

Scholar Wanderer Nirmal Kumar Bose: Study of Nomads

- **P.K. Misra**

It is indeed a great privilege and honour for me that I have been invited to deliver Prof. N.K. Bose memorial lecture. I express a deep sense of gratitude to the authorities of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts for bestowing this honour to me

Introduction:

It was Bose who put me on the study of nomads. I began my journey with the study of nomadic Gadulia Lohars (1970), followed it up with a survey of nomads visiting various parts of South India (1970), the study of nomads in Mysore (1971), a study of nomads at a trading centre in Karnataka (1972) and detailed reviews of nomadic studies in India(1982, 2011). These studies, led me not only to interact with the mobile people at different places but also with the scholars interested in their studies, and read literatures on them. Let me state that non-pastoral nomads have been referred to by a variety of names such as gypsies, travelers, service nomads, commercial nomads, non-food producing nomads, and non-pastoral nomads, other nomads, symbiotic nomads, peripatetic etc. It is the last name, peripatetic which seems more acceptable to scholars working in Asia and I too prefer to use it.

Objective

In my last paper (2013), I raised the issue as to why the peripatetics who have been resilient, pervasive and persistent throughout the history should remain stranger to the sedentary population whom they serve and in fact they have been generally overlooked by scholars too. In this presentation I would follow that issue and argue that owing to the drastic all round changes there is very little space for traditional peripatetics in rural India for their mobility, their strategies are being increasingly adapted in urban setting by modern day hawkers which I prefer to call it as a case of peripatetization.

Missionary zeal of Bose

Bose was a multifaceted personality, concerned thinker, visionary and builder. Sinha, one of his most brilliant students writes, 'Bose was a leading anthropologist, an outstanding exponent of Gandhism, a rare example of versatile creativity and a great nationalist' (1986: 1). Bose wrote profusely on a wide variety of subjects such as Anthropology, Temple Architecture, Pre-historic Archeology, Geology, Human Geography, Social History, Art, Politics, Education, Social work and Gandhism (see bibliography of Nirmal Kumar Bose, Ray 2002). Sinha further writes that Bose was, 'driven by indomitable spirit of enquiry; he transgressed the boundaries of specific disciplines and the

conventional divides between theoretical thinking and application of knowledge' (ibid: 1). Bose was systematic in whatever he did and imposed a strict regimen on himself and those who were around him. He always led from the front setting examples for others.

He was perhaps the only active nationalist anthropologist India has known. The field of anthropology, as is well known has been dominated by colonial concerns. Indian anthropologists did little to change those concerns. Bose felt that they simply copied what was prevalent in anthropology in the West. In his essay of 1952, 'Current research projects in Indian Anthropology' Bose noted that 'by and large Indian Anthropologists had not been able to make any area of enquiry specially their own in which they developed their own methodology of approach or theoretical interest of "enquiry"' (ibid: 56). He emphasized these points of view at several places. In an article entitled 'Fifty years of science in India: Progress of Anthropology and Archeology' based on a quick survey, he wrote 'the position of Indian Anthropology has, on the whole, been colonial in relation to schools which have dominated the European or American scene from time to time' (1963: 1). He wanted to chart out a course which reflected Indian reality and knowledge. He wanted that the perspective of India as a whole should be kept while studying at different levels, material,

organizational and abstract and also the interaction between them. He was concerned to demonstrate the characteristic features of Indian civilization and show its underlying unity. He forcefully argued 'there is more unity in India's variety than one is likely to admit in moments of forgetfulness (1961: Introduction). He visualized that the structure of Indian unity can therefore be compared to a pyramid. He argued that there is substantial variation at the material base of life and progressively less at the social organizational and at the level of 'ideals, on faiths or arts'. He wanted the reality and strength of India to be known so that the basic task of regenerating the colonially subjugated nation can be taken up in a systematic manner. Thus Bose already had a design in his mind about the research in India even before he joined as the Director of the Anthropological Survey of India. Within a month of his assuming the charge of the Anthropological Survey of India, he launched his most talked about, the first ever all India project, called the Material Trait Survey and entrusted the project to his trusted student Surajit Sinha to conduct it from Nagpur (Sarkar and Bhattacharya 2002:85-11). In undertaking this project, Bose had several objectives before him. One was to generate some simple and basic information which revolved around their material life indicating their ingenuity in use of the local resources as well as giving expression to their cultural designs in variety of ways. He was concerned to

