

**NMML
OCCASIONAL PAPER**

Perspectives in Indian Development

New Series

68

“Identity in Knowledge Society Some Critical Reflections”

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Formerly at Indira Gandhi National Open University



Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

2022

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Published by

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Teen Murti House
New Delhi- 110011

E-mail: director.nmml@gov.in

ISBN: 978-93-84793-44-9

Identity in Knowledge Society

Some Critical Reflections¹

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Abstract

The process of construction of identity gets widely influenced by the broad course of social transformation. The contemporary society is marked by the fast transformation of its economic order from agriculture and industry to knowledge/information driven society, fast transference of information, images, ideas, services, goods and people across the space and the borderless expansion of ICTs along with the neo-liberal globalization. These have paved the way for the emergence of a new social order which has widely been described as the knowledge society. India stands today in the epochal transition towards a knowledge society from the pre-given agrarian and part industrial societal framework. This emerging society has set in motion new patterns of social mobility and new dynamics of identity formations. Against such a backdrop, this paper is an attempt to develop an understanding of the nuances of identity: its essence, construction, transformation and configuration within the broad processes of social transition in India. This paper is arranged in six sections. Section I deals with the dynamics of identity. The key dimensions of the knowledge society and its emergence are explained in Section II. Section III elaborates changing contours identity formation in knowledge society. In Section IV, the processes and contexts of emergence of knowledge society in India are discussed. The dynamics of emerging identities in contemporary India is analysed in Section V. Section VI is concluding one.

Key words: Knowledge society, knowledge workers, identity, globalization, knowledge economy, hierarchy, mobility.

¹ This paper was presented as a part of the NMML Lecture Series on 5th February 2022.

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I. Dynamics of Identity

Identity is a change and transformative agency of a structured entity; it also resonates the resilience of such entity. It forecasts and ushers change and transformation in society and its movement announces the arrival of a new order by transforming a given structure into an agency. Identity echoes reflexivity and identification of purpose and meaning of an entity, and reflects the self-awareness of the ontology of an entity. It however does not connote a fixed or static entity. Rather as a dynamic and complex social reality, it interweaves through multiple foundations of its essence, undergoes frequent processes of construction, transformation and reconfiguration, and expresses itself through diverse modes of solidarity, fuzziness and fluidity. The complexities are also added because of identities undergoing construction/re/deconstruction due to their socio-cultural and contextual specificities. However, despite such complexities and fuzziness, identity has always remained an important aspect of social reality and social analysis as it is essentially a social construct and a social phenomenon. There is in fact a good degree of underlying consistency in the consolidation, construction and fuzziness of identity notwithstanding their diverse manifestations (Singharoy, 2018). Hence there is a need to elaborate the discursive elements of social identity and its various dimensions by locating them in a particular social and historical context.

Identities as Social Roles, Meaning, and Self Discovery: Within the structural arrangement of society, identity is usually described as a person's sense of self—both as an individual reflective of his or her own interpersonal skills and distinctiveness, and as a part of larger society (Bennett, 2015). It is conventionally and frequently used as an umbrella term for a range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions etc (Ochs, 1993). However, to Castells (1997), identities can't simply be understood in terms of objective role performance. There are in-depth subjective meanings attached to it for its substance and transformative expression. Identities are in essence sources of meaning for actors themselves, and by themselves, and identities are constructed through a process of individuation (Castells: 1997:7). Here to Cerutti (2001) construction of new identities leads to self-discovery of the actor(s), and that identities provide sources of meaning and legitimacy to the decisions, action and unity of the group's existence and also define the outer limits of group solidarity (Cerutti 2001).

Social Structural Arrangements, Power and Identity: Bourdieu (1986, 1984) narrates that power is culturally and symbolically created and continuously re-legitimized through the

interplay of agency and structure that takes shape through *habitus* — ‘the socialized norms and tendencies that guide behavior and thinking (Bourdieu 1984: 170); and that social order is progressively inscribed in people’s mind through social, cultural and symbolic capital ‘melding the system of education, language, judgments, and values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life’. These altogether lead to our unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchies, sense of one’s place and behavior of self-exclusion in society (Bourdieu 1986:241). These in many ways essentialize the social entity within a given structure and shape the social identity with deep sense of inclusion and exclusion. For Foucault (1989) the configuration of discourses, knowledge and power has deeper social implications in human societies. Though the discourse aims to reveal truth, in essence its purpose is to control individual. His genealogy of knowledge and power suggests that the subject, form and extent of social control, the forms of authority, form and extent of acceptability of behaviors are all defined by culture that is shaped by social structure; and the social structure is shaped by scientific discourses and discipline. Hence individual identity is interwoven with the genealogy of knowledge and power and its social reproduction that controls individual identity in this ‘disciplinary society’.

Identity as Essential vs. Identity as Construction: The essentialists have seen collective identity to remain rooted in ‘we-ness’ of shared attributes of group members. These attributes to them are the ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ characteristics of a group (Cerulo 1997: 386-87). To the constructionists, identity is the continually shifting description of human being, and tends to be a subjective construction of mainly their objectively fixed phenomena. It is widely described not as a universal but a culture-specific discursive construction. It is seen to be formed continuously as a never complete process (Hall 1996). Whether essential or constructed, identity provides the basis to develop the perception of inclusion, exclusion, we-ness and otherness in social collectivity. Here there is discursive dichotomization of identity as essential versus identity as construction.

Practicality and Reconfiguring of Identities: Identities are invoked and constructed to serve the practical needs and interests of the members of the community. The durability of an identity is contingent upon its ability to provide security, social status, and economic benefits for its members more than other existing alternatives do (Sahliyeh 1993). In fact, as the people are posited with multiple identities, they tend to activate any of these identities to meet the need of

the situation (Emitov, 2007). Identities are also constructed to achieve an imaginary world 'here and now' by constructing an issue to be immediately contentious for the community (Tarrow, 1998).

