

**The Social Transitions Research
Group presents a 1-week workshop
for BA and MA students on**



Researching Marginals in India: Lens, Perspective and Fieldwork

**Prof Badri Narayan, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
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University of Basel

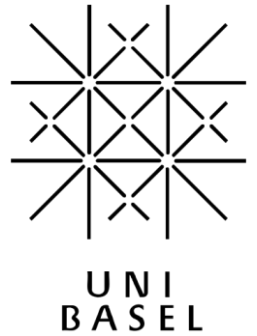
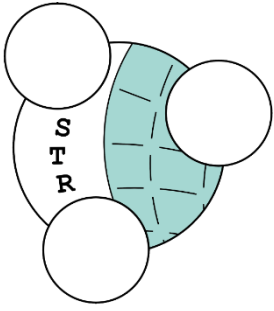
8-12 Sept 2025

10.15-16.00

Sociology, Room 215

Course ID: 76653-01





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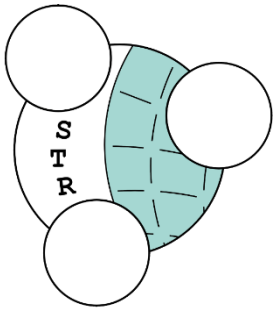
Introduction

This workshop aims to provide insights and methods to understand the lifeworld of marginal communities (especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) in India. It will also equip social science students, researchers, and faculty with a lens to capture the experiential realities of marginality in a multicultural and multilingual society of South Asia. In contrast to the textbook-dominated knowledge of research methodology, this workshop aims to provide a field-based perspective on social science research in India, incorporating specialised methodological concepts and tools to understand marginal communities, their worldview, knowledge, vision, and experiences. This workshop will orient researchers to sharpen their critical vision, enabling them to understand marginality in the context of locale and grounded experiences. Otherwise, we often miss out on the nuances of social meaning.

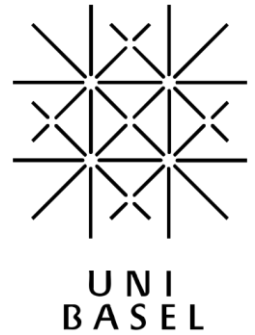
Objectives of the Workshop

- To provide an in-depth vision to understand the Indian society
- To orient the researchers to explore their own eyes to understand marginal society in the context of locale and experiences
- To critically examine the practices in social science research on Indian society, which often miss out on invisibilities because of the dominance of Eurocentric methodologies
- To orient researchers to work in a multilingual and multicultural society of South Asia





Researching Marginals in India: Lens, Perspective and Fieldwork



Workshop Overview

Session I: Understanding India: A Cosmos of Multicultural and Multilingual Communities

For India, multiculturalism and multilingualism are not merely traits, but core features of its ontology as well. This diversity is deeply embedded in the local cosmologies.

This session is designed to examine the ontology of Indian society through its multiculturalism and multilingualism. It will explore the concepts of diversity constructed by Indian thinkers, which will help to understand the multicultural and multilingual realities of India in its own context. Indian Indigenous frameworks to understand this diversity - "*Samanvaya* (Coordination)" - Rooted in Vedantic and Bhakti / Sufi traditions; "*Bahulata mein Ekata* (Unity in Diversity)" - Vedic and Shamanic traditions; "*Samrasta* (Harmony)" - through local and vernacular epistemologies; *Bahubhashikta* (Multilingualism) - living languages of India and their cultural contexts will be dealt with. The pedagogical approach for this session will be dialogic pedagogy, encouraging participants to explore their own linguistic and cultural roots.

Session II: Voices from the Margins: Theory and Life in the Indian Context

This session will deal with "Voices from the margins". It will highlight assertions and epistemic resistance of marginal voices. It will also explore how these marginal voices interrupt the forced silence created by dominant discourse and challenge both hierarchy and the monopoly over knowledge. They speak in ruptures—in the cadence of protest, in the rhythm of folk songs, in the texture of lived pain and hope. To capture these voices and grounded meanings, we need specific tools, as well as active and deep listening to those whose history has been erased.

