

BEYOND ANXIETY: INTIMACY AND BELONGING

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Intimacy, though often has been exclusively implied as sexual affinity, can be used aptly to refer to the affective bond manifested through a friendly correspondence between the intimate-others, like the backward class across the religions, the fair-skinned indigeneity with those of the dark skins, sissy with the macho, paving way for an intimate friendship between the women, queer, Dalits, differently-ables, religious minorities, environmentalists, all the contested citizens, even without excluding the one from the mainstream who would represent the non-disempowered-ally. An endeavour for a social (sharing intimate moments of companionship), emotional (communicating with one another in crisis) and intellectual (thinking mutually) intimacy might pave way for a recreational intimacy of collaborating each other in areas of mutual interest/concern: “This advance will (at first much against the will of the outstripped men) change the love-experience, which is now full of error, will alter it from the ground up, reshape it into a relation that is meant to be of one human being to another, no longer of man to woman. And this more human love (that will fulfill itself, infinitely considerate and gentle, and kind and clear in binding and releasing) will resemble that which we are preparing with struggle and toll, the love that consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other.” (Rilke, 45)

Intimacy and Anxiety

The anxiety that one suffers in trying to be intimate with another can be best explained by Irigaray’s pertinent observation: “Mankind [*le peuple des hommes*] wages war everywhere all the time with a perfectly clear conscience. Mankind is traditionally carnivorous, sometimes cannibalistic. So men must kill to eat, must increase their domination of nature in order to live or to survive, must seek on the most distant

stars what no longer exists here, must defend by any means the small patch of land they are exploiting here or over there.” (Irigaray, 5). Irigaray, nevertheless, also retains faith on “those who are persons in their own right to help them [mankind] understand themselves and find their limits” (5). Kropotkin is one such person who has attempted to assist the mankind with his notion of mutual aid: “the practice of mutual aid and its successive developments have created the very conditions of society life in which man was enabled to develop his arts, knowledge, and intelligence; and that the periods when institutions based on the mutual-aid tendency took their greatest development were also the periods of the greatest progress in arts, industry, and science.” (Kropotkin, 178). Mutual aid and sharing should have been the unifying factors among the differences and disagreements which prevail in India¹.

India gets often projected as the best suited example of successful democracy. Perhaps one needs to rethink how, in recent times, majoritarianism, wrapped up and well propagated as the voice of the democracy, is producing a neo-colonial threat for a wide range of the marginalized inhabitants— queers, Dalits, disables, religious minorities and the people of the North East India. The visibility of the privileged at the cost of the suppressed ‘invisibles’ that facilitates the ‘mainstream’ majority to enjoy greater access to freedom of choice and preferences bring out an antithetical image of India that is supposed to be ‘shining’. If “The possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy” (Giddens, 188) then it is crucial again to bridge the gap between the marginalized but dispersed population in order to strive for an intimate bond that is prerequisite for a democracy to sustain pluralism, nevertheless, through a conscious politics of belonging.

The nation-state which is often thought to be the polity of uniting people, can also create a tension/anxiety of intimacy and thus “signify the source of non-belonging, even produce that non-belonging as a quasi-permanent state” (Butler and Spivak, 4), by censoring some of its indwellers as non-citizens or preclude some others as ‘national minorities’². Moreover, if freedom, as observes Arendt, lies in the freedom of exercising it, then it can be further argued that even some of the people who are within the juridical protection of the state, are in fact jostled towards ‘statelessness’. Hence, as a counter-nationalist resistance against the conventional national mode of belonging, there needs to be an attempt of post-national belonging through intimacy. This intimacy of ‘we’ is possible only by and among the people who are on equal footing

as expelled/ minoritized inhabitants of the state as well as in their common struggle of challenging the normatized law in order to assert their right to have the right for defiance. This multitude of “we” can be thus assembled together by people who see themselves as the wretched of the mainstream/ majoritarianism— a belonging of the multiple marginalized, having porous borders internally despite their rigid external boundaries of differences.