Modernity: From Fuzziness to Counted Identities: Since the 17th century, human societies have been interconnected through the forces of colonization, modernization, industrialization, westernization and in recent times through globalization. Modernity envisaged to transform the world with the application of Western technological (Fordist), industrial, political, educational, cultural and administrative advancement. It aimed to create universal social identify which is supposed to be founded on reason, rationality, truth, progress, secularism, impersonality, formality, liberalism, and universal freedom as against the practices of traditionalism. As western modernity advanced itself with colonialism and capitalism, it invented administrative tools to identify and divide the native communities even in numerical terms. Modernity to Kabiraj (1992), by introducing modern census, mapping etc has transformed small, approximate, fuzzy communities into enumerated communities of minority and majority and has again submerged these enumerated identities of caste and religious within the identity of nation (Kabiraj, 1996).

Post Modernity and Identity: The postmodernists being critical to the Universalist's understanding of the modernist, consider the need to deconstruct established identity categories in the wake of collapse of modernist grand narratives of reasons and universal freedom (Cerulo, 1997). To them identity in the post post-modern world often becomes principally fragmented, discontinuous, de-centered, dispersed, culturally eclectic, hybrid, depthless, playful, ironic, and reflective of 'plurality of selves, scripts, discourses and desires' (Elliott, 2015: 9), becoming deceptive of reality itself as it privileges how we are to be seen by 'others' over the depths of our own being and distorting the essential by being false to self and true to others (Winnicott 1965, op.cit. Levine 1999: 83).

Hypermodernity, Self, Subject and Subjectivation: The contemporary world experiences the transition towards new waves of 'hypermodernity' those are characterized by disorganized capitalism, incoherent, fragmenting and unfixed social set ups, unstable locations of power, multiple subjectivities, ever-proliferating de/re/constructions, de/re/differentiations, de/re/traditionalizations, and de/re/subjectifications' in society (Lippens, 1998:17). It emphasizes on the intensity, instantaneity, urgency, instant gratification, and sovereignty of self-absorbed

consumers (Aubert 2005:14–15). Touraine (1997) has underlined the conflicting developments that have engulfed the contemporary hyper-modern world wherein we intensively live in an environment of markets and their products on the one hand, and retreat ourselves into our identity or identities, whether ethnic, sexual, national, religious, or simple local on the other. He further adds that ‘the nation state ceased to symbolize reason and has been swept away by empires as well as internationalization of economy and the dream of republic has vanished’ (Touraine 1997: 128). As against these backdrops, Touraine visualizes the coming up of the ‘subject’ as hypermodernity’s agent of change which is capable of actively producing society, constructs itself by articulating resistance to domination, respect for self-esteem, recognition of others as subject. The creativity of hypermodernity is linked to subjectivation through which the (individual and collective) subject frees him/herself of the social norms and roles that constrain her/him (Touraine 1995: 276).

Communitarianism, Violence and Identity: Identity, besides strengthening human relationship and social inclusion, as affirmed by Sen (2006), also promotes social exclusion, communitarianism, and rationalization of violence, politics and manipulation. He underlines the linkage between the construction of communitarian identity and violence (Sen 2006: 5). At times and places one communitarian identity is privileged by tyrannizing other identities. The phenomena of ‘new tyrannies’ also emerge when newly asserted identity tyrannizes, by eliminating other identities. These identities more frequently than not, exhibit their political roles in the society (Sen 1999: 22). The communitarian identity and its political expression often inflict victimhood through varieties of violence in society, and creates terrifying memories for the victims and their identity. The experience of communal violence has enduring impacts for the victim. As underlined by Das (2002), ‘If one’s way of being with others was brutally injured then the past enters the present not necessarily as a traumatic memory, but as a poisonous knowledge. This knowledge can only be engaged through knowing by suffering (Das 2002: 221).

Social Movements and Collective Identities: Social collectivities get transformed and rejuvenated as agency through their participation in collective actions. According to Pizzorno (1978: 293), the direct participation in collective action is an essential component and a ‘connecting a process of formation for a collective identity’. Self-conscious collective actions often generate new collective identity out of scattered individuals e.g., transforming *serie* into *groups en fusion* (Sartre 1960), or transforming ‘class-in-itself’ into ‘class-for-itself’ (Marx

1974). This transform of identity is not always founded on objective economic condition as underlined by the Marxian analysis, or the cost benefit analysis as emphasized by the Resource Mobilization theorists. This may be founded on 'subjectivity' and 'idealism' to bring a drastic change in the fabric of social life (Bertaux1990:153, Melucci 1992, 1996), to develop new worldviews to re-cognize reality itself (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). However, the new world along with the proliferation of several new identities also encounters the inverted image of sectarian radical identities in the name of cultural/religious etc. and other primordial collectivities by championing some abstract entity, essence or symbol, and emphasizing purity or homogeneity of identity (Wieviorka 2005:18).

The contemporary phase of transition of human society has been predominantly marked by the emergence of the knowledge era that experiences the arrival of new economic and technological orders along with unprecedented flow of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), digital and social media, transference of images, information, goods and services across the space, expansion of the processes of modernity, postmodernity and hypermodernity, secularism and communitarianism in its ambit. Many of the transitional societies like that of India are experiencing transition between tradition and modernity, post modernity and hyper-modernity, secularism and communitarianism, experience not only a state of fragmentation in its social self, but also the formation of multiple selves.

