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Pax Lumina

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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY



Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

**Building capacity dissolves differences.
It irons out inequalities.**

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam



Vol. 04 | No. 02 | March 2023

Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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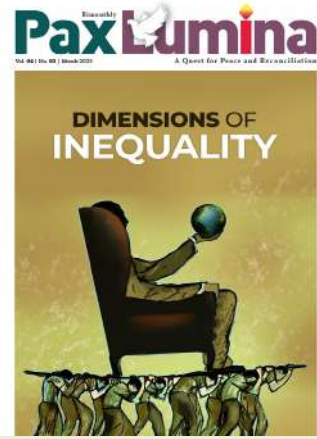
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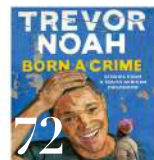
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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation







INEQUALITIES: HOW and WHY?

Editorial

No person is identically equal to another. And this is natural too. But when this unequalness gives way to inequalities at the individual and social levels one has to think seriously about this phenomenon and probe the reasons for the existence of these inequalities and inquire about possible means of correcting them.

In this Issue of Pax Lumina, we have tried through our writer-friends from all over the world to look into the various dimensions of inequalities we human beings encounter on this planet and possible solutions to address them. Of course, our chosen path is one of non-violence and therefore we have not considered the different attempts at amelioration of inequalities which human history is replete with.

On the other hand, some argue that inequalities are not intrinsically unwelcome but they can provide an impetus for growth at the individual, social and even national levels. But this magazine does not subscribe to this view for the reasons which, we hope, will be clear to our readers from the experiences and analyses provided by our writers in the following pages.

There is also another subtler argument in favour of the existence of inequalities which goes as follows. Though at the microscopic individual level freedom and equity are ensured, some 'short-term' distortions can arise simply because the collective complex whole is not the linear aggregate of individual behaviours, and therefore, inequalities arising hence are not unnatural. We cannot accept this view since the act of an individual cannot be judged by psychological, social or economic yardstick alone. There is an ethical dimension to every human action. Our writers from Africa illustrate this by highlighting the principle of 'Ubuntu' and similar philosophies of life which many traditional cultures value.

The spark for choosing dimensions of inequality as the focus topic came from the recent Oxfam report on the inequalities in wealth and income



in India. We have reports in this issue from Oxfam authorities. Also, some of our other writers have commented on the stark wealth and income inequalities based on the Oxfam findings.

French economist Thomas Piketty and his associates from Paris have been examining the wealth and income inequalities globally for over the last 250 years or so. They have warned of severe social consequences of this economic distortion. Piketty's conclusions are based on vast empirical data and statistical analyses. He calls for stricter wealth tax laws. The power to tax is with sovereign governments. But whether government is the best agency to ensure wealth and income redistribution is an open question. Cannot voluntary initiatives for the transfer of wealth and incomes be thought of in this regard?

There are many other dimensions of inequality like gender, caste and psychological ones which have also been covered by our writers.

More than the questions of efficiency and optimisation, the fundamental basis on which inequality, in any dimension, should be abhorrent to any human being is the ethical and moral one. It is a question of moral aesthetics. Can you see any beauty in the high-rise palace built in the middle of the slum-dwellers of Mumbai by the richest living Indian? If you can, then you can also enjoy beauty in the well-formed mushroom clouds from nuclear bombings.

Yes, actually, it is a question of aesthetics and sensibilities - a moral one.

Jacob Thomas



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NONVIOLENCE THROUGH AFRICAN PRINCIPLES

A RESPONSE TO INEQUALITY AND INJUSTICE



Inequality and injustice are human-made problems. Only creative and proactive humans can resolve them. Convinced that equity among people, respect for human dignity, and fair distribution of wealth are the pillars for positive peace in society, I recommend African principles to transform communities in Africa and the world.

Educated in African spirituality, I use specific principles from this spirituality to teach solidarity, integrity, equity, self-reliance, and the sense of belonging in African Jesuit institutions as solutions by Africans to address African challenges.

These principles are: “I am because we are, Ujamaa, Burkindlem, Ubuntu, and Zo Kwe Zo.”

The Role of Civil Organisations is Crucial in Africa

In 2013, I was sent to the Central African Republic to work in peacebuilding. I spent five years in this country. At the University Catholic Centre, I launched several training sessions, including training in peace and volunteering. As a result, I set up two civil organisations: Les Volontaires de la Paix (The Volunteers of Peace Network), composed mainly of young students, and Le Conseil

National de la Nonviolence Active (The National Council of Active Nonviolence).

The members of these faith-based organisations, who were local leaders, received training in the principles of active nonviolence and religious and cultural values. Their mission is to use African ethical values to advance positive peace in their communities, including care for the poor, commitment to transform conflicts, and audacity to invent their future.

African Spirituality has Many Values

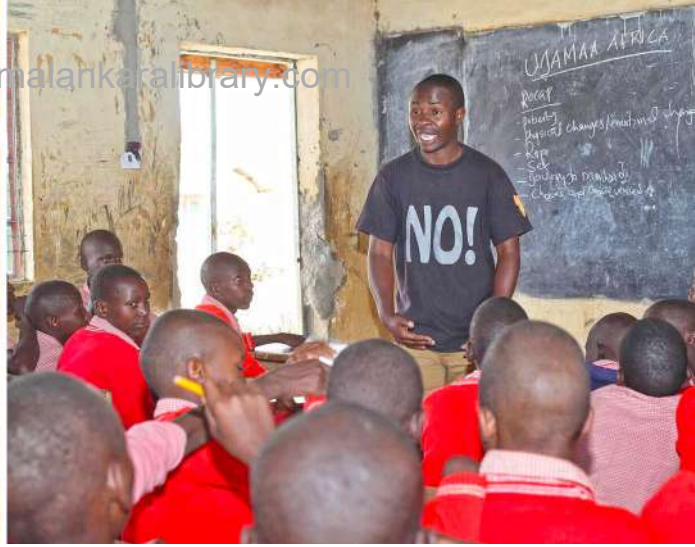
My commitment to nonviolence is fundamentally based on African spirituality. African spirituality is characterised by the belief that nature is animated. God created everything and diffused his spirit within all his creatures. Therefore, He is present in everything. Consequently, people should behave in respecting His presence. Performing good and avoiding evil is the ultimate commandment.

Therefore, taking care of one another is sacred. The notion of the ‘other’ includes humans, nature, animals, plants, rivers, and mountains. Animals are not only animals; trees are not only trees, and rivers are not only rivers. They are living beings because living spirits inhabit them. The same spirits in humans are called souls. Therefore, their well-being depends on our well-being as humans and vice versa.

The principle of ‘I am because we are’ was articulated by John Mbiti who is regarded as the father of modern African

Convinced that equity among people, respect for human dignity, and fair distribution of wealth are the pillars for positive peace in society, I recommend African principles to transform communities in Africa and the world.





theology. He elaborated on a reflection that considers the individual's achievements as the community's achievements because a community exists thanks to individuals and individuals exist thanks to the community.

“Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual,” said Mbiti. “The individual can only say: ‘I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am.’”

The capacity of individuals to feel their connections with others, including the ‘living people, the passed away living ancestors and the unborn living children,’ is vital to their essence. The understanding of our interconnectedness is indispensable to the making of human dignity in society.

The Principle of Ujamaa

Ujamaa means unity in supporting one another by any means available. Ujamaa is

the soul of African socialism proposed by President Julius Nyerere (1922-1999) in Tanzania during the postcolonial period. ‘A person is a person through other persons’ or ‘A person is another person’s remedy.’

The African sense of belonging to communities is inevitably connected to the soil (land), which, in many ways, serves as the ‘umbilical cord’ that links the past, present, and future; the spiritual and mundane, the individual and the community, the earth and the world above and the underworld. (Magesa, 2013, 122. Laurenti Magesa (1946– 2022) was a Tanzanian Catholic priest and theologian. He has been a major figure in developing African theology, having written a dozen books on topics, such as African Christology and African spirituality).

The awareness of belonging to Mother Earth is essential to care for one another and to implement environmental justice.



The capacity of individuals to feel their connections with others, including the ‘living people, the passed away living ancestors and the unborn living children,’ is vital to their essence. The understanding of our interconnectedness is indispensable to the making of human dignity in society.



The Principle of Burkindlem

Burkindlem is the essential virtue of the Burkinabe, the people of Burkina Faso, a ‘country of honest men.’ Burkindlem means integrity. A man of integrity, or a Burkinabe, is a person who is honest, upright, incorruptible, fair, and impartial (Sama, 2016). Authentic Burkimbi who manage public affairs (incorruptible leaders) are committed to equitable distribution for the common good.

The Principle of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an invitation to promote human rights, impartial political authority, fair international relations, and the common good. Ubuntu has been promoted since the end of apartheid in South Africa to build peace and reconciliation, and solidarity among people.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999), one the best framers of the Ubuntu philosophy, said, “A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good . . . he or she [is] humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed (Tutu, 1999, p. 35). This is because Ubuntu appeals to the very core of being human.

The Principle of Zo Kwe Zo

This principle is from the Central African Republic. It means all men/women are equal and deserve respect. President Barthelemy Boganda (1910-1959) said, “Civilisation means respect for the rights of others.” To Boganda, civilisation is nothing other than respect for the rights of people in their diversity, which prohibits others from violating their rights, misleading them, or harming them. Being civilised entails respect for every human, including their intelligence, name, and property (Sane, 2020).



John Mbiti



Julius Kambarage Nyerere



Barthélemy Boganda

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CULTURE AS JUDGE OF INEQUALITY

SOME INDICATORS OF
INEQUALITY IN THE MMEN (BAFMENG)
CULTURE IN CAMEROON

Unlike in Western societies where individual freedom and the capacity to choose is the foundation of understanding inequality, in Bafmeng, as in many other African cultures, community living is the basis for any profound understanding of inequality.



Concepts have different understandings and expressions in different cultures. The culture and practices of a people inform the extent to which a concept has meaning in that society. In the Mmen culture, like in many African cultures, the community is more important than the individual.

The Ubuntu concept of ‘I am because we are’ determines community organising. The individual is called upon to play a role in the community to keep it alive. The identity of the individual is rooted in the community. The community’s life is sacred, so religion and culture become a single practice.

In this context, a concept like inequality finds its true meaning only in community organising. Unlike in Western societies where individual freedom and the capacity to choose is the foundation of understanding inequality, in Bafmeng, as in many other African cultures, community living is the basis for any profound understanding of inequality.



Community Organising in the Mmen (Bafmeng) Culture

Bafmeng is a village of the Tikar ethnic group, found in the Menchum division of the northwest region of Cameroon. It has an estimated population of over 45000 people, of which many are young.

Agriculture, hunting and commerce are the major activities. The family is its most important unit, which defines every other activity. Family groupings are central to this culture. Community organising is determined by gender.

The practice of the people, simply put, is that the men protect and acquire wealth for the family, while the women cater for the children and the acquired wealth, which is mostly land. The children, on their part, support their parents. The girl supports her mother, while the boy supports his father. There is no competition about the roles as each group recognises the indispensable value it brings to the family and community at large.

The woman or man with many more honorary titles often becomes the ‘owner of speech’ in the group. He/she without a title can’t have parity with others who have titles in a community decision-making process or social gatherings.



All roles are important and needed for the family and community's well-being and peaceful coexistence. There is a deep understanding of the complementarity of roles. With this style of community organising, the ideal community solves the issue of gender inequality. The question of inequality finds value in a different perspective.

Aspects of Inequality in the Mmen (Bafmeng) Culture

The primacy of the community over the individual situates inequality at the level of one's participation in his/her role in serving the community. In this culture, inequality can be seen in those who carry out the same roles and between families. Honorary titles, family size, wealth, skills, and, more recently, education are some factors which cause injustice to arise in men's and women's groups.

Individuals who distinguish themselves in their service to the community are given honorary titles like ‘Chieh-Kwifon’, and ‘Tsong’ (Peh-Tsong, and Nye-Tsong). Individuals can receive more than one honorary title. The family can also award honorary titles to its children who have distinguished themselves in caring for the family.

In some cases, these titles come from one's position among his/her siblings. This is also tied to the role he/she will play in the family. Though these titles encourage more committed participation in the community's life, they can be a source of injustice and inequality.

Titles are used to segregate men and women. The woman or man with many more honorary titles often becomes the ‘owner of speech’ in the group. He/she without a title can't have parity with others who have titles in a community decision-making process or social gatherings.

