THE SOCIAL FACT

THE SOCIOLOGY OF CRICKET

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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SivarajavelIASAcademy

HEAD OFFICE
No.97, AF Block, Shanthi Colony, 12th Main Road,
Anna nagar West, Chennai – 600 040
Ph: 9626364444

TIRUNELVELI
No.106B, 3rd floor, Gilgal Complex, VOC ground opposite,
Palayamkottai - 627 002.
Ph: 9626252500

TRICHY
No.143, 4th Floor,Lakshmi Complex, Salai Road,
Thillai Nagar, Trichy - 620 018.
Ph: 9751500300 / 9786500300

INSIDE THIS SOCIOLOCIAL BULLETIN

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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CONNECTING THE DOTS

- *The Madras High Court orders removal of 'transphobic' panchayat president and directed the TN government to initiate steps to grant reservation for transgender persons in local body polls with a view to helping them slowly become part of mainstream society :* **This decision signifies a societal shift towards recognizing and including marginalized groups in governance but as Andre Beteille said, Law only decides the direction which society should take, the actual direction of the society is decided by its culture**

- *First, Alibaba founder Jack Ma demanded tech workers follow "996", a schedule of 9:00am to 9:00pm, six days a week. Then Elon Musk asked workers at Twitter(X) to commit to long working hours at a "high intensity." Now, Infosys founder Narayana Murthy wants young workers to have a 70-hour work week but research says that the profits are CEO are skyrocketed 1322% since 1978 whereas the salary of other workers are increased just marginally:* **This is the classic example of exploitation of the working class which is leading to polarisation of the classes and pauperisation of the workers in the modern times.**

- *Meat shops in the city will have to maintain a distance of 150 metres from religious places, according to a proposal passed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD):* **The decision to mandate a distance between meat shops and religious places reflects the symbolic importance of religious spaces within the urban landscape. This decision is rooted in the idea of preserving the sanctity or perceived purity of these spaces and the justify Louis Dumont's theory of "purity and pollution" in the city also.**

- *NFHS-5 data highlighted that there is a discernible disparity in the rates of C-section deliveries and hysterectomies across Indian states. More than half of the states show high C-section deliveries. The highest C-section deliveries was found in Telangana (60.7%):* **Foucault's work on the medicalization of society and the power dynamics within healthcare systems is relevant. He discussed how medical institutions exert control over individuals and how societal norms influence medical practices, which could apply to the rising rates of C-sections and hysterectomies as a reflection of medical control over childbirth.**

- *In a recent LinkedIn study, almost 70% of Gen Z and millennial Americans stated they planned to leave their jobs in 2023. And with unemployment at a low 3.4% with many jobs left over, all signs seem to point to the fact that American workers are fed up:* **Simmel's concept of the "blase attitude" or the indifference that can arise in modern urban life could be applied to harsh working conditions. He highlighted how repetitive or unfavorable work environments might lead to a sense of detachment and emotional distance among workers, which leads to "mass resignation**

- *Lancet study shows that the Suicide deaths in Indian men increased 2 times more than women in 2021. Unemployment, family problems, and health issues cause a 33.5 percentage point change in SDR among men :* **The Silent Male Suicide Epidemic" by Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas. This work delves into the societal expectations of masculinity and the resulting pressure that men face, which can contribute to higher suicide rates. She explores how traditional gender norms discourage men from seeking help or expressing vulnerability, leading to increased isolation and mental health struggles, ultimately culminating in higher suicide rates among men.**

- *They OBC groups are threatening to protest against the government's decision to grant Kunbi certificates to Marathas. They are not against increasing the EWS quota and giving reservations to Marathas under it but they are opposed to giving Kunbi certificates to all Marathas:* **This issue underscores the intricacies of caste identities and the competition for limited reservation quotas and the presence of vote bank politics (M.N.Srinivas)**

- *SC refuses to vacate order on temple priests in Tamil Nadu. Court had passed interim order on September 25 on the basis of a series of petitions; it was alleged that the State was attempting to appoint 'non-believers' as Archakas in Agamic temple:* **This issue touches upon the sociological aspect of religious hierarchy and traditions within the Indian caste system. The appointment of temple priests is historically linked to specific castes or communities, and any attempt to alter these norms can challenge established social structures in the form of counter hegemony.**

