Indian Contributions to Thinking about Studies in Ableism: Challenges, Dangers and Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

The article suggests ways to foster quality and rigour in research production around 'south Asian' experiences. This project is fundamental from an ethical perspective in terms of undertaking quality and rigorous research publications, but also to challenge some common research practices amongst non-occidental and occidental scholars. Disability studies in the sub-continent needs to be critical of the uncritical reception of occidental critical disability studies into our realm, along with its scaffolding of conceptual formations such as ideas of Self–kin relations, agency, sexualities, identity politics, to name a few areas. The article first explores the idea of 'south Asianness' or indeed 'Indian' as a default, fictionalised space producing a monologue, due to colonisation and the 'idea of the 'captive mind'. Secondly, I provide an overview of the notion of ableism and its relation to systems of dehumanisation and identity. There is an interlude into examining caste and ableism and the re-emergence of scientific racism. The final section of the article turns toward aspects within Indian philosophical traditions that provide *new opportunities* for a distinctive Indian form of disability studies, namely heterodox argumentation and the strands of an integrative ethos.

> The point of feminist comparative travel is not to discover new concepts, ideas, and problems that we can fit into our own frames of reference or worlds of sense, but to shift our frames altogether so that we see things differently from another perspective, a unique angle, and the standpoint of a new location.
>
> (Butnor and McWeeny, 2014, 11)

The opening epigram of this article has been extracted to set the tone of explorations around some of the challenges and common 'mistakes' in undertaking both conceptual and empirical research embedded within south Asian contexts related to practices of disability and ableism. The article suggests ways to foster quality and rigour in research production around 'south Asian', in particular 'Indian' experiences as this is the focus of the journal. This project is fundamental from an ethical perspective in terms of undertaking quality and rigorous research publications, but also to challenge some common research practices amongst non-occidental and occidental scholars. Disability studies in the sub-continent needs to be critical of the uncritical reception of occidental (critical) disability studies into our realm, along with its scaffolding of conceptual formations such as ideas of Self-kin relations, agency, sexualities, identity politics, to name a few areas. This critique extends to the coerced conditions of sub-continent research production in writing for the international marketplace which induces the usage of a

Eurocentric conceptual apparatus so that our analysis is intelligible; there needs to be a recognition of the politics of research production.

The article first explores an idea of 'south Asianness' or indeed 'Indianness' as a default, fictionalised space producing a monologue, due to colonisation and the idea of the 'captive mind'. Secondly, I provide an overview of the notion of ableism and its relation to the systems of dehumanisation and identity. There is an interlude into examining caste and ableism and the re-emergence of scientific racism. The final section of the article turns toward aspects within Indian philosophical traditions that provide new opportunities for a distinctive Indian form of disability studies, namely heterodox argumentation and the strands of an integrative ethos.

Delimitations

In this article the concept of ableism goes beyond disability; indeed, ableism need not refer to disability at all. The conceptualisation of ableism requires a shift from a focus on disability to the idea of ableness, perfection and what is configured to be fully human. Additionally, when I do refer to disability, I am not using disability in the sense of a metaphor; disability experiences are real and material. The Journal has as its focus Indian critical disability studies and whilst this article focuses on India, parts of the discussion have relevance to South Asian perspectives.

Colonised Cages – Where to, Next?

Current research relations as they stand means that scholars need to have an ideological commitment to an idea of South Asia on one hand and also simultaneously researchers have an academic necessity through the dominance of 'area' studies'. No intellectual or cultural practice can occur in a vacuum devoid of a sense of history, social stratification, temporality, place, and national politics. How do disability studies researchers configure our disciplinarity within a regional framework of South Asia? This prompts a further question, what is meant by 'Asia', and more specifically 'South Asia' or 'Indianness'? Where is the place of localised and ethno-religious contexts? Are there research opportunities for symbiosis, continuity and connections which cut across countries in our region that transgress temporalities in the realm of culture. The *Indian Journal of Critical Disability Studies* can be one of these projects.

The terminology of South Asia is itself clouded in a dense discursive fogginess. When we talk of south Asia in particular, south Asian disability studies, do we mean studies 'of', 'for' or 'in' South Asia? South Asian disability studies is not a monolith of equal partnerships; instead, there is the dominance of a regionalised Indian disability studies and relatively little disability studies research and conceptual development produced in other countries, especially in English such as in Bhutan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Be that as it may, developing a critical south Asian disability studies and thinking beyond conventional approaches to understanding disability and corporeal difference in various

locations in the region, enables a problematisation of our disciplinary practises and histories which are inherently linked to those locations.

A caveat to the study of abledness and disability relates to the necessity of thinking about the making of disability and abledness through the lens of nation making. Caution is needed in assuming that particular versions of local 'knowledges' are 'pure' and authentic rather than being fabrications of knowledges developed by outside experts who assume that certain ways of doing things are 'local' or are a composite of intermingling or extractive practices. A first hint of ableist framings of marginalised populations, for example, can be seen in the denotation of that marginality through the lens of 'disabilities'. In the repealed *Untouchability (Offences) Act*, No.22 of 1955, 'disabilities' is not used as in equivalency with disabled people, however the characterisation of asymmetrical practices as 'disabilities' is more in line with the idea of handicaps. As will be discussed later in the paper, this rendering is not coincidental, for the caste system *inter alia*, enacts ableist practices by way of producing the notion of 'disabilities' and degeneracy at a group, classificatory morphological level. 'Disabilities' whether that be in terms of handicap or material disability are designated as a negative relation.

