

## **Reflective Note – 1**

I opted for the Cross-Cultural Seminar out of curiosity and motivation to learn something new. Though I did not know how it would unwrap but that's the beauty of Paul's courses. They are packed with interesting activities and thought-provoking discussions. And then there is something unique + very insightful in the end as a learning outcome. In this seminar, we also had Shivani who is also an Architect and researcher. Now we had a two highly knowledgeable facilitators who would teach and evaluate us. It was initially a bit overwhelming but later turned out as bliss as the lectures became very engaging and the skillset of both the facilitators complemented each other which translated into in-depth learning about Cross-Cultura Research. In one phase - it was intellectual satiation!

The first week of the studio opened up with a few interesting activities wherein Paul asked us to draw from the sounds he had made - ku, ki, haha..all of us shared our drawings and observed how each one of us had translated the sound to personal interpretations in their drawings. In a way it was basically meaning making through sound. The other activity was about drawing on the board while team members provided verbal instructions on what and how to draw. Some crazy forms were drawn and we were again able to learn each other's interpretations of the verbal prompts and visual perceptions. There were some similarities and some differences.

Why were there the similarities as well as difference to the interpretations? What were the common lines of understanding a prompt and where did those lines get blurred? These questions constantly itched my intellectual curiosity. Through this activity we learned how there are different literal and interpretative meanings of language, codes and symbols. We also kind of delved into how meanings and symbolisms changed with social and cultural background of the interpreter.

After this we were asked to fill out a form which would communicate our areas of interest for the Cross-Cultural research to our facilitators. In this form we were supposed to identify ourselves as a part of one community and the hierarchies in that community. Through this activity, we also understood the meaning of community, our positioning in that community and the concept of hierarchy.

## **Reflective Note - 2**

On the next day, Paul and Shivani talked with us about our chosen communities and guided about the nuances of choosing that community for our research. Now, the intense discussions began. We discussed about semantics and semiotics. What

each of these meant and how they could be used in research. Paul gave us the example of product semantics that he did with Hindustan Pencils and elucidated on how semantics can be applied to cross-cultural research. Elaborating on this example - he also talked about Plato's Allegory of cave - this allegory symbolizes how humans can be trapped in limited perceptions and resist understanding deeper truths. The allegory explores ignorance vs. knowledge, illusion vs. reality and the discomfort of confronting deeper truths. Now, we could understand why it's important for breaking free from the shackles of ignorance & limited perception in research by way of semantics. I was amazed how such a confusing philosophical concept like Semantics was taught swiftly to us with the help of engaging activities, examples and storytelling.

Shivani expanded on Semiotics and gave us the example of her daughter's homework and Freedom Park. She elaborated on how freedom park which earlier a jail was, has now become a symbolic place for carrying out protests in Bangalore. She also told that how drawing and storytelling through it had helped her daughter offset the boredom of doing homework. The audio-visuals, narratives and discussions she carried out in class kept the engagement very high.

### **Reflective Note – 3**

It was now time to finalize our community for research. I was still engaged with my internal dialogue in evening on Saturday and that is when Paul's example of Plato's Allegory of Cave struck me.

My descriptive narrative of how I identified the subject for this cross-cultural research and the community for participation:

It was a quiet evening, and I was sitting on my apartment's balcony, watching the sunset. The sky was a mix of fading light and rising darkness, and I noticed a group of pigeons resting on a nearby ledge. As I gazed up, my mind began to wander - I started thinking about Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

I considered how people, including myself, often lived within their own mental caves, shaped by upbringing, assumptions and perceptions. I wondered if People who have migrated from other state/cities to Bangalore - like me - might see the city's culture only as shadows cast by our own preconceptions. When we encountered the 'true' Bangalore, it could feel confusing or uncomfortable, just like the prisoner stepping out of the cave and facing the blinding light of reality.

My thoughts drifted to a question that had been lingering since I came to Bangalore - **What is Bangalore? What is Bengaluru? What is Bengaluru-ness?** The city carries multiple identities, depending on who perceives it. For some, it's a tech hub

with glitzy offices and start-up culture. For others, it's a historic, slow-paced town with old-world charm, filter coffee, and language pride. This duality of **Bangalore** and **Bengaluru** creates a complex, layered identity that isn't easy to grasp, especially for outsiders like me.

I chose to explore how domestic migrants perceive 'Bengaluru-ness' because I wanted to understand if our experience of the city is only a fragmented shadow of its reality - a shadow shaped by assumptions, stereotypes and cultural biases. As someone navigating both identities - a North Indian adapting to a South Indian city - I felt like I was constantly shifting between **Bangalore**, the metropolitan illusion and **Bengaluru**, the authentic, nuanced experience of the locals.