Another factor which breeds injustice and, consequently, inequality is family size. The people are matrilineal. Polygyny and monogamy are accepted in the culture. But a polygynous family is seen as a stronger family. The larger the polygynous family, the stronger and more influential it is.

The size of the enlarged family is also a plus to one's status in the community. Men receive



With the coming of academic institutions, the number of educated children in a family has become another criterion for societal demarcation. Families with many educated children enjoy privileges which families with fewer or no literate people are unable to enjoy.



more respect from other men based on the largeness of their families. Women share this benefit in the women groups. A large family implies more land, more productivity and shows excellent managerial skills. A smaller family or a monogamous family will often be discriminated against. Little respect is given to people from smaller families, and their contributions to the community may be disregarded based on this reality.

Skills and the number of educated children are other criteria used to segregate women and men. With hunting being one of the major activities for the men, he who is capable of hunting animals, like a lion or tiger, is recognised to be skilful.

For the women, one who is capable of producing huge harvests from her farms is seen to be skilled and deserving of special status. With the coming of academic institutions, the number of educated children in a family has become another criterion for societal demarcation. Families with many educated children enjoy privileges which families with fewer or no literate people are unable to enjoy.

Conclusion

These are a few indicators of inequality. Emphasis is laid on the communal orientation of life. What is worth remarking is that inequality manifests itself in the efforts put in to serve the community. An individualistic outlook will reveal numerous aspects as inequalities. Such an attitude will be profoundly erroneous given that this culture understands the individual only with his/her role in the community.

Juxtaposing the individualistic and the communal views is confusing. This leads to the loss of cultural values. This is happening in the community. While recognising that the community needs to see to it that the attempts to reward individuals for their distinguished participation and service to the community do not become a drawback for more profound solidarity.

One must affirm that the organising which places the community as a whole at the centre is worth emulating for integral development and peaceful cohabitation.

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THE INDIAN ENIGMA



In terms of sanitation and child nutrition, India fares worst among all the neighbouring countries. Literacy rates in the younger age groups are also lower in India than in all other south Asian countries except Pakistan and Nepal. Perhaps the gap is narrowing over time, but it is still there.



Despite some accelerated progress in the decade preceding National Family Health Survey-4, India's social indicators in 2015-16 were still far from flattering. Many of them were still worse than those of India's neighbours (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), with the partial exception of Pakistan.

To illustrate, only Pakistan now has a lower life expectancy, higher child mortality rate and higher fertility rate. In terms of sanitation and child nutrition, India fares worst among all these neighbouring countries. Literacy rates in the younger age groups are also lower in India than in all other south Asian countries except Pakistan and Nepal. Perhaps the gap is narrowing over time, but it is still there.

This is puzzling, considering that India's per-capita GDP is almost twice as high as that of Bangladesh and three times as high as Nepal's. We have discussed this puzzle in earlier writings, but a little more can be said today in light of recent research. Briefly, there is growing evidence that India's poor social indicators, relative to neighbouring countries with lower per-capita GDP, are closely connected with various forms of economic and social inequality.

Some aspects of that connection have already been relatively clear for a long time. For instance, the role of extreme gender inequality in stifling social progress in India. Others have emerged more recently. Consider, for instance, child mortality rates in India and Bangladesh. On



average, they are a little higher in India. In the top wealth quintile, however, they are 'lower' in India than in Bangladesh, and the opposite applies in the bottom wealth quintile.

In other words, the relatively high mortality rate of Indian children reflects a huge mortality disadvantage of poor children vis-à-vis rich children (with mortality rates of 75 and 25 per live births, respectively, in the 0-5 age group). A similar point, it appears, applies to pupil achievements in primary schools – well-off Indian children are doing just as well as (if not better than) well-off Bangladeshi children, but India has much larger educational disparities between the rich and the poor.^[1]

One partial answer relates to gender inequality: Indian women are the first victims of inadequate sanitation, but they have little voice and power within the household. Of course, this may be true in many other countries as well.



During the last few years, the two-pit latrine design, which makes the task of removing human waste, relatively simple and harmless, has gained wide acceptance. Despite the government's claims, however, open defecation is still very common in India. ^[2]

It is not surprising that class, caste and gender inequalities have played an important role in preventing India from becoming a social development leader in south Asia. This connection reinforces the need to recognise the extreme nature of social inequality in India. Few countries have such an oppressive social system.

* Extract from the introduction to the second edition of 'An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions', by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen.

[1] See Swati Narayan (2018), 'India Surpassed: The Price of Inequality in South Asia', PhD thesis, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. The mortality patterns are based on NFHS and Directorate of Health Services data for India and Bangladesh respectively. The findings on pupil achievements are based on the author's survey data for a sample of villages, and awaits corroboration from larger datasets.

[2] On this, see Diane Coffey and Dean Spears (2017), 'Where India Goes: Abandoned Toilets, Stunted Development and the Costs of Caste'.

Another example is sanitation. This is a field where India has lagged behind not only south Asia but most of the rest of the world as well. Why so? One partial answer relates to gender inequality: Indian women are the first victims of inadequate sanitation, but they have little voice and power within the household. Of course, this may be true in many other countries as well.

India, however, also has special problems related to the caste system. It is the caste system, and its obsession with purity and pollution, that creates a phobia of human waste in Indian society, where the 'dirty' job of emptying latrine pits is left to specific castes of manual scavengers. Naturally, Dalits are now reluctant to do this, and no one else is willing either.

Jean Drèze is a Belgian-born Indian welfare economist, social scientist and activist.





INTERVIEW

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CIVIL SOCIETY CAN LEAD THE FIGHT AGAINST INEQUALITY



INTERVIEW WITH AMITABH BEHAR CEO, OXFAM INDIA

? Oxfam reports have highlighted the extent of inequality in India.
• What are the key factors that are driving this?

The drivers of inequality are complex and multi-dimensional. Certain facets of globalisation, domestic policy choices, national budget priorities, taxes and socio-cultural barriers have led to an increase in inequality. While the impact of world trade and global financial markets has led to economic growth, it has simultaneously worsened the distribution of income.

This is particularly true for low and middle-income countries such as India. Additionally, the national macroeconomic policies have also failed to safeguard the national economy from the impacts of globalisation. The 2015 publication, 'Humanity Divided' of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revisits the theoretical concepts of inequalities. It emphasises how policies have prioritised fiscal consolidation, but ignored





Empirical research has proved that an increase in inequalities can harm economic growth and poverty

reduction. It hinders progress in health and education and limits opportunities. It excludes the poor and the middle class from participating in the nation's economic progress.



progressive taxation and public investment in social sectors such as, health and education.

Social stratification and exclusion of certain groups such as women, Dalits, and tribals from opportunities and developmental processes lead to and exacerbate inequalities between groups. These factors combine to sustain inequalities, which go much beyond income and wealth. Inequalities in non-income dimensions such as disparities in educational attainment, health and gender inequality continue to plague this country.

? Inequality skews the development process and gives a misleading picture of increasing GDP growth. In real terms, do you think that inequality fuels development or development suffers due to growing economic inequality?

Inequality is not a natural fallout of economic development and inequality does not fuel national economic development. The UNDP's report also refutes the assumption that low and middle-income countries have to experience rising inequalities to achieve economic growth.

Empirical research has proved that an increase in inequalities can harm economic growth and poverty reduction. It hinders progress in health and education, and limits opportunities. It excludes the poor and the middle class from participating in the nation's economic progress. In the end, development will suffer because such progress will be exclusionary and unsustainable.

? During the Covid-19 pandemic, all sectors of the economy suffered. India's GDP growth declined. Yet, during the same period, how did the income of billionaires increase so rapidly?

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the world in unimaginable ways. In India, the impact on the growth of sectors was unequal. While hospitality, tourism, aviation and travel, automobile and real estate and construction sectors were hard hit, the E-retail, digital, Ed tech and pharma sectors benefited.

India is now the second-largest market for e-learning in the world. The sector's future evaluation is pegged at \$30 billion. This is more than double that of India's education budget. This has grown during the pandemic with a 30 percent increase in the time spent on education apps on smartphones reported since the lockdown.



The rationale behind this has been that the wealth accumulation by those at the top of the income, and wealth pyramid is massive and taxing it can generate huge revenue, which can then be redirected to the development of the social sectors. This has the potential to redistribute the resource accumulation by the rich to the poor, and to reduce poverty and inequality in the country.

? Rising inequality could also lead to a rise in social unrest, violence and crime in society. What can civil society do to reduce the effects of inequality and promote a more equitable economic system?

Ed-tech companies have gained immense popularity post-lockdown. At least 15 ed-tech startups have raised a new round of funding during Covid-19. Byju's and Unacademy continue to lead the market. Since there are many billionaires from diversified sectors, the income of billionaires dealing with digital technology and pharma increased during the pandemic.

? What are the structural changes required in the economy and in the economic policies that will contain the growth of inequality and promote a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources?

Inequality is reversible. It can be moderated or reduced. Countries have successfully done that through reforms in their policies. The government has to play an important and active role if sustainability and inclusive economic growth are the goals. Disparities in income and wealth can be reduced by taxing the richest, rolling out progressive taxation and by an increase in public investments.

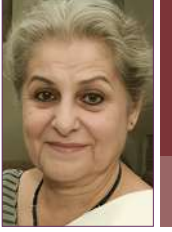
Progressive taxation on income is one of the least discretionary policy tools available that control the rise in inequality by redistributing the gains from growth. Imposing a tax on the wealth of the richest has been advocated by Oxfam for years.

Civil society has the agency to mobilise communities and build collective power to lead the fight against inequality. They have the potential to be a platform for active involvement and participation by citizens and stakeholders. They have to adopt a bottom-up approach - pass the microphone to the groups who have been excluded from the process of economic development and hear their stories.

The narrative against inequality has to be built. Civil society and development organisations need to portray an alternative to an unequal society through positive narratives. There is a need for knowledge-building on inequality and exclusion, particularly to influence the government and to advocate against inequality.

They have to engage with the government and make them see what the public wants - redistribution of income and wealth, access to good quality schools and seeking healthcare, irrespective of one's ability to pay. This will take time and collective effort, but the fight against inequality has to continue. Civil society can be the agent of change.

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EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF **INEQUALITY**



Several factors contribute to the concentration of wealth among a few individuals in India and globally. One key factor is globalisation. This has enabled the rich to invest and earn profits in different parts of the world. The poor lack the resources to participate in the global economy.



During my term in the Planning Commission (2004 to 2014) I found many 'dimensions of inequality' in my travels across the country. A few stories have become engraved on my mind.

One face comes to mind - that of Maimun Nisa. Hers was the first house I visited in Daniyalpur, a mohalla of Benaras. It was a one-room mud-and-brick structure. A broken charpai and a run-down loom were the only pieces of furniture. A white-and-orange fabric was trussed on the loom. A frail woman sat on the floor, sewing tiny stars into the fabric. Next to her, on the floor, lying on a scrap of cloth was a small child. As soon as we entered her home, she picked up her child and stood up.

"What's your name?"

"Maimun Nisa."

A thin face, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, and a frayed light pink dupatta covered her head. Her son, Imran, was tiny and had the face of an old man - shrivelled and shrunk. His feet were so thin that we wondered if he would ever be able to walk. His head seemed too big for his small body. I assumed he was about eight months old.

"He is eighteen months old," said Maimun.

"Eighteen months," I could not believe what I had heard. "What do you feed him?"

Eyes lowered, Maimun mumbled, "Sabudaane ka paani (gruel of tapioca)."

"What! And what else?"

Silence.

"Do you feed him milk?"

Again, silence.

"We have no money to buy milk, and I have none in my breasts. All I have ever been able to give him is 'sabudaane ka paani.'"

I heard a sound behind me. Turning around, I saw a tall, thin man with a balding head and a small white beard. He was crying.

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Thomas Piketty, the French economist, who is well-known for his research on global wealth inequality, has endorsed the Oxfam report on inequality in India. Piketty has been a vocal critic of rising wealth inequality around the world. His research has shown that the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few has been increasing for decades.

The Oxfam report, 'The Inequality Virus,' highlights the stark disparities in wealth distribution in India, where the top one percent of the population holds four times more wealth than the entire bottom 70 percent.

The report also notes that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequality in India, with the country's billionaires increasing their wealth by 35 percent during the pandemic, while millions of others have lost their jobs and livelihoods.

Increasing wealth inequality has dire consequences. It undermines social cohesion; people become divided by wealth and income. This leads to increased social tensions, political polarisation, and consequent violence.

