The Qualitative Report

Volume 25 | Number 5 Article 12

5-17-2020

Embodying Change at Work: An Autoethnography in the Indian Public Sector

Saikat Chakraborty
Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India, saikatc@iima.ac.in

Recommended APA Citation

Chakraborty, S. (2020). Embodying Change at Work: An Autoethnography in the Indian Public Sector. *The Qualitative Report*, *25*(5), 1341-1360. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2020.3987

Embodying Change at Work: An Autoethnography in the Indian Public Sector

Abstract

Beyond the macro picture of change in the Indian public sector triggered by economic deregulation and restructuration, the variegated experiences of employees exposed to organizational changes remain hidden and masked. Through a reflexive inquiry about my experience of participating in a managerial implementation of a performance management system in an Indian public sector organization, I write this autoethnography to bring forward a personal narrative of embodying change at work. I do this by revealing how my cultural, social, and political experiences during that episode of change were manifestations of being and constituting organizationally intended as well as non-intended changes. The writing process involved in bringing out the personal narrative unravels the contours of my relationship with organizational actors such as the employees, the union, and the management, to eventually understand their impact on my experience of change. The narrative analysis of the ethnographic memoir has helped me consider my insider knowledge, realization, and reflection as opportunities to retell the macro (view of change) in terms of the interconnected individual subjectivities. Thus the autoethnographic effort is directed to tease out the associated meanings of embodying change at work by thinking with the narrative, rather than using the narrative to think. The broader goal of this inquiry is to draw ethnographic implications for working lives exposed to organizational changes.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Change, Work, Public Sector, India, Narrative Analysis, Personal Narrative, Ethnographic Memoir, Qualitative Methodologies

Acknowledgements

I thankfully acknowledge the doctoral programme funding and library support provided by Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad for providing the scope and opportunity to write this paper. I also thank Sally St. George and Ronald Chenail for taking an interest in this paper and providing valuable direction towards developing it. Declaration of Conflicting Interests. The author declares no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

The Qualitative Report 2020 Volume 25, Number 5, Article 11, 1341-1360

Embodying Change at Work: An Autoethnography in the Indian Public Sector

Saikat Chakraborty
Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India

Beyond the macro picture of change in the Indian public sector triggered by economic deregulation and restructuration, the variegated experiences of employees exposed to organizational changes remain hidden and masked. Through a reflexive inquiry about my experience of participating in a managerial implementation of a performance management system in an Indian public sector organization, I write this autoethnography to bring forward a personal narrative of embodying change at work. I do this by revealing how my cultural, social, and political experiences during that episode of change were manifestations of being and constituting organizationally intended as well as non-intended changes. The writing process involved in bringing out the personal narrative unravels the contours of my relationship with organizational actors such as the employees, the union, and the management, to eventually understand their impact on my experience of change. The narrative analysis of the ethnographic memoir has helped me consider my insider knowledge, realization, and reflection as opportunities to retell the macro (view of change) in terms of the interconnected individual subjectivities. Thus the autoethnographic effort is directed to tease out the associated meanings of embodying change at work by thinking with the narrative, rather than using the narrative to think. The broader goal of this inquiry is to draw ethnographic implications for working lives exposed to organizational changes. Keywords: Autoethnography, Change, Work, Public Sector, India, Narrative Analysis, Personal Narrative, Ethnographic Memoir, Qualitative Methodologies

Why am I compelled to write this autoethnography? Perhaps it is true that autoethnography is "a response to an existential crisis – a desire to do meaningful work and lead a meaningful life" (Bochner, 2015, p. 53). Meaning is what we seek and draw from our past and present experiences and remain naturally attuned to this process through self-reflection and interaction with others (Bochner, 2012; Custer, 2014). Thus, autoethnographic initiatives begin with personal experiences that require a more in-depth and meaningful understanding (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017). Prioritizing the experience before theory in research can reveal meaning without committing the error of defining it (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Thus, a well-written autoethnography allows both the author and his/her readers to "experience an experience" (Ellis, 1993, p.711), and in addition to knowing the experience, allows for conscious reflection to inform praxis (Spry, 2001). Autoethnography, as an approach to research and writing, also adds contentiousness to the meaning-making process and brings my (author's) subjectivity in conversation with others' (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Hayano, 1979). Thus writing an autoethnography is not just for my learning but also to share how doing this work offers the possibility of changing my (and your) attitudes through our experiences (Ellis, 2017). Being an arts-based research practice, the myriad evocative, political, consciousness-raising, and emancipatory tales (Chenail, 2008) thus become valuable resources for co-constructing meanings (Chakraborty, 2017). In the same vein, this autoethnography is an effort to create a segment of my past working life as the "looking glass space" (Brand, 2015,

p. 516) to draw sociological implications for stimulating interest toward co-constructing meanings associated with the narrative.

This autoethnography pertains to a public sector organization in India. The narrative is associated with how a performance management system (PMS), one among several other neoliberal policies and practices, was implemented and brought into existence in the working lives of employees. My personal questions originate from and overarch the problem of change at work triggered for and by the PMS implementation. I ask how organizational-level changes engender intended as well as non-intended experiences and actions of change at the individual level? How is the perception of being an employee impacted by this? How the changing positions of organizational actors such as the management and the union with respect to an employee during an intended change event effect the employee's experience of change? If change is macroscopically portrayed and implemented to be in the organization's interest, what employee interests are met through the change? These questions stimulated my interest to reflectively analyze a period of perceptible change triggered by the PMS implementation. The autoethnographic perspective allowed me to bring forward my reflections as an organizational insider on being and constituting change at work (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The narrative analysis revealed how change at work manifested through my (and likewise other employees') understanding about reproducing and transforming intended, as well as non-intended actions associated with the PMS implementation. The auto perspective also allowed to understand the changing representation of employee interests, which, in addition to being socially and culturally derived, is shaped by economic and political constraints too. Therefore, through this autoethnography, I attempt to nudge the reader to see the embodied nature of change at work, prioritizing the micro and insider experiential narratives over the essentialist notions of change for understanding the implications for working lives exposed to organizational changes.

I locate this autoethnography by briefly discussing public sector employment in India and the macro view of change at work. Next, I discuss the methodology and declare the ethical considerations for writing this paper, followed by the organizational context. After that, the ethnographic memoir is presented as a reflexive narration of events followed by discussing the ethnographic implications for stimulating further inquiries in this field.

Background

Being a Public Sector Employee in India

Public sector organizations in India were mainly set up in the post-independence era to strengthen the economic and social development of the country. Under the influence of the government's protective policies to retain control over the strategic sectors of the economy, public sectors expanded and generated employment in the country (c.f. Bagchi, 1990; Bhattacharjee, 2001; Tulpule, 1976). The state played a key role in setting the character of managerial and employment relations in the public sector organizations. Every large public sector organization with country-wide divisions called units carried a similar public-sector image due to government regulation, industry-level collective bargaining, and the absence of market dynamism (Tulpule, 1976).