- *A 37-year-old man from the Dhangar community in the Sangli district of Maharashtra committed suicide while demanding reservation for the community. The police said that the man allegedly hanged himself from a tree:* **Durkheim's work on suicide provides a sociological framework to understand different types of suicides, including altruistic, egoistic, anomic, and fatalistic. In this case, the suicide might be viewed as a form of altruistic suicide, where an individual sacrifices themselves for the perceived greater good of their community. The act could reflect a deep sense of commitment to the cause of securing reservation for the Dhangar community.**

- *The Supreme Court of India refused to legally recognize same-sex marriages. The court ruled that it was beyond its scope and should be decided by parliament. The court's decision drew criticism from LGBTQ rights activists, who called the verdict "regressive":* **Foucault's work on the history of sexuality emphasizes how power shapes societal norms and controls individuals' behaviors and identities. In the context of the refusal to legalize same-sex marriage, Foucault's perspectives highlight how power structures, including legal institutions, regulate and control sexual norms, limiting the recognition of diverse forms of relationships.**

BEYOND BASICS

NATURE OF URBAN SPACES

"Why should we go beyond the basics?"

    Urban cities and spaces have emerged as pivotal focal points within the realm of Sociology, garnering increasing attention and significance in recent years. The burgeoning study of urban sociology accentuates the critical role played by cities and their spatial dynamics in shaping societal structures, cultural norms, and human interactions.

In recent UPSC Sociology optional, the emphasis on urban cities and spaces underscores the need to delve deeper into their complexities, This article by Ashay Raj, who is an undergraduate student pursuing Sociology from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, offering invaluable insights into the intricate fabric of modern-day societies.

City: A Unique Character

'Progress', 'achievement', 'mobility' and 'opportunity' are some of the common terms traditionally associated with the idea of a city. Urban spaces and cities are not defined in mere demographic and geographical terms but are also characterized by a peculiar cultural and economic mode of life. Simmels in his classic essay, 'Metropolis and the Mental Life' talked about the mental setup of an urban dweller. He mentioned how reason-based reaction, anonymity and individualism along with a special emphasis on factors like money and time

define what it is like to live a city life in contrast with rural areas where a deeper sense of familiarity, and collectivist outlook prevails along with an emotion-based reaction to events. Even though the line of demarcation between urban and rural is not rigid anymore with urbanism penetrating the grassroots, most of these observations still hold in the present times which is marked by an enormous proliferation of cities across the globe.

City, as a space began occupying a central position in the capitalist money economy in the aftermath of the industrial revolution. This space provided a conducive environment for the production as well as consumption of goods by exploiting the raw materials from the countryside and availing the cheap labour from the working class that flocked in large numbers to work in factories and gain a livelihood. These cities gave differential rewards and treatment to their citizens in a variety of ways. While the owner class (bourgeoisie) devoured the leisure, comfort, profits and status in city life, the migrants comprising the working class were at the receiving end of hostility, filth and poverty in the same city life.

With the advancement in technological equipment and strengthening of the infrastructures sustaining the capital-driven economy, cities in India, too acquired a life of their own and enticed the aspirational classes by promising them rewards and benefits in commensurate with their talents. The radiant glow of these cities conveniently blanketed the gloomy and despairing lives of large sections of the population and continued to attract people looking for a doorstep to success. With rapid urbanization, complex issues surfaced. This ranged from the planning of cities, equitable access to urban spaces, tussle between the middle class and urban poor, sense of belonging (us vs them), segregation and discrimination based on caste, class, region, and religion. These are discussed in this article along with the state response to such issues.

City: A Finicky Prima Donna for the Poor Migrants?

The long-lasting myth about the nature of metropolis that captured the imagination of people is the 'melting pot' analogy which highlights the assimilating nature of big cities as they welcome people coming from different cultures and religions, creeds and regions has been busted time to time with news articles reporting xenophobic attitudes of the metro population to the migrants and urban poor. Be it the well-publicized 'anti-Bihari' sentiments in some metro cities such as Bombay (Mumbai) to the religious discrimination faced by Muslims in job opportunities/rental accommodation leading to ghettoization or more recently, the middle-class associations such as RWAs fencing their spaces by restricting the access of vendors/hawkers in their establishments. Such incidents evidence the deplorable conditions that the underprivileged migrants are subjected to in these seemingly cosmopolitan spaces.

