

# UPSC Sociology Optional

## Important Article for Mains 2025

### Marx's Epistemology: A Case of Bipartisan Thinking (EPW, April 2025)

The article discusses Marx's unique epistemological approach, characterized by the synthesis of seemingly opposing philosophical traditions. Marx does not adhere rigidly to one perspective; instead, he blends and balances various philosophical viewpoints to develop a comprehensive understanding of society.

- Synthesis of Materialism and Idealism** Marx rejects the extremes of both pure Idealism (which prioritizes human consciousness and ideas as shaping historical reality) and pure Materialism (which emphasizes material conditions as determinative of history). Instead, he presents a "new materialism," stressing **praxis**—the conscious human activity through which ideas and material conditions interact to produce historical change. **Example:** Marx contrasts a honeybee's instinctual hive-building with an architect's consciously planned building. The architect's work illustrates how human consciousness interacts with material reality through intentional action.
- Synthesis of Rationalism and Romanticism** Marx integrates Rationalism (logic, reason, systematic thinking) with Romanticism (sensibility, emotions, lived experiences). He accepts rational theory's explanatory power but also recognizes the importance of emotional experiences and subjective realities, particularly under capitalism. **Example:** Marx's analysis of alienation, commodity fetishism, and commodification of labour highlights the emotional and lived suffering of ordinary people in capitalist societies, reflecting romantic critiques of modernity alongside rational economic analysis.
- Synthesis of Positivism and Hermeneutics** Marx combines Positivism (empirical, scientific analysis seeking objective, universal laws) with Hermeneutics (interpretive analysis focusing on human actions, intentions, and historical meanings). He believes that while economic processes can be scientifically studied, cultural and ideological phenomena require historical interpretation. **Example:** Marx clearly distinguishes between scientifically analyzable economic transformations (e.g., production and technological changes) and interpretatively analyzable aspects (politics, culture, religion) in works like *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *The German Ideology*.

#### Conclusion:

**Marx's Bipartisan Epistemology** Marx's epistemology is characterized by balanced integration rather than exclusive adherence to one philosophy. His method emphasizes empirical validation (positivism), openness to lived realities (romanticism), active human creativity and consciousness (idealism), and historical specificity and meaning (hermeneutics). This nuanced approach allows for a richer sociological analysis of complex social realities.

## Critique in Dark Times: Centenary of the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory and its Global Relevance (EPW, May 2025)

This article examines the legacy and contemporary relevance of the Frankfurt School, founded in 1923, which developed Critical Theory by integrating Marxism, psychoanalysis, and interdisciplinary insights.

### Core Theoretical Contributions:

- **Integrated Marxist Critique:** Revised orthodox Marxism by combining psychoanalysis and cultural analysis, exploring how ideology shapes society.
- **Authoritarian Personality** (*Adorno et al.*): Identified psychological traits (conformity, submissiveness) making individuals vulnerable to fascist propaganda—relevant in analyzing today's populist politics.
- **Culture Industry** (*Adorno & Horkheimer*): Mass media standardizes culture, reinforcing conformity and dominant ideologies. Useful for critiquing today's entertainment and social media.
- **One-Dimensional Society** (*Marcuse*): Advanced capitalism creates passive consumers, undermining critical thinking and resistance—helpful in analyzing neoliberal consumer culture.
- **Reification:** People treat human-made systems (market, hierarchies) as natural, maintaining existing power structures. Critical thought can expose these as historically constructed.
- **Fetishism:** Extended Marx's commodity fetishism to culture and consumption, highlighting how branding obscures exploitative labor conditions.
- **Negative Dialectics** (*Adorno*): Rejects simple solutions; promotes continuous questioning to reveal contradictions and resist simplistic ideologies.

### Methodological Innovations:

- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Combined philosophy, social theory, psychology, economics, and culture into a holistic social critique.
- **Freudo-Marxian Fusion:** Connected psychological factors (family dynamics, personality formation) to social and economic structures.
- **Dialectical Critique:** Revived Hegelian dialectics to bridge binaries (theory/practice, consciousness/material reality), making social analysis practical and grounded.
- **Normative Emancipation:** Explicitly normative, Critical Theory seeks social emancipation by revealing ideological distortions, not just describing society neutrally.
- **Self-Criticism (Immanent Critique):** Continuously revises its own assumptions, maintaining adaptability and relevance to contemporary conditions.

### Criticisms of Frankfurt School:

- **Eurocentrism:** Ignored colonial histories and global inequalities, viewing modernity mainly from Western experiences.
- **Race and Gender Omissions:** Early theorists neglected issues of patriarchy, racism, and intersectionality.
- **Grand-Narrative Assumptions:** Over-reliance on Enlightenment rationality and linear historical progress drew critiques from postmodern and postcolonial scholars.
- **Identity-Politics Supersession:** Identity-based movements have challenged the Frankfurt School's universalist claims, emphasizing specific oppressions neglected earlier.

### Contemporary Relevance:

- **Modern Authoritarianism:** Offers tools to understand and critique today's authoritarian populism and extremist politics.
- **Mass Media and Consumerism:** Its insights help analyze how digital culture industries perpetuate conformity and distract critical consciousness.
- **Critique of Neoliberalism:** Marcuse's concepts inform current debates about consumerist alienation and resistance to capitalism's absorption of dissent.
- **Understanding Crises:** Encourages critique of instrumental reason and irrational outcomes (ecological, democratic crises) emerging from Enlightenment rationality.

### Contemporary Renewal and Reflexivity:

- **Renewed Interest:** The centenary highlights Critical Theory as a resource against ideological dogmatism and nihilistic skepticism amid contemporary crises.
- **New Generations (Habermas, Honneth, Jaeggi, Celikates, etc.):** Updated theory through concepts like recognition, communication ethics, and democratic pluralism, keeping it responsive to changing societies.
- **Intersectionality and Engagement:** Increasingly engages feminist, queer, anti-racist, and postcolonial theories, addressing earlier blind spots on patriarchy, racism, and colonialism.
- **Global Critical Theory:** Recent scholarly emphasis on including perspectives from the Global South, calling for a more inclusive, polycentric Critical Theory.

## Barriers to Understanding Theory (EPW, Nov 2024)

The article examines why sociology students, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, often find social theory intimidating and inaccessible. It identifies several barriers and proposes inclusive strategies for overcoming them.

### Key Barriers in Understanding Sociological Theory:

#### 1. Abstract Nature of Theory:

- Sociological theories (e.g., Talcott Parsons' Theory of Social Action) often require high-level abstract thinking, similar to complex mathematics, discouraging students without adequate support.