Public sector employment was valued for several reasons. In addition to the state governed industrial relations, collective determination of wages and working conditions by political and institutional mechanisms benefitted the growing unionized workforce (Bhattacharjee, 2001; Hill, 2009). Due to the policy of trade union recognition and collective bargaining for wages, employees were often paid higher than the minimum notified wages. Job security and social benefits such as government-provided post-retirement pension and welfare facilities such as free housing, medical aid, and education for children, made these jobs ideal

for any job-seeker (Tulpule, 1976). Based on a pluralist Human Resource Management (HRM) ideology, organizational practices and procedures were aimed at sustaining an environment of balanced labour-management relations by adhering to labour laws and framing worker-centric personnel policies (Bhattacharjee & Ackers, 2010). Therefore, public sector employers were often called the torchbearers of dignified employment in India (Breman, 2013).

However, getting employed in the public sector remained an unfulfilled dream for a large proportion of the country's workforce. Despite the growth of the sector, the number of jobs was far less compared to the enormous labour market, resulting in the creation of a disproportionately large informally employed workforce left to struggle in precarious livelihoods (Breman, 1999a). The difference in the quality of life led by public sector employees compared to those employed elsewhere accorded a status of the privileged and protected enclave to public sector employees (Breman, 1999b; Sanyal & Bhattacharyya, 2009). Being aware of their privileged and protected status, public sector employees embraced their so-called "government jobs" as gifts of fortune.

Moreover, securing a public sector job meant enduring painful struggles of squirming out from a vast labour market of limited employment opportunities and overcoming barriers posed by nepotism, caste-ism, and bribe-ism (c.f. Kraay & Van Rijckeghem, 1995; Madheswaran & Attewell, 2007; Thorat & Newman, 2007). Thus employee resignations were negligible, and recruitments only happened at the entry-level (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004). People joined, progressed in their careers, and even superannuated in batches. Notwithstanding the geographical and organizational variation, employee recruitments at large public sector organizations were constitutionally conducted and audited by internal and external vigilance systems (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004). The elaborate procedures resulted in instilling bureaucratic strictness amid networks of personal influence (Kanungo, Sadavarti, & Srinivas, 2001). Further, employee transfers in these enterprises were resisted, often through trade unions (Roychowdhury, 2003).

Thus with unchanging faces and roles, every public sector unit owned and protected its stable yet transient identity, established in terms of task-based structures, the meaning of authority, belongingness to the system, and issues of exclusion and inclusion (Garg & Parikh, 1986). Consequently, these units developed their strong histories, workplace structures, and cultures, which had a lasting impact on the employment policies and practices (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004; Kanungo et al. 2001).

Change at Work—Macro View

However, since economic deregulation and restructuration associated with the economic reforms of 1991, a perceptible turmoil has been witnessed in the policies and practices of public sector employment. In a move to spur industrial growth, accelerate jobs, and reduce poverty, public sector policies were changed to prioritize free-market competition over state-mandated industrial relations and welfare (Datt, 1994; Maiti, 2013). In 1994, the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE hereafter), which is the apex regulatory body of central public sector enterprises under the Government of India, issued guidelines for decentralized bargaining. A mandate put forward was that the principle of parity, the original hallmark of public sector organizations, would be replaced by the principle of disparity to let market conditions decide each unit's capacity to pay its employees. Thus every public sector unit started bearing the direct pressure of marketable performance and thus getting differentiated from other units in terms of reacting to the imposed changes (Khanna, 2015). As deregulation and de-licensing was opening the door for privatization, market conditions for Indian public sector organizations went highly competitive due to both domestic and foreign private competitors (Remesh, 2007). For invigorating competitiveness, public sector organizations

were asked to improve their efficiency of human resources, which subsequently laid out the road for implementing personnel policies such as voluntary retirement schemes, golden handshakes, and performance-related pay (PRP; Budhwar & Boyne, 2004).

Amidst these structural transformations, trade unions and trade union activism was also changing. The power of collective bargaining (one of the most critical activities of trade unions until then) was obscured due to decentralization policies (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Trade unions at the unit-level started focussing on the unit-level issues such as those pertaining to personnel management policies and practices (Kanungo et al., 2001). In response to the management's invariable attempt to refurbish human resources to engender a proactive response to the dynamic business environment (Budhwar & Boyne, 2004; Shrivastava & Purang, 2011), trade unions leveraging on unit culture, history, and socio-structural factors, were trying to defend employee interests that were being harmed, neglected, and seconded in favour of organizational prerogatives (Roychowdhury, 2003). The managerial control over work and employees, and unions struggle to remain legitimate employee representatives, made this dialectical and decentralized union-management relationship a roadblock for any top-down implementation (planned by the top-level management for implementation across units). For instance, Kanungo et al. (2001) noted that the change from manual operation to computerization was resisted for 15 years by the employees' union in the State Bank of India.

However, decentralized unionism could not derail most of the management-driven changes. Unions were also acquiescing and supporting the management on several initiatives. For instance, support for labour rationalization arguments led to externalization policies (e.g., outsourcing) at the unit-level. Consequently, large-scale contracting-out was responsible for permanent jobs not being created in enough numbers in the public sector organizations (Remesh, 2017; Roychowdhury, 2003). Co-optation of unions in the methods of participation in the unit-level management, such as shop and plant councils, also led to alter the role trade unions originally played or were expected to play for employees. All of these obfuscated the approach and outlook of unions towards employees, markets, institutions, and internal policies of public sector organizations (Noronha, 2003).

Nonetheless, ripples of the macro-level changes happening at the public sector management and union levels were passing down to the employees who were grappling to accommodate these changes individually in their culture, history, and dominant social structures. The fragmented nature of this interaction at the employee level sustained due to the bureaucratic, supportive, and antagonistic cultures carried by and through people and processes relevant to each unit (Kanungo et al., 2011). In fact, the implementation of top-down reforms, demanding large-scale changes in a short period of time, took place gradually (Ahluwalia, 2002), and often in ways different from what was envisaged. This was because, beyond the macro picture of change, the variegated experiences of employees exposed to organizational changes often remain hidden and masked. Indeed, the top-down implementation of any policy, bringing changes in the way management and unions perform, also leads the employees to encounter several changes in their working lives, impacting their experiences about knowing and understanding the changes related to them being employees. Moreover, employee experience is related to his/her response, of course, under the management and the union influence, but also dynamically in personal ways to reproduce, transform, accommodate and become the change carrier in his/her working life. Therefore, prioritizing the personal experience of being an employee in the past, I reminisce and reflect on the changes encountered in my identity as an employee during my participation in a PMS managerial implementation to bring forward a personal narrative of embodying change at work. Before going further, I will explain the methodology first.

Methodology

Autoethnography, both as a process and product of research, is yet to find extensive usage in the social science academy (Boyle & Parry, 2007). Notwithstanding its criticism (see the section "critiques and responses" in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), autoethnography draws its strength from the fact that (a) social and cultural phenomenon is multifaceted; (b) articulating insider knowledge holds value; (c) the author can capture moments of experience that cannot be captured by traditional research methods, and which are essential for (d) contributing to a convoluted topic that requires alternatives to the dominant discourse, and (e) the text remains accessible to a larger audience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). All of these indicate that research methodology becomes crucial for writing a compelling autoethnography.

