

CASTE AS A FACTOR

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CASTE AS A FACTOR

An attempt to make sense of the current paradox in society through non-academic observations and experiential learning

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Advent of Agriculture

4-5,000 years ago, Humans moved towards a settled and labour intensive agrarian economy/society. What followed was the worst era in Human history. Exploitation of labour was at its highest. Human suffering was unprecedented. Life expectancy of the workforce was under 25 years. The vast majority of the population were reduced to sub-Human conditions till industrialisation and the bourgeois democratic revolution liberated them from feudal oppression.

Exponential agricultural production, year after year, without any increase in per-acre productivity. This created massive surplus, obtained at a near zero cost, and allowed humungous monuments and impressive infrastructure to be constructed. These along with ostentatious and opulent lifestyle of the ruling class belied the miserable plight of more than three-quarter the population. This is the so-called golden age that the rich nostalgically speak of.

1.2. Hierarchy

Hierarchy was needed to support the agrarian economy/society in order to:

- i. Keep a large number of people, concentrated in densely packed settlements in place, without rebelling.
- ii. Enable a massive exploitation of labour, providing just enough for the workforce to rest, recreate and renew their energy to toil again the next day.
- iii. Procreate to rapidly increase the population since settled agriculture needed an unlimited work force.

Different cultures introduced segregation and subservience in different manners. Many used brute force. Others indoctrinated the majority into mute submission through utter brainwashing, without the need to constantly force or employ continuous vigil. Ironically, the latter was a more “advanced” and efficient type of social control where everyone participated in greater or lesser degree to keep the lower rungs in place, and the bottom through fatalistic acceptance.

However, given the immediate history of Humans, introducing any form of Hierarchy, either forced or voluntary subjugation, was a big challenge.

1.3. Hunter-Gatherer Society

For the first 2,000 years, prior to the dawn of settled agriculture, Human economy/society was hunter-gatherer, and everyone was more or less equal. People lived in groups in caves, shelters and under trees. Although living standards were sub-basic and nature was cruel, there was an egalitarianism amongst people belonging to the same Clan/Tribe. Everyone worked according to their ability and got a share of the meat they hunted and fruits they gathered. Accumulation of perishable meat and fruit was not physically possible and there was no surplus. The fittest and most able person in a Clan was the Leader. The person who could keep the several Clans co-exist within

their respective footprints was the Tribal Leader. These could be men or women, but not necessarily the children of earlier leaders. This society was called Primitive Communism.

People feared supernatural powers possessed by everything they could not explain or control. Thunder, lightning, forests, floods, wildfires, dangerous predators, good and evil spirits. Ritual sacrifices of fruit, grain, animals, and even Humans were made to *appease* these supernatural powers. This was different from *worship*, which is a show of belief, faith and devotion. Primitive communism was an Animistic society with *Shamans*, who had gained wisdom through generations of observing nature and natural phenomenon, pacifying invisible forces and spirits that affect the living in the visible world. There was no organised religion nor the concept of god, a creator.

1.4. Heredity & Hierarchy

Hunter-gatherer society was matrilineal since paternity was not a certainty. Offspring could only be identified by their mothers. However, this was of no consequence since the passing on of power and property rights had never been an issue. Paternity was required only after the concept of private property emerged and even then, after it was owned exclusively by men.

It took nearly 1,000 years after the dawn of settled agriculture for it to get established as an economic system. The process was very gradual. Historic transformations took centuries; cultures and social orders *evolved*. A ruling class slowly emerged. Clan and Tribal leaders used their position and brute power to claim ownership of lands which, like forests, rivers and the like had hitherto been seen as bounties of nature – i.e. no one's property. They forced their people to work on these lands. They themselves stopped doing physical labour since it was no longer a participatory society; Rulers needed to enforce and oversee.

Clan and Tribal leaders started to declare their children and close relatives to be the next Rulers, even when these relatives were neither fit nor able to lead. Indeed, earlier skills, strength and leadership qualities needed to coordinate and direct a team to hunt were no longer needed in settled agriculture. Heredity in leadership was born, with patriarchy and Hierarchy as the natural outflow.

1.5. Slavery

Most populations in different parts of the globe brought hierarchy by introducing slavery. Victors of Clan clashes and Tribal wars stripped the vanquished of all weapons and made defeated people into slaves to work on their agricultural fields. This could not happen in hunter-gatherer society because weapon-less people were of little use as hunters.

Rulers and their cronies right on top, Slaves being non-Humans at the very bottom, and the middle occupied by managers, craftsmen, service providers, and the like.

1.6. The Role of Priests

The world over, the Priestly class established hierarchy for the Ruling class by constructing the concept of god, the creator. Priests prescribed rules and laws that got codified into religion. The pre-history of Humans was erased; it was wiped clean. The god-free era of about 2,000 years, before the advent of settled agriculture, was denied. After a while, it was forgotten.

This prehistoric period, before written records, was dubbed as barbarian in spite of the so-called civilized world with gods and organised religions having practiced the most vicious forms of individual torture and punishment. The Romans learnt from the Inca, the Puritans from the Romans,

the Catholics from the Puritans, the Nazis from the Catholics, the Taliban from the Nazis, the Israelis from the Taliban, and the JTF-GTMO in Guantanamo from them all.

Priests created the myth of Creationism. They claimed that the universe and all lifeforms were simultaneously and instantly created, exactly as they exist to this day, by divine action. Along with denying the role of biological and natural evolution, creationism debunked the truth behind societal evolution. It denied that Humans had ever lived in an egalitarian economy/society. It ordained divinity to rulers and claimed that god ordained patriarchy and created hierarchy.

1.7. Industrialisation

With the advent of early manufacture, as a predecessor to industrialisation, agrarian hierarchy that defined a role and place for everyone, got weakened. Individual strength, talents and abilities allowed people to move out of ascribed professions. This was actively encouraged by the newly emerging Traders and Manufacturers who cautiously positioned themselves against the ruling landowners.

A capitalist class emerged from the feudal Landlord and Big Peasant class. They were excited by the thrill of doing things different, increasing productivity, discovering new products to meet hitherto unfelt/unrecognised needs. They wanted to invest and reap returns in order to expand and grow. Amassing wealth to make ostentatious displays was not their motivation. They were not interested in maintaining any pretentious status. They formed alliances and partnerships with all other high spirited and rebellious individuals, irrespective of class background.

All of a sudden, history speeded up. Gradual societal evolution changed to rapid social revolution. Historically viewed, the bourgeois democratic revolution occurred in a sudden instant, all over the free world. Society was transformed in a period of just one single century.

A growing workforce was needed by the newly emerging industrial economy. But this time, the productivity of raw Human labour had to be enhanced with technology and machines. Unlike feudal cultivation, this could not be done by people living in sub-Human conditions, with little time, energy or incentives for anything other than procreation, recreation, and performing repetitive acts of labour using unchanged skills handed down over the generations.

Innovation and invention, that could come from just about anywhere and anyone, were vital requirements for industrialisation. Entrepreneurship of Owners parallely needed a spontaneous enthusiasm and enterprising spirit in the Workers.

1.8. The State

When the emerging capitalist class ignored established hierarchy and started introducing fundamental changes in the prevailing social order, it was met with fierce resistance. However, it was a lost cause for feudal Landlords due to the sudden and massive shift in concentration of wealth and economic relevance in favour of the new capitalist class.

Local tussles and one-upmanship in individual rural settings soon cumulated into major class struggles that took different forms in different parts of the world. Ranging from rebellion, popular uprisings, civil wars, independence struggles and, quite ironically, electoral victories/defeats to capture State power, although with limited suffrage. Often times, it was a heady mix of all these and more.

Inevitably, the bourgeois democratic revolution took place the world over. The obsolete landowning class lost, and traders, merchants and industrial capitalists emerged as the new Ruling class.

Thenceforth the State actively engineered the destruction of the feudal economy and disintegration of the peasant economy.

2. CASTE IN INDIA

2.1. Creationism

About 3,500 years ago, towards the end of the Early Vedic age, creationism took the form of *Manusmriti* in India, claiming *Manu* to be the first Human created by god. The *Varna* system was introduced as a construct to support hierarchy. It claimed that Humans were created from four bodily parts of god, the creator. Levels of purity/impurity were attached to Humans based on whether they emerged from the head, shoulders, stomach or feet of *Brahma*, with intelligence, warrior strength, commerce and manual labour respectively attributed to the different Humans thus created.

In order to fulfil the need for an even lower stratum of scavengers, and also to explain away the existence of a defiant nomadic pastoral lot who refused to get assimilated into the so-called “civilized” habitats of towns and villages, *Manusmriti* termed these concocted outliers as those who had no connection to *Brahma* – a blatant and irreconcilable contradiction to the claim of simultaneous and instant creation!

It is only in very recent times, less than a century back, unable to “explain away” the existence of a quarter the population, that outcaste *Panchamas* and forest dweller *Rakshasas* were constitutionally assimilated into the fold of religion with the non-scriptural and rather apologetic terms of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

In all fairness, it has to be pointed out that this is not peculiar or particular to India. Other religious and pseudo-scientific concoctions in other parts of the world have run into this same problem when they unsuccessfully try to justify hierarchy and segregation through creationism. Racial superiority, eugenics, apartheid, etc. are just a few glaring examples.

From this division of society into four religio-hierarchical categories, Caste was born as an economic sub-stratification of the population. Caste, that emerged from this religious construct, eternally confined people to various ascribed status and occupations.

2.2. Temporal Roles

It takes a subtle and nuanced appreciation to understand the powerful hold of Caste over the population. Caste places every single Human, without let or exception, in a rigid place on a hierarchical ladder. It allows no upward movement, but material slithering down to a lower rung is always possible. This is why everyone participates, in greater or lesser degree, to keep those in the lower rung in place. Except those at the bottom most rung; theirs is an impotent participation through fatalistic acceptance.

The functions of Caste, with ammunition provided by priests and with varying degrees of rigidity, exists in all cultures in some nomenclature or the other. But unlike in monotheist cultures, here it is not a subjugation to god the creator, but more so to superior Humans. Spiritual adherence is intertwined with temporal trembling.

Caste plays two temporal roles to serve religion:

- i. It prescribes specific religious rites and rituals that are particular to each of the 3,000 Castes and 25,000 sub-Castes.

Ritual sacrifice of food which earlier began as acts of *appeasement* to powerful forces that were feared, changed to *worship* – i.e. regular and repetitive shows of belief, faith and devotion to god, the creator.

- ii. Caste forbids marriage between different groups (exogamy) and allows marriages within the same group (endogamy), eternally keeping groups within their predefined levels of purity/impurity, thereby perpetuating the permanent continuity of Caste divisions in the population.

2.3. Popular Perception of Caste

However, in the popular perception and practice, Caste primarily became a definer of occupation. And remained so for the most part of the past 3,000 years. Everyone stayed, unquestioningly, within their ascribed occupations. Since each occupation conferred a different level in status and material benefit, Caste-class was born as a category to comprehend Indian society.

Temporal roles became habitual rote. Repetitious acts of worship were performed, devoid of belief, faith or any devotion. Except in times of extreme despair, sickness and grief, when some primeval instinct reverted suffering individuals back by three millenniums. For brief moments, they abandoned/supplemented prescribed forms of worship and hedged their bets by appeasing to supernatural forces and spirits. Relatively newfangled religions, whose primary purpose was to segregate and serve the ruling elite, could not fulfil this need, except perhaps with empty platitudes and afterlife assurances.

God men and shenanigans substituted *Shamans*. Superstition, witchcraft, and all things ludicrous, irrational and illogical prevailed. Dominant religions appeared to be patchy, unstructured, nebulous and amorphous. This did not unduly alarm Priests or the Ruling class since their main concern of maintaining hierarchy stayed unchallenged.

2.4. Character of Caste

Hitherto, we have examined Caste as a concoction brewed by the ruling class to instil hierarchy and allow economic exploitation through extra-economic coercion. We have hinted that this is a far superior form, when compared to constantly using naked force to keep a population under check. However, many of us understood the mechanics of Caste in a soulless manner but did not grasp its emotive value; how Caste made the population *feel*. We failed to understand how cunningly deceptive this construct actually is.