#### 2. Linguistic Challenges:

- The use of dense, academic language, predominantly in English, creates linguistic barriers.
- Lack of vernacular translations disproportionately impacts students less fluent in dominant academic languages, deepening inequalities.

#### 3. Cultural Capital (Pierre Bourdieu):

- Familiarity with academic discourse (cultural capital) is often greater among privileged students, making theory more accessible to them.
- Marginalized students may lack exposure to these cultural codes, reinforcing educational inequalities.

#### 4. Institutional Reinforcement of Inequalities:

- Institutions tend to reward students already comfortable with theoretical complexity.
- Curricula rarely accommodate students needing simplified explanations, thus perpetuating class and cultural divides.

#### 5. Political and Eurocentric Dimensions:

- Sociological theories developed in Western contexts are often uncritically applied to non-Western settings, neglecting local realities.
- This reflects "academic Orientalism," marginalizing indigenous perspectives and misrepresenting lived experiences of marginalized communities.

#### 6. Hierarchies within Theory (Grand Theory vs. Empirical Research):

- C. Wright Mills critiques "grand theory" for homogenizing explanations and "abstract empiricism" for reducing research to mere data collection.
- In India, Gopal Guru highlights distinctions between theoretical "Brahmins" and empirical "Shudras," exposing hidden academic hierarchies.
- Advocates for "middle-range theories," balancing conceptual depth with empirical relevance.

### Recommendations: Decolonizing and Democratizing Theory:

- **Decolonization:** Integrate non-Western and indigenous perspectives to enrich theoretical frameworks and avoid Eurocentric biases.
- **Democratization:** Simplify language and methodology, making theory accessible and relevant to all students, especially from marginalized backgrounds.
- **Inclusive Pedagogy:** Adopt dialogic teaching methods, storytelling, and relatable examples (e.g., Erving Goffman's dramaturgy), rooting theory in everyday life experiences rather than abstract concepts.

### Conclusion:

To combat "theory-phobia," educators must dismantle linguistic, cultural, and academic barriers by reframing theory as an inclusive, critical, and relatable practice. This approach enriches sociological imagination and fosters meaningful engagement across diverse student groups.

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## On the Futures of Caste (EPW, Dec 2024) by Surinder S. Jodhka

The article critically explores why caste persists strongly in contemporary India despite modern democracy, urbanization, and economic development. It rejects simplistic understandings and provides nuanced arguments based on empirical evidence.

### Critique of Simplistic Views:

Jodhka challenges three common misconceptions:

1. **Caste as exclusively Hindu:** This neglects caste practices within non-Hindu communities.
2. **Caste as static village tradition:** A colonial myth overlooking caste dynamics in diverse urban and historical contexts.
3. **Caste destined to disappear with modernization:** Simplistic belief ignoring caste's adaptation to modern economic structures.

### Factors Shaping Caste in Contemporary India:

#### Economic Growth and Democracy:

- Rapid urbanization and the weakening of traditional rural structures (e.g., jajmani system) have reshaped caste practices.
- Broader democratic participation and electoral representation have enabled marginalized castes (Dalits, OBCs) to claim political space.

#### Bottom-up Movements:

- Leaders like **Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram** mobilized marginalized communities, creating strong collective caste identities and political pressure groups.

#### Constitutional and Policy Interventions:

- India's constitutional equality principle and affirmative actions (reservations) fostered socio-economic mobility, creating a new marginalized-caste middle class.

#### Colonial and Post-Colonial Transformations:

- The colonial caste census redefined fluid caste identities into rigid hierarchies.
- Agrarian transformations (industrialization, Green Revolution) disrupted traditional caste occupations, changing power dynamics and reducing dependency relations.

### Empirical Evidence: Decline and Continuance of Caste:

#### Indicators of Decline:

- Reduced traditional caste dependencies and Dalit distancing from stigmatized occupations.
- New collective spaces (temples, gurdwaras) challenge upper-caste hegemony.
- Dalits actively assert dignity and rights, rejecting traditional notions of impurity.

#### Persistent Features:

- Strong caste-based endogamy and increasing caste associations, even in urban settings.
- Urban samaj-making (community-building) practices often reinforce caste exclusion and monopolies.

## Debates on Caste's Future:

### Eternity Thesis:

- Scholars like **Louis Dumont** and **Gopal Guru** argue caste's essence (purity-pollution hierarchy) remains unchanged, only adapting superficially over time.

### Modernization Thesis:

- Scholars like **Dipankar Gupta** suggest modernization undermines caste's structural basis, leaving only symbolic identities.
- **M.N. Srinivas** argued modernization leads to "horizontal consolidation," changing caste dynamics without eradicating caste.

### Alternative Materialist View (Jodhka's Position):

- Caste is deeply embedded in economic relations, power structures, and market inequalities.
- Urban caste practices reflect active economic exclusion ("opportunity hoarding") and sustained social dominance (e.g., caste networks influencing informal labor markets).
- Dominant castes (e.g., Jats, Marathas) demand reservations, reflecting competition in market economies.

### Conclusion and Recommendations:

- Future studies must adopt empirical and comparative approaches, moving beyond binary views of caste's eternity or disappearance, and examining how contemporary societal and economic changes continuously reshape caste.

## Recognising Cohabitation Relationships: The Need for Legislative Framework

(EPW, Vol. 59, Issue 19, May 2024)

The article highlights the growing prevalence of live-in relationships in India and argues for a comprehensive legal framework to address the rights and vulnerabilities of partners in such relationships.

### Live-in Relationships:

- Defined as long-term cohabitation without marriage, offering emotional intimacy with greater flexibility and ease of exit.

### Sociological Context:

- Changing family norms reflect **Giddens' concept of detraditionalization** – traditional joint families are giving way to nuclear, dual-earner, and cohabiting forms.
- Urbanization, financial independence, and individual choice are driving "**individualization**", leading to more live-in relationships despite social stigma.
- **Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid love"** and **Giddens' "plastic sexuality"** explain the flexibility, transience, and negotiated nature of modern intimate ties.

### Challenges & Legal Ambiguities:

- No uniform law on rights to property, maintenance, or protection from domestic violence.
- Judicial responses have been progressive but fragmented:
  - *Badri Prasad (1978)*: Live-in seen as marriage-like.
  - *Navtej Johar (2018)*: Upheld live-in relationships under Article 21 (right to life and liberty).
  - *Krishnan (2022)*: Legitimacy granted to children from such unions.
- Existing law like the **DV Act, 2005** only partially covers "relationships in the nature of marriage," with interpretation left to courts.

### Conclusion:

Live-in relationships reflect evolving forms of intimacy in modern India. Law must keep pace with society by offering clear, inclusive protections that uphold constitutional values of liberty, equality, and dignity.