Captive Minds, Conceptual Borders and Methodological Traps

What of the tenor, rigour and reliability of research about disability and marginalisation in India – is it a 'true' representation of peoples' daily lives and are researcher standpoints made explicit? What hermeneutics are engaged to understand these realities? Alatas (1972, 1974) remonstrated the idea of the 'captive mind' – a particular way of thinking that is dominated by Eurocentric thought in an imitative and uncritical manner that global south scholars through practice and coercion *imitate* and *privilege* western approaches to knowledge systems like views of individualism, autonomy, family, the Self, methods like problem description and selection, including what research questions are asked and prioritised, generalisation, generalisation and interpretation, and practice frameworks or civil society interventions. Western philosophies, conceptual schemas and research frameworks, specifically in our case, disability studies, has become the *benchmark* for thinking about both disablement and ablement. Such a captive mind then becomes an "uncritical and imitative mind dominated by an external source, whose thinking is deselected from an independent perspective" (Alatas, 1974, 692).

Furthermore, as Singhi (1987) argues, this kind of dominance or tilt towards western epistemologies has "…led to the trained incapacity of many contemporary Indian intellectuals to *construct cognitive alternatives* and to examine their own intellectual traditions as revealed in classical texts" (Singhi, 1987, 3, emphasis added). A fundamental critique is that the adoption of western conceptualisations (for example disability, ideas of shame, also the organisation of sex-gender distinctions), has distorted the analysis of Indian social realities producing a dissonance between the western paradigms and the exergies of Indian society. In reviewing manuscripts about non-western countries, I have noticed that many global south researchers uncritically appropriate research findings and concepts developed from outside their country. This is especially true of research from the US and

UK and it assumes, in an unfettered way, that these findings or conceptualisations, without any adaption, apply to their non-western country context. An example of alternative approaches are the concepts of women's agency and autonomy (Fonseka & Schulz, 2018), care ethics (Dalmiya, 2016), ideas of family (Chapin, 2018) and notions of a 'third gender' (Miller, 2012). This regurgitation of untested concepts of analysis appear to have a life of their own and hence transmogrifying as truth norms.

You cannot simply 'lift' one approach to theorisation and associated nomenclatures and transpose them to another social grouping, be that at the level of epistemology, methodology or not taking into account investments in social identities. There are some tricky territories from which to compare, for example the intersections and separation of the concepts of caste, class and race (Cox, 1959; de Reuck & Knight, 1967; Menon, 2006; Sen, 2005). Baxi (2011), in discussing critical etymology discusses the development of Euro-American words, which he argues has developed 'controlled meanings' globally. In making comparisons, there are wording decisions and we need to be mindful that "vernacular languages also encode functional equivalents of epistemic domination" (Baxi, 2011, 61). One example that springs to mind, is the Pali term *dukka* which has been rendered in English to mean 'suffering'. However, this rendition distorts the meaning of this term. A heightened translation, *dukka* more closely resembles the idea of dissatisfaction which has quite a different texture to suffering.

Baxi (2011, 62) argues for pairing, word by word, the vocabulary of the dominant and the dominated, "… and in doing so there begins the possibility of locating comparable and comparative understandings". In his discussion on undertaking comparative Indian phenomenology, Ram-Prasad (2018, 4) notes that any comparativist project around classical Indian understandings of the body, need to acknowledge "the historical specificity of phenomenology's emergence as a philosophical programme in the West". The particular use, care and explanation which Ram-Prasad utilises the phenomenological approach in his Indian exegetical research "… then becomes clear; otherwise, the reader may rightfully query the origin and utilisation of 'phenomenology' as a comparative category". Paying heed to the warnings of Baxi (2011) and Ram-Prasad (2018) and the complexities of 'comparison' and 'similarity' (Bhatti & Kimmich, 2018; Campbell, 2019; Felski & Friedman, 2013), are essential.

It is not enough for Indian disability studies scholars to do *more* research, because they often will labour under the weight of eurocentrism, which is not just an episteme; as Patel puts it, "it is also a way to organise the production, distribution, consumption, and reproduction of knowledge unequally across the different parts of the world" (Patel,2018; 98) – it is time to develop alternative epistemologies and methodologies to uncover ableist processes within Indian practices. The irony is that the conceptual structures in Indian philosophical tradition also claim universal applicability; this may not be known and even if there is insight, the global relations of research production diminish the possibilities of subjecting western formulations of humankind to Indian philosophical scrutiny (Krishna, 1987). I now turn to a summary of Studies on Ableism.

Ableism – what does it mean?

