

## Article

# The Great Western Social Churn: India Caught in the Crosshairs

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### Abstract

*India is in the crosshairs of literally every liberal publication of the western world. Its democracy is described as eroding and it is generally portrayed as slowly but inexorably moving towards fascism. This is despite the fact that press criticism of the government has never been sharper or more vocal, and that the head of state and head of government come from two historically underprivileged castes - a Dalit and an Other Backward Caste (OBC). This is also despite the fact that this government has done more to protect women's rights, spent more money on religious minority scholarships and afforded more welfare schemes bringing basic amenities like electricity and toilets to every Indian. While it is easy to see this as a conspiracy, it is much easier explained by sociological and political trends in the West. India needs to understand and counter these socio-political trends rather than simply feel sorry about conspiracies.*

**I**t's open season on India it seems. Going by what you read in western newspapers, think-tanks and academia, you'd be excused for thinking that India is a dystopian nightmare combining the worst aspects of Nazi Germany, George Orwell's "1984", and Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale". Yet, scratch but a little and you find that this uniformly negative coverage isn't just restricted to India, but covers a whole spectrum

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of issues and actors now deemed inimical to amorphous “liberal values” – be it Republicans in the United States, Tories in the United Kingdom, elected governments in Poland and Hungary and the entire nation of Russia, to name but a few. As this paper will show, the phenomenon is multicausal with multiple intersecting interests at play.

The end of the Cold War and the letting down of the guard by the United States against leftist indoctrination led to a slow but steady institutional capture of western institutions by the left in the US. Around this same period, China rapidly embraced capitalism and acquired enormous economic clout, making a “battle of economic ideas” (as the capitalist versus communist – USA versus USSR) irrelevant. This process was matched lockstep by the digital and information revolution, which for the first time in human history created a new niche of “quasi white collar” jobs while democratising both information and publication. The sheer rapidity of disruptions in the marketplace meant that companies large and small, needed new means of social control - intellectual tools to terrorise the general population into thought control and conformity that would severely limit their ability to disrupt the market – freedom of thought, after all, is the mother of innovation. Simultaneously, an end to discriminations and an era of unprecedented gender, race and other equalities lead to a dearth of “causes”, creating the need to find new scapegoats to explain personal failure. Cumulatively, this led to a saturation not just of left-wing ideas, but also resentment and the glorification of failure (which is the bedrock of left-wing politics), across the academic spectrum, which permeated into think-tanks, journalism and ultimately government. The disastrous decline of legacy media that accompanied this process, combined with the deeply polarising and aggregating nature of social media, meant such media houses were forced to grow increasingly extreme themselves, while precarious revenues meant that cheaper opinions were substituted for difficult to gather (and expensive) primary source news.

India and Hinduism essentially fell victim to the combined social disruptions in the West. Why? Because it failed to industrialise, grow wealthy and bribe or deter through money, because it failed to pick sides, and because of the sorry state of humanities education in India. All of which meant that India failed to read the tea leaves early --leave alone becoming a thought leader, and because its stoic citizens and adherents seldom, if ever, played the victim card. Paradoxically, this was also

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because India's diaspora, as it grew wealthy, refused to play identity politics or become a vote bank. Nursing a deep inferiority complex, it sought to integrate and ingratiate itself with those who would wish them nothing but harm, rather than assert and, when needed, protest.

This paper is a brief explanation of the cataclysmic and ongoing collapse of the enlightenment in the West, and a series of abysmal early warning and course correction failures within India – a failure which has meant that a civilisation subject to near constant genocide over the last thousand years is deemed the perpetrator rather than the victim; a failure that means that anyone who stands up for the civilizational values and ethos of Hinduism and India, as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates do, are brush stroked as violent fascists. The paper sets the socioeconomic background and nature of the threat that India faces today, the task ahead, the dangers and the opportunities.

## Background

Two countries critical to the “Western enlightenment,” France and the United States, are central to what unfolded – primarily because of the enormous intellectual normative power of France and the ability to globalise messaging by the United States. A simple example of this would be the pizza, a once obscure (mediocre to delicious, depending on who you ask) southern Italian edible – created through the genius of the Italian peasant, but popularised world over entirely by the globalising power of US capitalism, from movies to fast food chains.