Piketty has argued that policies such as progressive taxation and wealth redistribution are necessary to address rising inequality, both in India and around the world. He has also called for greater transparency in the distribution of wealth and income, and a global tax on wealth. The aim is to ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes.

Several factors contribute to the concentration of wealth among a few individuals in India and globally. One key factor is globalisation. This has enabled the rich to invest and earn profits in different parts of the world. The poor lack the resources to participate in the global economy.

Another factor is the increasing role of technology in the economy. This has led to the creation of high-paying jobs in fields such as tech, finance, and entertainment, while low-skilled jobs have been automated or outsourced to cheaper labour markets.

In addition, tax policies, regulations, and political power also contribute to the concentration of wealth among a few individuals. For example, tax policies that favour the wealthy, such as low capital gains taxes, allow them to accumulate wealth more easily.

Similarly, regulations that restrict competition or protect existing wealth can contribute to the concentration of wealth. Finally, political power can enable wealthy individuals and corporations to influence government policies in their favour, such as reducing regulations or lowering taxes.

Increasing wealth inequality has dire consequences. It undermines social cohesion; people become divided by wealth and income. This leads to increased social tensions, political polarisation, and consequent violence.

In addition, increasing wealth inequality makes it impossible for people to move up the economic ladder. The wealthy have more resources to invest in education and other opportunities. Lack of social mobility creates a sense of hopelessness and despair among those who are being left behind.

Finally, increasing wealth inequality can also have economic consequences, as it can lead to a decrease in demand for goods and services, as the wealthy have a lower marginal propensity to consume. This can lead to slower economic growth and higher unemployment, as businesses face reduced demand for their products and services.

Apart from economic inequality, several other dimensions of inequality need to be examined.



In a free-market system, market forces determine the allocation of resources and the distribution of benefits and costs. In a controlled system, the government plays a more active role in regulating economic activity and promoting certain outcomes. The effectiveness of these different systems in promoting sustainable and equitable development depends on a variety of factors, including the specific context and the policies and institutions in place.



1. **Social inequality.** This includes inequality based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other factors. Social inequality can manifest in a variety of ways, such as unequal access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, as well as discrimination and bias in the criminal justice system and other institutions.
2. **Political inequality.** This includes inequality in political power and representation, such as the disproportionate influence of wealthy individuals and corporations on government policies, as well as voter suppression and other barriers to political participation.
3. **Environmental inequality.** This includes inequality in access to a clean and healthy environment, such as the disproportionate

impact of pollution and climate change on marginalised communities.

4. **Cultural inequality.** This includes inequality in access to cultural resources and representation, such as the under-representation of certain groups in media, arts, and other cultural institutions.

The costs of development can be borne by various individuals and groups in society. For example, environmental degradation may disproportionately affect marginalised communities, while economic development may benefit certain industries or individuals more than others.

Also, the costs of development can be distributed unevenly over time, with future generations potentially bearing the burden of current development decisions. The organisation of society, whether free-market or controlled, can have a significant impact on development outcomes.

In a free-market system, market forces determine the allocation of resources and the distribution of benefits and costs. In a controlled system, the government plays a more active role in regulating economic activity and promoting certain outcomes. The effectiveness of these different systems in promoting sustainable and equitable development depends on a variety of factors, including the specific context and the policies and institutions in place.

Overall, addressing inequality in India will require a sustained effort and commitment from the government, civil society, and the private sector to promote economic and social justice and to ensure that the benefits of development are distributed more evenly. **These solutions require a collective effort from individuals, communities, and governments to address inequality in its various dimensions and to promote a more just and equitable world.**



During my term on India's Planning Commission, I watched the roll-out of the plans we prepared to address the Dimensions of Inequality we witnessed during our field visits to far corners of this beautiful country.

'Beautiful Country Stories of Another India' was the title of my book based on my experiences. Several social welfare programmes were implemented, as per the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Public Distribution System, and the National Food Security Act. These were aimed to provide food security, employment, and other basic needs to the marginalised communities. Over the years, the implementation of these programmes was uneven, and there were concerns about corruption and leakages.

Affirmative Action: We also implemented affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education and government jobs to address social inequality. However, over time, these policies became controversial and faced opposition from some groups.

Economic Reforms: India also pursued economic reforms to promote growth and development. This led to increased wealth and income, but

only for some segments of the population. These reforms also contributed to rising inequality, as the benefits have not been distributed evenly.

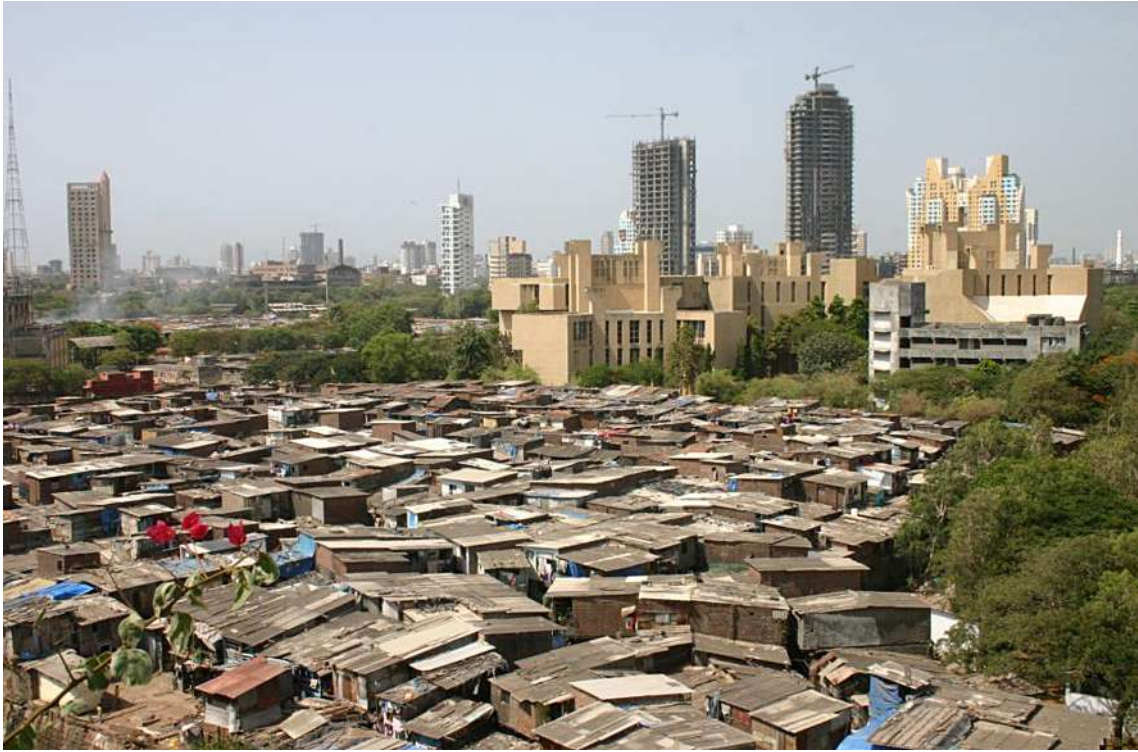
India has recently implemented some tax reforms, such as the Goods and Services Tax and the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme. These aimed to increase tax compliance and reduce corruption. There is, however, still a need for more progressive taxation policies and wealth redistribution measures.

What is the Road Ahead?

India's abysmal record on inequality is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach. To restore the balance and to address inequality, here are some corrective measures that need to be taken:

Progressive taxation and wealth redistribution policies, such as a steep wealth tax regime to reduce economic inequality. Implement a more progressive tax system. This would tax the wealthy and corporations at a higher rate and use the revenue to fund social welfare programmes and other initiatives to address inequality.

Policies and programmes to address social inequality, such as affirmative action, anti-



discrimination laws, and investments in education and healthcare for the marginalised communities.

Reforms to increase political representation and reduce the influence of wealthy individuals and corporations on government policies, such as campaign, reform and voting rights protections.

Policies and investments to address environmental inequality, such as regulations to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and investments in renewable energy and public transportation.

Efforts to increase cultural representation and diversity, such as funding for arts and cultural programmes that promote diversity and inclusion, and initiatives to increase the representation of the marginalised groups in media and other cultural institutions.

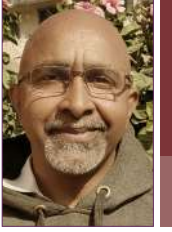
Investment in education and healthcare: India could increase investments in education and healthcare, particularly in the marginalised communities, to improve the access and quality of these essential services.

Job Creation: India could focus on creating jobs in sectors that are accessible to the marginalised communities, such as agriculture and small businesses, and provide training and support to help them succeed.

Land Reforms: India could pursue land reforms to address land inequality and ensure that the marginalised communities have access to land and natural resources.

Overall, addressing inequality in India will require a sustained effort and commitment from the government, civil society, and the private sector to promote economic and social justice and to ensure that the benefits of development are distributed more evenly. These solutions require a collective effort from individuals, communities, and governments to address inequality in its various dimensions and to promote a more just and equitable world.

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INEQUALITY IN ADIVASI SOCIETY

**ASSIMILATION OF MORE
EGALITARIAN SOCIAL FORMATIONS
INTO GRADED INEQUALITY**



Adivasis or mainland India's indigenous peoples distinguished themselves from the so-called 'mainstream' Indian society by the fact that they resisted the graded inequality caste or 'chatur-varna' system, rampant in mainstream social formations.

The caste-based gradation must have evolved as people began practising settled cultivation on alluvial plains, hoarding resources (wealth, power, honour and good fortunes) for themselves and ensuring their inheritance to one or posterity alone.

This has been done by processes that justified self-aggrandisement while negating the basic dignity and rights of the other in a situation of perceived scarcity or danger since the other appeared to be strange and to be subjugated or eliminated. While this oppressive system was legitimised and flourished in the plains, Adivasis kept themselves away in hills and forests.

They continued to be independent sojourners in forests, hills and valleys with a symbiotic relationship with nature – forests, rivers and land cleared to make it cultivable for subsistence.

They organised themselves in more egalitarian ways: their chieftains would be treated as one among them, and owned and shared resources

in common. Adivasi groups (tribes) organised themselves based on totemic lineages. The village chief or the headman had the responsibility of ensuring the security and safety of all members of a village.

Historically, Adivasis' interaction with the plain's people was mediated through their chieftains. However, there were instances of either certain Adivasi chieftains gradually becoming rajas or rajas, accompanied by Brahmanas, arriving from the plains. They offered protection to Adivasis while offering occasional gifts (salamis) to them.

There existed syncretic exchanges of religious-cultural aspects mostly through seasonal festivals under the patronage of rajas. Despite all this, the Adivasis managed to maintain their independence and distinctiveness by resisting the intrusion of the 'chatur-varna' ideology of the plains until the arrival of the British East India Company (BEIC).

These local rajas had sought the Company's assistance to subjugate Adivasi chieftains by agreeing to pay a certain sum of Rupees annually to BEIC.

Consequently, the rajas increased land taxes, and the number of tax collectors from the plains in Adivasi regions. And with the introduction of the concept of private ownership of land by the British, a large number of Adivasis began losing their land to zamindars and tax collectors. This triggered Adivasi rebellions against 'dikus' (outsiders, exploiters who gave trouble to Adivasis).

The Santal rebellion led by Tilka Majhi in Santal Parganas during 1781, the great Kol-rebellion

Adivasis or mainland India's indigenous peoples distinguished themselves from the so-called 'mainstream' Indian society by the fact that they resisted the graded inequality caste or 'chatur-varna' system, rampant in mainstream social formations.



As the years passed, the post-independence development paradigm adopted by the country, the already entrenched system of graded inequality and the type of political developments ensured that the great ideals of socio-economic justice, equality of opportunity and socialism, mentioned in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution evaporated.



of 1831-32 in Kolhan, the Santal Hul (the great Santal rebellion) during the 1850s in the 'Ulgulan' (the upheaval) led by Vir Birsu Munda in Khunti during 1895-1900 are a few important rebellions.

Consequently, anthropologists, administrators and missionaries, who took the trouble to understand Adivasis' alternative imagination, worldview, distinctive cultural values and traditional local self-governance systems, demanded provisions of alternative administration of the predominantly Adivasi regions.

Later, these provisions found their place in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution. There were heated arguments and debates about various policy considerations – isolation, assimilation or integration – concerning the incorporation and administration of predominantly Adivasi/indigenous regions into the Indian union soon after independence.

