

SOCIAL CURRENTS

NEWS THROUGH SOCIOLOGICAL LENS



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A. CURRENT AFFAIRS & SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

LIVE IN RELATIONSHIPS - SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

CONCEPT OF PLASTIC LOVE & LIVE IN RELATIONSHIPS: "*Plastic sexuality*" is a concept introduced by sociologist Anthony Giddens in his book "*The Transformation of Intimacy*" (1992). Giddens argues that in modern societies, traditional structures of intimacy, such as marriage, are being replaced by what he calls "plastic sexuality."

Plastic sexuality refers to the idea that **sexual practices and identities are increasingly disconnected from traditional norms** and are instead shaped by individual choices, desires, and circumstances. Giddens suggests that this shift reflects broader changes in society, such as increased individualism, the erosion of traditional social institutions, and the rise of new technologies that facilitate greater sexual experimentation and freedom.

Giddens also emphasizes the importance of trust and equality in modern intimate relationships, suggesting that individuals now seek relationships based on mutual consent and respect rather than traditional roles and obligations.

Anthony Giddens' concept of "plastic sexuality" is particularly relevant in understanding live in relationships :

- Live-in relationships, where individuals engage in intimate relationships outside of traditional marriage structures.
- Live-in relationships reflect the increasing autonomy and agency individuals have in shaping their intimate lives.
- These relationships are characterised by a more fluid and open approach to sexuality, where partners can negotiate the terms of their relationship based on their own needs and desires, rather than conforming to traditional norms or roles dictated by society.

A chilling effect on the freedom to love

TH PREMIUM

By penalising consensual relations and violating individual autonomy, the Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code Bill erodes constitutional rights to liberty, privacy and equality

February 26, 2024 12:08 am | Updated 01:52 am IST

Bertrand Russell on the subject nearly a century ago in his book *Marriage and Morals* (1929), advocated "**trial marriage**" or "**companionate marriage**," whereby young people could live together without getting married. Russell's outspoken views drew the ire of puritans. He was

described as “a desiccated, divorced and decadent advocate of sexual promiscuity who has betrayed his mind and conscience.”

Why is an Indian state punishing live-in relationships?

Couples must register with the government, or risk going to jail. That's in a law, which critics

SAME SEX MARRIAGES - SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Arguments for

- **Peter Hart - Brington:** Increase in support for same-sex marriage must be interpreted in light of the changing social imagination of homosexuality.
- **Ruth vanita's** work, "Same-sex Love in India", critically examines the historical and cultural dimensions of same-sex relationships in India, challenging prevailing stereotypes and advocating for legal recognition.
- **Hironimus-Wendt** argues the legalization of same-sex marriage could increase the stability of same-sex families because it allows them to function in society as equals within their community.
- **Callahan** argues that gay / lesbian households should be seen as families. He argues that, if marriage were available, many gay and lesbian couples would marry. Furthermore, he believes that the relationships involved are no different in any fundamental way from those in heterosexual households.
- **Roseneil** believes 'hetero norm' is increasingly breaking down, and there has been an increase in same sex marriage. Termed these as chosen families.
- **In a study of legally married gay couples from Canada**, where same-sex marriage has been legal long enough to assess its outcomes, Adam Isaiah Green, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Toronto reports that same-sex marital relationships tend to be more egalitarian with decision-making, the division of household labor, control of finances, and even questions of sexual fidelity negotiated between spouses, rather than based on traditional gender norms of marital monogamy.

Arguments against

- The **study, conducted by Mark Regnerus**, an associate professor of sociology at the university of Texas at Austin: problematic for child development in lesbian and gay families - including a lack of social support for parents, stress exposure resulting from persistent stigma, and modest or absent legal security for their parental and romantic relationship statuses
- **Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz**, ' (How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?' : children raised by homosexuals are more likely to experience gender and sexual disorders.

Supreme Court Refuses To Recognize Same-Sex Marriages, Asks Union Govt To Form Committee To Determine Rights Of Queer Unions

Padmakshi Sharma

17 Oct 2023 12:51 PM

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SURROGACY IN INDIA - SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In news?