The sky before me, a blend of light and dark, seemed to mirror this duality - the comforting shadows of familiarity and the harsh brightness of confronting a new reality. I thought about my own experiences - the assumptions I had about Bangalore before living there and the realities I had come to know. **The city's culture wasn't just idli-dosa and filter coffee or the tech hub stereotype; it was a complex, layered experience that I had slowly begun to understand.**

As the sky darkened, I wondered whether I had truly stepped out of my own cave or if there were still shadows left unchallenged. The pigeons suddenly took flight, their shapes momentarily blocking the last rays of sunlight, casting fleeting shadows on the wall. It struck me - how easily illusions could appear like the truth, how comforting those shadows could be, and how difficult it was to confront the full, blinding light of reality.

In that moment, **I realized that understanding Bengaluru-ness wasn't just about grasping what the city truly is - it was also about recognizing the caves we bring with us, the shadows we mistake for truth and the effort it takes to see beyond them.**

## Reflective Note – 4

### Using Semantics and Semiotics in My Research

Reflecting on the allegory made me think about how semantics and semiotics could help me navigate and make sense of this complex experience. **Semantics would allow me to understand the words, symbols and phrases that domestic migrants associate with Bangalore.** **What do words like 'Namma Bengaluru' mean to someone who grew up here versus someone like me who learned it later?** How do phrases like '*Silicon Valley of India*' shape our perceptions before we even arrive?

**Semiotics** would help decode the visual and cultural symbols that the migrants encounter in Bangalore. **The symbolism of traditional Kannada script on street signs, the cultural icons like Kempen Gowda II and the stark contrast between heritage temples and modern tech parks - all these signs carry layered meanings.** Analysing them could reveal whether we see the signs themselves or just their shadows on the wall.

By applying **semantics**, I would be able to explore how migrants interpret and adapt to the city's cultural artifacts - from food and language to public transport and festivals. Typicality mapping with images would help identify whether these interpretations are close to the intended meanings or merely projections of prior beliefs.

Ultimately, this exercise in **semantics and semiotics** aims to go beyond stereotypes and reach a more genuine understanding of what **Bengaluru-ness** truly means. It could reveal the tensions, connections and negotiations between perception and reality, helping me and perhaps others step a little further out of our caves.

### **Reflective Note - 5**

In the later part of the week, just before the Holi Holidays, I identified the research participants (people who have migrated to Bangalore) and curated an image deck with 50 images. Now, let's talk about my image deck – I critically reason each and every image how it could be utilized in the card-sorting activity. I curated these images based on my personal experience and discussions with a few other people who were not my respondents in the card-sorting activity.

I later showed the image deck to Paul & Shivani and updated it based on their suggestions.

My final Deck of images was as followed:

#### **Historical & Political Symbols**

- **Kempen Gowda** - Symbolizes the historical roots of Bangalore. In semiotics, Kempen Gowda is a signifier of the city's origin. Migrants might see it as a local figure, while locals hold a sense of pride in this founder figure.
- **Vidhan Soudha** - A political landmark symbolizing governance. Migrants may see it as a typical government building, while locals view it as a representation of Karnataka's political identity.

#### **Urban Infrastructure & Modernity**

- **Forum Mall** - Represents urban consumerism. Seen as a popular shopping and entertainment hub by migrants but carries a nostalgic value for locals as one of the first malls.
- **Electronic City** - Iconic for Bangalore's global IT identity. Migrants see it as a job hub, while locals experience its impact on the city's urban sprawl.
- **BLR Airport** - The city's gateway, symbolizing international connectivity. Migrants may see it as a point of transition, while locals take pride in its modernization.

### Culinary Culture

- **Donne Biryani** - A localized variant of biryani. Migrants might compare it to their regional versions, possibly perceiving it as less authentic.
- **Set Dosa** - A staple breakfast that might be oversimplified by migrants as just "another dosa" without understanding its unique preparation.
- **Asal Dosa Batter** - The term "Asal" denotes authenticity. Migrants might miss the cultural weight of this branding.
- **Filter Coffee** - A symbol of South Indian culture. Migrants might compare it to their tea culture, often interpreting it as a niche drink.
- **Ragi Mudde** - A dish tied to Karnataka's agrarian past. Migrants might find it unfamiliar or unappealing, reflecting their own food preferences.

### Language & Identity

- **Tamil Advert Board** - Indicates the linguistic diversity of Bangalore. Migrants might find it confusing, mistaking the city as predominantly Kannada-speaking.
- **Namma BLR Metro** - The term "Namma" means **ours**, expressing a sense of belonging. Migrants may see it as just public transport, missing the local pride.
- **Kannad Couple** - A visual of traditional local culture. Migrants might misinterpret it as outdated or stereotypical.

