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THE **SOCIAL FACT**

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NOVEMBER - 2022





Sivarajavel IAS Academy 's

THE SOCIAL FACT

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

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THE SOCIAL FACT

INSIDE THIS SOCIOLOGICAL BULLETIN

Connecting the dots :

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

Sociology Explained :

World is one for sociology. Many authors explain social problems and social changes in length and breadth through their research. This chapter collects and compiles those articles which are related to our syllabus.

Perspectives :

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



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CONNECTING THE DOTS

- *Several anti-Semitic messages were sent to the Israeli envoy Naor Gilon after Israeli filmmaker Nadav Lapid, who was the chair of the jury at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa, described The Kashmir Files, a film directed by Vivek Agnihotri about the exodus of the Kashmiri Pandit community from the Valley, as “vulgar” and “propaganda” : **Karl Popper says every ideology is totalitarian as it is blinded by ideological bias and hence indifference to plurality of view points. Hence ideology is antithetical to objectivity. Here, irrespective of who is right and wrong, ideology is the core of the issue.***
- *The ‘kangaroo court’ runs on patriarchal diktat. Its administrators claim to speak for the community with the stated aim of exercising social control. Men set the agenda and women are typically disallowed from participating. The fine of ₹25,000 is a form of enforcing social control and pushes people into penury : **The marriage being the social fact is used by the patriarchal society to enforce constraints on the individual agency and their choices to choose their partners. This incident advocates the fact that the social systems are larger than the individual choices as said by Emile Durkheim.***
- *In the last few weeks, two important events happened in global geopolitics. Women-Life-Freedom movement in Iran forces the theocratic government to revoke the Moral police, whereas in China, the totalitarian government has eased the zero covid policy due to the increasing protest by the people : **The biggest advantage of the new social movement(NSM) is its very structure and how it organizes. The leaderless NSM makes the demands more dynamic and fluid and able to give platform to “n” numbers of people, which governments find difficult to handle.***

- *The research, revealed by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) this week, found that people who followed some of Instagram's biggest social media stars including the Kardashians, Ariana Grande and Katy Perry experienced more negative social comparison, meaning they compared themselves unfavorably to the celebrity images they were seeing and developing their low self image : **Merton's concept of relative deprivation due to Reference group phenomenon. Here the reference group being an out and closed group, converts people into marginal men.***
- *Papanadu police have arrested a hair dresser, Veeramuthu of Nambivayal hamlet at Orathanadu taluk, on the charge of practising 'untouchability'. He runs a saloon at Kilamangalam area. Hairstyling service was denied to those hailing from the oppressed classes and 'double tumbler' system too was prevalent in tea shops : **Despite numerous efforts, Untouchability is still a social fact in villages. BR Ambedkar says Village is nothing but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness, and communalism and criticizes Village for its attachment with this social evil.***
- *Words are politically weighted, and an example of that is playing out between the BJP and the Congress over just how to refer to India's tribal communities. According to the Congress, it should be "Adivasi" (original inhabitants), while the Sangh Parivar opts for "Vanvasi": **The problems of tribal people starts from the very naming itself, says GS Ghurye. While Elwin called them as 'original owners of the country', Hunton and Grigson regarded them as 'primitive tribes'. In some cases, they are being associated with caste name also as Ghurye called them as 'backward hindus'***
- *French authorities rejected a nurse's application to be naturalized, arguing that she works too much. French law stipulates that employees cannot work over 48 hours in one week or a weekly average of 44 hours over a 12-week period. "You thus accumulate three jobs for a monthly duration of 271 working hours," it states. : **Karl Marx talks about how economic infrastructure influences the other social superstructure. First world countries who have developed can afford to have policies which prioritize the social well being of the people, which is a distant dream in economically underdeveloped countries.***

