Chapter 2
Marginality, Marginalisation and the Idea of Justice

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2.1 Preface

My first acquaintance with the term ‘marginal’, if I remember right, was way back in 1963. Professor S.C. Dube had come to our Department of Sociology, Patna University, on academic business. He was an iconic figure in our eyes. I was a fresh faculty entrant in the Postgraduate Department pursuing my Ph.D. on the Gramdan Sarvodaya movement. In the evening, he gave an inspiring, awesome, extempore lecture, in chaste and mellifluous Hindi—not a single word of English did he use. Enthralled, we heard him speak on seemant manav—the marginal man. Little do I recollect of the hour-long lecture, except that he spoke of ‘manav’ betwixt two cross-cutting cultures, and that I had felt proud to be one. A domiciled Bengali in Bihar, I felt proud and happy to be astride two cultures, participating in both with facility! Prof. Dube was quite familiar with the theory of the marginal man and chose to apply it to the indigenous context. He had included the integrative role of cultural marginality.

This paper will be largely conceptual–theoretical in nature. I will invite you to critically examine whether this enables you a more efficient understanding of the substantial areas of marginality and deprivation with which you are familiar.

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2.2 Marginality: Theoretical Foundations

Marginality is an adverse state or condition of existence of individuals/groups in a relation of subordination or inferiority to individuals/groups that are at the ‘centre’ or ‘mainstream’. Marginality and centrality therefore go together for an understanding of each. Marginalisation is the process by which the condition of marginalised is reached. However, the conceptual–theoretical orientations of marginality and marginalisation vary; consequently, the foundations of corresponding theorisations vary accordingly. The difference between the two approaches is paradigmatic and can be identified: (a) conceptual and theoretical orientations that are rooted in cultural marginality and (b) those that are anchored in structural marginality. The former is identified with the tradition of the marginal man; the latter finds its elaboration in the contradictions embedded in the iniquitous societal system. The classification is not to suggest total absence of overlaps, but they are fundamentally different approaches. The former is psychologistic, inasmuch as the consequences of marginalisation are sought in how this is associated with the ‘personality type’ of the individual/group ranging from possible deleterious effects of personal and/or social disorganisation, and bursts of creativity and extraordinary leadership of marginal individuals/groups. The latter focuses on the alienation that could come about as a consequence conflicts arising out of the marginalised situation between the dominant and the aggrieved groups in opposition.

More recently, we are inundated with the concern for social exclusion, and the state is emphatic on making its policies of development inclusive.

At the initiative of the University Grants Commission, many universities have opened departments of inclusion and exclusion to concentrate on researches in this substantive area and to disseminate the problems associated with it. It is sometimes quite difficult to make out how the socially excluded are different from the marginalised. The Wikipedia brackets them as one and the same. Conceptual confusion prevails.

Structural marginality found expression in the Marxist paradigm roughly at the same time that issues of cultural marginality surfaced in the early decades of the twentieth century. The former had to do largely with internal contradictions in a society that produced conflict and change, while the latter was a product of the huge migrations that moved to centres of rapid capitalist development creating conditions of cultural conflicts. The origin of the conceptualisation of marginality took place in the context of cultural conflict in the form of the marginal man but found its application much beyond its paradigmatic origin.

The Marginal Man: Robert Ezra Park, among the pillars of the famous Chicago School of sociology, was the first to conceptualise the marginal man as early as in 1928. The social world in the West was transiting rapidly from the traditional to the urban–industrial–modern. The USA was witnessing a massive movement of populations both from overseas and internally. During and after the American Civil War (1861–1865), between 1860 and 1914 (World War I), the rural population
doubled when the urban increased sevenfold. From 1880 till 1914, some 20 million immigrants arrived in the USA, and many of these were rural peasants from southern Europe, who got ghettoised in the industrial urban centres. Park’s conceptualisation of the *marginal man* takes place in these objective conditions (Goldberg 2012). He perceived the *marginal man* as:

a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused (1928: 892 in Goldberg 2012; 2/9).

Almost a decade later in the introduction of the study by his student Everett V. Stonequist, *The marginal man*, he drew attention to the cultural conflict that the *marginal man* underwent following prolonged cultural contact that contributed to the emergence of the ‘personality type’. He was fated ‘to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures’ (Stonequist [1937] 1965: 4–5; in Goldberg 2012; 2/9; italics added). Although the *marginal man* was a generalised concept, the Jewish immigrant was his archetype: ‘The emancipated Jew was, and is, historically and typically’, he observed, ‘the *marginal man*, the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world’ (Park 1928: 892; in Goldberg 2012; 2/9).

