
THE RIGHT OF POVERTY AND THE SOCIAL WELFARE NETWORK IN INDIA

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The second most populated country and the seventh industrial power of the world, the land of ancient wisdom and religions. How will an archaic culture answer the challenges of today?

Where does the Indian social order originate? What is the reason and today's projection of the caste system? How is the social network realized and who will look after twenty million deprived holy people? What kind of role do the otherworldly ideas play in the everyday life of the people? Is there a connection between the sanctity of the family and religion?

The question and many alike are being asked in today's India, the land of contradictions. However, anti-violence and tolerance, as an intellectual and social heritage, might mean a new alternative as well, bridging from past to present, even in Europe.

A gigantic country has gigantic tasks and problems. India really is the land of contradictions, as they say. There are shopping streets in Delhi, where one square meter of property costs more than in New York, and there are people living happily in the Street in the deepest deprivation though aplomb. The air conditioned luxury car and the track trailer, the elephant and the camel caravan advance next to each other on the highways. India is the world's most populated democracy, with all its hardships. In my paper I would like to deal with the approach, the cultural roots and some answers given to the challenges of life by the Indians.

India presents an unbelievably huge and dynamic market a major target of the consumer world. This thought has been present in India for a few years or decades, unlike the English conquerors—who have been there for let us say 200 years, and the Muslims—for 1500 years, but India has been boasting a 3-5000 years old ancient culture previous to all these. This traditional culture will hopefully survive even the consumer attack and will be able to retain its astonishing intellectual and spiritual values. The Indian culture is the only one that endured all the golden civilizations of ancient times, and the same intellectual and social phenomena can be experienced like thousands of years before.

Many people say this is caused by lack of dynamism but if we turn the idea upside down, lack might be seen as a value: in the form of stability, tradition and viability. This amazing viability is rooted in intellectual-spiritual foundations. The cosmic order of the world is reflected in the earthly and heavenly calling of humankind and its moral values, represented by its actions. Religious activities and institutions emphasize the feeling of social security. The yogi, the holy man, the ascetics, the different spiritual practices (pilgrimages, visits to churches, donations, etc.) or even personal meditation or anti-violence and yoga are thousands of years' old institutions of social continuity strengthening the notion of stability, genuine life, and security of the people on the level of the deep conscious. The eastern belief does not view earthly life as a one time and unrepeatable incident. Instead, it understands birth as a chapter of the spirit's eternity and what is not fulfilled at the present birth will be at the next. The belief in reincarnation opens up a wider perspective and the people's conviction of the soul's eternal existence places the opportunities and restrictions of a life into transcendent dimensions.

The cosmic justice, the law of karma is closely related to the vision of eternity, outlining responsibility for actions, the chain of positive and unfavourable-able actions, or their network-like interrelation. The harm done to the fellow humans or to the world authorizes the environment to recompense.

Indian thinking does not understand society as being comprised of individuals, but defines the individual as part of the community who thereby has a vital role within the universe, Based on this notion they seek to consider humanity's eternal, divine vocation besides fulfilling earthly tasks respectably.

The ancient tradition articulates four goals for the humans. The first one is following virtue, religion, moral norms, and the human calling (dharma), and everything else is based on that. The second is creating values (artha), economic growth, securing livelihood, and the third is the area of the senses (khama), the issues of love, family, and descendants. All these are part of the earthly calling, while the fourth is salvation (moksha), the heavenly profession of the human. The first three goals are serving the latter, giving transcendental perspective to humankind. This is why the deeply rooted spiritual value system differs from the western norm even if it seems to retreat at the moment.