It was in France that alongside its great literary traditions, began a faux socio-literary tradition – that of the *soixante huitards* – (the “sixty-eight” because in 1968 they occupied all the prominent positions at the Sorbonne) crafted by pseudo-intellectuals like Sartre, Derrida and Foucault. They mostly wrote utter rubbish in utterly complex language, and most people not wanting to seem uneducated grew to “appreciate” the non-existent “profundity” in their writings. Their writing masked a deep gripe, the inner realisation that they could never compete with true giants like Albert Camus, but they passed off their failures onto others, blaming everyone and everything that was not them for what travailed them. Their value (like social media that emerged much later) was pure shock and nothing else, going so far as to normalise their personal perversions like paedophilia.<sup>1</sup> In that sense, this was a variation because after all for

every true impoverished genius like Mozart, there has to be an undeserving wealthy mediocrity like Salieri, consumed by acute inferiority.<sup>2</sup> Several leftists, of course, saw the problem immediately – that identity politics would destroy class politics - but kept quiet due to left-left solidarity, voicing their opinions only when it was too late. For example, Noam Chomsky in 2013 calling out Paris intellectuals as “the center of the rot”.<sup>3</sup>

For a France in the middle of economic stagnation and social upheaval, coming to terms with the fact it was no longer a superpower (a fantasy thoroughly destroyed by the 1956 Suez invasion fiasco) through the 1960s and '70s, the resonance of these intellectuals were the only power projection they could realistically manage. It afforded a much-needed cultural salience for France at a time when the US establishment would ostracise any such remotely leftists' views; Reagan going so far as to impose sanctions on France<sup>4</sup> in the 1980s for among other things – having communists as part of a socialist government!<sup>5</sup>

All this would change rapidly in the 1990s after the fall of the USSR. Despite the emerging threat of China, its hard turn towards capitalism and the fuelling of a higher American lifestyle thanks to China's ability to produce essentials at vastly cheaper prices, meant that China would be dealt with as a military threat not an ideological one. This period was also the beginning of the “information age” which subsumed the “digital revolution” that had preceded it in the late 1970s and 1980s. This was a particularly crucial period anthropologically as it changed almost 12 millennia of social structures and hierarchies that came before it and upturned the economic structure of the manufacturing age of the preceding 2 to 3 centuries.

Starting in the 1950s owing to a significant amount of disposable income, the US economy employed more people in services than it did in manufacturing.<sup>6</sup> However, the miniaturisation that came with the information revolution drastically reduced the numbers required for manufacturing. Compounding this was the fact that while service sector jobs had a low skill set requirement, the information age saw the value of service based corporations shoot up well past traditional manufacturing.<sup>7</sup> This created a class of people I label as “quasi white collar” – people whose output requirements are relatively low skill for a developed country, but come with all the trappings of a white collar job despite essentially being line workers. The soaring income gap between the

owners of these new corporate giants, (massive cruise liner sized personal yachts<sup>8</sup>, commercial airliners as private jets<sup>9</sup>) and their employees combined with the valuations of the company and the grandiose delusions of self-worth of their quasi-white-collar employees was one powder keg.

Historically, while only between 2-7% of any population was suited for traditional white-collar jobs<sup>10</sup>, for the first time there was a significant surfeit of quasi white collar jobs with all the associated economic empowerment. The second powder keg was the fact that the rate of technological innovation and hence disruption became faster than it ever has in human history.<sup>11</sup> After all for those old enough to remember this, it was in 1995 that mobile phones were introduced in India<sup>12</sup>, and Nokia became a byword and aspiration for every Indian. Born as a rubber and cable manufacturer, by the 2000s it contributed nearly 4% of Finland's GDP and accounted for a full 21% of its exports.<sup>13</sup> Yet a mere 20 years later in 2014 Nokia as we know it had ended and been acquired by Microsoft.<sup>14</sup>

This kind of rapidity of change threatened the new capitalists, used as they were to corporate pre-eminence lasting over decades if not centuries as Ford, Boeing, Mercedes, etc., had shown. In the previous centuries hierarchy through religion had acted as a normative force for social order. But when innovation was threatening hierarchies and order in a post-religious world, a new form of social control was required. One based on perpetual social strife and terror – long since eliminated by the state capacities that the industrial revolution brought along, leading to a state monopoly on violence. Consequently, the need of the hour for both new and entrenched elites was to create a social disruptor – something that would weaken the power of the state, increase their own power, reduce limitations on their exercise of power through a delegitimisation of the state's monopoly on violence. Effectively, what they wanted was a return to a pre-industrial phase of development – one in which identities were all important (as manifested through anti-Jewish pogroms and the anti-Muslim Crusades or the large-scale demolition of Hindu temples). The capital existed given that the information age had concentrated unprecedented wealth in private hands

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creating a power differential greater than that between the East India Company and the British Government. The theoretical basis of this was to be the postmodernism of the venal *soixtante huitards* of Paris and the means of dissemination was to be social media.

