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COMPLEXITIES OF GATEKEEPING IN DELHI: A REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT

Abstract

The paper provides a reflexive account of the gatekeeping experience, observed during a field study of an elite neighbourhood in Delhi. Access was highly controlled during the research on agency formation between domestic workers and employers in their daily interactions. This paper discusses how residents, welfare bodies, and institutional forces are the in/voluntary gatekeepers to fortify the elite privileges. The researcher had to rely more on close observations than on respondents' response to understand the complexities of employer-employee negotiations.

Keywords: *Gatekeeping, gatekeepers, domestic workers, employers, exclusionary practices*

Introduction

The advent of COVID-19 pandemic led qualitative researchers to review and re-invent methodological tools of field research. Following ethnography during those uncertain times, characterised by doubts and anxiety over social distancing, was immensely challenging. Ethnography, as usually understood, involves a researcher living, and embedding oneself with a community/group to understand their life-patterns, and culture (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:1), was almost impossible when people were afraid of one another. In order to 'live with the new normal', newer ways of ethnography had to be experimented. The best alternative considered was to be a 'digitalised ethnography' (Ghosh 2020) or online-based research. Thus, this research also followed the suit. As the objective of this research was to understand the complexities of agency formation amongst domestic workers and their female employers through interpersonal negotiations in an elite neighbourhood of Delhi, the telephonic interview was considered the best possible methodological device for that time.

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The researcher tries to do a narrative content analysis (Wiles, Rosenberg, & Kearns 2005) by understanding and interpreting the embedded meanings and knowledge produced by the field. Thus, this paper focuses on a reflexive account of the gatekeeping constraints and complexities; also brings out the experience of 'civilised' (Arya & Matt 2021) data collection techniques through virtual platforms. The field study, a part of the researcher's doctoral work, was conducted in two different periods: during the peak of Covid-19 in 2020; and during 2022, when the rules on social distancing, and lockdowns were relaxed. During the second period, interviews were face-to-face which throws light on the restraints imposed on the gatekeepers/residents and the gated/researcher during the data collection process.

Gatekeeping refers to access constraints, control over information, surveillance, and simple measures of vigilance over the movement of outsiders (Kaur & Venkataraman 2021); (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). Gatekeeping measures include 'selection, addition, withholding, display, channelling, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localisation, integration, disregard, and deletion of information' (Barzilai-Nahon 2008: 1496). Gatekeeping also involves an attempt to mislead the researcher about the social reality. The intuitive nature of qualitative research helps to examine the complexities better. Structural aspects have to be observed subtly.

In the context of this research, gatekeeping implies apprehensions of employers and workers in interacting with an 'outsider', peculiar exclusionary practices of this neighbourhood, and how the residents perceive the researcher as a threat (Venkataraman 2014). Controlling was largely tried through unconscious behaviour patterns of the residents, restricted entry to public areas, strict parking regimes, unwillingness to participate, and in/sensitivity towards the research. Moreover, the law enforcement bodies also exercise their institutional powers through systemic knowledge control, which will be discussed in this paper.

While the normative ideals of research encourage the researcher to dig deeper, go   beyond the visible surfaces of social realities, obviously the gatekeeping mechanisms discourage all these attempts. This can be observed across all labour relations in Manik Nagar (pseudonym), an elite neighbourhood in Delhi, nestled along social class positions and patriarchal structures. Gatekeeping here was to hide the negative nature of human agency subtly. In this instance, it was a mounting challenge to go beyond beautifully presented social realities. The researcher was observant of the in/direct mechanisms of gatekeeping.

Furthermore, without showing excessive inquisitiveness, it became necessary to the researcher to be vigilant about surroundings. Consequently, the lives of Manik Nagar and the adjacent *basti* (domestic workers' settlement) became the refuge of the researcher for a length of time. The discourse analyses

from these settlements added contextual flavours to document the complexities of agency formation.

