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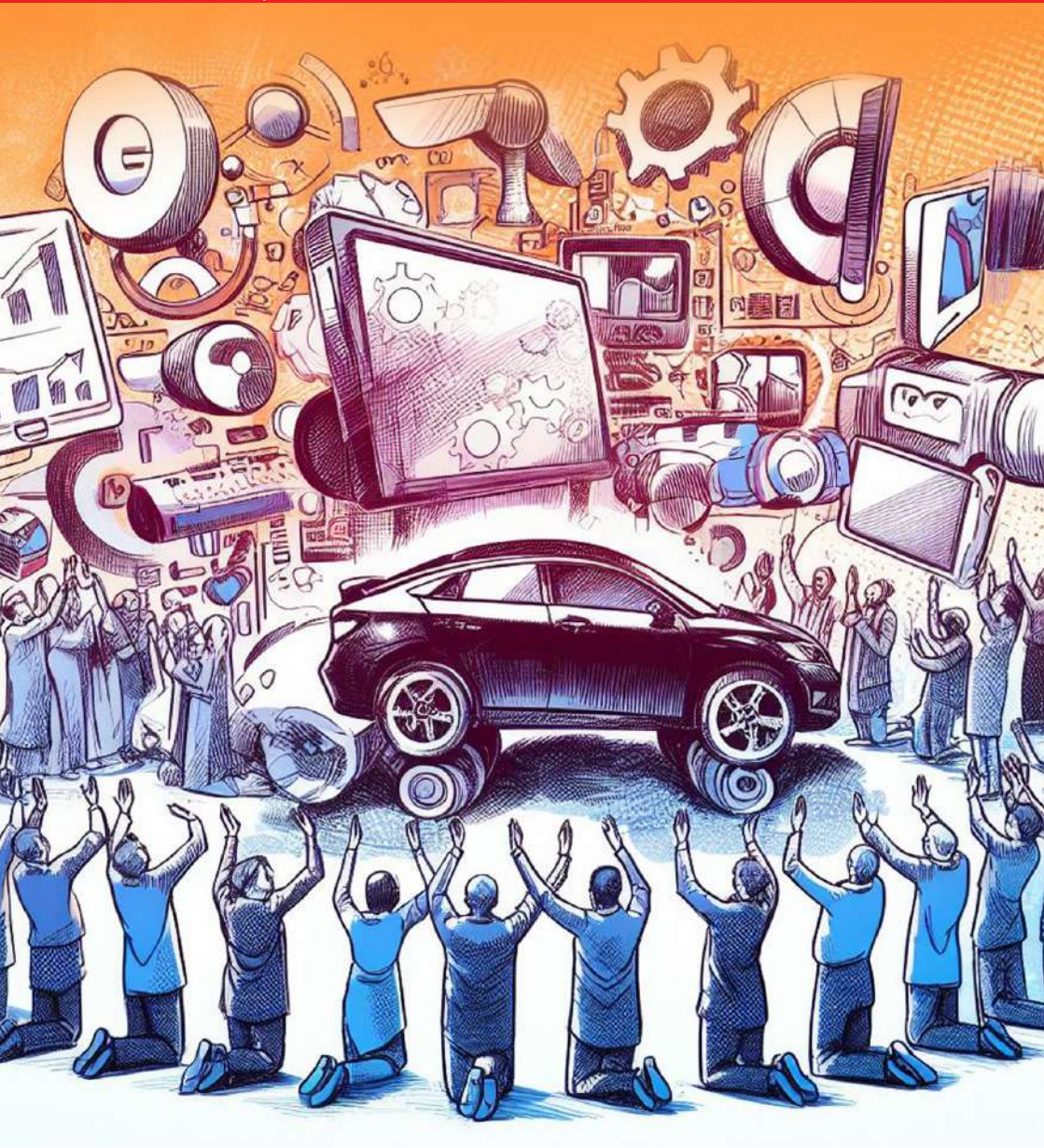

COMMODITY FETISHISM

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Sivarajavel IAS Academy 's

THE SOCIAL FACT

is a monthly bulletin for sociology current affairs which tries to give aspirants a new dimensions in their sociology preparations. The Magazine has been designed in such away that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

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Connecting the dots :
Sociology is a process in making. Everyday newspapers and weekly have many important news, which have sociological angle in subtle form. This chapter helps you to connect those dots and give a clear picture of the reality.

Beyond Basics :
Going beyond basics in studies for examinations is crucial to foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter, enabling more comprehensive and critical thinking. It allows students to tackle complex questions with confidence and adapt to evolving exam formats.

