OPUS

An Organisation for Promoting Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

India at the Dawn of 2019

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.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

We began the session with an introduction to "Listening Post" and the floor was open for the participants to share their preoccupations of the past year. For a brief moment there was absolute silence appearing as if the participants were revisiting and recapitulating their experiences from their memory.

Very soon one of the members took over by sharing her preoccupation with herself and work that little time was given to the happenings around the society. However, she also shared her fear towards the upcoming central elections. According to her, BJP, one of the political parties in India which is also the ruling party is on taking over the country with its agenda. In one of the recent report, it was mentioned that this party was ruling in most states of India and there is high probability for them to rule the country entirely with their agenda. This leave her with immense fear towards the future of the country as this party is causing communal violence and has negative effects on the developmental sectors and minority groups. There were other members of the group who agreed to experiencing fear not only due to communal violence but also due to the level of manipulation by the present government and its impact on the RBI and CBI. One of the members stated that the politics is so dirty that apart from fear there is also lack of hope. It almost appears as if there is no alternative in choosing the government since all the parties are black and corrupt. This leaves the youth of the country hopeless and distant from the dirty games of politics. Many people

also wonder as to what is the point in casting vote and selecting a leader. Due to the manipulation of the government the religious and communal violence has periodically increased over the last year.

One of the members shared that fear was not just limited to politics but also the dangers of gaming on phones and other devices like pub g and blue whale that has increased among children in the recent times amongst the caregivers.

Other fearful and distressing events were the natural disasters such as the tsunami in Indonesia and floods in Kerala. This member expressed how some of these disasters were man induced due to exploitation of the environment.

A member was soon taken back to how even in these disasters the political parties are playing their games of gain. The government is having debates but taking no action and are providing very minimal funds in the aid for the state affected. The government is also using media as a platform to portray and broadcast information in favour of them leading to fake news. Another member recalls how the political party used media to blame each other in the incident of the collapse of the Kolkata bridge and were unwilling to take on responsibility. This leaves the group hopeless and lack of trust towards the media and government.

The group also shared their preoccupation of government interference in religion and the incident where the Supreme Court passed a law related to women being allowed into the Sabarimala temple. It leaves them wondering whether it is necessary for the government to involve in religion or is there some game being played. On the other hand the feminism is also being played in this incident that leaves the members wondering whether women want to visit the temple out of devotion or to prove their power. On the whole the purpose and the objective seem to be lost. With feminism and woman's right being spoken one of the members was reminded of the 'me to' campaign which was overused and misused. The women used this platform to take their vengeance and the purpose was again lost.

Another preoccupation was on the role of media and its preoccupancy with the celebrity weddings that happened during the last year. The media went out of their way to cover minute details of the weddings which the group felt was unnecessary. The rich like the Ambanis have gone beyond the law and spent excessively in the wedding although there is a slab of limit to be spent and the media or government did not have an issue. Meanwhile it was pointed out that Ambani is one of the major sources of revenue for the government and hence are being favoured. Due to these reasons the important issues in the country is not being highlighted. It was also mentioned that the celebrity wedding triggered many young adults to commit into marriage and also have a fancy weddings like that of the celebrity idols.

After having spoken about negativity of politics and media, the group began to share certain positive events such as people becoming aware of the damages

done to the environment; they are taking small initiatives to go green like becoming a vegan, clean campaigns and measures to control waste generation. Other achievements during last year include the double storey bridge being completed after 28 years in Assam, a bill that assures facilities and provisions for people with autism and the revision of mental act.

Although media is accused of biased opinion, there are few channels on television and web like Netflix, Amazon prime and so on are coming up with their own series of episodes that tap social issues and creates awareness among the society. Many members of the group could relate to this and shared several advertisements and series that they have come across with a social message. With this a member recalled how she saw a document of how many people in the country are lacking their basic needs such as water and food while there are farmers ending their life as they see no hope in agriculture as a means of earning livelihood. On the other hand, the rich are shelling their money and causing lot of wastage. This is resulting in a large gap between the strata and has eradicated the middle class.