Archetype apart, the ‘mixed-race individual’ was also included in the category, by Park, possibly under the influence of the African American sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote on the ‘American Negro’. Over time, the concept got extended to include African Americans, and the Asian Americans. All these groups found themselves at ‘the intersection of two worlds’ (Goldberg 2012; 2/9).

Stonequist’s formulation underlines the psychologistic fallout of the *marginal man* thesis:

> The *marginal man* is…poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds, one of which is often ‘dominant’ over the other; within which membership is implicitly if not explicitly based upon birth and ancestry (race or nationality); and where exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations (1937: 8; in Billison 32).

He observed that ‘we experience at some point in our lives the kind of “dual personality associated with marginality”’ (quoted by Billison 2005: 32).

Theorising the *marginal man* led to ambiguities. On the one hand, cultural marginality could lead to his ‘mental conflict’ and personal disorganisation, and consequently to, social disorganisation preventing his ‘psychological integration’. On the other hand, this very simultaneous living in two worlds made the *marginal man* ‘the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint’, capable of becoming a creative agent (Park in Stonequist [1937] 1965: xvii–xviii; in Goldberg 2012; 3/9). Louis Wirth, also Park’s student, extended Park’s thesis by suggesting there was no inevitably about cultural conflict leading to personal disorganisation and delinquency. On the contrary, ‘far from becoming a criminal, [he] may develop into a prophet, a reformer or
a political leader’ (Wirth [1931] 1964: 241; in Goldberg 2012; 3/9). Numerous researches were carried out on the model of the *marginal man* in the area of race and ethnic relations in the USA. The USA was trying to forge via the *marginal man*, the melting pot that would become typically American.

The shift from race and ethnic relations to gender relations began in the fifties. It was argued that ‘the marginal woman [was] torn between rejection and acceptance of traditional roles and attributes’ (Hacker 1951: 67–68; in Goldberg 2012). Allegations were made that ‘the concept of the *marginal man* is intrinsically male’ (Deegan 2002: 103; in Goldberg 2012; 4/9).

From the forties, Park’s theory of the *marginal man* was extended to status dilemmas in occupational roles and professions. Its application found expression in the roles of the foreman, the chiropractor, the druggist, the merchant-marine radio operator, the university dean of student personnel, the engineering technician, the integrative manager, the university labour educator and the academic general practitioner (Goldberg 2012; 4/9). Varieties of researches have taken off from the hypotheses generated by the Park–Stonequist framework.

The paradoxes of marginality stemming from the *marginal man* framework have been discussed and debated extensively. Rutledge Dennis points out that the paradox of ‘dual marginality’ lies not in the marginalised ‘being outside the social sphere’ as it is made out to be, but rather that ‘they are both “outsiders as insiders” and “insiders as outsiders”’. Actually, there is no escape from the social sphere. They are just ignored ‘because with power, position and status do not view [them] as important to recognise, except within limited economic, political or cultural boundaries’ (Rutledge 2005: 4). Billson critiques, The *marginal man* as an ‘omnibus term’ a kind of *hold-all* category that admitted diverse forms of marginality, which ‘by including everything includes nothing’. The term needs careful application after specification of relevant parameters (Billson 2005: 33).

The resilience of the *marginal man* concept in the USA can be attributed to the increasing multiculturality of the American society with prolonged culture contacts between diverse cultures and the scope for potential or actual culture conflicts. The marginalised are not necessarily at the bottom of the hierarchy of cultures but also refer to those who are sandwiched in between cultures. So too is it with articulation role structures. The concept had not caught the imagination of the non-western world until recently, and that too mostly within the fold of structural marginality. The concept of the *marginal man* is indigenous to the West, particularly the USA.

There are several difficulties with this omnibus concept. First, the condition of cultural marginality may produce personality types ranging from the delinquent to the creative genius, the reformer, the messiah; second, it is not clear what to make out of the Jew who is supposed to be the archetype of the *marginal man* combining positions of power and influence as reformers leaders and even prophets; the

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1Chiropractic is ‘a system of complementary medicine based on the diagnosis and manipulative treatment of misalignments of the joints, especially those of the spinal column, which are held to cause other disorders by affecting the nerves, muscles, and organs’ (Judyth Pearsall, [1998] *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford. Clarendon Press, 320).
marginal are not necessarily economically impoverished, but culturally discrimi-
nated; marginalisation is a process that suggests downward mobility, but this does
not come out clear; third, marginality is not an absolute condition and there are
degrees of marginality in a continuum; fourth, a group may be marginalised in the
cultural domain and not in the others; finally, the marginal man tradition does not
tie up with the structural realities of power, class, ethnicity and the rest.

