Rural-Urban Divide in India

A look at the political and cultural difference between the urban and rural areas of India.

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India is experiencing cultural and economic changes on a scale not seen since the early 1990s. An influx of jobs, wealth, and Western culture concentrated mostly in big cities has created a divide between citizens in urban and rural areas. The ideological, philosophical, and cultural differences that have arisen between the two geographical subsets have been a cause for many conflicts, and have hindered the growth of the country. Casteism, illiteracy and sexism are rampant, and there are wide disagreements between rural and urban groups on these issues.

Social Structure – Caste and Religion

Mahatma Gandhi fought for the rights of the Dalit, a lower caste people who were segregated from society long before the British rule. The Dalit still have not been fully integrated into modern society. The existence of the Dalit inspired the creation of the reservation system by the founding fathers of India, which they thought would be an elegant solution to the problem of casteism.[1] The leaders of the Independence Movement hoped the reservation system would provide social equity for the underprivileged. The leaders hoped for equality and the abolition of the caste system, but neither of these has happened. Today, these measures are used as a weapon, and they have caused a cultural misunderstanding between different parts of the country.

The reservation system in India is a front for political competition and policy making. This system is not well-understood or discussed outside of the country, but it has a major impact on Indian Politics. By law, 50% of government jobs, standardized tests, educational

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[1] http://www.ambedkar.org/News/reservationinindia.pdf

institutions, and seats in legislatures are assigned to people belonging to the SC (Scheduled Castes) and ST (Scheduled Tribes) groups. This was established during the creation of the Indian Constitution in 1950 under Article 17.[2] Unfortunately equality was not achieved, and although this system helped people elevate themselves from poverty, it is now misused. The employees hired through this system are ill-qualified for their positions, which are guaranteed to their groups by law. The cut-off scores for higher educational institutions for the General Majority (GM) are higher than the scores required for those who fall under the reservation quota. Big caste organizations use this quota as a weapon to coerce the government to provide services and special favors. These organizations demand higher reservation for their caste by using civil-disobedience and disrupting public government services. This has caused a cycle of reliance on these systems for jobs and services, resulting in a poor-quality workforce. Although the aim of the provision is to elevate the poor, people from well-to-do socio-economic backgrounds continue to abuse this system to steal jobs from the underprivileged.

Education and Awareness

Culturally, urban cities in India have similar living standards to cities in the West. On the other hand, there is still a significant rural population in India (67%), many of whom cannot read and write.[3] The literacy standard in India is determined solely by whether a person can sign their name. The true literacy rate is therefore nowhere near the statistical one.

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[2] http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/coi-4March2016.pdf
[3] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS

Because the Indian government deems these rural areas educated, fewer resources are spent on education, leading to a lack of awareness among even the "educated" masses. Often, moral clashes arise between the uneducated and legitimately educated when there is a debate about morally ambiguous matters in the country. This ideological difference is aggravated by Indians from cities leaving the country for higher education. Upon their return, they are unable to recognize many cultural traits, which worsens the already existing divide between urban and rural people.

Political System

India has a two-party system at the national level, and has regional political parties competing in different states. These regional parties are usually affiliated with one of the two national political parties. Every democratic government relies on the governing entity and the opposition each having a significant voice in the decision-making process. But over the past few years, due to weak leadership and opposition from the INC (Indian National Congress), the current Prime Minister—Narendra Modi—has capitalized on this weak opposition and created a political climate which has very little opposition.[4] These circumstances resemble a dictatorship and are not healthy for a democracy. The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) from which the prime minister hails has ties to many Hindu extremist organizations.[5] Their conservative method of governing, the policies of which are based on Hinduism, has raised doubts about whether India is truly secular. Modi's

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[4] https://www.inc.in/en
[5] http://www.bjp.org

series of nationalist agendas, including the "Make in India" campaign among many others, has caused much friction between the left and the right-wing groups.[6]

Women in India

India is adopting Western culture, and since liberalism is characteristic of the West, there is tremendous conflict when problems involving gender arise. Historically, much like any other civilization, males were the dominant gender in India until the post-Independence era. Culturally, this is still the case in current Indian Society. Women are barred from being employed in certain jobs, sex education is not taught in most schools, and women are forced to remain unemployed and engage in home-making duties. Dowry, which is the practice of a bride's family giving a gift (usually large sums of money) to the groom, has contributed to the extremely high rate of female infanticide among poor families. This cultural tradition has caused the male libido to go unchecked for decades. In 2016, there were 19,765 cases of child rape registered in India—a rise of 82% from 2015.[7] Influential political figures have defended guilty men, attributing their behavior to male instinct. If this thinking isn't altered, far too many resources will be spent dealing with its ghastly consequences.