- *Elon Musk has given Twitter's staff an ultimatum: commit to being "extremely hardcore" and working long hours, or else leave the company with three months' severance pay. He wrote that employees "will need to be extremely hardcore" to build "a breakthrough Twitter 2.0" and that "long hours at high intensity" will be needed for success : **It is an example of forced workaholism. Workaholism is a motivation to work and having excessive work behavior. It affects the social sphere of the employees by intervening with the close personal relationships and distorts the balance between family and work.***
- *Gram Panchayat of Herwad village in Kolhapur district approved a resolution to end the widowhood tradition. The Panchayat members declared that no one should force widows to stop applying kumkum, putting on bangles or wearing colorful clothes; the villagers must also not ban them from attending marriages and christening ceremonies. : **The shackles that once decided matters for India's villages, caste, patriarchy, agriculture, no longer exercises their vigorous hold, says Dipankar Gupta.***
- *The appointment of a man as Scotland's first "period dignity officer" has sparked outrage, with critics calling the news "absurd". Jason Grant was announced as the period dignity officer for the Tay region in a role believed to be the first of its kind, after Scotland became the first country in the world to protect the right to free period products in law : **The under representation of women in the job is the best best way to perpetuate patriarchal society, says Sylvia Walby. Even in jobs which deal with women primarily are manned by non-women.***
- *Nearly two-fifths (39%) of the country's leading figures in government, business, the media and sport attended independent schools compared to the population at large (7%) according to "Elitist Britain", a study by the Sutton Trust. Britain is an increasingly divided society. Divided by politics, by class, by geography. Social mobility, the potential for those to achieve success regardless of their background, remains low : **CW Mills concept of power elite is relevant beyond the USA, where he did research on Military - capital - political office. It also explains the dominance of cultural capital in social mobility.***

- *Belgium introduces a four-day workweek for employees who want it. In February, Belgian employees won the right to perform a full workweek in four days instead of the usual five without loss of salary. The bill came into force on November 21, allowing employees to decide whether to work four or five days a week : **Karl Marx predicted these decisions in the past, as Capitalism increasingly moves towards exploitative ideology, people dissociate themselves from their work and experience alienation. This 4 days work per week is the reaction to the alienation, which gives the false consciousness of working less and having more leisure.***
- *Controversy erupted at the Jawaharlal Nehru University once again, this time over walls being defaced with anti-Brahmin slogans. Walls of the second and third floors of the school of language and literature and doors of several faculty members have been painted with objectionable slogans : **Despite universities being modern, secular institutions, caste slogans are very much prevalent in India, as Dipankar Gupta says . Modernity, is not about technology and consumption, as is mistakenly believed in India, but has to do with attitudes, especially those that come into play in our social relations***

A PICTURE TO PONDER



“what is the better way to explain the latent dysfunction of social media”

SOCIOLOGY EXPLAINED

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

Paper 2 : Challenges of Social transformation.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently suggested that coronavirus infections are higher in the UK than Germany or Italy because Britons love freedom more, and find it harder to adhere to control measures. Unsurprisingly, this view has attracted a lot of criticism. Some have argued that Germany and Italy love freedom just as much as the UK . Others suggest the difference is down to the quality of these countries' test and trace systems. There's no hard evidence to prove Boris Johnson wrong, but across the Atlantic, economist Paul Krugman has suggested something similar. The US's poor pandemic response, he says, is down to politicians and policy failing to get people to act responsibly. Loving freedom is, in his eyes, the excuse for "America's cult of selfishness". While we can't 100% pinpoint the reasons behind the high case numbers in Britain and America, it's interesting to see the UK prime minister and a Nobel laureate making similar arguments. Just how plausible are their claims?

“Loving freedom” is hard to measure, but it’s related to the concept of individualism. This cultural trait emphasises personal freedom and standing out, and celebrates individual success. Its opposite is collectivism, which accentuates the embeddedness of individuals in a group and stresses the need to support and learn from the social environment. The foundational work on individualism was done by the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede. He developed a framework to compare different cultures along six dimensions. These are: how individualist or collectivist a society is, how indulgent it is, what its attitudes towards power and change are, how it deals with uncertainty, and how masculine or feminine its values are. Within this framework, individualism versus collectivism has turned out to be the most robust and persistent contrast between different cultures

The roots of these cultural values can be linked to historic patterns of disease intensity across societies. In areas where the threat of infectious disease was higher, such as the tropics, societies developed to be more collectivist to counter those threats. Low levels of interaction with strangers, which characterize collectivist societies, served as an important defence against infection. In contrast, individualistic societies had more diverse social networks and less reliance on stable patterns of social interaction, making contagion more likely. COVID-19 has reached almost every country in the world, and yet has resulted in very different outcomes. So far, epidemiologists have offered numerous explanations for this disparity, including differences in demographics, urbanisation, quality of health systems, the natural environment, and the speed of government responses. However, we argue that culture also matters. Because consensus is more readily achieved in collectivist societies, their conditions are better for introducing fast and effective action to contain disease.

These countries also have strong social mechanisms based around shame and not wanting to “lose face”, which may drive compliance with control measures, making government actions more effective. Social networks in collectivist societies also tend to be more localised and oriented towards people’s close contacts (typically their extended family). This creates natural social bubbles, lowers social mixing and diversity, and therefore slows down the spread of the virus. And at an individual level, cultural values can influence personal decisions on such basic things as wearing a face mask or keeping social distance. There’s already work showing that in the US, in areas with a history of frontier settlements and a more individualistic culture, people are less likely to wear face masks and socially distance.

