

A long, long, time ago, there was a lake in a city. In the lake was an island, and on the island, a village. The city saw many conquerors over time. To protect their sacred objects from these conquerors, the villagers buried them under the ground.

Years passed, people left the island and went away to the mainland. In the meanwhile, the city expanded. The lake was covered, overlaid with buildings. One day, while excavating a foundation for a new building, the buried objects were found. The city council wanted the objects for the museum. But the people of the land didn't want to give them away. The 'villagers' packed them in newspaper and hid them.

People wanted their own museum. But this was an expensive proposition, and in any case, there were so many museums already. What was the point of a new one?

So, they began a project. People wrote histories of the objects. They wrote about what the objects meant, and the moment at which they had found them. Stories were woven around tales grandparents might have told about the objects, if these had been handed to the custodians by family elders.

They made a book of these objects – of the stories and of their photos. This book is now kept in the 'museum'. The objects are kept in peoples' homes. In the museum, you see the book. If you want to feel the object, and build a possible future relationship with it, you have to wend your way through the streets to the homes.

– as told by Conrado Tostado, visitor to Sarai, 2004.

**Conversations over a Broadsheet**

*You are cordially invited to invite us, the Broadsheet Collective, to talk to you so that you can talk to us and so that, even if we are strangers now, we will find a question or two to share for the road. Time: At your pleasure and our convenience. Place: In your neighbourhood, or in ours. Call, write, e-mail, and we can fix a time and place.*

Write to us at [outreach@sarai.net](mailto:outreach@sarai.net)

**Out Now**

**Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts**

The fifth in the Sarai Reader Series, *Bare Acts* looks at 'Acts' – instruments of legislation, at things within and outside the law, and at 'acts' – as different ways of doing things in society and culture. The Reader foregrounds explorations of borders, surveillance, claims to authority and entitlement, the legal regulation of sexuality and trespasses of various kinds, with a view to complicate our understandings of the bare act of the law, and a meta-legal domain of codes, norms and practices within which the law is located.

**Sarai** (sa-rai, sho-rai) n. (Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Turkish). An enclosed space in a city, or beside a highway, where travellers and caravans can find shelter, sustenance and companionship; a tavern, a public house; a meeting place; a destination and a point of departure; a place to rest in the middle of a journey.

**Sarai** is a programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. It is a space for research, creative practice and dialogue about contemporary media and urban constellations.

Participate in talks, public lectures, conferences, seminars and workshops; curate or watch films every Friday, and have conversation over coffee at the Sarai cafe. For details, see <http://www.sarai.net/calendar/calendar.htm>

Participate in online discussion communities around media and the city, intellectual property, community radio, cinematography, digital archiving and free software, hosted by Sarai. [http://www.sarai.net/community/lists\\_info.htm](http://www.sarai.net/community/lists_info.htm)

For more information, subscribe to the Sarai Newsletter: [hak@sarai.net](mailto:hak@sarai.net)

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Photo: Monica Narula

- PARADIGM SHIFT ■ TECTONIC SHIFT ■ SHIFTING SANDS ■ SHIFTING PATH ■ SHIFTING COURSE ■ LATE SHIFT ■ NIGHT SHIFT ■ MAKE SHIFT ■ GRAVEYARD SHIFT ■ SWING SHIFT ■ CIRCADIAN SHIFT ■ TAUTOMERIC SHIFT ■ SHIFT IN EMPHASIS ■ DOWN SHIFT ■ UP SHIFT ■ STICK SHIFT ■ GREAT VOWEL SHIFT ■ SHIFTING LANGUAGES ■ LANGUAGE SHIFT ■ SHIFTING BLAME ■ SHIFTING BURDEN ■ FUNCTIONAL SHIFT ■ POPULATION SHIFT ■ SHIFTY-EYED ■ EINSTEIN SHIFT ■ ZERO PHASE SHIFT MIRROR ■ SHIFT CLICKING ■ RED SHIFT ■ SHIFTING GEARS ■ SHAPE SHIFTING ■ SHIFTING TARGET ■ SHIFTING BOUNDARIES ■ SHIFT THE SCENE ■ SHIFTING CENTER ■ SHIFTLSS ■ SHIFT OFF ■ EVER-SHIFTING ■ SHIFTING CULTIVATION ■ PERCEPTUAL SHIFT ■ TIME-SHIFTING

1 Mar 2005 - 1 May 2005

■ **When Names are Swept Away**

13-01-05

Notes from the Diary of a City Researcher

I am reading an excellent and insightful article by Jane Caplan on, among other things, the politics of naming and identity. In the wake of the Tsunami catastrophe, some of the issues raised were unfortunately very timely. Some ideas that I have gleaned from the essay...