### Intersection

In a rapidly post-religious world where social controls and norms were fast eroding, therefore, yet another actor came into play – a product of the same information revolution and the quasi white-collar revolution: social media. As a researcher who works on the intersection of terrorism and technology, the democratising effects of technology began to attract me as a field of study long back. Within the dark web we had noticed that much of Al Qaeda's recruitment and business were carried out here since the 1990s-- from radicalisation, to recruitment, from finances to operation planning and execution, the dark web was a treasure trove of information. The most curious social impact we noticed was how the web tended to create these online communities of true believers and radicals – be it UFOs, government conspiracies or Al Qaeda. Invariably these would be the anti-social elements adrift in normal society that found fellow travellers and kindred spirits similar to themselves online. They would form a powerful self-reinforcing nucleus and invariably the most extreme and assertive would rise to the top within these virtual communities which invariably would translate to some terrorist action somewhere in the world. Curiously, this also followed a classic leftist pattern – the breaking of family and societal bonds or their subjugation to an all-subsuming ideology. With the advent of twitter and politicisation of Facebook in the late 2000s we saw these same dynamics play out on social media – the creation of online communities that broke societal and familial bonds while extremism was actively incentivised through publicity and followers. Before a fanatic would at best have an audience of a handful, suddenly he/she had an audience of a few million.

Meanwhile, the lessened hostility towards leftists since the 1990s and the ability of the left to produce copious quantities of theory (of which some were excellent, but the rest were overwhelmingly postmodernist junk in keeping with Lenin's famous dictum "every idea is worth a thousand pages of theory"), meant that the humanities, already the subject of a left capture, became even more entrenched. The results would begin to show in the following decades as humanities departments started acting as feeders for

those aspiring towards careers in government, think-tanks or the press.

Where does this leave us in the 2020s? A leftist capture of narratives and institutions, unprecedented economic prosperity having transformed a now increasingly irrelevant class-struggle into an identity struggle; the constant invention of new identities and new imagined grievances to create a state of perpetual civil strife; a deep polarisation and radicalisation of society driven through social media; a cynical exploitation of all these factors by a section of quasi white-collar new elite and entrenched elites to prevent change and slow down the pace of disruptive innovation through social control, including online lynch mobs. After all, who will talk about Apple, Google or Twitter moving jobs to China at the cost of Americans, if you tell the average American that he or she is not well off because of “institutional racism”; while atoning for “white privilege” means offshoring more jobs to China? What if you institutionalise this bogus narrative through ideological control of universities and permeate it to the government through think-tanks?

### The Indian Context

Today India finds itself in the midst of the perfect storm where all these socioeconomic phenomena have come home to roost. The attacks on Narendra Modi, the BJP, the RSS, Hinduism, and India itself are but a very small part of this great global churn – but they are a bellwether for defeating this frightful spectre that now confronts the nation.

India’s problem has partially been one of being an outlier that has bucked almost every social theory. Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, India was viewed with suspicion by the West because despite being a democracy it chose either to be neutral or, in most cases, side with the communist bloc. The communist bloc tended to view India with no less suspicion. Despite being as diverse and varied and ridden with caste, and a Brahmin leadership, India was a plum opportunity for conversion to communism and yet never did. The second problem was one of isomorphic mimicry in which foreign social constructs and theories were applied to India completely out of context. While India did see significant social churn it never reached the kind of breaking point required for revolution. Essentially, the caste-class obfuscation that was the basis of Indian Marxism,

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failed. Instead, India in its own peaceful and non-disruptive way embarked on social, political and gradual economic reforms.