Right from students to working professionals, identities of gender, religion, caste and region act as a hurdle in providing free unrestricted access to urban areas. Their 'right to the city' is barely acknowledged as they are somehow seen as 'infiltrators' on the land. The migrant populace still negotiates for the everyday existence in these cities right from accommodation, and commute to work opportunities. Highlighting the abuse a Bihari migrant faces, scholar Arvind N Das notes in his work, The Republic of Bihar, 'The out-migration of Bihari students, like those of labourers, to places of learning in other parts of India integrates Bihar further into the national labour market even as it produces a quasi-racial backlash in places such as Delhi which have started fearing incursions of Harrys (Biharis) from the east much in the same way as British did in the international realm.' This is one of the cases of nativist attitude to migrants owing to the 'regional' factor.

Neighbourhood Associationism and Poor Migrants

The poor migrant population, arriving in the metropolitan cities, seeks to secure their sustenance and aim for upward mobility. While ascriptive social identities continue to obstruct their path, elite communities and associations such as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) pose significant threats to the livelihoods of these migrants. The informal workers such as squatters, hawkers and street vendors are at the mercy of the elite society. Many hawkers are not permitted in the posh colonies as the space is exclusive for the residents and 'security' is their topmost priority. However, these societies are overly dependent on the hawkers for their daily essential items like vegetables, fruits or for services such as domestic help, waste picking, nannies etc. These hawkers however have to negotiate their use of urban spaces with the RWAs for their presence is a potential threat to the safety of the residents of these 'gated communities'. These hawkers are issued a license by the RWA members which permits them to work in the localities. The noteworthy point is that these licenses are not recognized by the Municipal authorities, they can be revoked at any time and hawkers might be reported to the authorities, if residents choose to. A fieldwork conducted by Seth Schindler in 2011 in the posh colony of Krishna Nagar in South Delhi, revealed the plight of hawkers, one of whom said, 'If RWA complains MCD can come and take me away' while another mentioned, 'People who have good behaviour are selected for a License'. These statements signify the plight of the hawkers who are rendered helpless and must be subordinate to the association, where the absolute power rests. In representational terms too, the RWA members are not diverse as most of these members are upper caste Hindu males.

As Coelho and Venkat, in their article on The Politics of Civil Society discussed, even the agendas of RWA are purely Brahminical in their nature driven by the emphasis on spatial segregation and cleanliness. The contempt that the RWA

association carries for the urban poor is also evident in numerous cases such as the RWA of an upscale suburb of Besant Nagar in Chennai which opposed the corporation's beach beautification drives for environmental concerns but were reluctant to join the resistance with the hawkers/fishing communities who also opposed the same beautification drive out of the fear of eviction and loss of livelihood. The middle class that constitutes these residential associations have time to time exhibited a tremendous indifference to the concerns of the urban poor and many times, have extensively voiced their eviction from the sight of their beautifully fenced and exclusive spaces out of an alleged fear of these 'urban poor'. The disgust is sometimes expressed, at times, with such vehemence that it is hard to digest. In one such case, a poor young man was beaten to death for defecating in a public park frequented by the residents. Most of the migrants who are part of the informal economy are harassed by the authorities and accused of 'appropriating' the urban land. This does not undermine the immense contribution of the informal sector to the economy as the large population churns out a living from activities like street vending. Recognizing this, the Supreme Court declared street vending as a constitutionally protected practice, subject to reasonable restrictions in 1985 and The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, was also passed in the year, 2014. Both these rulings claimed to legalize the occupation of street vending and provide much-needed relief from the harassment of local police and Municipal officials. It also gave a promise to end the encroachment and put a stop to the practices of extortion and a constant threat of eviction. However, the picture was not as rosy as many of these hopes could not be realized owing to factors like inefficient implementation strategy, lack of awareness among vendors along with a complicit state network. The insecurity and threats clouding the lives of these migrants/urban poor leads to dwindling of income which in turn, deeply affects their family and overall survival.