2.2.1 Sources of Marginality: Structural Marginality

Contemporary concern is largely with structural marginality that does not stem from
the Park–Stonequist framework. The intellectual foundations of this paradigm lie in
the socialist tradition of contradiction, conflict, change and development. It is
premised on the values of equality, freedom and justice. As Billson points out,
structural marginality ‘refers to the political, social and economic powerlessness of
certain disenfranchised and or disadvantaged segments within society. It springs
from the location in the socio-economic structures of society, rather than from
cultural or social role dilemmas’ (Billson 2005: 31). I have already pointed out the
Marxist moorings of structural marginality; hence, there is no need to elaborate a
fairly familiar terrain.

Research and theorisation must be relevant and methodologically rigorous. The
hegemonisation of social sciences produced in the West can be well appreciated;
after all, the sciences, whether natural or social, were institutionalised in the West.
However, whatever is indigenous to the West need not be universal for the rest. In
indigenising social sciences, theory and research (as opposed to their parochiali-
sation) lies in the path of their universalisation. Whether it is marginalisation or
social exclusion, I believe that the structural reality cannot be kept outside of the
framework. Since these are manifest asymmetries or inequities in social relations, it
is vastly important to introduce the elements of equality, freedom and justice as the
core values. Can we capture the inequities in marginalisation and social exclusion
effectively and efficiently?

2.2.1.1 An Alternative Framework: The Basic Structures

To be able to get a structural formulation of marginalisation, we need to articulate a
relevant framework of basic structures of a social system. I have defined the social
system as:

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a \text{system of social interaction} \text{ being constituted of interrelated and interpenetrating “parts”}
\text{(or structures), such that changes in any one or more of these will/can have consequences}
\text{for one or more or all of the others’ (Mukherji 2013: 110).}
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A structural theoretical approach, Marxist or non-Marxist in orientation, enter-
tains some notion of system and structures. The differences lie in how ‘structures’
are conceived and in the manner in which the ‘system’ is constituted of its parts (structures), in their interrelationship. In the former, there is a differentiation in terms of basic and supra-structures; in the latter, in terms of variants of the Parsonian functional requisites: adaptive, goal-attainment, integrative and latency (AGIL) structures.

Whether it is marginality issuing from cultural hierarchy, or from contradictions within a stratified social system, the central structural reality common to both is that of relations of asymmetries in the societal system, with reference to which marginality is perceived and felt. Freedom and equality are the core values that underlie a just society that is always in the becoming, rather than in the being. These abstract values are difficult to concretise in structural terms.

Since there is no perfectly just society free from hierarchy, stratification, and consequently, relations of asymmetries (except in utopia), it is proposed that we describe a social (societal) system in terms of the structural counter-concepts of (social) discrimination, (class) exploitation, (political) oppression, gender discrimination and eco-environmental asymmetry. These are domains of relations of asymmetry. Understandably, the number of domains depends upon the social scientists’ theoretical-analytical perception. I believe that the five domains are consistent with broader sociological tradition.

In our scheme, these constitute domains of social relations of asymmetry, and the social (societal) system is characterised by the interrelation, interpenetration and intermeshing of these domains. Together they form the basic structures of the social (societal) system. The whole system is always greater than the sum of its domains. Let me define these relations of asymmetries:

- **Discrimination** essentially conveys the context of normatively legitimated relations of asymmetry that are internalised generally from birth through family and childhood socialisation. This is the domain of primordial, ascriptive loyalties that provide major cultural anchorages on the basis of language, caste, race, religion, gender, creed, immigrants, etc. This is the ethnic domain.
- **Exploitation** is best applied in the context of unequal economic exchanges in the normatively defined role of the market, and in the relations of production. Both Weber and Marx are relevant in identifying the asymmetries. This is the class domain.
- **Oppression** has to do with the control and exercise of power. It defines the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. It also implies deliberate impediments created to obstruct access to power of the less privileged. This is the power domain.
- **Gender discrimination** refers to the iniquitous relationship between male and female in a system of gender relations.
- **Eco-environmental** asymmetry is basically the asymmetry between humankind in its relationship of exploitation of nature with differential consequences for the stratified and hierarchical population.
Logically, it can be inferred that processes leading to *reduction* in the asymmetries indicates: upward mobility, reduction in marginality, improvement in the life chances and overall increase in social development. As a corollary, the processes leading to *increases* in the asymmetries indicate just the opposites. In the real world, the dynamics are much more complex. These processes just don’t happen by themselves. Embedded in these asymmetries are *contradictions* which trigger conflicts and changes. Although the term contradiction is widely used, it is difficult to come by a definition. I have formulated the following definition which views contradictions:

as actual or potential oppositions arising out of differences that are socially perceived, sooner or later, and/or ideologically/theoretically constructed, having change/transformation (or resistance to change/transformation) consequences for the social system under reference (Mukherji 1999: 61).

The mere presence of contradictions in the asymmetries is not a sufficient condition for conflict. Contradictions can be non-antagonistic. Only when they become antagonistic do conditions for conflict and change come into existence. Besides, contradictions could be a complex of primary and secondary contradictions distributed over one or more of the domains at any given point of time. Conflict could be violent or non-violent and may or may not lead to social movements. Only when there is a group, existing or in the making, with a leadership that can articulate the injustices inherent in the contradictions with an ideology and programme of social mobilisation that a social movement comes into being with the ostensible objective of achieving or restoring justice. So long as contradictions remain non-antagonistic, the asymmetrical relations are perceived as existing in a situation of institutionalised complementarity or inequality.

If we apply this domainal framework to marginality and marginalisation, it becomes clear that marginality can be identified with respect to each of these domains. Park’s *marginal man*, e.g. the archetype Jew, is centrally located in the ethnic domain. If this archetype is credited generally with producing leaders, reformers, prophets, and *not* delinquents, criminals and sick minds, then there is much more to it than her/his ethnic marginalisation. Who are the ones who are ethnically marginalised and suffering from personality disorganisation? The strength of this framework lies in compelling the researcher to locate the individual/group in more than a single domain to make an overall assessment the person’s/group’s overall marginal status. The domains, we will recall, are interrelated, interpenetrating and intermeshed; hence, there is a multi-‘domainality’ within which the marginalised are placed, which cannot be written off. There is a need to distinguish between a position of *cumulative* marginalisation and that of *selective* marginalisation and the scope for *de-marginalisation* and upward mobility.
Justice: Rawls and Sen

If cumulative marginality or social exclusion prevails among structurally and/or culturally marginalised groups, then justice requires that protective discrimination by the state offsets this situation of ossifying inequality by recourse to corrective distributive justice. It is important to visit the two outstanding philosophers John Rawls and Amartya Sen.

Rawls devises an ingenious method to arrive at the principles of justice objectively and unambiguously. He creates a hypothetical situation of the ‘original position’ in which members who gather to deliberate on the principles of justice are ‘individuals conceived as free and equal moral persons’. They have access only to ‘general information provided by natural science and social theory’. The rest is shrouded in a veil of ignorance—they ‘do not know their place in society, their class position, or social status, their fortune in the distribution of natural talents and abilities, their deeper aims and interests, or finally their psychological make-up. And to ensure fairness between generations…they do not know to which generation they belong and thus information about natural resources, the level of productive techniques and the like, is forbidden to them’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 236–237).

The ‘original position’ in which the crucial deliberations take place is thus eliminated from all sources of unfairness or bias. Under this strictly contrived controlled situation, those deliberating are no longer in a position to frame the principles of justice in a manner that would subserve any interests of any member of the group. This will lead inevitably to unanimity in formulating the principles of justice ‘fairly’—fairness is justice (Rawls 1999a, b: 237). The outcome of such deliberations is the two principles of justice in perpetuity. These are as follows:

1. ‘each person engaged in an institution, or affected by it, has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all’;
2. ‘inequalities as defined by the institutional structures, or fostered by it, are arbitrary, unless it is reasonable to express that they will work to everyone’s advantage, and provided, that the problem and others to which they attach, or from which they may be gained, are open to all’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 133; emphasis added).

These two principles of justice feed into the shaping of the basic structure of society and its main institutions—the political constitution, and ‘the principal economic and social institutions which together define a person’s liberties and rights and affect his life-prospects, what he may expect to be and how well he may expect to fare’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 134; emphasis added).

