Smart Leaders IAS
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THE SOCIAL FACT

ISSUE NO: 33 | SOCIOLOGY BULLETIN

Nationalism in Sports

ISSUE 33 FEB -2026

Smart Leader IAS

THE SOCIAL FACT

is a monthly bulletin for sociology current affairs which tries to give aspirants a new dimensions in their sociology preparations. The Magazine has been designed in such away that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

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INSIDE THIS SOCIOLOCIAL BULLETIN

Connecting the dots :
Sociology is a process in making. Everyday newspapers and weekly have many important news, which have sociological angle in subtle form. This chapter helps you to connect those dots and give a clear picture of the reality.

Beyond Basics :
Going beyond basics in studies for examinations is crucial to foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter, enabling more comprehensive and critical thinking. It allows students to tackle complex questions with confidence and adapt to evolving exam formats.

Perspectives :
Beauty of Sociology, as a social science, is its capacity to offer different perspectives of a same topic. This chapter analyses a current topic with an unique social perspectives.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

- *January 2026 trend report based on Swiggy Scenes Data observed a significant shift in urban socialising patterns in India. Traditional "fixed-plan" outings—such as large group dinners or weekend parties—are reportedly declining. In their place, smaller, community-driven "micro-events" like supper clubs, run clubs, and themed gatherings such as "fake shaadis" (mock wedding workshops) are gaining popularity among urban youth :* ***This shift reflects changing forms of association in late modern urban life. Anthony Giddens describes contemporary relationships as increasingly reflexive and chosen rather than fixed by tradition. Micro-events offer curated, interest-based belonging in cities marked by mobility and anonymity.***

- *Fresh data released in January 2026 from Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) has reignited debate over the application of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. A significant proportion of cases reportedly involve consensual relationships between adolescents aged 16–18. Despite mutual consent, the law treats such cases as statutory rape, often triggered by parental complaints—frequently in situations involving inter-caste or socially disapproved relationships :* ***Modern societies regulate sexuality through legal and institutional mechanisms under the guise of protection. In this case, the law intended to shield minors may function as a tool for enforcing caste endogamy and parental authority.***

- *India's affluent consumers are increasingly turning to premium bottled water as a marker of lifestyle distinction. The premium water market is estimated at around $400 million and continues to grow, with imported and high-end domestic brands marketed as symbols of purity, exclusivity, and refinement. What was once an everyday necessity is now being rebranded as a luxury commodity within elite consumption spaces. :* ***This trend reflects how consumption becomes a language of status. When water—an essential resource—is commodified as luxury, it signals not just purchasing power but symbolic distinction. Premium water illustrates how even basic needs can be transformed into status markers in late capitalism, converting necessity into a performance of class identity.***

- *The continued public release and discussion of court documents related to the case of Jeffrey Epstein—often referred to as the "Epstein files"—have reignited debates in the United States about elite networks, accountability, and institutional transparency. The documents contain testimonies and references to powerful individuals allegedly connected to Epstein's trafficking operations. Their release has fueled media speculation, conspiracy narratives, and demands for greater judicial disclosure :* ***The controversy reflects public distrust toward elite institutions. C. Wright Mills's concept of the power elite is particularly relevant: political, economic, and social elites often occupy overlapping networks insulated from accountability.***

- *A massive nationwide strike has been called for February 12 by major trade unions including Indian National Trade Union Congress, AITUC, and CITU. Union leaders claim participation could reach up to 30 crore workers. Key demands include scrapping the Four Labour Codes, restoring the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), and ending the growing "casualization" of labour through outsourcing and contractual employment. :* ***From a Karl Marxian perspective, casualisation fragments collective worker identity while intensifying precarity. Pension rollback and labour code reforms shift risk from the state and employer to the individual worker. The scale of the strike indicates that industrial conflict has not disappeared but transformed—moving from factory floors to nationwide coalitions.***

- *Tensions resurfaced during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup as political rhetoric and diplomatic strain between India and Pakistan spilled into sporting discourse. Debates emerged over participation, venue politics, and symbolic gestures like hand shakes surrounding matches between India and Pakistan. :* ***High-stakes cricket matches become ritualised performances of national identity, where victory and defeat acquire political meaning. The controversy reveals how sport serves as a proxy battlefield—transforming geopolitical rivalry into emotionally charged spectacle. Rather than merely entertainment, such matches reproduce national boundaries through performance, media framing, and public sentiment.***

- *With the Union Cabinet's decision to include caste in the upcoming census, recent weeks have seen heated debates over its methodology. Self-Declaration Concerns: On February 3, 2026, the Supreme Court expressed agreement with a petitioner that caste enumeration should not rely solely on self-declaration without "verifiable material," citing risks of overcounting or inaccuracies. :* ***Scholars like M. N. Srinivas showed that caste identities are dynamic, shaped by processes like mobility and reclassification. The Court's concern reflects tension between fluid social reality and rigid state enumeration. Sociologically, the debate highlights how knowledge production is a site of power—defining caste statistically also shapes its political recognition, resource distribution, and social legitimacy.***

- *The University Grants Commission's draft equity regulations defined "caste-based discrimination" as actions directed specifically against SC, ST, and OBC students. This formulation triggered petitions in the Supreme Court, with critics arguing that the definition was exclusionary and failed to recognise the possibility of discrimination against General Category students. :* ***The backlash reveals a shift from structural justice to claims of formal equality. Sociologically, the debate illustrates tension between substantive equality (correcting historical disadvantage) and procedural equality (treating all categories identically), highlighting how policy definitions become arenas of contestation over the meaning of justice itself.***