The anxiety of intimacy is an outcome of the lack of clarity about why to belong with the other. Laclau’s reminder that “a politics of pure difference would be self-defeating” is the prime reason why people of differences as the markers of depravity need to belong with others who are differently marginalized: “To assert one’s own *differential* identity involves...the inclusion in that identity of the other, as that from which one delimits oneself. But it is easy to see that a fully achieved differential identity would involve the sanctioning of the existing *status quo* in the relation between groups. For an identity which is purely differential vis-à-vis other groups has to assert the identity of the other at the same time as its own and, as a result, cannot have identity claims in relation to those other groups. Let us suppose that a group has such claims—for instance the demand for equal opportunities in employment and education...In so far as these are claims presented as rights that I share as a member of the community with all other groups, they presuppose that I am not simply different from the other but, in some fundamental respects, equal to them” (Laclau, 48). Even if we ignore the plea for counting the opposing other, embracing the other as differently equivalent is important in order to assert the right of the marginalised. Rabindranath Tagore in his “Hey Mor Durbhaga Desh”, translated as “Nemesis”, has also appealed for an intimate belonging, emerging out of amity and intersubjectification: “Those you trample underfoot, drag you down,/ Further backward they recede, the less you advance./ Shut off the light of knowledge from them/ And a blind wall separates you from your well-being./ You must share with them all, their ignominy.” (Translated by Kshitis Roy; *Mainstream Annual* 1965). Overcoming the anxiety of intimacy by a positive inclination for an intimate belonging of us/we against the ‘introverted’ I/me, just as one learns to become a multilingual or at least a bilingual, is a mode of de-categorising the *minoritized* as not being a simple stagnant identity but rather multilinear and compound. This multitude of the plebeians, different but equivalent in their marginalization, can also provide the answer to “the worrying choice between an illusory globalization which ignores cultural diversity and the disturbing

reality of introverted communities” (Touraine, 12)³. Differentiating ‘the popular’, as the multitude of “all defenceless, dispossessed, and aggrieved members” from the privileged, protected and the rightful notion of ‘citizenship’ as a “unique historical we”, Vidal has suggested that ‘the popular’, “whatever their racial, ethnic origin or social status, have right to full solidarity” (Vidal, 32). This solidarity can be founded upon an ‘amphibious’ politics of belonging, that can be “adopted to both lives or both ways of life” of the marginal individuals with differences and in the course reliably develops each of them into “more than one cultural tradition and that facilitates communication between them” (Mockus, 37).

Another question that might also arise is that, why one needs to reconsider intimacy as a mode of belonging when it is often declared with certitude that India is all about unity in diversity. But the premise for such claim, that “the essence of the concept of India’s so-called ‘unity in diversity’ is best constructed at its most basic level in a ‘functional’ sense”, itself shows that the notion of ‘living together separately’ is based not on intimacy (Hasan and Roy, 19). Non-discrimination and equal safeguarding of the multicultural group-differentiated-rights need to form the basis of an intimate pluralism which is not mere ‘functional’, but instrumental in promoting justice and fairness by its ‘tolerant pluralism’. The unity that contemporary India represents, in my opinion, is not intimacy, but integrity. Derived from the Latin in and *tangere* (meaning touched), integrity denotes that, which is uncorrupted, being whole, indivisible and inviolable (Kasulis, 25). The marginalized people find themselves confined within integrity’s agreement to rules, whereas, intimacy calls for a spontaneous response to the immediate situation out of closeness and concern. As per the integrity orientation, ethics becomes primarily a standardized principle; according to the intimacy code, ethics is nurtured by a morality of love. Integrity’s moral request is to be responsibly rational to the other, whereas, intimacy’s mandate is to be affectively responsive along with the other⁴. Now the question comes how to be intimate in a culture that injects us with the doses of integrity? One might argue that Indian integrity has prepared us to realise of our differences. Recognizing the differences is important. However, from the binary of twoness that splits the existing differences into the polarized opposition of a power struggle shouldn’t we aspire for a transformative thirdness of a co-created reality? With our compartmentalized recognition of particularity, we have revealed how imperfect and hostile our ambience is. What’s then? Become a cynic? Limit our micro-belongings in order to bargain with the rest,

on the issues of intimacy? In time like ours, when a Dalit seems to have only the option of death, North East women are destined to be raped by the gun men, queer has to quit academics and learn how to die, or a minority can be killed on the basis of food habits, isn't it a mandate to be intimately together so that the idea of not being the privileged gets the crucial focus of an amplifying intersectional margin? There is a pathos in witnessing the very temporary arousal of momentary collective consciousness and that too only in the wake of some unwanted sad incidents, for example the 'kiss of love' or 'hok kalorawb'. Issues that denigrate need to be addressed for annihilation only by having a strong, sustaining, sense of belonging 'together' as an intimate 'Communitas'. The contemporary rebel is left with neither utopianism nor cynicism, but rather isolation. Indifference is a euphemism for violence. One may stay remote despite staying near. Even then, the evolving indifference can only be narrowed down by an inquisitive proximity. It's the right time to revisit the model of mutual aid devised by Kropotkin, that focuses on the living being's instinct of sociability as a biological mandate for intimacy and wellbeing. Even our bodies are essentially composite in nature. One's own body is not one entity. The mouth has tons of bacteria and foreign stuff. Human beings are dependent on the animals, and they on little birds and plants. We are not one single entity. Let there be recognition of self as a multiple entity, interconnected into a concerted oneness.