Caste caters to a primal Human need that we often fail to see when we make altruistic claims on the virtues of individualism; the need for everyone to be better than another, just about any other. This goes way beyond the competitive spirit; it is the need for each person to look down on an entire set of people. Caste offers a powerful argument for inherent superiority and inherent inferiority through an inherent hierarchy of beauty, intelligence, morals and worthiness.

Caste moderates this Human trait, preventing it from running amok through dog-eat-dog aggressiveness. While satisfying the lust for another to be scorned at as inferior, at the same time it instils an acceptance that someone else may be superior; a humbleness in the gang rapist, as it were.

This powerful yearning to identify another, just about anyone, who is inferior can be at the expense of material betterment, tangible benefits, peace and harmony. So long as the half-starved with tattered clothes can look down with contempt on the pristine and well fed from a lower Caste.

3. PEASANT ECONOMY

Unlike European latifundia or classical serfdom, feudal society in India was never structured around a monolithic landholding pattern. A significant peasant economy coexisted alongside feudalism. Apart from rental income from cultivating “their lands”, rulers and feudal Landlords granted titled ownership, with inheritance rights over smaller holdings to about one-quarter the rural population, the non-serfs.

3.1. Pattern of Landholding

For close to three millenniums, the pattern of landholding in rural India comprised of feudal Landlords, Big Peasants, Middle Peasants, Small and Poor Peasants:

- Landlords who, till very recent times, measured their holdings in swathes of land, meadows, hills, lakes, woods, forests, and even entire dwellings.
- The priestly class was the very first to get land titles and ownership rights as reward for first creating and then maintaining religious hierarchy.
- A growing coterie of subordinate rulers was similarly rewarded. They were the Big Peasants.
- Other professions and occupations got small patches, just enough to barely sustain themselves whilst providing their services – the Middle Peasants.
- Small Peasants usurped barren, uncultivable lands far away from village settlements, and had no proper title; they also leased in lands from others.
- Poor Peasants were landless labourers and also sharecroppers.

As a result, practically everyone in the village, including the landless, was a “farmer” of sorts in the liberal parlance of Caste-class blind planners and policy makers.

3.2. Middle Peasants

It was Middle Peasants who ruled village society, albeit with the tacit approval of Big Peasants, under the couldn't-care-less attitude of feudal Landlords. They were sadistic sociopaths who terrorised half the village population to ensure that everyone stayed obedient, subservient and within their Caste boundaries, not daring to stray from their temporal roles. Even perceived transgressions were punished with an unmatched cruelty. Usurious lending and petty borrowings resulted in lifelong bonded labour since there was no other material collateral that Small and Poor Peasant borrowers had to offer.

In semi-arid drought prone regions with sparse irrigation and dependent on erratic rainfall, Middle Peasants were hardly able to meet perceived standards that their Caste covenanted. They were a bitter lot, who oftentimes used stark oppression for no apparent material gain.

3.3. Big Peasants

Over the past two centuries, with the arrival of farm sciences, educated Big Peasants started treating their cultivation and workers quite differently on their farms and fields. They attempted to make farming a profitable enterprise, setting aside feudal norms and mores, at least on their fields. They invested in technology, raised diversified cash crops, spent more time alongside workers, upgraded worker skills through in-field training and ensured that modern technology was properly used.

Big Peasants were the harbingers of capitalism in agriculture. However, perhaps in order to maintain cordial relations with their Caste mates, they turned a blind eye to cruel social oppression in village

polity. They were an enigmatic lot, neither sympathetic nor neutral or detached. Their class characteristic hints at the apathetic and indifferent attitudes that the urban middle class would exhibit in later decades towards the plight of the poor.

3.4. Women

Women, in all classes, were delegated to “lesser” positions, albeit within their respective Caste-class. However, till the emergence of industrial society, there was no sorority of women across divides. Patriarchy was at full play in peasant society, but feminism had not emerged as a countervailing ideology.

Though womenfolk suffered indignities at the hands of their own menfolk, they behaved exactly as their men did when it came to treating subordinate Castes. They spared no effort to display identical Caste-class characteristics. In fact, women were the chief upholders of segregation, purity/impurity, and ardent practitioners of prescribed religious rites, rituals and worship.

Gender played a particularly heinous role. Since their immediate oppressors were within their respective families, women were blinded to a larger segregation of society. If at all, they identified their adversaries as individual male family members – fathers, brothers, husbands and even adult sons. As a result, there was no scope for a wider bonding to introspect and make any critical analysis, even within their respective Caste-class.

It is only in the final gasps of the peasant economy that rural women started to unite over common interests and issues. Till then, they were not “allowed” out of their houses due to fears that they would come under bad influences and get strange ideas. Elsewhere we have explained cognitive dissonance and described the “coming out” from this state of entrapment in some detail. Please see <https://fairclimate.com/Library/Docs/6/Engendering%20Climate%20Projects.pdf>

3.5. Dwellings

Caste demarcated dwellings in the villages. Ironically, mutuality and community spirit were inverse to Caste ranking; far more in Dalit colonies and Tribal settlements, diminishing in the main village, as one traversed up the rungs of the Caste ladder. Demarcation was therefore more to segregate, prevent inter-mixing and maintain levels of purity/impurity.

It was a vicious cycle. Personal hygiene levels, obnoxious behaviour, drunkenness, open promiscuity and outright filth further reinforced stereotypes justifying the concept of purity/impurity. Economic deprivation was never the acknowledged cause; it was the result of inherent impurity. Such were prevailing norms and mores.

4. EFFORTS BY THE BOURGEOISIE TO DESTROY FEUDALISM

Predictably, industrialisation came late to the colonies. Even basic crafts and primary processing were deliberately destroyed under the centuries long yoke of colonial rule. Except for local markets catering to miniscule geographies, every form of commerce was consciously wrecked. India never had a mercantile economy. Ancient mercantilism of commodity exports was in isolated port towns and did nothing to influence the surrounding feudal system.

After independence, it took a while to politically stabilise governance before any one section of the rulers, be they feudal Landlords or merchant traders or industrial capitalists, could pursue a serious economic agenda of their own to reshape society to their exclusive advantage.

4.1. Legislation

This changed after a few decades. About 50 years back, the bourgeois agenda of industrial capitalists was pursued with a vengeance to destroy feudal Landlords. Abolition of the privy purse, land ceiling and land redistribution did this in just a few strokes.

A major blow to the feudal economy was the infusion of currency into villages. Money, which replaced barter and wage payment in grain, led to monetisation as a novel way of valuation. Money in the hands of the poor was a major socio-political game changer. Feudal Landlords accepted this as inevitable in coming. To a point, Landlords were well informed and honourable men who knew when their time was up. Big Peasants, already into cash crop farming, were familiar with monetary dealings. This was in sharp contrast to the brash insolence of Middle Peasant, for whom it was totally alien. They were flabbergasted that cost-free Human labour, which had hitherto been their sacred right to call on demand, was now a service that needed to be negotiated and purchased at a price.

The ruling bourgeoisie was quick to realise there was no class homogeneity in the countryside. Everyone in the village was not a “farmer”. Inherent contradictions in the fractured peasantry were identified and astutely exploited. Cunning alliances were forged with different sections of the peasantry and even with urban liberals. Abolishment of bonded labour, moratorium on rural indebtedness, criminalising untouchability, tenancy rights, *loan melas, et al* appeased Small and Poor Peasants. Irrigation projects and the supply of seeds, fertilizers and farm inputs placated Middle and Big Peasants.

Simultaneously, the bourgeois State also struck at the very root of feudal hierarchy. Inter-Caste marriages were incentivised, non-Brahmins appointed as temple priests, SC/ST cooks appointed for school midday meal schemes, inter-eating promoted, government-built houses in colonies were deliberately allotted to a mix of Castes and communities.

Strategies and tactics of the ruling bourgeoisie varied, just as there were regional variations in the seriousness with which they were implemented in different states. Elsewhere, we have documented a case study at <https://adats.com/documents/book5/download/0501.pdf>

4.2. Activism

Macro interventions by the State weakened Caste in a mildly theoretical and academic manner. They gave statutory legitimacy, but not a moral sanction to break prevailing village norms and mores. Everything entailed in these measures was in diametric opposition to all that the feudal order preached to be sanctimonious. Understandably, even small and poor peasants showed an initial hesitancy to avail measures targeted to liberate them.

State interventions emanated from a self-serving need to reshape societal structures to suit the industrial economy. But for them to be believed, macro measures needed to be accompanied with an honest and selfless critique of feudalism, countervailing Caste and religion. One that small and poor peasants intuitively recognised to be in their true interest.

A geographically distanced ruling bourgeoisie realised that they could not provide believable assurances. Instead, they gave a free hand to socially conscious Left leaning liberal and progressive forces from the cities to conscientise the rural poor. Crusaders from the oppressed Caste-class joined them, as did many educated youths from Big Peasant families.

Senior policy makers and bureaucrats neutralised opposition from Landlords and their lackeys in the lower rungs of village and block government. They actively encouraged this politicisation through

community organisation, mass mobilisation and empowerment. In scattered patches across the country, it is this activism that augmented, fine-tuned and fast-tracked bourgeois efforts to destroy feudalism. Please see an illustration at <https://adats.com/documents/book5/download/0515.pdf>

4.3. Towns and Cities

Indigenous towns and cities had always existed in feudal India alongside the peasant economy operating in villages. They were not populated by just village folk who migrated to urban centres. I do not claim any knowledge of their genesis, original inhabitants or reason for their being. Except that they attracted a deluge of migration from the countryside which swiftly swelled their size and population to qualify as towns and cities.

What I do know, fairly intimately, is the influence that these urban centres had on rural folk who went there in order to escape feudal oppression and a miserable standard of living. It was a new and totally different life that migrants experienced.

On the one hand, a sense of complete abandonment. A total loss of identity that generational familiarity had provided them in their native villages. Street sense and survival skills suddenly became obsolete. A lack of security that family/community provided. And the most bewildering of all, a sudden disappearance of the perverse security that feudalism provided, knowing that if they stayed in their ordained place, they could at least stay alive. It was the feudal Landlords' honour bounden duty to keep the population living. Middle Peasants, on the other hand, had no such compulsions.

On the other hand, a whiff of freedoms. Their Caste did not matter any longer. Employers looked for strength and willingness to work. Even a lack of skills did not matter provided they had the aptitude and were willing to learn. A pleasing personality, confident posture and social skills counted; a demeanour they never knew would get them by since it was so alien to subservience. To a large part, they were not confined to any particular place of dwelling, choice of friends, partners or even marriage. Those who finally made it (and most did, after an initial period of turbulence), found themselves earning not just enough to survive, but actually had disposable income to indulge in minor luxuries like smart clothes, a variety of street food, soft drinks, ice-cream and the cinema.

It would take a while for migrant girls and women to experience the same freedoms since patriarchy was still the overarching ideology, be it in towns, cities or villages. But they eventually did, sooner in cities than in villages.

4.4. City Workers

Early industrialisation was like a breath of fresh air for people who escaped the stifle of villages and migrated to towns and cities. To a large extent, they shed their Caste identities. When the jobs they did had no Caste overtones, occupational ascription lost all significance, except perhaps for religious observances. Even then, there was no strict adherence to prescribed rites and rituals; just a vague remembrance of earlier practices. Festivals merely broke the monotony with good food, good drinks, good company and enjoyment. There were plenty of jobs for everyone and even the lowliest knew they could climb up through perseverance and hard work.

Not everyone rose to the ranks of the urban middle class. But they all, for the very first time, experienced *aspiration*. They knew that there were no social barriers to prevent dreams, hopes and ambition. Everyone lived their busy lives with the aim of rising to the middle class.

In spite of leading a month to month existence in sub-standard housing, all except brand new entrants and a large workforce in micro-mini enterprises, had access to schools, hospitals and other

city amenities. Factory workers had working place protection through trade unions. Those in the unorganised sector, through a camaraderie of fellow workers, although this was stronger in small towns than in cities. Caste and parochial identities were kept at bay by conditions in the workplace.

