

## HISTORIOGRAPHY AND GENOGRAPHY

Historical knowledge is neither sedentary nor sedimentary. It changes with time and technology. When tools like radiocarbon dating emerged, there was revolution in historical narrative. Professional historians sought the assistance of the archaeologists to rewrite histories. More they excavated, more of past was exhumed and different shades emerged. History, some argued, became hermeneutical reading of excavated past. Everything turned out to be fragments of texts, post-structuralists argued. History became archaeology of knowledge. But, all characterizations about history are temporary as is the nature of historical narrative itself.

With the application of bioinformatics in exploring history, more and more narratives are being developed based upon study of human mitochondrial DNA haplogroups. Excavations are done more in the realm of DNA codes, rather than territorial spaces. Human history is being written by examining the genomic datasets. Population geneticists replace the traditional archaeologists in this paradigm shift. Superhaplogroups, macrohaplogroups, clades, sub-clades, alleles, phylogenesis, heterozygosity, loci, polymorphism, affinity, genetic variance, gene flow, gene differentiation, mutation, autosome, genetic genealogy, biogeographic ancestry, genography and similar terms are migrating from the field of genetics into History.

With the advent of technology that can trace ancestry through own human cells, several companies have cropped up offering to resurrect individual ancestry at as low cost as US \$ 80. In 2007, *23 and Me* was the first major company to begin offering such service to people. Now there are five such companies-*23 and Me*, *Ancestry DNA*, *My Heritage*, *Family Tree DNA* and the *Genographic Project*. The combined total of customers has crossed 10 million. Such surge in exploring one's genetic genealogy has spurred interest in ethno-history.

Quest for "Purity of races" has been replaced by unravelling "purity of genes" among various ethnic communities, more so who are either historically diasporic in nature or those who are autochthonous and native to a territory. Fables about intelligence of the Jews are abound for aeons world across. But, Jews themselves are not homogenous community. It is a wider connotation for different ethnic groups sharing common belief system and certain unchanging rituals. Traditionally, Jews are classified into three major groups- the Ashkenazim or Germanic, Sephardim or Iberian and Mizrahim or the Eastern Jews. There are other smaller groups like Bene Israel in

India, Baghdadi Jews who settled in Bombay around 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bukharan Jews of Central Asia and so on.

Not all Jews are famed for their intelligence and success. Observation of Jewish genius is basically associated with the Ashkenazi Jews. Albert Einstein was an Ashkenazi Jew. They have the highest IQ score as an ethnic group and average range is of 110-115. Gregory Cochran, Jason Hardy and Henry Harpending worked on the “*Natural History of Ashkenazi Intelligence*”(J. Biosoc. Sc., 2005) and concluded that Ashkenazi Jews have the highest average IQ of any ethnic group, combined with an unusual cognitive profile, while no similar elevation of intelligence was observed among Jews in classical times nor is one seen in Sephardic and Oriental Jews today. Their intelligence, specifically verbal and mathematical intelligence, is extraordinary but not spatial ability. They further found that the Ashkenazi experienced very low inward gene flow, and experienced unusual selective pressures that were likely to have favoured increased intelligence. Moreover, for the most part they had jobs in which increased IQ strongly favoured economic success, in contrast with other populations, who were mostly peasant farmers. The great majority of the Ashkenazi Jews had managerial and financial jobs, jobs of high complexity, and were neither farmers nor craftsmen. In this, they differed from all other settled peoples of which world have knowledge. In a way, they were the first community with high specialization in service sector thereby enhancing cognitive ability in comparison with other ethnic groups.

We know how India has been a melting pot of populations. Population migration as far as Australia and Mongolia took place through the eastern Himalayan Corridor and intensely being debated by the population geneticists. India is proud to have welcomed ancient Jews, Greeks and the first Christians. In the current issue of the Journal of Indian Research, we are publishing a paper on “*Jewish Diaspora of Mumbai in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as covered by Press*” by Professor Dr. Neeta M. Khandpekar. She writes, “*There is a mention of the Bene Israel community of Jewish merchants and their synagogues both in medieval Muslim chronicles and in Portuguese records, specifically of the Bene Israel settlements that were in the Konkan area, including the port of Chaul.*” These Bene Israel were called *Telis*, as they were engaged in the profession of oil pressing in the villages of North Konkan. While Hindu oil pressmen were termed *Somavara Telis*, these Bene Israel were termed *Shaniwar Telis* (Saturday Oilmen) as they abstain from work on Saturdays to observe Shabbath. Bene Israel Jews are settled in western coast of India from remote times and have become completely Indianised with Marathi as their mother tongue.