II. Knowledge Era and its Key Dynamics

Though knowledge has remained an integral part from the early days of the civilizational journey, the knowledge era, widely described as the knowledge society, is of fairly recent origin. Emerging from the backdrop of 'professional society' of late 19th century (Perkin, 1989) and the 'New Class' society (Bell 1974, Gouldner 1979 and Touraine 1971) of mid-20th century, it has taken the form of a new kind of society that is driven by advances and innovations in the ICTs. The knowledge society representing a recent stage in modern society extends beyond the post-industrial society (Delanty, D 2003). In this society knowledge acquires an operational and commodity value; becomes a factor of economic growth (Machlup (1962).

Knowledge, Networks and Key Capitals: Though this new era has been described interchangeably as Knowledge Society, Information Society, Information Age, Electronic Era, Global Village, Technoelectronic Age, Post Industrial Society, Third Wave, Networked Society

and by many other such vocabularies, we will prefer to call it a knowledge society as it is knowledge that is produced in human mind as interrelated processed products and in this society knowledge has acquired an operational and commodity value, and has become a factor of economic growth. This society transforms knowledge as the main means of livelihood of the largest group of the population, and replaces agricultural workers and industrial workers by knowledge workers (Drucker, 1968). Operationally the knowledge based economic structure of this society ushers economic and social transformation at a global scale, creates new economic appetites, aspirations and demands (Porat 1977), replaces muscle by mind, (Toffler 1990), and develops global network of wealth, power and identity (Castells 1996). For the social being it creates a new zeal becoming the site of social power that shifts from possession of land and machine to cultivation of individual mind. In this society human beings are the key resource as the bearers of key capital i.e. knowledge. This society transforms human beings, triggers their creative reflection, converts their ‘tacit knowledge’ that is trapped within into ‘explicit knowledge’ for the creation of new meaning and mass production through increasing emphasis on formal education, skill and training (UN 2005: 36-37).

ICTs and Globalization: The ICT Revolution and globalization are the crucial co-constituents indispensable for sustenance and expansion of knowledge society that has posited humanity to ‘face a quantum leap forward, (Toffler 1980:348, Toffler and Toffler 1995: xi); and have made people to be part of large scale knowledge networks through computer, World Wide Web networking, Skype, emails, blogs, twitters, face-book, SMS, MMS and the like (Melucci 1996-8) replacing the pre-existing ‘mass society’(Dijk 1999). Globalization and ICTs has brought into being an unprecedented flow of goods and services and mobility of ideas, information, and images and of human being across the space in unprecedented speed. These have ushered a ‘networking form of organization across the globe with flexibility and instability of work, and individuation of labor through the constitution of a space of flows and timeless time’ (Castells 1997: 1), and a unitary framework of experience across the globe, yet at the same time new forms of fragmentation and dispersal (Giddens, 1990: 4-5).

Distinguishing Features: The knowledge society brings striking changes in most of the key areas of the society. Some of these distinctions are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Comparative features of agricultural, industrial and knowledge society.

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Key Areas	Agricultural Society	Industrial Society	Knowledge Society
Key Resources	Natural Resources	Physical Labour	Mental, intellectual Capability
Source of Power	Land, Animal and Physical	Steam engine	Internet
Key Tools	Plough, hoe,	Machine tools	Information and communication technologies
Major Products	Foods, other basic services	Industrial goods and services	Data, information, Knowledge, Ideas
Major Working Categories	Agricultural Workers	Industrial Workers	Knowledge Workers
Market	Localised markets	National and world market, colonies	Global market
Major Source of GDP and Employment	Primary sector	Secondary Sector	Tertiary Sector
Major Social Movements for social change	Peasant, Tribal, localized unity	Labor, factory or organization class based	Larger issues connecting people locally and globally on the issues environment, women, ethnic, gay, lesbian etc
Bases of Social Identities	Communitarian, consolidated	Secular economy partly consolidated	Multiple-global, widely diffused.
Forms of Social Mobility	Slow pace of mobility widely conditioned by primordial arrangements	Fast pace of mobility, widely vertical	Fast pace of mobility both vertical and horizontal
Forms of Spatial Mobility	Very limited, pre dominantly rural to rural and mostly for non economic purpose. Insignificant incidence of immigration	Fast Mobility for a limited section of people from rural to rural and rural to urban areas both for economic and non economic purpose. Immigration for a limited section of population	Extensive mobility from rural to urban and from urban to urban areas, predominantly for the economic purpose. Unprecedented incidences of immigration
Pace of Change	Very slow	Fast for a limited section	Very fast and all encompassing

Restructuring: Knowledge society brings varieties of restructuring and alteration in the pre-existing societal arrangements, and discontinuity with the past (Dracker 1966), live shock waves, dizzying disorientation in the social institutions, and an alternative consciousness (Toffler, 1970: 161). It has produced new architecture of power, new form of the exclusion, polarization, inequality, social asymmetries; inculcated new areas of interest, new identities, and social movements and new landscape of conflicts and political category of new underclass (Castells 2001: 60-61, Castells 1997:11) and has produced the interrelated forms of identities to respond to the logic of domination and loss of control over lives. At this stage let us elaborate the nuances of social identities.