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare notifies Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2024.

On surrogacy, Indian law goes a step further — but not far enough

Amendment to surrogacy rules is welcome. But legislation must be carefully crafted so as to not create hierarchies in contemporary family formations

Sociological Perspective

Surrogacy as a reflection of changing social norms and the division of labor in modern societies. He might argue that as societies become more complex, traditional family structures and norms around reproduction may evolve, leading to practices like surrogacy.

Surrogacy as a functional adaptation to challenges in modern family structures. He might argue that surrogacy can help address issues of infertility and childlessness, which could disrupt traditional family roles and functions.

- **Amrita Pande** - Surrogacy is India's new form of outsourcing, as couples from all over the world hire Indian women to bear their children for a fraction of the cost of surrogacy elsewhere with little to no government oversight or regulation.

In the first detailed ethnography of India's surrogacy industry "***Wombs in Labor Transnational Commercial Surrogacy in India***" Amrita Pande visited clinics and hostels and speaks with surrogates and their families, clients, doctors, brokers, and hostel matrons in order to shed light on this burgeoning business and the experiences of the labourers within it. She found out absence of any evidence that shows that all economic choices made by a woman are uninfluenced by a lack of informed consent, denying Indian women the ability to enter into contracts of surrogacy alone might seem misplaced.

- **Harvard professor Martha A. Field** in her book "Surrogate Motherhood: The Legal and Human Issues" argues that surrogacy involves using someone else's body, even with their permission. Just because you have the right to do something doesn't mean you have the right to involve someone else in doing it.
- Feminist scholar — **Andrea Dworkin**— have warned against the commodification of surrogacy in an inherently unequal world. For Dworkin, ***surrogacy is like prostitution***, because the surrogate has no choice.

The questions that concern the validity of a commercial surrogacy agreement, she wrote, are not indifferent from those concerning prostitution. When the state has “constructed the social, economic, and political situation in which the sale of some sexual or reproductive capacity is necessary to the survival of women,” Dworkin wrote, to believe that such women are exercising their free will in choosing to sell the use of their womb in a commercial transaction is simply amoral.

Dworkin’s claims, from an Indian context, are only bolstered by the boilerplate terms of the surrogate contract, which tend to deeply undermine the surrogate mother’s freedom and sense of bodily autonomy.

- Notion that surrogacy can at all be altruistic, as the Swedish journalist ***Kajsa Ekis Ekman*** wrote earlier this year in The Guardian , “— apart from being a red herring, since it barely happens in reality — has a very strange ideological underpinning. As if exploitation only consisted in giving the woman money. In that case, the less she is paid, the less she is exploited.”

Solution : Martha A. Field acknowledging that ‘surrogacy for hire is probably with us for the long term,’ she proposes an eminently sensible set of guidelines to contain it and recognize rights clearly.

SHILPA BHATTI

ZOMATO'S 'PURE VEG' POLICY - ISSUE OF CASTE & STRATIFICATION IN INDIA?

Zomato's 'pure veg' policy is a textbook case of how societal norms and business practices intersect. This policy reflects the concept of social stratification, where society is divided into different layers based on caste, religion, and even dietary habits. It's a clear example of how cultural norms can influence economic decisions and vice versa.

The 'pure veg' label is not just a dietary preference but a marker of social identity that aligns with the traditional caste system, which values vegetarianism as a symbol of purity. This is an instance of cultural capital, where certain lifestyles are valued over others, leading to social advantages for some and disadvantages for others.

The initial uniform policy for the 'Pure Veg Fleet' is reminiscent of labelling theory, where individuals are categorized based on external markers, which can lead to stigmatization. This policy could have reinforced social exclusion by visibly distinguishing between those who handle vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, further entrenching societal divides.