## Construction of Small-family Norm in Post-independence India

(EPW, Vol. 60, Issue 7, Feb 2025)

The article critically examines how the "small-family norm" became central to India's post-independence development discourse, analyzing its evolution, social impacts, and implications for inequality.

### Evolution of the Small-family Norm:

- Post-Independence India viewed population control as crucial for economic and national progress.
- Initially advocated by influential figures and institutions (e.g., R.A. Gopaldaswami, Indian Army), the preference evolved from encouraging two-to-three children (1950s-60s) to a rigid two-child policy by the 1980s (Rajiv Gandhi's Twenty-Point Programme).

### Influence of Neo-Malthusian Ideology:

- **Neo-Malthusianism**, promoted by demographers like Kingsley Davis and Frank Notestein, positioned population growth as a major economic threat, significantly shaping Indian population policies.
- International funding and ideological influence reinforced the view of smaller families as symbols of modernity, rationality, and economic prudence.

### Social Construction of the Norm:

- Aggressive, stigma-driven campaigns (e.g., the Ford Foundation-funded Red Triangle campaign) socially engineered perceptions, deliberately associating smaller family size with morality and modern values.
- Public shaming and incentives were strategically employed to reshape cultural norms around family size.

### Critical Social Impacts:

- **Marginalized groups disproportionately impacted:** Population control policies intensified vulnerabilities among lower castes, tribals, Muslims, and economically disadvantaged groups.
- **Gendered consequences:** Policies exacerbated gender inequality through practices like sex-selective abortions, female infanticide, neglect of girls, and intensified discrimination within families.
- **Coercion and exploitation:** Economic incentives for sterilization (especially during the Emergency, 1975) led to widespread coercion and violations of reproductive autonomy among marginalized communities.

### Resistance and Cultural Resilience:

- Despite coercive population measures, empirical studies showed significant socio-cultural resistance:

- **Mysore Population Study (1961):** Found family-size choices rooted in emotional, cultural, and economic motivations (son preference, elder care), rather than ignorance or irresponsibility.
- **Operations Research Group Survey (1971):** Revealed persistent preference for larger families driven by cultural security and economic logic.
- **Family Planning Association Study (1980):** Demonstrated public prioritization of economic and employment concerns over imposed population norms.

#### Conclusion & Recommendations:

- The small-family norm in post-independence India, though promoted as progressive, reinforced social inequalities through coercive measures and elite-driven control.
- Future policies must abandon coercion, instead adopting inclusive, culturally sensitive approaches that genuinely understand and address the socio-economic and cultural determinants of family-size decisions.

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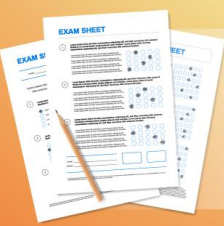
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## Satyashodhak Samaj's Sesquicentennial: An Opportunity Lost

(EPW, Vol. 59, Issue 36, Sep 2024)

The article reflects on the legacy, revolutionary objectives, and gradual decline of the **Satyashodhak Samaj** (founded in 1873 by **Jotirao Phule**) and emphasizes the need to revisit its radical vision today.

### Origins and Radical Vision:

- **Foundation:** Established by Phule in reaction to upper-caste reformist movements (e.g., Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj) that inadequately addressed caste oppression.
- **Objective:** Liberation of Shudras (lower castes) from Brahminical exploitation and caste hierarchy.
- **Gramscian Analysis:** The Samaj sought to end "mental servitude," paralleling Antonio Gramsci's idea that liberation from hegemonic ideas (mental slavery) is crucial for social revolution.

### Key Reform Areas:

- **Family Reforms:** Promoted egalitarian marriages and challenged patriarchal family structures, echoing radical feminist critiques against familial patriarchy.
- **Education Initiatives:** Established schools and promoted education among Shudras, reflecting Pierre Bourdieu's notion of using **cultural capital** (education) to empower marginalized groups.
- **Caste Annihilation:** Saw caste abolition as necessary to eliminate broader class exploitation and social inequality.

### Influence and Scope:

- Despite conservative portrayals, the Samaj had statewide influence, connections with wider movements (like E.V. Ramasamy's Self-respect Movement), and hundreds of affiliated activists and intellectuals.
- Inspired subsequent movements for peasants, women, Dalits, and working classes across Maharashtra and beyond.

### Decline in the 20th Century:

- Gradually, its radical revolutionary spirit weakened due to an increasing emphasis on caste and class harmony, reflecting Marx's concept of **false consciousness**, where underlying conflicts were masked rather than confronted.
- Shifted focus to class/caste conciliation rather than radical structural change, thus losing its original transformative character.

### Current Status and Recommendations:

- Present-day heirs of the Samaj often align with **Bahujan elites** (e.g., sugar barons, educational entrepreneurs), neglecting the initial radical critique of capitalist and caste-based exploitation.

- The sesquicentennial (150th anniversary) presents a critical opportunity to revive the Samaj's original progressive ideals, addressing ongoing inequalities in caste and class.

**Conclusion:**

The legacy of the Satyashodhak Samaj highlights both the revolutionary potential and pitfalls of social reform movements. Its radical origins and gradual decline offer valuable sociological insights into the dynamics of caste, class, ideology, and social transformation in India.



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## The Middle Class in India: Trends and Patterns

(EPW, Vol. 60, Issue 23, June 2025)

This article discusses the Indian middle class, highlighting its sociological importance, definitional challenges, historical evolution, contemporary patterns, and its socio-economic and political significance.

### Concept and Challenges of Defining the Middle Class:

- **General Definition:** Positioned between upper and lower classes, marked by income, education, occupation, and lifestyle.
- **Attributes:** Primarily salaried (formal sector), risk-averse, consumption-driven, crucial for economic growth, demand generation, and social stability.
- **Ambiguities:** No universally agreed definition, resulting in multiple interpretations based on income, occupation, education, or self-identification.

### Views of Major Thinkers on the Middle Class:

- **Karl Marx ("Petty Bourgeoisie"):** Middle class transitional between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Politically volatile, predicted eventual absorption into other classes.
- **Thorstein Veblen (1899):** Distinguished productive middle class (leaders, soldiers, priests) from the leisure class (elites).
- **Max Weber (1922):** Defined middle class through education, occupation, and social capital. Saw middle class as politically stabilizing, culturally influential, often progressive.

### Political Role of the Middle Class:

- Essential for stability and democratic consolidation.
- Can be either progressive (supporting democracy, rights) or conservative (status-quo oriented).
- Political orientation shifts based on socio-economic conditions.

### Economic Role of the Middle Class:

- Invests in education (human capital), drives consumption and savings.
- Promotes entrepreneurship, innovation, economic stability, and poverty reduction.