- *Kerala Legislative Assembly recently passed the Kerala Official Language (Amendment) Bill, reinforcing the use of Malayalam in administrative communication and official documentation across state institutions. The bill seeks to strengthen Malayalam in governance. :* ***Benedict Anderson argued that nations are "imagined communities" constructed through shared linguistic practices. By institutionalising Malayalam in administration, Kerala reasserts cultural sovereignty within India's federal framework. At the same time, the bill reflects tensions between linguistic pride and bureaucratic pragmatism.***

- *The United States conducted a military operation—named "Operation Absolute Resolve"—in Caracas, leading to the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores :* ***This dramatic arrest illustrates how power and legitimacy are contested beyond formal institutions of a given nation-state. Rather than a simple legal process, the event becomes a symbolic assertion of global hegemonic power, raising questions about the role of international law.***

- *A February 2026 study by the Fairwork India Team examined the social consequences of AI-based management systems used by food delivery and ride-hailing platforms. The report found that delivery and cab partners increasingly experience "digital alienation," where performance, incentives, and penalties are determined by opaque algorithms rather than human supervisors. Workers also reported "involuntary overwork," driven by rating systems and automated allocation mechanisms :* ***This phenomenon reflects a new phase of labour control. Karl Marx described alienation as the separation of workers from control over their labour process. Algorithmic management intensifies this by replacing human negotiation with automated surveillance. Simultaneously, it echoes Max Weber's rationalisation, where efficiency-driven systems prioritise metrics over meaning.***

- *New data from urban matrimonial and dating platforms in February 2026 revealed a 20% increase in individuals aged 28–35 opting for "solo-living" or voluntary singlehood. A growing segment of urban professionals are either delaying marriage or consciously choosing to remain unmarried. Respondents cited "personal autonomy," career prioritisation, and emotional independence over traditional expectations of settling down* ***: This shift reflects changing norms of intimacy in late modern societies. Anthony Giddens described modern relationships as "pure relationships" sustained by choice rather than obligation. Marriage, once a social necessity embedded in kinship and economic security, is increasingly negotiated as a lifestyle option***

BEYOND BASICS

CASTE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

"Why should we go beyond the basics?"

Caste is often introduced as a traditional system of hierarchy rooted in ritual purity, occupational division, and endogamy. While these foundations remain important, they are insufficient to explain how caste operates in contemporary India. In the 21st century, caste no longer survives merely through temples or villages; it moves through elections, urban housing markets, digital spaces, and educational institutions. It adapts to democracy, capitalism, and technology.

Going beyond the basics allows us to see caste not as a relic of the past but as a dynamic structure that reorganises itself within modern institutions. It invites us to examine how caste shapes aspiration, mobility, political negotiation, and everyday interaction even when it appears invisible. To understand caste today is not to revisit tradition, but to interrogate how inequality persists within modernity.

Caste is one of the most enduring systems of social stratification in India. It refers to a hereditary, hierarchical, and endogamous form of social organisation in which membership is determined by birth. Unlike class, which allows mobility based on achievement, caste traditionally fixes an individual's social position for life. Louis Dumont viewed caste primarily as a system of hierarchy based on purity and pollution. For him, caste was rooted in religious

ideology rather than economic class. In contrast, Andre Béteille emphasised the intersection of caste, class, and power, arguing that caste cannot be understood purely in ritual terms in modern India.

G. S. Ghurye identified key characteristics of caste including segmental division, hierarchy, civil and religious disabilities, and restrictions on occupation and marriage.

Structure of the Caste System

The caste system is commonly understood through two levels:

1. Varna (Theoretical Order)

The classical Hindu framework divides society into four varnas — Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (service providers). Outside this hierarchy were communities later referred to as "untouchables."

2. Jati (Practical Reality)

In everyday life, caste operates through thousands of jatis — birth-based, endogamous groups associated historically with specific occupations. Jati determines marriage patterns, social interaction, and community networks. Key structural features include: Hierarchy (graded inequality), Endogamy (marriage within caste) Occupational association, Restrictions on commensality and social interaction.

Functions of Caste

From a structural-functionalist perspective, caste historically provided order and stability in society. Sociologists like M. N. Srinivas argued that caste organised social roles and ensured continuity of traditional occupations. Each

group had defined duties, reducing ambiguity in social expectations. Caste also created strong community solidarity within jatis, offering social security, support networks, and identity. Ritual norms regulated behaviour and maintained social equilibrium. In this sense, caste functioned as a mechanism of social integration in traditional society.

Dysfunctions of Caste

However, caste also produced severe inequalities and exclusions. B. R. Ambedkar sharply criticised caste as a system of "graded inequality" that institutionalised humiliation and denied dignity. He argued that caste was not merely division of labour, but division of labourers — preventing mobility and reinforcing oppression. Dysfunctions include: Social exclusion and untouchability, Restriction of mobility, Suppression of individual talent, Reinforcement of social distance and prejudice, Caste also fragmented society into closed groups, weakening broader social solidarity.

Modernisation, urbanisation, and democratic politics have altered caste's expression, but not eliminated it. While ritual barriers may weaken, caste continues to influence marriage, politics, and access to opportunity.