Elite neighbourhood as a field site

Manik Nagar is one of the prominent elite neighbourhoods in Delhi. It is not only an upscale residential area, but also has a significant diplomatic settlement. During the middle of the twentieth century, Manik Nagar was primarily a retired central government officers' colony. During those days, the houses had a ground and first floor with garden views. The government prescribed a boundary of three feet, making it easier for people to socialise, and know their neighbours. In the 1990s, the government allowed the construction of a second floor which gave entry to private builders to reconstruct these buildings. They became freehold properties from a leasehold of the 60s, allowing the owners to sell and rent one or more floors to other non-government employees. Gradually, the owners also allowed builders to demolish the building to make bigger houses, and sell some of the space to others; they were sold at an exorbitant rate. The sizes of the plot in this area usually ranged from 200 to around 1200 square yards. The freehold properties attracted higher demand due to overpopulated neighborhood. Later some of the older houses were converted into embassies and diplomatic enclaves. The paradigm changes at the spatial level led to a shift in social relations. Thus, the area underwent tremendous gentrification due to the infiltration of the *nouveau riche*.

This restructuring was largely pushed by family dynamics: the presence of multiple heirs in a family which gave rise to many claimants. They were compelled to restructure their space. Now most of their heirs are settled abroad, but some stay put. However, there is also a little group who did not opt for restructuring, continue to live in the old structure; and profess to their old values and lifestyles. Thus Manik Nagar's idiosyncrasy is manifested in terms of economic disparity between those who serve and those served; at the same time the elegance of the elite household is ironically maintained by domestic staff (domestic help is called in sophisticated parlance); thus this place presents a perfect case to study agency formation.

Each block of Manik Nagar today boasts of a local market, comprising of high-end grocery stores, local boutiques, and other high multi-chain stores for daily essentials. The markets are also famous for their fine dining restaurants, coffee shops, top-notch cocktail clubs, fancy lounges, speakeasy bars, and high-rated Italian diners. Each block has many parks; they provide a daily recreational spot to kids and adults. It is not only very green, and clean, but is also well-planned and well-structured. The roads are wide, which provide enough parking space to residents. Thus it is a mix of multi-storied building, consisting of three-four floors, and diplomatic enclaves.

Many residents of Manik Nagar own full buildings, which are spread around many acres; and have a private parking space and a front-facing lawn. The newer residents with smaller families also own specific floor(s) in a particular building, thus the whole building work as a collection of apartments, floor wise. Each building has at least one or two security guards, who are usually armed. Every lane has its common security guard, making the whole neighbourhood tightly secured, and a 'safe' place to live.

Apart from the diplomatic residents and retired officers, another dominant group   who usually own houses are well-renowned businessmen, top builders, jewelers, hoteliers, and industrialists. It is not surprising to spot high-end luxury cars and motorbikes. It is a very common phenomenon that the number of luxury cars in one household might be more than that of the number of the members, residing in that household. Hence, every household is also likely to have at least one driver for the family, immaculately dressed in 'safari suits' (bush jacket and trousers). These drivers usually drive their 'madams' for salon sessions, or luncheons with friends. In addition, some households keep specific drivers for their kids to be picked up and dropped off to school, swim, and other recreational places with friends. This fleet of drivers and security guards fortify the area from any potential trespassers. They usually sit in a well-constructed huts at the entrance of a building, and keep track of every visitor's timings and personal details.

After spending a few months of fieldwork in this area, the researcher observed that it was possibly one of the quietest areas in Delhi as there was no honking, shrill calling of street vendors, and barking of stray dogs; otherwise, a common feature in other localities of Delhi. Residents usually keep to themselves. They prefer buying groceries from megastores, rather than from local vegetable hawkers. Since these residents do not come out for everyday purchases from street vendors; neighbours fulfil their need of social interaction by other means. The ladies usually chat with their friends during mall visits or grocery shopping. While the interaction between inhabitants may be negligible, the fieldwork experience in this neighbourhood underline how residents as an elite community reinforce exclusionary mechanisms to control the entry of a researcher/outsider, despite sharing similar class positionality.

Complexities of Gatekeeping

Navigating an elite colony presents immense challenges. The narrative analysis of this research is rooted in a snowballing technique. During the first part of the field study, telephonic interactions required access to contact information of potential respondents, virtually. For this purpose, the presence of facilitators, whom the researcher already knew, aided this research by circulating a message. The intermediary briefed the objectives of the research, and the professional background of the researcher to various WhatsApp groups: welfare associations, ladies' clubs, neighbour groups, and among other friend

circles. While the researcher crafted the message to be circulated, the facilitator held control over this information. The facilitator also dispelled the potential respondents' misgivings about the research and the researcher. The researcher was never allowed to participate in that group discussion; even when some of the respondents wanted more details about the project, the facilitators solely controlled the communication. On the way to thicker interactions, the researcher had to reckon with the first gatekeeper, in the form of facilitators. This also highlights how immense role they play as gatekeepers of social groups, in the hope of safeguarding their neighbourhood against any possible threat from an 'outsider'. The final authority to shortlist participants depended on facilitator's judgment about a resident and the researcher.