Indeed, given that India was largely a pre-industrial society, the path breaking reforms of 1991 and the second wave in 1999 led to a trajectory quite different from that of the West. It saw the creation of a services sector and rapid urbanisation without going through the disruptive effects of industrialisation. This led to a new middle class – entirely aspirational, that wanted to achieve and found several opportunities to do so. They did not want ‘handouts’, they did not have time to be angry with the world for perceived injustices. Most importantly, this was a generation that valued hard work and the creation of wealth, unlike their western counterparts who had no knowledge of abject poverty, had run out of causes, and needed new targets to blame for persistent inequality in their societies. Simultaneously, the nature of the Indian state – and its imagined identity-- also needed to change. After 50 years of independence the ‘idea of India’ to be dependent on one political ideology based on a short phase-- the freedom struggle-- in a history that stretched back over 5000 years, was simply not glue enough. All these factors coalesced around the rise of the BJP -- the need for new economics, the need to accommodate new aspirations, the need for social mobility, the need for a new glue – a ‘civilisational India’ based on a shared united heritage rather than an identity construct that exacerbated caste divides which had frayed badly during the 1990s.

The Indian trajectory, therefore, directly ran at cross purposes to what the neo-Marxist left had decided was the path. Of course, there are ways to defray their intellectual assault – either keep them dependent on your cheap production as China does (after all what CEO will criticise the sweatshop that helps him make billions); or throw money at them like Saudi Arabia (will you really criticise your major funder); or be electorally salient (would you talk down to a community that could decide your fate in the next elections). Sadly, in all these areas India’s slow pace or inadequacy became problematic. India never really industrialised, it skipped industrialisation, and as post-Soviet Russia discovered, services are replaceable unlike cheap labour. So, India had no leverage on US Businesses. Continuing regulations and wealth distribution policies meant no significant surpluses accrued to be lavished on purchasing international investments and making them beholden. Indeed, India’s negligible disposable income made it no bigger a market than small countries like Australia. Finally, the economically



powerful Indian diaspora, precisely because of their shunning of identity politics and immigration to the West to overcome the class divide, never formed a coherent voting block or pressure group in their host countries.

All these led to a perfect intersection of Interests in taking down India as we know it. Social strife had to be created and portrayed, be it on the grounds of caste, religion, economics or even pandemic management. The examples abound, but let us first look at the bona fides of the accusers. Publications like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Economist* have supported every single “humanitarian” intervention since the 1990s despite the enormous human suffering they have wreaked. Obviously, given the fact that these have led to greater instability and earning opportunities for their funders and advertisers and refugee flows that have strengthened their identity-based politics, would have nothing to do with it?

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Think-tanks, whose only exposure to India is the five-star lobbies and conference halls of Mumbai and Delhi, would presume to tell us what to do, despite being wrong about every previous humanitarian intervention wrought on unsuspecting victims ostensibly to “improve their lives”. These would be the same think-tanks that peddled a consistent, echo chamber, line on the Middle East that Trump proved so momentously as wrong. They can never forgive him for exposing them so thoroughly and getting more peace agreements signed between Israel and Muslim nations than all previous administrations combined that had relied on the advice of such think tanks. These were the same “distinguished” academia that provided disastrous economic advice to the previous Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) dispensation while sitting on the National Advisory Council and who led the Congress to its worst-ever defeat from which it has not recovered seven years on.

In many ways, this is like ex-President Ashraf Ghani – a known socialite in New York chatterati classes-- who wrote an acclaimed book on fixing fallen states<sup>15</sup>, but could not fix his own country and fled with his ill-gotten gains. Mind you, the Newspapers, Think Tanks and Academia have been the biggest beneficiaries of disastrous policies, given they get millions splurged on them for hyped up coverage, conferences and

overpriced studies to ideate solutions to problems. Yet, somewhere between the business class international travel and five-star hotel lobbies, it's curious how none of them ever manage to fix anything. Newspapers also benefit from the added readership that death and misery seem to bring – a peculiar vicarious pleasure of seeing horrible things happen to others while sitting safely at a distance – not unlike Rome's gladiatorial sports. Effectively, this is the old Roman formula of "*pane e circo*" (bread and circus).