Given that cross-country data on individualism is publicly available, it’s not difficult to begin to evaluate how it relates to COVID-19. Looking at data from early on in the pandemic – when differences between individualist and collectivist countries were likely to be most pronounced, given the potentially different speeds of their responses – there’s a raw correlation between COVID-related deaths per capita and countries’ individualism scores. This correlation remains when we compare individualism scores with countries’ deaths per number of cases, to control for different amounts of testing. The individualistic UK can be compared with collectivist Japan. Both nations are democratic and have highly developed economies, but Japan has an older population than the UK – so we would perhaps expect its COVID-19 outcomes to be worse. Yet it scores much better. Truly what’s needed is something that controls for other factors (demographics, urbanisation and so on) and that takes into account excess deaths caused by COVID-19. But for now, it shows that the individualism hypothesis is worth investigating further.

GENERALIZED OTHER

Paper 1: Mead - Self and identity.

It is an understatement to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted our social lives and how we interact with others. Mandated to self-isolate, in-person interactions have been replaced with countless Zoom meetings, Facetime calls, and virtual happy hours and game nights. The limited face-to-face interactions we do have are defined by new social norms. Suddenly, tasks that used to be mundane are defined by necessary, potentially life-altering decisions such as: should I go into public today? When should I wear a mask? When should I wash my hands? How close should or shouldn't I get to other people?

In essence, how we think about our own behavior and actions in interaction with others has changed dramatically. How we address these questions is largely guided by external expectations, both formal (like those from the Center of Disease Control) and informal (such as peer-pressure from other affected citizens). In both cases, our day-to-day lives now invoke constant reflection on the impact of our actions on others. The concept of the “generalized other” is helpful for thinking through these problems. In the late nineteenth century, the Chicago School micro-sociologist George Herbert Mead introduced his theory of the “reflexive self.” He argued that the essence of who we are—the “self”—is inherently social in its capacity for reflexivity. As we develop as social beings, our inner self develops the ability to view itself as both a subject and an object in relation to other people. It is this quality that makes us uniquely social creatures who can reflect on how we are seen through the eyes of others.

Additionally, Mead argues that as we gain reflexivity we also develop a sense of the “generalized other.” The generalized other acts as an internal representation of our communal attitudes and perspectives; once the individual has fully developed a reflexive self they are able to take on the perspective of their abstracted community and incorporate it into their own consciousness. Consequently, before acting the individual can internally consider how others in their community would theoretically respond; they are then able to decide whether to conform to the community’s standards or potentially diverge from them. For example, an individual preparing for a job interview might decide what to wear and how to present themselves based on their internalized voice of the generalized other. Regardless of whether or not they have met their interviewer before, they are able to anticipate the perspective of a theoretical member of their community.

The generalized other informs us about how our behavior is shaped by our surrounding community and their collective expectations. The generalized other is a useful tool for thinking about how our understanding of social norms has dramatically shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously routine tasks like going to the grocery store now necessitate a different kind of interrogation. Rather than internally considering “how will others respond to the outfit I’ve chosen to wear to the store?” we must now consider “what precautions do others assume I will take to keep them safe?” The internalized, communal voice in all of our reflexive heads must now account for a whole new set of questions that were previously insignificant to our communities. When should we wear masks? What other people am I allowed to see, if at all? How should I monitor my own health? Our generalized other has incorporated new assumptions and expectations due to the recent, threatening conditions of our society. Consequently, each of us must now think reflexively about our own actions in relation to these rapidly changing collective assumptions.

We must also consider how this phenomenon is raced, classed and gendered. Asian Americans, for example, have the additional task of considering others' assumptions about their race given the resurgence of the "yellow peril" narrative. Here, W.E.B. DuBois' concept of the "double-consciousness" (which explains how as a means of survival marginalized people must develop two consciousness: how they view themselves and how others view them) might be helpful. The voice of the generalized other may vary depending on one's class position. Consider, for example, that poorer Americans are more likely to live in population-dense neighborhoods with less access to healthcare and, therefore, communal expectations about how to behave in public and keep yourself and others safe might vary from rich, suburban individuals. Women, who are more likely to be caregivers and take on unpaid domestic work might also think more reflexively about their health than their male counterparts, who are less likely to engage in health-seeking behaviors or to be responsible for elderly family members and young children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many social changes, many of which are still unfolding. How we reflect on our own actions and place in the context of our community is one such shift. While there is still much to consider, using the generalized other as a guiding framework is one way we can understanding our changing social world.