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[6] http://www.makeinindia.com/home

[7] http://ncrb.gov.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2016/pdfs/NEWPDFs/Crime%20in%20India%20-%202016%20Complete%20PDF%20291117.pdf
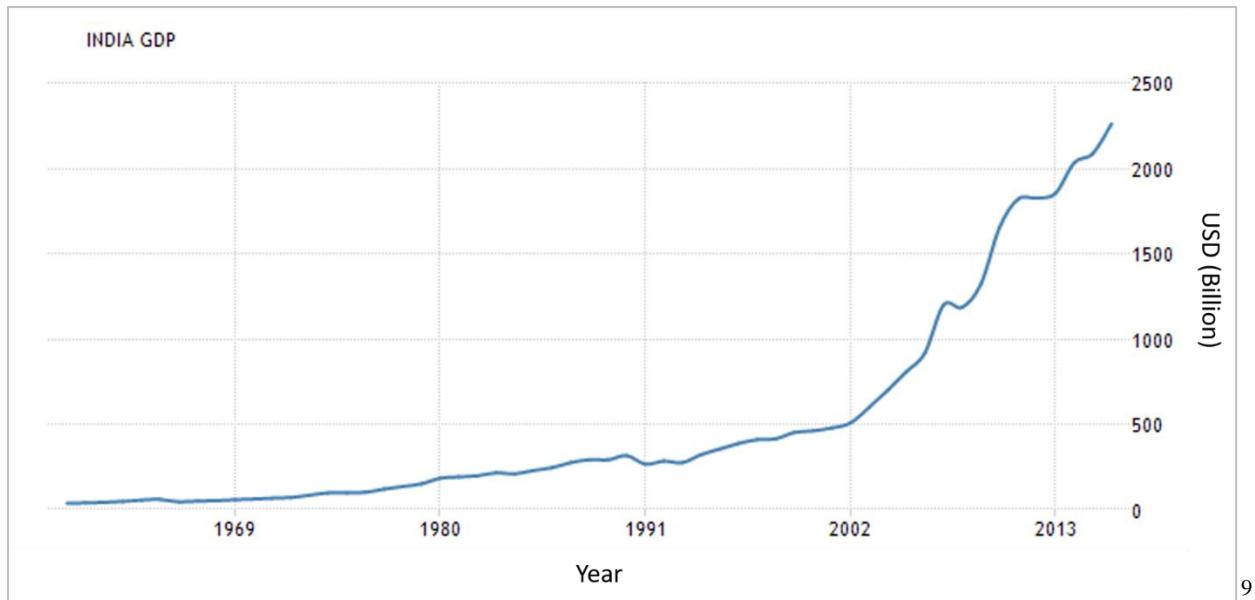
<u>Buying Votes</u>

India still relies heavily on cash for transactions, which is a cause for the rampant use of black money. Nearly 60% percent of all transactions that take place in India are in cash.[8] Political parties rely heavily on cash circulation for funding, which is mostly unaccounted for. Bribing and extortion are very common, even among urban governments. Any service that requires cooperation or permission from a government official almost always involves bribing. When elections take place, it is common to see reverse bribery when political parties invest heavily in buying votes from inhabitants of rural areas. Most lower-class people are unaffected by the political climate since the standard of living in rural areas is low, hence their votes are usually cast in exchange for money. During the colonial period, Christianity was spread in this manner. People were offered money and food in exchange for converting to Christianity. This practice of bribery by political parties may have been inherited from the British during that era.

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[8] https://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/paymentsystems_um.aspx

Indian GDP

INDIA GDP

India's GDP has risen exponentially since 1990. This is due to the economic liberalization of 1991, enacted by then Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. This led to an expansion in foreign investment and new competition from foreign companies against domestic markets. Prior to this economic expansion, markets in India were highly regulated and Indian corporations were secluded from the rest of the world. This economic liberalization is an important part of Indian history, not just economically but culturally. A cultural revolution took place in urban areas because of the rapid growth of the service sector, the increase in the standard of living, and the influx of Western culture. The rural areas couldn't keep pace with these changes, and since the 2000's have been dissatisfied, which has in turn increased the power of caste organizations.

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[9] https://tradingeconomics.com/india/gdp
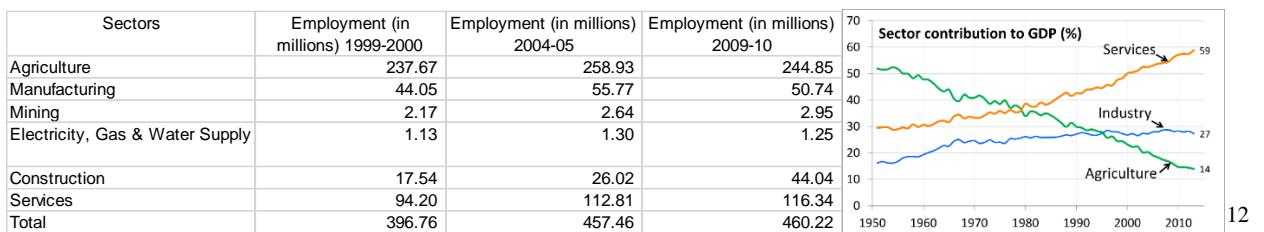
Technology