However, as the years passed, the post-independence development paradigm adopted by the country, the already entrenched system of graded inequality and the type of political developments ensured that the great ideals of socio-economic justice, equality of opportunity and socialism, mentioned in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution evaporated.

Moreover, India's educational curriculum and pedagogy have also contributed to the continuity of caste discrimination and oppression. Further, the country's education system did not have any space for information about Adivasi languages, cultural values, feasts, festivals, historical rebellions against 'dikus' by their great heroes and the special protective legal and constitutional provisions.

Moreover, the positive discrimination policies have played a significant role in advancing socioeconomic differentiation among the Adivasis themselves. There is a highly urbanised creamy layer mostly alienated from their socio-cultural roots and the everyday hardships of their numerous disadvantaged co-villagers.

These policies have been administered in such a way that very few in a village already had better quality/productive land that ensured food security throughout the year. Only their children were able to access education away from their villages in private schools and hostels.

Education enabled them to access reserved jobs which ensured they enjoyed a regular salaried income in addition to already ensured food security. They now own their ancestral land at their home villages cultivated by their





relatives, have purchased a piece of land also in urban centres and have private transportation facilities of their own.

Whereas, the majority of their co-villagers, with less productive land, were unable to ensure food security, and could not access education at private schools and hostels while government schools in rural villages have been functioning very poorly. Such a situation has significantly curbed their upward social mobility. Many of them have been left on their own, and to eke out a living as agricultural labourers at a very low wage rate. Many of them also become prey to human traffickers while others have been pushed out as distressed migrants to faraway places.

The situation in Adivasi villages is highly volatile. Forest covers have progressively been denuded by largely unregulated extractive industries since the land has huge deposits of minerals (both metallic and non-metallic). The people's resistance to mining-induced unjust displacement is crushed by the State's repressive arms. This action assists the corporates, while several villages have severely been affected by armed insurgency and counter-insurgency. Also, the basic agrarian infrastructure has been grossly neglected. This has led to deepening agrarian distress aggravated by uncertainties of extreme weather events due to global warming-induced climate change.

To sum up, the efforts and processes to develop predominantly Adivasi (Fifth Schedule) areas have been geared to move more egalitarian Adivasi societies into a highly unequal mainstream^[1] by systematically destroying a more egalitarian and sustainable worldview and socio-cultural organisation so dear to Adivasis.

The result, at this point in time, is a process of fast disintegration of once self-sustaining, more egalitarian Adivasi social formations into highly socio-economically differentiating and unequal ones.

[1] "05 per cent of Indians own more than 60 per cent of the country's wealth while the bottom 50 per cent of India's population possess only three per cent of the wealth. From 2012 to 2021, 40 per cent of the wealth created in India has gone to just one per cent of the population and only a mere 3 per cent of the wealth has gone to the bottom 50 percent." (see https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2023/0122_pd/shocking-inequality-richest-21-indian-billionaires-have-more-wealth-70-crore-indians (accessed on 28-02-23).

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EQUALITY AND EQUITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN



There is an erroneous understanding that to be equal, two individuals have to be same. **Sameness is not synonymous with equality. Two persons can be different and still they can be equal.**



‘**E**mbracing gender equity’ is the theme adopted by the United Nations Organisation for the women’s year, 2023. When women’s issues are discussed, the term equality often comes up. Conceptual clarity is required on equality and equity and the relationship between them.

During discourses on women’s issues, male/female differences are accentuated. The question that is thrown up is how can they be equal, despite their differences being a reality. There is an erroneous understanding that to be equal, two individuals have to be same. Sameness is not synonymous with equality. Two persons can be different and still they can be equal.

I remember seeing the picture of a man, a teenager and a child watching a football game from behind a wall. Their respective heights understandably are in descending order. Each of them is standing on a cuboidal block. For the man, the addition to height is not needed. The teenager is just fine. But the child is not able to see the playground.

Equal treatment by distributing an equal number of blocks does not accomplish the goal of each one being able to watch the game. Redistribution by giving the block of the man to the child will achieve equality, that is equality of outcome for all. Here equity is the act of redistribution.

Equity led to equality of outcome or equality. In this context of gender, gender equity is necessary to realise gender equality. Gender equality is a global concern and Sustainable Development Goal 5 is focused on this.

To extend the metaphor, the three-game watchers symbolise persons situated at different levels of power based on their control and access to resources. The props symbolise the whole spectrum of resources, including land, money, natural resources, technology, political power, religious power, knowledge, information, and status.

Let us analyse the power difference and the skewed distribution of resources among men and women. Across the globe, women own only 20 percent of the land (World Economic Forum). The global labour force participation for women is 47 percent while it is 72 percent for men (International Labour Organisation). Women constitute two-thirds of persons across the globe who cannot read (UNESCO).

It will take 267.6 years to plug the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity (Global Gender Gap Report 2021). Across the world, only 34 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government. Women’s representation is only 22.8 percent in Cabinets (UN Women). While striving for gender equality, these socio-political ‘unsameness’ should be considered for working out equitable processes to plug these gaps.

The ideology of patriarchy is the most important reason for these glaring differences. Patriarchy is the notion that men are superior and they are the ones who alone should have access and control over resources and worse still over ideologies as well.

The ugliest and the most pervasive manifestation of this can be witnessed in domestic violence which is inflicted on 30 percent of women worldwide (World Health Organisation). About 35 percent of women world over have experienced sexual harassment (World Population Review).

The slogan of this year's women's day is 'DigitAll: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality.' To realise this aspiration, there is a long way to go. Currently, women constitute only 22 percent of the Artificial Intelligence workers in the world.



In India, 86 rapes happen every day according to the 2021 data from the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB). About 71 percent of rapes go unreported (NCRB, 2006). The conviction rate in India for rapes is only 39 percent (NCRB Report, 2020).

All this evidence shows the comparatively 'unsame' position of women and men in the economy, politics and power positions and the consequent vulnerability of women to violence at home, in workplaces and public spaces. This points to the dire necessity of unequal treatment of women with positive discrimination during recruitment, and assignment of leadership positions.

Preferential treatment in the context of laws, and processes in the criminal dispensation system becomes necessary as a measure of equity. Everyday we witness instances of travesty of justice when well-resourced men in powerful

positions, intimidate women. Many times, this results in rape, workplace sexual assaults and domestic violence.

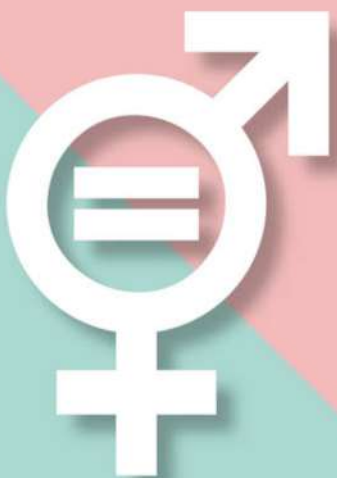
Any administrative or legal measures which ignore the power differential will be inequitable and will sabotage the noble goal of equality. The world has awakened to this reality and this is the reason why Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) have become the buzzword in arenas of many human endeavours.

DEI refers not only to gender diversity, but the inclusion of all types of diversity including ethnicities, neuro diversities, castes, and non-binary genders.

Take the case of women's very low presence in the high echelons of science. Though enrolment rates in graduation and post-graduation levels are higher for women, much fewer women make it to the top.

Some brilliant women scientists have made it to the top, but there are also many unsung heroines whose intellectual properties went unrecognised and even robbed of by powerful people. The trials and tribulations of three African American female mathematicians who facilitated John Glenn's space travel are poignantly portrayed in the book, 'Hidden Figures.'

Are the timings, rules and security measures of the laboratories and libraries flexible enough for women scientists? Do they have a supporting non-patriarchal domestic environment? Gender-based prejudices, discrimination and stereotyping are still prevalent in science, politics and corporations.



As women get more and more resourceful, some men might develop insecurities. Men need to realise that women have not stolen their space at home and outside, but are only claiming their legitimate spaces and resources which patriarchy had denied to them.



Unfortunately women, too, have internalised these patriarchal biases. This is discussed in the book, 'Lean In' by Sheryl Sandberg.

Despite these visible and invisible barriers, many women have had spectacular achievements. Despite being only 8 percent in the world, female political leaders accounted for 40 percent of the successful responses to the pandemic – Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, Angela Merkel in Germany, and the lady heads of State in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Taiwan.

In the United States, the African American woman, Dr Kizzmekia Corbett invented the Covid-19 vaccine. Only 18 percent of girls graduate with a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics degree. Out of that, only two percent are black.

Let us salute these great women. The slogan of this year's women's day is 'DigitAll: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality.' To realise this aspiration, there is a long way to go. Currently, women constitute only 22 percent of the Artificial Intelligence workers in the world.

Gender equity will lead to happier and better homes. Studies have shown that in gender-equitable homes, couples are happier, have a better sex life and the children are far less susceptible to substance abuse. In countries with higher gender empowerment scores, citizens have more life satisfaction. The country will have better governance and compassionate leadership.



Women need to strive for equality. Female solidarity is needed. Let 'lift as you climb' be the motto. As women get more and more resourceful, some men might develop insecurities. Men need to realise that women have not stolen their space at home and outside, but are only claiming their legitimate spaces and resources which patriarchy had denied to them.

They need to acknowledge their male privileges and scrutinise the toxic masculinities, if any, within them and their male friends. The enlightened among them can correct other males. Men of quality will stand for women's equality. Let us accomplish gender equality by embracing gender equity. This will bring peace to the world.

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DEEPENING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

**ENDLESS SUFFERINGS
OF THE 'UNEQUALS'**



Despite the rapid economic growth and development that India has achieved in recent years, a significant portion of the population still **encounters multiple deprivations and the burden of these deprivations is disproportionately borne by the poor and the marginalised.**



On August 15, 1947, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that the independence of India was 'but a step to the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity'. But, 75 years later, the country is still grappling with the same issues of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and inequity that still beleaguers much of India's vulnerable population.

The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022 (which combines 10 indicators grouped under three dimensions of health, education and standard of living) reports that India is home to one of the largest populations of people living in poverty in the world (22.8 crore people). Two-thirds of these people reside in a home where at least one member is malnourished.

In such a scenario, India requires a vibrant public health sector that these poor Indians can rely upon, to provide easy and free access to healthcare without any additional financial burden.

However, despite the rapid economic growth and development that India has achieved in recent years, a significant portion of the population still encounters multiple deprivations and the burden of these deprivations is disproportionately borne by the poor and the marginalised.

Health inequalities between the rural and urban population, between men and women, between children and adults, and between southern and northern States are too evident to be given a miss and they continue to negatively impact the inclusive progress and development of India.

India's 'Unequal Health' Indicators

While India has extensive public health care schemes and programmes, the health indicators show a dismal picture with high levels of Infant Mortality Rates, Maternal Mortality Rates, and a large percentage of children who are stunted (low height-for-age), wasted (low weight-for-height) and underweight (low weight-for-age). The progress in eliminating the inequalities in terms of gender, age, caste and region has been too sluggish for India to achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goals.

As observed in Oxfam's 'India Inequality Report 2021: India's Unequal Healthcare Story' there is a huge disparity between the social groups (general category and SC/ST category), income groups (rich and poor), and gender (men and women) in terms of various health indicators.

Obviously, the general category, rich people and men are found to be with better health indicators. The report reveals that the Scheduled Castes (SC) families have 12.6 percent more stunted children than those in the general category. Additionally, the probability that a kid would die before turning five is three times higher among the poorest 20 percent of the population than in the top 20 percent.

Similarly, the infant and mother mortality rates and the percentage of women and children who are malnourished are higher in the lower than in the upper strata. Even if we consider various child immunisation programmes, those who have most benefited from them are the people from high economic status. The report points out that 70 percent of the people from higher economic backgrounds accessed child immunisation programmes, whereas only 52.8 percent of the lower economic background could access the same.

The Rural Health Statistics 2020-21 show a shortfall of 5073 staff nurses in Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs). There is a shortfall of 1084 doctors in PHCs and a shortfall of 17,519 specialists in CHCs. Though most of the population lives in rural areas only 31.5 percent of hospitals and 16 percent of hospital beds are situated in rural areas. The government's apathy is further exposed by these statistics.

Public health infrastructure, both physical and human, has not greatly improved over the years with inadequate investments. The public expenditure on health has remained stagnant since 2010 with just around 1 percent of GDP and this has further deepened the already existing health inequalities.