Autoethnographic research in higher education organizations, previous/other life organizations, and those conducted as a complete member in other organizations, argues to have an insider membership for writing organizational autoethnographies (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012). Herrmann (2018) added that insider membership in not always required to write autoethnographies, implying that more than membership, the personal experience must be prioritized for the researcher's self to become the researched (Burnier, 2006). For instance, Blenkinsopp (2007) stated that problems or troubles faced in organizational settings are widely experienced, and resorting to autoethnography helps autobiographical experiences to become data, and with reflexivity, insights can be added about the wider social patterns and power relations. Thus authors must focus on the familiar but unsettling experiences (King & Learmonth, 2015; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012), and look to critique the established metaphors and explore conceptualizations to prosper the field (Cohen, Duberley, & Musson, 2009). In the same vein, I retrospectively interrogate my past organizational membership and work experience to find answers to unsettling questions regarding change at work. The writing endeavour began during a self-change reflection report written as part of my PhD coursework. I chose to describe this experience, and soon after, I gained some interest in rewriting the whole narration as a personal memoir. Finally, after coming across autoethnography, both as a methodology and a perspective towards research and life, I gained interest in developing it along the lines of an ethnographic memoir (Ellis, 2004).

An ethnographic memoir takes us back to a corner of the author's life that was unusually vivid, full of affect, and encompasses unique events (Tedlock, 1991). Within autoethnographic research practice, an ethnographic memoir undertakes the remembering self plus the reflexive and researching self (Scott, 2014). However, the benefit of writing memories of self-lived experiences as an ethnographic memoir within autoethnographic research practice is that it reveals as much about myself as it does about others (Scott, 2014). It is thus quite helpful for research that wants to deal equally with personal revelations and relationships. Thus the ethnographic memoir in my autoethnography helps narrate and reflect about self and others, at times even blurring the boundary between them. Therefore due to the inclusion of others, it is equally imperative to declare the ethical standpoints for writing this autoethnography.

Ethical Standpoints

Ethical considerations are murky waters in autoethnographic research practices. Since the event had occurred before the author seeks to reflect on it, it is impossible to get the informed consent of participants included in the research (Lee, 2018). Gaining retrospective consent is not only difficult, but, in most cases, develop a conflict of interest, which can potentially impact the outcome of the research (Tolich, 2010). Still, the author needs to remain aware that self-revelations always involve revelations about the participants. Although there are no set rules for ensuring ethicality in autoethnographic studies (Ellis, 2007), a range of

guidelines to reduce the implications of autoethnographic research for participants exist (Sikes, 2015). However, it is better to move beyond procedural ethics of adopting certain tools for ethics in practice, and rather declare foundational ethical considerations for writing an autoethnography (Tolich, 2010). By doing this, the author can continuously focus on *ethically writing* the autoethnography. Thus, following Tolich (2010), I think it is crucial to design and declare research-specific ethical standpoints before writing any autoethnography, which takes care of the common good and well-being of both the participants and the author (Ellis, 2007; Lee, 2018). Since my ethnographic memoir involves an organization, its policies and practices, and organizational actors such as employees, unions, and management, I have designed and followed the following standpoints for ethically writing this autoethnography:

- Renaming the various administrative/employee positions/titles in the organization so that they are not identifiable.
- Not revealing any sensitive and confidential organizational data.
- Refraining from disclosing the organizational policies and practices that are not directly related with the narrative, and thus not extremely relevant for this autoethnography.
- Partially referring to the organizational foundations and nomenclatures corresponding to the events described in the ethnographic memoir, and inclining more towards the personal perspective while doing so.

I have used Chenail's (2014) 9 P's of autoethnography (*person*, *populace*, *position*, *problem*, *purpose*, *perspective*, *plan*, *product*, and *praxis)* to cover the epistemology and methodology of my autoethnographic inquiry, and also present the ethnographic memoir and implications. For a continuous and sequential narrative, purpose, perspective, and plan are discussed in this (methodology) section. Following the organizational context, the ethnographic memoir has been presented where person, populace, position, and problem are discussed, and by renaming product as *proceedings* the events have been narrated. The praxis has been covered in the proceedings and implications section, and developed by (a) focusing on the social and cultural aspects of my work experience, (b) looking inward to read the contradictions within my working relationships, and (c) trying to dialectically reveal nuances about the social science concepts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2006).

Purpose and Perspective

Purpose is the author's reason, while perspective is the author's lens used to write the autoethnography. My purpose is to write the personal experience through which I strive to transcend beyond the local environment (Denzin, 1990). This means not just connecting the local to the macro, but keeping the personal equally involved in retelling the macro by voicing the interconnected individual subjectivities (Chakraborty, 2017). Thus for the same purpose, different perspectives might possibly yield different autoethnographic accounts, which also reveals from the conversation in—Ellis and Bochner's (2000) "evocative autoethnography," Anderson's (2006a) "analytic autoethnography," Charmaz's (2006) brief elicitation of Anderson's approach, Ellis and Bochner's (2006) and Denzin's (2006) reply to Anderson's approach, Anderson's (2006b) counter reply, and Burnier's (2006) assessment of the two approaches—that why autoethnography, both as a process and product, depends significantly on its perspective to meet the purpose. As my experiences are narrated from a subjective position, my perspective is subjectivist. I give weight and importance to my experiences to become the receptacle of multiple, plural, collaborative, and contrasting voices, which need to be brought together to illuminate the unknown. Thus purpose and perspective are interlinked,

and requires the author to reveal the consequent voice of his/her autoethnography. Sharing the voice of the research is required to authenticate and value the inquiry (Chenail, 2008). Indeed, it is the voice of the author, be it evocative, political, or emancipatory, through which readers ascertain the author's choice and establish verisimilitude (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Personal narratives provide space to express author's voice through his/her subjectivity and reflexivity helps to infer, inform, and write about the social and cultural patterns (Chakraborty, 2017). Therefore, developing conscious interlinkage between author subjectivity about his/her inner struggle to negotiate an emergent identity and the personal embodiment of the historical, social, and cultural patterns, is imperative for writing an autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Jones, 2009; Rambo, 2005). By keeping the subjectivities alive, I aim to meet the broader goal of this inquiry, which is to stimulate interest in co-constructing resolutions, and not gain a few generalized solutions about working lives. The validity of this work thus depends on readers who might have experienced similar changes and possibly relate to even a bit of this narrative.

Plan

The plan to write the narrative involves revealing change in my constraints, struggles, and interests, experienced as a public sector employee, and thereby create the window through which the pulls of the contextual change can be viewed. My experience was constituted through interactions with organizational actors such as employees, unions, and management. Converting myself as the research subject meant inquiring about my relationships, realizations, and emotions associated with the organizational milieu, and reminiscing the memories of events and people involved. This process was recursive as a continual reflection on particular events, instances, and conversations were required. Recursive reflection, however, is both a strength and a weakness. A strength as it helped me gain nuances I could have overlooked in the present. And weakness as one cannot decide on the level of recursion. The only strategy was to shed the present neutrality and seasoned indifference and think like I was back there into that time. Thus I have written the narrative from memory by resurfacing my insider knowledge, personal realization, and reflection about my working life, but also analyzing it simultaneously and not as a whole. Therefore, for narrative analysis, the effort has been to tease out the associated meanings of change by thinking with the narrative, rather than using the narrative to think. It meant reflecting along with the messiness (dilemmas, tensions, and confusions) of the narrative, and not submerge the messiness in the totality of the narrative to sanitize the reflection. It also involved recapitulating the numerous controllers, motivations, and strategies of the self, devised to navigate the messiness caused due to the unsettlement, trepidation, and temporariness of the situation. I also tried to question my self's temporary assessment of the then logical and rational, which was the only speculation for the future. Conscientiously reflecting with the narrative helped to situate my experiences within the structural and cultural influences, and thereby reveal nuances of the micro-macro linkage. I also do not deny that my present affiliation and research interests have influenced this retrospective process. Nonetheless, thinking with the narrative has helped to keep the "I" in the text, and retain personal reflection without muting the self-subjectivities (Ellis, 2004).

