

Boredom IN everyday life of urban youth in kathmandu

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Abstract

In this ethnographic study, I have explored the reason for youth roaming around Patan Durbar Square, one of the cultural heritages of Nepal listed under the UNESCO. The paper aims to show that youth roam around the cultural heritages like Patan Durbar Square in Nepal to escape their boredom in their everyday life. Roaming around usually is connoted with the purposeless wandering. However, in this paper I have used the term 'roaming around' to mean 'to wander around' because of some reason, if not with any purpose. I have established my argument to show that in a place like Patan Durbar Square youth roam around not always for fun or pleasure but to escape boredom, isolation and loneliness which are created by the hustle and bustle life of urban centers. Employing the everyday life theories, I explore the ways of living of youth especially observing their activities around the cultural heritages.

1. Introduction: Boredom in Everyday Life

Roaming around usually is to move about without purpose, plan or destination. Roaming around might be purposeless, without any plan or destination, however, there always seems to be reasons for roaming around. Roaming around for instance might be done for pleasure, to explore people, places because they seem exotic or it also might be for avoiding boredom or because of feeling lonely, isolated or excluded. In this sense, roaming around is something which is done without any purpose but having some purpose in it, both for a pleasure and to escape boredom. The former kind of roaming around is basically done for pleasure whereas the latter one which is to avoid boredom, isolation and loneliness is usually youngster in city.

Roaming around Durbar Square (Basantapur and Patan) during evening is not a new thing for youth in Kathmandu. This roaming around started since I first came to Kathmandu more than a decade ago. Unlike Basantapur Square Patan Durbar Square became more of a regular visit. I frequently routed the same way to my university. I find Patan Durbar Square less crowded, much cleaner and organized than the Basantapur Durbar Square.

People roam around Patan Durbar Square because the place carries historical significance and is listed in the UNESCO world heritage site. Roaming around Patan Durbar Square, one comes across a feast of beautiful temples, traditionally built houses, can enjoy foods from traditional Newari to contemporary English. The place is a perfect blend of traditional and modern cultures. Because of UNESCO's listing and its historical significance, it is one of the hubs for tourists' attraction. It only attracts foreigners (outsiders) but one can also see hundred thousand local visitors' visiting the place every day. Especially during the dusk, the place is jammed packed with visitors. From small children, adults to senior citizens, males-females etc. all seem to enjoy the serenity of the place alike.

People from different background, nationalities, age, sex etc. can be seen roaming around, talking to each other and enjoying the evening. However, a purposeful through observation shows people not only come for pleasure to enjoy the evening but

some people also come there to escape from their boredomness, isolation and loneliness. By comparing and observing different individuals and groups' one can see both the mixture of happiness and gloominess in the faces of the visitors. Some individual or group seem to be more happy and jubilant where others less happy and poignant. It seemed very evident that people visited Patan Durbar Square both for fun and pleasure and to avoid their loneliness and boredom.

Unlike Basantapur Durbar Square in Patan Durbar Square one can see more youth people sitting alone or in a group and chatting. One can find more youngsters, especially, My regular visit in the Square saw the same phenomenon, same kind of people, and similar type of grouping again and again. What I found from my regular observation that these people seemed to enjoy the gathering, the talk and the time they spent together. The happiness that reflected in their faces showed as if they were reunited after years of separation. The gestures, the laughter, the jubilation, and the kind of glow they had in their faces in that gathering always pleased me. Researching urbanism I am thinking of exploring the holistic lifestyles of urban youths that portrays the ways of being, ways of living and ways of doing of urban youths in Kathmandu. Thinking from such perspective, my research is inclined to be more interdisciplinary research rather than merely ethnographic or phenomenological.

2. Methodology

To portray the everyday life of urban youth, I chose travelogue method to describe my observation of youth in the street, in the park and in the restaurant. During the beginning of the year 2013 after I started my field work of PhD research, I realized to sharpen my skills and abilities for ethnographic observation of everyday life activities such as walking, talking and reading (Sheringham, 2006, p. 221).

This research to some extent is a self-study of a youth (my) who has living in Kathmandu for more than 15 years as an outsider. Portraying the everyday life of urban youth in Kathmandu, I chose auto/ethnography as a research approach which allowed me to explore my lived experiences and perception to better understand and critique the everyday life activities of urban youth (Bochner, 2012). Auto/ethnographic approach was important for me to explore how my internalized prejudices and experience counted to observe the youth's everyday life activities (Allen, 2015). It seemed keeping myself in the periphery of the research but it was dual in a sense that it moved back and forth with Self/Other emphasizing dialectical logics. I was a bit skeptical believing that everyday life in city might be transformative to create hopes and aspirations of youth. Auto/ethnography was helpful for me since my own experiences with the concern of cultural context brought the meaning of everyday practices of youth in Kathmandu as Spray (2001) believes that auto/ethnography as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts (p. 6).