demonstrate the characteristic features of Indian civilization and showing its underlying unity. Second, was to train young scholars to get acquainted with and gain some experience of rural India. Third, was to training young researchers to observe and systematically record the data on simple material traits. Bose in particular put a lot of emphasis on scientific observation. He would often cite example of simple folks who were keen observers of life around them (see Misra 2002: 55-68). Fourth, to inculcate a spirit of comradeship among the young research scholars in sharing data and ideas towards a larger goal of understanding India.

Material trait survey

In order that Material Culture Trait Survey could be taken up at all India level, it required the sanction of the Ministry of the Government of India so that funds could be allotted to this project for appointment of additional staff. To get the sanction of the Ministry, a project proposal was to be presented before the Advisory Committee of the Anthropological Survey of India for its approval and recommendations to the Government of India. In order to prepare the project proposal it was decided to launch a pilot study in Vidharbha and Jabalpur divisions of Central India. This proved to be a crucial juncture in my professional career, as I was one of the two scholars' selected to

conduct the pilot study for this project from Central India Station of the Anthropological Survey of India. This gave me an opportunity to interact with Bose more closely and learn from him.

The task given to us was precise. We had to study a village in each district of the two divisions, prepare our report along with sketches and distribution maps of each trait in the two divisions. It was also decided to mount an exhibition of the distribution of the material traits for the benefit of the members of the Advisory Committee to see. But the time given to us was too short. With Bose, there was no room for ifs and buts, and much less with his devoted and ardent disciple Sinha who was supervising the project. Bose periodically came all the way from Kolkata to Nagpur to check the progress of the work. During this period, I had the privilege to have numerous one to one interactions with him which were truly in the spirit of Guru Shishya Parampara. He was orator par excellence and his ideas on vast variety of subjects such as art, science, philosophy and his days with Gandhi just flowed so naturally from him. Those were precious occasions for me and continue to guide me. I began to realize and admire his immense range and depth of knowledge. These discourses were given to me while he was scrutinizing the progress of the work.

The report, the distribution maps, sketches etc., which we were preparing, were of critical importance to Bose, as on its approval by the Advisory Committee depended, his future ambitious plans of researches in Anthropological Survey of India.

We worked hard for this project. Advisory Committee of the Anthropological Survey of India was immensely satisfied with the report of the pilot project and readily approved and recommended the project to be taken up at all India level. The project was launched in October 1959. Sixteen research personnel got spread out in different parts of the country. At least one village each was studied in 311 districts of India, in some districts, more than one village were studied in order to cover the variations owing to ecological or significant ethnic differentiations in a district. It is a matter of record that within two years under the dynamic leadership of Bose and Sinha, the report was printed in August 1961 under the title **Peasant Life in India: A study in Indian Unity and Diversity (1961)**.

The report provides an authentic picture of cultural distribution at material level. It shows in certain measure regional cultural variations but with a considerable amount of interpenetration between regions. This picture also indicated relationship with Southeast Asia as well as with countries lying in the West and Northwest of India. In the

introduction of the book Bose wrote, 'India has been a land where cultures have mingled after flowing from both the West and the East. But what is original is that the new combinations have taken place here, and sometimes even new inventions. It is not our purpose at the present moment to enter into the depths of cultural history, but to indicate in the beginning of the present series of surveys that broad regional distinctions are even now discernable in the material culture of India, as well as sufficient proof of their interpenetration' (1961).

Thus as was conceived by him, the stage was set up for next phase of studies which focused on the study of some specialized occupational groups such as potters, fisher folk, metal workers etc., complex religious institutions such as temples, sacred centers, and centers for Sanskrit learning etc., and groups who had created a special niche in supplying goods and services to the settled population such as peripatetics. While assigning research topics and allowing me to work on the peripatetics, I recall Bose asked me 'are you married'. I answered him in the negative. Then he suggested 'marry one from the nomadic community and make them your life-long research interest'. Reflecting back I believe that he knew it was not easy to work among the ever mobile population (see Misra 1978: 139-48). To win their trust is important which cannot be achieved on the basis of study of a culture

from a distance. Though I could not follow his advice in marrying a girl from a nomadic community, study of peripatetic has remained a life long passion with me.