### The Indian Middle Class – Historical Evolution:

- **Colonial Origins:** Emerged via Western education (Macaulay's Minute, 1835) to serve British administration. Early forms (Bhadralok in Bengal, Brahmin elites in Bombay) embodied Western values.
- **Post-Independence Transformation:** Initially defined by civil-service jobs (Nehruvian era). Post-1990 liberalization and globalization shifted toward consumerism, aspiration, private-sector employment, and economic vulnerability during crises.

### **Social and Regional Dimensions:**

- Not homogeneous; includes multiple tiers (lower-middle, emerging middle, upper-middle, affluent).
- Growth among marginalized groups (SC/ST/OBC), yet upper-castes dominate affluent segments.
- Urban areas dominated by upper-middle segments; rural areas predominantly lower-middle.

### **Education and Social Mobility:**

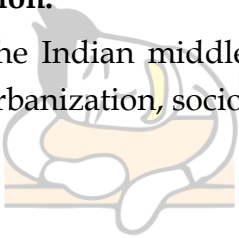
- Education critical to middle-class identity, upward mobility, and economic stability.
- Heavy investment in higher education and professional training to secure white-collar, skilled jobs.

### **Employment Patterns:**

- Predominantly white-collar roles in the service sector (clerical, technical, managerial).
- Lower-middle segments often in informal or agricultural sectors.
- Reflects Weberian linkage of class position to occupation and skill levels.

### **Conclusion:**

- The Indian middle class is diverse, aspirational yet economically vulnerable, influencing urbanization, socio-economic growth, and political dynamics.



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# Proudhon's Theory of Mutualism: A Critique of Capitalism and Authoritarianism

(The Hindu, Dec 31, 2024)

## Core Concept of Mutualism:

- **Mutualism**, proposed by **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, promotes voluntary cooperation, reciprocity, and fair exchange.
- Advocates collective ownership and cooperative management of resources (land, tools) to benefit society equally, without capitalist exploitation or state coercion.

## Property vs. Exploitation:

- Proudhon differentiated between "**Property**" (**capitalist**) and "**Possession**" (**mutualist**):
  - **Property** (capitalist): Ownership enabling profit-driven exploitation and control over others.
  - **Possession** (mutualist): Ownership based on actual usage, not accumulation or exploitation.

## Critique of Capitalism and Authoritarianism:

- Mutualism opposes capitalist exploitation (profit from labor) and authoritarian state power.
- Proposes reimagining property to serve collective fairness rather than private gain.

## Mutualism and Anarchism:

- Aligns with anarchist principles by rejecting state-enforced property rights and centralized authority.
- Balances **individual autonomy (individualist anarchism)** and **collective management (social anarchism)**.
- Envisions society managed through voluntary cooperation, mutual credit, and worker self-management without a state.

## Individual vs. Collective Interests:

- Mutualism replaces competition with solidarity, balancing individual freedom with collective well-being.
- Examples of mutualist principles observed historically (e.g., communal land and collective labor in traditional African societies).

## Critiques of Mutualism:

- **Structural Limitations:** Critics question mutualism's ability to address modern capitalism's large-scale inequalities or function at scale.
- **Marxist Critique:** Argues mutualism does not dismantle exploitative class relations; small producers remain vulnerable within capitalism.

**Conclusion:**

- Mutualism provides a radical alternative challenging capitalist and authoritarian systems.
- Though facing practical limitations, it continues influencing contemporary discussions on libertarian socialism, cooperative ownership, and non-hierarchical social arrangements.



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## We need a reformation: Caste salience must fall for India's social capital to rise

(Mint, 15 Dec 2024)

### Central Argument:

India's deep-rooted caste divisions severely limit its **social capital** (trust, reciprocity, cooperation), creating challenges in governance, infrastructure, economy, and environment.

### Role of Caste in Low Social Capital:

- Historical segregation into numerous endogamous groups (**jatis**) hinders trust and cooperation across communities.
  - **Ambedkar:** Caste system fragments society into an "ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt."
  - **David Reich:** Genomic evidence underscores extreme population fragmentation.
  - **M.N. Srinivas:** Democratic politics reinforce horizontal caste identities.

### Consequences of Low Social Capital:

- **Public Goods and Infrastructure:** Individualistic attitudes ("every-man-for-himself") worsen urban issues (traffic congestion, poor civic management).
- **Small Enterprises:** Difficulty accessing broad-based financial networks; caste-based economic exclusion (**Weber's "social closure"**).
- **Environmental Issues:** Collective action problems (e.g., Delhi's smog) persist due to low institutional trust.

### Proposed Solutions and Reforms:

- **Reducing Caste Salience:**
  - **Inter-caste Marriages:** Encouraged but state's minimal role limited to protection from coercion.
  - **Inter-dining:** Practical measure for breaking caste barriers through shared meals at workplaces, schools, public feasts.
- **Institutional and Technological Interventions:**
  - **Digital Payments (OCEN):** Expanding financial access beyond caste networks.
  - **Universal Public Education:** Early childhood exposure to diversity fosters inclusive attitudes and breaks prejudices.

### Conclusion:

For meaningful development and cohesive nation-building, India must consciously lower caste salience through multi-faceted interventions, promoting broader trust, cooperation, and social cohesion.

## On gender performativity: how it challenges the gender binary

(The Hindu, Oct 13, 2024)

### Core Idea: Gender Performativity (Judith Butler)

- Butler's theory in *Gender Trouble* (1990) challenges fixed, binary gender identities tied strictly to biological sex.
- Argues gender is **not innate** but socially constructed and maintained through repeated actions and societal norms (**performativity**).

### Key Concepts:

#### 1. Social Construction of Gender

- Gender roles appear natural due to repetition and reinforcement (e.g., girls playing with dolls), but they're actually socially produced and maintained through daily interactions.

#### 2. Essentialism vs. Social Constructivism

- **Essentialism:** Gender determined biologically; innate.
- **Constructivism** (*Butler's stance*): Gender is shaped entirely through cultural discourses and practices, not biologically fixed.

#### 3. Sex vs. Gender

- Butler critiques earlier feminist separation of sex (biological) and gender (cultural).
- Argues even biological sex categories are interpreted through social norms; both sex and gender are socially constructed.

#### 4. Gender as "Performed," not possessed

- Gender emerges through repeated actions ("doing gender"), creating the illusion of inherent identities.

#### 5. Performativity vs. Performance

- **Performance:** Conscious enactment of roles.
- **Performativity:** Unconscious and repetitive actions reinforcing gender norms.

