and services for agricultural produce.

the chapter, since ages is one that proposes a view without the civilizational lenses or definitions outside the state forms. The newly emerged anarcho-primitivism, anti-civilization, anti-establishment literature in an unconventional, interdisciplinary fashion has existed in the writings of the post-structuralist, post-modernist writers like Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Nietzsche and many. In reality this trail of thought which Deleuze calls 'nomad thought' did exist before these philosophers but as he specifies, they always exist in margins. A 'nomad thought' of Deleuze is similar to what Foucault called 'outside thought' that dares to do things differently and reject what has been accepted and appropriated as the 'universal image'. Nomad thought has always existed yet might have remained unnoticed because of it is neither confined to philosophy nor does it ask for any validation from the 'state forms'. Though now we have seemed to reach that threshold in literary expression that we find that new voices have come up, which advocates seeing nomadism as a subject of international significance rather than the conventional approaches that remained region specific, community specific which again brings us back to the issue of caste and tribe and the position of Indian nomads. These ideas challenge the status quo with respect to the negligence of nomadism by social sciences. Newer lenses to define and understand nomadism provides better opportunities to understand the philosophies which do not aspire to fit in 'little boxes'² that civilization offers via a well-structured and defined limits of civilization around the world. These philosophies are inherently similar to the newly emerging urban nomads, who reject materialism and territorial boundaries around the world at a minuscule yet significant manner.

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² A song written and composed by Malvina Reynolds in 1962. The song is a political satire about development of suburbia, refers towards an ever increasing conformist approach of people. The highly materialistic definition of development and progress of human lives forces them to live their lives in identical 'little boxes' driven and governed by the state institutions.