Out Of Sight, Out of Mind: Invisibilizing the Urban Poor and Slum Clearance

By creating an exclusive, safe space and restricting the accessibility of such spaces, gated communities and posh localities have further exacerbated the already skewed space distribution in the areas. The poor population, engaged largely in informal sectors has no option but to occupy the neighbouring slum areas at the periphery of the enclaves where resources are scarce, lack of sanitation, no government aid and not to forget, the haunting sound of bulldozers.

 The Central Government, in 1956, approved a Slum Clearance Plan, which was not acted upon till 1972, when a Slum Development Board was set up to implement the scheme. Initially, the government worked towards evicting the slum dwellers and demolishing their 'illegal' structures. After the Supreme Court ruling, the right to city of pavement/slum dwellers was also recognized and then the approach took a paradigm shift with the emphasis on relocation, upgradation, and environmental improvement of slums (Dupont, 2014). These promises were never fulfilled as the legal loopholes were exploited by the elite class, capitalists, and businessmen for the removal of slums. The clause of 'Public Purpose' allowed the bulldozing of slums in the name of beautification drive or infrastructural developments. The evicted slum dwellers were not rehabilitated properly and the bourgeois planning of the urban spaces necessitated the clearance of these slums which were seen as a nuisance, nourishing filth, disease and poverty in the otherwise aesthetically beautiful, economically developed places. Most of the rehabilitation centres for the slum dwellers were situated on the outskirts of the city, a strategy that is in perfect alignment with the aspiration of the middle class, i.e., to turn their place into a world-class city. This happens when the poor are evicted and situated in the periphery where they are out of sight and in turn, out of mind.

Conclusion: Creating a Sense of Belonging

As discussed in the article, the contestation for urban resources and the differential treatment of the migrants and urban poor has already led to tensions in the city. It is imperative to recognize the 'right to the city' of the deprived and resourceless population by welcoming them in and allowing them free and equitable access to the urban space to gain a livelihood and secure sustenance. This would only happen by fostering an inclusive environment and creating a sense of belonging for every city dweller to their land regardless of their socio-economic identities. The discriminatory practices and selfish pursuit of luxury and comfort are bound to widen the gap between the haves and have-nots and create unrest in the country. Efforts from the state towards mitigating these problems and regulating the 'migrant-native', and 'poor-rich' issues from an unbiased outlook are much needed before retaliations and violent reactions from the subordinate sections become a fait accompli.

THE HISTORY OF DALIT POLITICS

"Why should we go beyond the basics?"

The emergence of Dalit politics traces back to a long history of social injustice, discrimination, and the denial of basic human rights faced by Dalits, historically considered 'untouchables' within the caste hierarchy. Dalit politics gained prominence as a response to centuries of oppression and exclusion from mainstream socio-political structures

The ascendance of Dalit politics in the recent landscape of sociology examinations underscores the critical role played by marginalized communities in shaping the socio-political fabric of India. This article by Badri Narayan, who is a social scientist and Director of the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Prayagraj, UP, delves into a multifaceted history that reflects the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of the Dalit community.

Dalit politics in India evolved with the rise of various independent Dalit political parties such as the Republican Party of India (RPI), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), other political parties such as the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), the Puthiya Tamilagam (PT) in Tamil Nadu, and the Praja Rajyam Party (PRP) in the Andhra Pradesh and adjoining States. Most of these political parties are being gradually weakened with each passing day, which reflects in their political actions. The question being asked frequently is whether there is any future for independent Dalit politics in India. Some people say a deepening of democracy in India may compel every political party to give proper space to Dalits in their politics. In such a situation, the future of the independent Dalit movement seems bleak and dim.

The RPI, which was formed to fulfil the incomplete dreams and desires of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, celebrated its 66th foundation day on October 3; the most influential Dalit political party in North India, the BSP has also completed nearly 40 years. A critical engagement with the present and future of Dalit politics in India is needed.