Perspectives :
Beauty of Sociology, as a social science, is its capacity to offer different perspectives of a same topic. This chapter analyses a current topic with an unique social perspectives.

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THE SOCIAL FACT 2.0

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

We hope this message finds you well, and we're thrilled to connect with you as we embark on an exciting new journey. Today, we'd like to express our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support as subscribers to our magazine. Your commitment to our publication has been the driving force behind our success, and we are truly thankful for your contributions.

We are thrilled to share the stellar success of our magazine during the UPSC CSM 2023 examinations in particular. It has been widely embraced by the aspirants all across the country, and we are deeply grateful for your support and enthusiasm.

Over the years, UPSC examinations has witnessed significant transformations, and these changes have been reflected in our Sociology optional paper also. We understand that your interests and expectations have also evolved, and it is our mission to continue to provide you with content that aligns with these shifting trends.

We are dedicated to delivering even more compelling, insightful, and diverse content that not only informs but also engages and inspires. Our team of writers, editors and designers are working tirelessly to bring you the latest, most relevant stories, trends, and features that matter most to you. This new journey is a testament to our commitment to meeting your evolving.

As we move forward, we intend to continue providing you with valuable content through "Connecting the Dots" and introduce some exciting changes. Our readers can look forward to the continuation of the "Perspectives" section, which offers in-depth insights and analysis but in a new manner wihich involves cover story based analysis among others.

In addition to this, we are delighted to introduce a brand-new section titled "Beyond Basics." This section is designed to cater to the evolving nature of the examination and aims to provide aspirants with a holistic understanding of the subject matter. "Beyond Basics" will delve into various aspects like::

1. Case Studies: *We will explore real-life case studies that offer practical applications of the subject matter, allowing you to connect theory with real-world scenarios.*

2. In-Depth Content on Sociological Topics: *Our team will provide comprehensive and not-so-commonly discussed sociological topics, giving you a deeper understanding of the subject.*

3. Author Summaries: *You can expect concise summaries of renowned books and authors, saving you valuable time and helping you grasp key concepts more efficiently.*

These exciting additions are designed to enhance your exam preparation and provide a more comprehensive learning experience. We are committed to supporting your journey towards success and ensuring that "The Social Fact" continues to be a valuable resource for all aspirants.

With great pleasure, we extend our gratitude for being a part of this incredible adventure, and here's to an even brighter and more insightful future! Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome as we strive to provide content that aligns with your needs and aspirations. We are excited about this new phase of our magazine and look forward to sharing it with you.

Thank you for being a part of our community, and we can't wait to embark on this journey with you!

Warm regards,
The Social Fact Team.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

- *Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde announced on Wednesday that Ahmednagar city would be renamed 'Ahilya Nagar' after the 18th century Maratha queen Ahilyabai Holkar. His decision, "respecting the public demand", came on the 298th birth anniversary of the ruler who established Maheshwar (in Madhya Pradesh) as the seat of the Holkar dynasty:* ***Though symbolic interactionism focusses on the micro level, this example shows the relevance of the significant symbols in the larger socio-political infrastructure as well.***

- *From March 22 to April 26, 2023, as many as eight people have died while cleaning sewers in various parts of Gujarat, raising concerns about the continuing deaths of manual scavengers despite the fact that the practice has been declared illegal across the country:* ***BR Ambedkar reiterates that the Manual scavenging is not a career chosen voluntarily by workers, but instead a deeply unhealthy, unsavoury and undignified job forced upon these people because of the stigma attached to their caste. The nature of the work itself then reinforces that stigma.***

- *Worried over the increase in train accidents across the rail network, the Railway Board has called for urgent steps to fill vacancies and reduce the long working hours of locomotive pilots. The prolonged working hours of loco pilots due to an acute shortage of manpower was suspected to be the main reason for the increasing number of accidents, particularly SPAD cases :* ***Neo Marxists anticipated that a democratic state would never take a stand against capitalism as they themselves perpetuate the cheap labour.***

- *Observing that the attendants appointed to guard the bodies in mortuaries of many government and private hospitals indulge in "sexual intercourse" on the bodies, the High Court of Karnataka has recommended that the government amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to bring necrophilia under the definition of offence of unnatural sex or introduce new provision in IPC to make necrophilia an offence :* ***Sylvia Walby has given the six structures of patriarchy where violence is one of them and "necrophilia" shows the emerging forms of violence against women.***

- *Farmer leaders from across Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh on Thursday gathered for a mahapanchayat and took a decision to meet President Droupadi Murmu seeking justice for India's top wrestlers. The wrestlers have been demanding the arrest of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for alleged sexual exploitation, charges which Mr. Singh has denied:* ***This is a classic example of the influence of pressure groups in the politics. This also throws light on the way that these pressure groups are taking up the issues which are beyond their immediate interest.***