III. Changing Contours of Identity formation in Knowledge Society

Globalization and Identity: In recent years, the processes of ushering of knowledge society which is accompanied by neoliberal economic globalization, and revolution in ICTs have promoted an unprecedented and ever faster movement of persons, goods and services, ideas and images across the globe. Castells (1997), has validated that in this information driven globalized world there has been increased instability and fragmentation in the social order and most societies realize its existence as half flow and half being (Castells 1997:11). Giddens (1991), however finds the same world as increasingly becoming commonplace and a single world having a unitary framework of experience. He demonstrates that in this society the ‘self’ now becomes a reflexive project which requires self-planning and consequently becomes a central feature of the structuring of the self-identity. Similarly for Ulrich Beck (2009), under accelerated modernization, the process of production of identity has become increasingly open to choice, scrutiny and revision. In this de-traditionalized reflexive modernization ‘the integration of individualized individuals into the network of broader social relations necessarily arise in novel forms’ (Beck, 2009). For Elliott and Lemert (2006), the emerging state of new individualism looks for continual self-actualization and instant self- reinvention and drifting in and out of relations with others without long-term commitments (cf. Ibid, 2015). In the wake of penetration of new social, economic, political and technological forces, the state of flux has replaced stable group membership (Bococks, 1993), and identity is becoming relatively free-floating, detached from the bases of social structure which used to constrain it. People are now relatively freer to

pick and choose which of the various ‘you’ on offer we want to be ‘me’ (Weeks, 1890 cf. Bradley 2016: 41).

Identity through ‘Generalized Elsewhere’: In the emerging knowledge society, the extensive usage of ICTs and new media like those of mass email, facebook, skype, blog, twitter, whatsapp, etc. has contributed to the formation of web based epistemic virtual communities by challenging the established notions of identities those are founded on co-presence in the world (Cerulo, 1997). Identity is constructed by reframing the generalized others as the ‘generalized elsewhere and by weakening the connections between physical and social place’ (Ibid: 388). The emerging social order has also produced new social boundaries which are fluid and fragmented.

Solidarity and Fluidity in Identity: The knowledge society with its co-constituents of ICTs and globalization has brought a lot of fragmentations in the pre-existing collective self by uprooting predefined boundaries of social solidarity, injecting increasing flow of instability, mobility and migration of people across spaces. Hence for many, collective solidarity has now become a contested domain. Within these emerging complexities there have been manifestations of fluid-like elements in society and society is being increasingly subjected to shock waves from fluidity rather than solidarity, and public experience of self rather than reflections of collective identity (Urry, 2000 cf. McDonald, 2002). In this emerging society, identities are multi-faceted and are formed diversely in terms of their relation with power structure and dominant institutions in society. As the world has been further fragmented in terms of unequal power relations and domination, there has been diverse formation of identities in relation to the same. Castells (1997), describes them in his monumental work *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. 2 Power of Identity* as: *Legitimizing identity* (introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination); *Resistance identity* (generated by those actors that are in positions/ conditions devaluated and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from or opposed to those permeating the institutions of society) and *Project identity* (constructed by social actors on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them to build a new identity that redefines their position in society, and by doing so seek to transform the whole structure). These identities are however not fixed. Castells has also talked about the ludic identities where situationally, in relation to power there have been diverse expressions of identities.

Self and Society and Self the Cyclical Order: Society shapes self which shapes social behaviours (Cooley, 1902, Blumer 1969). Stryker (1980), in his framework of identity specifies reciprocal relationship between person and social structure — the ‘self’ and ‘society’ — wherein each one becomes a product and producer in turn. The knowledge society in its postmodern and hyper modern avatar experiences the proliferation of individualism. Though the society has changed over the centuries from agrarian to industrial, industrial to postindustrial and further to knowledge society, the basic interdependency between society and individual has remained fundamental till today in shaping the identity of the people. As E.H. Carr (1961) elaborates, development of individual and society go hand in hand. The cult of individualism began with the renaissance and its rise is ‘connected with the rise of capitalism, Protestantism, industrial revolution and the doctrine of free-trade. The whole process was a social process and not a revolt of individual against society or an emancipation of the individual from social constraints’ (Ibid, 1961: 55). Hence there is a dialectical relationship between self and social structure as argued by Stryker (1980), wherein both mutually condition each other.

In the wake of globalization, proliferation of ICTs and knowledge economy and unprecedented flow of mobility in social setup, the essence of the self/individual/identity has acquired profound fuzziness, multiplicity and fluidity; and the social structure of this knowledge society has also experienced unprecedented transformation in all its domains—social, cultural, economic and political. These fuzziness and fluidity are reflected in the existence of everyday collective lives. However despite these fuzziness and fluidity a large chunk of identities is tending to get consolidated through the communitarian, primordial and cultural roots, may it be caste, race, language, and ethnicity and region and religion. As against these backdrops let us examine the process of identity construction in the emerging knowledge society in India.

IV. Processes and contexts of emergence of Knowledge Society in India

India inherited a predominantly agricultural society from the British after independence. It introduced a plethora of new initiatives including those of the land reforms, agricultural modernization, and rapid industrialization till 1980s under the regime of centralized planning, rigid economic discipline, state controlled business environment, for export promotion and import restriction. These transformative programmes however brought only part success in agricultural and rural development and a very limited progress in industrialization. Over the

decades the transitional dynamics of India got widely characterized by chronic low rate of economic growth and a high rate of population growth, regular budget deficit, inflation, high rate of unemployment, labour unrest, large scale industrial sickness, and increasing trade deficit, and huge burden of indebtedness on the international funding agencies, persistent unemployment, poverty, hunger of large chunk of population, increasing social and economic inequality frequent presents, workers and farmers etc unrests and increasing pressure of population on traditional resources. Along the line largest chunk of India's work force remained trapped in agriculture, industrialization was slow, state sponsored avenues of educational and skill development remained very limited. Rapid industrialization and modernization of all traditional sectors of the economy that was visualized to be growth engines of Indian economy repeatedly started falling short of expectations. At these points while the world had been experiencing the new technological and economic choices and the unprecedented proliferation of knowledge revolution in the developed world, India in early 1990s opted for the path of economic liberalization going away from path of state controlled one, and adopted the ICTs driven globalized knowledge revolution as a new opportunity to ignite its human resource for a new future and 'to steer the society to a new direction' (Planning Commission of India 2001). The Planning Commission emphatically asserted that 'we missed the industrial revolution but we should not miss the information and knowledge revolution....Leap flogging into knowledge era looks eminently possible today for the societal transformation of India in the twenty-first century, which is going to be the century of hope for India' (Planning Commission of India 2001). The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that already paved the way for domestic market liberalization and private investment in the key sector of the economy helped the state to bring in huge private and foreign direct investment in the information and communication technology and also private investment in education. Huge infrastructures for road and transport, IT hubs and business processing, tour and travel, banking and insurance, health and education entertainment and recreation are now speeding across the country. ICTs links are established in every corner of the country both with the state as well as private initiatives. Digital India 2015 is a new slogan paving the way for a vibrant knowledge economy in India. The New Education Policy 2020 has envisioned 'an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society,