Since the emergence of *Studies in Ableism* in 2001, there have been unexpected consequences; these consequences are discussed in Campbell (2019). In the early days, the term, the little-known concept of ableism, was rarely used in disability studies research, let alone in the vernacular of disability activism. With the emergence of social media there has been an avalanche of references of the word 'ableism' on Facebook, Redditt and Twitter. When an activist or researcher is using the term *ableism*, that term needs to be defined or explored at the outset. Elsewhere, Campbell (2009, 2019) has argued that ableism is not merely a case of ignorance or negative attitudes. If that was the case, surely the strategy would be to engage in a mass re-education programme, of whose aim is to overturn and create positive attitudes towards disabled people and those considered different by society. In one generation our work would be done! Instead Campbell (2009, 2019) has argued that ableism has a process and practice that is multi-factorial, complex, changeable and comparative.

Ableism is everyone's business, not because of some ideological imperative but because we as living creatures, human and animal, are affected by the spectre and spectrum of the 'abled' body. It is critical that ableism stops being thought of as just a disability issue (Campbell, 2009). Ablement, the process of becoming 'abled', impacts on daily routines, interactions, speculations and, significantly, imagination. While all people are affected by ableism, we are not all impacted by ableist practices in the same way. Due to their positioning, some individuals actually benefit and become entitled by virtue of institutional ableism in different settings. When writing about the denotation of disability within courts of law, Campbell (2001) observed that ableism as a knowledge system was used to ascertain or nullify defining disability. She framed ableism as:[1]

> a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human
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> (Campbell 2001, 44).

This way of understanding ableism held for over a decade, however, Campbell (2019) articulated the need to be more specific about its key characteristics that she and others had observed not just about the rendering of 'disability', but also the marking out of other marginalised peoples:

> . . . system of causal relations about the order of life that produces processes and systems of entitlement and exclusion. This causality fosters conditions of microaggression, internalized ableism and, in their jostling, notions of (un) encumbrance.… A system of dividing practices, ableism institutes the reification

[1]There is no space to fully discuss here the spectrum of ableism conceptually and its practices, as has been conceptualised in my work; I recommend visiting my Academia.edu page for further discussion: https://dundee.academia.edu/FionaKumariCampbell. There are many papers about ableism.

> and classification of populations. Ableist systems involve the *differentiation, ranking, negation, notification and prioritization of sentient life*
>
> (Campbell, 2017, cited in Campbell, 2019, 147).

The point of Studies in Ableism is to turn the spotlight on the idea of abledness and how ablement is preserved. In other words, to invert our gaze and examine the rendition of abledness, ablebodiedness, the basis of becoming (en)abled. These *dividing practices*, which could be through classification systems or legal definitions, invoke a series of dehumanising practices that result in the disqualification of a human person or indeed demarcations between the human and non-human. Indeed there is an impassable divide between human and animal, with some like Peter Singer (1979), arguing that certain clusters of humans (intellectually disabled or aged people), have defined characteristics that disqualify them, and so they should have less rights claims to other 'higher forms' of life. Conversely, there are examples of certain categories of 'human' who have been persistently deemed animalistic such as Jews (Roskies, 1984; Volkov, 2006), homosexuals (Plant, 1986), Dalits (Chakravarti, 2018; Ramanujam, 2020; Velassery & Patra, 2018) and even women as a sex class (Criado Perez, 2019; Islam, 2020; Teltumbde, 2020; Ussher, 1991, Volkov, 2006). These examples show that the conceptualisation of ableism extends beyond a narrow understanding of 'disability', for at times we see the confluence of race, class and sex classes with disability.[2] To reiterate again when discussing ableism, 'disability' as traditionally understood, may not feature as part of that discussion; instead other aspects of ableist humanisation are the focus.

Ableism operates through the apparatus of 'animalisation' through, as typified by the Indian caste system, through "descending scale of contempt" (Velassery & Patra, 2018, 25), indicative of ableist practices of ranking and negation. Commonly we refer to dehumanisation in the scaling of humans, but what is really meant is the levers of the 'inhuman'. A life here is denoted as 'brute', disposal or not having grievable capacity (they are of less value and hence are unmournable). This idea of life prioritises the sheer biological fact of life in contrast with the way a life is lived and esteemed. Campbell's (2017) understanding of ableism as having five prongs is useful for thinking about political and strategic interventions and approaching research:

- Differentiation (neoliberal technicism, productivity, encumbrance, citizen(ship), capabilities, contributions)
- Ranking (causation: table of mains/income/class/caste/songbun/racial apartheids)
- Negation (what it is not/outliers/disposability – clear demarcations)
- Notification (notices/documents/certifications/regulation – that prescribe enumeration)

[2] This idea of confluence needs to be investigated with respect to methodological challenges in studying comparison and similarities between desperate areas. See Bhatti & Kimmich, 2018; Campbell, 2019; Felski & Friedman, 2013.

- Prioritisation of sentient life (access to the common-wealth, coalition building amongst minoritised peoples, claim to space & territory – bounded spaces).

Studies in Ableism Refutes Identity Politics!