Thus, at its core, caste is a system of structured inequality organised around birth, hierarchy, and social closure — historically functional in maintaining order, yet deeply dysfunctional in producing exclusion and injustice.

From Ritual Hierarchy to Structural Inequality

Classical sociological accounts often described caste as a closed system based on purity and pollution. However, the 21st century demands a shift from ritual explanations to structural analysis. B. R. Ambedkar conceptualised caste not merely as division of labour, but as division of labourers — a system that organises graded inequality.

In contemporary India, overt ritual exclusion may have declined in many spaces, but structural inequalities persist in education, land ownership, employment access, and social capital. Caste survives not because it is frozen in tradition, but because it adapts to new institutional contexts. Urban anonymity has not dissolved caste; it has reconfigured it.

Democracy and the Political Reinvention of Caste

One of the major transformations of caste in the 21st century is its deep entanglement with electoral democracy. Rather than disappearing, caste has become a central axis of political mobilisation. Political parties construct caste coalitions, negotiate reservation policies, and shape welfare distribution along caste lines. M. N. Srinivas introduced the idea of dominant caste to explain how numerical strength, land control, and political access combine to produce power. Today, this dominance is exercised not only in villages but in legislative assemblies and bureaucratic appointments. Caste politics is often criticised as regressive. Yet sociologically, it reflects democratisation. Marginalised communities use caste identity strategically to demand representation and redistribution. Caste has shifted from ritual hierarchy to political resource.

Market, Capitalism, and Caste Networks

A common assumption of modernisation theory was that capitalism would erode caste. Instead, caste has often entered markets through networks of trust, kinship, and community-based entrepreneurship. Informal credit, business partnerships, and hiring patterns frequently operate along caste lines. Urban professionals may reject ritual hierarchy, yet matrimonial choices, residential clustering, and professional networking continue to show caste patterns. This indicates that caste is not opposed to capitalism; it can be embedded within it.

Caste networks provide social capital. Access to opportunity is often mediated through community connections. Thus, inequality persists not through explicit exclusion, but through inherited advantage.

Education, Merit, and the Myth of Castelessness

The discourse of merit has become central to debates on caste in the 21st century. Reservation policies are frequently framed as compromising merit. However, sociology questions the neutrality of merit itself. Educational success is shaped by family resources, language capital, school quality, and social networks. What is celebrated as individual achievement often rests on accumulated structural advantage. Caste-based disparities in higher education and elite institutions demonstrate that access remains uneven. The debate over caste census, reservation, and equity regulations reveals a tension between substantive equality and formal equality. The claim of castelessness often masks privilege rather than transcending it.

Urbanisation and the New Visibility of Caste

Urban spaces were once imagined as dissolving caste identities. Instead, cities reveal new forms of stratification. Housing discrimination, matrimonial websites, workplace bias, and digital hate speech illustrate how caste travels into modern arenas. Digital platforms have also amplified caste assertion. Online communities organise around caste pride, political mobilisation, and even prejudice. Technology does not automatically democratise identity; it can reinforce boundaries. The 21st century therefore witnesses both assertion and backlash — Dalit movements gain visibility, while upper-caste anxieties intensify. Caste becomes simultaneously more visible and more contested.

Intersections: Caste, Gender, and Violence

Caste cannot be analysed in isolation from gender because its reproduction depends fundamentally on controlling marriage and sexuality. B. R. Ambedkar famously argued that endogamy is the essence of caste. Without regulating who marries whom, caste boundaries would dissolve. Thus, caste survives not merely through occupation or ritual hierarchy, but through strict control over women's reproductive choices.

Women's bodies become symbolic carriers of caste honour. The anxiety surrounding inter-caste relationships — especially those involving women from dominant castes — reveals that caste purity is imagined as biological continuity. When such unions occur, they threaten not just family reputation but the structural logic of caste hierarchy itself. This explains why resistance often turns violent.

Honour killings, social boycotts, and moral policing are not isolated acts of cruelty; they are mechanisms of social regulation. They reflect what sociologists call social closure — the process by which groups protect privilege by restricting access. By controlling women's sexuality, caste groups ensure that property, status, and lineage remain within the community.

Gender hierarchy further intensifies this dynamic. Patriarchal authority within families aligns with caste interests, creating a double structure of domination. Women who defy endogamous norms face both caste-based sanctions and patriarchal punishment. Men may also face violence in inter-caste unions, particularly when caste hierarchy is inverted (e.g., Dalit men marrying upper-caste women), revealing how masculinity and caste honour intertwine.

Urbanisation and education have enabled some resistance. Love marriages, online platforms, and migration weaken traditional surveillance. Yet family networks adapt — using emotional pressure, economic control, and community mobilisation to reassert authority. This shows that caste is not confined to rural settings; it is deeply embedded in intimate decision-making.

Thus, caste persists not only in economic and political institutions, but in everyday kinship practices. Its endurance lies in the regulation of intimacy — where biology, honour, patriarchy, and hierarchy converge to sustain social inequality across generations.

Globalisation and the Internationalisation of Caste

The 21st century has not dissolved caste; it has carried it across borders. Migration, transnational labour mobility, and digital connectivity have enabled caste to travel with diaspora communities. What was once assumed to be territorially bound to the Indian subcontinent now appears within global labour markets, universities, religious institutions, and technology sectors.

