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Utilizing embodied emotions in ethnographic research

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Abstract

Fieldwork makes the researcher the main tool of the interpretation of culture. Much of culture is performed and embodied. This paper argues that the way that a researcher dresses and feeds the body can violate cultural norms in the field, in this case: purity with regard to the female body in the Indian IT Industry (IT India). As a consequence, the researcher experiences powerful emotions of rejection. If these experiences are utilized, they provide valuable information. In this case, they uncover concepts of purity in IT India.

Keywords: embodiment, culture, emotions, India, IT, caste, purity

Introduction

Anthropological fieldwork makes the researcher the main tool of research. Through interaction with the field, insights on how the world is constructed socially from the field's perspective are being gained. This process is deeply subjective and based on researcher identity (Mahadevan, 2011b). When asked to provide proof of 'rigorous' research, qualitative researchers of organizations often tend to rationalize and downplay their subjectivity. Often, their own embodied and emotional performances are lost in the process.

In contrast to this approach, this paper suggests to reflect upon the researcher's body in the field, and to find out how embodied rule violation can be a means of insight for ethnography. It argues that the way that embodied researcher performance is perceived by the field can deliver insights on culture in the field, in this case: performances of purity in the Indian IT industry (IT India).

The female Indo-German researcher's experience is based on ethnographic fieldwork in various computer engineering organizations in the Indian city of Bangalore, often called the IT capital of India. By being herself, the researcher violates cultural norms and concepts of 'purity' in the field.

In this paper, selected embodied performances of purity in the field of IT India are described; their meanings are discussed. Based on these interpretations, it is suggested that the Indo-German female researcher's body is rejected because of the impossibility to categorize her performances with regard to 'purity'. To the researcher this is a deeply emotional process that is linked to personal experiences outside the field and within her Indian extended family. She has to ask herself whether her own embodied identity might be the major obstacle to ethnography in this field and whether she should actually be doing what she does. Yet, through re-conceptualizing

her struggles as means of insights into the field, she discovers the benefits of embodied rule violation.

In summary, this paper makes three contributions. Firstly, it shows how the body is fed and clothed in IT India. Second, it reflects upon how the researcher's body is rejected by the field with regard to these aspects of the body. Thirdly, it links these emotions to the field which delivers insights on performances of caste and purity in IT India. From there, it draws suggestions of how researchers could utilize such emotions of rejection as a tool of research. In this paper, the researcher will be called J.

Starting to research upon IT India

The first company of IT India that J researched upon between 2004 and 2006 is originally based in Germany. During time of research (2004 to 2006), the company had approximately 8,000 employees in Germany and 35,000 worldwide. To gain competitive advantage through comparably low-cost qualified labour in India, it was building up an offshore site in what has been called the Indian "IT capital" of Bangalore. Since then, J has conducted fieldwork at several offshore sites of foreign IT companies in Bangalore and has investigated into the relations of power between foreign headquarters and Indian offshore site. She has questioned this structural dependency from postcolonial perspective (Mahadevan, 2011a).

When J started her first fieldwork on IT India, she was one of few women and almost the only 'non-technical person' at the office. This made her difficult to categorize for mainly male employees who categorized themselves as 'engineers' in the beginning. This made it difficult to gain not only nominal but substantial access (Downey, 1998).

Yet, J could draw on a personal resource: The reason for management to have let her in was her perceived dual identity: Her father being ethnic Indian, her mother being ethnic German, and having spent her early childhood in India, employees from all sites were eager to ask questions about her nationality, language skills, eating habits, childhood, religion et cetera. Therefore, it was assumed that she would explain “the Germans” to “the Indians” and vice versa. During the initial negotiations, management had asked a lot of questions regarding J’s cultural identity.

And indeed, employees from all sites were eager to ask her questions on her own identity, trying to categorize her. After a few weeks, J would introduce herself to everybody with the words: “My name is XY, I am half-Indian, half-German, I am the goal. If I can manage, you can manage, too.” This usually was met with laughter and interest and numerous questions.