Moving Beyond Anxiety

Fabian has aptly observed that, "if it is true that recognizing others also means remembering them, then we should see relationships between self and other as a struggle for recognition, inter-personal as well as political." ("The other revisited", 145). Belonging through intimacy can result into a bond of diverse subcultures of resistance through a belonging, that necessarily does not appropriate/hybridize identity but assist in a performative belonging of togetherness without any premeditative agenda for giving birth to a compromised common identity. It can be founded on a continuum of intimacy that does not seek to threaten the singularity of an-other at its very inception, while initiating an intense interactions among those inspired by "collective imaginings"⁵ through 'a holding-in-common' (Wilbur, 47) idea of a 'coming community', with its 'coming politics'⁶ of "wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positioning of identity as a stable state"

(Probyn, 19). The significance of this politics of belonging, as an ever shifting (multi)identity, may emerge out of the intimacy based on the 'living union' of the ex-centric-Other through the realization that "it is the multiplicity and interconnectedness of our identities that provide the most promising avenue for the destabilization and radical politicalization of these same categories" (Cohen, 45).

The anxiety of intimacy often results from the consciousness of retaining one's 'singular' notion of the self. The awareness that helps in overcoming anxiety about intimacy is that the 'singular' distinctiveness of the self is rather 'singular plural' in two major ways: first, being 'singular' with difference is a 'plural' phenomenon where "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (*The Human Condition*, 8); and secondly, it is only through a pluralist interdependent relationship with others that identity of as the marker of distinctiveness can be discovered: "[W]e become one whole individual, through and only through the company of others. For our individuality, insofar as it is one—unchangeable and unmistakable—we depend entirely on other people" (*Essays in Understanding*, 358).

'Dialogue' is the first step towards moving beyond anxiety for enabling the self "to be in the presence of others precisely inasmuch as the Other has become content of our experience. This brings us to the conditions of possibility of intersubjective knowledge." (*Time and the Other*, 91-92). Since "Difference stands at the beginning of conversation, not in its end" (Gadamer, 113, 'dialogue' assists in "opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth... Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me" (Panikkar, 242). "We who are a conversation" (Gadamer, 110) is the realization that empowers one to overcome the anxiety of losing one's own identity through intimacy with an-other for, ""to recognise oneself (or one's own) in the other and find a home abroad—this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness" along with the facility "to recognise otherness or the alien in oneself (or one's own)" (Dallmayr, 92).

Intimacy as the conscious choice of loving others who are equal in their Otherized state of 'statelessness' is the first step towards an assemblage against oppression: "The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others" (Hooks, 298). Love, born out of intimacy, then assists in the politics of belonging in the form of a 'thirdness' that empowers one with the capability of listening to the multiple voices of others

who seem to be voicing even some parts of the victimized self, and thereby, inviting for a collaborative, intersubjective struggle against the experiences of belittlement. This thirdness as “not to be understood primarily as the intervention of an other, but, rather, requires the “one in the third,” the attunement and empathy that make it possible to bridge difference with identification, to infuse observation with compassion” (*The Rhythm of Recognition*, 50) is also helpful in overcoming the binary between the ‘doer’ and the ‘done to’ which, if extended, becomes beneficial for the state to rule by distancing the marginalized people of ‘differences’ from one another. The politics of belonging as a mode of intimacy among the people in India, equally otherized but differently, is also important in ensuring that the Otherized subject, overcoming the polemical enshacklement often fortified by the particularity of the victimized self, acquires the agency “to reunite elements that have been divorced and that have come into conflict, [through] interpersonal and intercultural communication” (Touraine, 301).

The realization that even among the differentiated-group identities there are multiple differences, some of which get reduced while some other crop up with time, can motivate one to contemplate upon the notion of what is ‘sacred’ (what has to be safeguarded) and ‘profane’ (what needs to be denounced) in order to ‘live together while living differently’ by forging flexible and need-based intimacies: “The campaign for acceptance will continue since the decision is never final but only for a fixed duration, and since it is made in a free and fair manner. Considerable negotiation, accommodation, compromise and adjustment is involved. This negotiation and compromise is an important basis for the democratic culture which emerges.” (De Souza, 28).