A Decline

It is true that these parties have played an important role in enabling Dalit empowerment in India. They also cultivated an assertive consciousness among Dalits which led to the rise of a number of leaders and cadres in the Dalit communities. But there has been a decline in their organisational capacities and electoral performance. There has been fragmentation and even a desertion by leaders. Many of these Dalit leaders are either moving to dominant regional and national political parties and engaging with them for tickets in elections, posts and political positions, or are forming their own groups. Most of these parties, such as the RPI and the BSP, have lost a large percentage of base voters to the dominant regional and national parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party, and in some States to the Congress.

Change by affirmative actions

These developments are not autonomous but are closely linked with processual change among Dalit communities due to the influence of democracy, state-led affirmative actions and rising developmental desires. As a result, the socio-political profile of Dalit communities has changed rapidly over time. The percolation of education at the grassroots and the dissemination of the benefits of the affirmative actions have led to a class of Dalits who now aspire for a proper space in politics.

However, while independent Dalit political parties have contributed a lot in leading to the rise of such a section among marginalised communities, they have failed in providing sufficient political space to such a politically aspirant section in Dalit communities, which is why there is a quest for political space in other political parties. Individual ambitions and a growing impatience to gain political power are leading to a drift away from Dalit lead political parties.

The Dalit common masses face struggles and so social welfare schemes launched by the major political parties are a key factor. These welfare schemes work in two ways. On the one hand, these schemes are forging their political relationship with the party in power or a party that might come in power.

Such support provides the basic condition to foster aspiration in even the most marginal Dalit communities. Aspiration is emerging due to state-led democratic interventions and media/social media exposure. These have resulted in the creation of a 'new Dalit mentality'. If independent Dalit political parties have to retain them, there needs to be a new direction to political mobilisation and transformative political programmes and actions.
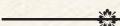
Most of the independent Dalit political parties still work in a conventional mode of politics involving clichéd identity, dignity and representation. There is a failure to develop an effective political programme around large goals as there are only mere slogans. There is a failure to understand that a sense of identity is now moving to aspiration — of becoming socio-economically mobile.

Need for democratic functioning

Most of these independent Dalit political parties, including the BSP, are unable to respond to the changing aspirations and identity quest by a section of Dalit communities. There is a need that they recognise the need to weave a politics of identity with the economics of identity in their programmes and politics.

Structurally, these parties need to ensure that there is democratic functioning within the party, so that grassroot leaders get proper political space, also restraining any dynastic tendencies that could be developing within these parties. Unfortunately, the BSP and some RPI groups have failed to stop the growth of a dynastic political culture.

A return to the 'chamcha age', where BSP leader Kanshi Ram 'warned Dalits against becoming "chamchas" of the brahmanical establishment' is unlikely now. Many of those at the forefront of the Dalits are politically competent, assertive and better in negotiating with dominant and mainstream parties than the decade of the 1960s when Kanshi Ram realised that trend. So, there will be a negotiation for proper political space and participation based on their rising political values. Dalit masses, cadres and leaders may move and disperse now among various political parties and possibly create a multi-polar Dalit politics in India.

CRICKET - A SOCIAL ANAYSIS

Paper 1: Sociological imagination
Scope of sociology

The sociology of cricket provides a fascinating lens to examine the intersection of sport, culture, society, and identity. Cricket, beyond being a game, holds deep sociological significance in various parts of the world, particularly in countries like India, England, Australia, Pakistan, and the West Indies. Here's a note on the sociology of cricket:

Cultural Identity and Nationalism: Cricket serves as a powerful symbol of national identity and pride for many nations. In countries like India, Pakistan, and the West Indies, cricket is deeply intertwined with post-colonial identities, representing a form of resistance against colonial powers and asserting cultural autonomy.

Social Class and Access: The sport also reflects social hierarchies and access. Historically, cricket was associated with the elite class in some countries, signifying privilege and exclusivity. However, it has evolved to become more accessible, allowing individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to participate and excel.

Gender Dynamics: Sociologically, cricket has predominantly been a male-dominated sport, but there's a growing movement towards inclusivity in women's cricket. The evolving perceptions of gender roles and opportunities in the sport

mirror broader societal shifts towards gender equality.