- *The younger lot is seeing its idols dragged through the mud, says Ajay Malik, who has trained top grapplers, including Sakshi Malik; another coach says fewer female wrestlers are joining his camp. While women wrestlers continue to train here without missing a day, they look visibly demotivated :* ***Merton talks about the reference group theory and anticipatory socialisation, here how the person is received or retreated in the reference group influence the desirability of the person to enter the non-participant reference group or not.***

- *The Gujarat government will move the High Court to challenge the acquittal of self-styled godman Asaram's wife, their daughter and four disciples in a 2013 rape case, an official said on Thursday. They were accused by the prosecution of aiding and abetting the crime, but were acquitted for want of evidence:* ***This can be quoted for the dysfunctional aspect of the sects and cults where the so called religious leaders exploiting their followers both physically and emotionally as they are already a vulnerable section (Weber called as them as theodicy of dispriveleged)***

- *China showered the Tesla CEO with admiration during his whistlestop tour of the country. Chinese social media was abuzz with news of Mr. Musk's sojourn, with related hashtags on the Twitter-like Weibo platform racking up billions of views. Many has expressed that they "worship" Mr. Musk for his "great personal charm and constant excellence in his field":* ***This 21st century "can-do" generation look up to the people in the technology over politics and the successful people becomes a charismatic authority, the rise of Elon Musk's popularity is a testimonial.***

- *Puducherry transport Minister S. Chandira Priyanga from the All India N.R Congress (AINRC)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition government citing caste and gender discrimination against her. The only woman legislator in the 30-member assembly, Priyanga hails from the Dalit community:* ***This is an example of Intersectonality, where the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.***

- *Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao will kick-start celebrations of the State's 10th year of formation at the State Secretariat on Friday. Over 21 days, the government will celebrate the State's achievements in different sectors since its formation. Mr. Rao ordered the release of ₹105 crore to District Collectors for organising the celebrations. A series of programmes dedicated to one department a day will be organised across the State:* ***Rudolf and Rudolf has emphasised that the federalism and regionalism has helped the country as a whole to develop as a strong democratic country.***

BEYOND BASICS

DRAMATURGICAL APPROACH

"Why should we go beyond the basics?"

In recent UPSC examinations, there has been a consistent focus on questions related to the Non-Positivist School of Thought, with the latest example being an inquiry into Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach. Erving Goffman (1922-1982) is renowned as a sociologist whose contributions to the field of symbolic interactionism and the study of everyday social interactions have left a lasting impact.

This insightful article authored by Adam D. Barnhart can greatly enhance your grasp of these theories, providing you with the depth of knowledge necessary for addressing UPSC questions related to Non-Positivist Schools of Thought.

Erving Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, published in 1959, provides a detailed description and analysis of process and meaning in mundane interaction. Goffman, as a product of the Chicago School, writes from a symbolic interactionist perspective, emphasizing a qualitative analysis of the component parts of the interactive process. Through a micro-sociological analysis and focus on unconventional subject matter, Goffman explores the details of individual identity, group relations, the impact of environment, and the movement and interactive meaning of information. His perspective, though limited in scope, provides new insight into the nature of social interaction and the psychology of the individual.

Goffman employs a "dramaturgical approach" in his study, concerning himself with the mode of presentation employed by the actor and its meaning in the broader social context. Interaction is viewed as a "performance," shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with "impressions" that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor. The performance exists regardless of the mental state of the individual, as persona is often imputed to the individual in spite of his or her lack of faith in -- or even ignorance of -- the performance. Goffman uses the example of the doctor who is forced to give a placebo to a patient, fully aware of its impotence, as a result of the desire of the patient for more extensive treatment. In this way, the individual develops identity or persona as a function of interaction with others, through an exchange of information that allows for more specific definitions of identity and behavior.

The process of establishing social identity, then, becomes closely allied to the concept of the "front," which is described as "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance". The front acts as the a vehicle of standardization, allowing for others to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits that have normative meanings. As a "collective representation," the front establishes proper "setting," "appearance," and "manner" for the social role assumed by the actor, uniting interactive behavior with the personal front. The actor, in order to present a compelling front, is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner.