Study of peripatetic

A few may be knowing that way back in 1956 Bose published a paper 'some observations on Nomadic castes of India' which in fact was a modified version of his speech which he had delivered at the International Geographical Seminar held at Aligarh Muslim University in January 1956. This article is germane in his understanding of the structure of the Indian society as well as his pioneering attempt to draw the attention of the scholars to the role played by the generally overlooked population like the nomads. A brief summary of that article is in order to grasp his understanding of the Indian Society.

He pointed out that it was not entirely true that the villages in India were self-sufficient. There were villages of various kinds and some were specialized villages such as that of potters, weavers, blacksmiths etc. Then there are villages which specialized in trading and were located at river-side ports from where roads radiated to hinter lands. Such villages attracted the attention of specialized group to settle down which eventually led them to become trading and manufacturing villages¹.

Apart from complimentary functions between villages, occupational specialization of castes within the village, weekly markets, seasonal and specialized fairs were all tied in an economic, cultural and social network. He further argued that since a variety of occupational groups cannot find regular patronage in a single village, they became wandering groups 'forming a compliment to the settled residents who inhabit the villages of India' (1956: 3). He further indicated that how some 'men of forest' were incorporated into this network. He noted that in spite of such incorporation these groups retained their identity. This was indeed a valuable insight. But we may also underline that he was indicating relationship between forest dwellers and peasantry which in fact was contrary to the understanding of colonial anthropology.

Low status of habitually mobile people

It is ironic that in spite of the fact mobility has been one of the most important attributes of humankind and that is how different parts of the world were colonized, sedentrization became the ideal and established order of honorable living, and mobility became a sort of aberration, if not inferior. Those who indulged in it habitually acquired a low status in the eyes of relatively permanent settled population. But on the other hand habitually mobile people have been there throughout

the history. However it is a fact that not only that they have been overlooked population they have also been labeled in negative terms, 'by the 19th Century, nomadism in Europe came to be equated with vagrancy' (Berland & Rao 2004: 11). I would like to underline that this labeling was primarily owing to associating poverty with criminality and wandering as incorrigible lust. These European notions were transported to India, completely overlooking that in the Indian tradition, the phase of acquiring knowledge and learning, detachment with material belongings as well as with people and places, are closely tied with wandering. On the contrary during the colonial period, the nomadic communities were referred to as 'vagrants' and 'uncontrollable' and hence classified as 'criminal tribes' who after the country became independent became de-notified communities². The stigma attached to them still continues and some of them in police records have been put into the category of habitual offenders. Unfortunately these biased perceptions and false categorizations were not seriously contested by the social scientists who themselves relied on second hand reports and cursory observation on them. Such people were by and large ignored, if not undervalued by the social scientists in general. This is the background in which the importance of Bose's 1956 paper has to be seen and read. It is a pioneering lead that he had

given indicating that the peripatetics were part of the larger socio-political-cultural and economic system of the Indian civilization.

Field studies on peripatetics

During the last few decades, a small but growing number of field studies undertaken by a number of social scientists (see Barth 1961, Misra 1975, 1977, Misra & Malhotra 1982, Misra & Prabhakar 2011, Rao 1987, Rao & Casimir 2003, Berland 1982, Berland & Salo 1986, Berland & Rao 2004, just to name a few) not only have brought the much needed attention to the role and status of peripatetics in the larger social system but also have brought awareness about highly distinctive life situation, cultural adaptation, and social forms represented by peripatetics. These studies show the presence of peripatetics specialists throughout the social fabric of Africa, Asia, Europe and America. Berland and Salo observed 'recent documentation has shown that every major North American city has been host for anywhere from six to a dozen of peripatetic groups on a regular basis for a century or more' (1986: 2). In a country like India they have been in existence for over thousands of years (Misra & Misra 1982: 1-14, Berland & Rao 2004: 2-3). Rao and Casimir write that South Asia has the world's largest nomadic population. Nowhere else is there a variety of people systematically herded such as bovines, equines, camels, sheep, goats, pigs, ducks,

guinea-fowls nor is the diversity of peripatetic professions to be matched (2003: 1). They also argue that Nomadism is resilient and is a rational response to a variety of ecological, economic, political and social circumstances (ibid: 3).