The Organizational Context

The public sector company had several strategic business units spread across the country. The headquarters of the company where the top management maintained their offices, served as the central location for deciding strategic policies and planning unit-wise implementations. All the units reported to the headquarters. The company had three cadres of

employees—managers, workers, and an intermediate cadre called supervisors. After dismantling the collective bargaining system, compensation policies in public sector organizations were formulated through the DPE (explained before). Since the early 2000s, DPE started the policy of performance-based bonus under the compensation policy, which was first made applicable for managers. Thus the company had designed and implemented a PMS for managers, which ranked them on their performances and based on their ranks, and company and unit performances, decided their bonus. Thus, the PMS was meant to jolt the poor performers and award the better ones by creating a ranking-based work environment and building a workplace philosophy entirely new for the company.

However, after the PMS implementation, problems related to its operation and acceptance had started emerging in the company. The ranks could not be kept confidential as every manager informally came to know the bonus drawn by others, and accordingly estimated their departmental and unit-level ranks. This performance-based inequality, resulting from PMS, could not fit in the organizational climate of equality for which public sector organizations stood for. For instance, salaries (basic pay, benefits linked to basic pay, and allowances) were equal within levels, as were equal participation and freedom of speech, equal right to contest against wrong judgement such as matters of anomaly, constitutional drafting of policies and rules to upkeep the notion of equality and justice, and so on. Equality was even palpable through a single uniform, common canteen, office provisions such as computers, furniture, and stationery items to be used on a daily basis. Everything embodying the company bred the notion of equality and non-differentiation. On the contrary, the PMS was contradicting the equality-based social structure and workplace culture by instilling a ranking-based, performance-driven work environment of differentiation. A general perception about PMS doing more harm than good had started to form in the company.

When I joined the company, PMS had become an object of detestation among the managers. During the ranking phase, reports of in-fighting of managers increased. Young managers were always unhappy with their appraisals, while the seniors were of the opinion that the young ones were the least affected. Despite the lingering problems of PMS, the top management had been unable to find any solution, perhaps because the grievance was *in-house* (i.e., both the aggrieved and the resolving parties belonged to the management cadre). Thus ironically, problems of managers were not problems for the top-management. Although managers had a collective body, its roles were obfuscated and powers highly limited when it came to represent issues of managers to the top management.

I also came to know that according to the DPE, the company was planning to extend the PMS for supervisors also. However, implementing PMS for supervisors was a different ball-game. Unlike managers, supervisors were tightly organized and staunchly backed up by their union which worked in collaboration with the union of workers, and both the unions had a stronghold in all the units. These unions had typical ways to settle matters with the management. The unit-level unions leveraged their strength on the unit's history, culture, and social structure to protect their members' interests. When the unions deemed any managerial action unsuitable, they responded with power. Nothing stopped the office bearers of the unions from freely barging into the offices of HR managers, shouting slogans, using abusive language, and disrupting work. A common strategy was to conduct milder forms of *gherao*[1] which made the HR managers feel vulnerable to even come to work. All the HR functions such as

[1] *Gherao* generally means the form of keeping the management or the managerial staff of industrial and other establishments in wrongful confinement, thus depriving them of their personal and other liberties. A technique adopted by militant trade unions—ambush key HR and top management personnel, surround them and restrict their movement for hours altogether while simultaneously pressuring them to meet their demands. See De (1970) for more detailed analysis.

recruitment, promotions, transfers, welfare, administration, and so on, stood affected. Thus when unions turned militant, the whole unit in some way or the other was disrupted, and this upheaval took days to settle down. On a bigger scale, the possibility of a company-wide disturbance also increased. In fact for these matters, the top management always blamed the unit-level HR managers for having failed to maintain cordial industrial relations. The top management also wanted the unit HR managers to pre-empt such circumstances and act early to seek union acquiescence (passively assent or agree without protest) in the first place.

The top management being aware about the problems of managers regarding PMS, knew that supervisor union would oppose the implementation of PMS for supervisors vehemently. Thus before the problem surfaced, the top management wanted that union acquiescence should somehow be taken for the implementation. Possibly due to this, unit-level teams comprising of unit-level HR managers were formed and guided to deal with the resistance in a fragmented way (i.e., nipping the resistance in the bud). The unit-level teams were instructed to conduct meetings with their unit-level union representatives, and without confronting them on the matter of PMS implementation, seek their feedback and suggestions to improve the PMS. Indeed, the top management's perception that unions could be acquiesced, shaped their assumption that union participation could be taken in the PMS implementation.

The Ethnographic Memoir

Person, Populace, Problem, and Position

It was at the above juncture that I joined the company at one of its units in the HR department. Despite lacking previous experience working in the HR function, I was somewhat sure about the politics that I was required to work with and learn. My perception about the HR manager, someone with acrobatic balancing skills working tirelessly as the on-ground management, left me less celebratory despite bagging a public sector job. It was not difficult to guess that with active unions, HR managers' task of contemplating how the opposing interests of the management and the union could be reconciled, was difficult. Maybe due to this reason, the job offer was pushing me to assume of myself as an extremely skilful person who can suppress uncertainties about having the ability to deal with conflicting situations more often than anyone. Forgoing public sector employment was simply imprudent. Thus I accepted the job offer in an irreconcilable state of mind, basking in pride, but equally apprehensive about sustaining that pride for long.

The formation of unit-level teams of two to three HR managers was going on when I was posted at one of the units. Since I was new and yet to be assigned to any HR function, I was included in my unit-level team for the PMS implementation. I think the declination of others to join this unusual team also worked. I remember getting cautioned by a few seniors in my department, but I was rather curious to decipher the unconventional. I also felt that the small team size which made the members more inter-dependent was suitable for a newcomer like me.

Nonetheless, being a newcomer, I was abnormally confused, less by the newness of the place, but more by the kind of direction given to us by the top management for conducting the PMS implementation. Supervisors were pictured as incapable personalities, lacking the knowledge about their best interests, as well as incompatible, for taking in confidence due to their stupidity to produce friction under the influence of their unions. Thus it felt as if the top management was devaluing the supervisors and their unions. It was also clear that the top management was assuming and portraying the whole PMS implementation process as an *us versus them* battle; us being the management, and them being the supervisors and their unions. Being a part of the unit-level team meant to identify with that notion of *us* and act on behalf of

the top management against *them*. It seemed that for a manager, although there were not many options for disobeying the top management, working to get used as agents of the top management and do their bidding was certainly obnoxious. The instructions given to us at the headquarters including the orders, for example, "start executing for the management!" were indeed instances of this hierarchical control. I was left thinking, does becoming a manager also means that one has to be compliant enough not to raise a voice against the top management's apparent biases?