While Bene Israel in India have been a subject of intense research for historians and anthropologists, rarely have the Chitapavan from the same Konkan region been studied. Chitapavan have hazel eyes and fairer skin and like Ashkenazi Jews

have been immensely successful and have made remarkable contribution in nation-building. Peshwas were the Chitpavan and they were not considered Brahmins by the local priesthood, causing the Deshastha (native) Brahmins to boycott Peshwa rulers. Deshastha Brahmins under the leadership of Shripatrao, the Pant Pratinidhi opposed the appointment of Baji Rao I as the Peshwa. In fact, Baji Rao I, the first Chitpavan Peshwa, himself was refused permission to perform religious rites at the ghats on the river Godavari at Nasik, by the Deshasthas. Chitpavans were considered as newcomers and not Brahmin proper, who were viewed as usurper of the power and privileges of the Vedic Brahmins in Maratha Empire. After the conquest of Vasai(1739) against the Portuguese, the Chitpavans contested the Deshastha's, claim of being Vedic Brahmin. Deshasthas migrated to Mumbai to work with the British against the Chitpavan Peshwas. When Peshwas were finally defeated by the Britishers in the Battle of Koregaon, Pune (1818), in which Mahars and Brahmins were arrayed against the Peshwa army of fickle-minded Peshwa Baji Rao II, they did not sit silently. The First War of Independence in 1857 was led by three Chitpavans- Nana Sahib, Rani Laxmi Bai and Tatyia Tope. Direct British Rule was established in India in 1858. Soon thereafter, Pune, the stronghold of Chitpavans, became the hotbed of uprising against British rule. May it be Chapekar brothers or Balwant Vasudeva Phadake, the armed uprising to overthrow British rule had nucleus among the Chitpavan community. Once it was realized that armed overthrow of the British rule was not feasible given the unequal distribution of military power, Chitpavans took lead in organizing the peaceful agitation against the British rule. Lokmanya Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were Chitpavans from Pune. In fact, the first session of Indian National Congress was originally scheduled to be held in Pune, but there was outbreak of plague and the venue was shifted to Mumbai. Chitpavans played pivotal role in shaping of modern India. May it be Bollywood or cricket or militant Hindu nationalism—these can be traced to the exploits of some Chitpavans. Dadasaheb Phalke, the father of Indian cinema was a Chitpavan. Grand Old Man of Indian cricket D. B. Deodhar was a Chitpavan from Pune. Veer Savarkar and Nathuram Godse belonged to this community. Nowadays also Chitpavans are in the forefront of building of modern institutions - from Madhuri Dixit in Bollywood to Sumitra Mahajan, Speaker of the current Lok Sabha; one can find chitpavans outperforming others.

Like the Ashkenazi Jews, the Chitpavans are known for high intelligence and beauty. The Bene Israel claim that Chitpavans too were Jews who settled in Konkan from later migration but converted to Hinduism. Chitpavans, known as Konkanastha Brahmins, originally belonged to the Chiplun(Chitpolan) and Ratnagiri part of the Konkan Coast, but spread to Pune, parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Recent genetic study to find out the genetic genealogy in fact has established that the Chitpavans have affinity with the Ashkenazi Jews from the Caucasus.

Sonali Gaikwad of National DNA Analysis Center and VK Kashyap of National Institute of Biologicals conducted extensive research on genetic composition of certain populations in western India and published “*Molecular insight into the genesis of ranked caste populations of western India based upon polymorphisms across non-recombinant and recombinant regions in genome*” (Genome Biology, 2005). They concluded “.... genetic association of Chitpavan-brahmin with Iranian, Ashkenazi-Jews (Turkey), Greeks (East Europe) and to some extent with Central Asian Turkish populations elucidating their distinct Nordic, “Scytho-Iranian” ancestry. The Caucasian link of Chitpavan brahmin has also been inferred from biparental microsatellites variations. The observed genomic analyses asserted the ethnographical fact that Chitpavan-brahmin share ancestry with conspicuously European-looking Pagan or Alpine group, who under religious pressure had migrated from Anatolian Turkey or East Europe to Gujarat coast probably via sea-vessel. Besides, their documented history is untraceable beyond 1000 years, further indicating that they were not part of the original Vedic migrations (early Indo-European) on the west coast.”

Genetics is bringing out fresh connections across continents. Is geneticizing historical narrative a current fad which would dissipate down soon or will it lead to formation of genetic communities in a globalized world? Will nationhood pass the baton of “myth of superiority” to the genohood?

I take this opportunity to invite paper from ethnohistorians and population geneticists to initiate critical debate on shifting sands of historicity. Hope the militant crpto- nationalism that has ablaze the sub-continent at this juncture gets punctured and bludgeoned by the bioinformatical historicization!!

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