This process, known as "dramatic realization", is predicated upon the activities of "impression management," the control (or lack of control) and communication of information through the performance. In constructing a front, information about the actor is given off through a variety of communicative sources, all of which must be controlled to effectively convince the audience

of the appropriateness of behavior and consonance with the role assumed. Believability, as a result, is constructed in terms of verbal signification, which is used by the actor to establish intent, and non-verbal signification, which is used by the audience to verify the honesty of statements made by the individual. Attempts are made to present an "idealized" version of the front, more consistent with the norms, mores, and laws of society than the behavior of the actor when not before an audience . Information dealing with aberrant behavior and belief is concealed from the audience in a process of "mystification," making prominent those characteristics that are socially sanctioned, legitimating both the social role of the individual and the framework to which the role belongs .

Goffman explores nature of group dynamics through a discussion of "teams" and the relationship between performance and audience. He uses the concept of the team to illustrate the work of a group of individuals who "co-operate" in performance, attempting to achieve goals sanctioned by the group. Co-operation may manifest itself as unanimity in demeanor and behavior or in the assumption of differing roles for each individual, determined by the desired intent in performance. Goffman refers to the "shill," a member of the team who "provides a visible model for the audience of the kind of response the performers are seeking," promoting psychological excitement for the realization of a (generally monetary) goal, as an example of a "discrepant role" in the team. In each circumstance, the individual assumes a front that is perceived to enhance the group's performance.

The necessity of each individual to maintain his or her front in order to promote the team performance reduces the possibility of dissent. While the unifying elements of the team are often shallower and less complete than the requirements of performance, the individual actor feels a strong pressure to conform to the desired front in the presence of an audience, as deviance destroys

the credibility of the entire performance. As a result, disagreement is carried out in the absence of an audience, where ideological and performance changes may be made without the threat of damage to the goals of the team, as well as the character of the individual. In this way, a clear division is made between team and audience.

Goffman describes the division between team performance and audience in terms of "region," describing the role of setting in the differentiation of actions taken by individuals. Extending the dramaturgical analysis, he divides region into "front," "back," and "outside" the stage, contingent upon the relationship of the audience to the performance. While the "official stance" of the team is visible in their frontstage presentation, in the backstage, "the impression fostered by the presentation is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course," indicating a more "truthful" type of performance. In the backstage, the conflict and difference inherent to familiarity is more fully explored, often evolving into a secondary type of presentation, contingent upon the absence of the responsibilities of the team presentation. To be outside the stage involves the inability to gain access to the performance of the team, described as an "audience segregation" in which specific performances are given to specific audiences, allowing the team to contrive the proper front for the demands of each audience. This allows the team, individual actor, and audience to preserve proper relationships in interaction and the establishments to which the interactions belong.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, though detailed, does not provide a comprehensive description of interactive processes. In exploring the construction of presentation among individual and teams, Goffman does not fully explore the nature of marginalized individuals, the importance of ritual or ceremony in the dramaturgy, or the construction of character. A reading of these complementary notions from Goffman's later work, including Stigma and

Interaction Ritual, provides a vehicle for expanding the analysis of the interaction of everyday life into the broader experiences of human interaction.

The pressure of idealized conduct is most clearly seen in marginalized people, whose deviance forces them into "discredited" or "discreditable" groups, based on the nature of their stigma. The importance of impression management is most visible with these individuals, as those who are discredited must assuage the tension their stigma causes in order to successfully interact with others, while those suffering from a discrediting stigma are forced to limit the access of others to information about the stigma or assume the character of a discredited individual. The emphasis on idealized, normative identity and conduct limits the ability of the discredited individual to achieve full acceptance by the population that he or she is forced to assimilate into. For the discreditable individual who attempts to "pass" and employ "disidentifiers" to establish him/herself as "normal", feelings of ambivalence and alienation emerge as a result of limited social intercourse. Ultimately, the existence of a stigma of any type, a part of the existence of a large segment of the population, changes the nature of impression management and, hence, interaction.

In his essay "Face Work," from Interaction Ritual, Goffman expands on the concept of the "line," originally employed in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, dealing with the definition of line in terms of ritualized, symbolic action. Symbol, as with the three types of symbolic imagery described in Stigma, stigma symbols, prestige symbols, and disidentifiers, assume a more abstract location in the communicative process, a reification of verbal cues. The face reflects the line imputed by others, regardless of cognizance of its existence, to the actor, based on the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, either affirming or denying a social construct. In this way a means of locating the actor in the interactive process and the broader society, allowing Goffman to affirm George

Herbert Mead's argument that identity is constructed through an understanding of the projection of the self to others.