Intimacy and the Politics of Belonging

In one’s private zone one does not remain necessarily alone but with the intimate others. Hence, the question is how to or why to turn the strangers into intimate others through a ‘longing-to-belong’ (Ferreday, 21). The answer lies in the dream to determinately fight together and “leave behind the hierarchies and “unfreedoms” of gendered and racially marked identities” (Seidler, 20). Belonging through intimacy is meant for not to negate one’s identity but to minimize ‘disidentification’. Žižek explains disidentification as the tendency to negate the multiplicities by retaining “false distance toward the actual co-ordinates of the subject’s social existence” (Žižek, 1998) through interactivity. Belonging “captures the desire for some

sort of attachment” (Probyn, 19) and affect has an important role in the culmination of such desire.

For a meaningful belonging, “What is important is a holding-in-common of qualities, perspectives, identities or ideas” (Wilbur, 47). Extending this argument one can say that despite differences in our identities, ‘holding-in-common’ in terms of perspectives and ideas among the communities of “unfreedoms” (Seidler, 20) and affect might help in accelerating the politics of belonging which is never in a fixity but always a part of one’s prioritized ‘shared concern’ in the process of becoming. The ‘surfaces of the other’ as marginalized surfaces the ‘suffering’, that appeals the self to extend sensitivity to other not to “order the course and heal the substance of the other, but to feel the feeling of the other” (Lingis, 31). A sense of belonging between subcultures, thus, can be premised upon the hope that “In the midst of the work of the rational community, there forms the community of those who have nothing in common, of those who have nothingness....in common” (Lingis, 13). Jean-Luc Nancy has initiated us to reconsider how “all loves....are superbly singular” (Nancy, 99). Moving beyond the traditional notion of love, predominantly seen as a hybridized encounter/relation, an intimate belonging of love actually remains a singular passage of opening of the one to another, assuring, thereby, singularity of a being in its community.

The politics of belonging is endeavoured at fostering the intimate act of offering help to others, which, according to Derrida’s notion of ‘hospitality’, is intrinsic to “the performance of happiness; desire which disturbs the pure narcissistic enjoyment of the Oedipal self and its familiars, and which reaches towards the absolute demand of the other” (Abbinnett, 183). Politics of belonging as a mode of exploring intimacy for the recognition of a pluralist identity is closely related to the ‘politics of happiness’: moving beyond the ‘neoliberal economy of pleasure’, happiness as an experience “can only be approached through the presence of others, both familiar and unfamiliar, to whom we must respond without the expectation of requital. This then is the aporetic fate of humanity: to live between ideological regimes that offer the shelter of collective happiness and the possibility of receiving the spectres that haunt the experience of belonging, plenitude, and love”. (Abbinnett, 185)

The above arguments can be nullified by the single question that how can an-other perceive the ‘lived’ experience of an-otherized? If ‘lived’ experience are the marked with the absence of freedom of choice in even altering the experiences but keep on suffering the ‘lack’, then one can argue that it is easier to relate the self ‘lived’

experience of experiencing the 'lack', howsoever different it might be in form but equal in its degree, for the disables in India with that of the 'not-self' like the queers, Dalits, disempowered women or the North East Indian contested citizens. Moreover, extending the argument provided by Srinivas, it can be said that these diverse marginalised groups reside in 'same cultural universe', and therefore, unlike someone from the foreign geo-cultural space, it is 'self-in-the-other' that is operational unlike the non-self or non-other position (Srinivas, 656-657). Approving of Srinivas's stand, Sarukkai has also affirmed that, "For a person steeped in this tradition, this does make a qualitative difference in constructing the other." (Sarukkai, 1408). Moreover, there are various modes available in this shared 'cultural universe' like the Gandhian *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, the Upanishadic ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, the ideal of collective empathy of the Buddhist *sarvabhutadaya* or the Jaina notion of *syadvada* (interrelation among all things) and *anekantavada* (multifaceted truth), which one can follow in order to acquire a pluralistic understanding of the self vis-a-vis Other(s) and vice versa.

Beyond the traditional linking of opposition / contradiction with difference, pluralism as a guiding trait into our understanding of difference might enable us to treat difference itself as ever-shifting: "Difference must become the element, the ultimate unity; it must therefore refer to other differences which never identify it but rather differentiate it. Each term in series, being already a difference, must be put into a variable relation with other terms, thereby constituting other series devoid of centre and convergence. Every object, every thing must see its own identity swallowed up in difference, each being no more than a difference between differences. Difference must be shown differing." (Deleuze, 56) With the acceptance of the self and the other as individuals with differences along with the recognition that "since differences are what there is, and since every truth is the coming-to-be of that which is not yet" (Badiou, 27), differences need to be treated as what truth might render as less significant in its more significant facilitating of "the constitution of a subjectivity in the interrelation to others, which is a form of exposure, availability, and vulnerability. This recognition entails the necessity of containing the other, the suffering, and the enjoyment of others." (Braidotti, 58). Intercultural dialogue among the subjects can pave way for an intimacy that democratically empowers the subject to be free to communicate with all that have been so long distanced under the anxiety of conflict. Inert tolerance and passive acceptance of differences do not necessarily enhance intimacy. Rather it often reinforces anxiety. Intersectional communication and