There is some confusion about identity politics and its relationship to the idea of ableism which need clearing up. The theorisation of ableism is not based on an agonistic relation of conflict such as those antagonisms expressed in Marxism and some post-modernist theories. Studies in Ableism does not start from the point of delimited categories of disabled people and able-bodied people, nor is there reference to substantive group identity analysis, with reference to the idea of identity politics. In fact, the opposite is the case. Studies in Ableism draws upon the idea of an open system where various actors, conditions and causes interact, to produce processes and practices of social exclusion. To reduce humankind to that of an identity, or a discrete bordered group, is in conflict with the conceptual foundations of ableism, at least in the epistemology developed by Campbell. In *Contours of Ableism*, Campbell (2009), I make reference to the fact that able-bodiedness is understudied and thus there is the necessity to invert the gaze from disablement to abledness or what has been recently termed *ablement* (see Campbell, 2019). Indeed, my work traces genealogies of ability, and abledness and concludes that historically these are slippery categories. It is a trap to adopt linguistic terms such as 'the disabled', or 'the able bodied' as if these signifiers are self-evident, acknowledging that these terms are used strategically in an essentialised way (Spivak, 1988). Once these signifiers are problematised they become catachrestic (that is, elusive and unravelling). So, where does this holding onto identity of politics emerge?

Wendy Brown (2000) points to the terms of engagement in human rights and anti-discrimination claims, the most common of which is through the lens of identity politics. Brown rightly points out that in the development of anti-discrimination claims, the petitioner as an individual or group is required to show that they have suffered. Claims for protection of human rights are based on argument that the ascribed group has a particular particularised form of suffering and hence is in need of protection by the law. The Indian Constitution has a system of reservations and protected categories, which drawn upon prohibitory and affirmative jurisprudence (see Islam, 2020).

US constitutional law has shaped global approaches to 'identities' in human rights instruments. The global development of the civil rights movement has been influenced or at least shaped by strategies adopted by US activists; hence we speak of a 'minority group' or minority rights model, wherein organising is through identity clusters. The articulation of social justice claims globally has been through establishing certain political, moral and pragmatic identities to articulate the claims of marginal people. Secondly, you will see from what I have already described, that identity politics claims are framed by cordoning off, ring-fencing identity formation. There has been a tendency to police 'who is in, and who is out', of a group by both activists and judicial as well as government bodies. A lot of this strategy plays out in that phrase "discrete, insular minority", which is in and of itself a form of containment, a cordoning in, if you like. There is political and

emotional investment by activists and governments, for different reasons, in classificatory practices and ensuring that any outliers are ejected or rejected from associations. More than this, is the idea of entrapment, the policing of identity becomes paradox, that is, in order to promote an identity, the marginal group becomes entrapped by its preconditions (qualifications for membership).

Gayatri Spivak (1988) points to the need to engage in *strategic essentialism* (almost implying certain characteristics as immutable or unique), if we are to engage in the storying and representations of our experience, including identity claims in law. Nevertheless, such essentialism needs to be used strategically if we are to work towards accessible futures for all. Many societies still rely on population designations and enumerations in order to implement distributive justice and equality measures through law and legal classifications. We give power to ableist practises, when strategic essentialism takes on the appearance of normalised relations between human beings. The concept of reason can be separated out from the constraints of identity politics. Identity can refer to those aspects of oneself: individual, moral, political, intellectual, ascetic or religious, one's interests or caste, sex or other attribute; can be a work of reason, filtered through local norms. Indian traditions present resources to individuals through its tradition of reasoning and public debate (Ganeri, 2012). I turn now to a preliminary discussion around aspects of the Indian philosophical traditions that exude either terror or possibility in research Studies in Ableism within Indian contexts. These thoughts are summative as well as provisional, there is much future work to be undertaken.

Unsettled(ing) Traditions – Discourse of Terror

There is no space within this article to appraise the concept of *karma* within Hinduism and Buddhism (considered a non-orthodox school in Indian philosophy). Suffice to say, frequently south Asian literature (including disability studies) contains unsupported claims about the philosophical meaning of *karma* (there are a multitude of interpretations, debates by philosophers and religious scholars. Additionally, there is a necessity to separate the teachings of *karma* in the form of tales) at the village level. Limited research has been undertaken furthermore, on how disabled people and their families make sense of the doctrine of *karma* and how attitudes toward disability are shaped by the concept. More urgent research needs to be undertaken. Instead, given the orientation of this article I will explore the caste system.

Cast(e)ing Ableism

> I used to be human once. So, I am told. I don't remember it myself, but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet just like a human being.
>
> (Sinha, 2007, 1).