Family budgeting and fiscal discipline were totally alien for Small and Poor Peasants leading a hand to mouth existence in their villages. While city born and bred workers could perhaps handle readily available credit and EMI, this was not so for first generation migrants. Indebtedness was a major problem, compounded with the uncertainty of continuous employment. Many a time, rural families resorted to distress sale of agricultural lands in order to rescue adventurous sons.

There was an intermixing of Castes when it came to dwellings. Even the poor from upper Castes lived side by side with others, much to the consternation of elders in their villages. It was not a full amalgamation since groups retained some traits in dialect, diet, dress code and customs. As a result, forms of worship got mixed and blended, even among different religions. City residences were segregated by class, with gated communities, suburbs, apartments, lower middle-class colonies, and slums.

4.5. Weakening of Caste

Even in its heyday, the popular perception of Caste had always been a rigid and ascribed definer of occupation. When this definition no longer held good in towns and cities, it was only a matter of time before it also crumbled in the villages. A nagging doubt was born as to the eternal certainty behind arguments that upheld the status quo. Caste came to be seen as a false asserter of inborn abilities that set limits on not just self-development but also to dreams, mobility, desires, hope and aspiration.

The urban liberal culture, on the other hand, advocated freedom for individuals to make their own choices. Everyone was incentivised to attempt anything and everything possible so that manufacturing processes could increase productivity and ventures chase exponential growth. This was the socio-political setting that the rapidly expanding market economy wanted. One where everyone participated, a partnership between entrepreneurs and workers.

Winds of change were felt by those who stayed behind in the villages. Along with legislation and activism, the formidable challenge to Caste was the rapid permeation of the industrial economy. There was nothing scattered or patchy in its penetration into the entire length and breadth of the countryside.

4.6. Poor Peasant Struggles

Through a combination of State intervention, activism and narratives told by returnees, perhaps for the very first time in history, the liberal culture brought about a unification of Small and Poor Peasants across narrow and parochial Caste lines. This was very different from the earlier so-called “united peasantry” struggles under the leadership and for the benefit of Big Peasants. Other semblance of any such unity was only during calamities. Famines, floods, earthquakes and the like levelled the population and they were forced to mutually cooperate.

The Reservation policy placed persons from all Castes, including the untouchables, into every single State institution. Transactions were allowed in native languages. Everyone got access to various government bodies and police stations since they could approach *their own persons* in these offices.

Personal identities changed from Caste, Caste-class, to Worker. Disregarding Caste differences, the rural poor together addressed issues that affected them, mainly against Middle Peasant adversaries. Many struggles were to avail legislative reliefs like land reforms, tenancy rights, living wage, and the

like. Others were to defend rights over commons like water, forest and grazing. Even in acts of passive defiance, Caste differences were set aside when working shoulder to shoulder in State sponsored civic works.

There was the appearance of a brief period of relative harmony in the villages with everyone going about their business. All Castes and occupations were considered as essential for the village to function. However, this was under the angry and glaring watch of a handful of Middle Peasants who found the altered social order and their loss of social status repulsive.

In spite of a certain civility that gave the appearance of a relative harmony, misery and abject suffering had not abated. It was akin to tranquillity found in graveyards.

When the material conditions and relative power of the upper Caste was under threat, their reflexive response was to diminish the other and generate a greater distance between them, as an act of self-preservation. Conversely that means that where we witnessed the role of Caste diminishing with the growing prevalence of inclusion, the upper Caste interpreted it as a function of their charity, and not a function of humanity. Such a narrative saved face and provided yet another way for them to elevate themselves in the prevailing context.

Young people, especially from the lowest Castes, displayed a militancy for the very first time in peasant India. They bonded together with a brazen bravado. They defied the assimilation of their (animistic) gods and cultures with platitudinous titles like “children of god”, only to be denigrated to sub-Human and untouchable status in mainstream religions. This happened the world over, in all segregated societies. Dalits in India, Black Panthers in USA, Blacks in South Africa. Their brash and insolent aggressiveness did keep them slightly apart from the inter-Caste unity described in the preceding paragraph but did not seriously hamper joint struggles.

After a while even many poor women, hitherto the chief upholders of segregation and ardent practitioners of religious rites and rituals, got together across Caste-class lines to defend themselves against domestic violence, alcoholism, early marriage, denial of schooling, etc. In our view, this was the ultimate indicator of the weakening of Caste.

5. CAPITALISM IN INDIA

After independence, we have seen three major genres of capitalism at play in India. Social capital, liberal capital and imperialistic capital, with quite a bit of overlap and concurrency. Let us reflect on the role that Caste played in assisting political leaders establish social democracy, liberal democracy and majoritarianism, respectively, as congenial societal structures for each ruling Caste-class.

5.1. Early Days

For several decades after independence, capitalism served as a liberating force. The bourgeois democratic revolution followed a rather classical course with positive outcomes for the population as a whole. There was a planned balance between large, medium and small industry in order to meet the needs of the newly emerging industrial economy. All types of ventures and scales of business existed side by side. A healthy diversification was seen in production, amalgamation, aggregation and marketing. The only blotch was red tape and bureaucratic control through the license raj. It was a brief period of social stability.

But due to centuries of colonial rule when the trade balance was skewed with everything from the country exported practically free of cost, foreign reserves were insignificant. When India entered the world market, these paltry foreign reserves had to be closely guarded with tight regulatory policies.

A progressive tax regime was followed with the rich paying more. Politicians and leaders were national heroes and *de facto* setters of the moral code of conduct. Simplicity was a way of life in every walk of life, and parades of wealth or even religion were considered vulgar.

5.2. Structural Adjustment & Economic Reforms

Thirty years back, under compulsions of structural adjustment and economic reforms, a so-called market liberalisation process was started. Well before the native population reaped the benefits of industrialisation, the economy started to blindly emulate the then prevailing international model followed by countries with a high standard of living, high per capita income, and developed infrastructure. This happened way before a sizeable middle class with purchasing power and respectable standard of living was created in India. Increasing per capita income for all strata of society was sacrificed for growth at the altar of GDP.

A gradual and indigenous evolution of capitalism, carrying everyone along, abruptly ended. Capitalism's guiding philosophy of enlightened self-interest was forgotten. It was no longer believed that entrepreneurs needed to further the interests of others in order to serve their own self-interest.

These so-called economic reforms were motivated more by a poverty felt by the elite than the real impoverishment and unspeakable suffering of the general population. The ultra-rich felt abashed that their country did not have the splendours and grandeur of the developed world. Alongside was a middle-class poverty felt by a section of urbanites for whom luxuries of yesteryears, met with imports from abroad, had become necessities of today. Through a liberalisation of imports, international brands came into the country and soon, MNCs were allowed to set up shop in India.

This pseudo-cosmopolitanism was the genesis of a competitive and dangerous xenophobia. Ultra-nationalism can be traced to this particular point in our economic history.

Public sector institutions were gradually shut down or privatised. They had been set up with exchequer resources at a time when native capitalists did not themselves have enough capital. They were as much to provide a basic infrastructure for industrialisation, as to create mass employment.

Policy choices were not thought-out strategies to develop an indigenous economy that served the whole population. The poor were to believe in trickle down expectations that would eventually reach some among them. It was a blind acceptance of the Bretton Woods prescription. Different models followed by other economies were not seriously looked at.

The claim was that India was one of the few newly independent countries that experienced a pain-free structural adjustment. Other countries had seen hyper-inflation, privatisation of public goods, severe unemployment, food queues and unprecedented uprisings that they had not witnessed even during their independence struggles. Here, employment was still on the rise and inflation under control. This was partly because social democracy was still the prevailing ideology of the political leadership, under the influence of the socialist bloc. They refused to give too free a hand to the economists. Also, due to a miserably low pre-independence baseline.

5.3. Big Business

A decentralised and diversified economy that once had space for everyone in early capitalism started getting centralised and concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer players. Industry started imitating the international model and got characterised with the dominance of a few large corporations with ancillaries around them. Even decentralised services that catered to local economies and made perfect financial sense were, over time, deliberately destroyed through the

entry of large players. Big business was seen as the only vehicle to deliver efficiency and increase productivity.

In the name international competition, big business has entered all and every process of production – finance, manufacture, aggregation, distribution, marketing and service provision. Over time, even retailing was not spared. In sector after sector, monopoly is established with a reduced and even total lack of competition.

Essential services meant to be provided by the government as entitlements started getting privatised. Bureaucratic leakage that this was supposed to curtail was replaced with an even bigger diminishment in the form of corporate profit. It began with roads and highways, transport, delivering basic health care and hospitalisation, education, insurance, and even school midday meal schemes. The latest among these is the provision of instant and usurious credit to lower middle class and the rural poor. Government, which constantly moans about restricted resources, finds large funds in the form of bank loans for capitalists.

New-fangled technology, mechanisation and automation was soon followed by digitization, industrial robots and now, AI. Productivity is linked to cost-cutting efficacy, a pseudonym for retrenching workers, while at the same time vast investments are made on unproven technology.

5.4. Extractive Economy

It is an extractive economy that fails to understand that abundance is limited. Depleting and even exhausting natural resources is not a concern when focussed on quick returns and high profits. But these are not fly-by-night operations. They are large monoliths that irreversibly damage entire landscapes, biodiversity and fossil reserves, with no chance of regeneration. Empty platitudes are paid to environment and climate change. Climate integrity is demonstrated through the mouthing of banal clichés and greenwashing.

We are totally flabbergasted that even when cities are neck deep in water, policy makers and the public refuse to recognise proven science. Instead they search for high funda techno solutions that only exacerbate the problem.

Science and technology have a most peculiar effect on the filthy rich. They have started to delude themselves to be *Homo Deus*. They no longer see their lives as nested in a society of Humans. They are an elite group of individuals in cloud-cuckoo-land of gadgets, devices and robotics, where technology will make energy zero cost and planet Earth is not their only possible habitat. The masses are just a nuisance to be separately addressed.

5.5. Loss of Jobs

Creating jobs is not a priority in the changed economy. A large workforce of factory workers is no longer needed. Labour intensive industries that provided mass employment are shut down. Handling advanced technologies requires far more urbane employees who are themselves upper Caste-class products of sophisticated education; a schooling and university that the vast majority cannot afford.

Mass unemployment is compounded by an education that leaves students unfit, unprepared and unemployable. The schooling they receive is designed to prepare for clerical duties in governance. Extra skills that some youth privately obtain at great cost and effort in computerisation, business management, bookkeeping, *et al* are obsolete in the new economy. There is a scramble for lowly government jobs like schoolteachers, clerks, peons, hospital attendants and even foot soldiers in the military. Even these are few and far between. Vacancies stay unfilled since, after all, these are jobs that service the masses and not the elite.

When the quantum of capital required to run ventures shoots up, the first casualties are small entrepreneurs and their workers in the MSME sector, which provides about 45% of jobs in the economy. Even in small towns, business ventures are getting swallowed up by branded players. Next, it will be the turn of the entire workforce when *“Humans need not Apply”*.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment says:

- 17% of the workforce in India is employed in the organized sector, with wages that are 2.5 times higher than in the unorganised sector.
- 83% are in the unorganized sector; 92.4% of them have no written contract, paid leave, or other benefits.
 - 57.3% of them are self-employed.
 - 18.3% work unpaid in household enterprises.
 - 21.8% are casual labour.

5.6. The Paradox of Rising Consumption

In spite of a loss of factory jobs and industry not directly benefitting a majority of the population, consumption levels have gone up in large tracts of southern and western India. In the last two decades, abject poverty and destitution has all but disappeared in these regions where a number of large, ancillary and small industries are located. This paradoxical effect is due to a combination of factors.

Disposable income of the middle class is disproportionately higher than their numbers. A range of domestic and other services to the employed classes create petty jobs for the unemployed. Food and other government subsidies provide the basic minimums to keep body and soul together. But it is a day to day existence, just a tumble away from an illness or accident.