The persistence and pervasive presence of the peripatetics throughout history raises several questions. The most important being though they have been performing a variety of roles in the overall social system since ancient times why they continue to be strangers to the settled populations? Before I attempt to answer this question, let me briefly state some characteristic features of these populations which are based on the studies of the scholars on peripatetic way of life.

1. Their presence has been noted all over world.
2. They are flexible and adapt different strategies to provide goods and services that are inaccessible to the local populations.
3. Their multi-resource economic activities compliment rather than compete with traders, pastoral, peasant or even industrial production.
4. Travelling is a condition of their livelihood, but its duration, frequency and mode has a lot of variety.
5. They tend to exploit socio-cultural-economic niche and may also combine with exploitation of natural niche.
6. All human settlements are potential opportunities to them. They devise variety of ways to gain access to them.

7. They develop appropriate skills to gain acceptance to the settled population.
8. Freedom, flexibility and resourcefulness are their special features.
9. They are generally multi-lingual but have a dialect of their own for intra-group communication.
10. Though the members of a group may remain dispersed in wide area for short or long period, they have fairly good idea about the movement of each section of their group and keep in touch with each other. In other words they are not a lost people. They maintain their group identity.
11. The movement of the peripatetics is not haphazard, they are well directed. If the two groups have the same occupation, then each group tends to operate in a different territory.
12. All peripatetics identify themselves with some area as their 'home' base.
13. They are endogamous. In traditional rural society of India each group is treated as a caste. Restrictions of inter-dining and inter-marriages are imposed on them, and that is because their status is ambiguous, being strangers.
14. Generally every peripatetic group has a council of their own. Almost all decision pertaining to their domestic, social, economic life and about their movement is negotiated in the council. Intervention of secular forces like police and judiciary are not appreciated by them. The intervention of these forces however have made dent in the authority of their council and thereby the solidarity of the communities have been weakened to some extent.
15. The settled population have some vague perceptions about them, such as 'they are always on move; they have 'no base', 'people from hills' etc.

Around the time Bose made his observations on mobile population, others studying villages in India, began to take note of the peripatetics visiting villages. Mckim Marriot during the study of a village in Uttar Pradesh noted 'during one period of three months, I counted forty five different specialists coming to Krishnagarhi from outside to provide goods and services; probably there were many more whom I did not count' (1955: 179).

In June 1967, I undertook a quick tour of certain parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to collect some preliminary information about the peripatetic communities visiting the villages. I moved by a jeep, and mostly remained on main roads. Altogether I met 40 different peripatetic groups. I met them on the roadsides, on move or in camps near the villages and towns. They camped beneath a tree, under a cloth tent, temporary huts or just in open. They transported their baggage by horses, donkeys, cows, bullocks, bullock carts, trains, buses or as head loads. Some moved throughout the year, others moved only in a part of the year. It was noted that frequency of their movement was more during the harvest season. They engaged themselves in a variety of occupations such as hunting, trapping and fishing; crafts such as umbrella repairing, polishing and scrapping of horns of cattle, rope and mat making, black smithy; they did many

other skilled jobs such as bull and snake displaying, recitation of mythological stories, singing and staging dramas, acrobating, displaying deities, practicing herbal medicine, veterinary, forecasting, money lending and various forms of begging; cattle rearing; trading such as selling perfumes, spices, aluminum vessels. Most of them did multiple occupations. Apart from those who were actually met, enquiries in 12 villages in that region of Karnataka and Andhra revealed names of eighty eight different peripatetic groups having different occupations (Misra 1970: 151-93). Another study conducted by me at Tarikere (District Shimoga, Karnataka) where a weekly market is held more than 200 groups of peripatetics were contacted in a study of three months (Misra 1972). The sporadic studies indicate that peripatetics have existed through history and widely found in different parts of the country. However, they have never been systematically counted and therefore it is difficult to say that how many peripatetic groups are there and what is their total population? Any estimate of their population would be a guess work. However, it should also be stated that estimation of their population is problematic because (i) no systematic census of these population has ever been undertaken (ii) there is much room for confusion about the names of the communities (iii) flexible nature of the communities and (iv) some of the peripatetics in the past were listed as criminal communities.