Another thing noticed in the society is how young people are looking for full-time employment in online media like bloggers, critiques, and reviewers from their regular 9-5 jobs. In order to gain popularity and fame on social media, the young adults are becoming under skilled. The group also mentioned such professions are more like a fantasy when in excess may end up with a mental illness. Other members in the group had different opinion about the influence of media on young adults. They believe that technology has made the youngsters a global citizen and confident to initiate and be innovative. The session therefore came to an end wondering whether the technology and media has been a positive or a negative influence on the youth.

The theme that emerged from the discussion are as follows

- Fear of uncertainty in government ruling
- Political instability and manipulation
- Role of media in our life
- Manmade disasters and environmental changes
- Technology - positive versus negative effects
- Increasing gap between strata of economies
- Celebrity weddings and its glorification
- Responsibility by youth in forming own groups
- Dangers of Gaming
- Pushing trends
- Individual groups taking responsibility
- Interference of government in religion
- Exploitation
- Feminism politics or vengeance

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.

The hypotheses formed were interrelated and are hence grouped based on their commonalities.

1. Because of instability and manipulation in politics the members of the society are experiencing fear of uncertainty resulting in indifference and withdrawal by youth towards authority.

2. Because of instability and manipulation in politics the members of the society are experiencing fear of uncertainty resulting in youth forming own groups and taking responsibility.

3. Because of political instability the young members of the society are taking responsibility resulting in change.

4. Because of political interference in all areas of citizen affairs there is exploitation resulting in members forming own groups and taking responsibility.

5. Because of political manipulation the members are experiencing fear of uncertainty resulting in bias of information by media.

6. Because of political instability the members are connecting and forming own groups to support survival.

7. Because of government interference in all areas, the members of the society are experiencing fragmentation resulting in lack of trust.

The above hypotheses are around the theme of politics which was one of the predominant preoccupations of the member in the group. The instability and the manipulation by the political parties has evoked fear in the members of the society. The present government taking over the entire country has also left the society with fear of uncertainty. Due to these factors the young adults have withdrawn and have initiated in forming own groups and make changes in the small ways possible. Fear is the common feeling evoked when experienced with a threat resulting in either a fight, flight or freeze response. It is noticed that more members are opting the fight response by taking initiatives and responsibility and not entirely depending on the government.

1. Hype created by media on celebrity wedding is pushing trends and creating a gap between the two resulting in mental stress and instability
2. Media plays a significant role in our lives that members of the society internalize and believe in everything portrayed by them resulting in instant gratification of needs
3. The interpretation of feminism is distorted because of the influence of media in the way its being portrayed resulting in vengeance

4. Promotion of technology through media is increasing gaming dangers resulting in fear and uncertainty among caregivers
5. Pushing trends is creating materialism and increasing exploitation of environment resulting in natural disasters
6. Media portrayal of the rich is rising expectations of the upper middle class resulting in depletion of the environment
7. Because of the youth taking on responsibilities there are many initiations of start ups resulting in the growth of Indian economy
8. Because of the access to technology the young adults are feeling empowered as global citizens resulting in innovations and initiators of start ups

Another preoccupation of the members in the group was the role of media and technology and hence has formed the above hypotheses. Initially the members shared the negative effects of media on the society and the fear of it being politically influenced and biased leading to fake news. Media in the recent days have broadcasted glamour news such as the celebrity weddings and has exaggerated the reality, that the common people have raised their expectation to live up to what is being portrayed resulting in increase of materialism, exploitation of environment and the gap between the strata. Development of technology gas increased fear among the caregivers because of the widespread gaming dangers. However, technology and media has had a positive influence especially among young adults as they are using these facilities to become a global citizen and take initiatives and thereby bringing about a change in the society.

While the members were forming hypotheses, towards the end of the session began talking about downsized movies and moving to another planet which almost appeared as if it was an unconscious wish to move away from this world.

Convener: Cicily M P