The vehicle for the construction of the character and identity can be seen in Goffman's article "Where The Action Is." The emphasis on the movement between social spaces, similar to his discussion of audience segregation and the "presence of third parties", underscores the importance of the recreation of the self in different environments. To fully define the self, Goffman argues, involves performance in voluntary, consequential action, which is not fully available in everyday life. As a result, individuals are drawn to activities that involve risk-taking, such as gambling and bullfighting. Ultimately, the experience of action may become more important than social perception in defining character. As Goffman states:

Although fateful enterprises are often respectable, there are many character contests and scenes of serious action that are not. Yet these are the occasions and places that show respect for the moral character. Not only in mountain ranges that invite the climber, but also in casinos, pool halls, and racetracks do we find worship; it may be in churches, where the guarantee is high that nothing will occur, that the moral sensibility is weak.

In this sense, Goffman depicts extraordinary circumstances as a means of developing the character central to the experience of everyday life. Through an investigation of his work in a broader context, the relationship between the forces that shape society and the individual becomes more clear.

While Goffman's symbolic interactionist orientation situates him well in developing an understanding of micro-sociological function, it provides only a cursory exploration of the larger institutions and processes of society. Despite this emphasis, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, is a work that lends

itself well to a macro-sociological reading. By placing Goffman's work in the context of the writings of other thinkers, a beneficial link between the micro- and macro-structures of society becomes visible.

An important link may be made between Goffman and Durkheim may be made in an inquiry into the concept of "spontaneity." In The Presentation of Self, the importance of spontaneity emerges as an aspect of the performance, as the actor seeks to create a front that does not appear to be contrived. Spontaneity allows for the realization of the "true" self, an idealized type of interaction that allows the individual to realize a desired face. In The Division of Labor in Society, Durkheim describes a macro-sociological model of spontaneity, a "finely articulated organisation in which each social value...is appreciated at its true worth". Durkheim, though primarily concerned with labor, describes a type of social interaction that, like Goffman's model, reaffirms the existing social environment through the notion of "truth." Each individual is bound to the contemporary social organization, while attempting to realize a sense of freedom in expressing truth.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony extends this relationship further, establishing an ephemeral unconscious acceptance of existing social institutions. Change in this state, for Gramsci, takes place via change in human consciousness:

Since present control is internalized in the minds and hearts of workers and peasants, a counter form of socialization, a counter form of self-identity, is required to overthrow that control (Gramsci).

Through changes in consciousness, hegemony forms an "moving equilibrium"through an assimilation of the doctrinal bases of the culture through "common sense". In light of Goffman's work, hegemony provides the definition

of "idealized" performance and the pressure to correspond to established definition. As a representation of what Marx termed "the ideas of the ruling class" hegemony provides the norms, mores, and laws to which stigma, line, face, and Durkheim's anomie can be applied. In this sense, hegemony provides a vital link between the macrostructure of social institutions and the micro-sociological phenomena of face-to-face interaction.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life provides penetrating insight into the nature of interpersonal interaction and the institutions to which interaction more strongly applies. Despite an unusual, anecdotal methodology, Goffman's work displays an uncommon analytical rigor in dealing with a comparatively unexplored area of social thought. Through an inquiry into the everyday life of humanity, the book provides a strong foundation for the understanding of microsociological phenomena, an understanding bolstered by an investigation of his other writings. By limiting his work to a dramaturgical study, however, Goffman eliminates the possibility of applying the activities of the mundane world to the larger social world, a problem that may be reconciled by examining concepts employed in the book through the work of macrotheorists.

EMBODYING MOTHERHOOD: PERSPECTIVES FROM CONTEMPORARY INDIA

"Why should we go beyond the basics?"

In our optional paper, the chapter on "Family and Kinship Systems" remains perennially significant. It's worth noting that the evolving nature of families and the changing roles of women within these kinship structures are gaining increased importance, both in Paper 1 and Paper 2 of our curriculum.

For contemporary insights into the role of motherhood, we highly recommend the book mentioned above, which offers valuable perspectives that can be aptly cited in your answers, which delves into the complexities of motherhood in modern society. This book summary was authored by Priyasha Choudhary, who holds a Master's degree in Development Studies from the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad,

The book : Motherhood: Perspectives from Contemporary India by Anu Aneja and Shubhangi Vaidya (published by Sage in 2016) is another ground-breaking text that brings to the limelight how ideologies of motherhood have been shaped, drawing on lived experiences and subjectivities of motherhood. Motherhood has always been a contested and convoluted experience comprising multiple layers of emotions, perceptions, and experiences shaped by patriarchal ideologies and constructs which impede and dictate maternal subjectivities and lived experience. Since time immemorial, mothers have held a glorified and idolized position within the Indian tradition, positioned as compassionate and endearing entities circumscribed by patriarchy. Women's identity and status are often inextricably linked to their role as mothers.