Diaspora communities often reproduce caste through subtle mechanisms — endogamous marriage networks, community associations, temple management structures, and informal hiring preferences. Caste operates less visibly than in rural India, yet it persists through social capital and trust networks. Business partnerships and professional referrals frequently flow through

kinship and community ties, demonstrating how caste adapts to capitalist modernity rather than disappearing within it.

The tech industry debates in countries like the United States illustrate this transformation. Allegations of caste-based discrimination in Silicon Valley have brought caste into global legal and corporate frameworks. What was

historically considered a "local" social hierarchy is now framed as an issue of workplace equity and human rights. Caste discrimination has entered diversity policies, litigation processes, and international advocacy platforms.

This shift reflects what sociologists describe as the transnationalisation of social stratification. Caste is no longer embedded only in ritual status; it becomes entangled with global class mobility. Highly skilled migrants may achieve economic success abroad while retaining caste endogamy and symbolic hierarchies within community life. Thus, global mobility does not automatically produce social equality.

At the same time, globalisation has empowered anti-caste activism. Dalit scholars, student groups, and civil society organisations use international forums to frame caste as a violation of universal human rights. By invoking global norms, they challenge both diaspora practices and domestic denial.

Sociologically, the internationalisation of caste demonstrates its remarkable adaptability. It mutates from ritual exclusion to network-based privilege; from village hierarchy to corporate discrimination; from local custom to global rights discourse. Rather than being confined to tradition, caste now circulates within transnational capitalism, reshaped by migration, markets, and digital communication. Thus, globalization does not erase caste. It reorganises it — embedding hierarchy within new economic and institutional structures while simultaneously exposing it to new arenas of contestation.

Conclusion: Caste After Modernity

Has caste declined in the 21st century? Sociologically, the answer is complex. Ritual rigidity may have weakened in some contexts, but structural inequality, political mobilisation, and social reproduction remain deeply caste-inflected. Caste has not disappeared; it has mutated. It operates through democracy,

markets, merit discourse, and digital culture. To view caste as merely traditional is to misunderstand its resilience. Going beyond the basics reveals that caste survives not despite modernity, but often through it. The challenge is not to declare caste obsolete, but to interrogate how it reorganises power within contemporary institutions

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DATING APPS AND THE ALGORITHMISATION OF DESIRE

Dating has always been socially structured. Even when described as spontaneous attraction or "chemistry," partner selection has historically been shaped by caste, class, religion, kinship networks, and neighbourhood proximity. The digital era, however, introduces a new mediator between individuals and intimacy: the algorithm.

Dating apps promise freedom, choice, and compatibility. They appear to liberate desire from family control and geographical constraint. Yet they simultaneously embed desire within digital infrastructures governed by data, metrics, and platform logic. What appears as personal preference is increasingly filtered, ranked, and curated by code.

The sociological question is not whether dating apps are good or bad, but how they restructure intimacy. When algorithms begin to sort, recommend, and optimise potential partners, desire itself becomes measurable, predictable, and marketable. Romance enters the domain of platform capitalism.

From Arranged Marriage to Algorithmic Matching

Historically in India, marriage was arranged through kinship networks that ensured caste endogamy and social compatibility. Even "love marriages" operated within boundaries shaped by social structure. Dating apps present themselves as the opposite of arranged marriage: autonomous, individualised, and choice-based. Yet structurally, both systems involve mediation. The difference lies in who mediates. In arranged systems, families filter potential partners based on status and community norms. In dating apps, algorithms

filter based on behavioural data, location, engagement patterns, and inferred preferences. The mediator shifts from family authority to platform architecture. The transformation is not from structure to freedom, but from one structure to another.

Algorithmic Rationality and the Quantification of Attraction

Dating apps operate through quantification. Profiles are reduced to age, height, location, interests, photographs, and swipe patterns. Compatibility is translated into percentages or match scores. This reflects what Max Weber described as rationalisation — the transformation of social life into calculable, efficient systems. Intimacy becomes optimized for speed and engagement. Algorithms prioritise profiles based on activity, desirability metrics, and engagement likelihood. Desire is thus reorganised as data. Attraction becomes measurable. Rejection becomes silent and automated. Emotional processes are embedded within technical frameworks designed to maximise user retention rather than relational depth. The promise of infinite choice produces not freedom, but endless scrolling.

The Commodification of Intimacy

Dating apps are not neutral spaces; they are profit-driven platforms. Users are customers, and attention is currency. Premium features — visibility boosts, "super likes," location controls — convert romantic aspiration into monetised advantage.

From a Marxian perspective, intimacy becomes commodified. The user is both consumer and product. Profiles compete in a marketplace of desirability, where attractiveness, profession, and lifestyle are curated as brand assets.

Self-presentation becomes strategic. Photographs are edited, bios optimised, humour calibrated. Individuals market themselves as desirable commodities. The logic of consumer capitalism enters the sphere of romance. The paradox is striking: platforms sell the idea of authentic connection through deeply commercial infrastructures.

The Illusion of Infinite Choice

Dating apps dramatically expand the horizon of possibility. What was once limited by geography, family networks, workplace proximity, or social circles is now filtered through a radius slider and a swipe interface. This structural expansion produces a paradox: the more options available, the less secure any single choice feels.

Zygmunt Bauman's idea of "liquid modernity" becomes crucial here. In liquid conditions, bonds are kept flexible so they can be exited without heavy cost. Dating apps institutionalise this liquidity. Every interaction unfolds under the shadow of unseen alternatives waiting in the queue. Commitment becomes a decision not only about a person, but about renouncing hypothetical others.