SOCIOLOGY OF ADOPTION

Paper 1 : Contemporary trends of marriages, family

Paper 2 : Types of kinship systems.

Adoption is a little personal, and still new. And yet, we can't help but to think about everything in a sociological way and so, over the past two years, We been mulling over the issues, and thought it would be a useful way to think about the sociology of families. Joshua Gamson's book *Modern Families* details how today's family is the product of complex societal changes that weave together incredibly intimate and complicated personal experiences with larger social forces (e.g., reproductive technologies, international policies, reproductive freedom, gay and lesbian family rights, geopolitical power, changes in work, delayed parenting, global inequalities and war). Adoption is one piece of the story of what being a family means today.

There are many reasons why sociologists should be interested in adoption. Allen Fisher, in his review of the sociological literature, wrote that there are at least four reasons. First, the American family is getting increasingly diverse: there are increases in "families of never-married, single parents, divorce, cohabitation, same-sex, multi-partnered fertility, and co-residence with grandparents" (Also see this article for more information).

Second, families are socially constructed and, important, we often forget it that's the case. As Stephanie Coontz famously noted about families when American culture began to panic over family diversity, we have a nostalgia trap of thinking about how families once were, and how we want them to be now. *Kinship by Design* is a book about the history of adoption that traces the changes in how matching was done, and how adoption enters into the nature/nurture debates.

Third, adoption raises complex questions about race and ethnicity, class, and gender. Barbara Katz Rothman's *Weaving a Family* is a sociologist's on the ground experience with adopting her children (including a typology of how adopted children can be understood as proteges, trophies, or pets), who says that there are not many "accidental adoptions" for middle class white families but details the many issues of culture and identity in transracial adoptions. Kim Park Nelson's *Invisible Asians* examines how adopted Korean children are used to perpetuate the model minority myth, and SunAh Laybourn's article "Adopting the Model Minority Myth" provides additional context for adoption and its relationship with "honorary whiteness" and "forever foreigner" statuses.

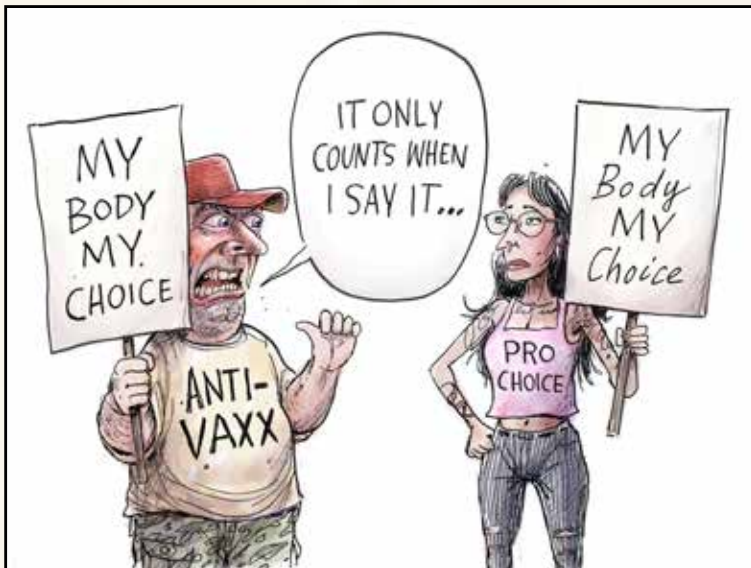
And fourth, adoptions affect millions of people in the "adoption triad:" birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted children. Two percent of Americans have adopted a child, and same sex couples are four times more likely to adopt or have foster children: 15% of the 1.1 million same-sex couples in the U.S. have adopted. Same-sex couples who are women are more likely to adopt or foster than same sex couples who are men. (The 2000 Census was the first to attempt to include questions that differentiate adoptive and biological children.) Adoptions, however, declined between 2007 and 2014, with declines in international adoptions being one of the reasons why.

We got our newest family member a little over a year ago. The process was long and included a minefield of difficult choices that only those who've gone through it--either as an adoptive parent or, later, as an adopted child who learns about it--can really fathom. Domestic or international? What kinds of health issues can your family responsibly take on? A private adoption or go through the foster system? Should you make a trans-racial adoption or do you say that you are unwilling to consider adopting a child from a different race than your own?