Humans should keep all four goals in mind throughout their lives, and the ideal condition is to balance them. The traditional social order was aimed at this, as well, the so-called caste system. This structure became rather negative—although in its ideal form—it meant the healthy social body of human capabilities and qualities

cooperating organically. “Caste” is a Portuguese word originally. In India, the word “varna” is used to mark social categories, meaning “colour”, referring not to skin colour but the colour code of characteristics. The four castes are the priestly and intellectual caste (Brahmin), royal, fighter, administrative caste (Kshatriya), the farmers, merchants, and stockbreeders (Vaishya), and workers, servants (Shudra). Originally, this was not based on birth and free pass was granted between the castes, but later many distortions happened. In the ideal form, all four castes are organic parts of the whole of the community and are compared to the organs of the human body. The intelligentsia is the head, the knights are the arms, the farmers are the torso, and the servants are the feet. All are needed for the healthy operation of the social body, and more than that, reaching the common goal; the otherworldly salvation is alive from archaic times. Everyone may reach perfection through completing their own duties or professions. However, the mythic-archaic structure has been corrupted and through the independence of India, the caste system was abolished. The discrimination of lower castes was attempted to be balanced by preferences and quotas within the areas of higher education, state administration, and employment.

Another element of the administrative social welfare network is the poverty—i. d. card. Anyone may receive cheap or free food and other subsidies at the food-relief centres located in larger settlements. A registration is required to receive the poverty—i. d. card that exonerates the citizen from paying taxes, but on the other hand, they may not take a job. This is similar to the unemployment system, but on another level. The cost of the system is paid by the large and well to do middle class—meaning millions of taxpayers—from whom tax is collected by assessment or agreement. Inspection, turnover assessment, appraisal of business dealings and tax bargain is followed by agreement about the amount of the payable community contribution. These are the elements of a “spontaneous tax system”.

A spiritual network supplements the administrative social welfare network, as well. It is the religious duty of the Hindus to help the needy, to support noble goals, and to give. The approximately twenty million (!) holy people (Sadhu) trust themselves to human and divine providence and all believers know that material success is also a blessing from the Gods that one has to share with others. NGOs and other social organizations, and families are the links of this religiously based welfare network who give to charity and persons, plus the churches collecting donations of which many take part in free food distribution or assistance to those suffering from natural disasters, etc.

Donations are considered a kind of spiritual investment, too, that will be returned with an interest, not only in its material, but also in a finer, spiritual sense. That is why a Delhi giant poster reads: “Do some good every day”

I will hereby list a few problematic elements Indian culture has encountered throughout its thousands of years long life, and to which it managed to provide significant and successful answers—but these have created further problems.

Multiculturality

In a country as huge as a continent, culture is inherently multi-faceted; it differs by regions, by ethnic groups or by dialects. One billion people cannot be imagined in a uniform civilization. The system of religious ideas and practices meant a coherent linkage for thousands of years, and the Sanskrit language, as the lingua franca, as well as the social structure, namely the caste system.

With the arrival of the conquerors—the Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Huns, Muslims, Portuguese and English—Indians learned to live with strange cultures. The presence of “strangers” strengthened the identity of the Indians and the sense of belonging together. The melting pot nature of India is mirrored by several cultural fusions, as well, like the Hellenic characteristics in Buddhism, the Sikh religion combining Hindu and Muslim beliefs of the Mogul rulers.

Overpopulation

Overpopulation originates from poverty, and population loss originates from wealth. Reproductivity is doctrinally based on the sanctity of life and anti-violence, while its practical relevance lies in the primeval wisdom saying the world is prepared to provide everyone with the necessities. Nature is viewed as a self-providing and self-regulating, organic body—the cosmic “body” of God, in its sacramental meaning. On the other hand, as Gandhi put it, none of the world’s treasures are sufficient for a greedy person. This portrays the interrelations of the number of the population and the quantity of possessions and poses more of a problem of allocation, plus the question of moral responsibility.

Poverty—the compensation of the Third World?

India had been the synonym of fairytale wealth one time, and was that of misery in the 20th century. This has all changed by now. Deprivation is not the first association since

economic growth shows significant dynamics. Pauperization did have its economic and political reasons, and the colonial system brought more burdens than advantages to the natives. According to some opinions, one of the sources of financing the English industrial revolution happened to be the depredation of Bengal where domestic industry was tried to be ruined even at the price of cutting the weavers' thumbs.