### Influential Thinkers:

- **Simone de Beauvoir (1949):** Gender is learned socially ("One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman").
- **Iris Marion Young (1980):** Social norms shape gendered bodily comportment (e.g., girls restricted in physical movements).

### Critiques (Julia Serano)

- Argues Butler overlooks intrinsic sense of gender ("subconscious sex") particularly relevant for transgender individuals.
- Gender identity involves internal self-perception combined with social influences.

**Conclusion:**

- Butler's concept fundamentally reshapes understanding of gender as fluid, socially enacted, and changeable. While critiqued for neglecting intrinsic gender experiences, her theory remains central to modern feminist and queer thought.



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## Reversing the global democratic recession

(The Hindu, April 24, 2024)

### Global Context: Democratic Decline

- **Pew Research (2023):** Global decline in support for representative democracy; increased acceptance of alternatives like direct democracy (70%), expert rule (58%), authoritarianism (26%), and military rule (15%).
- Disillusionment due to perceived inefficiency in consensus-building and decision-making delays.

### The Indian Scenario:

- Decline in preference for representative democracy (**44% in 2017 → 36% in 2023**).
- Rising support for strong, authoritarian leadership (**55% → 67%**) and rule by experts (**65% → 82%**).
- 85% positive response to military or authoritarian governance.
- Described internationally as a **"hybrid regime"** (partly-free, flawed democracy, electoral autocracy).

### Reasons for Disenchantment:

- Democratic processes viewed as slow and inefficient.
- Belief that centralized authority accelerates economic growth and decision-making.
- Preference for strong leaders higher among populations with lower income and education.

### Recent Advocacy for Strengthening Democracy:

1. **"Strengthening Democracy by Design" (Thomas & Upchurch, 2018):** Proposes four essential pillars: Participatory citizenship, Equality and freedom, Informed citizenry, Accountable governance

2. **"The Civic Bargain" (Manville & Ober, 2023):**

Argues democracy requires:

- **Norms fostering cooperation**
- **Transparent decision-making processes**
- **Civic friendship** (mutual respect and understanding among diverse citizens)
- Highlights democracy as collective self-governance, requiring active civic responsibility.

### Conclusion:

- Global and Indian democratic disillusionment indicates an urgent need for reform.
- A robust democracy demands intentional strengthening of democratic pillars, active civic engagement, and transparency, thus rebuilding public trust and collective responsibility.

## Urbanisation, no liberating force for Dalits

(The Hindu, April 15, 2024)

### Central Argument:

- Contrary to Ambedkar's expectation, urbanisation in India has not significantly liberated Dalits from caste oppression. Cities continue to reflect deep caste-based segregation and discrimination.

### Ambedkar's Perspective on Urbanisation:

- Ambedkar viewed cities as potential liberating spaces, offering anonymity and opportunities to escape village-based caste hierarchies.
- He hoped urbanisation would shift society from caste-based discrimination to class-based interactions (aligned with **modernisation theory**).

### Current Reality in Indian Cities:

- Persistent caste-based spatial segregation visible through housing practices (e.g., non-vegetarian food preferences becoming barriers in housing).
- Government regulations (e.g., meat sale bans near religious places) reinforce caste biases and **symbolic violence (Bourdieu)** and **cultural hegemony (Gramsci)**.
- Dalit and Muslim communities disproportionately inhabit polluted areas (landfills) and have poor access to infrastructure, exemplifying **environmental racism (Bullard)**.

### Impact of Urban Ghettos (Gopal Guru):

- Ghettos reinforce negative caste identities, marking inhabitants as "polluted," consistent with **labeling theory (Becker)**.
- This spatial segregation results in social marginalisation, discrimination, and systemic exclusion.

### Conclusion:

- Despite urbanisation, caste adapts and persists through new spatial and policy forms, reflecting **social reproduction (Bourdieu)** of inequalities.
- Urban spaces have largely failed Ambedkar's vision, as Dalits remain segregated, marginalised, and, as Ambedkar described, remain "children of India's ghettos."

## The Collapse of Categories and Post-Individualism

(The Hindu, August 31, 2024)

### Central Argument:

Traditional social categories — like sex, gender, caste, and citizenship — are increasingly contested, leading to new governance challenges and identity conflicts in a fluid, post-individualist world.

### Key Themes:

- **Collapse of Stable Categories:** Categories once seen as objective (e.g., sex, caste, citizenship) are now subject to personal interpretation and political debate. *Example:* Gender eligibility disputes (Imane Khelif) and caste sub-categorization in India.
- **Gender and Identity Fluidity:**
  - Gender now seen as self-defined, unlike biologically fixed sex.
  - This shift complicates laws, education, healthcare, and public policy.
  - Reflects a broader move toward aligning the **body with the mind**, challenging the traditional mind-body unity.
- **Post-Individualism:**
  - Individual identity becomes fragmented; the body is no longer fixed, but adaptable to subjective identity.
  - Raises questions about the limits of personal autonomy.
- **Liberalism's Paradox:**
  - Liberal societies promote freedom yet must tolerate illiberal or divisive group practices (e.g., identity politics, religious conservatism), deepening social fragmentation.
- **Technology and Science:**
  - Medical science shifts from restoring to **transforming identity**, e.g., gender-affirming surgeries redefine sex as personal identity.

### Conclusion:

The fluidity of identity in today's world challenges traditional binaries and governance models. While this reflects growing autonomy and self-expression, it also creates complexity, social tension, and a fragmented sense of self.

## Michael Burawoy's Legacy: Why Sociology Must Engage with the Public for a More Just World

(Indian Express, Feb 11, 2025)

### Core Idea: Public Sociology

- **Michael Burawoy** championed *public sociology*—a sociology that engages with communities beyond academia to address real-world inequalities and promote justice.

### Key Principles:

- **Dialogue & Engagement:** Bridging academia and the public to co-produce knowledge.
- **Moral Responsibility:** Centering marginalized voices in sociological work.
- **Global Inclusivity:** Challenging Euro-American dominance in the discipline.
- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Resisting narrow, market-driven approaches to knowledge.

### Need for Public Sociology:

- Academic sociology often remains detached from societal problems.
- Rising **neoliberalism** threatens intellectual autonomy and social commitment.

### Impact & Examples:

- Engagement with issues like **education reform, civil rights, feminism, and global conflicts**.
- Encouraged translating **private struggles into public dialogue**, fostering collective action.

### Legacy:

- In his landmark **2004 ASA address**, Burawoy urged sociologists to pursue “**real utopias**” — practical, transformative alternatives within existing systems.
- He inspired scholars to reject bureaucratic constraints and embrace socially engaged, morally conscious sociology.

### Conclusion:

Burawoy redefined sociology's role—transforming it from mere analysis to **active social intervention**, leaving a legacy of committed, public-facing scholarship.

