



## India at the dawn of 2018 Report of a Listening Post held in Bangalore on 11 January 2018

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### **PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

*In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations; or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.*

One of the members began by sharing her key preoccupation with the communal stress and tensions spread across the country throughout the year in different forms. It was either in the form of killing people due to the ban of beef consumption, or destruction of church and mosques. Despite the communal stress, another member pointed that there is a gain in communal strength over Jallikattu controversy in Tamil Nadu which stood against the verdict of the honourable Supreme Court of India.

The same member also highlighted the whole sensation caused in the society due to Goods & Service Tax (GST) which was introduced within a short period after demonetization. There was chaos and confusion around the nation leaving with the members to have different opinions about this law passed by the government. People also became vigilant about their bills and the percentage of tax they were paying. Few members also shared their experiences after the GST being introduced. One member reduced going to restaurants since the tax was high while another member refused to give tips to the waiter as it was already in the taxes. One member pointed that these taxes were present even before the GST rule but people became aware and cautious of the money being spent post the legislation. A member shared how certain people in the food business are taking advantage of this tax system and printing inaccurate bills as only people who are careful and go through the bills get it rectified and others end up paying more. However with the GST in place, people are more aware about the taxes they pay and this was achieved through media hype says one of the members.

Supporting this statement another member reported that the media make things a big deal. For example the Aadhar card was asked to be linked to the

mobile number which the member ignored until she received continuous notifications. Apart from the media hype, the fear of new government policies like the demonetization of 2016 has affected everyone personally thus making them cautious reported the member. She also stated that she experienced certain amount of fear with the rule of linking Aadhar which has now proven to be under threat because of its unsecured access to personal information. Another member shared her concern with the increase in taxes and the stagnant salary. She also stated that she was contemplating the idea of relocation to a rural area where the expenses are comparatively low. She also mentioned that due to linking of Aadhar, she is fearful that if ever there are chances of nation going monarchical with the power to freeze everyone's bank account.

Another preoccupation by one member was on the rule that if ever the bank's experience financial crisis there is a provision to absorb the money of citizens deposited in the banks. They also have reduced on the percentage of interest in saving schemes. These rules instil fear among the middle class strata.

One young member gave her observation that the communal stress or strength is due to herd mentality. She stated that the government takes advantage of the herd mentality and knows if any issue is made a fashion where one person starts every other individual will continue doing the same as well observed during the implementation of GST. Therefore this member says that fear is the product of herd mentality. This member also shared her frightened concern was the blue whale game. She felt it was stupid of these young adults to experiment with this game despite knowing its harmful effects just for the reason their friends tried it. She pointed that this was also due to the herd mentality.

One member shared his experience saying that it's not really the herd mentality he sees but how people find it easy to ask something in a group rather than enquiring individually with no basic thinking. He says that it was the strength of unity of all walks of life with respect to the Jalikattu issue. He also stated that people have realised that when they come together and oppose an issue the government does listen to them. In the case of GST, since many people opposed, the items were re-shuffled among the slab of taxes. He also shared his other preoccupation that was the sense of surprise towards many men supporting the 'no sexual abuse campaign'. Another member of the group from an education background shared her preoccupation of fear towards sexual abuse among young children in schools. She also expressed her fear as a parent of a girl child, as the child spends most of her time in school not knowing when she is under threat. This made her cautious about where she goes and whom she interacts with. Listening to the fear of child abuse, one member shared an incident that she had heard about a 4 year old boy having molested a girl. It is alarming to know how young children are able to process information and hence we need to be aware of what is made available to our children.

A member shared that the media heavily influences our thinking and the herd mentality whose outcomes can be positive or negative. This results in people coming together either to protest these issues united or leading to communal

divisions. This impact of media is a threat as people are not thinking or verifying whether the information received in any form is accurate or relevant. Another member stated that the media and people in authority attack the emotions of an individual which makes them reactive and their ability of thinking stunted. Be it the GST, molestation or any communal stress, the survival or identity is at threat resulting in high emotional reactions, making them vulnerable and destructive. Adding to this, another member shared that this has been his preoccupation as well, that these days people are not thinking what they want but are just reacting as a group.

Another member revisited the topic of child safety and stated that the child is at high risk due to the lack of proper parental supervision. Since both the parents of this generation are working, the time spent with their children is insufficient. Since the parents do not provide quality time, they experience guilt and compensate by buying the child different kinds of gadgets and expose them to a lot of things that may not be appropriate. She also shared about how her nephew who is 6 years old owns a cell-phone and communicates to her through phone. Another member shared that she is experiencing contrast effects of media. On one hand she is becoming aware of various issues happening in the society such as abuse and others through media. On the other hand she has realised that media has brought a distance between her and her son. Though they sit on the same table but they do not talk to each other but are occupied with their phones. In the past the family members sat together and spent time talking to each other which strengthened the family bond. But in this generation members of the same family do not converse face to face but through any other mediums of technology. This brings in isolation and a sense of loneliness and depression thereby increasing the rate of suicide tendency in youngsters.