Amalgamating traditionality and modernity / conciliating absolute and relative value systems

It is said that Asia is long-lived and Europe is ephemeral. Europe lives in centuries, and Asia does in millennia. In Europe, everything is small, fast, and fragile, and nothing holds the secret of immortality. India thinks along a cosmic and divine order that is reflected in the human moral order. However, India is lumpish due to its magnitude and age. Thomas Mann wrote that Europe is a tiny, quick thinking province of the vast Asia. The condition of the unhurried East and the speedy West is similar to the collaboration of the crippled and the blind. The aged East does not move easily but it is wise—and the young West is forceful but blind. If the one who is strong and blind takes the other who is old and almost crippled on its shoulders, both reach their goal—in kind of a convergence.

NEW PROBLEMS

Violence, the failing of public safety

Gandhi an anti-violence played a successful political role in attaining independence earlier, and now violent acts increase—in connection with the erosion of the ahimsa, the aggressive cultural and economic confrontation, and the shaking of general moral values. In earlier times, consuming alcohol meant losing one caste. By now—justified by my personal experiences—liquor shops are opening in large numbers even at holy sites.

Media-consuming society—the appearance of the fourth branch of power

India is also a vast dream factory, one of the leaders of moviemaking in the world. The demand of the society for information and media is substantial. A parliamentary debate took place a decade ago on the permission of satellite TV broadcasts that was finally accepted. The conditions of Indian rural media may be likened to that of the 1960s in

Hungary. People gather in small villages to watch TV in teashops, but on the other hand, India is a computer giant. The sacred deployment of media is also evident: the Djaipur city TV broadcasts the early morning ceremony live from the famous Radha-Govinda temple.

Erosion of spiritual values

Apart from economic and political phenomena, the East being westernized intellectually, and we might also say the West is orientalised. Besides material wealth, physical and spiritual harmony and spiritual balance is set as a goal for more and more people to which the knowledge of the Eastern notion contributes greatly.

Due to the demonstrative effect, the western consumer and life conduct customs are spreading and many are drawn into the value crisis of uprooted ness and undervalue their own culture. At the same time, holy people take on active public roles and several monks participate in the parliament. This ensures the possibility to reformulate traditional values, to give adequate answers based on the traditional approach or the representation of stability as the counterpoint to modernity.

Consumer society and relative poverty

The idea of consumer-idiotism does not refer to biological reproduction but the escalation of consumption that is a hazardous game with natural resources. Let me recite some data reflecting the immeasurable differences in consumer ratios: the consumption of one child in the USA is eighty times that of an Indian, an average British consumption norm is ninety times that of an average Indian. A ten percent decrease of US beef consumption could save sixty million people from starving to death approximately. A simple lifestyle, a conscientious, voluntary simplicity, and other morally based self-control mechanisms could mean feasible alternatives. Sustainability coincides with the ten basic rules of yoga, prescribing the culture of content instead of discontent. The ecological view is necessarily a spiritual view, as well. People may relate to strange things in three ways. The coarsest reaction is the “strange therefore I refuse it” and the most scientific is the “strange therefore I examine it” answer. Humanity, throughout its history, implemented these two reactions quite often of which the results are still felt. The third method, the “strange still common and human, therefore its mine, too”, enabling an entirely new and deeper understanding based on the good willing approach and empathy. In addition, the lessons of a culture alive and continuous since thousands of years might be awakening even in the third millennium.

As a closing remark, let me quote the historian professor Arnold Toynbee on the world: “It is already becoming clearer that a chapter which has a western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race...”.

Table 1. The traditional structure of social and spiritual castes in India

Brahmin intellectuals	Calmness	goodness	White	Monk (sannyasi)	Purification of life knowledge audacity
	Self discipline				
	Repentance				
	Purity				
	Peacefulness				
	Honesty				
	Wisdom				
	Knowledge				
Religiosity					
Shatria king, fighter administration	Heroism	Passion	Red	recluse (vanaprastha)	asceticism whithdrawal spiritual preparation
	Strength				
	Audacity				
	Inventiveness				
	Bravery				
	Generosity				
Leadership ability					
Vaisha farmers	Agriculture	passion + ignorance	red + blue	Family life (grhastha)	Self – discipline giving holidays
	Protection of Cows				
	Commerce				
Sutra servants	Physical work	ignorance	blue	Unmarried student (brachmachari)	Studies Repentance simplicity
	Serving others				

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