## The Gig Economy is Growing at the Cost of Workers' Rights and Social Security

(Indian Express, May 10, 2023)

### Core Argument:

The rapid expansion of India's gig economy — driven by platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Uber — offers consumer convenience but undermines gig workers' rights, job security, and dignity.

### Key Issues:

- **Precarity & Exploitation:** Workers, especially from vulnerable backgrounds, are lured by the myth of flexibility but face **insecurity, overwork, and low wages**.  
→ Guy Standing's "precariat" and Althusser's "mystification" explain this hidden exploitation.
- **Algorithmic Control:** Platforms use **algorithms to monitor and manipulate workers** (Algorithmic Taylorism), setting incentive traps and evading labor laws by calling workers "partners."  
→ Reflects Marx's conflict theory and Jan Breman's idea of tolerated informality.
- **Lack of Legal Protection:** Gig workers remain legally invisible, lacking enforceable labor rights.  
→ Existing labor laws fail to cover platform-based employment.

### Policy Innovation: Rajasthan Model:

- Rajasthan passed India's first law to ensure **social security for gig workers**, including automatic registration and minimum benefits.
- Sets a **global precedent** for legally recognizing and protecting gig workers.

### Conclusion:

The gig economy symbolizes "**commodity fetishism**" (Marx) — consumer ease masks worker exploitation.

Rajasthan's law shows that digital platforms can also **empower**, not just exploit. A nationwide framework is vital to ensure dignity and rights for all unorganized workers.

## Why the Young Don't Want to Have Children – And How to Fix That

(Indian Express, April 3, 2024)

### Core Argument:

Falling fertility rates globally – including in India – are not just due to economics or education, but increasingly reflect **young people's disillusionment** with the world's future.

### Key Causes of Fertility Decline:

- **Climate Crisis & Uncertainty:** Fears over an unlivable future due to climate inaction – explained by **Ulrich Beck's Risk Society**.
- **Economic Insecurity in India:** High informal employment, income inequality, and democratic decline contribute to hopelessness.  
→ Interpreted through **Merton's Relative Deprivation Theory**.

### Theoretical Context:

- **Demographic Transition Theory** (Warren Thompson): Societies shift from high to low birth/death rates with development.
- **Welfare State Theory** (T.H. Marshall): Social policies must address job security, healthcare, pensions to rebuild trust.
- **Social Justice Theory** (John Rawls): Advocates for fairness, equality, and dignity as the foundation of a hopeful society.

### Solutions:

- Promote **women's education** and **inclusive policies**.
- Ensure **fair taxation, job security, healthcare, and social security**.
- Rebuild **youth optimism** through equality, dignity, and freedom of expression.

### Conclusion:

Fertility decline is not irreversible. By addressing structural inequalities and restoring faith in the future, societies can ensure demographic and social stability.

## For Women-Led Development, Invest in the Care Economy

(Indian Express, May 8, 2024)

### Core Argument:

Unpaid and under-recognized care work, predominantly done by women, must be formally recognized and invested in to achieve **gender equality and women-led development**.

### Key Sociological Insights:

- **Ann Oakley** argues that a housewife's autonomy is **more theoretical than real**, as domestic labour is expected and unacknowledged.
- **Arlie Hochschild's "Second Shift"** describes how women do paid work followed by unpaid caregiving duties at home, burdening them doubly.

### Economic Value of Unpaid Care Work:

- **ILO (2018)** estimates women's unpaid care work contributes **\$10 trillion annually**, or **13% of global GDP**.
- In **India**, unpaid domestic and care work contributes **3.1% of GDP by women**, and **0.4% by men**. (*Time Use Survey, Institutions and Development Database 2014*)
- **India's female-to-male ratio of unpaid care work time is 9.83**, highest among surveyed countries. (*Institutions and Development Database 2014*)

### Employment Potential of Care Sector:

- A **2% GDP investment** in India's care sector could create **11 million jobs**. (*ILO*)
- **Globally**, care sector investment could generate **475 million jobs by 2030**. (*ILO*)

### Demographic Context (UNFPA 2022):

- Elderly population in India is projected to rise to **20.8%**, increasing care demands.
- Children will constitute **18%** of the population, with high absolute numbers — necessitating care infrastructure for both age groups.

### Policy Recommendations:

- **ILO's 5Rs Framework:** *Recognition, Reduction, Redistribution, Rewarding, Representation* — a roadmap for restructuring care work policy.
- **SDG 5:** Calls for recognition of unpaid work, social protection, and shared caregiving responsibilities.
- **G20 Task Force-6:** Recommends placing **care work as a central pillar** of development, pushing for gender-inclusive childcare policies and improved quality of care services.

### Conclusion:

Investing in the **care economy is crucial** for gender equality, job creation, and achieving India's development goals by 2047. Public and private stakeholders must work together to recognize and support care work, making it **visible, valued, and fairly compensated**.

## Patriarchy and violence against Women

(Indian Express, Oct 1, 2024)

### Core Argument:

Patriarchy is the root structure underpinning gender-based violence in India. Despite progressive laws, systemic power inequalities persist, especially for women from marginalized backgrounds.

### Understanding Patriarchy:

- **Nivedita Menon** (Seeing Like a Feminist) defines patriarchy as a **systemic power structure** privileging adult males, reinforced through: **Patriliney** (inheritance via male line), **Virilocality** (women move to husband's home), **Male authority** in decision-making roles.
- **V. Geetha**: Patriarchy thrives through **social norms** that privilege male choices and restrict women's autonomy.
- **Simone de Beauvoir's** insight: *"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"* – underscores **gender as a social construct**, not biological fate.

### Manifestations of Patriarchy:

- Victim-blaming and **honor-based narratives** dominate responses to gender violence.
- Patriarchal conditioning shapes **family roles, workplaces, and media portrayal**.
- Even rape is often seen as a **crime against family honor** rather than a violation of individual rights.

### Intersectionality and Selective Outrage:

- **Kimberlé Crenshaw's** idea of **intersectionality** explains why caste, class, and social status affect how society responds to violence.
- Cases involving **marginalized women** often receive less attention or empathy.
- **Desensitization** and voyeurism reflect deep societal apathy, as seen in the **Ujjain incident** where a bystander filmed a rape.

### Limits of Legal Reforms:

- **Anti-rape laws** like the **Nirbhaya Act (2013)** and **West Bengal's Aparajita Bill (2024)** have been passed, but violence persists.
- **NCRB 2023**: Crimes against women rose by **4%**, with **31,000+ rape cases** in 2022 – suggesting that **laws alone are insufficient**.