Aside from the north Korean *songbun* system where ranking and differentiation result in inequalities being assigned at birth and effects residential, employment, schooling capabilities (see Collins, 2012), there is the more well-known Indian caste system, which is also hereditary and determinative, to the extent that any gains in education, public or financial status does not change a caste designation. Those at the top have privileges, whilst those at the bottom are deemed to have 'disabilities'. The proximity of caste stratifications bears a close resemblance to the five-pronged dividing practises of ableism. As Uma Chakravarti (2018, 10, emphasis added) argues, "the basis of inequality underlying the caste system in India is the application of *evaluative – value-based - standards* in placing particular castes as high or low". Notably, that despite the enactment of anti-caste laws and affirmative measures which effect the public domain, casteism is still evident in daily acts of segregation and hospitalities in private domains (access to spaces, social intercourse and communicative householder relations). This process of spatial differentiation is alluded to by Jodhka & Manor (2018) who describe the manner of regulation of mobilities and space, which they characterise as a game of:

> … *exits and distractions*. 'Exits' may entail physical absences from the home villages – typically, moves to residences in urban sentence centres. Those absences may be for short periods – perhaps to visit sons and daughters for whom residences have been purchased – or permanent. Others may remain in their villages but withdraw or 'exit' from panchayat politics, and thus, to a great degree, from village politics.
>
> Jodhka & Manor (2018, 21)

Despite empirical evidence that those from 'lower' castes and Dalits experience significant degrees of social and economic deprivation as well as systemic and individualised violence, if not humiliation (Chakravarti, 2018; Menon, 2006; Rodrigues, 2011; Velassery & Patra), some Marxist analyses have conceptualised caste as nothing but a hidden relation of class, having no real existence, eventually fading away with the overthrow of capitalism. This idea that caste has no real existence also can be found in the works of some post-colonial theorists and Hindutva rhetoricians that connect caste with colonialism (Menon, 2006, 5). Caste is rarely associated with ableism, and instead is viewed as a self-contained religious system, effecting one albeit large country. Yet as Campbell (2020, 39) notes, the caste (in the case below, the Valmiki lower caste) produces mobility impairment and hence is another face of ablement that results in a crushing captivity or containment of movement. In "'I'm born to do this': Condemned by caste, India's sewer cleaners condemned to death", Safi (2018) documents the lives of the Valmiki caste whose mobility is restrained by the caste system to manual scavenging or, put more simply, to manually emptying of toilets and cleaning septic systems by hand without protection. Paradoxically, there is daily mobility, where 'low-caste' women visit multiple houses, cleaning waste from deep-hole toilets and moving it to a central disposal site. Ironically, India's rail ministry is the largest employer of manual scavengers.

The caste system is fundamental to the understanding and thinking about the humanisation and dehumanisation of social life. Studying caste relations, I argue, can

provide insight into the operation, justification and apologetic defences of segregated, desegregated and integrated communities. To be clear, I am not equating caste with disability, or seeing caste discrimination as having *equivalenc*e with disability discrimination; however, I am associating caste relations within a broader field of ableism. The idea of ableism must be applied to different hierarchies of the caste system and we need to study the differential impacts, for example, on disabled people at the higher end of the hierarchy as well as disabled people deemed members of the lower castes.

Those at the lower ranks of the system or indeed beyond the caste system are considered as subhumans, less than human, in fact worse than beasts. Waghmore (2018, 116, emphasis added) speaks of the idea of untouchability as invoking an ableist association with disability: "The Untouchability Offences Act incorporated the Dalit's body *as deformed or injured property* that belongs to the state, and abolishing untouchability has also cemented 'untouchability'". We are speaking of the ranking of certain shades of human morphology using the language of *deformity*. How is caste related to ableism? Casteism can be seen as the prototype of all types of human estrangement. Ableism's focus on Negation as an element captures this radical Othering, a marked separation, producing a sense of 'us' and 'them'. Velassery & Patra (2018) define caste as a:

> … particular, historically and culturally located form of human categorisation involving visual determinants marked on the body through the interplay of perceptual practises and bodily appearance. Caste has not had one meaning or a single essential criterion, but its meanings have always been mediated through visual appearances. The criteria that determine caste identity have included ancestry experience, outside perception, internal perception, coded visibility, habits and practises – all of these and more are variously invoked for both individuals and groups
>
> (Velassery & Patra, 2018, 92).

Ableism is literally written on certain lowered caste bodies. The abled body acts as a core signifier within the caste system as it is "the primary symbol of the social body, the body politic. Bodily appearance, movement, and functions – from dress, hair, food, and toilet to excrement, sexual fluids, and menstrual discharge – are given cultural and socially determined meanings" (Ramanujam, 2020, 43). In other words, caste is an institutionalised stable form of human interaction which is maintained and reproduced by belief and behaviour. Anxieties over the retention of purity literally shape social intercourse, the securing of integrative and exclusionary space; normally associated with historically segregated and integrative practises in the West towards disabled people. The idea of untouchability is not merely a by-product of instilling codes of purity and pollution; it is, as Ramanujam (2020, 88) argues, the essence of caste, in that "touch-un-ability is always part of the subject", it inheres like a fingerprint in the person, having an immutable quality. Waghmore points to the existence of codes of Hindu politeness, in response to Dalit claims of legal discrimination. He argues that "politeness constitutes a new moral obligation of politeness across castes, including untouchables" (Waghmore, 2018, 117),

which acts as a manufactured way within space of polite transaction. Politeness continues to construct Dalits and other people regarded as impure, deformed, repulsive and hence undesirable subjects.