by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower(Govt. of India 2020:4).

Contemporary India is experiencing phenomenal expansion of educational institutions — from 103 universities and 3604 colleges in 1970-71 to 1300 universities and 4600 colleges in 2020. Over these years GER in higher education has increased 27 per cent. The GER at secondary level has gone up to 65 per cent (ibid.). The educational background of the work force has also substantially increased.

In the 1990s less than 0.5 per cent of population had access to internet. Now more than 58 per cent of the Indian population has access to internet, 91 per cent over mobile telephone. Mass, digital and social media have brought new opportunities for social networking, new patterns of work participation, and new capacity for mass production, dissemination and use of knowledge by the large segment of population of India 65 per cent of which is below 35 years. All these have brought not only new momentum in the economy by creating new varieties of job, but also a new phase of economic growth and social arrangement in the country (Statistia 2021).

The economy that was stagnating below 4 per cent rate of economic growth in pre-1990s has even experienced above 9 per cent economy growth in the 1990s. In 2020-21 India's economic growth rate was 8.9 per cent according to World Bank (2021). Besides the higher economic growth rate, India is also seeing significant shift in the work participation from agriculture to service sector and the highest contribution of the service sector to the nation's GDP (63%), (ibid.). Workforce participation in agriculture has declined to 42.6 per cent in 2021 from 72 per cent in 1971 and its contribution to GDP to 20 per cent from 57 per cent in 1951-22 (Census 1971, World Bank 2021). However, despite several state sponsored initiatives India has not been able to emerge as an industrialized nation yet. This sector accommodates 25.1 per cent work force and contributes to 26 per cent of the GDP. There is, however, phenomenal expansion of the service sector. The sector contributes 54 per cent of the GDP and accommodates 32.3 per cent of the total workforce of the country (Statistia.com 2021, Timesdata 2021). The service sector's growth rate surpasses that of agriculture and industry; it has registered above 10 per cent growth in the last fiscal year (*Economic Survey* 2022). The fast shift of the economy towards the service sector is linked to the expansion of IT, trade, hotel, restaurants, and transport. Communication, financing, insurance, real estate, business processing services, and community, social, health,

education and personal services and all those who contribute to augment the knowledge economy in the country.

Knowledge Work, New Hierarchy and Mobility: India today stands at the threshold of a knowledge society. Occupationally, it is at a fast-transitional phase. However it has created new occupational hierarchy across the cities, towns and the villages putting knowledge related jobs at the top. The new occupational hierarchy has evolved as a human pyramid whereby a small section of core workers (knowledge workers) and their support service providers exploit the emerging economic opportunities and maximize their economic interests, reinforcing their social significance by occupying the top and middle segments of this pyramid. At the bottom of the pyramid is the vast mass of manual/unskilled workers who provide varieties of physical labour for the growth and sustenance of this society and its organizational structure. This occupational and social hierarchy has sharpened with the increasing gap between the core knowledge workers who are knowledge-rich, upwardly mobile and informed on the one hand, and the knowledge-poor, who are stagnant, uninformed and only spatially and horizontally mobile on the other (SinghaRoy 2014). In terms of knowledge inequality the social division has been sharpened in India which comes closer to the observation (Castells 1997:67). That class division between the knowledge haves and the knowledge have-nots and between the empowered 'information-rich' and the 'information-poor' has sharpened.

Within the emerging contexts of knowledge inequality, new patterns of social hierarchy and marginalization are in the process of taking shape. Resultantly, a significant section of the society has access to appropriate knowledge and information, are affluent and upwardly mobile and emerges as the dominant section society on the one hand, while on the other knowledge inequality has produced its own pattern of marginality from amongst the knowledge deprived or semi deprived. Importantly, this development has simultaneously reinforced many of the old facets of marginality in one form or the other. It has produced a vast number of *structurally marginalized people* who are located within the knowledge society and contribute to the expansion of this society without getting substantive scope for upward social mobility. They are represented by migrant workers in the informal sector, workers not getting adequate access to education and ICTs, workers who are continuing to provide cheap labour while remaining socially neglected, economically disadvantaged, politically disempowered and historically deprived. Apart from the structurally marginalized, there are those who are *functionally*

marginalized, a status within the emerging functional arrangements of knowledge society even though they have the potential for upward mobility. Moreover, there are the *neo-marginalized* who are not marginalized historically but have acquired this status because of reshuffling of the economic and the opportunity structure. Importantly, most of the marginalized workers of the knowledge society has brought in the historically inherited position of their marginality in this emerging knowledge society. However, a section of them has been able to break the barriers of their marginality by getting access to education, training, skill and ICTs and are a part of larger social networks and constructing new social identities.