During the telephonic interviews, employers exercised their authority over the researcher and domestic workers. Most of the time, employers would not share the contact details of their workers to avoid the communication between them and the researcher after working hours in private. Some others offered to let the researcher speak to their workers over employer's phone, with strict time limits, which impeded free-wheeling conversation. As a result, the workers' narratives were filtered and controlled by their employers.

The researcher also realised that employer often overheard the conversation between worker and the researcher, which made them anxious about sharing any information, and answering questions without possible hesitation; and they were fearful of being rebuked by the employer. These were examples of negative agency, exercised by employers. Negative agency in the domestic work arrangement is defined as the misuse of employers' agency towards their workers, which affects the labour relationships in daily negotiations. As a theoretical framework, it emphasises the dysfunctionalities of individual agency when it un/consciously 'overrides' (Kabeer 1999) and cripples the agency freedoms (Sen 1999) of another individual. In this understanding, employers' agency in terms of being gatekeepers, manipulated and constrained workers' freedom of choice, decisions and free will. As a result, employers' agency reinforced structural constraints on workers in domestic work arrangements.

When the field site partially opened up for face-to-face interview, as the Covid-19 rules of social distancing were relaxed; certain preconceived notions with which the researcher tried to access this field, was justified, and brought in this paper. In terms of face value, Manik Nagar is always understood as a very posh and lavish colony. Hence, the researcher had inhibitions and apprehensions about approaching the rich propertied class with their exquisite tastes, behaviour and dispositions. Surprisingly, after spending a few weeks in this colony, the researcher realised inconsistencies and contradictions that defined its demographics and social fabric. When a potential respondent was apprised of the objective of this research, the researcher was faced with varied comments. While some asked, 'Why are you so interested in the lives of maids?';

'What will you gain out of this research'; 'Couldn't you find a better prospect for your career given your socio-economic privilege?' Getting past these sort of respondents was challenging. This kind of encounter led to moments of self-doubt; then after initial hiccups, these comments encouraged the researcher to observe even more, and understand the relationship dynamics between employers and their workers. There were also others who were responsive to requests, and supportive by saying, 'Ask me everything' or 'What an interesting research topic'.

Assimilation and acceptance among respondents were the major gatekeeping concerns for a researcher. It is imperative for both the researcher and a respondent to feel one of a kind to achieve a healthy interactive session. While the researcher prepared a checklist of the characteristics and background information of potential respondents; they indirectly preferred the researcher on certain factors such as dress, behaviour, honesty, and various other class credentials. Respondents in this research belonged to two extreme groups. Class privilege enabled the researcher to socialise with the elite easily. While at the same time, the investigator convinced people with lower incomes that their concerns matter as well, and that their experiences are as important for research. Thus, the researcher was very cautious not to intimidate the lower end respondents.

Due to busy lifestyles, the respondents were usually indifferent and wary of a random interviewer in the beginning. Many random attempts for interview were directly turned down over a message, or were politely declined by the gatekeepers in the form of security guards, who would say, *'Madam ghar par nahi hai'* (madam is not at home). The researcher's presence was seen with suspicion, and disturbing due to strict controlling measures against outsiders. This was a serious concern for the researcher, as in such a case, it was only possible to fix shorter interviews with the elite respondents.

Adapting to 'right' dressing code, accent, and attitude was necessary. These 'aesthetic dispositions' (Bourdieu 1987) reinforce perceptions, and class-laden values towards individuals. The researcher had to self-fashion (Greenblatt 2012) as 'one of those ladies' to confide to the researcher. Thus, a proper alignment with the respondents in terms of language, behaviour, and dressing pattern seemed important in order to gain confidence and avail full potential of the opportunity. The ladies usually avoided welcoming the researcher into their homes, and preferred to talk over exquisite luncheons, comprising of varieties of sushi or fancy cocktails. Only with access to common friends, and social spaces such as the club or nearby cafes, an interview becomes possible.