The sources of inequality lie in an initial higher class position, her gender status, or in the differential natural abilities and capabilities. The basic problem of distributive justice lies in these differential ‘life-prospects’ that come in the way of many individuals.

This prompts him to apply the ‘difference principle’ to state that ‘these inequalities are just, if and only if, they are a part of the larger system in which they
work out to the advantage of the most unfortunate representative man’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 138). The ‘basic structure is just throughout when the advantage of the most fortunate, promote the well-being of the least fortunate…When the prospects of the least fortunate are as great as they can be’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 138).

Rawls asserts that under a just constitutional democracy: (a) that which ‘secures various liberties of equal citizenship’, (b) upholds a ‘legal order’ consistent with the ‘principle of legality’, and, (c) in which ‘liberty of conscience and freedom of thought are taken for granted’, it is possible to arrange the institutions in accordance with the two principles of justice, within the framework that satisfies the ‘difference principle’. For this to happen, a ‘just procedure’ for choosing between governments and ‘enacting just legislation’ should inform the political process (Rawls 1999a, b: 141).

In addition, equality of opportunity, in several senses, has to be present; namely, the government should provide for:

(a) ‘equal educational opportunities for all either by subsidising the private schools or by operating a public school system’;
(b) by enforcement of ‘equality of opportunity in commercial ventures and in the free choice of occupation’; and
(c) by guaranteeing a ‘social minimum’ with the help of ‘family allowances and special payments in times of unemployment, or by a negative income tax’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 141). This does not happen on its own without ‘policing business behavior and by preventing the establishment of barriers and restriction to the desirable positions and markets’ (Rawls 1999a, b: 141).

The government, in other words, has to regulate its free economy. A comprehensive scheme of taxation is at the core of operationalising distributive justice—proportional expenditure tax, wealth and gift tax, and others for redistribution of national wealth.

As a logical construct, the theory of justice, in general, and its application to distributive justice within a plural democratic society are an admirable and outstanding contribution. The two principles of justice, especially the ‘principle of difference’, sound like an echo of Gandhi’s ‘antyodaya’, where the change in the condition for betterment of the most deprived and marginalised is the litmus test of true inclusive development. The role of public reasoning between free and equal citizens, rationality and reasonableness guiding public deliberations, mark the maturity of democratic ethos, in upholding values of just institutions.

At the policy level, the principles of justice in tandem with the difference principle, is a remarkable contribution. None-the-less at the empirical level, it becomes difficult to relate and apply his theory of justice with ground realities. The whole array of just constitutional democracy, just basic structure, just procedure, just legal order are objectives to be pursued. This discomfort finds expression in Amartya Sen’s idea of justice. He is critical of the ‘hypothetical situation of primordial equality…where people’s vested interests are not known to the people themselves’ (Sen 2009: 10).
Sen, whose respect for Rawls is profound, identifies himself with a different philosophical school that included Adam Smith, the Marquis de Condorcet, Jeremy Bentham, Mary Wollstonecraft, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, among others. They engaged in realisation-based comparative studies, empirically grounded in actual institutions, actual behaviour and other influences. Rawls, in contrast, falls in the ‘contractarian’ school in the company of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant who engaged in *transcendental institutionalisation* focused on ‘transcendental identification of the ideal institutions’ (Sen 2009: 6).

He argues for a different approach: ‘we can have a strong sense of *injustice* on many different grounds, and yet not agree on one particular ground as being the dominant reason for being the diagnosis of injustice’. The problem is not how to make institutions perfectly just, rather, how justice could be advanced (Sen 2009: 2; emphasis added).

Marginality, Social Development and Justice

Marginality, whether cultural or structural, whether it emerges out of the ethnic asymmetries in the domain of social discrimination, or from structural marginality embedded in the asymmetry of class exploitation, or from powerlessness in the domain of oppression, or from patriarchic asymmetries of gender discrimination, or from a combination of one or more of these, it is freedom from injustice that is being sought on the core values of equality and freedom. Civil society organisations, social movements, insurrectionary wars and the like, it can be said, act as agents of change in response to conditions of deprivation and marginality. The condition faced by the marginalised seeks deliverance from injustice. Our concept of basic structures of the social system is based on the counter-concepts. Injustice too, in this sense is a counter-concept. What we can seek to do is advance justice by reducing injustice, rather than by its total elimination which is utopian.

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