Another member shared her preoccupation of the brutal rape incident that happened on the New Year day of 2017. She stated that, men who largely supported 'say no to sexual abuse' campaign are also men when under the influence of a substance tend to do such an act. She personally finds this nature of men very annoying. She also shared about the murder of a famous journalist in Bangalore who spoke the truth. She says that it is ironical that the law assures the right to speech and expression but when instances of truth are brought to light people are killed and the law does nothing about it. Another member shared her opinion not all men being sexual hunters as otherwise people who talk about gender equality suffer from inequality and live in a fear of being accused as asexual hunter. Many male teachers despite having the passion of teaching develop distance and refrain themselves of any opinions to girl students as they are fearful. A member shared that men are also a victim to abuse and is never spoken. The feminist movement has empowered the women to a greater extent that the environment has become dangerous for men in so many ways to co-exist. She has also come across male teachers especially the sports and dance teacher being very frightened who teach the steps or the game without touching the students. Because of vast and intensive support being provided for women safety, the incidents of crime reporting that occurs needs a closer look if it is real or fabricated. Another member supported the fact of male

being a victim to sexual abuse by sharing an incident of her husband experiencing inappropriate touch while commuting in public transport as he was also uncomfortable to share that with her. Another member continued saying that 1 in 7 men in India are a victim to abuse but do not express such experience easily because of the patriarchal nature of the society. Men are said not to cry and share their vulnerability and this member says that it is the ugly side of patriarchy.

A member moved on to say that it is wonderful to see Priyanka Chopra moving into Hollywood and the progress of India in Hollywood. Another member shared her satisfaction with the movies of these days that is focusing on promoting mental health. Many short films are also being produced that are motivational said another member. Therefore media also has a positive effect on the society. Another member stated that media with the help of technology has been a boon to mankind and made life more easy. Be it the internet banking, online food apps or shopping apps have made it easy for many working people who do not have time from their busy schedule certain tasks. Another member said that though it has saved time and made the shopping experience more choice full and comfortable. It has also resulted in people becoming lazy resulting in health issues. One member also shared how she commented on her daughter's profile picture through message though she was seated in front of her. Another member shared that she and her husband go out to spend some time with each other but end up sitting with their phones checking messages and mail. Another member states that use of technology has become a tool for escapism as she tends to use her phone pretending like she is busy when her mother comes to complain or have talk that is unpleasant.

According to certain researches people who post their picture on social media and gets 'like' tend to have better self esteem and increase their narcissistic pleasure. Another member states that it is due to technology many people are experiencing isolation and loneliness. The adults of this generation especially find it difficult to express their feelings when in grouchy and end up taking extreme steps. This has spiked in numbers of suicides in the recent past among adolescents. In most cases media is used by people largely to post their happy stories that cover the reality to others assuming things are going well which is drastically on a rise. By a post or share or like or any number of emojis has become the deciding opinions of people failing to look into their real lives. Things can go wrong if the balance between things do not happen as it is important to consciously use the media in the right way. One member shared how he made an effort to reduce the usage of phone and became mindful of what he is doing while eating. With this note at the end, we arrived to the conclusion of the discussion.

## **PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

*In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.*

### **Theme 1: Threat to survival, identity and security**

The Jalikattu issue, sexual abuse and sudden government policies are instilling fear and thereby the survival, safety and identity are threatened.

### **Theme 2: Fear and anxiety**

All the issues in the society is evoking fear and anxiety among the members

### **Theme 3: Manipulation of people's feeling by the authority**

Linking of Adhaar card and the GST was impose on the citizens and the other government policies triggers various emotions of the people making them reactive

### **Theme 4: Sudden realization of democracy**

People have realized that they have the power to oppose the policies proposed by the government and hence they said no to the percentage of tax and thereby reducing the tax rate.

### **Theme 5: Herd mentality and collectivistic versus individuality**

The jalikattu issue shows that people can oppose anything only if they are in a group.

