From the Editor

Dear colleagues,

The humankind is going through a testing time today. The Covid 19 pandemic has already impacted our traditional social relations and norms in many ways and the future we are moving into is somewhat uncertain. Social scientists have a challenging responsibility ahead in analysing and conceptualising the changing social realities. We hope to see some insightful and illuminating research in that direction in the near future.

It is my pleasure to present the eighth issue of Explorations. The present issue consists of seven papers published under the ‘Articles’ category, one interview, one commentary and three book reviews.

The first article, titled Negotiating Public and Private: Women as Movement Actors, by Gayathri O. and Biju P.R. investigates the degree of critical consciousness that women get through their participation in an organisation and the extent to which movement activism changed the worldview of women within the family. The attitude of members of a leading women’s organisation in Kerala – All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) forms the premise of analysis in this paper.

The second article, titled Rethinking Conflict Prevention through Grassroots Activism: Narratives of Women Building Peace in Rural India, by Ivy Dhar and Diksha Poddar explores the existing experiences of grassroots peace activism, drawing on the narratives of a civil society group, Mahila Shanti Sena, where women have taken the role of transformers in preventing inter-personal conflicts within households and those that lead to neighbourhood and community tensions. The paper argues for the need to widen the scope for decentralised participatory interventions while contextualising the gender discourse of conflict prevention and peace-building.

The third article, titled Food Culture and Identity in Northeast India: Prospects for Social Science Research, by Hoineilhing Sithou argues that though often considered an insignificant subject of study, a study of gastronomical practices, dietary customs and practices can tell us much about the ‘Northeastern self’, the
community, identity, intercommunity dynamics and relationships, as also the role of food in producing social meanings. The paper brings to fore the lack of scholarship on food as a politico-cultural item and urges the need to study not only the instrumental value of dietary practices but also their intrinsic value, as a means to an end.

The fourth article, titled Challenges of Manufacturing Motherhood: Caregivers in the Neo-liberal Economy, by Sarmistha Das and Obja Borah Hazarika explores the intricate relationship between two categories of working women, one who goes out to work leaving her child with the caregiver and the other who comes in to fill the space of the working mother. The paper is an attempt to look at ‘motherhood’ as a concept and the role of caregivers in the neo-liberal economy; it attempts to understand the nature of relationship, built on mutual understanding, to create an environment of manufactured motherhood vis-à-vis their everyday negotiations.

The fifth article, titled Exploring Participation of Women in Self-Help Groups: A Study of Two Blocks in Darjeeling District, by Pema Lama examines the participation of women in Self-Help Groups (SHG) and argues that the SHGs are a fundamental pre-requisite for women empowerment and enhancement of their socio-economic status. The paper shows that despite the difficulties they confront right from the grassroots level to the higher authorities, the SHGs have come a long way in terms of being initiated to the ‘participatory culture’ and that they have great potential to be a salient channel of a participatory approach.

The sixth article, titled Fragmented Identity of the Chakmas in Mizoram: Citizens or Illegal Immigrants?, by Partha Pratim Baruah and Bikash Deka articulates the challenges faced by the Chakmas politically and socially in Mizoram due to their fragmented identity, both as citizens and illegal immigrants. The paper raises the question of state intervention to embark on a mechanism to detect the illegal immigrants (if any), regulate cross-border migration so that the Chakmas who are the authentic citizens of India and are indigenous to Mizoram are not susceptible to continuous discrimination.

The seventh article, titled Understanding the Alienation of Indigenous Ethnic Groups during the Assam Movement of 1979-1985, by Tonoya Mahanta and Barnali Sarma attempts to look into the experiences of indigenous ethnic groups of Assam, focusing on the Bodo tribe, during and after the Assam Movement. The
paper argues that the Assam Movement, on one hand, united a large section of the Assamese population on the issue of identity but on the other hand, the assertion of the Assamese identity also muffled the voices of the smaller ethnic communities of the state and caused them to drift further apart from the larger Assamese community.

This issue carries an interview of late Professor Yogendra Singh, one of the most well-known Indian sociologists, with Dev Nath Pathak and Biswajit Das.

The commentary by Amit Singh, *Normality is an illusion: Crisis is not*, argues that COVID-19 pandemic may have redefined the ‘idea of normality’ to the privileged one, but for the excluded, marginalised and discriminated, comfortability of normality is just an illusion.

This is followed by three book reviews: *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (2018) reviewed by Yogesh Mishra; *Writing Social Science: A Personal Narrative* (2019) reviewed by Shefali Bedi; *Matchmaking in Middle-Class India: Beyond Arranged and Love Marriage* (2020) reviewed by Sristi Mondal.

*Explorations* invites your contributions for future issues of the journal. We will appreciate your feedback or suggestions on the journal.

Stay safe.

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