This book is a rich and layered text that critically analyses motherhood in its myriad forms by using a feminist framework to 're-vision the embodiment of maternal as symbolic and experiential'. The book is divided into seven chapters and an introduction. These chapters analyze the ideologies of motherhood from various perspectives like religious iconography, cinema and consumer culture, disability, etc. The authors' lived experiences as mothers and their academic affiliations and interdisciplinary locations provide a fresh and in-depth lens to analyze the same.

The first chapter uses psychoanalytic and feminist frameworks to explore how religious iconography and text shape woman and mother ideologies, often at odds with the lived realities of women. The author maps the historical trajectory of goddess worship and iconography and compares the mythical to the real and states, 'if the only mother-goddess to escape patriarchal infringement is a discursive goddess, then it is work on language which is the key needed to open doors to liberating subjectivities; it is in and through a work on speech and language that women can re-cast the feminine and the maternal'.

The second and third chapters discuss maternal subjectivity in the context of literature, cinema, and psychoanalysis. The chapters provided a rich understanding of how a mother is imagined, dreamt of, and understood and how they play out in cinematic or literary representations. Films that reimagine the maternal through alternative representations are also discussed.

The next chapter shifts the focus to the everyday experience of women who are mothers of children on the autism spectrum. Shubhangi Vaidya's extensive research, combined with her lived experiences as a caregiver, provides rich insights into the experiential and emotional dimensions of motherhood in the context of mothers of autistic children.

Like with many of the other chapters in the book, a critique of normative mother-blaming constructs, such as the theory of 'refrigerator mothers', is an essential component of this chapter. As the author aptly states, 'the 'refrigerator mother' demonized by (male) experts thus became the perfect target of blame for a child's atypical or abnormal development, as an 'abnormal' mother deficient in maternal instinct and caring practices'. The chapter is fascinating in understanding how these terms have been challenged over time. The chapter ends with two case studies, leaving the reader with a hopeful note and giving an important message about parents as advocates in such situations.

The fifth chapter discusses the commercial surrogacy scenario wherein India has emerged as a global forerunner. The chapter provides a comprehensive account of how contractual motherhood is performed and its complexities regarding maternal subjectivities. These transactions are often between upper caste/class households and lower ones, thereby bringing caste/class hierarchies into the picture. It is significant to understand all these practices in the backdrop of contemporary capitalism and consumerism. The authors also present the provocative idea that the care work performed by nannies and caretakers in urban households may be viewed as a different kind of 'surrogacy', where lower-class nannies engage in reproductive labour for upper-class women.

The next chapter is one of the best chapters of the volume that looks at disabled mothers and how they challenge the norms of motherhood and sexuality. Disabled women have been historically subjected to desexualization and seen as incapable and incompetent of caring for a child or themselves. They are always viewed as entities that require care and unfit to provide it; therefore, disabled mothers are often either invisibilized or ignored.

The chapter uses a feminist intersectional framework in a cross-cultural context to highlight these issues and concerns. It also discusses thorny issues pertaining to institutionalization and forced sterilizations of disabled women.

The book's final chapter presents a comparative perspective of French feminist literature and Indian feminist literature to explore the potential of critical theory in making sense of the study of motherhood. The book ends on a note wherein the authors yet again remind us of the paramount importance of cultural and context-specific research on the experiences and subjectivities of women.

Motherhood has been one of the most idealized and glorified forms of labour that women are naturalized to undertake and enjoy. It is interesting to note that the virtue of a mother and the qualities of a mother are so deeply entrenched and essentialized for women that any amount of deviance from the norm is tantamount to treachery. Motherhood is one of the most crucial spaces for understanding the power relations between men and women. The naturalization of mothering instincts renders women especially vulnerable to essentialization and unjust expectations of femininity. "Embodying Motherhood: Perspectives from Contemporary India" by Anu Aneja and Shubhangi Vaidya presents a compelling and rich exploration of motherhood in the Indian context through diverse lenses and feminist frameworks. The book delves into the complex and multifaceted experiences of mothers, challenging traditional patriarchal ideologies and constructs that shape maternal subjectivities. By incorporating their own lived experiences as mothers and drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives, the authors bring a fresh and intimate lens to their analysis of motherhood. The book not only critiques prevailing norms but also advocates for language and cultural work that can liberate women and reshape the understanding of motherhood beyond limiting stereotypes.

While the book's focus on contemporary India provides valuable insights into the country's cultural and social context, readers should be mindful of its limited generalizability to other regions or cultural settings. Additionally, some might seek a more balanced discussion that includes diverse perspectives and experiences, such as those of LGBTQ+ families or non-biological motherhood.