My position further muddled after realizing that the top management's hierarchical power was structurally rooted. For instance, negotiation with unit-level unions was left to the unit-level HR, but the latter never had the true freedom to negotiate. Keeping the headquarters *informed* was the protocol, thus snatching away the unit-level HR's ability to grow a spine. Therefore, the practice of regular *consulting* the headquarters, even when it was not required was structural. It indicated that despite the argument of decentralization propounded by the macro perspective, centralized command and control of the top management clearly dominated in the public sector. I remember mulling over two options: resist the top management which meant declining to be a part of the implementation team and probably even risk my job or agree to play the managerial role of becoming agents of the top management.

However, a third option was also evolving before me. After sharing my thoughts with some of my team members, who although did not seem to understand my confusion entirely, shared their experiences and knowledge about how supervisors and their unions might respond in our unit, and then what our team could do. I sensed that although the top management was dictating the managerial processes, according to their us versus them paradigm, the real scenario of implementation was going to be something else. I could sense that organizational processes did not happen exactly the way top-management perceived and guided. I also realized that there were spaces called deviations from the standard operating procedures. In no time, my interest in conducting the exercise was back, and I was keen to observe the middle path between resistance and compliance unfold. Thus in my populace, apart from the top management, supervisors, and their unions, another actor entered–my unit-level team.

Therefore, despite developing an initial antipathy for the top management, I appeared compliant on the outside to follow their instructions and not pull out from the implementation exercise. However, I was also not very forthcoming about owning my team after understanding their lack of strength to confront the top management despite them helping me to retain my interests. Perceptibly, my preconception of HR managers was changing. I was beginning to realize that the skill HR managers needed was to adapt and change according to situations. But I was unsure about how the internal conflict emanating due to accommodating changes could be managed. So I had to wait for the events related to the PMS implementation to begin at my unit.

Proceedings

Although the top management instructed the unit-level HR teams to focus only on the supervisors' unions, our team planned to involve the supervisors too. An awareness workshop about PMS involving all the supervisors and meetings with union representatives were planned. Adding to the change, a few nominated managers were also involved for conducting the workshops as trainers. After the workshops began, I started realizing the importance of meeting the supervisors individually. I realized that the workshops were meant not only to impart the knowledge of PMS, but also to prepare each of them for the forthcoming change. The role of nominated managers was also critical. They could have potentially impacted the change process by derailing the implementation by unloading their problems of PMS on the supervisors. So we improvised the situation slightly in our favour. We assured the managers

that their complaints regarding the PMS system would also be included in the feedback supposed to be collected only from union representatives for sending to the headquarters.

The one-to-one meetings with all the supervisors and the nominated managers introduced me to the thickness of change triggered for the PMS implementation. Maybe for the first time in my life, I was meeting so many new people, and surprisingly, conversations were not limited to the PMS issues, even if I would have tried that initially. I understood that the working lives of people in organizations were about informal relationships that characterize the formal looking structures and practices. I started realizing that change involves people as much as their countable actions. Thereby, their numerous adjustments and interactions, and their emerging preparedness to accept a changing workplace matter significantly for the actual change. Being part of that organizational milieu, even I was undergoing several changes. Still, the changes happening within each of us were different, despite driven by relationships nurturing over our conversations about PMS.

In the meetings with union representatives, we aimed to systematically prepare a repository of their grievances, complaints, objections, and suggestions regarding the PMS. I felt that union representatives were initially sceptical as they did not cooperate to provide their actual feedback despite marking their participation in the meetings. They were overtly wary about the top management's intention to forcefully implement the PMS, and kept arguing that public sector organizations never run on rat-race ecosystems. Their intent to participate and open up gradually in the meetings started increasing after several of our attempts expressing optimism to improve the PMS.

However, the change I noticed with union representatives was not the same as it was with supervisors. A direct conflict of interest between our team and the union was never there. The union was opposing the PMS because it was unpopular among managers, while our team was trying to seek their help to improve that situation. Perhaps both of us wanted a change. Thus in the process of meeting them time and again, their opposition for PMS gradually got replaced with their suggestions and feedback to improve the PMS. Nonetheless, unlike conversations with supervisors, meetings with union representatives were more formal in nature. Both the parties (our team and their representatives) never wanted to leave their respective fronts undefended. I started realizing the impact of one-to-one informal conversations on change, compared to cold discussions in formal meetings. I remember that during those closed-room meetings, the constant realization that the words we spoke were received, both by them and us, as part of a planned agenda, never ceased to exist. In other words, I was not being myself in those meetings. I was instead someone or something I was representing, and apparently, meetings happened over agendas more than among people.

After completing the whole exercise, a list of modifications required in the PMS was sent to the company headquarters. I was glad to see that I was not a newcomer anymore in the unit. Through the elaborate process of meeting people, I had made more friends than many others in the department. I started realizing that employee viewpoints about organizational issues were extremely subjective, staying beneath the veil of organizational structures and practices to appear somewhat objective when seen for a distance. So I was unsure how subjective issues could be tackled by addressing few objective details pertaining to the PMS implementation. Nonetheless, I was content that my work had been fruitful, and our team efforts were going to bring some change in the company. My initial assumptions about employees exposed to change at work had altered. With every passing day, identities of employees as individuals in themselves were becoming more vital and vivid to me, compared to the cadre they represented. Thus, contrary to the picture of us versus them painted by the top management, I was beginning to see the supervisors as people with whom the change was progressing in myriad ways.

My assumption that the top management wanted to work on the unit suggestions to improve the PMS system was short-lived. Most of our recommendations were disapproved of as they appeared biased towards employees and unions, and were called ignorant of the management rationale. The headquarters also said that standardization of recommendations received from all the units would be undertaken to shortlist the actionable points of PMS. I was shocked and taken aback. I failed to understand the meaning of the whole exercise. Units would always differ in their suggestions, so why standardize? What was the purpose behind creating dedicated unit-level teams for conducting such an elaborate exercise when standardization was eventually the motive? What exactly were these teams supposed to do? Did we do something wrong? Perhaps we did not act as the agents of the top-management. Although I failed to find the answers for these questions, it was clear that our work was judged and declared valueless. Thus from being content about having made a recognizable contribution to the company, I started understanding that most of the work people do in public sector organizations get reduced to mere dirt. Moreover, due to this culture of public sector organizations, employees often shirk taking up new work, and eventually their efficiency gets questioned. Nonetheless, this was again a new change that I was encountering. I felt that similar to putting on the uniform daily before going to work, a cloak of ignorance and suspicion must also be applied to prohibit oneself from accepting any new activity and getting attached to it emotionally.

A detailed response from our side was sent, but to no avail. However, the skin-saving conversation on emails and phone calls continued for some time. More than the headquarters' ignorance, I was troubled to see that everything was hunky dory in my team and department, as if this was yet another routine affair. Although I was new and yet to accommodate to the culture, getting stunned at the lifeless reaction of our head HR was normal. Some colleagues disclosed that the head HR feared going against the headquarters, and that if he supported our team, he might end up offending the top management. My bewilderment kept growing at the workplace culture more by observing my team members for whom, for instance, the timely clearance of their mobile phone bills by the accounts department seemed a more pressing issue. I was wondering how I would be able to see my own identity at work get smothered by this mysterious aloofness about work that would increase gradually with each passing day in that organization.