Some of these choices are easier, but many are very difficult. New research informs these choices, and approaches to adoption change over time. For example, it used to be commonplace to not tell children that they were adopted, but as adoption stigma has diminished, openness and clarity about being adopted has become more common. Similarly, closed adoptions (where the family is not in communication with the birth parents) used to be more common, but now it's understood that open adoptions have the potential for positive outcomes for members of that adoption triad over time. (There are also semi-open ones, which are mediated by an adoption agency.) In a section of Jennifer Reich's new edited volume *The State of Families: Law, Policy and the Meanings of Relationships*, the editor introduces the section on adoption by detailing post-adoption data from the Children's Bureau: contact with biological parents is more common in private domestic adoption (68%) as compared with international adoption (6%), and that most (95%) of domestic infant adoptions were open. Some of the larger ethical dilemmas can be quite challenging.

The process requires a great deal of faith, humility, but also living with some uncomfortable decisions, perhaps particularly with trans-national adoption. Heather Jacobson's *Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference*, for example, examines how adoptive families attempt (and fail) to "keep" the culture of their adoptive child's homeland? And in her book *Somebody's Children*, Laura Briggs details the asymmetries of power between "sending" and "receiving" countries and that such exchanges are not without a tie to the west's (and America's) colonial and imperialist rule. Briggs also notes that birth mothers who relinquish custody of children can experience short and long term trauma. Kimberly McKee calls it a "transnational adoption industrial complex" that commodifies children, and undermines connections between children and others from their culture.

A PICTURE TO PONDER



*“Different yardsticks in the patriarchal society”
- Anti vaccination vs Pro choice -*

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PERSPECTIVES

WEBERIAN BUREAUCRACY

Paper 1: Max Weber - Bureaucracy

Like many of the classical theorists of his age, nineteenth-century German social theorist Max Weber sought to define “modernity.” Weber lived in a society experiencing rapid economic, political, and social changes and devoted much of his time to characterizing what defined modern society and how (and why) society had come to look differently than it ever had before. Weber explored many facets of modernity (including religion, social class, and politics), eventually developing one of his most famous concepts, “bureaucracy.” According to Weber, modern society is in part defined by the introduction of bureaucracies, a new type of organization developed alongside capitalist values in western Europe. Unlike other organizational forms, bureaucracies exhibit a unique set of characteristics that set them apart. First, bureaucracies are defined by a clear-cut chain of command, wherein every member reports to someone of higher status and knows their own role and responsibility within the organization.

Next, bureaucratic members must follow written rules that govern their conduct (consider human resource policies you might encounter at work, for example). Members are also salaried, work full-time, and have a separation between their work at the bureaucracy and their home life (this might seem intuitive, but consider a worker during a feudal system, where they would have worked and lived in the same location).

Finally, Weber specified that bureaucratic members usually use materials at work that belong to the organization, rather than to themselves personally (this might again seem straight-forward, but is a relatively new capitalist phenomenon!). Many of these qualities may seem familiar because bureaucracies have become very commonplace in our everyday lives. Consider the Department of Motor Vehicles, for example. The “DMV” is a fixture of modern adult life and possesses all the qualities Weber identified. The DMV relies on order and strict rules and regulations--so much so that it sometimes might actually be very difficult to accomplish what you need to get done there. Even universities are very bureaucratic in nature. Consider how many different offices there are on your campus with specific responsibilities, and the number of explicit rules of conduct you are expected to follow as students. While these organizational forms might seem commonplace in our everyday lives, Weber’s work reminds us that they are a relatively new phenomenon.

Weber also noted that the rise of the bureaucracy came with both positives and negatives. Because of their streamlined organization, bureaucracies tend to be very efficient and fast-paced (a plus in a capitalist economy). Additionally, Weber deemed bureaucracies “impersonal,” meaning that they are goal-oriented and driven by rationality, rather than by social values and emotions. Consequently, bureaucracies tend to be focused on achieving their desired goal and thus theoretically do not play favorites or discriminate. Consider again your experience at the DMV, for example. Their reliance on rules and regulations means that everyone who enters their doors is supposed to be treated the same, no exceptions--even if the employee helping you knows you personally.

Despite this, Weber also argued that bureaucracies come with some downsides as well. Although they are very efficient, their streamlined, regulatory nature can make them very rigid and hard to navigate. As an outsider it might be difficult to ascertain exactly what those rules are, thereby making it very complicated to achieve a seemingly simple task!