### **Theme 6: Overcompensation by parents**

Since parents are not able to spend enough time with their children then feeling guilty. To deal with this feeling they overcompensate by providing expensive gadgets to their children hence exposing them to lot of unsafe things

### **Theme 7: Lack of face to face interaction**

### **Theme 8: Isolation**

### **Theme 9: Vulnerable youngster**

### **Theme 10: Increase of suicide rate among young adults**

All these themes emerged from the fact that these days people are preoccupied with their phones and do spend time with each other hence resulting in loneliness, suicide and isolation

### **Theme 11: Influence of media and technology**

### **Theme 12: Inferiority**

### **Theme 13: Depression**

### **Theme 14: Inclusion and joyful**

These themes are positive and negative effect of technology

### **Theme 15: Ugly side of patriarchy**

### **Theme 16: Gender discrimination and Inequality**

### **Theme 17: Insecurity**

With increasing incidents of child sexual abuse and male being a victim of abuse there is insecurity.

### **Theme 18: Lack of awareness**

### **Theme 19: Fear of authority**

Fear is evoked due to lack of information about various government policies

### **Theme 20: Absence of positive aspects**

People preoccupied with negative experience and not sharing about their happy moments

## **PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

*In Part 3, the participants were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here, participants were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world: their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.*

In this part we tried and analysed the information obtained from the first two part of the discussion to find the deepest layer of the social system. Some of the themes were interconnected and led from one theme to another it was hard to derive at certain hypothesis. However the group worked together in forming hypotheses based on their commonalities.

1. Because of lack of information, members of the society are experiencing fear and anxiety resulting in herd mentality
2. Sudden realization of democracy is happening because of identity crises leading to herd mentality.
3. High level of trust is happening due to herd mentality leading to lack of responsibility.
4. Because of manipulation of people's feelings by the authority, members of the society are experiencing anxiety and threat to social identity leading to herd mentality.
5. Sudden realization of democracy is happening because of a sense of ma-

nipulation of people by authority leading to interdependence and questioning safety and survival.

The government is coming up with new laws and policies, which is brought into the awareness of people through social media. However, there is lack of complete understanding, and confusion due to conflicting versions that are circulated. This is leading to fear and anxiety, threat to survival and identity. In order to deal with these unpleasant emotions, people are exhibiting herd mentality by coming together to voice out their concerns.

1. Isolation and insecurity is happening due to lack of face to face interaction which is leading to depression and increased suicide rate among young adults
2. Overcompensation by parents is because of the absence of face to face interaction leading to vulnerable youngsters
3. Lack of face to face interaction is happening because of excessive usage of technology adversely affecting relationships.
4. Negative influence of media and technology is happening because of lack of awareness leading to vulnerable youngsters.
5. Absence of positive impact is happening because of social media leading to lack of joyfulness and fear and anxiety.
6. Unrealistic standards have been created through social media leading to a high rate of depression and suicide.
7. Higher curiosity in children is happening due to overcompensation and excessive exposure by parents leading to unclear boundaries

Technology, especially smart phones and the internet today, is becoming easily available to the masses. Therefore in today's generation we see that everyone is using technology excessively and are addicted to their gadgets. Parents have also started giving their younger children gadgets to keep them occupied because they do not have enough time to spend with their children. This is increasing the level of inappropriate exposure that a child receives, but may not be able to fully comprehend. Increased exposure and lack of adult supervision is resulting in unclear boundaries and risky behaviour such as experimenting with games like the Blue Whale.

This over engagement in technology is leading to weaker bonds in relationships and isolation and depression. The excessively positive image that people portray through social media is setting unrealistic standards which in turn affects the self esteem and makes youngsters vulnerable.

**Hypothesis 1: Positive influence of media and technology is creating awareness and leading to joy and inclusion and an increase in self esteem.**

Despite the many negative impacts, there are also the positive effects of technology. Through technology people have been able to reconnect with individuals from all over the world. Technology has also made life very easy due to the various apps for internet banking, shopping, ordering food, and thereby saving time for other activities. It is bringing people of similar interests together and helping build connections.

**Hypothesis 2: Feelings of helplessness and insecurity are happening because of absence of positive impact leading to fear, anxiety and threat to survival.**

People are experiencing fear and anxiety because every day, the media is full of reports of death, destruction, abuse, violence and so on. This is leading to a sense of insecurity and helplessness and an activation of the death instinct.

**Hypothesis 3: Gender inequality is caused due to the ugly side of patriarchy leading to insecurity and inability to express among the male members of society.**

India being a patriarchal society, men are told that they are stronger and more powerful. However, with increased feminine empowerment, men have become vulnerable, even by the law. Men now experience tremendous insecurity due to their gender, as they are seen as guilty until proven innocent. Many male members who have been victims of abuse have not been able to express their trauma. Men do not have the freedom to express their emotional experiences and this is the ugly side of patriarchy.

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