Howsoever widespread they may have been the peripatetics continue to suffer with the prejudices of sedentary population. They tend to cater to the needs of the poorer and unlettered sections of Indian population. They are overlooked and marginalized population. Their activities however, were closely linked with the social cultural and economic life of the sedentary people; India has a long and continuous history. Its traditions have evolved through interaction between people of diverse cultures, language and practices. Its classical traditions have grown through interaction with folk traditions. Items of folk practices were refined and systematized and adopted as classical; items from classical practice were often adopted by the folk in their language and culture. One of the reasons of remarkable continuity one finds in Indian tradition is owing to back and forth interaction between classical and folk levels. The continuity was supported by highly decentralized and diversified pattern of life. Variety in all aspects of life – culture, language, diet, rituals, art, dance, drama, music and use of natural resources, has been one of the characteristic features of the Indian society. Therefore it will be perfectly justified to recognize that peripatetics have been one of the links in maintenance of decentralized and diversified framework of the Indian society and this is best seen in the context of Indian villages where bulk of the Indian population continue to live.

Decentralized model

Village population in India was composed of a number of caste/communities (hereafter referred to as '*jati*'). The mode of production was basically localized and catered to a region. Each *jati* had its own hereditary occupation, culture and even dialect. Each *jati* was autonomous and regulated its own internal affairs yet there was a great degree of social and economic interdependence between *jatis*. Inter *jati* affairs were regulated by village council. The system was well protected against competition and encroachment from outsiders. The system though undoubtedly coercive with regard to *jatis* lower in status provided some security. The most important thing in this respect was the pride people had in their traditional occupations. They were considered specialists of their craft/service they offered to others. In turn they were recognized and customarily rewarded on various ritual and festival occasions. The goods and services were distributed through customary *jajmani* relationship between different *jatis* in the villages. What was not available in the villages was obtained from weekly markets, regular markets in towns, periodical fairs, pilgrimage and centers of excellence, and goods of forest were provided by the forest dwellers. Whatever goods and services could not be obtained through these sources was provided by peripatetics. Each *jati* had its

own traditions and it jealously guarded its identity. There was enough scope for peripatetics to find their niche in the decentralized hierarchic caste system. Variety in life-styles of different *jatis* sustained the peripatetics that is, if one group served one cluster of *jatis*, the other focused at another cluster. For example, there were some peripatetics who served none other than the lowest *jatis*. This aspect is of some significance in understanding the dynamics the caste system. That is even the lowest *jati* had some stake in the hierarchical *jati* system. As far as peripatetics are concerned, serving the lower castes becomes a resource for them. They earn their livelihood and at the same time it does not hurt them as they are not exactly part of the system. They are impervious to stigma. They are 'betwixt – and – in between people'; they are insiders as well as outsiders. Pollution they experience by serving lower casts does not matter to them, as they are strangers. Pressure on the resources was minimized because each *jati* had its own taboos and preferences in various aspects of life. In other words, peripatetics were one of those who facilitated the maintenance of decentralized and diversified model (Malhotra and Gadgil 1998: 408). Different castes and communities had a variety of preferences for their diet, dress, shelter, in short in their way of life. Their traditional technologies making use of local resources also differed significantly (See Bose 1961).

On account of various factors the diversified pattern of living is changing very fast in modern India. The process of homogenization and standardization is sweeping through the country. 'Mainstreaming', 'undermining orality' and disregarding indigenous knowledge are order of the day. Obviously, all these developments are also increasing competition among communities for the resources. Vast areas of land which were lying either as a common land or 'waste' or marginally used have been reclaimed for cultivation of commercial crops released for industry or incorporated in urban development or just fenced. Thus in a nutshell there is less and less room for movement and camping for peripatetics and rural masses have very little to spare for peripatetics particularly grains. The question arises that under these very adverse circumstances, what is the future of the peripatetics?