a collaborative togetherness alone can enable us to become intimate inhabitants. Touraine has rightly observed: “The three themes of the Subject, communication and solidarity are inseparable, just as freedom, equality and fraternity were inseparable during the republican phase of democracy. Their interdependence delineates a field of social and political mediations that can re-establish the link between the instrumental world and the symbolic world, and thus prevent civil society from being reduced to a market or an enclosed community.” (Touraine, 301).

No consolidated identity is an absolute homogenised one and in that sense any bordering of identity is based on a border crossing. Avar Brah has rightly pointed out that, “border crossings do not occur only across the dominant/dominated dichotomy, but... equally, there is traffic within cultural formations of the subordinated groups” (Brah, 209). Combining Brah’s observation with that of Clifford’s critiquing of our bias for an organic/naturalised culture of a particular group of identity⁷, one may argue that every identity encompasses a double consciousness about subjectivity where destabilizing the inside/outside conflict, one’s “intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider.” As an “inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her[or his] difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (Minh-ha, 374-5) the essentialized bordering of any exclusive identity possibly ends up in framing an outsider-within or an-other as a non-identical-ally. Relating Mockus’s plea for an amphibian intersectionality with what Lavie and Swedenburg calls “the borderzone between identity-as-essence and identity-as-conjuncture” (Lavie and Swedenburg, 13) one might proceed towards ‘soft boundaries’ through which the ‘amphibian borders’ of the diverse identities would crisscross and “obey partially divergent systems of rules without a loss of intellectual and moral integrity” (Mockus, 39). Moreover, this ‘borderzone’ as a ‘third time-space’ that moves beyond the older notions of identity without instituting a new fixity of identity by being “too heterogeneous, mobile, and discontinuous for fixity”, nonetheless, “remains anchored in the politics of history/location” (Lavie and Swedenburg: 14).

Does this plea for overcoming anxiety of intimacy through belonging sound like too much of an impossible utopia? Let me end while answering this by borrowing from Spivak, who while highlighting the importance of a mythopoetic understanding of history “where history is in the process of becoming” (Butler and Spivak, 115), has insisted upon the need to “conceive of history as

mythopoesis” so that “we must again and again undo the opposition between philosophy and the practical.” (Butler and Spivak, 117).

Notes

1. Reflecting on the notion of ‘Indianness’, U.R. Ananthamurthy has said: “The vibrant Indianness emerges only when you don’t accord parameters to it. Vaikom Mohammed Basheer writes about Muslims, but he is a very Indian writer. So also with Paul Zachariah, who writes about the lives of Christians. India’s plurality has to be continuously explored. Take the popular slogan ‘unity in diversity’. If you overstress diversity, you begin to see unity and vice-versa. For instance, when we try to select binding factors in the Indian cultural tapestry, we begin to notice variations everywhere—the Assamese from the Kannadigas, the Bengalis as dissimilar from the Maharashtrians, and so on. On the other hand, when we consciously try to pick up the contradictions, we stumble upon the unifying factors.” (‘Interview’, *Times of India*, 10 December 1994.)
2. The people who do not succumb to the homogenized national ideology of the state and, therefore, seen as ‘illegitimate’ residents.
3. Judith Butler has also made similar observations: “When the chain of equivalence is operational as a political category, it requires that particular identities acknowledge that they share with other such identities the situation of a necessarily incomplete determination. They are fundamentally the set of differences from which they emerge, and this set of differences constitutes the structural features of the domain of political sociality. If any such particular identity seeks to universalize its own situation without recognizing that other identities are in an identical structural situation, it will fail to achieve an alliance with the other emerging identities, and will mistakenly identify the meaning and the place of universality itself. The universalization of the particular seeks to elevate a specific content to a global condition, making an empire of its local meaning.” (Butler, Laclau and Zizek, 31).
4. For a detailed study see Kasulis, 2002.
5. According to Rosi Braidotti it refers to “a shared desire for certain transformations to be actualized.” (Braidotti, 51).
6. “The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity)” (Agamben, 84).
7. “Cultures’ do not hold still for their portraits” (Clifford, 10)

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