The caste system has been informed by the *Codes or Laws of Manu*, which subordinates and dehumanises the existence of both Dalits, lower castes and women and entitles higher castes to certain 'privileges'. Caste then evokes three aspects namely, repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialisation. And this is deduced on the basis of certain visual determinants such as colour, described social stigma, stark poverty, ancestry, outside perception, habits and practises – 'disability' and backwardness are representations that are engaged communally as part of social, legal and political interventions to mitigate the negative effects of the caste system within the Indian State. Various assertions around bodily differentiations and configurations feature as designators of purity or pollution which are not able to be overcome. Caste as an ableist practise of ranking and differentiation produces boundary adherence and is only possible through the use of power and coercion to enforce these divisions and demarcations (Chakravarti, 2018).

Scientific Racism a Cloak of Ableism?

The introduction of the infamous 1935 Nuremburg laws of the German Reich bought together the racialised caste 'Jewishness' as well as genetic genealogy (Volkov, 1986). Robertson, Ley and Light (2019) draw attention to the *Krankenmorde*, the event of the systematic murder of 2,16,000 people with physical, mental and emotional disabilities. They note that in eugenics discourses, ableism and racism were kindred bedfellows during the middle of the 20th century. Indeed, Nazi persecution on the grounds of race, disability and (homo)sexism were enabled by the regime's creation of categories of biological otherness. The Nazi's used scientific discourses or metaphors such as cancer, infection or genetic impurity to position and describe such biological Others as threats resulting in the creation of the concept of a master race (Plant, 1986; Robertson, Ley and Light, 2019, 159; Volkov, 2006).

Ableism creates whole pools of people saturated by lower expectations or are viewed as 'characterologically suspect' and of lower intelligence. A similar version of Indian racialist ideology can be found in the Hindutva movement which contains strains of racialised intelligence discourses in monolithic cultural and racial terms. Hindutva, is, an essentialist approach to Hinduism that is based on a political and social programme of militant fascist communal Hindu organizations with the aim of establishing a *Hindu Rashtra.* As Teltumbde, puts it, "Hindutva thus pretends to abolish every kind of difference, notably caste, and appears to reassure the Dalits that they would no longer be Dalits if they donned Hindutva" (Teltumbde, 2020, 25).

In the west, there is an older history that shattered the idea of the fundamental equality of human beings. Saini (2018, 29) argues that it was the 'discovery' of the continent of Australia by white folk that helped shatter the Enlightenment belief in the idea of human unity and common capabilities. Here there is the emergence of the idea of comparison.

The benchmark reference point of this idea was being the able bodied white European human subject from which to ascertain other 'human' comparisons. Today's version of exponents of scientific racism term themselves, 'race realists'. Instead of classic racial markers, these racial realists manipulate language by using terms such as human variation, populations, ethnicity, and human biodiversity. According to Saini (2019, 136) these protagonists argue that quite different ethnicities should be encouraged to do what they do best, every person in a diverse society has a place, it is just not the same place. Here we have ranking and differentiating practises being normalised in the form of language that appears to come out of an equality paradigm. I want to move onto the re-emergence, of eugenics discourses around ableism during this time of COVID-19. Saini (2019) provides a useful definition of eugenics in an updated fashion:

> eugenics is a cold, calculated way of thinking about human life, reducing human beings to nothing but parts of the whole. It also assumes that almost all that we are is decided before we are born.
>
> Saini (2019, 71)

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, we are witnessing the return of soft eugenics as well as the legitimisation of scientific racism to bolster nationalist politics (Saini, 2019). Coupled with the rise of popular genetic genealogy members of the public are seduced by technologies to determine our 'origin', we see an emerging strain of genetic determinism in the public imagination. The current discussions around COVID-19 bring together discourses around disability and race in close proximity. There have been attempts in some countries to have COVID-19 legislation trump or at least suspend existing human rights legislative protections. The point of the prong of 'Notification' is not an exercise in disagreeing with the importance of data collection and enumeration; rather it points to the locus of control. That locus in the contemporary field and historically has always been in the hands of ableist clinicians and professionals with the support of legal regulation, who under the guise of professionalism and scientism, have had limited transparency for decision making and accountability, and when this does occur, it is long after the fact.

In summary, we need to be vigilant about the rise of eugenics and its normalisation. Saini (2019) points to the fact that governments continue to use racial categories such as those in census forms which do not necessarily map the true picture of human variation. This disconnection in categories and peoples' lived experiences also extends to the classification of 'disabilities' and holding onto diagnosticism to frame experiences of disablement. In fact, the debates over which groups are at risk for COVID-19 are very telling. We find scientists routinely using racial/ disability and clinical categories that are not only familiar to them, but to the public – yet in many ways, scientists are enveloped by the very categories that they use. As researchers and activists, we need to be mindful about examining the conditions of ableist relations and look to who benefits and who loses out. Ableism is a constantly shifting landscape with racial realists reappearing on the scene in the membership of advisory boards of both sociological, psychological and

scientific peer reviewed journals (this includes academics from both China and India promoting narratives of superior DNA intelligence).