While the nation has a thriving private health sector, the public health sector continues to be neglected with inadequate physical infrastructure, shortage of manpower, insufficient public spending and scarce monitoring. Even as more people access the public sector for health, as evident from both the primary research study and the National Family Health Survey-5, the public sector health facilities remain away from the government's watch. Hence the 'unequal' and 'unhealthy' stories of these underprivileged and deprived sections of people from rural India continue to remain under the carpet of the 'waiting list' for this government.

It is no wonder that the World Inequality Report 2022 observed that India is among the most unequal countries in the world, with rising poverty and an affluent elite.

Public health infrastructure, both physical and human, has not greatly improved over the years with inadequate investments. **The public expenditure on health has remained stagnant since 2010 with just around 1 percent of GDP and this has further deepened the already existing health inequalities.**



How Covid-19 Worsened Health Inequalities in Rural India

A recent research study on the 'Impact of Covid-19 in Rural India: A cross-sectional study from 12 States' lays bare the negative impact of Covid-19, especially on the health status of the rural population.

Rashmi (name changed) from a village in Bihar said that her father got infected with Covid-19. His condition was severe and he was rushed to the government hospital. But due to the non-availability of any beds, they had to move him to another hospital. Rashmi recollected





The story of Rashmi exposes the stark reality of health inequalities without adequate facilities in rural areas. **Rashmi's experience of loss and grief is only one among the many such incidents, especially in rural India.**

that incident with pain and said that if the hospital had better facilities her father would have survived.

The story of Rashmi exposes the stark reality of health inequalities without adequate facilities in rural areas. Rashmi's experience of loss and grief is only one among the many such incidents, especially in rural India.

The story of a pregnant woman, Radha (name changed) from the State of Odisha is another painful case where the poor rural health infrastructure caused a great ordeal for a family. Radha was eight months pregnant with severe difficulty in breathing, cough and cold. Her husband took her to a nearby CHC from where they were referred to Berhampur Medical College and Hospital, Odisha on October 6, 2020.

She tested Covid-19 positive and was shifted to an ICU early in the morning. She died that night. Her husband lost his wife and unborn baby. In addition, he also had to spend a lot of money on hospital bills and travel charges. Radha's husband was left helpless only to point fingers at the insufficient facilities and inadequate healthcare in the public health system.

The Way forward

Most importantly the government must address the 'ongoing underfunding of the public health system, particularly primary healthcare, and the

poor state of the country's health infrastructure' as noted by Oxfam India CEO Amitabh Behar.

Improved budgetary allocation and increased public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP to at least three percent from the current one percent are crucial to address health inequalities as other countries have shown.

A recent report, 'Democracy and Health in India: Is Health an Electoral Priority' showed that health remains a lower priority issue for the voters. Only when health becomes a priority issue, we might see some change in the health sector. Health activists and civil society groups need to lobby hard so that the public can push healthcare as a priority issue for politicians and voters.

Unless and until the abounding health inequalities based on such categories as sex, religion, social category, occupation, income and geographical location are minimised and eventually eliminated, the country cannot be truly termed 'developed', and instead will continue to remain 'unequal' for many Indians.

Credits

Adithya Shibu helped in the collection of secondary data.

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THE PARADOX OF INEQUALITY



Tom earns astonishingly higher than Jim does. That's because, Tom is by birth, more talented than Jim. Is this a mere difference between the two persons? Or is it an inequality?

According to Groan Sherborn, Professor of Sociology at Cambridge University, there are three criteria to say that a condition suffers from inequality. First, a difference is horizontal without any classification as higher, lower, better or worse. But inequality is always vertical involving ranking.

Second, differences are matters of taste or categorisation only. But inequality is something that goes against or violates a moral norm of equality.

The third criterion is that if the difference is abolishable, it is an inequality.

But many researchers disagree with the above classification. Jeana has a lot more friends than Tiya because the former is extraordinarily generous, sympathetic, charming and witty.

All inequalities, whether unchangeable or changeable, are to be considered inequalities. **This is the concept I have adopted in this article. I will be focusing mainly on psychological inequalities, their consequences, prevention and remediation.**



On the other hand, Tiya is very jealous, hot-tempered and irritable. We can understand that this is Tiya's inherent disposition that cannot be changed.

According to Sherborn, this cannot be an inequality. But many researchers oppose this view. They say that if differences in talents are the sources of inequalities, why not personal differences also be considered inequalities?

All inequalities, whether unchangeable or changeable, are to be considered inequalities. This is the concept I have adopted in this article. I will be focusing mainly on psychological inequalities, their consequences, prevention and remediation.

Noel is studying in a boarding school. He has two friends, Tom and Tiss. Usually, 8 to 10.30 p.m. is the study time for the boarders. The students assemble in a hall to study. They are not supposed to move from their seats and are expected to observe silence.

Tom confirms strictly to these norms. But Tiss reads loudly. So, the warden punishes him. Noel, on the other hand, cannot sit quietly for a long time, and he stands up or walks out in between for which he is reprimanded.

Let us look at the scenario. There are three types of learners: visual, auditory and kinesthetic.



So what is to be done is to make a judgement appropriate to the skill of the students. **It is better to unconditionally accept his or her status and help them to select the subject and profession suitable to their inborn ability.**



Visual learners learn by concentrating visually on whatever is in front of them. They can sit, read silently and learn. Auditory learners learn by hearing what they recite loudly. They cannot learn like visual learners. Kinesthetic learners do learn by feelings and movement of the body. These are inequalities. But they are irreversible or unchangeable. Therefore, to boost their learning, they are to be given facilities to follow their inherent styles and if not, they will be restless and problematic.

The visual student will be keenly concentrating on what is written on the board, but the auditory student will be waiting for the voice of the teacher to study and grasp things. Meanwhile, the kinaesthetic one will be restlessly moving

this way and that way. Ignorance of these facts makes many children suffer and they get labelled as misfits.

Another inequality is that of temperament. There are three types of temperaments: Easy, difficult and warmer. Those with an easy temperament face all emotional turmoils calmly and adequately. But those with a difficult temperament will always react spontaneously and get angry often. Others, even though at first they get angry, they cool down immediately. So, we can expect children with different temperaments to behave differently in the same situation.

Those with easy temperament will be labelled as good and others discounted. The children do not understand their differences. Hence, naturally, they get humiliated and put down by the punitive reactions of parents. When the teachers, parents and other people concerned identify and understand the nature of children, they will gain self-esteem. Tuning into the inbuilt system of an individual helps them grow in the appropriate direction.

Next, let us consider the inequalities in the field of so-called 'intelligence'. Parents of children are always proud of the A+ achievements of their wards. Here it is appropriate to consider certain inequalities. Certain capacities are inherited and unique to everyone. Some people are gifted with a wonderful talent to study mathematics, while others are gifted with excellent language skills.

Many children do not have these skills together. Those children who have these skills by birth,



The Easterners are in time with the future in front, the present inside and the past behind. They are here-and-now oriented and are not much bothered about time. **Think of the situation in which a through-time employer has an in-time employee and the probable incidents that can occur in their daily routines.**



can easily (of course with some effort) achieve A+ in all subjects. But those with only one gift will be performing less in the other area.

So what is to be done is to make a judgement appropriate to the skill of the students. It is better to unconditionally accept his or her status and help them to select the subject and profession suitable to their inborn ability. Some people are highly interpersonally successful. At the same time, they may not be proficient in either language or maths. But they can survive in professions demanding a successful interaction with people.

Some others, though not proficient in language and maths, may be excellent in special arrangements. The way they arrange their rooms or the pattern in which they organise their garden can be fascinating. This shows their special intelligence, which makes them likely candidates for professions such as interior decoration and fashion design.

Students with artistic, musical, sports and performance-related talents need not be academically outstanding. But these children can be discriminated against in grade evaluations. So this is also an inequality which if not dealt with understandingly, will result in sorrowful consequences. But when all the above-mentioned categories are properly identified, facilitated and approved, equality can be seen sprouting in their lives.

We are all here in the world just as we are destined. We did not decide on our parents. We did not choose our country, our village or our family. We did not choose our caste and creed. Our colour, our short or long stature, our intelligence and our temperament are there without any choice for us to accept or to reject.

So naturally, there are remarkably sufficient opportunities for inequalities. But the dwarf may compensate for his/her lack of height by being intelligent. A person with a dark complexion may rectify his/her inequality with an outstanding gift of music. Thus, chances of bringing harmony and equality in one way or other are hidden in almost all inequalities.





If you fix an appointment with a Westerner at 10 am, and you appear by 10.15 am, he/she will be disturbed. On the contrary, if you make a similar commitment with an Easterner, most probably, he/she would ignore the late coming. This is because of the differences in their concept of time.

Westerners are supposed to live through time. That is, they see their past, present and future extending from left to right, straight in front of them. They ruminate about the past, are miserable about the present and anxious about the future. They are strict about the time.

On the other hand, the Easterners are in time with the future in front, the present inside and the past behind. They are here-and-now oriented and are not much bothered about time. Think of the situation in which a through-time employer has an in-time employee and the probable incidents that can occur in their daily routines.

Similarly, a through-time husband and in-time wife can bring a life of fun and misery to such situations. Here, compassionate manipulation of the situations is the only way to bring equality.

Certain couple conflicts are worth mentioning. I had a lady client who was highly interpersonally intelligent, and successful in her studies at the same time. She was the student chairperson in the college, an excellent speaker and a dynamic organiser.

Her marriage was fixed with a well-established professional. In the premarital interview, she explained her desire to get employed and shared her social dreams. He agreed to all these things

and got married. But after marriage, he denied her desire to go for a job, which annoyed her.

Her fire of disappointment was highly ignited when she was prohibited from social activities, and even participation in religious gatherings. He told her that he could give her double the amount she would get from employment. He was not interested in social gatherings and had very few or rather no intimate friends.

He was a workaholic, fully immersed in his profession, and took no interest in family get-togethers. From the beginning, she started getting disappointed and highly frustrated. The same restrictions were imposed on her teen-aged daughter. To summarise, when the girl passed her teens the mother and daughter were irreparably emotionally disrupted and became hostile to him. This is the inequality between introverts and extroverts.

To bring equality here, the only way is to compromise and come to a midpoint. Otherwise, inequality mounts up and disharmony results. Where there is a mountain, there is a valley and a river. The day should follow the night. Inequality is the hallmark of creation. Inequality is not meant for hostility and rivalry, but for complementary interaction and compassionate acceptance. In a nutshell, unconditional acceptance is the final solution for all inequalities.

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INEQUALITIES AS CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH EAST

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COVID 19



Illustration: Henry Wong



A significant number of people in Northeast India, particularly tribals, are unable to pursue better educational and employment opportunities due to financial constraints and economic disparities and lack of economic opportunities in their communities.



A sign of the intensification of economic inequalities is the plight of the migrants. The sudden lockdown left more than 100 million migrant unskilled labourers jobless and homeless. It led to reverse migration more often than not on foot. Some people even lost their lives. As they returned to their place of origin, they encountered a shortage of necessities like food and shelter.

Many of those who returned home faced social stigma and humiliation. Most of them had to find alternative forms of livelihood with scarce resources. Their labour is the backbone of the economy of the host cities but the hosts continue to treat them as enemies as the frequent attacks on the migrants in Kerala show.

A significant number of people in Northeast India, particularly tribals, are unable to pursue better educational and employment opportunities due to financial constraints and economic disparities and lack of economic opportunities in their communities.

Several people from the Northeast have, therefore, migrated to other parts of the country in search of jobs. They have been experiencing racism which is inherent to Indian society. This recurring problem has resulted in prejudices towards racially-varied communities at the cultural, social, economic, and political levels.

People from the Northeast have encountered discrimination due to their ethnicity and culture. Such racial profiling got exacerbated during the pandemic. Discrimination towards the Northeast people got worse due to the 'Chinese origin' of the pandemic. It resulted in an upsurge in discriminatory attacks against people of Mongoloid stock.

In addition to the struggle against the pandemic, they had to fight for equality.

Although there are a few Covid-19 cases now, and people are back to their normal routines, the effects of the pandemic on our societies will not be easily forgotten. The pandemic has exposed the reality, particularly concerning the inequalities that have long existed within it. These structural inequalities need to be addressed to create a more just and equitable society.

As political scientist Joan M. Nelson says, "Conflicts can be caused by a variety of factors, including rapid social and economic transformations, the pressures of globalisation, growing inequalities within states and the information revolution."