In the end, J’s official role, as shaped by the field, was one of “someone who knows about India / Germany” and “someone to whom we can talk about our problems unofficially”. As demanded for, J was careful to reflect upon herself in the process. Yet, she did so only intellectually. Any emotions she might have experienced during research, she tried to hide in her final account. Alternatively, she detached herself from her own emotions by using irony. At this time, the body was not an issue in cultural research for her. To write up to the expectations of ‘what a proper ethnographic account’ should look like, she also felt compelled to sanitize her final account from her embodied emotions while doing research (Mahadevan, 2011b). In this paper, she reflects upon bodies in the field and her own body within this context.

Bodies in the field

Clothing the body

At 9.30 am in the morning, busses arrive with the employees of all the technical companies that are located in Indian City Technologies Park. The bodies of the field are clothed in multiple, yet patterned ways. J discovers these patterns over time.

Indian male engineers wear either jeans or more formal trousers, combined with T-shirt or shirt. Those higher in hierarchy tend to dress more formally. Female engineers usually wear Indian style clothing, either traditional or modern “ethnic Indian style”. Young female engineers usually chose an Indian style shirt (kurta or salwaar), combined with Indian style trousers. In all cases, the shirt is below waist-length and covers the hips. Most female engineers combine this shirt with a scarf to be draped over one’s bosom (dupatta). Some female engineers also wear a full Indian outfit, consisting of scarf (dupatta), shirt (kurta or salwaar) and trousers (pajama or chameez). This Indian outfit can vary in style and will be then called differently, but in all cases it consists of scarf, long shirt and trousers.

Those Indian women who have made their way up the ladder to the ranks of management wear a sari, i.e. nine inches of cloth draped around the body and combined with a blouse. Usually, like all those who work on a higher managerial level, they don’t arrive by bus but in a car with personal driver. As J’s relatives have told her, it is expected that a women who is married or a women beyond a certain age will cease to wear kurta pajama or salwar khameez and start wearing the sari.

In all cases the sari worn at ChipTech is made out of silk, embroidered with gold. The embroidered silk sari shows social status and is usually associated with higher castes; J has never seen her Indian aunts leave the house dressed in anything but a embroidered silk sari. Yet, age can make a difference her: J’s cousins, albeit

married, sometimes wear salwar khomeez or western style jeans – but only in the city, never in the province.

In all cases, ChipTech Indian female employees accessorize their outfit high-heeled sandals. In all cases, fingernails and toenails are painted. In all cases, Indian female employees use white powder (talcum) to powder their faces. Talcum gives the face a grayish tint which is perceived as beautiful, for it lightens the skin colour. Most of the Indian female employees would wear gold jewellery, only one female engineer would actually wear so called “black silver” that mirrors Kashmiri and Rajasthani tribal jewellery and is considered to be “cheap”. Virtually all Indian female employees at the company have long hair which they wear in braided style, and only two Indian female employees with long hair do not braid it. Only one Indian female employee has hair cut short, she is also the only one to wear western-style shirts; only one Indian female employee wears jeans. With the latter, J becomes friends.

J realizes: Indian male employees dress no different than their counterparts at the German site yet Indian female employees dress in what is perceived as Indian style. “Women are expected to cover their butt”, says one Indian female engineer. As J discovers, long braided hair, gold jewellery, and the beauty ideal of light skin colour are adhered to as well. Yet, J does not pay particular attention to this fact: It is just one of the things that an ethnographer has to observe and then to move on to deeper meanings in the field.

Feeding the body

There is a canteen in the office, soft drinks are for free; a catering company serves fresh lunch daily. There are vegetarian and non-vegetarian options. Again, J discovers patterns:

Those engineers who eat non-vegetarian food are mainly Christians from the province of Kerala or Sikhs and Hindus from Northern India. South Indian Hindus usually chose the vegetarian option. Some bring their own food: There is one married couple who is Jain, a religion that promotes vegetarian food which should not have been grown beneath the soil. At least this is the explanation that is given to J. Therefore, this couple brings their own food. Some employees from Tamil Nadu, a province that is said to be conservative Hindu, bring their own food in the Indian “dabbas” (tiffin-boxes).