### Religious & Cultural Markers

- **Ganeshotsav** - Celebrated with a unique blend of local and migrant cultures, demonstrating Bangalore's multicultural identity.
- **Bull Temple** - Important to locals for religious reasons. Migrants might view it as a tourist spot without grasping its cultural significance.
- **Iscon Temple** - A blend of spirituality and commerce, appealing to both locals and migrants, reflecting Bangalore's cosmopolitan spiritualism.
- **Bengaluru Karaga** - A deeply rooted local festival. Migrants may not recognize its historical significance, viewing it as just another celebration.
- **Pongal** - While known as a Tamil festival, it is integral to Bangalore's multicultural framework. Migrants might view it as specific to Tamils only.
- **Door Rangoli** - A typical sign of South Indian households. Migrants may view it as mere decoration, overlooking its ritualistic meaning.

### Everyday Life & Urban Symbols

- **BMTC Bus** - Represents the struggles of daily commute. Migrants may see it as an underdeveloped public transport system.
- **BLR Traffic Jam** - Known for its memes and online commentary. Locals endure it, while migrants see it as a frustrating stereotype of the city.
- **BBMP Garbage** - Reflects civic issues. Migrants may interpret it as urban mismanagement, while locals understand deeper systemic problems.
- **Bangalore Floods** - Symbolizes the city's urban planning challenges. Migrants may see it as mismanagement, while locals connect it to rapid, unchecked urbanization.

### Entertainment & Popular Culture

- **KGF & Kantara** - Films that represent local culture while gaining national recognition. Migrants may appreciate them as movies but miss the cultural pride they evoke.
- **Rahul Dravid & Rajni Kanth** - Icons representing sports and cinema. Migrants see them as celebrities, while locals view them as cultural treasures.
- **Royal Challengers BLR** - Unites locals and migrants through cricket, blending identities within the city's passionate sports culture.

- **Crows** - A mundane yet constant part of the city's ecosystem. Migrants may overlook them, while locals see them as a sign of everydayness.

### **Traditional vs. Modern Identity**

- **Cubbon Park & Lal Baugh** - Heritage green spaces amidst urban growth. Migrants might see them as recreational spots, while locals view them as nostalgic retreats.
- **Kormangala Flower** - A symbol of Bangalore's earlier green landscape. Migrants may not realize its connection to the city's diminishing greenery.
- **Mysore Sandal Soap** - A traditional brand with a loyal following. Migrants might see it as an outdated product, while locals value its heritage.

### **Educational & Intellectual Identity**

- **Iisc** - Represents academic excellence. Migrants may see it as a prestigious institute but miss its role in the city's intellectual culture.
- **Narayana Murthi** - An icon of Bangalore's IT boom. Migrants see him as a corporate leader, while locals see him as a transformative figure.

### **Festivals & Celebrations**

- **Groundnut Festival** - A hyper-local event unknown to many migrants, representing deep-rooted cultural ties.
- **Dussehra** - Known across India, but the Mysore Dussehra has a unique connection to Karnataka's heritage, which migrants might not fully understand.
- **Ganeshotsav** - A cultural overlap where local and migrant interpretations of the festival blend.

### **Religion & Spirituality**

- **St. John's Church** - Symbolizes Bangalore's colonial and cosmopolitan history. Migrants might see it as just a church without deeper historical knowledge.

- **Jama Masjid BLR** - Reflects the city's religious diversity. Migrants might view it as a generic mosque, missing its local significance.

### Rural & Rustic Elements

- **Cow Dung Cake** - Symbolizes rural life still present in the urban periphery. Migrants might view it as a rustic remnant.
- **Crows** - Often unnoticed but ever-present, symbolizing the city's coexistence of urban and rural elements.

### Art & Design

- **Srishti Manipal** - Represents the city's creative and educational identity. Migrants might see it as just another design school without understanding its influence.
- **Bharat Natyam** - Typically seen as a Tamil art form but integrated into Bangalore's cultural scene. Migrants might view it as purely classical and disconnected from the city's modern identity

### Reflective Note - 5

I later engaged with the respondents to conduct the card-sorting activity to develop emic and etic perspectives. There were interesting insights that came out of the card-sorting activity. Again, despite of the differences in image categorization there was some common-ness in the reasoning. The differences were a function of the duration a person has stayed in , their observation of the culture outside Bangalore, lived experiences at the place, their understanding of the three categories, their interpretation of the word – Typical, somewhat typic and atypical, cultural perceptions/biases and to some extent their professions as well.

Experiential Learning, Semantics, Semiotics, Cross- Cultural Research, Emic – Etic, Sense making through visual data, unwinding, Contextual Meaning, Data Synthesis, Card Sorting, Collective Conscience, 3 point Likert Scale