In the villages, agricultural wages have sharply risen due to MG-NREGA, capitalisation of agriculture, government civic works as well as the general influence of towns and cities. Many schooled rural youth are underemployed in nearby towns in a range of trades like roadside eateries, selling fruit and vegetables, on-call car drivers, etc. They also work as waiters in small hotels, and in construction under masons, carpenters, painters, electricians and fabricators. Even as daily wage earners in mechanic shops and petty stalls in the market, their earning and spending is 3-4 times higher than that of their parents.

Middle Peasants realise that farming is not profitable without the underpaid labour their cultivation depended on. Caste and prestige considerations no longer prevent them from keeping lands fallow. More and more Middle Peasants form work gangs and undertake contract labour on richer capitalised farms. Alongside, they use their Caste-class connections to get minor government contracts like road repair, culverts, drains, desilting tanks and other civic works. The State turns a blind eye to more than 50% of civic works and anti-poverty budgets being siphoned off to subsidise the failing peasant economy.

5.7. Start-ups

A couple of years ago, a captain of industry lamented that ever since independence, for the past 75 years, there has hardly been a single invention made in India.

The superficial reason for this can be attributed to the lack of sophisticated laboratories and advanced research facilities. The few that are present are wholly owned and controlled by foreign

corporations attracted to the country by the availability of a handful of relatively cheap, highly educated and compliant workforce.

A more holistic reason is to be found in the incompatible societal structure that does not give room for everyone to think, question and imagine. As earlier stated, invention could come from just about anywhere and anyone. They ought to be appreciated and actively encouraged. Entrepreneurship of Owners, as we have said, parallelly needed a spontaneous enthusiasm and enterprising spirit in the Workers. The entire population needs to be caught in the excitement of exploring, discovering and improving.

However, a few well connected urbane youth from the privileged Caste-classes, who received a sophisticated education, are fairly good in putting together a bundle of existing inventions and innovating. Start-ups meet previously unrecognised needs/services for the middle and upper class.

In the past decade, 1.27 lakh start-ups have come up in the country, each employing an average of 11 equally sophisticated urbane youth. Some of these start-ups have quickly grown to themselves become impressive global businesses.

6. RESURGENCE OF CASTE

History is anything but linear. As the historian Yuval Harari says, *“When examined in terms of decades or centuries, it’s hard to say whether history moves in the direction of unity or of diversity”*.

Achievements are not automatically converted to accomplishments. With hindsight, we realise that unification across narrow and parochial Caste lines was not an enduring form of unity. It was just a brief getting together to achieve some immediate results. Everyone was not comfortable wearing each other’s identities. It did not lead to either individualism or homogeneous grouping.

6.1. Reshaping Societal Structures

Almost overnight, billionaires, ostentatious rich and an upper middle class came out of the woodwork. They belong to the top three Caste categories who together comprise 27% of India’s population. Even among them, it is only a very small portion who made it rich.

At the same time, factory workers, small entrepreneurs, farmers and the rest were left behind. Wages for the few who did hold on to jobs did not catch up with inflation. Purchasing power dropped.

Capitalist farmers, the erstwhile Big Peasants, were squeezed by the price scissors of steeply increased input costs and fluctuating/unpredictable price for their harvests. Factory workers went on strike. Indigenous people protested against the plunder of commons and natural resources. The hapless unorganised sector helplessly watched it all.

The now firmly entrenched ruling class, ultra-rich and monopolistic industrial capitalists, continued to reshape society to their exclusive advantage, largely ignoring what was happening around them. Entitlements for the rural poor were greatly reduced, removed or, more prudently, simply not implemented. Earlier attempts to firmly establish liberal democracy is abandoned, although a veneer of electoral democracy retained in order to establish its most dangerous form, Majoritarianism.

The goal was no longer to provide employment and salaried income for all the people. Instead, they claimed to develop big businesses that would sustain the mythical, objectified nation which came to be seen as an entity rather than a space populated by people. These mega businesses would pay moderate taxes on their super profits, and this would be enough for the government to spend not

just to provide sustenance to the population but also, perversely, leave the masses with a little disposable income to buy some of the products/services offered by them.

The less politically correct among them openly state that it does not matter if people have no jobs or salaries. As long as they get food to eat, a roof over their heads, and entertainment, the masses will be satisfied. They will worship the gods, sing *bhajans*, pursue sports, and partake in cultural activities, a rather hackneyed fall-back to the era of the Roman colosseum.

6.2. Capitalism Morphs into Feudalism

The basic arrangement of relationships and interactions between people in society changed. The rapidly emerging societal structure strongly suggested that capitalism had morphed into feudalism, substituting landholding with factories and corporations, and serfs/peasants with nobodies.

Enterprises are no longer partnerships between owners and workers. Early capitalists had undertaken enterprise for the thrill of inventing, innovating and finding new and better ways to do things. Gone is this previous excitement to discover novelty. With systems and mechanisms firmly in place, capital keeps growing till it hits a ceiling in any sector/enterprise. Then it shifts to yet another, displaying no loyalty to any particular brand, service or product.

Now they view it merely as a minting operation to amass wealth. Discovering ostentatious ways to flaunt this wealth replaced their earlier disdain for opulence. Hospitality and recreation has become a major service sector to offer comforts and experiences that emulate those supposedly enjoyed in the mythical golden age of feudalism and also in utopian Shangri-La.

Transnational experts, consultants, pseudo intellectuals and policy advisers live in a parallel universe, totally divorced from reality. They are totally clueless as to how the majority live in villages, relying on stratified random socioeconomic surveys they claim to be scientifically precise. They are liberal in their usage of concepts and terminology like gender, inclusiveness, *et al* that are trendy cliché of the day. They refuse to accept that being approximately correct outweighs being precisely wrong. They refuse to even recognise mistakes, let alone learn from them. After all, mistakes are what did not work for someone else.

Big budget announcements, supposedly to better the lives of the people, are inaugurated with much fanfare and grandiose eventification. These are showcased with snazzy advertisement, select showcasing, and a friendly media. Inaugurations are flamboyant shows of mass deception.

It takes a deep delve by scholars into government provided numbers to discern the truth. The 906 central government schemes announced in the last decade were funded with just 28% of their announced budget allocations. Infrastructure projects like international airports, superfast and bullet trains, expressways, etc. that benefit the upper middle class were overfunded to complete on time.

6.3. Iniquity, the New Normal

Iniquity is a social and cultural condition. It is not caused merely by the lack of capital and technology. It is a condition caused by a conscious choice by the ruling Caste-class.

Threat to Participation

Iniquity cannot be understood through wildly fluctuating statistics depending on who presents them. The real and absolute indicator is the extent/absence of comprehension that different Caste-classes have on what's happening to them. Aside from causing destitution through deprivation, iniquity is a serious threat to democracy.

How can the masses participate when mind staggering amounts of moneys that the ultra-rich flaunt and governments announce are beyond normal Human comprehension? The number of zeros that follow a digit are galactical. The normal brain associates a sum of money with a tangible object. E.g. ₹ 50 lakhs = an apartment; ₹ 15 lakhs = a modest car; ₹ 25k = a refrigerator, etc. What on earth can they associate with billions, trillions and tens of thousands of crores?

Ill-informed is taken to the next level of incoherence. The mind-boggling numbers do not, as claimed by policy makers, invoke aspiration that leads to ambition. It invites surrender. The David and Goliath contest may have worked in mythology; not in real life. Even in the pre-democratic polity with limited suffrage, there was the principle of first among equals.

Technologies befuddle the majority; colossal sums of money even more. Add to this the inscrutable algorithms of AI that give new definitions to money.

Political Necessity

Providing the bare minimum nutrition, health, education, housing, transport, *et al* is no longer an economic necessity that permits production. It has become a political agenda to keep the population in check. Schooling for the masses, as we have already stated, is just an eyewash that does not skill students to get employment in the salaried job market. The public exchequer substitutes the absence of salaries and wages with subsidies and minimum income schemes.

The classical equation Employment → Salaries/Wages → Income is abandoned to Minimum Income.

This sudden and vulgar onset of iniquity is not only totally accepted by the entire population, but also applauded and popularly flaunted with ultra-national pride.

6.4. Why this Acceptance?

Perhaps it was science and technology that did it. Possibly it was plain greed and avarice. My intention is not to pass any moralistic judgement on the advancement of the industrial economy in India. What has happened has happened; history cannot be undone. We need only reflect on why this morphing of capitalism into a feudal-like social structure is so readily accepted by the population.

Let us examine mega-infrastructure projects as a case in hand to try and understand how the ruling elite obtains the unwitting approval of the overwhelming majority of the population, in spite of their lot standing to lose.

Mega Infrastructure Projects

When populations get concentrated in large cities and metropolis, infrastructure become acutely inadequate. The government has to provide solutions. Urban mega infrastructure projects are of two types. Those that benefit only the ultra-rich, and others that cater to travel and transport needs of the general population.

Those that benefit the ultra-rich get immediately and fully financed either through the public exchequer or with foreign direct investments (FDI), opening the doors for international finance capital. Catering to global capital, in spite of a politically touted veneer of nationalism, the neoliberal market economy exceeds the wildest expectations of Bretton Woods institutions.

Public private partnerships are another means to finance mega infrastructure projects. They provide yet another investment opportunity for capital. When the bidders go public, they tap into small and large savings of the general population through the share market. In this model, costs are fully borne

by the masses; one portion through taxes they pay into the exchequer, and other through small savings invested in share values that dangerously fluctuate.

The other type of mega infrastructure projects that provide public goods for the general population get tranches allotted in annual general budgets, with successive instalments kept in limbo. Widening of roads, completing the metro, laying new water and sewerage pipes, drawing electricity lines, *et al* are taken up at a frustratingly slow pace. By the time one small bit is completed, a larger need opens up.

So too with rural infrastructure projects like major irrigation, setting up processing plants, providing market support, laying tracks for passenger trains, etc.

Both types of mega infrastructure projects are presented as contributing to the splendour and esteem of the country. They are inaugurated with equal fanfare. The latter are repeatedly showcased as having achieved impressive results, oftentimes even before the start of implementation.

This manufactured instilling of false pride to belong to a great country that is racing to become the third largest economy in the world, is not the same as stimulating individual aspiration. One creates an abstract awe. The other generates concrete and material ambition. One makes you sit back with satisfaction. The other ignites a spark at the tip of your tail.

One makes you gaze at monuments like Madurai Meenakshi temple and Taj Mahal from afar and wait to see the bullet train whizz past on its elevated track. The other sets in motion plans and schemes to enterprise. In historical terms, one is momentary while the other is forward propelling and sustainable.

7. CASTE & RELIGION

7.1. The Eight Pillars of Caste

In her seminal work, Isabel Wilkerson explains that Caste stands on eight pillars:

1. Divine Will and the Laws of Nature
2. Heritability
3. Endogamy and Control of Mating
4. Purity versus Pollution
5. Occupational Hierarchy
6. Dehumanisation and Stigma
7. Terror as Enforcement
8. Inherent Superiority vs Inferiority

The profound depth of her exposé is that multi-theism is not one of the pillars. Caste equally and forcefully exists in all hierarchical societies, irrespective of whether the dominant religion is monotheist or multi-theist, with one or many gods.

7.2. Characteristics of Religion

Religions are founded on fictions. These are not ordinary stories; they are *elaborate* and powerful stories created by tellers of tales, on behalf of Rulers. They are learnt and accepted by everyone as the divine truth that cannot be questioned, cannot be challenged, and need not be proved.

Be that as it may, religion is the single most powerful unifier of Humans.

- 84% of the 8.12 billion people on planet Earth identify themselves under the banner of religions.
2.4 billion Christians, 1.9 billion Muslims, 1.2 billion Hindus, 506 million Buddhists, 394 million Chinese traditional religion, and 19 more faiths.

- Only 16% (1.2 billion) who call themselves secular/nonreligious/agnostics/atheists.

Religion is a classy way of peddling untruths. The essence of religious experience is at heart poetic. A declared truth that cannot be questioned, along with rituals, are merely the framework of organised religion. The willing suspension of disbelief for the moment constitutes poetic faith. The most apt description of poetry is "saying something that cannot be said". The poor are not inclined to appreciate the luxury of poetry.