In an ethnically and religiously diverse work-environment such as ChipTech India, eating reveals social status: Others can guess one’s subcaste (jati) but also one’s regional background from one’s eating habits. Furthermore, one’s family name gives an indication. Societal caste is very much a boundary condition of the field: Most managers are South Indian Brahmin. All managers with NRI (non-residential Indian) status are South Indian, mainly Tamil Brahmin. On engineering levels, sub-caste or jatis are much more mixed; many engineers being the first in their family to have attended college. Yet, higher jatis are represented to a higher degree throughout all levels of hierarchy.

Those who are South Indian Brahmin embody purity through vegetarian eating both in the organizational and societal sphere. This can be interpreted as behaviour which is in line with societal norms for higher castes. Most of them also abstain from drinking alcohol to various degrees which can also be interpreted along these lines.

The higher percentage of South Indian Brahmin on managerial level, especially amongst those with NRI status, most likely reflects a privileged access to education or a high value placed on ‘brain work’ such as computer engineering. The fact that younger organizational members have a much more diverse background

might signify that the former disparities in access to higher schooling are undergoing change.

Yet, what was surprising to J: *all* Indian managers eat vegetarian food in public, even though their names do not suggest that all of them have a social obligation to do so. As J found out, only eight out of these twelve Indian managers came from Brahmin families. J has seen four of the Indian managers eating non-vegetarian (two Brahmin, two non-Brahmin), but only in Germany, and only in informal interactions with German colleagues outside the work environment, never in front of their employees and never in formal interactions at work. Hierarchy seems to play a role here: During J's stay in India, two engineers were promoted manager. They had eaten non-vegetarian in public and stopped doing so after they had been promoted manager.

J thinks about caste in India. In Indian society, caste segregation and hierarchy largely manifests itself in bodily expressions, such as posture, eating, drinking, attire and many more. Dumont (1980) has conceptualized this difference as relative difference between 'pure' and 'impure'. The purer, the higher the social status is. Eating vegetarian food as a 'purer' food intake can therefore be associated with higher social status.

Eating more pure than required can be viewed as the attempt to alter one's social status. M.N. Srinivas (1952) has coined the term "Sanskritization" for such an attempt by lower castes to acquire status through emulating the behaviour of higher castes. The change of eating habits after promotion might be interpreted along these lines. Yet, in this organization, instead of 'doing societal caste', one is doing 'organizational hierarchy' or 'engineering class' through purity as based on societal caste. To J, this means that concepts of purity have been transferred to another

context. J thinks about power and agency (based on Foucault, 1979, 1980) and how actors have the interpretative power to make new sense out of old meaning. But she does not think that this is a major aspect of the field.

The researcher as embodied other

The first fieldwork experience

When J enters the field in 2004, her body is 26 years old.

J is short for a German woman, approximately 5 feet 4 inches. For an Indian woman, she would be of average size; in South India, she would not even be considered short. Her skin colour is a light beige, not really brown but not Caucasian as well. In Germany, she is often asked whether she comes from Iran. In German winter, her skin colour will get lighter. Then people often ask her whether she comes from Italy or France. Quite often, Germans with a migration background from Turkey, get angry at her for not being able to speak Turkish. It seems that they think she has assimilated too much by losing what they think is her mother tongue.

J's hair is a dark-brown, not that bluish-black of Indian hair. It is straight and thick and beautiful from German perspective but much too thin from Indian perspective. Her father's skin colour is a dark-south-Indian brown, her mother is a tall-blond Nordic type. J remembers the following story (she cannot separate between narrative and historic event): When she was six years old, her blond, Nordic-type mother took her to this small German town's primary school to enroll. The family had just come back from India, where J spent her early years, so J was quite tanned at this time. Upon seeing mother and daughter, the headmaster said: "This is not your own child. You must have adopted her."