When we examine ableist practises and processes in order to develop interventions to change those practises, we should look at those conditions in terms of how (a) they originate; (b) their source; (c) their processes of generation; (d) how those conditions are nourished, and (e) how conditions act foundationally upon society (Campbell, 2019). Ableist systems attack minoritised peoples whether that be disabled people, black and brown people, religious minorities and others, and engage in practices of humiliation that dehumanise and ultimately animalise human beings.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a nasty, virulent, underbelly of hostile attitudes towards minoritised peoples. With COVID-19, the concealed has become revealed in the playing out of various government promulgations and media portrayals about disabled people, people of colour, migrant workers, displaced persons and ideas of boundaries, borders and nationhood. We see the return of speech acts that characterise people in terms of vermin, leeches, and burdens on the State. This combined with the rise of right-wing attempts to reconfigure who are the People, and therefore by way of inversion, who are the excluded, the redundant, the dispensable. I now turn to those aspects of the Indian tradition that require in-depth research explorations at the conceptual and practice levels to better understand particularised practices and processes of ableism and develop cognitive theoretical alternatives.

Contributory Movements – Transformative Approaches?

Given India's has an appalling record of social asymmetry, it would be useful to survey, albeit briefly, Indian's foundational ideas about equality drawn from political theory and Indian philosophies, at least in terms of showcasing aspirational commitments. I undertake this task first by considering India's tradition of heterodoxy, especially concerning argumentation, and then examine some perspectives from classical philosophy.

Heterodox Argumentation

Before considering heterodoxy in argumentation, it is worth noting Indian philosophies' propensity towards investing in classificatory practises. The word *jati* for instance refers to many kinds of things besides caste classifications, quoting Ganguly (2005):

> … it refers to all sorts of categories of things – sets of colours and sound, for example: it includes living creatures generated from seeds, from moisture, from eggs, and from wombs. *Jati* means a whole range of earthly population that we call families, kin groups, genders, occupational categories, speakers of the same language, regional populations, religious communities, nations, races; it encompasses the categories of gods in their heavens.

Ganguly, (2005, 3-4, cited in Ramanujam, 2020, 10)

Hence, *jati* denotes a whole series of dividing practices and the differentiation of those categories define the world views that constructed those categories. The result is a system of highly attuned categorical thinking. Indian philosophy treats 'truth' within an epistemological context, and different theories of truth are associated with divergent theories of knowledge. Truth is regarded as a property of cognitions, not as in the west, of sentences or propositions. Although it is presupposed that a true cognition, if appropriately verbalised, would be expressed by a true statement. Hinduism generally, and Indian philosophy particularly, contains and embraces many dissenting voices and heterodox opinions (Ganeri, 2020, 38).

Unlike a two-cornered form of argumentation found in the West, the Jaina (non-orthodox school) seven-valued logic is a paradigmatic formulation that proposes that contradictions can be defused by discovering a hidden parameterisation in their statements. Cognitions form dispositions, but the concept of a disposition is not in the forefront in classical Indian analytics as in accounts of dialectic and argumentation found in the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Nyāyasūtra*, or the *Vādavinoda*. The orthodox schools of Indian philosophy contain systems, or *darshanas*, for debate. These debates contain penetrating insights, often with a degree of repetition, about such issues as the status of the finite individual, or the distinction as well as the relations between the body, mind and the self; the nature knowledge and the types of valid knowledge, the nature and origin of truth and the types of entities that may be said to exist. The Jaina seven-valued logic is a system of argumentation developed by Jain philosophers to support and substantiate their theory of pluralism. This argumentation system has seven distinct semantic predicates which may be thought of as seven different truth values (Kumar, 1984; Ganeri, 2001, 2002).

In the *Nyāyasūtra*, there is a systematic discussion of the multiple ways in which an opinion or principle might count as 'settled' – *siddhānta*. A view might be 'settled' due to general consensus, which is understood as a situation in which the view or perspective is accepted by some parties, including oneself, and lacking any outright rejection. The construction of these conceptual categories could help in understanding the reality of Indian society as it exists today (Singhi, 1987, 6). As Ganeri (2020, 38), exclaims in terms of current challenges around the role and place of secularism is Indian society: "One needs to show how Hinduism has within itself models of rational deliberation that make possible the dissenting voices and internal critiques and how those models also make available to Hindus a conception of what it is to reason about the public good". I now turn to a selection of integrative ethics. Heterodoxical thinking is emblematic of philosophical approaches.

An Integrative Ethos?

Outlining the common characteristic belief systems of Indian Philosophical schools with the exception of the materialist school; Ramakrishna Puligandla (2008, 11) argues that these schools in respect of an integrative or 'equalities' ethos, believe that (1) No account of reality which fails to do justice to reason and experience can be accepted; (2) Every acceptable philosophy should aid humankind in realising the *puruṣārthas* (the chief ends of life). Indeed, all philosophies of India are philosophies of life and that (3) All systems hold that there is no limit to the perfectibility of humankind (humans are capable of continuous improvement), as we are all infinitely perfectible, and finally, (4)All schools argue that complete freedom is to be obtained here and now in the *bodily* existence. This perspective is supported by the four categories or groups that one ought to equalise as designated in the *Mahābhārata* (MB XII.142.11). These are 1. myself (*ātman*), 2. those who please me, in other words, my friends and family (*iṣta*), 3. those who do not please me (*aniṣta*), and 4. those I hate, in other words, my enemies (*ripu*).