Religions differ only in the extent of fundamentalism and intolerance they propound. Even this varies according to times and circumstances, at times lenient, at times bigoted. Various monikers they employ, rites/rituals and worship styles they prescribe are neither unique nor significant.

All dominant religions are built upon the *pre-ordained segregation* that the eight pillars justify with illusory and deceptive argument. When Caste is questioned due to the influence of the capitalist economy, religion takes a knock. Dominant religions have to rapidly readjust and be precariously balanced on just the first pillar of "Divine Will and the Laws of Nature", without the buttress of Caste. All the remaining are either defiled through lenient observance and common practice, prohibited by legislation, or outright rejected by the demands of industrialisation.

Religions also claim to prescribe morals and values, ascribing virtues and vices, ostensibly in order to maintain order in society. But these are a secondary by-product of religion. The tellers of tales did not set out to deceive anyone. Moral codes were prescribed based on their own emotional projections and wishful thinking. They projected their deeply felt hopes and feelings and emotions on how things should be. Nevertheless, their commandments are honoured more in the breach than the observance. They are legitimately violated by the powerful upper Castes to satisfy their extra-economic, vile and depraved pleasures. Society turns a blind eye and deaf ear to these transgressions.

7.3. The Fallacy of a Casteless Religion

For the past few centuries, social/religious reformers had attempted to do just that. By and large, their attempts to project a Caste-free religion have failed to capture the popular imagination. This is because they put the cart before the horse, looking at Caste as only a sub-grouping of people belonging to the same religion. Religions, the direct derivative of Caste, are not innocent quests for spiritualism.

Caste is the determinant of the societal structure that provides legitimacy, births and nourishes religion. It sets the founding arguments for segregated society, creating hierarchy and constructing religion itself. Caste is the superstructure upon which religion is built. Caste cannot be cast aside and discarded as just a sub-sect of religion. Without Caste, there is no religion.

The very nature of the two constructs is different. Religion is a broad unifier of Humans, serving a spiritual need to express faith and devotion to god.

Caste, on the other hand, after providing the fallacious argument for religion plays a second, more temporal role, prescribing *how this faith and devotion should be expressed*. It lays down rites and rituals for each sub-group. If every sub-group were to share identical rites and rituals, then segregation would not be recognisable. The primary objective of religion, to justify hierarchy, would be lost.

In more recent times, a confused attempt is being made to alter the very nature of religion to more ecclesiastical, membership based, virulent, exclusive and intolerant congregations. Classic characteristics of religion are replaced with that of a fanatical crowd.

8. POLITICS & CASTE

8.1. Political Rhetoric and Practice

In modern democracies, political parties and elections are the manner in which the ruling class forms government and governs society.

Each political party represents the interests of a particular Caste-class and is identified by a particular world view or ideology that furthers its socioeconomic interests. Since India follows the first past the post (FPTP) system and not proportional representation (PR), all the voters, irrespective of their Caste-class, choose their elected representatives based on a simple majority of even a single vote. Therefore, irrespective of whose particular Caste-class interests they represent, all contesting political parties have to appeal to all sections of society. Herein lies the distinction behind political rhetoric and practice.

Rhetoric is the quasi believable assertions of what the party says it will do for various sections of society. It is contained in party manifestos and fiery speeches delivered by candidates, leaders and star campaigners.

Practice is what they actually do after winning a simple majority and forming government. This is announced in annual budgets and subsequent reports compiled by bureaucrats and submitted to legislative bodies.

8.2. Politicians

The nature of electoral politics went through several phases over the past seven decades. And with that the character of politicians.

Leaders

At first, politicians and parties were driven by idealism, albeit within the realm of their personal and party ideologies. Politicians saw themselves as representatives of the people; service minded individuals, prepared to set aside their professional and business self-interest while in office. Their intimacy with the people who voted them into power made them hardly distinguishable from the voters in lifestyle, mannerisms and demeanour. They were honest, humble, open to learn from and accommodate allies as well as adversaries.

Mobilising government resources was a challenge in the newly independent economy. Impeded by a lack of authentic data, they were nudged to go by bureaucrats' impressions. Allocating scarce resources to various projects and purposes was an even bigger challenge. They were dependent on wily bureaucrats, a legacy of the pre-independence raj. This was offset with native wisdom and an astute political sense of what would work and what wouldn't. Through extensive conversation with their constituents, even after assuming office, they thoroughly knew their constituencies and constituents.

Decorum was maintained in society and politics was civil. Doctors and teachers were revered role models, the educated were decent, and judges were fair. Only the lowest policemen extorted bribes while higher officers were just. The record keepers and tax collectors were corrupt, through and through. Scribes cheated and lawyers blatantly told lies.

Second Generation

Second generation politicians were self-important leaders who knew it all. In part because of feelings of entitlement that came from being born into political families. And also, because they

were more educated and did not easily sway to the tunes of civil servants who were also second generation and hadn't served under colonial masters.

They did not put their business and professional pursuits on hold during their tenure in office. As a result, simplicity in lifestyle was not an attribute to this new breed of politicians. Although pompous, they were largely honest, avoiding conflict of interest.

Commensurate with a growth in the economy, rights and entitlements were guaranteed to the population, as opposed to whimsical schemes and programmes that could be terminated at any point in time. Some were to comply with international standards on governance. Others like the forest dwellers act, right to employments, right to information, etc. were rather original.

Today's Politicians

And finally, when the exchequer grew, electoral politics became hard-core business. The spending of public money became an industry in itself; by far the most profitable of them all. This attracts a totally different type of politician; one who is prepared to invest heavily to win, knowing that he will reap double and even triple his investment if "fortune favours him".

Insofar as political parties are concerned, winnability is their only consideration. They need the legislative numbers to push through their agenda. They are confident of reining in even the most ardent disbeliever within their respective parties since no one will dare revolt, forfeiting the crores he has invested to win in the first place. So much so that the leader of a national party recently told me, "*We give tickets based on money, Caste and um... well... ideology*".

Once they get the ticket from a party, any party for that matter, today's politicians shamelessly mouth party positions with pretended passion, completely contradicting what they claimed to have stood for just weeks/months earlier. This is the current genre of the vast majority of politicians in today's world.

8.3. Garnering Votes

Candidates

Campaigns start with the selection of candidates.

With the exception of possibly the heads of political parties, ideology is neither understood nor given thought to by prospective candidates vying for party tickets. In the weeks following the announcement of dates for a state or national election, we see hopefuls – new entrants and stalwarts alike – scrambling from party to party. Were it not so tragic, deranged and detrimental to democracy, their clawing and clambering is pathetically comic to the extreme. These are our probable representatives and leaders.

Party Funds

Party funds are needed by political parties to contest elections. Campaign material, advertisement, public meetings, rallies, road shows and setting up war rooms to coordinate takes money. Extensive travel by star campaigners to every nook and cranny of constituencies is expensive. Ceilings set by law are too low to realistically cover even a fraction of costs in bitterly fought dog-eat-dog contests.

By and large political parties do not give any money to run of the mill candidates who, in any case, gamble outlays in the hope of recovering their business investment many folds. But a handful of genuine and competent candidates, who are essential for the party to maintain its ideological stance and governance capacity, find costs prohibitive. They need to be fully funded by their party.

After the elections, when a contesting party is short of a majority, party funds are also used to poach legislators and engineer defections. The sensitive among turncoats call it compromise. I term it crass dishonesty, on the wafer-thin line bordering criminality. But ours is not to sit at the pearly gates and pass virtuous judgements. Ours is to discern why voters re-elect them.

A small fraction of party funds is mobilised from the general public with much fanfare. This serves more a campaign purpose than meeting any serious funding requirement. The major portion comes from big business, industrialists, traders and merchants who want to protect their current enterprises, dip into the exchequer for contracts with inflated quotations, and also create a congenial societal structure for them to operate in. In modern day democracies they can do so only through political parties and electoral capture of State power.

Feudalism was a monolithic society, varying only with the fertility of soils and bounty of nature. Unlike in those times, all forms of capitalism are not of the same shade. They range is from entrepreneurial, state-guided, nationalistic, monopolistic to imperialistic and many more. The societal structure each form seeks to establish through the capture of State power also ranges from social democratic, liberal democratic, participatory, pluralistic, decentralised, centralised to autocratic and oligarchic. Moreover, individual capitalists and business houses of the same ilk compete with each other and bet on different horses. These are the broader Caste-class interests as well as individual hankering that enable various political parties to mobilise party funds from the same set of ruling classes.

Cadre Workers

The role of a cadre of booth workers is vital for the candidate. They are the ones who campaign house to house and impress potential voters with *whatever they need to feel*. This could be Caste loyalty, accessibility, recognition of pressing needs, protection from the “other”, or whatever. What the cadre worker says or does need not have even the remotest bearing to the party stand or ideology. The vast majority of them would never have even seen the manifesto. Cadre workers are true conjurers, masters at creating illusion.

The day before and on voting day, the cadre becomes booth workers. They ensure that a paltry sum of money reaches each voter for “*loss of wages and incidental expenses on voting day*” and see to it that there is a healthy turnout. They convince voters that they have the means to check if there has been any betrayal through crossvoting.

In this state of affairs, recruiting the right type of cadre workers is of paramount importance. Nearly every Middle Peasant family, vying for minor government contracts like road repair, culverts, drains, desilting tanks, etc., is a potential applicant. But only a handful of them would have proved themselves to be effective in garnering votes. They are the ones who would have maintained their proximity to the electorate either due to Caste identities or because they kept their arrogance/despondency under check through earlier victories/defeats.

During the five year term post victory, only a small fraction of this cadre can be rewarded with the minor contracts they covet. The dissatisfied majority switch to the opposite side. As a result, it is often the very same cadre that works for the winning candidate during consecutive elections. This comes through as hardly any surprise in a milieu where switching sides is the characteristic malaise of electoral democracy.

Voters

Voters see candidates displaying personal grandeur and listen to them list self-professed virtues and exaggerated achievements with oratory skills, denigrating their opponents. Voters hardly pay any

attention to the soundtrack of party positions playing somewhere in the background. If it is a catchy tune, so much the better. If not, it is simply switched off.

Unlike in vibrant liberal democracies where voters call out during periodic elections, electoral promises are heard with a nod and a wink. In an uninformed and disinformed society, elections are hardly about what voters *think*. It is about how they are made to *feel* at that instant moment. This could be because of an acquired wisdom in voters who have seen it all, once too often, that tells them that a change in rulers will not necessarily alter governance in any significant way.

Astronomical sums needed to fight elections give a relative advantage to the incumbent party. But not always. Sometimes, when the performance of the incumbent party/government has been particularly miserable, the above mechanisations do not work. The awe and belief in an opposition party leader overrides anything that individual candidates and their cadre do. However, once again, it is *how they feel* and not *what they think or know*. When this happens, there is a one-way sweep.

Identity Politics

Individuals wear multiple identities whilst performing various functions during their lifetime. Parent, child, spouse, worker, boss, teammate, friend, teacher, student, etc. From among them, the primary identity is the one that is most consistent and enduring during most of one's life.

Primary identities of individuals are defined by societal structure. In this sense, they are determined as much by how they see themselves, as by how others see them. They determine the socioeconomic role and contribution of individuals and consequent returns they could obtain from the economy.

That is how primary identities become, by and large, cultural identities which stay more or less constant and unchanging. Like a wide brimmed hat placed over and above other caps worn at different times.

We have already explored, at great length and in some detail, how the primary identity of the erstwhile peasantry changed from Caste to Caste-class, shedding much of their ordained and predetermined identity. But it takes a very strong individualism to remain in one's own primary identity of choice, where one opts to suffer anxiety, fear, terror and indignity all alone. It requires intellectual courage, far rarer than physical bravery, to not slip back into one's cultural identity. Courage is about having fear, being mindful of risks, and making a conscious decision to do something anyways.

The classics describe this as the contradiction between intellectual and social consciousness. For the underprivileged, it means burning bridges with established survival strategies and forging new alliances and dependencies.

At the constituency level, candidates appeal to the Caste identity of voters to elicit loyalty. At the national level, leaders invoke Religious identity. Both these cultural identities come to the surface when the going is not good.

