

COMMUNAL RELATIONS IN INDIA'S ECONOMY

India is a religiously plural society. If we heed Kancha Ilaiah and discount Bahujans from the Hindu fold, caste Hindus are under half the population. Muslims made up 9.8% of the population in 1951 and 14 % in 2011 – 172m people, about 200m now.

India's religions are etched into the economy. Although there's no evidence that Hindu caste relations obstruct the growth of the economy, the founding fathers of Independent India are on record as regarding caste as a barrier to factor and labour mobility. But they were confident that the steel frame of the state and the animal spirits of the market together would 'automatically' dissolve the obscurantism of Hinduism.

This has not happened. Religion has not been relegated to the private sphere.

Part of the explanation for why this hasn't happened relates to the formal and practical irrationalities embedded in the state. India's conception of secularity means respect for all religions but, through at least two processes, has generated a perverse practical outcome. 1. Equal respect has morphed over time to toleration of inequality between religions – and that towards Hinduism as the national secular religion – and as Hinduism as the dominant religion and then as Hindutva as a totalising concept of Hindu-ness. 2. Regulative law has been both contested and selectively enforced leaving space to for regulation by social forces. Among them is the 'big religion' which Weber had said might dissolve other customary rules which compete in the economy. Religion is one of India's social structure of accumulation. But it is also part of the carapace of institutions which are a social structure of discrimination.

Economic tensions reflecting discrimination escalate into political violence.

The history of communal riots and pogroms is a long one, one to which others today have borne witness and which has roots in pre Independence India. Since 2014, the Hindutva family and its armies have been emboldened – spreading camps for weapons training and preparation for civil war. Religion is also a mask for criminal attacks with impunity from the police. In 2020, communal clashes nearly doubled over the year before while arrests from these events dropped by 14%.¹ In fact since mid December 2021 in conventions in Haridwar, Delhi, Raipur and Ghaziabad there have been calls for the genocide of all Muslims (and in some calls all religious minorities and all Communists) (Z.U. Salam *Frontline* Jan 28th 2022 p15). Condemned by the Congress Party and CPI(M) there's been silence from other parties and a deafening even unconstitutional² silence from the PM.

While Lemkin defined genocide as the intent to destroy a people, politicide is the exclusion of a people from power, the elimination of a people from being thought to be a threat to a political elite's hegemony. Discrimination where a people is treated unequally and in a prejudiced way does not necessarily lead to either politicide or genocide but it's an existing condition, a context, for both.

While others have warned about the speed with which hate speech can morph into violence I want to use my time to talk about two dimensions of discrimination in the economy. These flare into violence. They are slow motion preconditions for violence. They are part of Galtung's structure of violence.

¹ 1-2000 communal event depending on your source. Time of India report from Lok Sabha 2-2-22)

² In India's constitution there's a duty to promote harmony and brotherhood)

The first is the day to day discrimination faced by Muslim in the business economy. The second looks a little more deeply at what's afoot in the livestock economy.

Small town business economy. Muslims are not the only social identity group discriminated against in the business economy – dalits (SC) and tribals (ST) also face systemic discrimination. Indeed we can identify whole regions of discrimination which we have mapped in an Atlas.³ The south of the subcontinent which has been regarded by scholars to be pro poor. But in business - it's anti dalit - which is another process entirely.

Meanwhile self employment is the commonest kind of employment in India where 92% livelihoods are unregistered. So informal livelihoods have to be researched through survey statistics and fieldwork. This is how we can explore Muslims in business among other businesses in two small towns⁴. We find that Muslim firms are confined to certain sectors – fruit and veg, metal and auto repair, transport and fancy goods, non veg meals hotels – and retail rather than manufacture..They are small family businesses with low rates of return and low life expectancy. Disadvantaged by Hindu businessmen in credit markets at higher interest, in contact and business information in market prices (contracts are refused, raw material are more costly and prices of finished products lower, reimbursement takes longer), they hardly grow in size and are unable to diversify. With little change since liberalisation in 1991 these relations are the seedbed for politicide and violence when Muslim firms compete directly with Hindu firms.⁵

The livestock economy is 25% of agricultural GDP and provides livelihoods for 9 % of the population. India produces 20% of the world's cattle and buffaloes, it's the number 1 producer of milk, has been a top exporter of beef, the world's second largest producer of leather and shoes – the industry is worth \$27bn and employs 3m people and in 2015 its exports amount to \$6bn.

All this activity requires the slaughter of animals yet the cow has always been sacred to Hindus.

The livestock economy is disproportionately a sector for Muslims and Dalits. Muslim livelihoods are grounded in agriculture and its multipliers – renting out draught animals, cattle transport and trade, slaughter, tanning and leather work and processing of other parts of cattle carcasses.

Markets for beef in India are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, SC and ST consumers.

But huge tensions are being generated – since 2005 – cow slaughter has been banned - now in 20/28 states (but not in NE, WBengal and Kerala and some states allow old unviable milk cows and male calves to be killed). 2017 the BJP government banned all sale of cattle for slaughter but had to drop this - after widespread protests.

We watch the increasing mobilisation of cow vigilantes - gau rakshasa - which feel free to assault Muslim suspects with meat (any meat). Case of Pehlu Khan's death was recorded on cellphone and broadcast nationally on TV. 86% of those killed in cow-related violence are Muslim and rest Dalit.

³ 2014 Barbara Harriss-White, Elisabetta Basile, Anita Dixit, Pinaki Joddar, Aseem Prakash and Kaushal Vidyarthee) DALITS AND ADIVASIS IN INDIA'S BUSINESS ECONOMY: Three Essays and an Atlas, New Delhi Three Essays Press

⁴ Their identities cannot be revealed.

⁵ Here's an example https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997_Coimbatore_riots

But also between 2014-17 over 200k live cattle seized from Muslims, cooped up in shelters and then sold to Hindus for agricultural work! \$36m worth of cattle have been stolen in this way by gau rakshas.

Starving feral cows are starting to be reported invading and rampaging through fields.

The outcomes for Muslims include 1-3 m livelihoods destroyed in the livestock economy before 2017 alone. And more in multiplier industries: leather and shoes. And countless more in domestic work of women – gloves and leather goods.⁶ The wages of those still in work have dropped.

Massive amounts of foreign exchange have been lost – exports declined by 40-50% from 2015 to 2020 – international demand dropped. India falls down the ranks of countries participating in the global leather industry.

These are simply two examples of Muslims in India's economy.⁷

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We see the genocidal impulse in which the victim is outside the bounds of social obligation and humanisation and morally loaded as evil is a *social construct, a social process*.

The India I first visited in 1969 was a pluralist society striving for secularism democracy and socialism. With many liberal intellectuals then, I did believe that Weber's steel frame (the state) and Smith's animal spirits (the markets) would prevail over the obscurantism of religions. Much progress has been achieved. Average life expectation has risen from 48 to 70.

But that for Muslims is estimated as 10 year less and average. India is moving towards a form of social fascism in which Muslims are the largest and most dangerous moral 'other' among other 'others'..

Colleagues have spoken today of the rapidity with which rhetoric and hate speech can be translated into violence. I argue here that longstanding, day to day practices of economic discrimination also have this potential – which we must all deplore.

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Forces for Renewal, SouthEastAsia – Cambodia – Conference on *India Genocide Warning*

⁶ On top of the devastation after demonetisation, GST and labour law 'reform'. And non –relief during covid

⁷ See B Harriss-White India Working – e-book.