When she was 18 years old, J's hair was flowing down her back. During this time, she cultivated ethnic Indian style, wore black silver jewellery and ethnic Indian shirts. She was still living in this small German town, where everyone knew her family as "the Half-Indian family". Questions were not asked anymore. Then J moved away from home to university in a small German town. In her first semester, she would not get a room because the landlord suggested that "somebody from our own culture" might fit better. A fellow student she had never encountered before took the seat next to her in a lesson, looked at her and said, referring to her not-quite-German looks: "There must be something else inside you as well". In the year before leaving university, J had her hair cut short. In a male German environment, it seemed a wise move not to appear too Indian or too womanly when applying for her first job.

During time of research, J has short hair, cut to about one inch length, which she wears in a spiky style. She dresses in casual and boyish way that fits her haircut. Most of the time, she wears jeans and sneakers, combined with t-shirts.

On the Lufthansa flight to India, J is asked by the stewardess: "You don't have Indian nationality, have you?" J confirms and receives an immigration card for non-Indian nationals. When clearing immigration, the Indian officer comments on her German passport: "Your family name, that's an Indian name." J gets angry (but does not show) and thinks: "If I have to explain it one more time...!"

When J steps out of the airport, she draws a deep breath: The air smells like childhood, so humid and damp, full of spices and homely feelings. It is dark outside but the streets are crowded; in front of the airport, a human mass is eagerly awaiting recent arrivals. Not looking left or right, J exits the airport full of confidence: She knows this country, this is familiar, this is childhood, family, and so much more. She finds her driver, let him take her luggage and sits back comfortably on the backseat. If

would have never occurred to her to sit next to the driver in the front (as one does in Germany). As the Indian city's streets pass by, she takes comfort in the familiar picture of tea stalls, small shops, laborers, villagers, families on motorcycles and motor-rikshas: It is good to be back.

This being her first time in India after marriage, J is obliged to visit family. Upon seeing her, her aunt comments: "Why such short hair!" Immediately, J is redressed Indian-style, in scarf, shirt and trousers. The family comments on pregnancy not showing on her body. The wedding band (made of white-gold) is inspected and commented upon ("Is this silver? Why so cheap-looking?"). J feels rejected and hurt but hides her feelings.

To neighbours and shop-owners, J is constantly introduced as: "This is my German niece/cousin" or "this is my brothers's/husband's younger brother's/father's younger brother's German daughter. He has married a German girl". It hurts her but she never let it show, as she always has. She just tries even harder to be perceived as 'one of us'.

J is being served vegetarian food (which does not include eggs) at her family. They are Tamil Brahmin from Southern India. Once, J was visiting an Indian aunt with a female German friend. The friend was being asked by J's aunt what she wanted to have for breakfast. Being unaware of the fine aspects of South Indian vegetarianism, J's German friend wished for scrambled eggs. J's aunt had a boy from the street send to the market and buy eggs which she prepared for J's German friend. As J observed, her aunt did not touch the eggs with her bare hands once. Later, J's aunt throw all the tools involved in preparation out of the house and had the cleaning lady clean the entire kitchen twice. J knows about these things. Once, J was backpacking through her father's native region and signed in to a local hotel. When

the receptionist read J's father's name, he summoned the entire staff and declared: "[YOUR FAMILY NAME], it is a very famous name in our region, very famous." Therefore, as J has learned since childhood, a person who bears this name, a member of her Indian family, is expected to show high status through eating vegetarian food.

During J's first days in the Indian office, she is looked at with curiosity. Over lunch (vegetarian from J's side), conversations begin. J is asked questions which bother her, yet, she did not quite know why.

After a few days, J notices that the questions seem to follow a pattern. Usually, the first one is: "First time in India?" J then answers with an explanation of herself and her childhood in India. She wants to belong to what also feels like her home. She wants to talk about her country. Yet, this usually ends the conversation. Alternatively, Indian employees ask: "First time you eat Indian food?" They would then explain Indian food to J.