A few audio/video clips will be used to deconstruct dominant narratives, and the art of listening will be employed as a pedagogical approach. Marginal Epistemologies, Critical Pedagogy, Resistance Literature, and protest music will be discussed in detail.

Session III: Deconstructing the lens while selecting the field: blurring the boundaries of outsider and insider

Fieldwork lies at the heart of ethnographic and sociological research. However, the decision to study one's society versus an unfamiliar or "other" society carries deep epistemological, methodological, and ethical implications. This session seeks to critically explore this binary by deconstructing the lens through which researchers choose and engage with their field. Emphasizing the experiential turn in the social sciences, it interrogates the positionality of the researcher, the politics of representation, and the reflexive dilemmas embedded in field selection and narration. It will also address the historical and theoretical debates surrounding the distinction between self and other in field research. The goal is not to resolve this binary, but to inhabit the tension creatively and ethically. Pedagogy will include field diaries, documentaries, and fictions. Each participant will be encouraged to discuss their "positionality" and reflect on their identity in relation to the fieldwork.

Session IV: Baat se Baat Methodology (Unstructured conversation to retrieve the memory) and capturing the silences

This session will discuss the *Baat se Baat* methodology. It is a culturally embedded, non-linear, and dialogic approach to knowledge production. Rooted in everyday experiences and conversational practices in the Indian context, it employs unstructured conversations not only to collect data but also to co-construct meaning, retrieve submerged memories, and capture the affective textures of social life. It is particularly powerful in engaging with marginalized voices where dominant epistemic frameworks often fail. *Baat se Baat* emphasizes open-ended conversations over formal interviews or surveys. To understand the various elements of exaggerations, forgetting, reconstructions, and divided memories, multiple interviews with respondents and other connected individuals from the same village are conducted to verify, supplement, and create authentic data. These narratives provide insight into how individuals make sense of change in social, emotional, and political contexts. It is a method of "being with" rather than "knowing about," where stories are not solicited but unfold slowly, like a shared thread between interlocutors. Field narratives and a few audio-visuais will be used to encourage participants to discuss their field narratives, cultural metaphors, and silences.

Session V: Creative Ethnography

Creative ethnography is not just a method. This session will question and disrupt canonical forms of documentation to imagine new relationalities and make ethnography a space where critical thought and aesthetic expression converge. Creative ethnography represents a methodological shift that blurs the boundaries between experience and epistemology. It questions the rigid, textualized form of traditional ethnographic writing and opens up spaces for poetic, performative, and multimedia interventions. At its core, creative ethnography is not about abandoning rigor but about reimagining how knowledge is represented, felt, and experienced. As a pedagogical tool, it empowers students to see themselves not merely as observers but as co-creators of meaning. Immersive and Multisensory Learning, Narrative Reflexivity, and Participatory Practices will be discussed with specific playful ethnographic activities.

Session VI: Documenting the Folk (proverbs, folk stories, and songs) and Writing Social Stories

Documenting folk expressions—such as proverbs, folk stories, and songs—and translating them into text is not merely an act of cultural preservation but an epistemological intervention. Dialogic methods focus conversations with community members, allowing folklore to emerge organically rather than being extracted. The researcher becomes a listener-writer, capturing nuances in tone, gesture, and emotion. Proverbs, songs, and stories are translated with attention to cultural metaphors, local idioms, and performative elements.

This session will explore tools to document proverbs, folk songs, and stories, as well as their transformation into socially relevant narratives. This methodology will help in understanding that folk is not a relic of the past, but a living, evolving epistemic force that must be written *with*, rather than *about*. Audio-visual clips will be used to help participants decode their field experiences.