Globalization and Diaspora: Cricket's global appeal reflects the impact of globalization and diasporic communities. The sport transcends borders, connecting diverse communities worldwide. It serves as a cultural bridge, fostering connections among people from different backgrounds.

Media, Commercialization, and Celebrity Culture: The sociological aspect of cricket extends to media representation, commercialization, and the creation of sporting celebrities. The sport's coverage in media shapes public perceptions, influences fan engagement, and contributes to the commercialization of the game.

Fan Culture and Rituals: Cricket fandom encompasses rituals, traditions, and a sense of community. Sociologically, the shared experience of supporting a team or player creates a collective identity among fans, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie.

Rivalries and Nationalism: Cricket rivalries between nations often reflect broader geopolitical tensions and historical rivalries. Matches between countries like India and Pakistan or Australia and England carry intense nationalistic fervor, contributing to the sociological understanding of how sports become platforms for expressing national pride and identity.

Community and Social Integration: Cricket plays a role in fostering community integration and social cohesion. Whether in local clubs, schools, or neighborhoods, the sport brings people together, transcending social barriers and promoting social interaction among diverse groups.

Ethnicity and Inclusion: In multicultural societies like Australia or England, cricket serves as a platform for ethnic minorities to assert their cultural identities. It provides opportunities for inclusion and representation, allowing individuals

from different ethnic backgrounds to participate and excel, thereby challenging societal norms and fostering diversity.

Economics and Development: The sociology of cricket also encompasses the economic impact on players, communities, and the sport's development. It involves examining how the commercialization of cricket influences player behaviors, access to resources, and the sport's infrastructure in different societies.

In addition to the above analysis, the sociology of cricket can be explored through the perspectives of various sociological thinkers, each offering insights into different aspects of the sport:

1.	Pierre Bourdieu: Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" can be applied to cricket. He emphasizes how cultural practices, like knowledge of and participation in cricket, confer social status and reinforce social hierarchies within society.

2.	Erving Goffman: Goffman's theory of "dramaturgy" can be relevant when analyzing cricket matches as performances. He highlights how individuals act differently in various social settings, and in cricket, players, fans, and even media adopt distinct roles during matches, shaping the social dynamics within and around the sport.

3.	Michel Foucault: Foucault's ideas about power and discipline can be applied to cricket, particularly in understanding how rules and regulations govern the game. Foucault's insights can be valuable in analyzing how institutions like the International Cricket Council (ICC) regulate the sport and maintain power structures within it.

4.	Antonio Gramsci: Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" can help understand how cricket, as a cultural practice, reinforces dominant ideologies. The dominance of certain cricketing nations or styles might reflect broader power structures and cultural hegemony within the sport.

5.   Norbert Elias: Elias's theory of "civilizing processes" can be applied to cricket's evolution and its changing norms over time. His perspective on how societies regulate behavior and the gradual transformation of social norms can be observed in the shifting rules and conduct within cricket.

Each thinker's theories offer unique perspectives for analyzing different sociological dimensions of cricket, ranging from the cultural significance and power dynamics within the sport to its role in shaping social identities and norms within societies. Applying these theories helps in unraveling the intricate sociological aspects embedded in the sport of cricket.

In essence, the sociology of cricket goes beyond the boundaries of the game, offering insights into societal structures, cultural dynamics, and the complex interplay between sport, identity, and community. It serves as a microcosm reflecting societal changes, aspirations, and the diverse fabric of societies where cricket holds significant cultural and social relevance.

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ADMISSION IN PROCESS

ETHICAL CRISIS OF THE POLITICAL CLASS

Paper 1: Politics and Society

Paper 2: Law and social change

An immediate reservation of one-third of the existing seats for women, is likely to benefit largely those women who already have the cultural and political capital to contest elections, and these are bound to be elite women. This article by Nivedita Menon (The writer is Professor, Centre for Comparative Politics and Political Theory, School of International Studies, JNU) helps us to understand the BJP's determined opposition to the Mandal Commission reservations for OBCs and its equally fervent support for women's reservations? The Bihar caste survey highlights a factor that remains invisible in the women's reservation issue, that of caste, and the significance of the "quotas within quotas" position.