J loves to cook Indian food; her German (?) mother (who has lived in India for many years and who has learned to cook a "full Indian meal") has taught her how to do it. J's favourites are *rassam*, *sambar*, *daal*, *upma*, and *firni* or *paisam* for desert. She loves *puri* with *channa masala* or *alu gobi* for breakfast, spicy Indian dishes of her childhood. At home, J often eats leftover Indian curry for breakfast. She hates to be served sweet dishes for breakfast, such as toast and jam. Once, during a holiday to Spain, J embarrassed a friend by carrying around a plastic bag of leftover noodles from last night's dinner and eating it with her right hand. Yet, when she names her favourite dishes now, this seems to silence her counterparts. At the best, they cause questions of disbelief: "You can *really* cook [this or that]?" And J thinks: "Most likely, you spoiled male engineers cannot cook yourself".

After two weeks at the Indian office, J cannot hear the questions “First time in India?” and “First time you eat Indian food?” without feeling profound aggression. It feels like being rejected constantly. On the other hand, J is convinced that, as an anthropologist, she should pretend not to know anything about local culture. Yet, she is struggling: How could she do so without negating herself? J is hurt for not being allowed to be a part of what she considers her own identity, her childhood.

The Indian clothes that J has brought with her are old-fashioned and symbolize provincial Southern India where her family comes from. In cosmopolitan Bangalore, J feels that she needs to look more metropolitan. At the same time, J is aware that she would not be able to judge what ‘metropolitan’ actually means from Indian fashion perspective. Therefore, J asks an Indian female friend whom she has met at work to join her in her shopping endeavor. They buy new and fashionable dresses: shirt, scarf and trousers (salwar kameez). After her friend sees J in her new clothes, she says: “Now, you don’t look any German anymore.”

Often, J spends the weekends with Indian family members living in Bangalore. Her aunt wants her to wear salwar kameez (long shirt with trousers) when she leaves the house. Sometimes, she goes directly to work from there. Yet, J does not like high-heeled sandals; she had a sports injury when she was 16 years old. Therefore, she combines Indian clothes with loafers. Nail-polish and talcum are also nothing for her. Khol (black colour) to circum-colour the eyes make her weep. So, J wears loafers and no make-up at all.

On one of these Mondays, an Indian male engineer in his mid-twenties approaches J and says: “So, you bought some Indian clothes?” J feels confident, accepted, and therefore answers: “You should have seen me yesterday, I was in full salwar kameez.” He answers: “I saw you but I think, Indian clothes like sari, salwar

khameez, they don't suit Europeans, when you are too fair, they don't suit you." J feels rejected, cast out, and answers: "So, maybe I should not wear them anymore then." He laughs and says: "No, you shouldn't." This hurts.

The next Monday, J shows up at work, wearing one of her favourite salwar khameez. Her white-gold wedding band and loafers, but no talcum powder to whiten the skin, no nail-polish, and not the usual high-heeled sandals accompany her outfit. Her hair is short and spiky, as always. A young male engineer approaches her in the canteen, saying: "I don't like your dress." Some bystanders look at J but do not comment. J feels wounded. She does not have the energy to engage in further fieldwork and sits alone during lunch.

On Wednesday, J wears a western outfit but gold earrings that one of her Indian aunts had given her when she was eight years old. These earrings are obviously made in India; as they have a higher amount of copper compared to earrings manufactured in Germany, their colour is more golden than that of foreign jewellery. As J is approaching her desk an Indian female engineer whom she passes comments without an introduction: "You can wear as much fake jewellery as you want – you will never be Indian." J is devastated. Today, it will be hard for her to work in a motivated way.

On Thursday, J has a meeting with eleven managers. It is planned as a focus session to discuss working together with the German site. As it is common at the Indian office, one manager explains to J, it will be planned as a "lunch meeting", starting at 12 o' clock and ending at 2 o' clock in the afternoon. As soon as everybody has arrived, a Pizza Hut pizza menu is being passed around. The Pizza Hut Joint is located in the building's basement, an office boy will be sent to collect the food after it has been ordered. All managers order vegetarian pizza. J cannot pretend to only eat

vegetarian food anymore. She orders a Pizza Chicken Hawaii. The managers look at her. The one in charge is resistant to order. “Are you sure you want to eat this?”, he asks. J confirms. “Are you *really* sure?”, he asks again. J confirms again. He looks at her for endless seconds. Finally, he orders. J feels exposed.