The interviews with workers were conducted mostly in the household of their employers, usually with the looming presence and distrustful glances of their employers. After a few minutes of the interview, the anxious employer came to inspect, or stroll around the room; or if nothing else, they would offer

water/ food to the researcher. Few asked the researcher to be present during workers' working hours from the very beginning. This seems to be on two counts: the researcher might extract some unpalatable information from a domestic help, or the latter might feel emboldened to show laxity in the work.

Another difficulty experienced by the researcher was respondent's reluctance about recording of interviews. In such cases, the researcher had to find a solitary place after the interaction for documentation of discussions and reflections. While the employers were eager to protect their privacy, the workers, too, hesitated when it came to recording their interviews. It was probably due to their fear about any potential rebuke from employers; and lack of understanding about the ethical code of conduct, followed in the research to protect the privacy and credentials. To add to this was the constant dilemma the researcher faced about how to maintain ethical protocols of the research by sharing professional and personal information with respondents. Sharing personal information with respondents largely assuage their misgivings about the research and comfort them to share their relatable everyday experiences, at the same time the researcher has to be constantly striving to maintain detachment

The researcher recalls an incident which highlights the level of caution and mistrust exercised by residents against outsiders. One afternoon when the researcher was interviewing a lady in her garden, a man was heard shouting at my driver for parking the car at the rear of that person's house. As the researcher rushed out to apologise to the man for probably offending him; soon the realization dawned on both sides that the interview was conducted with his wife just the previous afternoon. The man felt guilty for not only showing a bad example of a neighbour to the researcher, but also being rude and unfriendly. This is just an illustration to bring out that the feeling of being constantly monitored was very deep.

Another interesting aspect that makes Manik Nagar peculiar is its rules and regulations concerning the garden in each block. Outsiders can find the parks and gardens' rules and regulations as exclusionary. The parks are supposed to be public property, maintained by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). However, some wealthy residents have reportedly paid the authorities to maintain   control, and supervise the parks privately as they feel that the MCD's   maintenance is not up to the mark. In this manner, they not only stake ownership of these parks, but also lock them; and keep the keys with them. They are responsible for deciding rules and regulations about who and what is allowed in the park or not. They refuse people from other blocks of Manik Nagar from entering, and ask them to use their nearby park. One such park is also apprehensive of the entry of children who study at a government school, nearby. As a result, it is a routine affair for the park attendants to stop children from playing and running around as they fear that they might destroy their plants.

The unspoken exclusionary practices also made it inconvenient for the researcher to talk to the part-time workers in these parks as they commuted from one household to another for work. It is usually common to find domestic workers and daily labourers strolling, taking a nap, having lunch or chatting with their friends in parks in regular middle-class localities of Delhi. The strict controlling measures relating to public places of Manik Nagar make it an exclusive neighbourhood. This throws light on the class-laden attitudes and surveillance of the residents towards outsiders. Since the research also comprises interviews with workers, it becomes essential to interrogate the gatekeeping challenges in their *basti*, which will be discussed in the following section.

Navigating the *Basti*

As mentioned earlier, meeting with workers was always controlled by their employers. However, some part-time domestic help welcomed the researcher in their *basti* after work hours. Two middle-aged female help seemed excited to introduce the researcher to their settlement. 'We will show you around'; 'we will introduce you to all our friends'; 'you will be safe with us', they said. While the researcher visited the *basti* with them, she was offered to sit on a chair under a tree while other women sat on the ground. The hierarchy and visual differences between the researcher and the helps seemed to be based not only on class credentials but also on account of the power perceived by them about the former as a 'researcher'. The researcher felt uncomfortable with this seating arrangement, she preferred to sit closer to them. As they invited their fellow workers, convincing them that a 'survey' was being conducted, soon a large group of women gathered, hoping to get a solution of the water crisis. While some women seemed overtly enthusiastic about sharing their experiences in domestic work; some preferred not to share any experience. 'What if you tell my madam about what I share with you? She will ask me to quit the job, and my children will starve', remarked one woman who was the sole breadwinner of her family.