New Socio-cultural Milieu in a Pre-Existing Segregated Society: The expansion of economic neo-liberalism, education, ICTs and emergence of new occupational hierarchy on the one hand, and marginalization of vast section of people on the other — a metro/ urban centric, youth focused, fast changing fashion and consumption-oriented global socio-cultural milieu is happening across the urban and rural spaces in India. This socio-cultural milieu has helped convert the world into a site of consumption of varieties of goods and services and information. This unitary framework of consumption culture has largely converted the society into a market place within which people look for instantaneous gratification. India is experiencing the arrival of a new generation of youth who are the product of economic liberalization, globalization and ICTs. They are the 'e-credos' of India with deep orientation to ICT driven consumerist life-style. The trend is spreading very fast both in rural and urban areas and are influencing all segments of society though with a differing intensity. These 'e-credos' and other similar segments of population have emerged as the driving engine of the information age. Significantly, the middle-aged professionals, academics, entrepreneurs and others who have both the desire and capacity are profoundly tempted to be integrated within this socio-cultural milieu and are in the process of getting acclimatized with this techno-centric culture. Within the networked consumerist culture all tend to project them more as an individual self, as personification of self-liberated entity, than a collective self. Their integration to the knowledge society is through virtual networkers of being and becoming. They are however not a homogenous category. For many, their pre-given locations in a specific spatial, caste, ethnic, and gender etc. groups widely condition the construction of their world views.

This emerging society has been unable to integrate a large segment especially the structurally marginalized within its ambit. In effective terms, they have become part of this

consumerist cultural milieu by compulsion and not by choice. In the process of integration with the knowledge society many of them tend to lose not only the required space to preserve, practice and promote their own life choices, culture and the pre-given morality but also become dependent on the market driven available alternatives on which they seldom have control. As local tends to be irrelevant within the brutal expansion global consumerist forces, the consumerists seldom are able to uphold their traditional culture, self and identity. They only silently mourn their self-demise, and wait for the opportune moment for its revival. Within this emerging economic and social milieu, this section of people has emerged to be the outsiders from within and survive as global 'marginal man' who resides in urban areas as immigrants, and in rural areas as native but are not integrated effectively either culturally or politically. The traditional cultural mosaic of Indian society, which is for long made layered and fragmented, has been layered and fragmented further with the emergence of new socio-cultural milieu even though the whole society is circumscribed by global consumerism. How and when to be a global consumerist is a cultural fad in the knowledge society; to be globally integrated is more dependent on the economic capacity than the infused desire of these global marginal men. They often lack behind in their economic capacity.

Caste, Gender and Ethnicity: The expansion of knowledge society has shown a positive correlation with high level of education and skill, higher degree of urbanization and high caste and ethnic backgrounds. The above mentioned group is highly integrated across all spatial verticals within the knowledge society through its access to high and technical education and ICTs. The intermediate castes have high level of integration in metros and district towns but moderate level of integration at the village level. Both the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have got a moderate to high level of integration in metros and district towns but a low level of integration in towns and villages. Awareness about the policy of protective discrimination among a section of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and their migration to the urban areas have contributed to such integration in the urban space. Women on the other hand, have a high level of integration in the metros and district towns and a very low level of integration in villages. However, knowledge jobs in general has become gender friendly. In all, higher degree of integration within knowledge society is positively linked to higher degree of mobility in society. However, the form of mobility and extent of integration into knowledge

society has remained conditioned by caste, ethnicity and gender consideration as well as circumscribed by spatial locations (SinghaRoy, 2018).

V. Solidarity and Fluidity in Identity: The Emerging Facets

Within the emerging pattern of social division — marginality, diverse forms of social integration, and interconnectivity with the wider world — the emergent knowledge society experiences a formation of diverse identities. The emerging knowledge society has produced a small but powerful community of status-quoists who have been able to harvest maximum benefit out of emerging social connectivity, networks, new avenues of economic opportunities because of their pre existing social and economic status in society. For them all is well and ever progressive, statusquo to be ensured, and questioning and critiquing the authority in power be avoided to ensure that the system functions. Such an identity need not to be consolidated on the surface, but operate tacitly and effectively in silence. The core group of knowledge workers are predominantly adherents of such formation. Increasing connectivity and networks have opened up possibilities for new economic opportunities, migration and occupational mobility, new frontiers of freedom, choice and friendship for a section of marginalized people of society. While a section of them tends to be statsquoist, the predominant section of the traditionally marginalized now relocate their resources, strength and knowledge to get connected with the wider world. By developing networks of alternatives choices, they also develop critique of the present world and articulate a resistance against traditional forces of domination. As their marginalization was legitimized through the traditional arrangement of ethnicity, caste and gender, they have been aware of the political and economic significances of their primordial identity. They now privilege ‘primordiality’ as it keeps them grounded to their roots. It is however not to say that knowledge society reproduces primordial identities for a political or economic goal but to argue that historically inherited deprivations and dominations that have primordial roots, have significantly retained their association with the new and rejuvenated collective identity formation in this age. And that they use this collective identity to integrate with the newly formed networks at times as a mark of unity, and at times as a language of protest against domination.

ICTs function as a double-edged weapon; while it liberates a section of people, it also helps consolidate areas of conservatism and absolutism. While the knowledge society has made

people individualistic through the cultural dynamics of modernity and hypermodernity and consumerism, and rootlessness through the increasing flow of mobility, migration and dissociation, it has also made people to develop a nostalgia for primordiality to get in touch with the cultural roots. The communal and fundamentalist forces, who often mobilize people on the primordial communitarian line, use this as an opportunity for propagating extremist view. Thus a part of such primordialization is co-opted by religious fundamentalism as 'project identity' and use social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, WhatsApp across the space on everyday basis to propagate such views. This is widely reflected in the increasing manifestations of religious fundamentalist forces and identities across the country who use all high end ICTs to propagate their medieval dictum causing tensions, conflicts and disharmony. As the hyper images, ideas and information are spread fast across the borders many communalist forces use it to penetrate without authentication, the common mass to serve their political purpose. Even distorted images, ideas and information become hegemonic and counterhegemonic among ordinary lives giving new lease of life to the communal and fundamentalist forces who essentialise we-ness and otherness through primordiality.