In the days and weeks after the lunch meeting, J can overhear whispers: “Did she *really* eat a Pizza Chicken Hawaii?”, “Did you hear what she had for lunch?” In the weeks and months thereafter, eating a Pizza Chicken Hawaii becomes a well-known narrative in the Indian office. Five months later, back in Germany, J will be once again asked whether she *really* had a Pizza Chicken Hawaii.

At that time, J just feels devalued: How to cloth her body? How to feed her body?

Linking researcher experience to the field

Directly after the Pizza Chicken Hawaii story has become to be public knowledge, the Indian female engineer who has become friends with J suggests: “Maybe you should wear a T-shirt, saying: ‘Yes, I *am* half-Indian’”. This makes J laugh, but only a little. There is too much truth in this statement. This Indian friend also assures J: “Times will change.”

J realizes: The way her friend cloths her body is unusual: She is one of only two Indian women in this organization (out of more than fifty) who show up at work dressed in jeans and blouse, like any male IT-engineer would do. Yet, she has fights with her manager constantly, the very same person who has commented on J’s attire in the canteen. She tells J the following story: When a new laboratory was to be inaugurated, he had demanded that every female employee attend the inaugural prayer (puja) in a sari. Male employees were to wear a suit. J’s friend continues: “So, I asked

him: ‘Will you wear traditional dress as well?’. But he did not answer. So, I had to borrow a sari from my neighbor, for I did not even own one. I had to lend a sari from a friend and then have someone dress me because I cannot do it nicely.” To her, this behaviour is discriminating: “Why is it that only women have to wear a sari?” Half a year later, J’s Indian friend leaves the company, after her relation to her manager has deteriorated constantly.

J thinks about the episodes of feeding and clothing the body again and how the female body might play a role here. She is astonished that these seem to be very deep and very emotional topics not only for her, but for her friend as well. In this way, the researcher’s experiences on how her body is perceived helped uncover the perspective of another female engineer who seemed to struggle with some aspects in the field in similar ways that J did.

In this way, J realized that the emotions that she experienced during her first fieldwork go beyond her individual experience. But still, she did not touch upon this insight until years later. Now, she tries to re-conceptualize her body as a tool of research, even though this is emotionally difficult for her.

J’s experienced emotions are those of someone who is constantly being rejected. This rejection apparently is linked to her body that is clothed, adorned or fed in the wrong way. Yet, might this mean for culture in the field? Obviously, the female Indian body is something that is categorized. Apparently, J violates these categories. She thinks about eating habits and the body and about all the requirements that have been made. She thinks about what she has read about pure eating as an embodied manifestation of caste. She thinks about the pure Indian woman who needs to clothe and dress in a high caste manner. Therefore, J investigates into these issues. She does more research on several companies in IT India. She finds similar reactions to her

body. The goes on. The following section of this paper is the product of this process, trying to highlight the meanings of pure bodies and pure eating habits in IT India.

The meanings of purity in IT India

Theoretical background

Caste and the degree to which it involves purity is *the* single most discussed concept of Indian society and culture. The way caste is conceptualized reflects the characteristics of society in India as *with* tradition and modernity. The perspectives on caste range from caste as an age-old and all-encompassing tradition to caste as just one of many features of modern middle-class life in the Indian metropolis. These two opposing poles are represented by Luis Dumont (1980) and Andre Beteille (1996).

The centerpiece of Dumont's (1980) work "Homo Hierarchicus" is the concept of purity, or more precisely: The dichotomy between pure and polluted which encompasses three main structural principles, namely: hierarchy, separation and interdependency. Many aspects of society in India have been and are still interpreted through such a certainly pre-colonial ideology of purity (overview in Fuller, 1996). These interpretations include: eating rules, rituals, the separation of castes, the sanctions against pollution, the classification of professional activities, and the categorizations of time and space. This makes Dumont's work the most influential but also the most controversial work on caste in India (Bastin, 2004; Quigley, 1998; Khare, 2006).