It is when the economy fails to provide them with meaningful engagement; when jobs are scarce, wages low/stagnant, cost of living unbearable, and aspiration is dead, that individual voters stop thinking of themselves as workers or small entrepreneurs. They resort to their primary Caste and Religion identities with the misguided expectation of mutuality, support and solutions from their respective Caste leaders. To a very limited extent, joint and extended family pressure does work a little bit, with slightly reduced commissions and kickback to get their work done.

It is this communalisation of the voting pattern that candidates and political parties carefully calculate and capitalise on.

8.4. Delivering Governance

Governance is the manner in which political parties rule society at the behest of the ruling Caste-class who placed them in power. “*Of the people, By the people, For the people*” holds good only insofar as the majority accept and give consent to the manner in which the government will do so. Over the past decades, the nature of governance has shifted with the growing strength, influence and altered genre of the ruling capitalist class.

By their very nature, political parties neither desire nor are able to placate all sections of society. This is the dilemma that faces them after winning an election. The extent to which they attempt to do so defines them as left, right or centrist. Whatever be the label, they find it difficult to satisfy even their core Caste-class constituents in the manner and to the extent they promised.

Governing

Today, after seven and a half decades of independence, the three arms of government run on autopilot with established formalities and practices well in place. The bureaucracy administers multifarious departments, institutions continue to function, and services are delivered. The police take care of law and order, and the military defends sovereignty. The judiciary overlooks the fair and just implementation of existing laws. By and large, even foreign policy remains unchanged. All these happen, all by themselves, after every change in government.

The real job of any newly elected government is therefore to unabashedly serve the interests of the ruling Caste-class who have put them in power in the first place. They then form a cabinet of ministers comprising not just the capable, but also giving Caste and regional token representation to placate everyone. It is this toying with efficiency that makes the head of government all powerful, sowing the seeds for autocracy; a situation that the ruling Caste-class welcomes with open arms since there is only a single authority to placate.

Once these textbook roles are fulfilled, the next job is to draft the new direction that the government will take. Here is where policy advisers come in. The overwhelming majority of transnational experts, consultants and pseudo intellectuals are either directly or institutionally financed by the ruling Caste-class. There are a number of instances where government white papers, policy documents and even proposed legislature are directly outsourced to such institutions and universities.

The new political bosses determine fiscal and monetary policies to shape the economy. They make revenue estimates and allocate funds to meet electoral promises made *in camera* as well as to the public. Annual budgets that firmly commit financial allocations and next year’s tax regime are, however, nominally kept confidential till they reach the legislature.

They pass new laws through the legislature in order to reshape and capture State institutions more firmly in favour the ruling Caste-class. Rules and regulations are framed with clever wordings that conceal bias and intent, ensuring a broad acceptance without hiccups.

Officials at all levels, from the lowest to highest, satisfy their political masters who, in turn, serve the elite ruling Caste-class.

The State

Ensuring a broad acceptance of the new direction, without hiccups, has come to be the definition of stability and good governance. Not participation, consensus, accountability, transparency, equity, inclusiveness, sustainability and all the other much touted principles.

This is where Caste, hierarchy, subservience and a fatalistic acceptance comes into play. A government that is forced to resort to brute police force to control its own people is a weak State. Ironically, one that manages to hoodwink the population is considered a strong State.

Distraction

Political parties resort to distractions to divert attention from non-delivery with anything that catches the public imagination. It normally is the celebration of a manufactured milestone in the country's march towards greatness. Exaggerated claims and sensational eventification of glorious achievements is perhaps the most harmless of them.

Shifting the blame and directing public anger onto others with deliberate falsification is not so innocent. A sophisticated industry to fabricate mischief and spread lies as disinformation operates at the behest of political parties. A grain is enough to build a complex conspiracy theory. Half-truths, when cunningly twisted, can turn it on its head and vitiate the atmosphere.

Oftentimes it is a fabricated threat of something just waiting to happen. Or a perceived disrespect or insult to the nation or a particular religion/community. Sometimes it is a deliberate exaggeration of some isolated incident or an obscure person's words or actions, projected onto an entire community. Some street protests, like around language chauvinism, are deliberately provoked but kept under check in order to keep the population on the boil. Others that are critical of the regime ruthlessly crushed.

For a while, people do not stop to ask if the propaganda is true or not. The question is how well it connects people to act together based on the spin and brainwashing. This is where charisma comes into play in political leadership.

When a falsehood is factually disproved or found to be baseless, it is as suddenly abandoned as it was created. The intention, after all, was never to expose and remedy a situation; it was just to turn the public's eye away from failure.

Waging war is the ultimate form of distraction. Distraction, as we shall soon examine, lays the ground for victimisation and has serious socio-political consequences.

Corruption

In spite of righteous assertions and indignant pretensions, a tolerance for bribery and corruption is inbuilt through the electoral system. Candidates openly invest humungous amounts in the hope of striking it rich. Once they win, they recoup investments through the awarding of contracts for infrastructure projects. This is accepted by everyone as fair play.

The highest echelons of the pampered bureaucracy work hand in glove with elected leaders. Politicians, bureaucrats and their benami have joined industrial capitalists and business houses to be the *nouveau rich* in the developing world.

Top level corruption goes unnoticed by the electorate till bridges collapse, roads get potholes, clogged drains cause flooding, schools and hospitals are understaffed, projects stay incomplete because they overshoot their budgets, *et al*. Whistle-blowers are, by and large, disgruntled insiders who didn't get their cut. Independent journalists conduct exposés and opposition parties take up the matter.

Resisting transaction corruption is no longer possible in this day and age. Earlier, villagers would gherao Panchayat offices and demand accountability and civic services. That disappeared when the practice of spending heavily seeped into even municipality, gram panchayat, cooperative and other local body elections. They too need to get back investments. They connive with village and block

level government servants to siphon off large chunks of local development funds. This too is accepted as the new normal.

Indignant crusades and mass movements against corruption have turned out to be publicity stunts. The setting up of vigilance bodies, occasional raids and seizure of staggering amounts of unaccounted black money, and even rarer convictions are just an eyewash that leaders indulge in to project a holier than thou image that impresses nobody. More often than not, these are used for political vendetta with the kettle calling the saucepan black.

Transaction Corruption

The most hypocritical stance of all is to liken the hapless poor and middle class who pay to get their work done, with the rich who indulge in giving bribes to illegally enrich themselves. The poor face situations where ration cards cannot be got, land documents cannot be updated, house taxes cannot be paid, patients cannot get treatment, electricity and water cannot be connected, bank accounts cannot be operated, small loans cannot be obtained. In a nutshell, nothing at all can be done at any level of government without bribes being paid.

Without speed money, no files move, and the job stays undone. Recent moves to digitise services and provide e-governance have, in reality, only increased the power of IT literate brokers, agents and officials. Till now, the poor and middle class knew they just had to pay some Rupees, over and above the prescribed fees, under the table. Today, they are befuddled, dazed, confused and speak of an enchanted “thumb” that the officer seems to have in order to get their work done.

9. SOCIAL WORK

9.1. Philanthropy

Philanthropy in India has been an age old and virtuous tradition. While it wasn't even remotely due to any critique of the manner in which the rich obtained their wealth, it does indicate a mild remorse on the plight of those who had nothing. Perhaps it had more to do with thanking the gods for having been born into the right families and blessed with the opportunity to amass wealth. Some philanthropy was inbuilt into social and religious customs.

Be it as it may, the country saw a lot of charitable activities in general. Social work appeared as a vocation. The rich merely provided resources, and charitable organisations began to specialise in delivering assistance to different types of underprivileged.

Over time, social workers began to reflect on the causes of poverty and, in addition to direct delivery of succour, took up literacy campaigns, conducted health camps, taught skills, helped set up small trades, etc. When more resources were available, charitable organisations set up institutions to run schools, colleges, hospitals, etc. With greater knowhow and systemisation, they undertook development programmes to complement government efforts. The nomenclature shifted to NGO.

Up until this point, the polity accepted these social workers/development workers and their interventions. To this day, they are recognised as an essential and honourable occupation within the boundaries of Caste-class ridden capitalist society. Even the vernacular has not changed. The socio-legal structure offers special status in recognition, tax exemption, etc. The State found it convenient to partner with NGOs, many of whom became unpaid/underpaid social contractors implementing government funded programmes.

9.2. Development Programmes

Universities started offering generic and then specialised courses to professionalise, manage and measure the impact of social work. When academia entered the field, the causes of poverty were delved into much deeper. Economics, sociology and political science were used to analyse societal structures and class character to critique poverty.

Other liberal democracies also generously supported development programmes through international NGOs. Besides providing funds, they too joined in making critical analysis and a rich development debate ensued.

Indigenous philanthropic funding paled in volume when compared to foreign and government funding of development work. Ten years back, India became the first country to make philanthropy mandatory. Companies above a certain profit level have to compulsorily spend 2% of their pre-tax profit on social, environmental and economic development work. Besides their own foundations most of these funds went to NGOs, following the long established philanthropy practice.

9.3. Grassroots NGOs

When deliberated strategies emerged from the national and international development debate to effectively address poverty, the boundaries between social work and activism blurred. Socio-political interventions like empowering women, Dalits, Adivasis, domestic workers, sexual minorities, were recognised as the most effective means to get them out of dire straits. As earlier stated when discussing Activism, the State agreed and actively supported conscientisation and community organisation as the best pathway for the people to access entitlements.

We have extensively elaborated on the journey of grassroots NGOs in the opening pages of a paper at <https://adats.com/documents/book5/download/0515.pdf>

9.4. Enlightened Business Leaders

Along with thought leaders who struggle to recognise debilitating limitations in the current path of the economy, enlightened new age businesses leaders who have long crossed the *laissez-faire* stage see that the centralised and extractive model will not work for much longer. They are prepared to experiment with environmentally sustainable, decentralised modes. They are willing to provide capital, state of the art technology and management expertise to set up decentralised business units owned and managed by groups of rural poor.

Setting up decentralised business units should to be the future of pertinent grassroots NGO intervention in the current political economy. Not as conventional cooperative societies set up with government subsidies, but as private limited companies with the same statutory recognition and obligations as any other entrepreneur. At every single stage, this will be extremely challenging, complicated and time consuming. Nevertheless, they should not be treated as “projects”. They should not be viewed as separate charitable spaces set aside from and outside mainstream business. In this regard, DBUs are akin to several community owned and managed climate projects presently being implemented, which project those negatively impacted by climate change as being part of the solution.

NGOs who enjoy a longstanding and intimate contact with communities need to partner with these enlightened business leaders and facilitate small and large groups of villagers to conduct market surveys, study value chains, make business plans and set up these seemingly innocuous ventures. Please see <https://adats.com/documents/book5/download/0523.pdf> for one such DBU that is currently being set up.

In truth, such DBUs will have much more than a normal demonstration value. They will challenge the dominant perception that centralised solutions are the only path to make ventures succeed. Piggybacking on the credibility of powerful capitalists who cannot be ignored or dismissed, it can be shown that a return to liberal capitalism is viable, possible, sensible and a preferred option for sustainable development. Development workers can passively bolster the argument for taking a step back to participatory and inclusive liberal democracy.

10. OTHERING

10.1. Intolerance

Intolerance is not the simple antithesis of tolerance. Intolerance kills multiplicity and diversity as much as tolerance. The fact that something needs to be tolerated implies that it is still distasteful. Intolerance is a refusal to accept the very existence of that which is different. It goes beyond unacceptance, to exterminating difference. What intolerance does brazenly, tolerance displays in a subtler manner.

The real opposite of both is a happy acceptance and celebration of differences as healthy diversity. The core design of Humans in society is to co-exist in harmony. Not to hate one another, be fearful, harbour suspicion and distrust.

Intolerance is the populist milieu deliberately created for something far more sinister to fester. On the surface, it is a rejection of all that is different. At a deeper level, it is laying the ground for the ruling Caste-class to establish absolute and unchallenged supremacy.