The Prime Minister claimed that God had chosen him to empower women by shepherding the passage of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. Did God also suggest the stratagem of postponing its implementation to a distant future by imposing the two pre-conditions of census and delimitation? Or was the Prime Minister guided in this by shrewder mortals?

There are other issues such as the impropriety of claiming to be chosen by God in a space sanctified by the Constitution of a democracy that came out of an anti-imperialist struggle; the patronising title of the legislation that sets up women as idols receiving worship from men rather than as active citizens; and the patriarchal invocation in the Prime Minister's speech of women as "mothers, daughters and sisters" of presumably male citizens. Then the question of why the Nari Shakti of the wrestlers battling sexual harassment

by a BJP MP was not worthy of vandana, and why the devotion to women expressed by this regime is matched by the impunity of widespread increase of violence against women all over the country during its tenure. Not to mention that delimitation is a politically charged strategy to increase the BJP's seats in the Hindi heartland into which it has now been corralled.

But let us focus on what one-third reservation for women in Parliament would actually achieve. This legislation was first introduced in 1996 by the Deve Gowda United Front government and its last incarnation lapsed in 2014 with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. What is the purpose of the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB) and why has it been held up for so long?

Reservation for women had come up in the Constituent Assembly but been rejected by women representatives as it was seen to underestimate the strength of women to compete as equals. In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) considered the same question. Arguments in favour were mainly that generally patriarchal political parties fielded very few women candidates, and that reservation for women would enable them to act as a strong lobby. Arguments against were mainly that this violated the principle of equality in the Constitution; and that women cannot be equated to socially backward communities, not being a socially homogeneous group. Finally the CSWI by a majority decided to uphold the position taken in the Constituent Assembly and rejected reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

In 1996, however, there appeared to be a general consensus across the political spectrum, including the women's movement, that the time for women's reservation had come. Two developments explain this shift.

One, the democratic upsurges of the 1980s and 1990s which transformed

Parliament from a largely upper-class and upper-caste body to one with a large OBC presence. Caste and social justice came to the forefront of Indian political discourse.

The other development was that women had emerged as a significant force in politics since the struggle against the Emergency, and from the 1980s feminist issues were firmly on the public agenda — dowry, equal wages, violence against women. At the same time it was clear that there were very few women in representative bodies. By 1996 then, the women's movement acknowledged that abstract citizenship was only a cover for male privilege.

Thus, the emergence of women as a significant grouping in Indian politics and the transformation of the caste composition of Parliament through the growing presence of backward castes through successive elections, produced two different, mutually opposed sets of concerns — feminist and dominant caste — that tied in at this particular conjuncture to produce the sudden general acceptability of women's reservation.

The opposition to the legislation, which held it up for so long, was not simply patriarchal. It expressed the legitimate apprehension that a blanket reservation of 33 per cent for women would replace non-dominant caste men with dominant caste women. An immediate reservation of one-third of the existing seats for women, is likely to benefit largely those women who already have the cultural and political capital to contest elections, and these are bound to be elite women. How else to understand the BJP's determined opposition to the Mandal Commission reservations for OBCs and its equally fervent support for women's reservations?

The experience of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) since 1992 has been positive for many women, but another

consequence is the strengthening of the entrenched power of dominant caste groups of the area. That is, men of less dominant castes in PRI have been replaced by women of dominant castes. Hence the opposition to the WRB had insisted on "quotas within quotas", demanding a further reservation within the 33 per cent, for OBC and Muslim women. (The SC/ST reservation is a constitutional requirement that comes into operation automatically.)

But quotas within quotas have been firmly resisted by all non-OBC parties across the political spectrum, which raises the suspicion that the objective of reservations for women is indeed to replace non-dominant caste men with dominant caste women. After all, the parties that have unanimously passed this legislation have fielded only 6.11 percent to 9 percent women from 1999 to 2019.

It seems that the sudden passing of this legislation after 27 years (its implementation indefinitely deferred, and with quotas within quotas off the table) reflects at some level the ethical crisis of the political elite as a whole.