The major counter-perspective to Dumont is represented by Andre Beteille (1996) who argues against the all-encompassing importance of purity and stresses the cultural agency of the individual. Following Beteille, urban India is a creative appropriation of modernity, a space populated by rational and teleological humans

who are equals in a globalized world. To him, caste is a category of modernity; its influence in modern urban India being limited to marital choices.

IT India is *the* context of urban India today. Like no other context, IT India symbolizes the globalized, post-traditional, and economically powerful India. All actors in this field to whom J has spoken stress the fact that ‘caste has nothing to do with IT India’. So, there is a strong modernist discourse in the field. Yet, based on her own experiences, J intends to find out: Do those working in IT India – called Techies in public Indian discourse – perform caste? This paper highlights insights into this aspect, focusing on women in IT India.

Bodies, power and eating vegetarian food

To J, the body is not culturally innocent. Based on Foucault (1979, 1983), every society has its specific “political anatomy” (Foucault, 1979: 138) in which bodies and performances are classified, classed, raced, aged, gendered, and so on, by particular mechanisms of power that are always contextualized based on a specific locality and history (Foucault, 1998). To Foucault, power is not constituted through the relationship between already existing objects. Rather, those holding power and those subjected to power emerge in and through interaction (Kusch, 1991: 130-138).

Read with Foucault, the norm of vegetarian eating which J observed in the field is therefore not simply an adaptation to established power structures but a conscious act that signifies cultural agency. To analyze such an act, wider questions regarding the anatomy of power have to be asked.

First of all, there *is* a global class in IT India, namely the class of techies. As many authors have shown, this group shares a collective professional identity beyond societal cultural difference (Mahadevan, 2009). This identity involves a certain

habitus that manifests itself through numerous embodied practices, starting with wearing jeans, T-Shirt and sneakers to work and ending with ‘how to talk about code’ (I am excluding the gender aspect here on purpose but will refer back to it later). ‘Not being limited by tradition’, is an important aspect of this habitus (Mahadevan, 2011c). In choosing to eat vegetarian, Indian actors limit themselves, and in doing so, violate this global habitus.

From a headquarter perspective, such a ‘limiting’ eating vegetarian food might be interpreted as resistance to modernity and global engineering habitus. Headquarter engineers indeed react with work-related feelings of being rejected and subsequent frustration and sometimes even with aggression towards a mere display of vegetarian eating. Embodied purity can therefore be conceptualized as a means of resistance for those organizational subalterns, whose organizational dependency is so high that they do not have any other voice but performing purity. In this way, organizational subalterns reconceptualise themselves as the metropolitan elite. From postcolonial perspective, eating vegetarian might hence also be interpreted as an emulation of high caste behaviour that serves the purpose of resisting headquarters domination.

Foucault’s notion of power might also explain for *why* embodied purity is relevant to this field at all, for surely there are South Indian Brahmins who do not eat vegetarian – and most NRI managers concede not having done so during their time in the USA. Especially in such a presumed ‘modern’ context as IT India one would expect presumed ‘modern’ Indians to not care about concepts of purity. However, to the contrary, they *do* care a lot, and the degree to which they care seems to be linked to power relations in the field.

Sanctions against women engineers

Yet, this creativity is not without limits: Cultural agency as conceptualized with Foucault also implies sanctions against those who resist embodied practice. And indeed, a manager not eating vegetarian might be commented upon by fellow Indian actors. However, the aspect of resistance and sanctions is most notable when it comes to women in the field. Following Srinivas (1977), high caste Hindu women are the custodians of the purity of the house and its members, and of ritual. As several authors have shown, Indian women might resist this role through their attire; what to wear is a deeply political decision (Betéille, 1990; Tarlo, 1996; Banerjee and Miller, 2004); therefore, there are numerous sanctions regarding how the Indian women should dress.