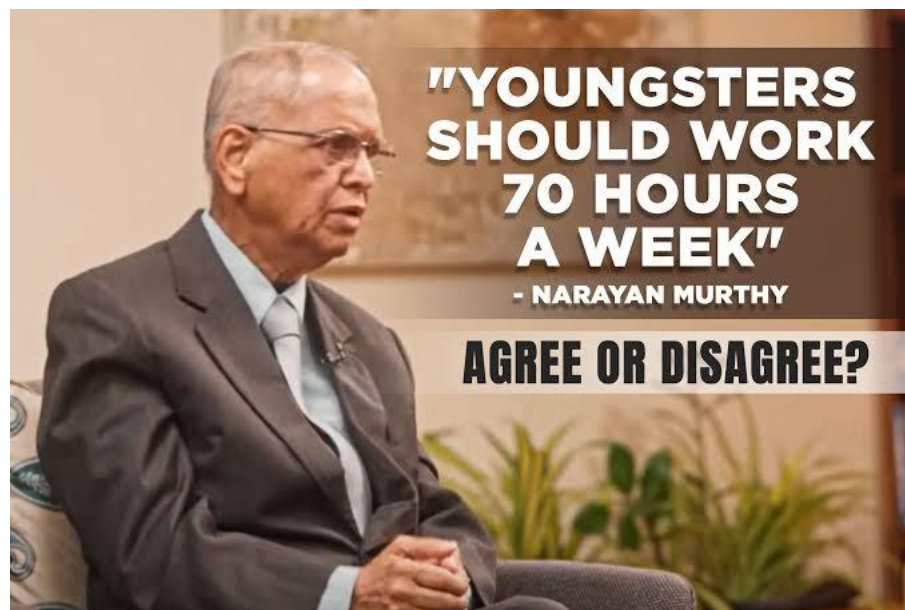


- **Louis Dumont** views the caste system as a reflection of societal values, with vegetarianism symbolizing purity, especially among upper castes, while meat consumption is unfairly linked to lower castes. Dumont argues that the caste system is not just a form of social stratification but a representation of the overarching values of Indian society, particularly the concept of purity and pollution.
- **M.N. Srinivas** explains "Sanskritization" as a process where lower castes adopt vegetarianism, among other upper-caste practices, to elevate their social status.
- **André Béteille** observes that despite changes in the caste system, dietary habits remain indicators of caste identity, perpetuating inequality.
- **Gail Omvedt** analyzes caste through a Marxist lens, showing how caste and class together influence dietary choices and social standing. The Term Kuccha food, often simple and perishable, is linked to lower castes and seen as less pure. Pukka food, associated with higher castes, signifies purity and ritual suitability due to its elaborate cooking. These traditional associations are evolving with societal changes and personal choices.

Contemporary sociologists note that while globalization has blurred caste-based dietary lines, traditional views on vegetarianism and caste purity still hold sway in many areas.

In conclusion, Zomato's 'pure veg' initiative serves as a real-world example of several sociological theories, including symbolic interactionism, which looks at how people interact based on shared meanings and symbols, such as 'pure veg' being a symbol of caste purity. It's a reminder that our choices are shaped by and reflect the complex tapestry of societal structures and beliefs.

70 HOUR WORK PER WEEK-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



- Long work hours can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and an imbalance in work-life equilibrium.
- In ***alienated labour***, **Marx** claims, humans are reduced to the level of an animal, working only for the purpose of filling a physical gap, producing under the compulsion of direct physical need
- "Working long hours" has become a "social disease" that needs to be addressed (**Spector et al., 2017**).
- All workers create more value at work than they receive in wages. **The extra 'surplus' value** goes in the boss's pocket as profit. More working hours with same salary will only add surplus value pocketed by Bourgeois class.
- **Tondokoro et al.** confirmed that long working hours, shortened sleep time may be a key factor in psychological distress. This study highlights the importance of sleep management in maintaining employees' mental health and the need to consider the circumstances and conditions of other daily tasks, such as working hours, in order to better manage sleep.
- **Kanter (1977)** emphasized the fundamental interconnectedness of the work and life by highlighting how work affects the family and vice versa. Along the same Lines, Pleck (1995) defined what he termed as spillover as a phenomenon where work role affects the family role and contrariwise.