The new PMS was released with bare minimum changes. Most of our suggestions drawn based on the feedback of union representatives had been ignored. In other words, we were made betrayers in the eyes of the union and the supervisors. After informing supervisors to begin their appraisal activities in the PMS, there was complete silence for a day or two, similar to the calm before the storm. Gradually the noise started picking up as union representatives began to notice that none of their recommendations had been implemented in the PMS system. I had made up my mind that I would disclose the actual situation to them, but I was not aware that there would be no such opportunity given to me. The union representatives spread the news among supervisors like wildfire that our team collaborated with the top management to conduct this exercise for manufacturing union acquiescence for the PMS implementation. Indeed, that was enough for supervisors to lose their cool. They started gushing into our offices, like tidal waves on a full moon and led by vocal ones who would start yelling even before reaching our desks, with others joining the bandwagon. A few of them wanted to create a ruckus as they came back with a new group of supervisors every time to repeat the episodes.

More than being frightened by their threats and intimidations, I was helplessly discontent about the breakage of social bonds and the resulting disquiet that I was struggling with. The relationships built during the workshops seemed non-existent. I felt that a gulf of distrust had suddenly emerged around me, and I could say nothing that could reach them, let alone trust me on anything that I was saying. After a point in time, there was nothing new to

listen in their abuses, but their strange and disconcerted faces screaming at our infidelity, hypocrisy, and impotence, did not seem to fade away. It was getting difficult to keep going to the office every day as it meant enduring another horrifying day without any visible restoration. But I thought to make myself available to them was perhaps the only way out of this; in fact, I was dealing with it on my own. There was no team to share the pains with, and no communication in the department to forge solidarity. However, I was not the only one suffering there, and sadly this was the only solace left to keep myself sitting on that chair for days altogether. Yes, all HR persons inside that office were involved in fighting their own battles, undergoing personal struggles at their desks with their files and papers, and accommodating themselves in their working lives by surviving and waiting for another hour and another day to pass.

Soon we heard that the supervisors' union was planning to boycott the PMS by calling a strike against the bonus policy and getting covert support from the workers' union. The mention of labour strike does something unusual in the public sector. Initially, in desperation and after that in a planned way, our team started communicating with other units and came to know that circumstances were more or less the same everywhere. Subsequently, our team and similar others at different units decided to represent against the top management collectively because individual persuasion had not helped. An exciting change also started becoming visible in the unit. A small number of supervisors, perhaps pressured to complete their appraisal by the due date, had begun to open their PMS accounts and initiate their self-appraisal tasks. With each passing day, this number began to increase. To my great relief, I saw that their angst against us, the HR managers, was also depleting. The social familiarity created during the workshops seemed to be coming back. They started approaching our offices again, but their abusive demeanour had surprisingly vanished, and a seeking-out and requesting-for help-like face had appeared. Even their empathy with our situation seemed to increase as they came to know about our collective stand with other units.

Although it was a pleasant change, I was yet to get over from the past. So unlike the previous socialization during the workshops, I felt more restrained in opening-up. I began sounding like other HR colleagues, but when it became evident to me, I became obnoxious from my own presence. My HR colleagues seemed to like this change in me and said that I had become *mature*. Undoubtedly, the so-called maturity was reflecting everywhere. Even the language in my emails was changing and read like impersonal official statements. It might seem funny, but I must mention that my appearance was changing too, which I came to know during the annual photo-shoot for employee identity cards. I did not like any of these changes, but I was unable to shift back strangely enough. More importantly, I seemed to lack the will and strength to get emotionally attached to people at the workplace. I started developing a distanced outlook towards my work. Was I getting detached from myself? Well, maybe altogether not, as somewhere inside, I still wanted to change and become what I was.

In the meantime, the joint-unit representation against the top management became more durable for sustaining the reputation of unit-level HR departments in front of their respective unions. I was, however, puzzled to see supervisors' acceptance of PMS. Why did they change? Was it due to our effort to collaborate with other units, through which they came to know about our right intentions, or was it something else that made them turn into compliant employees? Contrastingly, there was hardly any change visible in their union's approach. The union representatives kept hurling at the head HR office and their loud voices, and the occasional sighs of the head HR remained audible inside the office premises for the next couple of months. However, as days passed by, the threat of the strike seemed to fizzle out, giving way to several new stories. Some of our colleagues started praising the HR head, others said that workers' union had withdrawn their support, while some opined that the supervisors' union had an internal breakdown. I never came to know the real reason why the strike did not happen, but I

could certainly notice a gap that had created between the supervisors and their union. A gap that was not built in a day, but the effect had come out very suddenly.

PMS operated without any modification that year. In the following years, the headquarters started showing some level of tolerance towards improving the PMS based on suggestions and recommendations from the units, perhaps because the real threat from supervisors' union to oppose the implementation had faded out. The supervisors, on the other hand, seemed to learn to settle down with the PMS and its style of working life. I never got the opportunity to delve again into knowing how many of their problems were solved, but I could see that the supervisors did not mind living with it. Leadership also changed, almost at all levels, and by the time I had decided to leave the company, new problem areas had emerged, which took the time and energy of people in power. This old but once a critical subject of dispute was finding a place for itself in the organization's history.

Ethnographic Implications

For drawing implications from the narrative, I shall again think with the narrative rather than use the narrative to think. However, here I shall try to abstract meanings from the memoir to inform praxis. Thus abstracting from the reflective account of personal, situated, and dynamic change, the ethnographic implications aim to highlight the sociological underpinnings of embodying change at work.

Neoliberal market forces wanted the organization's work culture to change and become competitive, profit, and performance-oriented. However, the collective orientation of equality at work was resisting this change. Through the PMS, the top management wanted self-driven individual preparedness of employees to become individual change carriers in their working lives. The DPC's guideline of performance-based bonus under the compensation policy, top management's governance and control, and a similar PMS already in place for managers, altogether strengthened the ideology working behind the PMS implementation. Thus, during my initial days in the organization, my assumptions made me see change as being *driven*. Therefore, I saw the top management as the driver of change, trying to push down a policy to the employees through the unit-level teams. Thus I was led to think about the whole exercise as us versus them battle between the top management and the supervisors' union. The difference between these two social groups was also made prominent through the whole exercise, wherein the unit-level HR teams were instructed to work on behalf of the top management. The guidelines and task structures further prepared us as the change-drivers and instilled the belief that change needs to be seen as an outcome rather than a process. The imposition certainly had hegemonic and psychic prison effects (Brown & Humphreys, 2003).

However, I was facing an intense dilemma too. Perhaps, it was the sign that change emerges within us. The natural urge to understand what we see and feel, though not always critically due to historical conceptions, socialization, and personal traits, makes us the meaning-making beings (Bochner, 2012; Custer, 2014). In this realm of meanings and values, we think and interact as poets and storytellers, and not as human scientists (Bochner & Ellis, 2006). Thus to resolve my dilemma, when I interacted with my unit-level team, I was exposed to a thick context of change, which provided the sense of multiple actors and a context upon which the change process gets constituted (Doolin, 2003). It increased my awareness about the much messier, emergent, and gripping reality, almost like a plot, and provided a glimpse of the thick, engaged, and situated perspective of change. Therefore, the *first* implication is that change cannot be simplified to an outcome or an indicator to declare whether the change has happened or not. Instead, change is political and depends on people's action which reproduces and transform place and time-dependent structural specifics on a processual basis. Thus it is simplistic to extend and project a macro perspective of change to be applied conservatively

over any particular work context. A naive acceptance or a planned trajectory eventually never appears in the narratives of those who experience the change.