Another perspective: customary strangers

Though there has been persistent and pervasive presence of the peripatetics throughout history they have also been stranger to the settled population. Berland and Rao (2004) in one of their publications have provided a new perspective on the peripatetics by referring them as customary strangers. By designating them so, they believe that our understanding of the position of peripatetics may get broadened.

While the peripatetics keep themselves well informed about the settled people, their histories, mythologies, their specific occupations, as well as their social and economic status, the sedentary people hardly know anything about them except that they supply certain services and goods during specific seasons of the year and keep on moving. From where they come and where do they go neither the sedentary people know or care to know. For them they are strangers or customary strangers as Berland and Rao have preferred to call them. 'Given the pervasiveness and historical perdurability of peripatetic people they may be profitably considered as persistent cultural system within the plural societies' (ibid: 3), this observation is very important. In other words, a stranger is not a stranger as is normally understood. The stranger is not that 'wanderer' who comes today and goes tomorrow – the potential wanderer, so to speak who, although he goes no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a certain spatial circle – within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries – but the position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that is not, and cannot be indigenous to it (Simmel, in Levine 1971: 143).

Peripatetics, as discussed earlier fulfill certain needs of the sedentary society. As a part of their strategy they do not involve themselves in the power game of the sedentary society and therefore they pose no threat to them. As they are 'outsiders', they do not in any way involve in identity competition in *jati* conscious society of India which in a way fully supports their flexibility and resourcefulness. These qualities are so very important for maintaining their stranger status. What they do is trade. The quality of a trader emphasizes a kind of strangeness. The stranger in a trader points towards a relationship, 'a specific form of interaction' (Simmel, in Levine 1971: 143-44) which at once points towards distance and temporary nearness, indifference and at best spot involvement. **It is the stranger who finds what is familiar to the group. Peripatetic's niche is human beings.** The significance of the qualities the peripatetics have developed to exploit the human niche becomes understandable. Their resilience, flexibility, resourcefulness, ability to take risks, a dash of adventurism, plus immense capacity to innovate, and develop appropriate skills, sharp eyes to spot gaps in the supply of goods and services and entrepreneurial acumen enable them to be the provider of those goods and services. These qualities work well as long as they remain stranger, do not get involved in power jostling or cling to a status identity or do not get involved in any kind of indirect reciprocity. But

when the cloak of strangeness begins to slip and they become more familiar, their qualities of being flexible, resourceful etc., also start diminishing proportionately and they begin to sedentarize. They begin to move away from asymmetrical relationship of power. These aspects of peripatetics appear to be useful in understanding the present situation of the hawkers in modern urban India which is growing up by the day (Misra 2010: 209-12).

All around profound social, economic, political and material changes are taking place in India which is significantly changing the social fabric, including the physical environment and values.

While the spread of visual media, many of the entertaining and performing peripatetics have lost their trade. Their role as communicants has almost extinguished. Mechanization of agriculture, availability of cheap industrial products, changes in the environment has made a serious dent on the availability of raw materials which have adversely affected the life of artisan peripatetics. Deforestation and enactment of various laws to protect environment have made serious impact on the life of those communities who were trapping a variety of animals. Therefore the question arises as to how the peripatetics are coping up with all these changes? Historically speaking, they have been facing numerous challenges over time but the present one is

certainly very different. As indicated earlier, there are serious impediments regarding their movement and camping. The law requires like everybody else they also need to have identity cards. How to remain stranger and hold identity card? The welfare agencies can reach them only if they settle down. The dominant discourse is in favor of sedentization. Indeed majority of them have either settled down, maintain a kind of semi-peripatetic status, some, however, still manage and maneuver their peripatetic skills and are able to locate gaps in the supply of goods and services even in the fast changing environment. This would not have been possible 'without flexibility in cognitive processes as much as in their patterns of social structure and organization' (Berland and Rao 2004: 22) and also other qualities such as acute sense of observation, advanced knowledge, and ability to foresee and adopt³.