This generates what sociologists might call anticipatory regret — the fear that a better match could be one swipe away. The platform architecture reinforces this feeling through infinite scrolling and algorithmic refresh. The interface itself discourages closure. There is no natural endpoint; there is always "more."

The psychology of abundance shifts the logic of evaluation. Rather than asking, "Can I build something meaningful here?" users are nudged toward asking, "Is this the best available option?" Attraction becomes comparative rather than relational. Profiles are assessed rapidly, often on surface markers — appearance, profession, aesthetic presentation — because the speed of the platform rewards quick judgment over slow discovery.

Decision paralysis emerges when users become overwhelmed by possibilities. The cost of choosing increases because choice implies exclusion. Ironically, the freedom to choose widely can reduce satisfaction with the choice made. Studies in behavioural sociology show that excessive choice often lowers perceived happiness, as individuals continue to imagine superior alternatives.

Swiping culture also alters the temporal rhythm of intimacy. Conversations are easily abandoned, connections easily ghosted. The knowledge that interaction is reversible lowers the perceived obligation to invest. Emotional labour becomes risky when alternatives are abundant and commitment appears unnecessary.

Moreover, the platform's business model subtly benefits from prolonged uncertainty. Stable couples exit the app; undecided users remain active. Thus, the architecture of infinite possibility is not neutral — it aligns with engagement incentives.

Choice, therefore, becomes ambivalent. It empowers individuals to bypass restrictive social norms, yet it burdens them with constant optimisation. In this landscape, intimacy is not only about finding connection, but about navigating abundance without being consumed by it.

Caste, Class, and the Digital Reproduction of Hierarchy

Despite presenting themselves as modern and cosmopolitan spaces, dating apps frequently reproduce deeply embedded social hierarchies. The architecture of choice is never neutral. Filters for religion, profession, income bracket, education level, and even dietary preference operate as socially coded sorting mechanisms. What appears as "compatibility preference" often mirrors historically entrenched forms of stratification.

Even in the absence of explicit caste filters, caste travels through subtle markers. Surnames, mother tongue, schooling background, neighbourhood, and even modes of self-description signal social location. In India especially, educational institutions and elite professions function as proxies for caste and class capital. Users learn to read these cues instinctively. The interface may look liberal; the signals remain stratified. This reflects what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described as the reproduction of social distinction through taste.

Preferences are not purely individual; they are structured by habitus — the internalised dispositions shaped by upbringing, education, and class location. When users say they are "just attracted to ambitious professionals" or "culturally similar people," they are often articulating socially conditioned tastes that align with inherited advantage.

Algorithms amplify this tendency. Dating platforms rely on behavioural feedback loops. If users consistently swipe right on profiles from certain educational institutions, linguistic backgrounds, or aesthetic types, the system interprets this as preference and narrows future suggestions accordingly. The algorithm does not challenge bias; it optimises it. Over time, the platform becomes increasingly homophilous — showing users people who resemble those they already favour. Homophily, long studied in sociology, refers to the tendency of individuals to associate with socially similar others. Offline, this pattern emerges through neighbourhood segregation, school systems, and workplace clustering. Online, it is accelerated and refined by machine learning. The digital sphere does not dissolve social boundaries; it renders them more efficient.

Importantly, hierarchy is re-inscribed not through overt exclusion, but through personalised filtering. Because the selection feels voluntary, inequality becomes naturalised as "taste." This shifts hierarchy from collective norm to individual choice, making it harder to contest. When discrimination is embedded in preference, it appears private rather than political.

Moreover, visibility on platforms is itself stratified. Algorithms rank profiles based on engagement metrics, perceived attractiveness, and activity levels. Studies of dating apps globally show that desirability scores create tiered digital markets where certain racial, class, and body-type groups receive disproportionate attention. In the Indian context, this stratification intersects with caste-coded aesthetics, English fluency, and urban sophistication.

Thus, technology does not function as a neutral equaliser. It translates social inequalities into data patterns and feeds them back into user experience. Hierarchy becomes automated. The promise of borderless digital intimacy coexists with subtle digital sorting. Rather than dismantling caste and class, dating apps may refine them — embedding old social divisions within new computational infrastructures. What changes is not inequality itself, but its mode of operation: from visible prohibition to invisible optimisation

Gendered Dynamics and the Politics of Visibility

Dating apps reshape gender relations. Women often face harassment, unsolicited messages, and pressure to perform desirability. Men experience competition and algorithmic invisibility when not matching platform metrics.

Platform design influences interaction patterns. Features like limited likes, message gating, and ranking systems produce asymmetrical power dynamics.

Women's profiles may receive higher engagement but also higher exposure to risk. Men may encounter algorithmic marginalisation. Both experiences reveal how technology structures gendered interaction. Desire is not only personal; it is platform-governed.

Surveillance, Data, and Emotional Extraction

Every swipe, pause, and message generates behavioural data. Platforms analyse patterns to refine recommendations and maximise engagement. Users believe they are searching for love; platforms are extracting behavioural insight. This echoes Michel Foucault's notion that modern power operates through surveillance and normalisation. Users internalise platform norms — optimising profiles, adjusting photos, altering behaviour to increase matches. Desire becomes disciplined by feedback loops. Validation is quantified. Self-worth becomes correlated with match frequency. Intimacy becomes an arena of data capitalism.