During the unit-level exercise, I realized that people involved in change need to shed their pre-imposed identities and ideologies for making conversations happen. It allows interaction between actors to sustain and their listening abilities to improve. Thus, communication after a certain point of time occurs in the context of change rather than to bring change (Ford & Ford, 1995), and conversations take forward the change co-constructively (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009). Therefore, the *second* implication is that change is cultural, as it is co-constructively taken forward through conversations and personal embodiments. The communication in the cultural milieu happens in the context of change rather than to bring change.

However, after experiencing the setback when the headquarters ignored and refused to accept our suggestions, I realized that co-constructed change needs further illumination. Although the lesson depicted the temporality of the change process, I needed to understand it better by reading it in the context of the public sector organization. Upon further reflection, it became clear that co-constructed change does not imply a free-flowing, unrestrained, and weightless trajectory of change involving people and their actions. The possibility of being influenced by political and economic interests, defended through people, processes, and cultures that replicate these influences always remain (Sayer, 2000, 2001). However, the headquarters' control over accepting and rejecting suggestions related to the PMS showed that these economic and political forces could also be external to the organizational milieu changing. Similarly, the change in my conception of being an HR manager in a public sector organization was also changing due to the workplace culture and macro-structural realities of the public sector. Therefore, this tells about the *third* implication that co-constructive cultural change is not unrestrained as relatively durable macro-structural influences shape it.

Nevertheless, people defend their existing positions based on cultural, social, and political claims (Pettigrew, 1985). The context of public sector employment made equality and freedom at work values that employees derived and practiced as citizens. These were the constitutional bases upon which the unit's history, culture, and social structure were built. The right to ask questions provided the impetus to supervisors and their union to raise questions when their suggestions were declined, while the same ethic made us silently receive their anger as we could not honour their rights. After finding their rights dishonoured, the supervisors' union threatened to boycott the PMS. The union's threat to call the labour strike engendered our effort to gain a collective power at the unit-level and confront the headquarters, which was again a constitutional protest against governmental imposition and a counterbalance of power, both characteristics of the public sector. In other words, countering the hierarchical control of the top management after getting disillusioned of perceptions that the organization is larger than its employees (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) was thus another stream of change. Therefore, the *fourth* implication is that for triggering the intentional change, several forms of non-intentional, non-classified, and non-characteristic changes, deriving their legitimacy from the socio-political texture of the workplace, also emerge.

The turning point in the story was when supervisors initiated their self-appraisal activities in the PMS despite their union's notice to boycott the system. The union's interests behind boycotting the PMS by calling a strike did not match with the supervisors' interests. Here the picture of change got more complicated. Through my interaction with the supervisors, I felt that their willingness for the workshops and accepting the PMS derived from their need for individual empowerment manifesting through one-to-one conversations, interactions beyond the point of interest, and social relationships. It was, however, non-conventional for a public-sector, wherein unions mostly deliberate between management and employees. Thus it was a change for supervisors, who perhaps wanted to unshackle their individual-level voice

from getting eclipsed in collective representations and union-led practices. Moreover, supervisors' support for their union and obeying the latter for boycotting the PMS weakened due to the DPC's mandate to implement a performance-based bonus, top management's plan to implement the PMS, and the prior existence of PMS for managers. Indeed there were reasons behind supervisors showing empathy towards us for putting the efforts to build the joint-unit representation. In that situation, supervisors had to either support the unit-HR or show solidarity with their union. In other words, they had to either reject the PMS to show collective solidarity with their union or individually accept the PMS, the philosophy of which each of them had somewhat accepted by participating in the workshops. Choosing the PMS meant supporting the unit-level HR to contest on their behalf for attaining system modifications. They individually chose PMS and sided with the unit-level HR as it perhaps fulfilled their longing for individual empowerment and an interactional culture wherein individuality receives recognition from the unit management. Thus, supervisors could not delegitimize the PMS on an individual basis, and consequently embodied the economic and political change, but at the same time, exercised their constitutional rights to collectively withdraw their support from union activity. This probably explains why the supervisors' union could not go on a strike. Therefore, the *fifth* implication is that change, as experienced by the individual, involves decisions to be made under socio-political and cultural influences. There are resources as well that provide individuals the agency to make choices based on their existing, relative, and desired positions in the organizational field. Therefore, change at work qualifies as the embodied truth of each and every individual in the organization, and reaffirms the need to highlight personal insights of change pertaining to working lives.

References

Adams, T. E., Ellis, C., & Jones, S. H. (2017). Autoethnography. In J. Matthes (General ed.), C. S. Davis & R. F. Potter (Associate eds.), *The international encyclopaedia of communication research methods* (pp. 1-11). London, UK: John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0011

Ahluwalia, M. S. (2002). Economic reforms in India since 1991: Has gradualism worked? *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 16*(3), 67-88.

Anderson, L. (2006a). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 373-395.

Anderson, L. (2006b). On apples, oranges, and autopsies: A response to commentators. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 450-465.

Bagchi, A. K. (1990). *Public sector industry and the political economy of Indian development.* Calcutta, India: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

Bhattacharjee, D. (2001). The evolution of Indian industrial relations: A comparative perspective. *Industrial Relations Journal, 32*(3), 244-263.

Bhattacharjee, D., & Ackers, P. (2010). Introduction: employment relations in India—Old narratives and new perspectives. *Industrial Relations Journal, 41(2),* 104-121.

Blenkinsopp, J. (2007). The ties that double bind us: Career, emotion and narrative coping in difficult working relationships. *Culture and Organization, 13*(3), 251-266.

Bochner, A. P. (2012). On first-person narrative scholarship: Autoethnography as acts of meaning. *Narrative Inquiry, 22*(1), 155-164.

Bochner, A. P. (2015). Putting meanings into motion: Autoethnography's existential calling. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 50-56). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (2006). Communication as autoethnography. In G. Shepherd, J. St. John, & T. Striphas (Eds.), *Communication as . . . : Perspectives on theory* (pp. 110-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Boyle, M., & Parry, K. (2007). Telling the whole story: The case for organizational autoethnography. *Culture and Organization, 13*(3), 185-190.

Brand, G. (2015). Through the looking glass space to new ways of knowing: A personal research narrative. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(4), 516-525. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss4/12

Breman, J. (1999a). The study of industrial labour in post-colonial India—The formal sector: An introductory review. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 33*(1-2), 1-41.

Breman, J. (1999b). The study of industrial labour in post-colonial India—The informal sector: A concluding review. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 33*(1-2), 407-431.

Breman, J. (2013). A bogus concept? Review of G. Standing: *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. *New Left Review, 84,* 130-138.

Brown, A. D., Gabriel, Y., & Gherardi, S. (2009). Storytelling and change: An unfolding story. *Organization, 16*(3), 323-333.

Brown, A. D., & Humphreys, M. (2003). Epic and tragic tales: Making sense of change. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 39*(2), 121-144.