The knowledge society has also produced a thin layer of people with 'ludic identity' who want to enjoy the world 'here and now' and are characterized by conspicuous consumption without any regard for environmental, neighbourhood, societal or cultural concerns. Though they are relatively young, educated, predominantly belonging to upper and upper middle strata from urban India, their size is gradually increasing. They want to be globally linked — locally uprooted and enmeshed in the latest material and non-material world, can enter and exit in legitimizing, project or protest according to convenience.

The knowledge society is yet to fully evolve in India. It has remained part agrarian, part industrial and has emerged to be part knowledge based, part local and part global even though the strong flow of the knowledge society is spreading across the space. Societies in India now witness the momentum of multiple interactivities of multiple and diverse forces, structures and processes causing the proliferation of multiple identities. It is in a rapid yet transitional phase and finds itself in a whirlpool of multiple socio-cultural realities those have unsettled many of the pre-existing social forces. The emergence of knowledge society has kept a section of the society socially, economically and politically undetermined and in a state of constant flux. Herein, the contemporary social realities appear to be more fluid than fixed, and so are the social identities.

Through increasing interconnectivity with the wider world, identities have become highly flexible as social collectivities that are regularly mobilized on the principle of fragmentation at one end and unification on the other. These identities get consolidated on the principles of workers, peasants, farmers, citizens, environmentalists, civil society activists, patriots on the one end, while on the other, get reconsolidated on the basis of caste, community, language, ethnicity, nationality subsuming many of the preexisting identities within these ambits. These identities experience continuous renewal and rejuvenation and are in the process of crystallization of a composite cultural reflexivity, resonance and resilience. These flexible identities are shaped as reaction to sustained marginality at one end and receptivity to new world views on the other that have emerged out of the expansion of education, literacy and enhanced virtual and physical connectivity (Singharoy, 2018). An agricultural labourer of rural north Bengal is no more an ignorant daily wage earner; rather he has become a milk seller, beneficiary of rural development scheme, a migrant labourer to the city, member of Dalit association, a voter, a citizen, member of a political party and an assertive nationalist by getting connected with the wider society through ICTs and social media. He is now empowered by locating himself within the flow of multiple identities and asserts his caste identity to break the barriers of his economic marginality and political subordination in society.

VI: Conclusion

India's emerging knowledge society is posited to bring fast, extensive and far reaching transformations in the society. However these transformations are widely circumscribed by the forces of economic neoliberalism, dynamics of postmodernism and hyper modernism, resurgence of populism and the arrival of new way cultural politics, those have emerged to be integral parts of the structural arrangements of the society. Importantly economic neoliberalism tends to convert the society in a marketplace in each and every domain of its activity—social wellbeing, education, health, food, housing, fashion and construction of worldview etc with competitive consumerism and common market appetite. While the post modernism asserts the failure of the generalizing trends of modernity and finds the emerging society to be fragmented in social, economic and cultural terms, the hyper-modernism underlines the increasing significance of instantaneity, urgency, instant gratification, fragmenting, and unstable identities. Within these processes they find interactive processes fragmentation and de/re/ constructions of the vital

arrangements of the society. Also, within these processes there has been the resurgence of populism that claims to be moral and authentic and true representative of the people, encourages anti-establishment/elite agenda through large scale mass mobilization, promotes exclusion in the name of culture, ethnicity, economy and historicity of social existence, creates new symbol of unity, uses rhetoric and all means of communication and media to reach out to the mass to construct new identity and gets a good host in developmental imbalances and persistent social in society (SinghaRoy 2021: 209-221). Finally, the new way cultural politics emphatically sees people as cultural entity as against the economic/consumerist entity; endeavours to unite people in terms of traditional cultural practices as against modernity and post modernity; emphasis on the revival of traditional cultural practices; reconstructs the present in terms of cultural unity; and redefines politics in terms of traditional cultural symbols, norms, values, and practices. This politics widely puts religion into mobilising cultural symbols, norms, values, and practices; cultivates religious sensibilities of people through these symbols, norms, values, and practices to get their support; and most importantly derives its world view and legitimacy to control and capture power through these practices.

The Constitution of India has emphasized on the equal citizenship identity of the people of India notwithstanding the legacies of caste, religious, regional and linguistic etc. identities in the society. In the period between 1950s and 1980s India envisaged economic development with justice, empowerment and inclusion of all citizens through state controlled centralized planning, land reform, agricultural modernization and industrialization. However India experiences a paradigm shift in its developmental perspective since early 1990s in the wake of globalization and economic liberalization. Importantly, though these have paved the way for the emergence of knowledge society in India with fast penetration of ICTs, expansion of the bases of quality education and skill, and faster rate of economic growth and social development than ever before, there have also been vivid and persistent developmental anomalies. As per the Census 2021 projection 16.5 per cent of population of India is till illiterate, female illiteracy rate is to the extent of 34 per cent. Unemployment is rampant especially in the rural areas, and the unemployment rate among the educated (graduate and above) is to the extent of 19.4 per cent (Statistia 2021). The land-man ratio has sharply declined from .50 hectare per person in 1981 to .09 hectare in 2015, and rural to urban migration for employment has increased exponentially. According to 2011 Census the migrants constituted 45.36 core or 37 per cent of the country's

population. 20.8 per cent people lived below poverty line in 2020 (as per the criterion of the Tendulkar Committee), in 2021 25 per cent of the population was multidimensionally poor (as per Multidimensional Poverty index of Niti Aayog 2022). India ranks 101st of the 116 countries and scores 27.5 in the global hunger index indicating the prevalence of a serious level of hunger (Global Hunger Index, 2021). Along with faster economic growth, inequality has grown phenomenally with the top 10 per cent of Indians holding 77 per cent of the total national wealth (Oxfam, 2022). The economic inequality has been accompanied by criminalization of politics with 233 Members of Parliament out of the 539 winners in Lok Sabha election in 2019 having criminal cases pending against them (*Hindustan Times*, August 11, 2021).