India has become one of the biggest players in the outsourcing market, with 60% of its services being outsourced to American companies. Most of this outsourcing has been in Information Technology. The outsourcing has ushered in a golden-age of technology, which is evidenced by the fact that India overtook America in smartphone sales in 2017 (by quantity and not by revenue).[10] This new technology increased social media usage and helped connect Indian citizens to one another. The downside to this technological expansion is that these platforms are used by uneducated people. Google recently published an article exposing how many petabytes of data are used to store meaningless images shared on messaging services.[11] False news is on the rise, and propaganda spreads quickly. This new communication has helped right-wing nationalist groups spread hypocritical and falsely patriotic sentiments, which have in turn hindered free speech and progressive thought. The Shri Rajput Karni Sena, a Rajput caste organization has caused turmoil in the state of Rajasthan and its neighbors. The Shiri objected to the release of the film *Padmavati* which, according to them, unfairly depicts Padmavati (an Indian queen whose existence is disputed). This is one among many examples of caste organizations suppressing creativity and free speech. Many cast organizations like the aforementioned rely on unemployed people, strength in numbers, and political backing since they represent a large voting body.

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[10] https://www.statista.com/statistics/431224/market-share-smartphone-shipments-countries/
[11] https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-internet-is-filling-up-because-indians-are-sending-millions-of-good-morning-texts-1516640068
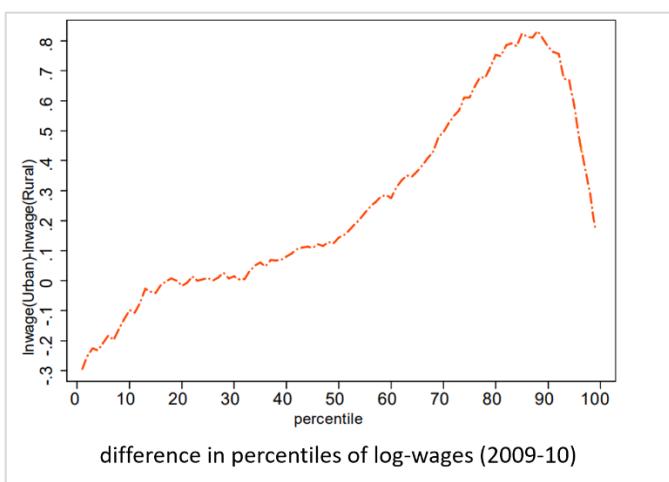
Intellectual communities are fearful of caste organization and any creative or academic findings are not published if they are perceived as offensive to religious and caste groups.

Inside the Indian Economy

Sectors	Employment (in millions) 1999-2000	Employment (in millions) 2004-05	Employment (in millions) 2009-10
Agriculture	237.67	258.93	244.85
Manufacturing	44.05	55.77	50.74
Mining	2.17	2.64	2.95
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	1.13	1.30	1.25
Construction	17.54	26.02	44.04
Services	94.20	112.81	116.34
Total	396.76	457.46	460.22

India is still considered to be an agro-based economy with 53% percent of its people employed in the field, yet the major GDP contributor is now the services sector which exists primarily in urban areas. An increasing amount of wealth is concentrated in the hands of urban areas at the cost of decreasing wages for people belonging to lower-income categories. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India due to poor standardization of the agriculutre market by the government. The prices of foods are set to a bare minimum so that the majority of the people are able to purchase them, but this in turn effects farmers who fall into the same low-income category. Frustration is expressed in the form of riots, demand for increase in reservation in governement services, and public disobedience. The wage gaps, in contrast to what the media say, are still increasing, especially between

difference in percentiles of log-wages (2009-10)

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[12] https://data.gov.in/catalog/employment-sector-industries

the 75th to 85th percentile.[13] This trend is likely to continue, especially with big corporations like Tata Corporation, Reliance, and Rajesh Exports increasing their revenue exponentially year-by-year and concentrating wealth in fewer hands. The disparity between wage-earners is also increasing exponentially. The top 1% of wage earners accumulated 24% of India's wealth in 2014.[14] The voting turnout in India is largely from the lower-income groups, and the votes of these groups are aggressively pursued by the government. The result of this government favoritism is that caste and violent political sub-organizations are rarely convicted of crimes and mal-practices.

Conclusion

It is important for India to bridge the rural-urban divide if it wants to become a world-leader. The political parties must stop targeting the rural areas solely for the sake of votes, and once elected they must focus development projects uniformly across all parts of the country. Although the urbanization rate is high compared to other Asian and African countries, the rate is not high enough to keep up with the globalization and cultural changes happening in metropolitan areas. India's policy makers need to stop using the wrong combination of capitalist and socialist methods to solve problems, and must reconsider the differences between these ideologies. Often, the average Indian confuses liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, which leads to conflicts and wars of ideas in the media. Even among the conventionally educated, most people are still morally uneducated. India spends

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[13] https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Hnatkovska-Lahiri-2012-Working-Paper-March.pdf
[14] http://indianexpress.com/article/business/economy/world-inequality-report-2018-indias-top-1-earners-received-22-of-national-income-in-2014-4992098/

most of its educational resources on enriching technical and medical schools instead of a well-rounded education. Despite these challenges, India is the biggest democracy and the sixth-strongest economy. Only when India closes the rural-urban gap will it become truly democratic and secular.