Inequalities, or the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities, are significant contributors to conflicts. For example, side by side with its rapid economic growth, India has experienced significant economic, social, ethnic and gender inequalities. These inequalities have already existed.

Globalisation and the pandemic brought these widening gaps to the fore and intensified them. The marginalised communities experienced the most adverse effects of the pandemic, including in accessing healthcare and education, loss of job opportunities and racist attacks. Policy responses to the pandemic, such as strict lockdown measures on short notice, further deepened the pre-existing economic, ethnic, and gender divides.

The unequal distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes is often based on factors like the socio-economic status, race and gender. Long-term lockdowns brought on by Covid-19 had a negative impact, especially on students from economically backward families.

Online learning that became the norm because of the closure of schools also widened the achievement gap, especially between wealthy and poor households. Low-income urban and rural poor families were devoid of such support mechanisms, but middle-class families with access to electronic gadgets could continue with online learning without much disruption. Pre-existing inequalities worsened through this, and the effects of socio-economic instability and an inadequate home environment for online learning were exacerbated.

The socio-economic inequalities were visible also in the access to healthcare and in the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on the poor, particularly in the urban slums. The preventive measures of social distancing and vaccines were more accessible to the urban middle and rural upper classes than to the urban slum-dwellers and the rural poor. The

pandemic, thus, exposed the fragility of the deeply unequal Indian economy. The crisis led to an increase in poverty and intensified inequality between the rich and the poor.

The discourse around Covid-19 has largely focused on medical terms, ignoring its differential impact by caste, class, gender, and region. The pandemic as a disease has made no distinction between the rich and the poor. The picture changes when one comes to its negative social impact which has been felt more by the urban slum-dwellers and the rural poor, particularly in the administratively neglected regions.

For example, social distancing was possible for the urban middle class and the rural upper classes. But it is a luxury that the urban slum-dwellers and the rural poor cannot afford. Rural areas lack the health infrastructure required to deal with such an emergency. Moreover, no effort was made to educate the rural population about the need for vaccines. Awareness about it was not strong enough to counter the pandemic.

The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in social, political, and economic systems, leading to a rise in unemployment among women and greater inequality. Domestic violence spiked worldwide, including in India. There were reports of increased violence, cyber violence, and trafficking. It has unevenly affected women, as can be seen by the rise in child labour, and child marriage of girls. The most vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, were more at peril without the means to deal with job loss and health crises.

Consequently, it should be emphasised once more that social and economic inequality is the starting point of conflicts. The pandemic has only brought to light in clear-cut terms the pre-existing social and economic inequalities that affect vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as low-income families, members of racial and ethnic minorities and women. It is vital to deal with these inequalities to resolve the conflicts and improve the situation in our society.



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TOWARDS ACHIEVING **EQUALITY**



Scriptures of every religion say that all are created equal. Constitutions of every major country highlight the importance of equality. We, the people of India, solemnly resolved through our Constitution to secure to all its citizens, equality of status and opportunity. The motto, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' adorns the French Constitution, and the American Declaration of Independence, drafted by the former US President Thomas Jefferson, held it to be self-evident that 'all men are created equal.'

Yet, as the French writer Anatole France pointed out, "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets and to steal bread." Cynical as it might be, this observation brings out a key factor – equality and poverty may be related concepts, but they are dissimilar in certain manifestations. This is a distinction that needs to be borne in mind as we look into dimensions of inequality. What is more important for a just society – the elimination of poverty or the elimination of inequality?

The other day, I came across a video of a young woman with two small children, who, faced with a bleak situation in which she had no means for the next meal, went to the Ottapalam police station in Kerala and was helped by policemen.

It was a touching story which deservedly went viral. Two aspects surprised me. One was that the family when in need had the thought of approaching the police station first, and not the local temple, mosque or church. This was indeed a matter of pride for me as a former police officer. The second was the realisation that such abysmal levels of poverty still existed in a State like Kerala.

The girl and her two children were reasonably well-dressed and did not seem to belong to the lowest strata of society. It was clear from the girl's statement that she had a job. It was not clear whether the husband had one. In any case, the income they had was not enough to ensure that the children got three square meals a day. Maybe it was a case of genteel poverty, but it was poverty all the same.

To the French economist Thomas Piketty, who has studied global wealth over the past many years with the help of enormous empirical data, inequality of wealth was the primary issue. I have not gone through Thomas Piketty's three voluminous tomes on the history of inequalities, but had picked up a copy of 'A Brief History of Inequality' (2021), in which he attempted a summation of his findings.

To my surprise, his finding was that at least since the end of the 18th century, there has been a historic movement toward equality. According to Piketty, the world of the early 2020s, no matter how unjust it may seem, is more egalitarian than that of 1950, which itself was more egalitarian than that of 1850 or 1780.

Piketty goes on to point out that at present, humanity is in better health than it has ever been, but this great leap forward has merely

Equality and poverty may be related concepts, but they are dissimilar in certain manifestations. This is a distinction that needs to be borne in mind as we look into dimensions of inequality



shifted inequalities to another level. Disparities in access to education and basic healthcare between the global North and South remain very deep.

“Like the quest for the ideal democracy, which is nothing other than the march toward political equality, the march toward equality in all its forms (social, economic, educational, cultural, political) is an ongoing process which will never be completed,” he said.

Given these difficulties, it seems reasonable to say that elimination of poverty should take precedence over the quest to achieve equality. Significant achievements in poverty eradication have been recorded by two of the largest nations on earth, India and China over the past few decades.

I remember President APJ Abdul Kalam telling me when I called on him as the chief of India’s External Intelligence in 2005 that we could lift millions of our people out of poverty if we could make sure that there was no war for the next ten years.

There was no war, indeed, in the next several years. Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanyam said, in 2015, that the rate of poverty reduction achieved from 2005-06 to 2011-12 was the fastest in the country’s history. Poverty reduction since then has also kept pace more or less. The absence of war had certainly been a key factor, as the Supreme Commander advised his Intelligence Chief!



My old professor, Dr.C.T. Kurien, an intense critic of Neo-classical economics, argued in his book, ‘Economics of Real Life: A New Exposition’ (2019), that ‘high growth’ in India meant little unless it led to a reduction of poverty. Well, the statistics quoted above seem to suggest that the goal of reduction of poverty has been achieved to a considerable extent in recent years, but perhaps at the cost of an increase in disparities in income.

The young scholar, Thomas Verghese questions in his book, ‘The Happiness Goal’ (2015), whether the economic growth model that has been promoted with its great promise of lifting people out of poverty and misery, has proved to be unsuccessful when evaluated as a whole.

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He said it failed to focus adequately on ‘other dimensions of development such as social, environmental, human, political, religious and spiritual to build a holistic development paradigm where the true indicator of development is human well-being and happiness.’

The eradication of poverty through other models has been engaging the attention of economists. Pilot studies conducted by a team headed by Guy Standing of the School of Oriental and African Studies and Sarath Davala of the Self-Employed Women’s Association in Madhya Pradesh brought out interesting findings about the importance of improving human development and resilience. Both, along with social worker Renana Jhabvala and social scientist Soumya Kapoor Mehta authored a book titled ‘Basic Income – A Transformative Policy for India’ (2015).

The Indian National Congress included such a Universal Basic Income scheme under the name ‘Nyuntam Aay Yojana’ (NYAY) in their manifesto for the 2019 general elections. However, even the leading members of the party seemed to have been unable to grasp the nuances of the concept. It is interesting to note that NYAY again finds mention in the Raipur Resolution of the Congress, adopted last month.

In 2010, academician C.K. Prahlad, in his book, ‘The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid,’ spoke about eradicating poverty through profits. He looked innovatively at the creation

of ‘inclusive capitalism’ so that the capitalist world, with its technological and managerial know-how and investment capacity, could make a significant contribution to the solution of the problem of pervasive global poverty and disenfranchisement.

I shall conclude by quoting the Nobel Prize winners for economics Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo who say that economic growth, which requires manpower and brainpower, will spark and spread if citizens are properly educated, well-fed, healthy, secure and confident.

However, they added, “If misery and frustration are allowed to have their way, and anger and violence take over, it is not clear that the spark will ever arrive. A social policy that works, that keeps people from striking out because they feel that they have nothing to lose, may be a crucial step toward preserving the country’s date with that elusive take-off.”

In other words, freedom from fear and want is the key not only to human security but to national security as well.

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DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY IN INDIAN UNION BUDGET 2023-24

The budget is a constitutional obligation as per Article 112. It is a description of the fiscal policies of the government in taxation, and public expenditure policies and the financial plans corresponding to these.

Selected Indicators of Union Budget 2023-24

Table I: Selected indicators of budget 2023-24

Sl No.	Item/year	2022-23 Revised Estimate	2023-24 Budget Estimates	% change over R.E. 2022-23
1	Revenue Receipts	23,48,413	26,32,281	12.08
2	Capital Receipts	18,38,819	18,70,816	1.74
3	Total Receipts	41,87,232	45,03,097	7.54
4	Total Expenditure	41,87,232	45,03,097	7.54
5	Total Exp. on Revenue Account	34,58,959	35,02,126	1.25
6	Total Exp. on Interest payment	9,40,651	10,79,971	14.8
7	Total Exp. on Capital Account	7,28,274	10,00,961	37.44
8	Revenue Deficit	11,10,546	8,69,855	-21.6
9	R. Deficit as % of GDP	4.1	2.9	-
10	Fiscal Deficit	17,55,319	17,86,816	1.79
11	Fiscal Deficit as % of GDP	6.4	5.9	-
12	Primary Deficit (11-6)	8,14,668	7,06,845	-13.2
13	Primary Deficit as % GDP	3.0	2.3	-
14	Gross Dement Product (Nominal)	27,307,751	301,75,065	10.5

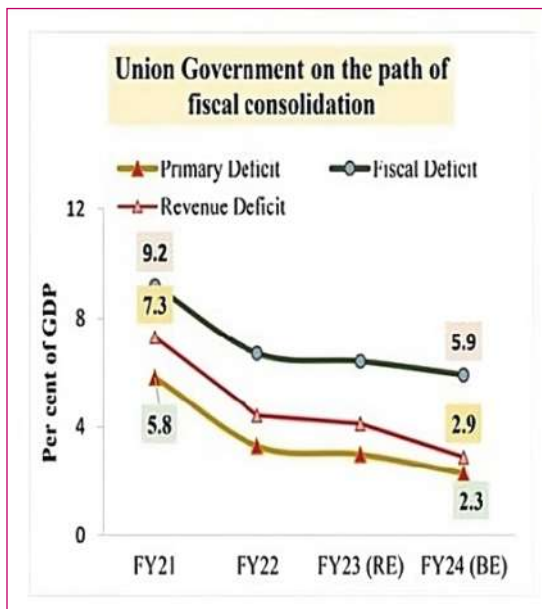
Source: Budget Documents, Government of India, Various Years

The last row of the Table I presents the normal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India as Rs. 3,01,75065 crore. This expects a 10.5 percent increase over the revised GDP of 2022-23 (Rs. 2,7307751 crore). The size of the budget is revealed by the total expenditure which is Rs. 45,03097 crores which shows a 7.5 percent increase over the revised budget 2022-23 (Rs.41,87232 crore).

Total expenditure and total receipts will always be kept at the same level, which is clear from rows 3 and 4 in the table. When total expenditure on revenue account records only 1.25 percent increase over the previous years revised budget. Capital expenditures show a 37.44 percent increase. This shows the big push given to capital expenditure in the budget.

The budget gives the impression that the Government is in a fiscal consolidation path. The revenue deficit is reduced from the previous year's 4.1 percent of GDP to 2.9 percent of GDP. Similarly, the fiscal deficit is narrowed down to 5.9 percent of GDP from 6.4 percent of GDP. The following graph provides a clear picture of fiscal consolidation path.

Path of Fiscal Consolidation



The graph examines the fiscal consolidation attempt from fiscal 2021 to 2024. Sustained effort and the resultant decline in deficit indicators are visible.



Focus on Amrit Kaal

Budget visions 'saptarishi' priorities with programmes for empowering and tapping the youth power through varied methods of job creation while the country moves towards 100 years of freedom by 2047. When the periodic labour force survey reported that the urban unemployment stands at 7.2 percent in the quarter ending September 2022, job creation through investment in research and development (R&D), infrastructure, green growth, and start-ups are resorted to in the budget.

Only by an examination of the sectoral allocation of expenditures, it would be clear whether the budget is really inclusive as it claims in many ways. Let us examine briefly the following Table II.