During the travel into the city, I met and several people in the street, in the park, in the theater, in the tea-shop and other different corners of city. I have had major six research characters (participants) in the tale of Kathmandu of my PhD research; however, I have used the narratives of four characters in this paper: Pasa- the Mr. Weed, Rajmati- the Ms. Geek, Montu- the Mr. God seller, and Maili- the Ms. Sales girl. All of them are youth from 15-40 years age group and living in Kathmandu.

Pasa- the Mr. Weed was born in Kathmandu. I would say him native, an insider from Newar community, core Kathmandu but he became an outsider when he completed his high school during his adulthood. After his high school, he was trapped

in the adversities of weed, drug and alcohol in the city and became alienated, but gradually he overcame such adversities with the help of his family. Now he is living his life with his family.

I met Rajmati- the Ms. Geek, who had both pleasant and bitter experience of being insider of Kathmandu. She was struggling to make her fortune better in Kathmandu. She was an example of hardworking youth in city.

Montu- the Mr. God Seller was like me an outsider of Kathmandu who migrated from Eastern Terai of Nepal. He was an artist of sculpture and sold in the corners of city Kathmandu.

Mali- the Ms. Sales Girl, also migrated from the Western Nepal and working as a sales girl who neither had academic qualification nor skills to adjust the everyday life of city in Kathmandu.

3. Using Everyday Life Theory as Facet

I was in dilemma what particular aspects of everyday life of urban youth should I prioritize? Everyday urban life might be ordinary life events occurring in youth's life. Possibly, they could not be aware of doing such things of drinking tea, having girlfriend/boyfriend, playing the guitar, working in the office, visiting café and many more as they are doing. They might have created certain pattern of living in Kathmandu "being within the everyday aspects of cities is to be in a state of constant movement between being situated and being placeless" (Narula, 2002, p. 107). These youth are always in motion in Kathmandu. Possibly, they seem to achieve 'American Dream' in Kathmandu believing that time is money and motion is progress. Though, the idea of 'American Dream' in Kathmandu was not as fast and furious as New York and Los Angeles. The everyday life perspective helps me to unpack the extra/ordinary ways of being, living and learning among the youth within the continuum between affinities and alterities (Narula, 2002, p. 107).

Everyday activities of urban youth have been influenced by the visible and invisible dynamics of urbanism as Heller's (1984) believes everyday life activities are the reproduction of cultural and political context. For this study theoretical reference of Heller (1984) contributes me to understand the city life such as courage, self-control, coping with problems, feeling pleasure, loyalty, and gratitude (p. 7). This theory empowers me to interpret the opportunities that appear in urban centers rather than critiquing the urban challenges in the daily activities.

Everyday life of youth in Kathmandu gets influenced more by the Modern Western ways of living (Lietchy, 2002). Western ways of living can be gauged from their gadgets, phones, and lifestyles such as the music they listen, the conversation they carry out, the films they watch, the TV shows that they watch, the game they play and watch in TVs- such lifestyles can be the part of the global culture and the youth are foremost agents to anticipate such changes. Their names and aims, their goals and modes, their culture and relation all are the part of their everyday life.

Such everyday life activities are the "part of the expression of cosmopolitan sentiments within spheres of everyday life, there should be identifiable carriers of the cosmopolitan: humans and non-humans alike, which act as symbolic containers of cultural difference" (Kendall, G. Woodward, I. & Skrbis, Z. 2009, p. 10). Thus, I used the everyday life to "explore and interpret the changes in the ways of living among youth. But this is not to say that the content and the structure of everyday life are the same for all individual in all society" (Heller, 1984, p. 7).

Everyday life theory enables me to explore the particular and individual features of urban youth in Kathmandu.