### Need for Cultural and Civil Society Interventions:

- **Bottom-up societal change** is essential to dismantle everyday patriarchy.
- Example: **Women in Cinema Collective (WCC)** – formed after the 2017 actress assault – is fighting structural sexism in the film industry.
- **Protests by doctors** after the August 9 incident show public resistance and demand for justice.

## Conclusion:

Sociological analysis shows that **patriarchy, intersecting with caste and class**, normalizes violence and silences victims. Legal reforms must be matched by **social transformation**, public accountability, and the **collective redefinition of gender roles**.

### Quick Comparison of Our Top Sociology Foundation Programs

| Program Inclusions                                               | Sociology Master Batch                | Sociology Mentorship                  | Sociology With Evaluation             | Sociology Without Evaluation          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Comprehensive Video Content                                      | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| Comprehensive Current Affairs Coverage                           | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| Weekly Answer Writing Practice                                   | LIVE                                  | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| 4 Half-Length Tests, 2 Full-Length Tests & 22 Chapter-wise Tests | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| LIVE Answer Writing                                              | ★                                     | ✗                                     | ✗                                     | ✗                                     |
| One-to-One Personal Strategic Mentorship                         | ★                                     | ★                                     | ✗                                     | ✗                                     |
| Answer Evaluation & Detailed Feedback                            | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✗                                     |
| Model Answers & Video Solutions                                  | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| Routine LIVE Sessions with Faculty                               | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| Dedicated Telegram Group for Support & Doubts                    | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
| Interview Guidance & Mock Sessions                               | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     | ✓                                     |
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## The post-Mandal moment is here – and it calls for a new politics

(Indian Express, August 14, 2024)

### Core Argument:

The 2024 judgment permits **sub-categorization within SCs/STs**, challenging the idea of homogenous reserved categories. The Supreme Court's ruling marks the beginning of a **post-Mandal era**, requiring a rethink of caste-based reservation politics. Traditional Mandal frameworks now face fragmentation, internal contradictions, and the need for structural reform.

### Evolution of Mandal Politics:

#### 1. Pre-Mandal Phase:

- Rooted in **anti-caste struggles** by Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar.
- Focused on **eliminating caste hierarchies** and ensuring **social equality**.

#### 2. Mandal Era (1990s):

- **Mandal Commission Report (1980)** recommended reservations for OBCs.
- Implementation in 1990 led to **mass mobilization** and **numerical representation**, but not deep reforms.

#### 3. Post-Mandal Phase (2000s–present):

- **Bureaucratization of reservations** and reduced focus on anti-caste ideologies
- Major parties (BJP, Congress) **adopted reservation as a vote tool**, causing **fragmentation of caste coalitions**.

### Key Sociological Contradictions:

#### 1. Representation vs. Power Asymmetry:

- Numerical quotas alone don't ensure **fair power sharing** within caste groups.
- Elite capture within OBC/SC groups raises questions of **intra-group inequality**.

#### 2. Reservation vs. Structural Reform:

- Reservations are used as a **quick-fix**, avoiding deeper reforms in education, land, and labor.
- Judiciary-led interventions dominate policy space.

#### 3. Unity vs. Fragmentation:

- Mandal-era fostered **social bloc formation**, but also saw the rise of **caste-based factionalism** and **competitive backwardness**.

### Conclusion:

The **post-Mandal moment** signals a turning point in **reservation politics**, demanding:

- Greater attention to **internal stratification** within reserved categories.
- A shift from **symbolic representation** to **substantive equality**.
- New frameworks for **inclusive, coalition-based politics** that align with **current socio-economic realities**.

## National interest, financial rewards do little to convince families to have more children (*Indian*)

Express, October 25, 2024)

### Core Idea:

Despite nationalist appeals or financial incentives, families tend to limit childbirth unless broader **social, economic, and gender norms** are addressed. **Fertility choices reflect lived realities, not state agendas.**

### Global Lessons on Fertility Decline:

#### 1. Russia's Example (Stalin's Mother Heroine Award)

- Despite incentives for having 10+ children, fertility declined to **1.16 (1999)** and only marginally improved.
- Shows that **state incentives alone are ineffective.**

#### 2. Europe: Tempo Effect & Modernization

- Fertility dropped below **1.3 TFR**, briefly recovered, then declined again.
- Rising **age of marriage** and **economic aspirations** delay childbirth, aligning with **Demographic Transition Theory**.

#### 3. East Asia: Intense Parenting & Low Fertility

- Countries like **Korea (TFR 0.8)** and **China** show ultra-low fertility due to **education-centric parenting** and **economic pressure**.
- Indian trends mirror this (Desai & Basu): one-child focus for better future.

#### 4. Japan & Southern Europe: Gender Roles Matter

- **Rigid patriarchal family norms** and **inflexible work culture** discourage childbearing.
- Japan: rise in lifelong singlehood (**28% men, 18% women by 2020**).

### Policy Lessons:

#### 1. China's Failure:

- Relaxation of one-child policy failed as **state support for women reduced**, and **female workforce participation fell**.

#### 2. Sweden's Success:

- **TFR 1.9 (2015–2020)** due to **family-friendly policies**, parental leave, and **shared childcare** responsibilities.

### Key Sociological Takeaways:

- **Judith Blake**: "People do not have birth rates; they have children." Fertility is a **human rights** decision, not just a statistic.

- **Demographic Transition Theory** explains natural decline in fertility with modernization.
- Gender inequality, economic insecurity, and cultural rigidity are **structural barriers** to higher fertility.

#### Policy Recommendations for India:

1. **Invest in care infrastructure** (like Sweden) to support working parents.
2. Encourage **inter-state migration** (e.g., UP to Tamil Nadu) to address regional aging imbalances.



**Sleepy Classes IAS**  
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## How urban migration is redefining womanhood and kinship

(Indian Express, June 12, 2025 – by Irfanullah Farooqi)

### Core Argument:

Urban migration, especially among **middle- and upper-class women**, is transforming traditional ideas of **womanhood, autonomy, marriage, and kinship**, while exposing **new forms of control and inequality across caste and class**.

### Sociological Highlights:

#### 1. Changing Gender Norms and Kinship:

- **Families now view girls' education** as a social asset, not a liability.
- Migration fosters **personal autonomy**, delayed marriage, inter-caste unions, and court marriages.
- **Parul Bhandari**: Middle-class urban women experience “**elongated singlehood**”, seeking self-care and partnership-based marriage.
- **Mihirini Sirisena**: Women use “**strategic dissent**” to gain parental approval for love marriages.

#### 2. Social Data Supporting Change:

- **NFHS-5**: Total fertility rate (TFR) dropped to **2.0**, reflecting smaller families or child-free choices.
- **Pew Study (2022)**: Increased support for **women in decision-making and leadership**.