Table II: Ministry-wise expenditure on Major Sectors (2023-24) (Rs. in Crore)

Sl. No	Item / Year	2022-23(RE)	2023-24(BE)	% of total expenditure
1	Defence	5,84,791	59,538 (1.5%)	13.2
2	Road Transport & Highways	2,17,027	2,70,435 (24.6%)	6.05
3	Railways	1,62,312	2,41,268 (48.6%)	6.02
4	Food & Public distribution	2,96,523	2,05,765 (-30.0)	4.57
5	Home affairs	1,93,912	1,96,035 (1.1)	4.35
6	Chemicals & Fertilizers	2,27,681	1,76,482(-21.0)	3.96
7	Rural Development	1,82,382	1,59,964 (-12.3)	3.55
8	Agriculture & Farmers Welfare	1,18,913	1,25,036 (5.1)	2.78
9	Communications	1,05,478	1,23,393 (17.0)	2.74
10	Education	9,9,881	1,12,899 (13.0)	2.50
11	Health & Family Welfare	7,9,145	89,155 (12.6)	1.97
12	Jal Shakti	7,4,029	97,278 (31.4)	2.16
13	Housing & Urban Affairs	7,5,546	76,432 (2.5)	1.70
14	Other Ministries	17,70,613	20,33,419 (14.8)	45.15
15	Total Expenditure	41,87,232	45,03,097 (7.5)	--

NB: RE (Revised Estimate) / BE (Budget Estimate)

Given in brackets are percentage changes over the revised estimate of 2022-23

Source: Expenditure Budget, Union Govt.

When we examine Table II, we observe that defence attracts the highest share of expenditure followed by physical infrastructure. Food and Public Distribution system, though gets 4.57 percent of the total expenditure, there is a drastic cut of -30.6 percent over the revised estimate of the budget 2022-23.

It is even a challenge to the National Food Security Act of 2013. The warning on global food security given by FAO is still active as the Russia-Ukraine tension still persists. With this, we also read the row-8 on Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. Though 2.78 percent of the Total Expenditure is set apart for agriculture, is it enough where 48 percent of the population of 140 crore or more (2021 population census has not been undertaken yet) finds a living in agriculture, keeps India food self-reliant and brings large export earnings.

At this juncture, we have to examine row-6 on chemicals and fertilisers also. Though the sector gets 3.9 percent of the T.E., the allocation this year is 21 percent less than the revised budget.

Sri Lanka's experience of what happened to its agriculture and food security when chemical fertilisers were banned would be a learning lesson for any government. Chemicals are human-friendly unless they are overused or abused.

A promise to build a high tech digital public infrastructure to agriculture is progressive. Similarly, the 'Sree Anna' project for making India a global hub for millets is appreciable because that may help reduce the alarming level of malnutrition in India, especially among children and women. Further, in order to promote agro-based innovative value-addition start-ups in rural areas the Agriculture Accelerator Fund is promised. Similarly, credit facility worth Rs.20 lakh crore is earmarked for animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries.

When focus is shifted to education, its share in total expenditure is found as 2.5 percent. But this amount is only 0.37 percent of GDP. The University Education Commission right from the late President of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan onwards reiterated the centrality of investing 5 percent of GDP or more in education.

As per the study advanced by Pratham (NGO) in January 2023, the percentage of children in class 3 in government or private schools who were able to read at the level of class 2 dropped from 27.3 percent in 2018 to 20.5 percent in 2022. With several indicators, the study paints the picture of fast-falling quality of elementary education, which is the base of any level of learning afterwards. Kerala belongs to the list of States which depicted 10 percentage points or more fall in standards.

Scheme for Youth

At a time of high unemployment, budget proposes internship facility with stipend for three years, 100 labs will be set up in engineering institutions for developing applications using 5G services. Three centres of excellence for R&D in Artificial Intelligence will be established in select educational institutions. A National Data Governance Policy will be released to enable access to anonymised data. A programme to promote research and innovation in pharmaceuticals will be taken up through Centres of Excellence. However, India's Research and Development (R&D) expenditure - GDP ratio of 0.7 percent is abysmal when compared to major economies and much below the world average of 1.8 percent of GDP.

Row-11 gives us a glimpse of the health sector. Though health and family welfare get 1.97 percent of the total budgetary expenditure, it is only 0.29 percent of GDP as if the Finance Minister is unaware of the National Health Policy 2017. This policy mandates States to set apart 8 percent of GDP for health by 2020 (so far no State has reached the level) and the centre 2.5 percent of GDP by 2022. This faultline pinpoints the cleavage between the promise and reality.

Jal Sakti (Row-12) is another area of concern since India is home to more than 17 percent of the world population with hardly 4 percent world water resources.

This vital sector is given 2.16 percent of the total expenditure. Conservation of water is very crucial for two reasons: (1) It ensures the availability of drinking water to the most populous country of the world and (2) Indian agriculture is still a gamble on the monsoons.

Though the Finance Minister reiterates that the budget 2023-24 is an inclusive budget, it is not. All the socially important sectors which we have examined get much less than what they deserve.



As a matter of fact, total expenditure budgeted in 2023-24 is Rs. 45, 03097 crore only which is just 7.5 percent higher than the revised budget of 2022-23. Out of this, India is forced to keep apart 13.2 percent for defence. Because of our war monger neighbours and the war clouds around.

To conclude, though the Finance Minister reiterates that the budget 2023-24 is an inclusive budget, it is not. All the socially important sectors which we have examined get much less than what they deserve. Of course, the dream of an internationally-competitive physical infrastructure covering highways, railways, airways and sea-ways should become a reality.

Therefore, a Rs. 10 lakh-crore-agenda is justifiable. But as former Secretary of Health and Family Welfare K. Sujatha Rao observes, "Equity and justice are values that must guide a polity to build a nation. Measuring policy and money allocation only in terms of political expediency is short-term and unsustainable. When such structures collapse, as they will, it is the poor and the marginalised who will suffer disproportionately." (The Hindu, 8.2.2023; "Neglecting the health sector has consequences").

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A CRY FOR **RACIAL JUSTICE**

Courage is needed to stand up against systemic racism. Where are citizens of goodwill in America? Please save us from racial injustice. Justice remains a luxury for the blacks. **The continual oppression and injustice destroying black communities since 1441 is a national health crisis in America. It has now risen to a state of emergency**



Racial injustice is real. We must have the courage to face it. About one million Americans died, due to Covid-19, the majority of whom were black, brown and indigenous people. This pandemic challenges us to revisit the way we are addressing the epidemic of injustice.

In the United States of America where I live, despite our latest medical, technological and economic surplus, we are yet to find a vaccine for the virus of injustice. On May 25, 2020, Amy Cooper, a white woman, called the police about a black man, Christian Cooper, who asked that she follow the dog leash laws in Central Park, New York.

Amy was infected by the virus of injustice. She was sure that as a white woman, the justice system would favour her. But in the end, it did not go her way. As Dr. Martin Luther King said, "True peace is not a mere absence of tension. It is the presence of justice."



Where are the Catholics? Where is the action and show of support from the Catholic Church? Courage is needed to stand up against systemic racism. Where are citizens of goodwill in America? Please save us from racial injustice. Justice remains a luxury for the blacks. The continual oppression and injustice destroying black communities since 1441 is a national health crisis in America. It has now risen to a state of emergency.

The list of murdered black Americans is endless. This is an epidemic that has been lurking in the black community for centuries. It has been silenced only due to the reluctance of white Americans to address and fix these issues head-on. Black Americans are speaking out and bringing the issue to the forefront. As a black man in America, almost every day, I ask myself if I am going to be the next victim of injustice.

During the Civil Rights Movement in America, black people were asked to protest without violence, but they were often met with violence. The whites felt that they had to defend themselves. Today, in America, we, black people feel that our rights have been violated, our voices oppressed, and our existence erased. Hence, there is going to be a reaction.

The killing of four girls in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, on September 15, 1963, the killing of Medgar Evers on June 12, 1963, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968, are just a few examples of actions that culminated in riots due to systemic racial injustice.

The race problems surpass the global pandemic in longevity, scope, and the number of people affected. The pandemic has a cure in progress. **But what cure is there for systemic racism and racial injustice?**



Today, we see the results of a game played against black people involving white privilege, oppression, and silencing. Aside from healthcare, food, shelter, and a place to be free, black people are yearning for justice.

Author James Baldwin said, “Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.” This is why people are protesting. They have a deep hunger for justice. As Dr King said, “I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.” While some are fighting for their lives against the pandemic in a hospital bed, Black and Brown are now allies on the street fighting for justice.

The Problem of Race in America

“The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the colour line,” said the historian, W.E.B. DuBois in his book, ‘The Souls of Black Folk’. Born in Haiti, the first black republic in the world, I did not know that I was a black man until I came to America. The virus of injustice persists due to the notion of race. In 1968, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy said that the No. 1 domestic problem was the race problem. In 2023, this is still a problem.

The race problems surpass the global pandemic in longevity, scope, and the number of people affected. The pandemic has a cure in progress. But what cure is there for systemic racism and racial injustice?

People around the world are beginning to see that the race problem has not been solved. Instead, it had been silenced and allowed to stew, but the pot is now boiling over. As Dr. Martin Luther King said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

The issue of the colour line and the race problem was preventable. All that was needed was a recognition of shared humanity. However, white Americans did not want to budge. So, protests became the means to ensure that blacks would be heard.

Hunger for Justice

You cannot delay feeding your child when they are hungry. You can't delay immediate justice for those who need it. Injustice is like starvation. When you are angry, you do not know how to reason. Survival instincts always win. As Dr. King said, “You may well ask, why direct action, why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path? You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action.”

Many have experienced hunger. I was a child, yet I remember my mother always saying that it was a tough time for them to feed us daily. Somedays, we had to go to bed with nothing, we only drank a glass of sugar water and ate a piece of bread. That was dinner.

Today, this is the reason why people are in the street. They are starving, begging for justice because they know what it is like to live without it. Today, it is time to recognise that racial injustice is real. The world is crying for justice. This is the time for us to come together to find a vaccine for this virus.

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THE FADING OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

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As this is the 40th year of them being in the USA, we can recognise they have achieved many dreams, both individually and as a family, and yet, this dream feels more distant and unrealistic as I get older.



As I navigate different aspects of my life, I witness the growing weight of the hoarding of wealth, by people like Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, and founder of SpaceX Elon Musk, and the devastation it brings to the everyday person in the United States.

Growing up in a multiracial household in rural Delaware in the United States, I was conditioned to admire the vastly unattainable goal of gathering as much wealth as I could without having any possible way to spend it in a lifetime.

My father helped run a small family business and my mother's family came to the United States with very little as they immigrated from Cambodia in the 1980s as refugees chasing the 'American Dream'. I question them if they still believe in it. And yet, I can't fault them.

The American Dream was presented as a form of reachable idealism shared through American television and movies that became quickly burned into their minds. My mother's family believed this as they struggled to find income for necessities.

As this is the 40th year of them being in the USA, we can recognise they have achieved many dreams, both individually and as a family, and yet, this dream feels more distant and unrealistic as I get older. Unless we challenge this perspective, it eats away at our core values and damages our ability to care for our neighbours and community as we become focused on our individual desires. And yet, we function in a society where this search for financial security becomes indispensable. As the wealth gap grows, we distance ourselves from this ideal.

These people were portrayed as novelty and success stories and yet, their wealth collectively grows and it becomes apparent that while they could end global issues, such as hunger, nothing systemically changes. And still, it's not uncommon to hear others in your life or see people on social media critique those at the bottom of the social ladder. These are people who need the most public assistance and always wonder where their next meal will come from and if they can find somewhere safe for shelter in the evening. But they are being blamed as the cause for it all instead of those who have obtained excessive wealth and resources.

Why should someone be allowed to own multiple homes, cars and yachts when the average family is debating if parents should buy themselves food when their children don't and are fearing the next inevitable and costly emergency? And regardless of your political ideology, these fears are all true.

We point to a different monster as being the cause of it all and a different antidote to this toxin. This growing problem feels like the cause of a system designed to fail those who need the most help and assistance. It's the expectation of a broken foundation causing the house it is supporting to, one day, collapse; every solution keeping this system intact is simply adding fresh wooden planks to the flooring of a house infested with termites.

The whole cost of this system is placed on those who suffer the most. How can we not expect those people to become angry? To be raised in a country and know that your grandparents struggled, and your parents struggled, and you continue to struggle. The American Dream fades away deeper in the distance as you grasp nothingness.