INDIAN DIASPORA & CASTE

- **A 2016 Equality Labs** survey of 1,500 South Asians in the U.S. showed 67% of Dalits who responded reported being treated unfairly because of their caste.

REPORTAGE CASTE

California's Legal Ground in Battling Caste Discrimination Takes Centre Stage in Historic Cisco Case

- **A 2020 survey of Indian Americans by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** found caste discrimination was reported by 5% of survey respondents. While 53% of foreign-born Hindu Indian Americans said they affiliate with a caste group, only 34% of U.S.-born Hindu Indian Americans said they do the same.
- Two cities, Seattle and Fresno, Calif., made caste a protected class in 2023, and several universities, including the 23-campus California State University System, have also created special caste-based protections for students and faculty.

Explained | Will the Seattle move shield against caste bias?

Why are Dalit rights activists calling the Seattle City Council ban on caste discrimination historic? How will it impact movements across America and the world for equal rights? What are the anti-caste laws in India?

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WHEN CASTE FOLLOWS YOU OVERSEAS

The Indian diaspora in America is often celebrated as a "model minority" for its educational achievements and professional success, epitomizing the pursuit of the American Dream. However, this portrayal obscures the deep-seated caste identities that many individuals carry with them. **Despite geographic and social mobility, these caste affiliations persist**, influencing behaviors and attitudes in ways that are often unexamined and perpetuated unconsciously.

The case of Cisco, where allegations of caste discrimination surfaced, **highlights a critical paradox**:

- Highly educated and seemingly modern individuals can still revert to practices rooted in caste prejudices.
- This incident serves as a stark reminder that migration and professional success do not automatically lead to the shedding of entrenched social hierarchies.
- Instead, caste identities remain ingrained, shaping interactions and perpetuating divisions even in a new cultural context.

From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon can be understood through the lens of socialization and the persistence of social structures.

- The Indian diaspora, while navigating new social landscapes, continues to be influenced by the social norms and institutions of their homeland. These norms are internalized early in life and can persist despite exposure to new cultural settings. **The persistence of caste among the diaspora illustrates how social identities and structures are resilient, adapting to new environments rather than being entirely abandoned**.

Moreover, the Cisco case acts as a critical catalyst, bringing to light the covert ways in which caste discrimination operates in ostensibly meritocratic environments.

- It challenges the assumption that migration leads to the dissolution of traditional social barriers. Instead, it shows that caste can be a hidden yet powerful force that shapes social dynamics in diverse contexts.

This case should spur broader awareness and dialogue about the ways in which caste continues to influence social behavior among the diaspora. It underscores the need for introspection and active efforts to address and dismantle these prejudices, even in seemingly progressive and rational communities. By highlighting the persistence of caste in diaspora communities, it opens up new avenues for questioning and transforming these deep-seated social structures.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES & MODERN TIMES

RELEVANCE

A. KARL MARX

THEORY OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM & CLASS

- **Income Inequality:** The widening gap between the wealthy elite and the working class in many countries mirrors Marx's prediction of increasing class polarization under capitalism. The widening gap between the rich and the poor in many countries can be seen as a result of the capitalist mode of production, where the bourgeoisie accumulate wealth through the exploitation of the proletariat.

1%	The top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1%, while *670 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their wealth.
70	There are 119 billionaires in India. Their number has increased from only 9 in 2000 to 101 in 2017. Between 2018 and 2022, India is estimated to produce 70 new millionaires every day.
10x	Billionaires' fortunes increased by almost 10 times over a decade and their total wealth is higher than the entire Union budget of India for the fiscal year 2018-19, which was at INR 24422 billion.
63 M	Many ordinary Indians are not able to access the health care they need. 63 million of them are pushed into poverty because of healthcare costs every year - almost two people every second.
941 yrs	It would take 941 years for a minimum wage worker in rural India to earn what the top paid executive at a leading Indian garment company earns in a year.

"The 'Billionaire Raj' headed by India's modern bourgeoisie is now more unequal than the British Raj headed by the colonialist forces," says a new study by the World Inequality Lab.