Overall, "Embodying Motherhood" serves as an essential resource for scholars, researchers, and anyone interested in understanding the intricate realities of motherhood in India. By examining the diverse subjectivities and experiences of mothers, the book encourages readers to rethink and reimagine the institution of motherhood, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of women's roles and identities in society. It will be a crucial read for scholars from anthropology, gender studies, sociology, family studies, development studies and even public policy enthusiasts.

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PERSPECTIVES

BELONGING, 'PERFORMANCE' AND EVERYDAY EXCLUSION IN IITs:

Paper 1: Education and social change.
Suicides (Durkheim and Merton)

The recent suicide case of Anil Kumar, a B.Tech student at IIT-Delhi, is the second incident of suicide after Ayush Ashna in the last two months. The growing number of suicides among students from marginalised castes in IITs reveals how structural exclusion operates in everyday institutional spaces. It raises several questions about the so-called proclamation of institutional diversity. For instance, why are IITs and other so-called Institutions of Excellence becoming Institutions of Exclusion? Why do marginalised students experience institutional segregation in the everyday social spaces of higher education institutions (HEIs)? Why has the notion of 'performance' always been flagged off when it comes to justifying incidents of suicides among marginalised caste students and also in defence of institutional diversity and inclusion?

The last decade in Indian higher education has been transformative. And deeply challenging. The marginalised students entered HEIs through reservation policies, social movements, and solidarity groups, and they have challenged the hegemonic presence of privileged social groups through social collectives and fraternity groups on campus. However, such solidarity groups are not active in many institutions in India. The presence of marginalised students

in technical, management and medical institutions is very small compared to the institutions of liberal arts and humanities. Here they constantly struggle to get accustomed to the everyday social spaces of the institutions, which often leads to the inability to forge belongingness. This article attempts to link the notion of belonging, 'performance' and structural exclusion to understand student suicides in institutions like IITs and how academic practices and performative norms make IITs a site of structural exclusion.

Framing Belonging

The incidents of student suicide in technical institutions need to be framed in the discourse of belonging in higher education. The micro-observations of such suicide cases open many layers of students' lived experiences where many marginalised students encountered a sense of not belonging to the institutions. The pressing question is, "Who decides their (non-)belonging"?

The dominant narratives of belonging to institutions like IITs are based on the idea of merit. Historically, IITs have been known for protecting the status quo of social privileges in the name of merit. Ajantha Subramanian (2015) has attempted to deconstruct the meaning of merit in her pinioning work 'Making Merit', based on an anthropological study of IIT, Madras. She argues that the meaning of merit is embedded in the (post-)colonial histories of technical education, caste, and capital. In the context of IITs, caste has significantly defined the transformative nature of merit and its linkage with the larger social structure and institutional hegemony.

In the context of IITs, the politics of belonging is linked to an apparently 'homogenised social space' where privileged groups are entitled to all kinds of systemic support, and unprivileged groups lack the bare minimum. The institutional unwillingness to accommodate marginalised students in many technical institutions is evident in the ways by which differential treatments forced

marginalised students to dissociate from normal academic life. The everyday lived experiences of marginalised students reflect the implicit imposition of casteism, making them realise that they are devalued and inhumane compared to their privileged counterparts. In such situations, when first-generation students like Darshan and Ayush enter the IITs, they experience a sense of non-belonging.

Deconstructing Performance:

The dominant justification in cases of student suicides has been narrowed to performance and mental illness. The institutional logic always understands students as individual entities that are not marked by their differential social identity. Often, institutionalised Brahmanical hegemony limits institutions from recognising the social dimensions before understanding such suicide cases. In the case of Darshan Solanki's institutional death at IIT Bombay, the institution investigated and found "deteriorating academic performance" as a reason to take extreme steps. But institutional probe intentionally undermined caste discrimination and constant humiliation as a reason for taking such steps.

The notion of performance is a social construct. The ongoing debates and discussions around performance and caste identities in HEIs are evident enough to argue that existing norms and methods to assess learners' performance are beyond binaries of academic aptitude and classroom engagement of individual students. Students from marginalised backgrounds often struggle to find supportive peer groups, faculties, and staff. The hostile and exclusive ecosystem of institutions pushes them into alienation and segregation. In such an institutional atmosphere, the everyday learning of marginalised students gets affected, and therefore, so-called performance parameters create gradation among desirable and undesirable learners. An empirical study titled 'Survey at an IIT Campus Shows How Caste Affects Students' Perceptions' suggests that students belonging to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe groups report facing

hostile attitudes from teachers and fellow students.