The same positively impersonal nature of bureaucracies might also be a downside. Weber warned his readers against the increasing rationality of our society, reminding us that sometimes it's a good thing to leave room for social values and emotions because they are what makes us human. If bureaucracies do not leave room for such things we might be left operating like robots-albeit efficient ones. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many bureaucratic workplaces to adapt in order to keep their operations afloat and employees safe. In June 2020, Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom estimated that approximately 42% of United States workers worked from home during the pandemic. While working from home comes with some perks, it strikes me that this new way of life has emphasized many of bureaucracy's flaws.

For example, consider that bureaucracies are in part defined by the separation of employee's work and social life. This divide has become strikingly blurred during the pandemic. Forced to create makeshift offices in their homes and maintain productivity in isolated settings, many researchers have reported U.S. workers are struggling to achieve the work-life balances they once had. Only one month after many workplaces shut down, Bloomberg noted in a recent article: In the U.S., homebound employees are logging three hours more per day on the job than before city and state-wide lockdowns...The contours of the workday have changed, too. Without commutes, wake-up times have shifted later...but peak email time has crept up an hour to 9 am. Employees are also logging back in late at night. This shift is even starker for parents of school-age children, who suddenly must balance their own work alongside their children's schooling. This phenomenon is particularly true for female workers who are often asked to shoulder the labor of parenting.

Despite being a prominent fixture of modern life, it is clear that the structure of bureaucratic organizations is currently not sufficient. Moreover, it is clear that bureaucracies are not equipped to rectify these issues. Reliant on strict regulations and the principle of impersonality, bureaucracies were not designed to deviate from their internal structure or take care of their employees during periods of mass-duress.

As a consequence, many bureaucratic workers' quality of life has dramatically suffered. Both the CDC and National Safety Council have recognized the toll working through a pandemic has had on workers' mental health, citing rising stress and anxiety levels, or even drug use. While these issues are well known, the burden of resolving them often falls on the shoulders of workers themselves rather than their workplaces. The CDC, for example, recommends practicing mindfulness, utilizing mental health resources, or talking to family and friends. This disparity between workers' institutional demands and individual accountability points to some of the major flaws of bureaucracies-namely, that the rigid and impersonal structure that makes them so efficient might also harm those within the system.

Although Weber first theorized the bureaucracy over a century ago, it is clear that his principles still ring true to this day. While the bureaucracy has become a fundamental fixture of modern life and has brought many positive changes, this past year has also brought many of its flaws to the forefront.

TEARS - A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Paper 1: Scope of the subject (Sociological imagination)

November marks the point in the year when the cold beings to set in. Fields, buildings and streets are blanketed in heavy fog, blurring the city like an old painting. Trees look like skeletons and dawn frost carpets the grass. It is the time when biting winds gnaw on our skin and whip chilly, wintry air into our eyelashes. Our eyes tear up, because it's freezing Tears keep our eyes lubricated when it is cold and blustery; wash away smoke, dust or other irritant substances; and protect us from foreign particles that enter the eye's environment. Though some animals do have the physiological ability to produce tears, humans are the only creatures whose tears can be triggered emotionally.

The capacity to burst into tears due to emotional stress or pain shows us how tears are a social phenomenon. Cornelia Mayr explains tears as a Social phenomenon. Whether tears stem from grief, remorse, regret, joy, laughter, anger or fury, they can function as a social glue. In fact, tears can be social not only in their origins but also in their effects. We can see the social aspects of tears in the way that both we as individuals and those around us react to tears. Asking "how people respond behaviorally when they see someone in tears," Ad Vingerhoets put these processes of "affect" in a sociological context by considering how people make sense of tears. In his book, Vingerhoets talks about the mystery of tears as something that emerges out of the mutual relationship between the crier and the observer. He observed several instances when "tears result in caregiving, social bonding, or a reduction in aggression" It is rare to see someone breaking down in tears being ignored by others.

As dramaturgical team-mates, Erving Goffman would argue, many of us would step in to soothe the person and to keep he or she “in face” – to restore the disrupted order to “normal appearance.” However, Vingerhoets concluded that tiny droplets sliding down our cheeks do not always “guarantee positive reactions from others” (p. 116). In particular, he suggests that negative responses, such as withdrawal from someone who is shedding tears, may occur when those watery eyes are used strategically for manipulating others. This seems to be an example of impression management which entails the manipulation of social situations. Through weeping “crocodile tears” people can intentionally mislead others. Nonetheless, tears are techniques for a “dramatic realization,” and we must interpret what those water drops in someone’s eyes are as we seek to understand the meaning given by others to their expressions.