Importantly, India simultaneously does experience the penetration of agricultural and industrial growth and the knowledge era in its social and economic existence with seamless participation. Culturally it swings between tradition and modernity, post modernity and hyper modernity, formality and informality, individualism and communitarianism, secularity and primordiality, civic and ethnic constructions. Politically it finds the proliferation of cultural politics and mobilization of people in the name of religion, caste, ethnicity for institutionalized democratic practices, and increasing alliances of the peasants, farmers, and workers and other alliances with the primordial forces. Along the line, the developmental anomalies and contradictions — between high end skilled work force and illiterates, between prosperity and rampant poverty/hunger, between sharp mobility and sustained stagnation, between democratic mobilization and criminalization of politics — have engulfed the life situations of vast majority of the people across the space. These together have brought a state of fluidity in the social existence of most social categories such as peasants, farmers, workers, professionals, civil society activists, party workers, castes, gender and ethnic groups and of citizens alike.

The developmental anomalies and increasing fluidity in the society has created a space for the resurgence of populisms who speak against the traditional elites, highlight deprivation of the masses, their choices and rights, and arrange distribution of benefits and freebies of various forms for the masses. As these populisms inculcate the culture of ‘beneficiary’ and ‘recipients’ for the distribution of benefits and freebies to expand and ensure their vote banks covertly in ethnic terms, large sections of development-deprived ordinary masses often try to get included in the potential category of beneficiary and recipient following the ethnic root.

Within the life world of fluidity, for many people, primordiality has got an alternative situational meaning for rootedness to recast old solidarity in new context and also an identity for legitimate collective political action through the rejuvenated category of caste, religious community and ethnicity. As non-primordial identities appear to be fluid, multiple and unstable, primordial identities are privileged to be stable and solidifying collectivities. Many individuals and collectivities, who express themselves as a part of collective body of peasants, farmers, workers, professions, trade unionists etc at one point of time, become part of primordial solidarity at another moment. Many primordial identities like caste, religion and ethnicity etc have emerged to be proactive to assert their identity. Some primordial collectivities are also reconfigured by developing cross-allianced political parties, civil society and social movement organizations and the vice-versa and becoming parts of multiple identities. There has also been cooption of the primordial identities for political purpose. However, those are but explicit in the electioneering process starting from the Panchayat to Parliamentary levels. Within the state of fluidity, de/reconsolidation and formation of new alliances in this knowledge era there has been the spiral movement of identities as both the essential and constructional dynamics of identity are boosted in their own context causing fluidity on one end and solidarity on the other.

The social and digital media are integral parts of the knowledge era. With the over flow of images, ideas and information as circulated through social and digital media most social discourses seldom get stability among masses, as additional and counter images appear to sweepingly overshadow the previous one even before any new image of reality is being consolidated in their mind. These on the one hand cause constant fuzziness in the social self, on the other many a time help in rooting contradictions and binaries in society by flourishing communalism and fundamentalism. The increasing incidences of hate speech many a time are the product of such a formation. During the brief period between October 2021 and February 2022 in the six northern states in India there have been as many as 89 instances of hate crimes and hate speeches (*The Wire*, 09 March 2022). The yearly cases registered for promoting enmity between different groups have gone up to 436 per cent from 2014 to 2020 (Sengupta, A, 2022:22).

The processes of rejuvenation, formation and assertion identities in the emerging knowledge society have been accompanied by a mix of despair and hope in the Indian society. Rejuvenation of primordial communitarian identities to propagate hate and exclusion, usage of

primordial identities for political purpose reveal a kind of darkness and despair of the emerging society. As and when the choice for primordialism get dogmatized as a world view, and primordialism becomes a function to political overture, it only becomes a tool for exclusivist political discourse in a pluralistic inclusive society. However, simultaneously being traditionally a multi-cultural society, people's association with primordial identity has not been always founded on cost-benefit calculation or dogmatization in this emerging society. Hence the making of a choice for a primordial communitarian identity, constructing a new identity through alliance with primordial identity and becoming part of multiple identities have got linked to the aspiration of breaking the barriers of developmental deprivation, and structure of domination, and to smoothen the process of social mobility through political collective mobilizations in the emerging knowledge society. These choices have opened up the space for new discourse for hope of inclusion and liberation in the emerging knowledge society. Thus, the emerging of knowledge society in India despite bringing the elements of disembeddedness (Giddens 1990), incoherence, fragmentation, instability, decenteredness, multiple subjectivities (Lippens, 1998), state of flux (Elliott and Lemert 2006), and fluidity of half flow and half being (Castells 1997), has also brought the space for as suggested by Touraine (2022 'subjectivation' of the 'subject' of the new age, who in turn would create a self-conscious society free from coercion, domination, inequality and injustice. This society has ignited people's mind by enhancing access to education, skill, knowledge, information, networks and mobility. They are in the process of making their space for self-expressions getting consolidated in the form of primordiality at one end and re-consolidation in the form non- primordiality on the other for their individual and collective assertions to usher a new era — liberation from poverty, unemployment, ignorance, traditional domination and social exclusion.

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