In modern India, an emerging class of people occupying the urban spaces, dealing in a variety of goods and services, which are popularly called as hawkers but they are also looked down upon with disdain and despise. Like the peripatetics, they remain impervious to such valuation. In popular perception, the spaces they occupy are unauthorized and the trades they indulge in are illegal. They are resilient resourceful, and have tremendous entrepreneurial skills. They

have keen eyes in locating the gaps in supply system of goods and services and also in locating strategic places to operate their trade. They develop a variety of contraptions so that they remain flexible and are not accused of permanently occupying the spaces, though they may everyday return to the same spaces. They may be identified with the trade they peddle but beyond that they are strangers to the client community. They are insiders as they peddle in goods and services required by urban dwellers conveniently and at cheaper rates. They may adopt local dialect, dress and manners but for all other purposes they are outsiders and strangers. They take risks and of course they have a sense of adventure and yet keep themselves inconspicuous, and keep themselves aloof from the power game. They operate in a small scale. The moment they begin to expand, they tend to lose their status as outsider and stranger. In spite of all odds, they are patronized and keep themselves afloat and reach out to their clients by adopting a variety of strategies, including staggering their timings for peddling their goods and services depending upon the needs of their clients so much so that some of them are nocturnal and some begin to operate before the day breaks. Like the peripatetics, they too have been overlooked by social scientists and the establishment routinely tends to declare them as unwelcome. Interestingly, a hoard of secondary workers has emerged to serve the hawkers in a variety of ways. The

avalanche in urban areas can be correlated to massive migration of peasants from rural areas. Agriculture is no more a viable option for poor and marginal farmers. Some of them have adopted the strategies of the peripatetics. They do not participate in identity politics and also do not jostle for power. Considering their pervasiveness throughout the long history of humankind, the peripatetics are 'persistent cultural system within plural societies'. In spite of their being as 'persistent cultural system' they remain outsiders and strangers to the sedentary society and remain impervious to the disdain and low status given to them. They scrupulously and judiciously avoid participating in any kind of power struggle and maneuver their way around. They in a way point towards 'a specific form of interaction' and have created space for themselves through the peripatetic strategies and are visible as hawkers in modern urban spaces and as vendors in moving trains. It is a process of peripatetization. They open an interesting and challenging window for the social scientists to explore the spaces in urban areas targeted by peripatetics.

Postscript

At the time of writing this paper an interesting development is taking place in Mysore city. Like any other urban centre in India, the main foot paths are often occupied by a variety of vendors. In course

of time objection to their occupying public spaces begins to gain momentum. Then all of a sudden like a cloud burst the city authorities wake up, declare that these vendors as menace, causing traffic problems, health issues etc., and they are ejected out. For months things remain quiet and slowly the vendors reappear at the same places from where they had been earlier ejected out – persistent cultural system within plural society. Then again the old scene is repeated. This has been going on for many decades. This time some citizens and NGOs took up their cause, organized some political meetings etc., and eventually some agreement has reached to demarcate vendor's zone in different parts of the city. At the time of writing, it has been suggested that the vendors be issued identity cards. At this stage the scheme is restricted to the food vendors only and is being done in the name of providing clean and nutritious food to the citizens. Therefore, it has also been suggested that they be graded in hierarchy. They will have identity cards and graded status which certainly is contrary to their being stranger, flexible and outsider. It will be interesting to watch what happens further.

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End Notes

¹ IGNCA had initiated a national project on variety of Indian villages under the leadership of Professor B.N. Saraswati

² This is now a well known fact that during the colonial rule, owing to their economic policies and promotion of the cultivation of cash crops a large number of peasants and artisans became unemployed and were left with no option but to become peripatetic.

³ In the local trains in Mumbai, there are ladies selling pre-cut vegetables chopped onions, ginger, garlic and chapatti dough balls to lady customers.

Those who have been travelling in trains in Northeast India know that a variety of household durables are sold on moving trains by mobile hawkers marveling their ingenuity and risk in moving from one compartment of another with heavy loads on their shoulders and braving all the restrictions.