CASTE CENSUS

Paper 2: Caste system

For far too long, any decision to collect caste data has been seen as self-evidently "political", whereas the equally deliberate decision to not collect it has somehow been placed outside or beyond politics. Now that the results of the Bihar caste count (officially termed a comprehensive caste survey, or CCS) are out — and the skies have not fallen, nor is the earth shaking — let us ask the questions that can no longer be silenced: What is the politics of not counting caste? Who benefits from the absence of caste numbers and data? Before we explore answers, the Bihar CCS must be placed in proper perspective. It is indeed a historic event because it is the first such large-scale exercise where results have been made public. The states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, as well as the Union government itself (in the ill-fated Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011), have collected comprehensive caste data in the past, but for reasons that remain unclear, never revealed it. On the other hand, the Bihar government is yet to release the all-important supplementary data (on the socio-economic status of caste groups) that will allow us to make social sense of the bare caste counts made public.

It is hoped that this data, too, will be released shortly and that the state government will not falter after having boldly come this far — for without inferential information on existing caste inequalities, numbers alone will merely feed speculations in electoral arithmetic that are worthless for understanding society. So, until further notice, the Bihar CCS is historic but only with a small "h".

To begin answering questions about the politics of not counting caste, we must first revise Max Weber's famous dictum about the modern state. Today, states are no longer defined by their monopoly over legitimate violence within a specified territory. They are defined as much,

or even more, by their monopoly over aggregated social statistics. Nation-wide numbers are priceless resources crucial for the exercise and maintenance of political power in modern electoral democracies because they are critical to the management of public perceptions, beliefs, and feelings. This has usually been seen in terms of control over the media. Such control remains crucial, as is evident to Indians today. But to take a step forward in the struggle for total power, it is also necessary to gain control over the possible content that the media could use.

In short, totalitarian regimes need to control the news, not just news channels. Social statistics — numbers that describe our collective self — are always big news precisely for that reason. That is why the first moves towards authoritarianism are often aimed at controlling institutions that produce social statistics on growth, employment, health, and inflation — in general, numbers that say something about the well-being (or otherwise) of the electorate. Caste data is a special case within the more general category of social statistics. It tells us about the smaller identity-containers (castes) that form the larger national whole.

It is important because this data has the potential to highlight social inequalities, likely to lead towards social discontent and tension, which in turn threaten to weaken or break the political hegemony of the ruling regime.

The strongest, most enduring and common argument against caste enumeration has been that it will harden caste divisions and delay or prevent the movement towards a casteless society. There is some truth here, but it is overshadowed by a larger and more compelling truth — the realities of caste inequalities in the present must be acknowledged and addressed before we can arrive at a caste-free future. To censor or suppress caste divisions is not to overcome them.

This difference has been ignored by our leaders since the freedom struggle, and it was almost erased in the Nehru era. But only the most brutal authoritarian can suppress a social reality lived daily by millions.

Whatever his other faults, Nehru was not a brutal autocrat. As a result, the outing of caste inequalities could only be postponed, until it fought its way into national politics in the 1990s.

Ironically, for all the vitriol the current regime has directed at Nehru, it is attempting once again — from a very different vantage point and with very different methods — the muting not of caste differences themselves but of talking about them. The counting of caste is not a magic wand that will wave away the evils of caste inequality and oppression. Instead, it is a messy, contentious, complex exercise that is sure to have its flaws and inadequacies. But it is also the inescapable first step towards an honest political engagement with the real differences and disparities of caste. And for that reason, it is imperative that India no longer evade.

As a caste society, we have yet to realise that the most important reason to count caste has nothing to do with refining welfare programmes or electoral manoeuvring. Caste must be counted because it counts — it is arguably the most important regulator of life chances today. This means that caste differences are real differences. To call for "unity" without addressing these differences is to practice dishonest politics. Just as courage is not the absence of fear (which could be mere foolishness) but its overcoming, true political unity is the negotiated overcoming of differences, not their denial or suppression.

Fake unity is fake politics. By pretending that we are all "one", we lower the standards of accountability by which our politicians must be measured. The Western liberal ideal of the "pure" individual unencumbered by any social identities may not be in our future. But political representation that is accountable across acknowledged differences certainly is. Messy and contentious though it is, counting caste will eventually take us there. The best reason to cautiously welcome the Bihar CCS is that it might be the small first step.

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