The male gatekeepers further complicated the entry. As the researcher and her women facilitators walked the by-lanes of the *basti,* going from one house to another; they constantly shielded the researcher. One of the facilitators said, 'Ours' is the most unsafe area, as even an old woman could be easily harassed or raped by drunk and unemployed men in the area. The researcher was also constantly followed by a bunch of men on bikes, and the fear of being robbed or harassed was constantly felt due to intimidating male gaze. Few of the older women in the *basti* mistook the researcher as a government employee who might help them with their difficulties. They also walked around with the researcher placing their demands, like easing the withdrawal of pensions, increase in the ration, opening bank accounts or helping them find more work. Still others considered the researcher as a 'survey

madam', and were disappointed to know that the interviews were only on domestic work conditions. Hence, the flow of interactions was also filtered in the worker's settlement, due to their fears and misconceptions.

Few older women who ceased to be domestic workers anymore, exercised their discretion over the choice of respondents. They would decide whom the researcher should meet, and who, they think, might narrate stories of lies. Most of the women they wanted the researcher to interview, were their friends or family members. They would not let the researcher exercise discretion in choosing participants. Even if interaction began, the interviewer's view would be interrupted. Also, due to prevalence of caste and class distinctions amongst the people of *basti,* the facilitators, who usually belong to the upper caste, forbade the researcher from accessing the blocks of the *jamadaars* (toilet cleaners) and other lower caste populations from Bihar.

The *basti* was divided into blocks based on ethnicity, and caste of the residents, people were from Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar, belonging to Muslim, South Indians, upper caste and *jamadaars*. 'Madam, it will not be safe for you to visit jamadaars and the lower caste', the facilitator remarked. The facilitator also controlled knowledge by opening gates of the *basti* for the researcher on the basis of their perception of caste structures, and also to their kith and kin. The workers introduced to the researcher were mainly friends, acquaintances and relatives of the facilitator. Facilitators undertook the liberty of selecting the respondents. When the researcher proposed to interview respondents through snowballing, the facilitator would remark, *'Woh nahi baat karegi'* (she will not talk to you) or *'Wo koi kaam ki nahi hai'* (she is of no use). As it would have been difficult for the researcher to access the *basti* on her own given the identity: upper/class/female; she could not go against the suggestions and information provided by facilitators. At the same time, the facilitators guarded the researcher, from the time they being picked from their employer's house till sending off in the car; they carefully executed the exercise. Despite the researcher's gratefulness towards these facilitators for helping to reach otherwise inaccessible field site; somehow it seemed that most of the information was manipulated and controlled by facilitators' personal beliefs and choices.

This is in line with that knowledge is situated and reproduced through social actors like the gatekeepers (Mullings 1999) who occupy higher rungs of social hierarchy. As a result, the knowledge and information gained by the researcher are partial (Mullings 1999) and inadequate not only because of various social class identities but also because of the constraints of those who control the narrative in various ways.

Bureaucratic gates

The initial intention of this research was to substantiate the theoretical

framework of negative agency by analysing data sourced from the police, in the form of FIR and charge sheets. The data from the Records and Research Department of Forces would have provided a solid empirical edge to this research which aims to deepen the understanding of agency formation. However, the bureaucratic channels presented extreme access constraints to the researcher. Nevertheless, the researcher pursued the authorities to find credible data. It was assumed that contacting the senior levels of the police would help in accessing this data. One of the researcher's colleagues from the university, a long-standing civil servant, helped the researcher to fix   the meeting with a top-level police officer within a wait of half a month. The researcher met the officer with the hope that he would consent to academic requests. To pursue this, the researcher went to meet the officer with a thorough background check: the idea was very much appealing to meet a well-educated and an honourable member of the police force. Little did the researcher expect that even a responsible person, officiating an important department, is going to be far from being punctual. The wait was for three hours to meet the secretary to the officer. Though it must be mentioned that the ambience was very comfortable as the meeting hall was fully air-conditioned, well-equipped and beautifully constructed, this was far from being shabby and rickety, as is generally portrayed. The researcher was served two cups of coffee within three hours, and was offered to pass her time, looking at magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Outlook* and *India Today*.