Since the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC, administrators around the world have been devising ways and means to deal with the question of how to re-identify someone as the same person he was once known to be. How can one re-identify a person from others like him?

Solutions came, but they were few and far between. They came as edicts, decrees, laws, ordinances, administrative ramblings and dictates of the sovereign.

Regimes were set in place to mark populations – first at birth, then at marriage and at death – till finally every social transaction that an individual undertook during the course of his/her lifetime, became an instance for enumeration.

Laws were formulated to assign a name to particular person. For instance, 16<sup>th</sup> century France had laws which allowed a person to assume names only from a given set, and restrictions were in place to disallow citizens to be named Jesus or Babylon or Lassallia, etc.

Shifting, moving populations were made immobile by criminalising movement across, and within, territories. Identity was made the primary and legitimate token for every citizen to have a justifiable existence.

But what happens when these tokens suddenly disappear? Say, due to a natural calamity such as the 'tsunami'? The biggest problem for these people is yet to come – the loss of identity documents, as the the landmass and islandic islands. The recent Tsunami disaster has left hundreds of thousands of people stranded in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

What happens when your 'tokens of trust' – your voter ID card, driving license, passport, ration card and property documents – disappear? And the bank that contained trust deeds and LLC papers is literally, and figuratively, swept away? Who are you, then, in the eyes of the state? How does the state cope with this? Does the state have a system in place to deal with a calamity such as this, when the entire bureaucratic machinery is paralysed by a systemic failure?

This category of 'neighbourhood affected' has meant that in formulation of rehabilitation packages, the people of the fishing and farming communities that do not own boats, nets or lands, generally remain ignored. It has also meant that the government has provided the needs of the fisher boat-owning community, to the detriment of landless labourers. In Kerala, fisher-people have received 60 kg of rice, while landless agricultural labourers have received only 5 kg. This is unacceptable, since both categories of people have lost their livelihoods to the 'tsunami' – the fisherman having lost his boats/nets and thus the ability to fish, while the landless agricultural labourer has lost his/her work on lands, since these have been salinated. This differential treatment has resulted in the landless facing serious food crisis.

However, the issue is not one of property/asset ownership alone. A majority of the landless are dalits, and most vulnerable to facing severe food crisis. What seems like an issue of class in purely economic terms becomes extremely complicated when located in a situation of entrenched social hierarchy, where the poorest are also the community most vulnerable to violence and discrimination by socially dominant castes. Data-based discrimination is exacerbated by the landless being a part of government agencies of communities being 'homogenous'. Fishing communities comprise of three main castes – the Meeruvar community (Most Backward Caste), dalits (Scheduled Caste) and Puzhavanul Makhal (Scheduled Tribe). While the Meeruvars own boats, the others are engaged in ancillary manual tasks. Therefore while relief is caste-blind, this presumption leads to severe imbalances in relief distribution. Even within the fisher-people, interests of those who have lost their kith and kin against people who have lost their livelihood, to the detriment of the latter.

Finally, within the 'affected' persons' category, district authorities seem to have prioritised and commented the dalits have been excluded from relief efforts.

Excepted and deprioritised from relief and rehabilitation of Tsunami-affected persons in Tamil Nadu and Pondichery and 'Exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis in the Time of Tsunami: The Case for an Inclusive Relief and Rehabilitation Policy', by Vireni, Niju, Arvind, Revathi, Min, Deepu and Chitra. The full text of the reports can be accessed at: <http://mail.sarai.net/permalink/reader-lis/2005-February/004978.htm>, and <http://mail.sarai.net/permalink/reader-lis/2005-February/004979.htm>

I received my monthly bill from my mobile phone provider, Orange Netherlands. Getting a monthly phone bill is nothing special, but one which informs you that you are a 'Tsunami victim', and therefore credited with 42.55 Euro for 'extra way' expenses related to the 'tsunami', is strange. Especially if you were on a Jet Airways flight from Bombay to Delhi, when the tsunami ravaged the coasts of India and Sri Lanka.

It is no secret that mobile phone providers record the location data a mobile phone generates, but under Dutch law, this data cannot be used for anything other than invoicing purposes. Moreover, as far as I can remember, I did not generate any data at all during the time the tsunami struck, as I replaced my Orange sim-card with an Airtel India-branded one, and switched back to Orange only on the 11 January 2005. I am not comfortable with my phone company using this (non) data to shower its timely benevolence! Not to mention, during the tsunami I was in Delhi, which, thanks to its inland location and altitude, is probably even less tsunami-affected than Amsterdam. It is not difficult to imagine the mechanisms behind this situation. The public relations gurus at Orange saw, in the tsunami, an opportunity to build a personal relationship with their customers. They asked their data-mining department for a list of all customers travelling to south

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