Urban Loneliness and the Search for Connection

The popularity of dating apps also reflects structural loneliness in urban life. Migration, nuclear families, demanding work cultures, and fragmented communities reduce traditional avenues for meeting partners. Dating apps provide structured spaces for interaction in otherwise anonymous cities. They offer not just romance, but belonging and visibility. Yet the same platforms that promise connection may intensify isolation if interactions remain shallow or transactional. The search for intimacy unfolds within structural precarity.

Beyond Romance: Redefining Modern Relationships

Dating apps are not only changing who people marry; they are transforming what relationships mean. The rise of "situationships," casual dating, polyamorous arrangements, and consciously delayed commitment reflects a broader cultural shift from institution-based intimacy to negotiation-based intimacy. Marriage, once framed as a social milestone tied to family continuity and economic stability, is increasingly approached as an optional and revisable life choice.

Anthony Giddens described this transformation as the emergence of the "pure relationship." In late modern societies, relationships are sustained not by tradition, religion, or economic compulsion, but by ongoing emotional satisfaction. They continue only as long as both individuals derive meaning from them. Communication replaces duty as the central binding force.

Dating apps intensify this reflexivity. Profiles encourage individuals to articulate preferences, boundaries, and expectations explicitly. Conversations often begin with negotiation: What are you looking for? Casual? Serious? Long-term? The language of relationships becomes contractual rather than assumed. Intimacy turns into a conscious project requiring continuous management.

However, this reflexive model carries instability. When relationships are sustained purely by mutual satisfaction, they remain permanently conditional. The presence of constant digital alternatives amplifies this condition. Even within a relationship, individuals are aware of an external market of potential partners. Commitment becomes a choice that must be repeatedly reaffirmed rather than socially secured.

This shift aligns with what Ulrich Beck termed individualisation — the movement away from prescribed life paths toward self-designed biographies. Individuals are expected to construct their own relationship trajectories rather than follow culturally scripted stages. While this expands autonomy, it also transfers responsibility for success and failure onto the individual.

Relationships, therefore, become negotiable projects. They require emotional labour, communication skills, and constant alignment. Stability is no longer guaranteed by institution; it is achieved through effort. Breakups are reframed not as moral failure but as incompatibility discovered through self-reflection.

At the same time, this flexibility allows experimentation with forms previously marginalised. Non-monogamy, delayed marriage, or singlehood gain legitimacy. The app environment normalises plurality rather than singular life scripts.

Yet the very negotiability that empowers also produces fragility. When all bonds are open to renegotiation, permanence becomes uncertain. Love, in this context, is not disappearing — but it is increasingly embedded within a culture of contingency.

Conclusion: Desire in the Age of Algorithms

Dating apps do not eliminate social structure; they encode it. They reorganise intimacy through metrics, filters, and engagement economies. The algorithm becomes a silent mediator between attraction and interaction.

The algorithmisation of desire signals a broader shift: from community-regulated intimacy to platform-governed connection. Choice expands, but so does commodification. Autonomy increases, yet surveillance deepens.

The sociological challenge is not to romanticise the past nor demonise technology, but to understand how desire itself is being restructured. In the 21st century, love is no longer only emotional — it is computational.

NATIONALISM IN SPORTING EVENTS

Introduction: When the Nation Takes the Field

Sport is often described as entertainment, leisure, or competition. Yet few arenas generate collective emotion as intensely as international sporting events. When national teams compete — whether in cricket, football, or the Olympics — the event transcends athletic performance. It becomes a symbolic confrontation between nations.

Flags wave, anthems play, and victories are celebrated as national triumphs. Defeats provoke collective grief. Athletes are transformed into embodiments of the nation. Sport becomes a theatre where national identity is performed, consumed, and emotionally renewed. Sociologically, this phenomenon reveals how nationalism is not merely political ideology but lived experience. Sporting events function as rituals through which nations are imagined, reaffirmed, and contested.

Imagined Communities and Collective Emotion

Benedict Anderson famously described the nation as an "imagined community" — a socially constructed group whose members will never meet most fellow citizens yet perceive themselves as part of a shared collective.

International sporting events provide one of the most powerful stages for this imagination. When millions watch a match simultaneously, share reactions online, and celebrate under the same flag, they enact a moment of collective belonging.

The stadium and the television screen become spaces where the nation feels tangible. The anthem sung before a match transforms an abstract political entity into an emotional reality. Nationalism, in this context, is not imposed; it is experienced.

Ritual, Symbolism, and Civil Religion

Sporting events do not merely resemble rituals; they function as modern civic rituals. Opening ceremonies, national anthems, flag hoisting, and coordinated crowd chants create a highly choreographed sequence of symbolic acts. These gestures transform a competitive match into a ceremonial reaffirmation of collective identity. Uniform colours, flags painted on faces, and stadium choreography operate as visible markers of belonging. The repetition of these symbols across tournaments stabilises national meaning. Every anthem sung before a match reasserts allegiance. Every medal ceremony stages the nation in hierarchical form — the flag rising, the anthem echoing, the athlete standing solemnly — mirroring sacred rites of elevation.

Émile Durkheim's idea of collective effervescence becomes central here. Durkheim argued that rituals generate intense emotional energy that transcends individual identity and binds participants into a moral community. In stadiums or shared television viewings, strangers

experience synchronized emotion — cheering, chanting, grieving, celebrating. The individual dissolves into the crowd. The nation feels embodied.