The three-hour wait finally ended when the researcher was escorted to the secretary's cabin. The secretary was very welcoming with   a courteous smile. He was happy to know the researcher's educational background and family history. 'It is my daughter's dream to study the course you are pursuing, and it is such a pleasure to meet you', his enthusing words. He later enquired about the researcher's primary motive for meeting the senior officer. As the secretary was told that the meeting was to seek the officer's permission to access records, to permit to interact with a few police officers working in the field area, and also to ask him a few questions relating to that elite neighbourhood; the secretary seemed puzzled. He suggested that these are not serious concerns where the researcher need to meet his boss as they are basic issues where the secretary could be helpful. He remarked, 'Your request is very small, and I can easily help you access records, and you should not worry'. As he asked me to wait while he went to get the password details from his senior, he also instructed a peon to care for the researcher while waiting. The researcher waited patiently another hour until the secretary returned with a gloomy face, with the news that a formal procedure was required to gain access online database. The researcher had to then convince three other junior police officers about the rationale of the research, but it all seemed futile.

Finally, while deciding to walk out of the station, the secretary informed

(after five hours), that the senior officer would like to meet the researcher. Entering into the cabin, the researcher was in awe of its grandeur and the officious nature of the office, who had three other secretaries, present in the same room to record this brief meeting. The officer said, 'I am so honoured to have a scholar visiting me, which has never been the case in my ten years of service'. Momentarily, the researcher was overwhelmed and thought the wait was worth it; further explained to him the nature of work, the rationale for data and how his positive response would expedite the research. In an assuring tone, he said that the permission could be obtained by sending an extensive email to the police headquarter, charting the research outline, objectives and how the police records are crucial in this endeavour. After leaving the cabin, the secretary took the researcher to a corner and said, 'do not worry, everything is possible in a country like ours,'. He gave his private number to the researcher and asked to be contacted after the two days. Meanwhile, he fetched the data.

This visit left the researcher with mixed bag of emotions. Since the researcher wanted to maintain the quality of the data; drafted an email to the police headquarters stating all the research purposes. Two months of waiting and frequent follow-ups with the secretary, and other officers through emails, the reply has not come yet. The last reply received from the secretary which stated, 'Madam, everything needs to be done through a channel, and you need to be patient'. The whole process made the researcher understand how the façade of politeness through personal conversations was a dumb power play.

This reflexive account highlights access restriction is done at very deep level by those who hold authority and 'professional certification' for safeguarding of 'knowledge' (Turkel 1990). In this light, Foucault's understanding of interdependence of power and knowledge (Foucault 1980) as knowledge embodies power in classifying and accumulating discursive data, and forms of communication, finds relevance in gatekeeping patterns. 'Discipline' is thus reinforced by restricting the movement of the 'outsiders' or researchers through regimentation by the local bodies (Foucault 1978). One of the objectives of controlling knowledge flow by the guardians of institutional structures is also to ascertain reciprocity factors (Broadhead & Rist 1976), such as the potential gains of the institution by allowing entry of the researcher to access 'highly classified information'.

Conclusion

This paper has brought out the experiences of gatekeeping at community level, and also at structural settings, that embody institutional authorities; they can restrain academic rigour and research endeavours (Broadhead & Rist 1976). The research has brought out how residents, welfare bodies, *Basti* settlement, and institutional forces function as gatekeepers who manipulate the knowledge exchange. At the same time, at some unconscious level it deepens the understanding of the nuances of social interactions; interactions can be made

possible owing to similar social, economic and political power as compatible with gatekeepers. Respondents' domestic spaces worked as units of social, economic and political control (Wheelock & Oughton 1996); and a sphere of unequal power dynamics between the gatekeeper/employer, gated/researcher and the subject/ worker. Gatekeeping is thus a respondent's control over the quality of data. Therefore, the role of observation, unstated words and unexpressed expressions play a bigger role in bringing the picture of the field alive.

Gatekeepers can be perceived as 'negative agents' towards research as they try to manipulate and override the agency of the researcher Gatekeeping strategies of the field also highlight the complexity of the agency negotiation between the researcher and a respondent. Respondents' instincts to fortify their privileges make them fearful of the entry of an 'outsider' into their unexposed mental and physical zone who might breach the safety of their family and the community. On the other hand, for a researcher, these access constraints thwart the academic objectives. In the field, politically correct answers need to be probed gently. Further intersectional complexities need to be navigated. As for an illustration, encounter with bureaucracy's power politics and artificial politeness, as mentioned above, affect the common people and academicians alike who seek to understand the intricacies of the system. These numerous aspects in gatekeeping have been navigated through the reflexive research process. The researcher did not let the in/voluntary manipulations by respondents in bringing the complexities out. Thus the rigour of research was maintained.

Disclaimer: All the details that may reveal the respondents' identity and the field have been anonymised.

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