10.2. Majoritarianism

In recent years the manner of government formation changed. Democracy has come to be understood as majoritarianism. Governance has accordingly changed to become absolutist and authoritarian.

Obtaining a legislative majority is only the first step, however important, in any form of democracy. Inbuilt systems should ensure that answerability and accountability are a continuing and ceaseless process. Even if it eventually discarded, there is a procedural obligation for government to hear, listen and make a sincere attempt to understand a different point of view. In this sense, everyone is a winner. The winner and the loser, both having a say in policy making. No one is run roughshod over.

Majoritarianism, on the other hand, is assumed to give licence to licentious governance through sheer numbers. There is no attempt at consensus building or constructive dialogue with either the opposition or minority communities. Legislative debates to arrive at multi-partisan consensus have become sparring matches. Adversaries are converted to opponents.

Majoritarianism, in spite of its misleading nomenclature, has hardly ever been used for the greater good of even major communities. It is merely a ploy to distract voters and get legislative numbers. It is not as if the opinions of the majority are taken into account and their words heeded. It has always been used by authoritarian forces to hoodwink the masses by presenting just one side of the coin and put down the other.

Early majoritarianism is a play with numbers to get an electoral majority by hook or by crook and then establishes a tyranny of the majority. It then goes on to capture State institutions and obliterate multiple political parties, also by fair means and foul. When electoral defeat and

discrediting does not work, enforcement agencies of the State are used to cajole, threaten, weaken, disqualify and jail opposition party candidates.

As majoritarianism advances, it becomes a two-party rule. In a two-party system, both share the same intrinsic characteristics of assisting a section of the ruling Caste-class to obtain absolute and unchallenged supremacy. At that stage, it is just a competition between groups of politicians as to who will reap gratitude. Finally, majoritarianism moves to altogether eliminate any authentic electoral democracy and become a despotic theocracy or oligarchy.

10.3. "Othering"

Global Project

With the unbridled growth of imperialistic capitalism, Othering is the current global project that is underway the world over.

Othering is the final, most vicious form of societal structuring that the ruling Caste-class attempts to establish in its pursuit of supremacy. It is an international phenomenon that is pursued in different ways in each nation-state for the ruling class to conduct business with absolutely no hinderance. For this to happen, an authoritarian and totalitarian form of governance that brooks no room for contradiction or criticism is needed. One that is the antithesis of harmonious living, which is the natural instinct of Humans in societies.

The Think Tank

Othering is directed by a crafty and deceitful think tank of sorts who have a warped and twisted perception of a uniform, diversity-free, permanent and unchanging ordering of people in society. The historic similarity of such an endeavour to establish hegemony can be traced back to the establishment of Caste in their respective countries/societies. The dissimilarity is that Humans and the manner in which they live has since advanced from that primitive stage where the establishment of virgin societal structures was possible.

Manifold are the differences in this day and age. With established religions already at play, engulfing 84% of the world population, there can be no new priestly class to construe any new divinity or spirituality. Economic development has significantly changed the living conditions of the entire population, however patchy and unequal it may be. With a few tragic exceptions, nation states are firmly established with fixed boundaries and inhabitants.

Reengineering today's world is tough. It needs a devious but canny reading of flux in society in order to constantly adapt strategies and tactics to move towards a societal structure in exclusive favour of a single community or Caste-class, sabotaging all others. Contrary to a ladder like hierarchy, this new design is perceived on the absolute superiority of a single authority.

The economic agenda of Othering is to weed out upstarts from the lower Caste-class, the small entrepreneur. As we have explained, their very existence in the first place was interpreted by the upper Caste as a reflexive function of their charity, and not a function of accepting humanity.

The political agenda to achieve this is once again a pretence at the creation of a Caste-free religion.

Figureheads

Carefully chosen and fanatically obedient front men are chosen as political figureheads. These marionettes need to be closely directed and constantly monitored. Othering differs from distraction resorted to by mundane leaders to cover up their ineptitude. Distractions are carefully calculated boundaries hit by artful players; even these can sometimes boomerang into self-goals.

Othering is way too complex and long drawn an agenda. It takes a devious and determined mindset and years of patient preparation for the ruling Caste-class to design ways and means to take absolute and total control of society. A mindset of inherent superiority and exclusivity has to be ingrained into an elite section, the “support population” as it were, to infiltrate all and every institution of State power to provide teeth as well as pseudo-legitimacy.

The Enemy

It takes serious effort to prepare an enemy against whom the majority can unite. Through an elaborate, convoluted, carefully planned and executed process, carefully chosen enemies are created, blamed and demonised for all the ills and evil in society. For the people to unquestionably accept hitherto friends, business partners and neighbours as enemies, there has to be either real or fabricated history of their having cornered resources, cruelly depriving others of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Dubbing the enemy as foreign invaders, agents of foreign powers and questioning their loyalty to the homeland is particularly useful.

This concocted enemy has to be characterised with dangerous beliefs, practices and threatening intentions that all must beware. An isolated incident is made generic through blatant exaggeration to project an entire community as evil. The think tank runs riot with media cells, provocative slogans and inflammatory speeches in its vilification of this supposed enemy with a fabrication of outright lies and narratives through the falsification of not just history, but also present-day transgressions. Entire communities are stereotyped as anti-social, criminal, anti-national and non-Human.

Othering is reinforced through impersonalisation. Targeted communities are not referred to by their actual names. The mildest example of this is Muslims and Christians being referred to as “minorities”. Even the highest business and political personages are not spared from this retitling. History is replete with bygone and present-day labels like encroachers, infiltrators, vermin, cockroaches, termites, etc. given with popular conviction to the “Others”.

Enforcement

In order to maintain sharp divisions even after the enemy is done with, the State needs to get militarised with bigoted legislation, police and enforcement agencies. Vigilante is encouraged, street violence justified as spontaneous expressions of popular anger, and extra-judiciary instant justice meted out to the enemy.

Patriotism is the love and devotion for all the people who live in one’s country, with the nation being the physical boundaries where they are contained. This praiseworthy quality is brazenly replaced with nationalism which refers to devotion to an animate but objectified nation, and to only one group of people over all others. Furthermore, ultra-nationalism and accusations of a foreign hand is used to curb and punish even perceived criticism.

Critique by intellectuals silenced. Satire, comedy, and even humour that hints at dissent or criticism is punished under harsh and unreasonable laws. Lengthy prosecution and delayed justice is in itself punishment.

11. EXPIRY

11.1. Rejection

To paraphrase the earlier quoted historian, *“when we adopt a satellite view, which scans millennia rather than centuries, it becomes clear that history is moving relentlessly towards unity.”*

I don't believe that we need to wait for a thousand years. People will eventually see through the global project of unbridled growth of imperialistic capitalism for what it is. Sooner rather than later they will come to their senses and recognise distractions for what they are. The enamour will vanish as fast as it was created.

The so-called post-democracy daydreams of the think tank will not come to be.

Illusions of Wealth

Regardless of what propaganda says, the current form of the economy is neither viable nor sustainable. Wealth measured in the modern form of money is as much a mesmerising fiction as any other untrue tale. Exponential growth is shown not through a real expansion of the economy with the production of useful goods and services that people exchange in the market. The sale and purchase of a billion-dollar bomb is an illusionary transaction, irrespective of whether it is actually used or allowed to go obsolete and await the next billion plus version. The exhaustion of resources and concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is what allows the fabrication of these ludicrous mirages.

In sheer volume, this type of economy will never be able to produce the type of products that meet the basic needs of the population as a whole. Because then the World Bank will categorise it as Tier 3 economy, as an insult to national pride; the real reason being that profit margins will be lower than the avaricious expectations of imperialist capitalists. They need underdog economies controlled through imperialism to supply garments, toys, and even silicon chips and automobiles.

Disdain for nature and natural resources cannot be sustained. When "emptying" continues in this manner and at this rate, Nature will strike back with catastrophic consequences. The ingenuity of science and the power of technology may not be overrated. But the patience of Nature is very finite. Climate change is just the first such baring of her teeth.

Adaptation and mitigation strategies are the elitist's short-sighted response to climate change. The latest such endeavour is to restore emissions from fossil fuels back into the bowels of the earth through carbon capture. When nature gets sick of such frivolous arrogance and abruptly disallows the extractive economy *per se*, it is only the poor who will be able to resort to nature-based solutions with intuitive knowledge and innate resilience.

Joblessness

An economy that admits that it can only provide minimum income guarantees but not jobs, will be rejected. Jobs do not only give employment, wages/salaries and income. They give pride, dignity and above all, a primary identity of one's own choosing. This is something that the ultra-rich and their elite lackeys will never understand. They term it as ingratitude, exacerbating the contradiction between the ruling Caste-class and the general public.

The promise of food to eat, roof over their heads, entertainment, etc. will work only when poverty and deprivation are acute. Moreover, poverty is relative; it is defined by rising aspirations. A few decades back rural folk, rich and poor, fatalistically accepted early deaths due to appendicitis, childbirth and "heart attacks". Today, they expect government health services to address far more serious illness.

People will not be content with a jobless existence. Even if they get more than a delicious variety of food, more than just a roof over their heads, they will get fed up with merely worshiping gods, singing *bhajans*, pursuing sports, partaking in cultural activities, and listening to flowery political rhetoric. Already, in regions where welfare is decently implemented and leakage-free minimum

income properly distributed, we begin to see recipients of charity grumbling about laziness, boredom, narcotics, increase in petty crime, youth going astray, etc.

Humans are not pet dogs and cats. Even many well fed caged animals in zoos, with primordial memories of the wild, refuse to naturally procreate.

11.2. Liberal Democracy

The present trend will be countered by a return to liberal democracy, a more enlightened form of governance that already had a brief run in the very recent past, before unchecked avarice took over. Federalism will get re-established. Pluralism will take into account regional, linguistic and cultural variances without any browbeating into a uniform conformity.

Attempts at manipulating elections through the spread of disinformation and even outright tampering will be resisted. Political parties will not stay vanquished. Rule of law, protection of individual rights and liberties and limitation on the power of elected legislators will once again be established. An independent judiciary and a system of checks and balances between different branches of government will be put back in place.

A return to quasi socialism with state owned monopolies controlled by the bureaucracy will not be an option. This became clear when we consciously moved away from social to liberal capitalism. Liberal democracy is different from the early social democracy that the country tried out soon after independence. It will be a market economy with private property that encourages all forms of business and entrepreneurship. Through rigorously enforced anti-monopoly policies, the State will ensure fair competition and an open, level playing field for big, medium and small entrepreneurs.

Society will accept that technology can advance with capitalism as the vehicle, but both should not stay unfettered. Technology is valueless till it is applied. When employed with restraint, it does immeasurable good. When freed from the narrow race for productivity and efficiency, technology can be reimagined to actually create more than just hi-tech jobs. Freedom and participation will counter the inequality and oppression that unchecked *laissez-faire* capitalism promotes.

Just as in with organic, economic growth is also an empirical truth, a law of nature. It is inevitable and welcome. It is the manner of growth, its definition and measurement which determine who benefits. Growth will be impartially understood and cautiously chosen by an informed public.

No economy can stay insulated, non-competitive and self-contained. The global marketplace is a reality. *Gram Swaraj* is a principle for decentralisation that prevents the hogging of spaces from the less than ultra-rich. It is not a dogmatic prescription to bring back a romanticised past.

Charisma

Most countries who do not harbour an imperialistic design opt for liberal democracy as their socio-political model. They choose a parliamentary form of government rather than presidential. Not just due to the danger of absolute power being abused. But because charismatic leadership is not a good fit for electoral democracy.

Charismatic political leaders are dangerous for a functioning democracy. Such leaders and their followers are connected by real stories and deliberately created fiction about their origins, virtues, service, *et al*. Who they represent, their ideology, what they say and their actual message is lost in the din and clamour of propaganda built around their persona. Liberal democracy demands that each voter retains individuality to make a conscious choice as to what is best for her. Predetermining right and wrong choices is anathema to participatory democracy.

Majoritarianism, on the other hand, depends on charismatic leaders and their rhetoric to deceive the public by diverting attention through distraction.