These features are relatively fluctuating to create meaning of their everyday life activities. At the same I am aware of everyday life of youth as an alienated and aesthetic as a critique. Moreover, I inclined to the Lefebvre's ideas who suggested that everyday life activities are guided by the aesthetic components (Berger & Del Negro, 2004, p. 6). At the same time Heller's ideas, as everyday life are acquired through the constant internalization of experiences and perceptions, everyday thinking remains a 'heterogeneous amalgam' that is totally inseparable from praxis, imbued with needs, perceptions, and feelings, everyday knowledge" (Sheringham, 2006, p. 36). In this line, such everyday life theories empower me to look at the heterogeneous amalgam of the urban youth of Kathmandu to understand the urban anthropology of Kathmandu.

4. Boredom in Kathmandu

Why Rock Star did not like to attend the lecturers in his college? Why did Rajmati bunk her class and moved to theater often? Why did Rajesh Dai just stay at his home without any work? Did Montu sleep in a day without working in a factory? How often Suresh thought that his life was bored? We all came here in Kathmandu to search better future, to fulfill dream but we experienced certain level of boredom living in the city. I used the term boredom not exactly to refer the psychological upheavals of an individual but to refer a) sense of alienation, b) sense of frustration and c) sense of incompleteness of the youth in city like Kathmandu. I have not the used the term boredom when urban youth do not spend leisure time. I used the concept of boredom to describe a kind of obsession that youth experience and feel living in city. Possibly, I was influenced by Specks (1996) whose book *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* might have influenced to me to uncover the boredom as a provocation and a consequential of living in city life.

Reflecting upon the everyday activities of my participants, initially I heard their stories of boredom when they arrived in city. It was not only the rock star who was randomly moving in the streets of Kathmandu and feeling bored, but my other participants also experienced boredom as a temporal phenomenon in Kathmandu.

5. Boredom: Sense of Affordable

After a formal conversation with Rajesh Dai, he was going to explain the story behind the curtain of being absent in his office. Once on Sunday, his day was off, one of his friends asked him to go for rafting. In order to escape boredom youth in Kathmandu usually planned to hang on with friends preferred bungee jump, rafting and hiking. Sometimes they organized picnic and party with their colleagues. Actually, it was the ideas of Rajesh Dai to encourage friends for rafting in *Trishuli*. He was the person who encouraged going to rafting for 2/3 months. So, they had planned on that day. He was excited enough but He must pay nearly NR 3000 to go to rafting. He was not affording the money as he did not have any balance from the previous month. "Just tell me how can I balance money as I earned NRS 5000/- month?" Noticing that, he apologized and pretended that he had to attend the meeting. Now, they couldn't force him. He was escaped from the group of his friends. Late in the evening, he was surfing the internet in his smart cell phone. Meanwhile, he found tagging photos in facebook. He checked all photos spending nearly 40 minutes to see the photographs and became more frustrated to miss the rafting with friends. It was

completely jealous to his friends and pathetic to himself. Photos of splashing water to each other, hugging tightly while rafts made quick movement and many other similar poses made him very sad. Nearly, my eyes spilt some drops of tears. Very hardly, I made them stopped. I tried to sleep but for long I didn't.

It is not only Rajesh Dai but we all participants escaped from our close circle when we were not able to afford the amenities in city life. We pretended. Hearing Rajesh Dai, I would like to thank William Shakespeare who often tells me, "Dude, the whole world is a stage." That was not the first time as performing a role of liar, I faced such situation. I killed my desires time and again. If I had kept record, it would have been 'trillions'. And if I were blamed for that I would be in jail for thousands years. Then, I became bored.

Rajesh Dai called a shopkeeper of the tea shop and ordered cigarettes. He lit it. I observed boredom of Rajesh Dai in each puff of his cigarettes. "I don't know why do I occasionally go to office?" Listening to the story of Rajesh Dai, I understand we all experienced the sense of boredom in the city because of affordability. We can get things to buy enough but it matters to what extent can we afford? In Rajesh's case boredom was something which was not related to leisure activities. Possibly, youth in Kathmandu experience boredom to emphasize the relationship between the expression of troublesome behaviors and the socialization of young people into particular socioeconomic class positions (Willging, Quintero, & Lilliott, 2014).

Life is too mechanical and routine in Kathmandu that leads to boredom. Pasa- the Mr. Weed, on the other hand used to be bored in the city during his post high school days. When he could not get a puff of weed and would be bored. Maili still experienced her boredom while she did not earn for food in Kathmandu. Rajamati remained bored when she did not get love and affection from her dad. Montu had also similar reasons to be bored as he lives alone in Kathmandu and usually became nostalgic recalling his family in his village. However, they all have different strategies to overcome the boredom in their life.