Alfred Schütz can offer a meaning interpretation (*Fremdverstehen*) and help deconstruct the complex inter-subjectivities which take place when facing tears. According to Schütz, people rely on a great deal of interpretative tools to infer the meaning of others. We use and apply these tools when observing another’s body as it moves, speaks, gestures, creates sound or sheds tears. We then try to infer the meaning given to the person’s expressions by engaging in a private act of reflection and consider the meaning we would give amidst similar experiences. “Everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experiences,” Schütz would say (1967, p. 106). In other words, we try to align our intentionality with those of other people and sense their stream of consciousness.

If we then look at tears from a phenomenological perspective, we can see how people experience and construct the meaning of tears objectively and subjectively. Following Schütz, we would never be able to directly access the subjective experiences of someone else. We can understand another's act of crying tears only on the basis of our subjective experience, of our own "stock of knowledge." Having said that, crying tears brings in certain forms of symbolic displays that can evoke others to interpret and "fix" the situation, whether those drops of salty liquid are produced beyond one's own control or are caused by the individual him- or herself. As the only body liquid that does not cause disgust or repugnance, tears trigger human connection and as a signal that others can see, they can facilitate, disrupt or challenge interaction order.

In most cases, this kind of expression is mostly judged depending on whether tears are appropriate. Think about the last time you burst out into tears and all the situations when you had to hold back your eyes from gushing tears down your cheeks. What brought you to tears? When and where did it happen? Were you alone or with others? Laying at the juncture of many dichotomies, such as culture/nature, public/private and masculinity/femininity, most of us make sense of tears in terms of social norms and public rules. We may stifle tears because social conventions tell us that letting your tears flow in public is shameful, considered unmanly, and display vulnerability or weakness. Conversely, our health might benefit from shedding tears. The pivotal question for sociologists might then be how people deal with the sense and meaning of tears. Whether you let your tears flow or wipe them off, they drop in exciting new directions for theorizing and understanding subjective interpretation of reality and social behavior. Tears are more than just a passive, physiological reaction to cold and harsher conditions, or a way to keep our eyes moistened. Eventually life brings us all to tears; as it starts and ends with tears.

POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Paper 1: Sociological theories of power.

Paper 2: Education and social change.

The parallel coexistence of central and provincial spheres in education has a visible functional role but also a less visible political and an even less visible sociocultural role. Several decisions announced since the beginning of 2022 enable us to observe these disparate and simultaneous roles. Decisions taken in some of the states are quite noticeably related to impending assembly elections.

Since the beginning of 2022, education has been a busy site of politics and bureaucratic action. In Karnataka, a political move was backed by a circular from the department of education and further reinforced by a court order. In Gujarat, two “decisions” taken by the government were announced in the assembly: first, to start teaching English from Classes 1 and 2, and second, to include the Bhagavad Gita from Class 6 upwards. At the national level, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced its decision to drop certain topics from the syllabus of political science followed in affiliated schools. The University Grants Commission declared that a centralised admissions test will govern entry to undergraduate courses in all central universities. The course itself will now cover a four-year curriculum, with a wider range of choices, including vocational subjects and multiple exit options. And most recently, Haryana announced that it will replace grants to universities with loans.

All of these are decisions, first made, then announced, and then duly covered by the media. Why should that be noteworthy, one may ask, assuming that the government's job is to make decisions and then to implement them? In this assumption, no distinction needs to be made between the government's role in deciding what should be taught in schools and the police's role in which car should be purchased for use. Changes in financial allocations for different sectors of education are decisions of a different kind. They reflect changes in the state's macro view of different domains of its responsibilities and how they are to be fulfilled. Decisions of this kind respond to a social universe and the ongoing assessment, by the state apparatus, of how that universe might accommodate the change. The Haryana government's decision to change financial grants into loans for state universities has now been reversed, reportedly because the original decision met with protests by students and teachers' organisations. Unrest among college-level youth might have affected the course of the impending elections, media reporters were told.

Though significant, this episode does not offer us a general or theoretical basis to claim that educational decisions are politically important. The context plays a crucial role. The time left for an election and the specific constellation of parties and factions are two major ingredients of the context. Like Haryana, Karnataka is heading for elections, but the government stood firm over its decision on school uniforms. Apparently, the constellation of social and political considerations did not require the decision to be reviewed, let alone reversed, even though it was widely criticised within the state as well as outside. In this case, the government's firmness was politically more beneficial than the display of flexibility required for a review.