#### 3. Emerging Challenges:

- **NCRB Data**: Crimes against women rising in metros, despite declining overall crime.
- **Moral policing**: Women tenants face **social scrutiny** over dress, visitors, lifestyle.
- **Deniz Kandiyoti's “Patriarchal Bargain”**: Women tactically negotiate within patriarchy for limited freedoms.

#### 4. Class and Caste Divide in Migration:

- **Upper/middle-class women** migrate for **career and autonomy**.
- **Lower-caste, tribal, and poor women** migrate due to **distress**, often working in **precarious, low-wage jobs** (construction, domestic work), with **limited mobility**.

### Conclusion:

Urban migration is not just economic—it reshapes **gender roles, kinship patterns, and social norms**. But this transformation remains **unequal**, as **privilege enables autonomy**, while structural inequalities continue to constrain marginalised women.

## The reasons behind resurgence of nationalist sentiments across globe

(Indian Express, June 12, 2025) by Shibashis Chatterjee

### Core Argument:

Nationalism is resurging globally due to a mix of **economic insecurity**, **cultural anxiety**, **political disillusionment**, and **digital mobilisation** – each rooted in broader structural changes and societal transformations.

### Key Sociological Drivers:

#### 1. Economic Insecurity and Globalisation:

- **Job losses and wage stagnation** in the West due to outsourcing and industrial decline.
- **Protectionist sentiments** rise as people blame foreigners/elites instead of abstract global markets.
- **Sociological Link:** *Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems Theory* explains resentment in core nations due to shifting production to peripheries.

#### 2. Cultural Anxieties and Identity Crisis:

- Rapid migration and global connectivity threaten **local traditions and identity**.
- National identity offers **emotional security**.
- **Sociological Link:** *Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolism* explains the emotional power of shared myths and history. *Durkheim's collective consciousness* shows how shared rituals (culture) unify society.

#### 3. Rise of Populist Leadership:

- **Mainstream parties** seen as elitist and globalist.
- **Populists** like Trump and Brexit leaders mobilize nationalism to rally “the people” against “the elite”.
- **Sociological Link:** *Ernesto Laclau's populism* and *Weber's charismatic authority* during times of crisis.

#### 4. Multipolar World and National Self-Reliance:

- Decline of **US dominance** and rise of a **multipolar global order** creates insecurity.
- Countries turn inward for **resource control and strategic autonomy**.

#### 5. Digital Media and Echo Chambers:

- **Social media algorithms** amplify nationalism and polarize discourse.
- **Sociological Link:** *Manuel Castells' Network Society* explains how digital spaces facilitate identity-based mobilisation.

### Conclusion:

The resurgence of nationalism reflects **deep-rooted structural and cultural shifts**. **Balanced strategies** are needed—addressing economic distress and cultural insecurities while avoiding xenophobia and sustaining global cooperation.

## More to digital inequality than access to phones

(Indian Express, July 7, 2024)

### Core Argument:

Digital inequality in India is not just about access to smartphones but also includes **differences in digital skills, language proficiency, family background, and social empowerment**—all shaped by **caste structures**.

### Key Sociological Insights:

#### 1. Caste Shapes Digital Access and Usage

- **Upper-caste students** have high-end devices, Wi-Fi, and family support.
- **Dalit students** often use shared, low-end phones and lack digital autonomy.
- *Vikki Katz's* idea of the “under-connected” highlights limited access leading to limited use.

#### 2. Cultural Capital and Language Barriers

- **English proficiency**, part of *Bourdieu's cultural capital*, is uneven—Dalit students struggle with English-based AI tools, unlike upper-caste peers.

#### 3. Social Reproduction and Family Background

- *Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction*: Upper-caste families transmit educational and digital advantages across generations; Dalit families often cannot.

#### 4. Neighbourhoods and Caste Geography

- **Upper-caste students** benefit from tech-friendly environments; **Dalit students** face isolation in resource-poor areas—even in urban spaces.

#### 5. Algorithmic Reinforcement and Meritocracy

- Dalit students' limited device access + shared usage = reduced algorithmic exposure to learning tools and content.
- *Michael Young's* critique of meritocracy applies: digital platforms often deepen inequality rather than provide equal opportunity.

### Conclusion and Recommendations:

- True **digital inclusion** requires more than device distribution—it demands **language support, digital literacy, and systemic reform**. Without addressing caste-based disparities, **technology risks reinforcing old hierarchies** rather than dismantling them. Policies must promote **digital citizenship** by equipping marginalised groups, especially Dalits, for full digital participation.

## Hillary Clinton says Kamala Harris could break the 'glass ceiling'. What does it mean?

(Indian Express, August 23, 2024)

### Definition and Significance:

- The "**glass ceiling**" is an **invisible but real barrier** that prevents women and marginalized groups from advancing to top positions despite being qualified.
- Coined by **Marilyn Loden (1978)**, the term reflects **structural and cultural constraints**, not legal prohibitions.

### Sociological Context and Evidence:

#### 1. Historical & Legal Efforts:

- **Second-wave feminism** and **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964)** challenged gender discrimination.
- **Glass Ceiling Commission (1991)** found women earned >50% of master's degrees but held only 5% of senior management roles.

#### 2. Persistent Inequality in Politics & Corporates:

- In 2022, **only 29% of U.S. House seats** were held by women.
- In the EU (2016), **only 5.1% of CEOs** were women despite 45% workforce representation.  
(Data from Marianne Bertrand's study)

#### 3. Class, Race, and Caste Critique:

- The metaphor often **excludes marginalized women**—e.g., racial minorities and Dalits in India—who are **blocked at entry-level** due to deeper socio-economic barriers.
- Sociological critique: **Structural inequalities compound**, making elite-centric metaphors insufficient.

### Competing Sociological Explanations:

#### A. Individualist View – Sheryl Sandberg (Lean In):

- Women must "**lean in**", be more ambitious and assertive to succeed.
- Criticized for ignoring **structural discrimination and inflexible workplaces**.

#### B. Structural View – Marilyn Loden & Claudia Goldin:

- Real barrier lies in "**greedy jobs**" (Goldin) that demand long hours and ignore **work-life balance**.
- Women's careers suffer **unless caregiving is equally shared** and **flexible work** becomes the norm.

### Conclusion:

The **glass ceiling** remains **sociologically relevant** as it captures the **gendered barriers** to leadership.

However, true equality requires:

- Structural reforms (e.g., flexible work hours, equal caregiving roles),
- Cultural shifts in workplace norms,
- Acknowledgment of **intersectionality** – how caste, race, and class shape women's access to opportunities.



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