Budhwar, P. S., & Boyne, G. (2004). Human resource management in the Indian public and private sectors: An empirical comparison. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 15*(2), 346-370.

Burnier, D. (2006). Encounters with the self in social science research: A political scientist looks at autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 410-418.

Chakraborty, S. (2017). Using narratives in creativity research: Handling the subjective nature of creative process. *The Qualitative Report, 22*(11), 2959-2973. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss11/9

Charmaz, K. (2006). The power of names. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 396-399.

Chenail, R. J. (2008). But is it research? A review of Patricia Leavy's *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(3), 7-12. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss3/12

Chenail, R. (2014). The art and craft of autoethnography. *The Qualitative Report Conference*. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqrc/fifth/day3/8/

Cohen, L., Duberley, J., & Musson, G. (2009). Work—life balance? An autoethnographic exploration of everyday home—work dynamics. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 18*(3), 229-241.

Custer, D. (2014). Autoethnography as a transformative research method. *The Qualitative Report*, *19*(37), 1-13. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss37/3

Datt, R. (1994). Jobless growth: Implications of new economic policies. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, *29*(4), 407-427.

De, N. R. (1970). Gherao as a technique for social intervention. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5(3/5), 201-208.

Denzin, N. K. (1990). Presidential address on the *Sociological Imagination* revisited. *Sociological Quarterly, 31*(1), 1-22.

Denzin, N. K. (2006). Analytic autoethnography, or déjà vu all over again. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 419-428.

Doloriert, C., & Sambrook, S. (2012). Organisational autoethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography, 1*(1), 83-95.

Doolin, B. (2003). Narratives of change: Discourse, technology and organization. *Organization, 10*(4), 751-770.

Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 54-63.

Ellis, C. (1993). "There are survivors": Telling a story of sudden death. *The Sociological Quarterly, 34*(4), 711-730.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman Altamira.

Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*(1), 3-29.

Ellis, C. (2017). Sleeping around, with, and through time: An autoethnographic rendering of a good night's slumber. *Qualitative Inquiry, 23*(4), 287-299.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 273-290.

Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Ellis, C. S., & Bochner, A. P. (2006). Analyzing analytic autoethnography: An autopsy. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35*(4), 429-449.

Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. (1995). The role of conversations in producing intentional change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 20*(3), 541-570.

Garg, P. K., & Parikh, I. J. (1986). Managers and corporate cultures: The case of Indian organizations. *Management International Review, 26*(3), 50-66.

Hayano, D. M. (1979). Auto-ethnography: Paradigms, problems, and prospects. *Human Organization, 38*(1), 99-104.

Herrmann, A. F. (2018). Communication and ritual at the comic book shop: The convergence of organizational and popular cultures. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography, 7*(3), 285-301.

Hill, E. (2009). The Indian industrial relations system: Struggling to address the dynamics of a globalizing economy. *Journal of Industrial Relations, 51*(3), 395-410.

Humphreys, M., & Brown, A. D. (2002). Narratives of organizational identity and identification: A case study of hegemony and resistance. *Organization Studies, 23*(3), 421-447.

Jones, S. R. (2009). Constructing identities at the intersections: An autoethnographic exploration of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(3), 287-304.

Kanungo, S., Sadavarti, S., & Srinivas, Y. (2001). Relating IT strategy and organizational culture: An empirical study of public sector units in India. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems, 10*(1), 29-57.

Khanna, S. (2015). The transformation of India's public sector. *Economic & Political Weekly, 50*(5), 47-60.

King, D., & Learmonth, M. (2015). Can critical management studies ever be 'practical'? A case study in engaged scholarship. *Human Relations, 68*(3), 353-375.

Kraay, A., & Van Rijckeghem, C. (1995). *Employment and wages in the public sector: A cross-country study*. SSRN papers. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=883218

Learmonth, M., & Humphreys, M. (2012). Autoethnography and academic identity: Glimpsing business school doppelgängers. *Organization, 19*(1), 99-117.

Lee, C. (2018). Culture, consent and confidentiality in workplace autoethnography. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography, 7*(3), 302-319.

Madheswaran, S., & Attewell, P. (2007). Caste discrimination in the Indian urban labour market: Evidence from the National Sample Survey. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *42*(41), 4146-4153.

Maiti, D. (2013). Precarious work in India: Trends and emerging issues. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *57*(4), 507-530.

Noronha, E. (2003). Indian trade unions: Today and beyond tomorrow. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, *39*(1), 95-107.

Pettigrew, A. (1985). *The awakening giant* (Routledge Revivals). London, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203816264

Rambo, C. (2005). Impressions of grandmother: An autoethnographic portrait. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *34*(5), 560-585.

Remesh, B. P. (2007). Optional or imposed? An ex post evaluation of voluntary retirement scheme in BALCO. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *42*(21), 1934-1941.

Remesh, B. P. (2017). Informal work in the formal sector: Conceptualizing the changing role of the state in India. In E. Noronha & P. D'Cruz (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on work and employment in globalizing India* (pp. 83-94). Singapore: Springer.

Roychowdhury, S. (2003). Public sector restructuring and democracy: The state, labour and trade unions in India. *Journal of Development Studies*, *39*(3), 29-50.

Sanyal, K., & Bhattacharyya, R. (2009). Beyond the factory: Globalisation, informalisation of production and the new locations of labour. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35-44.

Sayer, A. (2000). Moral economy and political economy. *Studies in Political Economy*, *61*(1), 79-103.

Sayer, A. (2001). For a critical cultural political economy. *Antipode*, *33*(4), 687-708.

Scott, J. D. (2014). Memoir as a form of auto-ethnographic research for exploring the practice of transnational higher education in China. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *33*(4), 757-768.

Shrivastava, A., & Purang, P. (2011). Employee perceptions of performance appraisals: A comparative study on Indian banks. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *22*(03), 632-647.

Sikes, P. (2015). *Ethical considerations in autoethnographic research.* https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.586562!/file/SREGP-Autoethnography-2015.pdf

Spry, T. (2001). Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *7*(6), 706-732.

Tedlock, B. (1991). From participant observation to the observation of participation: The emergence of narrative ethnography. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, *47*(1), 69-94.

Thorat, S., & Newman, K. S. (2007). Caste and economic discrimination: Causes, consequences and remedies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *42*(41), 4121-4124.

Tolich, M. (2010). A critique of current practice: Ten foundational guidelines for autoethnographers. *Qualitative Health Research*, *20*(12), 1599-1610.

Tulpule, B. (1976). Management and workers in public sector. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *11*(22), M49-M58.

Author Note

Saikat Chakraborty is a PhD candidate in the organizational behaviour area at Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India. His research interests include dignity at work, labour process, employment relations and organizational issues associated with informal workers, with methodological interest in qualitative research. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: saikatc@iima.ac.in.

Acknowledgement: I thankfully acknowledge the doctoral programme funding and library support provided by Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad for providing the scope and opportunity to write this paper. I also thank Sally St. George and Ronald Chenail for taking an interest in this paper and providing valuable direction towards developing it. Declaration of Conflicting Interests. The author declares no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Article Citation

Chakraborty, S. (2020). Embodying change at work: An autoethnography in the Indian public sector. *The Qualitative Report, 25*(5), 1341-1360. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss5/12