Karnataka has also gone ahead with its decision to make changes in the Kannada textbooks used in state board schools. These changes are consistent with the ideological predilections of the government. Quite similar is the decision taken in Haryana to develop new history textbooks for state board schools. The perspective and details of this new history present no surprise and require no examples worthy of comment. Indeed, the pursuit of ideological dominance through curricular decisions is no more in the stage where professionally inspired critical analysis might be needed to illuminate the nature of the decision. Examples of outrageously indefensible items of knowledge are also unnecessary, although a protest against the inclusion of wild information does provide some solace to the relatively more concerned reader in the midst of political gloom.

We also need not dwell on the absence of any lengthy or wide-ranging deliberation justifying these changes. The case of Gujarat government's decision to introduce the Bhagavad Gita is not all that different, although it seems so because it invokes the old, quasi-legal debate on whether religious learning can occur in state-supported schools. Professional issues like the writers commissioned to prepare curricular, age-appropriate frames for different sections of the Gita would also be superfluous. With the announcement of the government's decision to introduce the Gita in the state's school curriculum, a political point has been scored in the pre-election ethos. It connotes ideological dominance. This is all that matters in the shrunken atmosphere of democracy. The centre-state division is underscored by the various decisions taken in these past few months. The systemic structure of education marks out the boundaries of professional spheres. In school education, the kendriya vidyalayas (or central schools) and the CBSE override the geographical territories of the provinces (or states).

From their inception in the 1960s, the kendriya vidyalayas have been symbols of high standard. The justification to run them centrally was originally given with reference to the need to provide the ease of curricular continuity to the children of central service cadres who were transferrable throughout India. Central universities are also believed to signify higher standards and relative freedom from provincial politics. In reality, these symbolic qualities have proved to have little substance. The move to administer a centralised admission test for undergraduate courses in central universities marks an attempt to underscore their freedom from local or regional influences. Their curricular structure is also being resculpted under a centralised plan. The new structure offers an American look to learning during undergraduate years. In this import of a foreign model, two key features of the source country—institutional autonomy to choose students and the teacher's autonomy to design the curriculum—have been ignored. Selective import of ideas is hardly new, and the poor record of transplanted ideas enjoys worldwide familiarity.

What happens at the provincial (state) level is mainly of political significance. Professional considerations are beyond the institutional capacity of emaciated organisations and committees. They function under permanent political and bureaucratic pressure in a social universe where the limited force of civil society is absorbed by the central or pan-India sphere (represented by the CBSE, Indian Certificate of Secondary Education, and now international boards). However, this situation may also be heading towards a change. The CBSE's announcement of its decision to drop certain topics from the political science syllabus has been received within its client schools with silence. A similar decision announced earlier in the context of online teaching showed that the CBSE was constrained to fiddle with the curricular structure shaped by the National Council of Educational Research and Training through its 2005 reform exercise. A new exercise is now underway and is due for completion in 2024.

Curricular changes in the states, with few exceptions, are sporadic and piecemeal. They affect the learning and also the cultural and ideological grooming of children whose parents' income is lower than that of their peers whose children attend the CBSE schools. The pan-Indian character of these latter schools is both symbolic and real, that is, in terms of the market of jobs they are associated with. The schools affiliated to provincial boards use the appropriate regional language as the medium of instruction, whereas CBSE schools, including the kendriya vidyalayas, use English. This division occasionally acquires political meaning. A state heading for elections prefers to cover the language divide, and that explains why Gujarat has announced its decision to introduce English from Class 1. As a gesture, its politics is hardly an innovation. Political parties have reason to believe that this kind of gesture politics works. Silent gestures are also worth noticing. In Karnataka, the state government's order on school uniforms was irrelevant for the kendriya vidyalayas located in Karnataka, but they quietly complied with it.

Clearly, politics shapes education in more immediate ways than education shapes politics. The power play involved in politics unfolds in the present, whereas the influence that education might exert over politics takes a considerable length of time to consolidate and express itself. This contrast between the agencies of the two helps us appreciate why the benefits of education are accessible mainly to societies where history—that is, what happened in the past—is no longer capable of providing some political advantage.

LOUIS PIERRE ALTHUSSER



- Louis Pierre Althusser (16 October 1918 – 22 October 1990) was a French Marxist philosopher. He was one of the most influential Marxist philosophers of the 20th Century.
- Althusser is commonly referred to as a structural Marxist, although his relationship to other schools of French structuralism is not a simple affiliation and he was critical of many aspects of structuralism.
- the theory of ideology Althusser developed has been broadly deployed in the social sciences and humanities and has provided a foundation for much “post-Marxist” philosophy
- Notable works : Ideological state apparatuses, Christianity and marxism, Marx not Hegel



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