Charismatic leadership belongs to the time when there is a national crisis, when shaping the economy and governance are not the immediate priority. Churchill and FDR connected millions of soldiers and civilians in one common cause, using the sheer power of their charisma (with even military genius of their commanders attributed to them). They managed to hold the world together to defeat Hitler who also similarly connected his people with each other and himself. Well before them, and for much longer, the Mahatma did the same for a totally different cause. But none of them could have been able to play any effective role when the people themselves, each individual on her own, had to make conscious and informed choices to shape the economy and decide on a form of governance.

Civil Society

Civil society has its origins in grassroots NGOs moving away from implementing development programmes to activism. The earlier polity accepted and even encouraged this as a positive input for establishing liberal democracy.

Liberal democracy, with its emphasis on separation of powers, independent judiciary, *et al* is a socio-political check on Imperialism. And civil society is a check on liberal democracy itself. Anti-monopoly policies, fair competition and an open, level playing field for big, medium and small entrepreneurs is anathema to imperialist capitalism. Global cosmopolitanism, the idea that all people are members of a single community and that all humans are equal and should be treated as such, is an outright denunciation of Imperialism which, by its very definition, goes hand in hand with ultra-nationalism.

Meanwhile, the ruling Caste-class increased its stranglehold on State institutions and began to reshape societal structures. The economy has begun to change from liberal democracy to the present-day form of imperialistic capitalism. Grassroots politicisation and participation is not in the interest of establishing hegemony.

Activism by grassroots NGOs has come to be viewed as political work, completely outside the gambit of conventional social work. Moreover, foreign funding is interpreted as a blocking of the model being pursued by a developing country to become a world superpower.

Civil society and a free press are imperatives for liberal democracy by ensuring transparency and answerability. Nascent imperialist capitalism, on the other hand, evidently does not desire these features. While established imperialism can tolerate and even accommodate intellectuals, criticism, critique and dissent, emerging societies that aspire to become imperialistic cannot. They declare that enemy nations infiltrate and subvert civil society through funding and liberal policy influence in order to hurt the recipient's national interests from within. Civil society is seen as the fourth-generation warfare being undertaken by developed countries against developing ones. Climate change, concern for the environment, nuclear proliferation, Human rights, gender, transparency in governance, *et al* are seen as arguments to keep others perpetually underdeveloped.

Using multi-disciplinary approaches of economics, sociology and political science to analyse the class character of societal structures is being snuffed out. To start with, foreign contributions for anything other than conventional charity and social work is blocked. As a next step, activism is equated with economic terrorism and criminalised under draconian laws ostensibly to safeguard sovereignty and integrity. Restrictions are placed on freedom of speech, right to assemble and right to form associations.

Radicalising Activists

Ironically, the labelling and repressing of legitimate criticism is indeed a major contributor to the radicalisation of patriotic development workers who are motivated solely by their love for the underprivileged. While it could be argued, with very little evidence and absolutely no justification, that NGOs are for the self-employment and self-aggrandization of development workers, this can hardly be the case with civil society activists.

The baseless smear campaign, maligning and even infliction of pain and torment has made civil society activists come of age and realign themselves to the altered political economy. A mature realisation has dawned that economies and politics are conjoined and reciprocally connected. The type of capitalism we will have depends on the societal structure we build, and vice versa.

Preserving electoral democracy and preventing autocracy are jobs for political parties. It is now understood that when liberal democracy is under threat, non-party-political formation is an ineffectual and wasted proposition. Many activists have realised that for civil society to play its role, opposition political parties have to bring back social democracy as the form of governance.

Coalitions

Society is made up of different Caste-classes who each have their own particular demands from government. The ideal coalition is one where each Caste-class interest is fairly represented and protected. This is why many liberal democracies have opted for the proportional representation system where each such Caste-class chooses its own legislator. Political parties therefore need, in their membership, a composite mix of all the major socioeconomic and cultural groups that comprise society.

We are different on two counts. Firstly, we have, willy-nilly, been unmindful of consequences and already allowed the capitalist economy to grow into an unbridled/unfettered imperialistic phase described in some detail in these pages. Secondly, we have a first past the post electoral system. Party politics has gravitated to two dominant national parties and a plethora of smaller, regional ones.

The dominant political parties approximately represent moderate and extreme capitalism; liberal democracy and majoritarianism. Depending on which Caste-class interest they represent and their assessment of how best to project those interests, the smaller political parties oscillate between the two dominant national parties to form alliances. But these are not clean black and white choices. They have shown to be totally unmindful of whether there is liberal democracy or majoritarianism.

Under these circumstances, coalition politics takes on an entirely different meaning in India. Voting for or witnessing the victory/defeat of any one bloc doesn't say much in terms of the population's choice for the type of societal structure or genre of capitalism they prefer. Muddled with communalisation of the voting pattern, an assessment of people's opinion on the state of the union becomes even more confusing. This is not quite the same as vote bank politics which provide some approximation of what communities, if not Caste-classes, perceive.

Add to all this the fact that the fiefdom of political parties comprises personalities, the politicians. Today's politicians, as we have already described, primarily have the protection of their financial investments and personal interests upfront.

Coalitions in India can best be understood as pre-poll and post-poll alliance partners getting together to share the spoils of governance. The nett description of these alliances has therefore to be based on the ideology of the dominant political party, tempered by its accommodation of smaller allies.

In recent years, more under the threat of obliteration than ideological compulsions, political parties are attempting to form coalitions. Politicians are getting compelled to put aside their differences and act unitedly. Without fully understanding the economic implications of imperialist capital, they recognise the social danger of majoritarianism.

Parallely, the dominant political parties are undertaking a novel conscientisation exercise. They are publicly articulating their contradictory socioeconomic ideologies out in the open. Notwithstanding the reasons for allies getting together, the stage is getting set for voters to make informed choices as to what sort of economy they want and which societal structure will permit it.

These are still early days with many teething problems. Even within the dominant parties, it will take a long time for ideologically clear leaders to educate their candidates and cadre. Some activists from civil society are finding a role and relevance in this pursuit.

It will take many years before true coalitions that are imperative for the proper functioning of liberal democracy are built to fairly represent and protect various Caste-class interests. And also, to resist succumbing to imperialistic temptations.

12. THE PERMANENCE OF CASTE

12.1. Connecting Humans

Many a time in these reflections, I have insisted that the basic nature of Humans is to live in unity and harmony with each other. They do this by forming connections between themselves.

School betterment committees connect parents into small groups of very limited numbers in single geographies. Similarly, trade unions, sports clubs, etc. Schools, trade unions and sports clubs are *objective entities* that truly exist. Information that Humans exchange in these connections merely allow these already existing entities to function.

Subjective realities, on the other hand, are things like pain, pleasure, anxiety and fear that are not “out there” but “in here”. They are real only for the person who feels them. When subjective things like anxiety and fear that exist in a single mind, connect with a large number of minds that share the same “in here” feelings, *intersubjective entities* are created.

Information that Humans exchange with each other about intersubjective entities create things that never existed prior to the exchange of that information. The exchange of information about things that never existed before, created these things. Of all the types of stories Humans told each other, those that create intersubjective realities have been the most crucial for the development of unity through large-scale Human networks.

12.2. Religion

Homo Sapiens mean “wise man”. The tellers of tales, in their wisdom, went about laying the basis for unity by creating fictions which would in turn create gods, religions and large-scale Human networks. But the multiplicity of gods and religions, all at violent loggerheads with each other, did not help.

When lots of people tell one another stories about laws and gods, this is what creates these laws and gods. Intersubjective things like laws and gods are extremely powerful within a particular information network and utterly meaningless outside it. The Abrahamic stories mean everything to Jews, Christians and Muslims, but nothing at all to Hindus. Vice versa with the Bhagwat Gita and Ramayana.

Religion is an intersubjective reality that connects billions of people. It creates a bonding between people who would otherwise never have known of the others' existence, let alone gotten together. Whether through implanting fake memories, forming fictional relationships, or creating intersubjective realities, stories produce large-scale Human networks.

When examining the origin of religions, the question arises as to why Humans told stories in the first place. Why did they create intersubjective realities through shared stories? The answer is simply because only they could do so. They had an inherent advantage over all other species.

Subjective realities are emotions. Emotion is an innate, perhaps unique, characteristic to *Homo Sapiens sapiens*. All other species, on the other hand, have *responses* guided by species specific instincts (some domesticated animals learn to imitate actions conveying Human emotions of loyalty and affection).

Perhaps even the 7 other *Sapiens* species who preceded us did not. This is a matter for conjecture. But what is definite is that large-scale Human networks gave Humans an unmatched advantage over all other species and also over the natural environment. It gave Humans an inbuilt ability to unify.

12.3. Back to Caste

Caste is a reality that will keep popping up. Realities are not always truth, just as Truth is not always the reality.

Caste itself will not go away. The lower Castes will refuse to experience it when the economy justly serves them. Babasaheb's prescription of inter-eating and inter-marriage is more an indicator of free choice than a prescription to end Caste. He advised acts of passive defiance by socially conscious radicals.

The three-millennium old social construct of Caste is not likely to be destroyed. It can be snuffed but not fully doused. It will linger like the cinders of a fire that can never be fully put out. Like embers that are as hot as the fire that created them, simmering in their own heat, never getting fully extinguished, anxiously waiting to flare up and play its mischief. The world over, Caste is like the addict who can never use the past tense to claim *he once was an addict...*

When the going is good and everyone has a role in the economy, small or big, the *experience of Caste* is put on the back burner. Egalitarianism does not mean perfect equality; it is enough if the economy gives everyone the opportunity to aspire, have ambition and contribute meaningfully. The lower Castes will *refuse to experience it* and the upper Castes *will not be allowed to assert it*.

When this fails and the economy stumbles, the base instinct of Humans, the need to look down on someone else as inherently inferior, surfaces. And we are back to Caste.

12.4. Why Caste?

The seeming enigma that the ultra-rich constantly root for Caste, knowing fully well that it will re-appear only when their economy falters is no big puzzle. They do not desire a sustained and balanced economy that works for everyone. Theirs is a crass, uninformed and illiterate coterie that yearns for exclusivity, supremacy, dominance, hegemony, oligarchy.

There is much truth in the vernacular adage "Only the hapless poor (*Abhāgya, nis'sahāya pēda prajalu*) and good for nothing rich (*Panikirāni dhanavantuḍu*) hold on to Caste and religion".

Epilogue

This is a very personal chronicle primarily meant for myself. I am a healthy, active and involved septuagenarian, intimately connected with the same Caste-class of underprivileged people in this same semi-arid region for the past five and a half decades. Along with them, I too desperately need to make sense of what is happening in today's world.

History isn't the study of the past; it is the study of change. History teaches us what remains the same, what changes, and how things change. I found it necessary to go back to the very beginnings and discern the bearing those past events and happenings have in shaping today's society. I have chosen Caste as the prism because it is the Apple in the parable.

I have refused to look up any literature or even my own earlier writings. This recounting is based on scattered remembrances of what I have read, heard, felt, shared and experienced.

Over the years, I have let it all soak into my subconscious to become intuitive impressions, opinions and responses in everyday life. I have let it all speak to me once again in these pages. In order to get a proper flow and not let loose a ramble, I have spent more time in ordering and reordering points and paragraphs than in recounting and recording.

I have no formal education and do not belong to academia. This is not a thesis on every topic commented upon. Neither does it attempt to be a complete elaboration. It does not provide any definition of concepts. They are reflections on nuances that strike me as relevant to understanding today's world. Impressions I have formed that gradually led to convictions.

This has not turned out to be a crisp and catchy piece of work. When composing, I have struggled to use the correct words and phrases to convey exactly what I mean. The odd metaphors are from my incensed imagination. I realise it has become a tad bit tedious and a little long. I have refused, and indeed cannot, make an executive summary. Should poring through these pages provoke in the reader's mind her own recollections and reflections, and if that helps make sense of the current paradox in society, that would be great!

Ten years back, at the conclusion of one of the many intense eleven daylong training sessions I held to prepare climate teams across the country, my son blurted out to his forty fellow trainees, "Think, Question, Learn!"

Ram Esteves,

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