Dalmiya (2018, 159) notes that these four groups of equalities promote a self-conscious and cultivated practise of equality. These ethical dimensions are suggestive of possibilities for exploring trends of thinking that could be considered as counter-ableist. Echoing this Integrative ethos**,** Sen (2005) suggests that India is typified by the sentiment expressed in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*:

> Since members of all forecasts are children of God, they all belong to the same caste. All human beings have the same father, and children of the same father cannot have different castes.
>
> (cited in Sen, 2005,11)

Sen argues that pluralist toleration pivots around the Sanskrit word *swīkriti*, in the sense of 'acceptance'; Sen argues that *swīkriti* is concerned with the "acknowledgment that the people involved are entitled to lead their own lives. The idea of *swīkriti* need not, of course, convey any affirmation of equality of the standing of one 'accepted' group compared with another. Acceptance, in this elementary sense, might not seem like much, but the political value of pluralism has much to do with acceptance that indeed is the domain in which this *swīkriti* delivers a lot" (Sen 2005, 35). This pluralist tolerance is somewhat pragmatic, recognising the compulsions and constraints of Indian politics and geographies. As Khilnami puts it:

> Indians, no more than their counterparts anywhere else, are not virtuous, moderate, principled or even especially tolerant people: they are deeply self-interested. But it is that self-interest – so apparent in the conduct of the political elite - which encourages them to make compromises and accommodations
>
> (Khilnani, 2003, xiii)

Such an orientation towards equality is amplified further in the metaphysics of the *Advaita Vedānta* which argues all humans are inherently one, as the same atman (soul) resides in all people, "… then there is essentially no difference between me and my

neighbour. Both are one and the same person" (Tiwari. 2017, xxv). From this, Tiwari deduces that "the essence of man [sic] is spirit or soul. In the nature of this spirit, all men [sic] are one, at least essentially" (Tiwari, 2017, xxiii). The National poet and political activist Rabindranath Tagore stated that the 'idea of India' itself militates 'against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others'. (Tagore, cited in Sen, 2005, 349). The recent political turmoil in India would appear to contradict Tagore's perspective of an integrative message – in the idea of 'Indian' identity.

Nonetheless, a counterpoint to the caste system articulated in the *Manav Dharmasastra*, the intellectual traditions within the various school of Indian philosophy suggest some measure of 'equalisation' amongst persons. Social morality involves a degree of self-sacrifice is the first condition of social morality on the part of the adherent. Indeed, morality on the individual plane, precedes social morality. Interaction with the unfamiliar or repugnant demands than the first impulse should not be revulsion, rather the controlling the senses. Indian ethics then promotes *Indrīyanigraha* (control of senses); *Anasakti* (non-attraction towards objects) and *Niskāmatā* (control of desires) (Tiwari, 2017, xviii). Unlike western systems of ethics which sees morality arising in social contexts, the Indian metaphysical system on ethics is based on *duty*, obligation and virtue. As Tiwari (2017) articulates:

> … The whole Indian ethical system is deontological. Something is *dharma* (duty, obligation or virtue) simply because it is a Vedic law or it is prescribed by *Dharma Sūtras* and *Śāstras*. This seems to be the temperament of the entire Indian system taken in general.
>
> Tiwari (2017, 118)

A distinctly 'Indian' ableism studies research should be mindful of the pitfalls of reductionism, that is reducing synergies, similarities and generalisable claims to their lowest common denominator. We need to orientate our research to explore genealogies of knowledges and practices that include continuities as well as discontinuities within and across particularised spaces. Indian philosophy itself has a long-standing system of heterodoxy of thought, including scepticism, and simultaneous truth articulation which does not need to be made coherent and these contexts, can frame research relations in ableism studies.

Concluding Thoughts

One of the challenges in undertaking disability and ableism studies research is to circumvent monolithic thinking at the level of ideas, region and also country. All is not as it might seem, in terms of inter-communal interaction with people viewed as different, for instance the operation of *lajja bhayya* (fear-shame) – what will people think of us – which often forms the backdrop of interactions and behaviours in encounters with 'strangers' and 'outsiders' who might compromise purity.

What I have attempted to undertake in this article is a problematisation of 'Indianness' and what that would mean for 'area' focused research. I have outlined some of challenges in developing disability and ableism studies and the appreciation of the endurance of the 'captive mind'. Key to the article is the treatment of the idea of ableism, formulative errors and the vexed issue of identity politics. A focal concern is the system of caste relations and scientific racism and how they might intersect with the insights of Studies in Ableism. In the final section of the article, I turned to distinct possibilities within Indian traditions that may offer different insights into the study of dehumanised human difference.

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