Many privileged caste students believe that marginalised caste students have lower academic ability, and this leads to humiliation and discrimination against their fellow students.

Conclusion:

The socio-spatial structure of IITs still dominates the culture of privileged caste groups. Several studies, including N. Sukumar's recent book 'Caste Discrimination and Exclusion in Indian Universities' uncover the ongoing institutional casteism that perpetuates the notion of purity and impurity in the everyday social spaces of HEIs. Therefore, I argue that institutions like IITs need to bring the social justice agenda to the forefront of their academic structure. Creating diversity and inclusion cells does not address the rooted social exclusiveness and institutional casteism. The destruction of structural exclusion will be only possible when every marginalised student gets recognised with the spirit of rationality and fraternity.

(This article is written by Vidyasagar Sharma, who is a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany.)

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COMMODITY FETISHISM

Paper 1: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle.

Commodity fetishism is a concept introduced by Karl Marx in his critique of political economy, particularly in his work "Capital, Volume I." In this concept, Marx argues that in a capitalist society, people often attribute mystical or magical qualities to commodities, seeing them as possessing inherent value, while in reality, their value is a result of social and economic processes.

While commodity fetishism, as originally conceptualized by Karl Marx in the context of 19th-century capitalism, might not be as overtly visible in today's society due to the evolution of capitalism and cultural changes, it can still be argued that it remains relevant in modified forms. Here are some reasons why commodity fetishism continues to have relevance:

1. Digital and Technological Commodities: In the digital age, intangible commodities like software, data, and online services have become central to our lives. These commodities are often mystified and attributed with value beyond their physical attributes, reflecting a form of fetishism.

2. Brand Cultures and Identity: The importance of branding and consumer culture has only intensified in contemporary society. People often identify with and ascribe a sense of self-worth to the brands they consume. This demonstrates a form of commodity fetishism where the symbolic value of the brand is more significant than the physical product.

3. Luxury Goods: The luxury goods industry is a prime example of how commodity fetishism endures. People pay exorbitant prices for products not solely based on their utility but on the perceived status and prestige associated with these commodities.

4. Consumer Culture and Advertising: Advertising and marketing strategies continue to exploit commodity fetishism. They create and perpetuate desires for products, making them seem essential for happiness or social success.

5. Environmental Concerns: The global environmental crisis can be linked to commodity fetishism, as people often prioritize the consumption of goods over sustainability. The perceived value of commodities can lead to overconsumption and disregard for the environmental consequences.

6. Inequality and Consumer Debt: Many individuals still fall into cycles of consumer debt, driven by the desire to acquire commodities they believe will enhance their status or happiness. This is indicative of a form of commodity fetishism.

While some elements of commodity fetishism may still persist, particularly in niche markets or certain consumer behaviours, it is not as prominent or relevant as it once was. Modern society is characterized by greater awareness, diversity of products, and changing consumer attitudes, which have shifted the dynamics of how people relate to commodities.

1. Information and Transparency: In today's interconnected world, consumers have access to an abundance of information. They can research and understand the true value and origins of products, reducing the mystification associated with commodities.

2. Changing Economic Structures: The nature of production and consumption has evolved significantly since Marx's time. The rise of the service economy, the digitalization of products, and the complexity of global supply chains have altered the dynamics of commodity exchange.

3. Consumer Awareness: Consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of their choices on society and the environment. Ethical consumerism and sustainability concerns are changing the way people relate to products, focusing on the social and environmental consequences of consumption rather than fetishizing the commodity itself.

4. Diverse Product Offerings: The modern marketplace offers a diverse range of products, catering to a wide spectrum of preferences and values. This diversity undermines the notion of one-size-fits-all commodity fetishism.

5. Postmodern Critiques: Postmodern theorists have critiqued and challenged Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, suggesting that it is an oversimplification of the complex relationships between individuals, commodities, and culture.

6. Experience Economy: In contemporary society, the value of experiences often surpasses the value of physical possessions. People are willing to invest in experiences, such as travel, events, and entertainment, rather than in the fetishisation of commodities.

But in the larger picture, while the manifestations of commodity fetishism may have evolved in response to changes in capitalism and culture, it still plays a significant role in contemporary society. It has adapted to the digital age, luxury markets, and branding, and remains a relevant concept for understanding the psychological and social dimensions of consumer culture.

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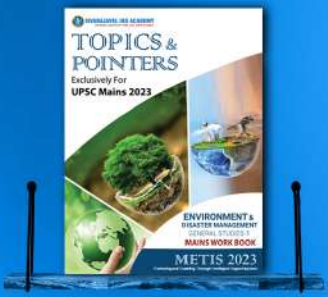

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