- **Technological Advancement:** Historical materialism can help explain how technological advancements, such as automation and artificial intelligence, are impacting society. These changes are not just about technological progress but also about the social relations they create, including issues like job displacement and economic inequality.
- **Gig Economy:** The rise of precarious and temporary work arrangements, such as freelance or gig work, highlights the vulnerability of workers and the potential for exploitation by capitalist interests.
- **Globalization:** The globalization of capital has led to the outsourcing of jobs to countries with lower labor costs, often at the expense of workers in more developed countries. . It reflects the interests of the capitalist class in expanding markets and increasing profits, often at the expense of workers in both developed and developing countries.

- **Corporate Power / Monopolisation / Cartelization:** The dominance of multinational corporations in shaping economic and political policies can be seen as a form of capitalist control over society, consistent with Marx's critique of the bourgeoisie's influence.
- **Social Movements:** The emergence of social movements advocating for workers' rights, such as the Fight for \$15 movement in the United States, demonstrates ongoing class struggles and the pursuit of economic justice.
- **Automation:** The increasing use of automation and artificial intelligence in production processes raises concerns about job displacement and further exacerbating inequalities between capital owners and workers.
- **Housing Crisis:** The housing affordability crisis in many urban areas reflects the commodification of housing and the impact of speculative real estate practices on working-class individuals and families.
- **Political Polarization:** The growing divide between left-wing and right-wing ideologies in many countries can be understood, in part, as a reflection of class interests and conflicts within society.
- **Environmental Crisis:** Marx's theory can also help analyze the environmental crisis, as it emphasizes the exploitation of natural resources for profit. The focus on endless growth and consumption in capitalist societies has led to environmental degradation and climate change.

These examples illustrate how Marx's theory of class continues to provide a framework for understanding contemporary social and economic issues related to inequality, exploitation, and class conflict.

COMMODITY FETISHISM

Commodity fetishism is a concept in Karl Marx's critique of political economy. It refers to the way in which commodities (goods or services) are imbued with social power and value, often obscuring the social relations and labor processes that underlie their production. Here are some examples of commodity fetishism in modern society:

- **Brand Loyalty:** Consumers often develop strong attachments to brands, believing that they hold special qualities or status. This can obscure the fact that these brands are produced through labor and are part of a system of capitalist production.
- **Luxury Goods:** Luxury items often carry high prices and are associated with prestige and social status. This can create a fetishistic relationship where the object itself becomes more important than the labor that went into producing it or the social relations it represents.
- **Advertising:** Advertising plays a significant role in creating fetishistic relationships with commodities by presenting them as essential to happiness, success, or identity. This can obscure the true nature of the products and the social relations involved in their production.

- **Global Trade:** The global trade in commodities often involves complex supply chains that obscure the labor and environmental costs of production. Consumers may not be aware of the conditions under which the goods they consume are produced.
- **Digital Goods:** In the digital age, commodities such as software, music, and movies are often treated as infinitely replicable and disposable, leading to a detachment from the labor and resources required to produce them.

Overall, commodity fetishism highlights how the social relations of capitalism can be obscured by the fetishistic focus on commodities themselves, leading to a distorted understanding of the true nature of production and consumption.

BIRKIN BAG & COMMODITY FETISHISM

The example of Birkin bags and luxury brands exemplifies Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. The emphasis on the high quality, symbolic value, and exclusivity of luxury goods can lead consumers to attribute almost magical qualities to these commodities, overlooking the labor that went into their production.

The high price, rarity, and unique aesthetics of Birkin bags contribute to their allure, creating a perception of value that is detached from the social relations and labor processes involved in their production. This phenomenon highlights how commodities can be fetishized, with their social and labor aspects obscured by their perceived value in the market.

Moreover, the idea that commodities appear to have an inherent value compared to all other commodities, as mentioned in "Removing the Veil," further underscores Marx's argument that the social relations of production are hidden behind the exchange value of commodities. This illustrates how capitalist societies can fetishize commodities, leading to a distortion of their true value and the labor embedded within them.