Session VII: Narrative Analysis to understand the caste/gender orality and to capture muteness

Analysing the long, unstructured, unorganised, and ruptured narratives, intersecting with caste, voice, and silence, presents a methodological challenge. Narrative analysis allows us to decode caste orality—the lived, spoken, and remembered experiences of caste-based communities and provides a critical lens to interrogate the silences, absences, and symbolic muteness that dominate caste margins. Together, these methods open a dialogic space to engage with both the *said* and the *unsayable*. Narrative analysis centres the *story* as both method and meaning. It explores how individuals and communities make sense of their world through storytelling, emphasizing temporality, agency, and identity.

In this frame, *narratives are not just reflections but constructions*. From personal testimonies to collective myths, narrative becomes a critical tool for accessing lived realities, especially those of the marginalized. Another challenge is narrative writing. Tools needed for listening deeply, contextual reading, and reflexive writing will be discussed. Sharing a few *stories* and *field memories* will engage learners in experiencing narrative writing.

Session VIII: Participatory Rural appraisal: Analysing Social Settings and Community Reviewing

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a set of innovative, adaptive, and people-centered approaches that enable local communities to share, analyse, and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions. More than a methodology, PRA is a praxis—an act of co-learning between researchers and communities—that seeks to democratize the research process. It shifts the focus from "extractive" data collection to "collaborative meaning-making." These methods enable communities to articulate their social worlds and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, access/control, as well as change and continuity. In this session, researchers will use participatory tools to uncover the caste, class, gender, and generational hierarchies embedded in space and everyday life. PRA enables the mapping of power geographies, which involves identifying who controls resources, decision-making, and symbolic authority. Participatory classroom methods, including role-play, simulations, and collective mapping, will be used to prepare students for the complexities of the field.

Session IX: Reflexivity and Ethical Questions in Documenting the Marginality

Documenting marginality involves engaging with the lives, voices, and epistemologies of people pushed to the peripheries by systems of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, or colonialism. In this session, the researcher's positionality will be discussed, which is neither neutral nor apolitical. Discussions will help them explore how reflexivity becomes a methodological imperative, and ethical engagement moves beyond procedural formalities to a deeper interrogation of power, representation, and accountability. Through the help of audio-visual materials, a few important questions will be addressed on how researching Dalit women's narratives requires intersectional sensitivity, recognizing how caste and gender intersect to produce layered marginality. Here, "listening" must include attending to silences and affective registers—the need to move towards decentring authorship and ownership. To document marginality is not just to 'give voice'—a problematic phrase—but to *listen radically, write accountably, and engage ethically*. Reflexivity and ethics are not appendices to research; they are its core.

Session X: Roundtable- Reflection, Group Discussion and Feedback



Workshop Conveners



PROF BADRI NARAYAN, a social historian and cultural anthropologist serves as the Vice-Chancellor of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and is the former head and director of the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad. His interests lie in popular culture, social and anthropological history, Dalit and subaltern issues and the relationship between power and culture. Besides having written a number of articles both in English and Hindi, he has recently authored 'Republic of Hindutva: How the Sangh Is Reshaping Indian Democracy', Penguin Random House, 2021. His other critically acclaimed books are 'Fractured Tales: Invisibles in Indian Democracy', Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014; 'The Making of the Dalit Public in North India: Uttar Pradesh 1950-present', Oxford University Press (2011); 'Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India', by Sage Publication, New Delhi 2006; 'Fascinating Hindutva – Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation', by Sage Publication, New Delhi 2006.



Dr. Archana Singh is an Associate Professor at G B Pant Social Science Institute, Prayagraj (A constituent Institute of Central University of Allahabad). Her research area is Gender and Caste. She is working on contemporary caste/gender issues among Dalits, tribes and minorities, especially on the methods these women use to resist subjection hidden in Caste-class-gender dynamics. Her work proposes a new lens to look at grassroots politics of gender and caste in North India. Her research writings highlight the use and reconstruction of socio-cultural spaces by women to generate collective and critical discourses. She has coordinated various important research projects, seminars and workshops. She has various research projects and publications on her credit. She is a Gender trainer. She is the coordinator of the Museum of Ethnography, Kumbh Study Centre and Dalit Resource Centre (DRC) at GB Pant Social Science Institute.