Usually, boredom was theorized in ways of connecting leisure time. Carl (2012) opines that youth remained bored when they did not get leisure time but youth in Kathmandu experienced boredom with leisure time. These youth hardly got chance to work because they hardly got any opportunities to work. Perhaps, there are several other reasons to be bored for youth like Rajesh Dai. Montu as an entrepreneur was expecting to enjoy his leisure time with his friends but he did not get time. He had a target to sell sculpture gods and goddess in the market. I also observed the boredom of youth in Kathmandu as Mains (2007) explained the boredom of the youth in Ethiopia because they were unable to experience progress in the city.

6. Boredom with Education

Usually, I spent time in the café where youth might have drunk tea and smoke cigarettes. Perhaps, it was mid-January, 2014, I went to a café. I was trembling by cold 2 degree centigrade in Kathmandu. I was desperate to drink hot tea. As soon as I entered into the café, loud Hindi filmy song was playing in the background. There is written free wifi zone. Most of the tables were occupied by young couple. I sensed that they were talking to them, but they were playing with their cell phones. Possibly, they were in virtual world. I wonder what happened when they did not care much their friends sitting nearby them. Possibly, they can go beyond the circumstances around them. I was inquisitive to know about their experience about living and being in city. I went nearer

to a boy who was in college uniform and saw that he was downloading apps in his cell. I got a permission to talk about the life experience. Perhaps, he thought that I was a psycho³ to know about his personal life. He did not seem to be interested to talk to me. While I clarified my purpose he seemed to be ready to talk to me. He said it was the lifestyles to be connected to friends and circle. I did not want to ask more about his friends and circles as my intention is to look boredom of his life.

“Why do you come to the café?”

“I can escape from boredom. I can use free wifi here. I don’t need to pay for wifi. I can read the major daily newspapers in the morning and thus I save money to buy newspaper. I can have chat with my friends. Moreover, the shopkeeper makes tasty tea. (*Bakhlo Chiya*)”

“Well, is wifi or internet that makes you avoiding boredom?” I asked him.

“Actually, I was bored to study at home. My parents always seemed to be worried about my education. I was not allowed to go night club, parties and outing with my friends. Only one recreational activity at my home was too embedded with virtual world. So, I did not have many friends too. There is no way out from the virtual life.”

“Have you completed your study?”

He addressed me as brother and said, “Not yet.”

“Why?” I further asked.

“What is the worth of studying, brother?” He countered the question to me.

I remained silent as I could not have answer of his questions which satisfies him. As a teacher I had experience that many students in their +2 and undergraduate course asked me the same question. When I attempted to answer their question, they mostly said, “Oldie, again the same lecturer”. They never believed me that education in college really prepares themselves for their future. Sometimes, I tend to agree with them. Let me recall a story when I was teaching to the students of 10+2 level in a private college located in Kathmandu. A group of boys in the classroom were not ready to listen my lecturer. They were making noise and trying to disturb the whole class. I was attempting to persuade them saying that it is important to pass +2 exam so that all the doors of your career and education get opened. One of my students asked, “Sir you seemed talented, why did not you try for abroad.” Another student asked me, “Sir how much do you earn in a month? Another question, “How do you feed your family by teaching? Is it enough for you?”

Another student added, “Therefore, he is teaching in three/four college.”

I showed my sense of humility in many contexts to deal with urban students.

Thus I did not dare to tell him the importance of education. Is education in urban deteriorating now days? I don’t have an answer to convince youth saying that you need to be successful to be educated. Youth in the college experienced bored and blamed that it was futile to get education. Possibly, whether urban education hardly addressed the need of the youth or youth get proper teaching learning atmosphere in college. These students are not allowed to use cell phones and internet in the classroom. Cell phones are banned but they liked to use cell phone and internet in the classroom. This might be one of the situations of being bored in the college.

8. Conclusion

As stated earlier, roaming around may be purposeless but has some reason. My observation there made me feel people not only came to Patan Durbar Square for pleasure and enjoyment. Some urban youth would come there to escape from their boredom, isolation and loneliness. Rajesh Dai is not merging with his friends also shows his lack of social connection. This lack of social connection of Montu in Bourdieu's sense is the lack of social capital when he states social capital as a resource consisting of durable social obligations or connections, such as group or network memberships, that can be called upon to access other valuable resources. Hence, we can say loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of (quality of) certain relationships. This includes situations, in which the number of existing relationships is smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realized. (Gierveld, Tilburg & Dykstra, 1987, p. 120). Thus, roaming round even if not done with any plan or purpose is done for variety of reasons.

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