Sport thus performs what Durkheim called the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The playing field becomes temporarily sacred space. The anthem marks sacred time. Athletes are elevated beyond ordinary citizens into symbolic representatives. The ball, the jersey, even the trophy acquire near-sacral status. Objects become carriers of collective meaning.

This dynamic resembles what sociologists later termed civil religion — the sacralisation of national symbols in secular societies. In increasingly secular modern nations, sport fills the emotional space once occupied by religious ceremony. The stadium replaces the temple; the anthem substitutes for hymn; the athlete becomes the moral exemplar.

Athletes are narrated as embodiments of national virtue — discipline, perseverance, humility, courage. Their biographies are woven into national

mythology. A comeback victory becomes evidence of national resilience. A last-minute goal becomes proof of indomitable spirit. Sporting success is not interpreted merely as athletic skill but as moral confirmation.

Ritual repetition ensures continuity. World Cups, Olympics, and annual tournaments cyclically renew collective identity. Each iteration re-enacts the same symbolic sequence — anthem, competition, victory or loss, commentary, celebration. Through this repetition, the nation is not only remembered; it is re-performed. Yet this ritual energy is emotionally volatile. Just as collective effervescence produces unity in triumph, it can produce collective despair in defeat. The moral community formed in joy can quickly turn toward disappointment or scapegoating. Sociologically, sport demonstrates that nationalism is sustained not only by institutions and laws, but by ritualised emotion. It survives because it is repeatedly felt, enacted, and symbolically affirmed in shared spaces. Through ceremony, spectacle, and shared ecstasy, the nation is continuously made sacred — and continuously made real.

Rivalry and the Construction of the "Other"

Nationalism in sport thrives not merely on competition, but on symbolic rivalry. Few sporting contests illustrate this more powerfully than India–Pakistan cricket matches. These encounters are never framed as routine fixtures; they are narrated as historic confrontations, emotionally charged with the weight of partition, wars, and unresolved political tension.

In recent years, diplomatic strain has repeatedly spilled into cricketing arrangements. Bilateral series have been suspended. Questions arise over neutral venues, refusal to tour each other's soil, and debates over participation in tournaments hosted by the other nation. Even gestures such as handshakes, post-match interactions, or anthem protocols are scrutinised for symbolic meaning. Sport becomes a diplomatic extension rather than a separate domain.

Sociologically, this reflects how identity is constructed relationally. A nation does not define itself only through internal cohesion but through contrast with an external "other." The India–Pakistan rivalry simplifies complex

historical and political narratives into emotionally accessible binaries: loyalty versus betrayal, pride versus humiliation, dominance versus vulnerability.

The match becomes a ritualised battlefield — a space where symbolic victory substitutes for military confrontation. Cricket stadiums and television screens function as arenas of controlled antagonism. Collective emotions — anger, pride, relief, triumph — are channelled through sport rather than armed conflict.

However, this symbolic containment is fragile. When media narratives frame matches as "war without guns" or amplify hostile rhetoric, rivalry risks sliding into xenophobia. Social media further intensifies polarisation, where trolling, hyper-nationalist slogans, and suspicion toward minority players may surface.

The refusal to play on each other's soil, calls for boycotts, or politicisation of handshake moments demonstrate that sport does not escape geopolitics — it mirrors it. The boundary rope becomes a symbolic border.

Thus, rivalry in sport is not merely about competition; it is about identity consolidation. It transforms geopolitical tension into emotionally charged spectacle. While it can provide cathartic release and national unity, it can also deepen polarisation when symbolic conflict hardens into social hostility.

In this sense, sporting rivalry reveals both the integrative and dangerous potential of nationalism — capable of bonding a nation internally while sharpening its perception of external threat.

The Political Appropriation of Sporting Success

Sporting victories rarely remain confined to athletes. Governments quickly align themselves with moments of triumph. Political leaders issue public congratulations, host celebratory receptions, and frame the success as evidence of national resurgence. The athlete becomes not just a sports figure but a representative of state vitality.

This appropriation reflects how sport functions as symbolic capital — a concept associated with Pierre Bourdieu. Symbolic capital refers to prestige and recognition that can be converted into legitimacy. When a nation wins a major tournament or secures Olympic medals, the achievement is narrated as proof of collective strength, discipline, and progress. Political actors tap into this emotional reservoir to reinforce authority.

International tournaments also serve as instruments of soft power. Hosting mega-events signals infrastructural capacity and global relevance. Medal tallies are frequently interpreted as indicators of developmental success, even though athletic infrastructure often reflects long-term policy investment rather than immediate governance. Success in sport becomes shorthand for national competence.

This dynamic is especially visible in emerging economies, where sporting victories are framed as markers of arrival on the global stage. Leaders may invoke such moments to consolidate national unity, particularly during periods of political strain or economic uncertainty. The emotional energy generated by sport can temporarily eclipse internal divisions.

However, this appropriation is not neutral. When political legitimacy becomes intertwined with athletic success, athletes may be burdened with expectations beyond performance. Defeats can trigger public disappointment framed as national failure. Athletes from minority communities may face intensified scrutiny, revealing how inclusive celebration can quickly shift to selective blame.

Moreover, state celebration of sport can overshadow structural issues within sporting systems — underfunded grassroots development, unequal access, or gender disparities. The spectacle of victory may mask systemic inequities. Sociologically, this phenomenon illustrates how nationalism is continuously constructed through public events. Sport becomes a stage where the state symbolically demonstrates vitality, competence, and unity. Yet when pride is instrumentalised, the line between collective joy and political strategy

blurs. Sport, in this sense, becomes both celebration and governance — a powerful resource in the theatre of nation-building.