Leaving their illustrious track record aside, one must focus on the outright lies that are peddled and gotten away with. For example, the *Economist* has a known history of systematic lying.<sup>16</sup> The *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, if their coverage of the false Iraqi weapons of mass destruction weren't enough, covered themselves with no great glory peddling a non-existent "Russia Gate" hoax. The issue is in India they get away with a lot worse given the lack of systematic data and information collation and dissemination. For example, with their Indian Counterparts (essentially, an alliance of those who benefited from the largesse of the previous administration) they peddled a story of "rising intolerance" based on alleged "church attacks". When these were rapidly dispelled<sup>17</sup> they switched to "cattle lynching". Now as we know<sup>18</sup> the issue of cattle theft is intrinsically linked with organised crime – where drug and arms smuggling networks double up as cross border cattle smuggling networks. Moreover, the theft of cattle affected extremely vulnerable families where the cattle was the singular source of protein and a significant source of income. An accurate summation of the problem would have been that in an enforcement deficit state like India, where criminal gangs fill the lack of state monopoly on violence, a change in government would automatically realign power equations. Yet, despite a few disparate incidents that need to be placed in their correct sociological context, the episode was blown up as a nationwide phenomenon and a targeted assault on minorities. Reportage be damned, accuracy be damned, academic context be damned and any semblance of academic or policy rigour be damned!

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We saw the same episodes play out again over the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) debates or the continuum of violence sparked by malevolent and outright dishonest reportage, commentary, 'think-tankery,' and academic chicanery that started at Delhi's Seelampur with riots, proceeded onto a highly menacing "peaceful gathering" at Shaheen Bagh that mauled<sup>19</sup> journalists and

lawyers and took hostages<sup>20</sup>, and culminated in the Delhi riots.

Yet again, the same steady stream of disinformation was peddled with the alleged “farmers’ protests” normalising the violent rioting in Delhi. During the abrogation of article 370 in Kashmir for example, two reporters of the *Washington Post* – Joanna Slater and Niha Masih-- fabricated entire sections of their reportage on medicine availability despite ample evidence that these were available in a hospital opposite the hotel where they (and I following up on their reporting) stayed, while others were busy

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reporting on non-existent police excesses<sup>21</sup>. The *BBC*, for example, fabricated police atrocities, not even substantiated by their own images,<sup>22</sup> while the *Independent* reporting on stories of excessive violence couldn’t find anyone except the same protestor<sup>23</sup> to film in September that the BBC had filmed in August! Their coverage of the Covid went from praising a socialist government in Sweden for refusing to shut down a country, to praising a socialist government in New Zealand for a draconian shut down, but no matter what India did – it was uniformly bad. When the States, to whom health powers had been delegated by the Central government in September 2020, failed to cough up a robust vaccination programme, the Centre was blamed and when the Centre did a spectacular job of vaccinating half the population within months it was entirely ignored. When funds disbursed in mid- 2020 for an expected oxygen shortage remained unused by States, again the Central government was blamed, and when oxygen shortages were shown to be vastly exaggerated in Court, the narrative moved on to why the Pfizer vaccine was not made available, accusing the two Indian vaccine producers of nepotism and cronyism.

## Conclusion

To understand how powerful this lobby is, all one needs to know is that at the time of writing this paper Adar Poonawala, one of the two producers of the Covid vaccine in India, has donated 10 crores to a TV news channel whose reporters were at the forefront of maligning him with charges of Nepotism and Cronyism.<sup>24</sup> It would, however, be a huge mistake to get carried away and focus on just what the Western media and their local compatriots report, what gets echoed in their think-tanks, and what gets cited in academia or their exclusion of specific news and views to create a

history and echo chamber that will reflect how they viewed the situation rather than how it actually was. This is, of course, not new. Kings who gave liberally to poets and authors were glorified in history despite often being atrocious, while those who did not were either reviled or consigned to the dustbin of History. However, as this paper has attempted to show, we are no longer dealing with mere courtiers and the need for patronage. There is a massive social churn happening in the West – one where business interests are aligned with ideological, and with tools of disruption and disaggregation never seen in human history.

There must be a pushback, and it needs to be multifaceted. For the government, the need for validation by this toxic 'liberal' ecosystem is much like Chamberlain at Munich. It demands simultaneously both capitulation to the Western liberal social agenda and appeasement because they will never be sated. Even the fielding of "acceptable" faces – is capitulation because "acceptable" to these forces means someone who will never call them out robustly. Moreover, the response has to be across the intellectual, government, communication, academic, economic domains through incentives and disincentives. The "intellectual" assault is merely the vanguard of a much larger and much more insidious project. The question is: will the powers that be fathom the terrifying depth of the task that faces us? It is the answer to this question that will decide the future of India.

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