Also in IT India, women engineers might be forced to wear a Sari when an official prayer (puja) is conducted, e.g. for the inauguration of a new laboratory or facility or in order to celebrate the success of a project or to pray for its future success. Also, a female engineer's hairstyle, choice of clothing and choice of jewellery is likely to be commented upon. There are also acts of resistance and lost battles; and J's own embodied performances provided rich insights into this aspect: Yes, also the way J dressed mattered to the field.

Some sanctions with regard to women touch upon the technological world of computer engineering. To give an example: It is a common belief that female engineers should not work in microchip "testing". This is astonishing, for computer engineering in general is considered to be pure and hence suitable for woman (in contrast to mechanical engineering, for example).

In order to understand why women should not do testing, one has to investigate into the markers of status in computer engineering.

Distributed engineering as a virtual village

Doing caste in societal India involves work separation based on relative purity and pollution, and resulting interdependency (Fuller, 1996). Much of computer engineering, too, is interdependent work which requires separation within a distributed technological system (Mahadevan, 2009, 2011a). However, in contrast to relations in the Indian village, performed computer engineering is largely invisible beyond the technology in which it emerges. Therefore, work practice in IT India and its structural principles can only be approached through the narrative or visualized representations of technology, or through secondary technology such as databases, technical documentation or computer programs.

In narrative representations of technology, images of purity are evoked. Symbolic language might include expressions such as “his code is not clean enough”; or “he contaminated my design”. In visualization, technological space is classified. In such a way, the invisible world of technology can be approximated.

To understand the social markers of status in this invisible world, one has to know the basic categories of computer engineering. Its two main categories are software development and hardware design. Software development is different from hardware design in such a way that is more distant from the actual physical lay-out of a micro-chip or component. It is less physical. It is also of higher status in the field.

Within software development, there are different levels of status as well: Specification is ranked higher than implementation which again is ranked higher than testing. Specification means to develop the concept of how to write code; implementation is writing code; testing is looking for flaws in the code someone else

has written. This means that testing is the nearest to physical reality. It involves less ‘brain work’, and the brain work involved takes place in someone else’s code.

To summarize the markers of status: The less ‘physical’ an activity is, the higher its status is. The more an activity involves ‘cleaning up’ another person’s code or design, the more inferior it is. If transgressions between different levels of status are described, they involve metaphors of purity and pollution.

It is notable that those who speak of their own position in this virtual society rate their own status to be higher and their share of the system to be larger than those of others. In such a way, the encompassing is larger than the encompassed; and this aspect is also an important feature of the caste system as conceptualized by Dumont (1980). However, testing seems to be at the bottom end of the hierarchical strata.

With regard to women, this means: Computer engineering in general is not physical – therefore, it is suitable for women. However, software design is a more suitable work activity than circuit design. Testing, however, should not be done by women engineers. If testing is polluted – meaning: too physical and requiring close contact with another person’s code – then this makes it unsuitable for the implicitly pure women.

This gives the anatomy of power regarding women in IT India a second dimension: On the one hand, women in IT India might have to perform ‘modernity’ towards the implicitly modern Western headquarters, and this largely means to not be impacted by tradition; on the other hand, they might have to perform ‘purity’ towards their male Indian managers, and this means to dress appropriately, and not to engage in all kinds of technological work.

Conclusion

This paper intended to highlight how the researcher's embodied performances can deliver insights into the field. I have looked at IT India in such a way and have discussed how techies perform caste. Like in every fieldwork, I did not enter the field with the above stated question in mind. Rather, I simply wanted to understand the multiple ways of how actors in this field make sense out of themselves and their social settings. However, I observed and experienced multiple – often implicit – references to purity, hierarchy, interdependency and segregation. They seemed to signify the complexity of caste as a relational system and as an embodied practice.

If IT India is conceptualized as a postcolonial field, then performances of purity can never be separated from the anatomies of power; the interactional context in which they emerge; and the societal structure they emerge in. I could only analyze performances of purity in the field through being me. Therefore, I had to re-conceptualize myself as a tool of research that constantly transgresses between 'We' and 'the Other' and between 'Tradition' and 'Modernity' and whose body violates embodied norms in the field.

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