Inclusion, Exclusion, and the Question of Who Represents the Nation

Sport is often celebrated as a unifying force, yet it also exposes the boundaries of belonging. When an athlete steps onto the international stage, they are presented as the embodiment of the nation. But this raises a deeper question: who is considered an authentic representative of that nation?

The celebration of athletes from marginalised communities often produces what may be called conditional inclusion. Minority players — whether defined by religion, caste, region, or ethnicity — are embraced as symbols of diversity when they succeed. Their victories are framed as proof of national inclusivity. However, moments of defeat or controversy can quickly reactivate identity markers that were previously suspended. Loyalty may be questioned; belonging may be scrutinised.

This dynamic reflects the tension between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism defines the nation through shared citizenship and constitutional values. Ethnic nationalism defines it through cultural homogeneity, language, religion, or ancestry. Sporting events temporarily strengthen civic unity — the flag symbolically erases internal divisions. Yet underlying ethnic hierarchies do not disappear; they are merely bracketed during moments of triumph.

Sociologically, this can be understood through the concept of boundary maintenance. The nation draws symbolic boundaries around who belongs fully and who belongs conditionally. Sport becomes a testing ground for these boundaries. Minority athletes may be celebrated as national heroes, but their acceptance often depends on performance. Success grants symbolic integration; failure can reopen lines of exclusion. Regional tensions also surface in team selection debates. Representation from different states or communities becomes politicised, revealing how sport intersects with federal and social identities. Selection controversies sometimes echo broader patterns of centre–periphery inequality.

Gender adds another layer. Women athletes from marginalised backgrounds are often celebrated as stories of national upliftment, yet their narratives are framed through sacrifice and resilience rather than structural critique. Representation becomes inspirational but not necessarily transformative.

Thus, sport reveals both the promise and fragility of national unity. It can momentarily transcend caste, religion, and region, producing powerful images of collective belonging. Yet this unity remains contingent — dependent on victory, performance, and media framing. National identity, therefore, is not simply reflected in sport; it is negotiated through it. Inclusion is celebrated, but the terms of inclusion remain shaped by deeper social hierarchies.

Commercialisation and Corporate Nationalism

Sport in the 21st century is not simply a contest between nations; it is a vast commercial enterprise. International tournaments are embedded within sponsorship deals, broadcasting rights, brand endorsements, and merchandising industries. Corporate logos share space with national flags. Stadiums are named after companies. Even national team jerseys carry commercial insignia.

This fusion transforms national pride into an economic resource. Patriotism becomes a marketable sentiment. During major tournaments, brands release "nation-first" campaigns, patriotic jingles, and limited-edition merchandise wrapped in tricolours. Consumer participation becomes framed as civic participation: buying a jersey, streaming a match, or endorsing a sponsor is subtly presented as supporting the nation. Sociologically, this reflects what Benedict Anderson identified as the commodification of national imagination in print capitalism — now extended into digital capitalism. Media corporations package nationalism as spectacle, and advertising industries convert collective emotion into purchasing behaviour. The citizen is simultaneously addressed as fan and consumer.

The spectacle intensifies through corporate storytelling. Brands align themselves with athletes as embodiments of national resilience, discipline, and aspiration. Victory narratives are integrated into marketing campaigns that equate personal consumption with national pride. Corporate nationalism thus merges market logic with patriotic symbolism.

This dynamic also reflects Guy Debord's idea of the "society of the spectacle." Nationalism is not merely felt; it is staged, broadcast, and monetised. The emotional high of a match fuels advertisement impressions, social media engagement, and product sales. The louder the nationalism, the higher the commercial return.

Importantly, commercialisation alters the structure of fandom itself. Access to matches increasingly depends on paid streaming platforms. Merchandise differentiates supporters by purchasing capacity. Stadium tickets are priced according to market demand, often excluding lower-income fans. Thus, participation in national celebration becomes stratified by class.

Corporate nationalism also shapes which sports receive visibility. Cricket in India, for example, dominates advertising revenue and broadcast attention, reinforcing its status as the "national sport" in popular imagination, while other sports struggle for sponsorship. Market viability influences symbolic prominence.

Nationalism, therefore, becomes embedded within consumer capitalism. It is not weakened by commercialisation; it is amplified and circulated through it. The flag becomes a brand aesthetic. The anthem precedes advertising breaks. The nation becomes an emotional marketplace.

In this ecosystem, citizens do not merely watch the nation perform — they purchase it, wear it, and circulate it. Nationalism is no longer only political sentiment; it is an economic strategy woven into global sports industries.

Conclusion: Nation as Performance

Nationalism in sporting events reveals that the nation is not merely a political structure but a recurring performance. Through ritual, rivalry, spectacle, and emotion, sport renews collective identity. Sport does not create nationalism from nothing; it amplifies and dramatises it. Victories produce solidarity; defeats produce reflection. Media intensifies emotion; politics appropriates symbolism. In the 21st century, the stadium has become one of the most visible theatres of national imagination. Here, the flag is not only waved — it is felt. Nationalism in sport is not accidental. It is structured, ritualised, commercialised, and deeply emotional. It reminds us that nations endure not only through constitutions and borders, but through shared moments of collective passion.

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