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While we choose to not be defined by our societal expectations in our contributions to the American economy, we are constrained by those expectations. I've known individuals with disabilities who wish to receive government assistance and focus on their health needs, but due to their marriages or how the government defines their disability, this assistance is not a guarantee.

We sacrifice joy for security. It causes a wave of anger to grow that sits for generations as the situation grows worse. The way to find a non-violent solution to this growing problem is to expand outside of your inner being and reconnect to your community.

How many people know their neighbours' names? How many people know what their average day consists of? How many people know what brings them joy?

We need to be able to answer these questions to form meaningful relationships and support one another through creating systems of mutual aid that don't rely on already existing broken systems that have failed the most vulnerable.

As much pain and suffering exist and although this may not exist perfectly in a system where those with few resources are given to those with no resources, lives could be saved, and people can be fed or have their basic needs met. While that may not be the dream that my family spent decades searching for, this could be a new American Dream.

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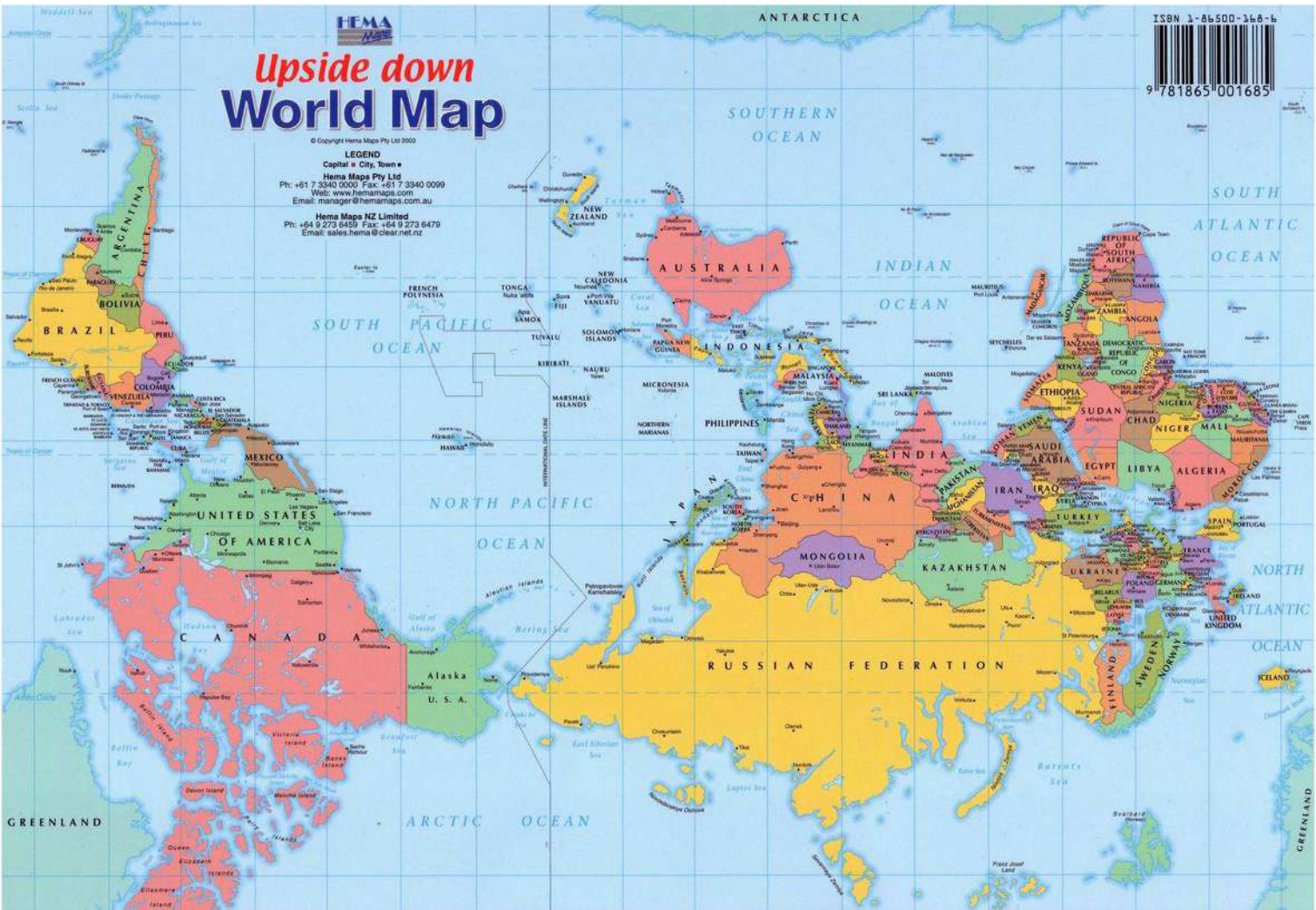


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INVERTING MAPS TO CHALLENGE TACIT INEQUALITIES



Some inequalities have come to be so structurally internalised and systematic that we fail to take note of them, or worse, find them innocuous. Such biases pervade our world, ubiquitous and invisible as the air we breathe. They insidiously lurk in our standards, conventions, etymologies, and traditions.

One such bias pertains to directions, encapsulated in expressions like ‘heading south’, implying decline or trouble, which throughout colonial history, seems to have turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Only 32 per cent of the Earth’s land mass lies in the Southern Hemisphere, of which a quarter is constituted by the terra incognitum of Antarctica. The three major landmasses of the Southern Hemisphere – Africa, South America, and Australia, apart from their numerous islands, all feature natural barriers that kept them isolated until significant advancements in cartography and maritime industry were made.

Despite being the cradle of our species, teeming with vibrant millennia-old indigenous groups, and prospering with magnificent civilisations and opulent kingdoms, the base-bowl of The Blue Marble (Blue Marble is the photo of the earth taken from space) was dominantly thought of as being mysterious, inhospitable, and sinister by the First World.

While a lot of it is attributable to a lack of knowledge and a general fear of the unknown, exploration didn’t bring about a change of attitude. Natives of the Southern Hemisphere were dominantly viewed by much of the First World as savage, socioculturally underdeveloped, intellectually backward, and undeserving of the riches and bounties of their land.

While race and ethnicity were dominant factors, geographical essentialism had a significant role to play as well, supplementing xenophobia. This is evident in the considerable neglect and discrimination faced by the descendants of colonists who settled in the overlooked part of the world for a long time. This makes cartographic convention an issue of critical social scientific reflection.

There is no sense of ‘up’ and ‘down’ in space. Earth’s gravity pulls everything towards its centre. Yet, when NASA released its iconic ‘Blue Marble’ photograph, the originally-generated image was flipped to conform to the generally-popular orientation of the globe which represents the mental image of the Earth that we have. The disparities are stark.

Consider for instance, that even today, after centuries of colonialism, decades of globalisation, waves of mass migration, and intensification of cosmopolitanism, only one in nine people inhabit the planet’s southern half. Only two countries from the Southern Hemisphere feature in the list of 50 wealthiest countries by GDP per capita. To understand these disparities, historical and anthropological analyses are of the essence.

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The so-called upper reaches of the planet have historically typically been inhabited by more exploratory and expeditionary civilisations. The societies inhabiting the northern regions have usually been more geopolitically curious and aspirational than their nether counterparts. There are, of course, notable exceptions, such as the Polynesians, who were exceptional seafarers.

However, given the presence of certain key facilitators, opportunities, scarcities, and adversities, regimes in the northern part of the world have generally been more motivated to seek to extend their influence and control beyond their lands. Such factors ranged from the availability of horses and cattle to the evolution of key metallurgical techniques and the scarcity of various natural resources such as soil, freshwater, and minerals to the asymmetric distribution of ocean currents and wind systems, favouring voyaging.

The quest for more resources pushed kingdoms of the North to pursue martial expeditions into uncharted lands and seas. The landscape proved to be favourable – the presence of vast expanses of flat, clear land as the steppes and riverine plains helped certain kingdoms



grow into mighty, expansive empires as they consolidated power by successively conquering and absorbing neighbouring territories.

In comparison, civilisations and communities in the Southern Hemisphere were often confined in their habitats. Transcontinental deserts, dense tropical rainforests, and scattered islands prevented contact among various isolated cultures residing within their bounds.

Many such societies and communities were self-sufficient with plentiful natural resources available in their habitat, providing them little incentive to look for bounties beyond their realm. Tropical rainforests, in particular, provided cosy, snug, naturally-rich habitats which were comfortable to reside in, but difficult to navigate and surpass.

Such compartmentalisation ensured that few civilisations could rise to become large empires by expanding their dominion and consolidating power. Even when imperial powers were eager to expand, most regimes were hesitant to fund voyages down south, owing to ignorance of geographical knowledge and the prevalence of ominous myths and folk tales about the mysterious frontier of the world.

Since most written historical accounts that exist today were composed by Europeans and given colonial power structures in education and academia, it is no wonder that most standards, conventions, norms, and narratives in any academic discipline or field of knowledge are



Eurocentric and embody European biases and conveniences.

This explains Britain's perch at the top centre of the world, the prime meridian passing through it, hearkening back to its imperial paramountcy and pervasive colonial control, where the crown would set the rhythm for the entire world.

Before the British, the Greeks and the Romans, the plinths of Western civilisation exhibited similar self-centric alignment in their cartography of the known world. Even as much of our world moved towards liberal democracy, inconsideration bred from egocentrism was perpetuated as a convention.

Turning the world map upside down is not only an act of critique or dissent, a postcolonial unlearning of a supremacist, imperial construct. It is an important reminder to us to be conscious and critical of everything we take for granted – to never stop questioning conventions, authority, and the establishment.

The moment we glance at a so-called 'upside-down' map, we find ourselves overtaken by an overwhelming sense of absurdity, a product of profound conditioning. Once the initial consternation has faded, one could start looking at the deeper nuances of such an orientation.

Most continents taper North to South. Hence, an inverted map makes continents appear as towering structures and oceans appear as giant bowls. It is as instinctive as it is fallacious for

us to subconsciously feel a sense of gravity looking at a 2D map. It is a psychological quirk that would incidentally help us better visualise the historical and contemporary geopolitics and socioeconomic dynamics of our world.

A South-up map helps visualise maritime routes, anthropological origins, migration patterns, and resource flows better. Among others, it brings ecological hotspots to the forefront, portrays the malady of desertification akin to alarmingly rising flames, captures the tense close-knit and strategic significance of the Indian Ocean region, and helps us realise the oft-forgotten rarity of inhabitable land on the planet. These insights are usually lost in North-up maps.

A South-up map huddles the developed world below as sediments while bringing the rising peaks of developing nations into the centre. The South begins to seem like a prized top



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spot that everyone strives to reach, but finds it difficult to stay in. A South-up map is not merely a long-neglected equal alternative or rotational counterpart and not a novel curio or head-turner meant to flare one's interest for a fleeting moment and then be forgotten.

It is a map more in tune with our times, values, and worldly dynamics. It is a map that is consistent with modern, liberal ideals, an acknowledgement of historical injustice, and a small but significant step towards rebalancing the skewed global geopolitical soft power dynamic.

It better reflects our understanding of power structures and puts into perspective global anthropological, sociocultural, economic, and geopolitical fluxes and interactions as well as our critical environmental context. It is a map that unifies rather than divides, restores than aggravates, humbles than foments, and promises hope than furthers greed and lust for power.

In a discussion of South-up maps, it's pertinent to address another fundamental cartographical default that most of us tend to take for granted. Devised in the 16th century, the Mercator projection is the prevalent mode of representing the world on 2D surfaces such as pages and charts. It renders a map of the Earth on a rectangular sheet via cylindrical projection. Since a sphere is a figure that is widest at the centre, and while a rectangle has a constant width along its entire length, Mercator maps, by far the most popular kind, stretch countries further away from the equator out of proportion.

Hence, the further away a country is from the equator, the bigger it appears. This blows European nations, Canada, Russia and the US out of proportion while underplaying the expanse of South and Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Central America. These are the parts of the world with maximal population concentration and fastest growth.

A GDP-per-capita map of the world starkly illustrates the consistently disproportionate geographical distribution of wealth. While most of the world's tapped resources are concentrated between the tropics, most of the wealth lies beyond it, even in the Southern Hemisphere.

To their geographical situation, most nations between the tropics face persistent crises and



obstacles to development, including epidemics and natural disasters that are worsened by climate change, poverty, and unplanned imposition of First World ideas of development.

As people inhabiting tropical and subtropical lands deal with the effects of climate change which are disproportionately contributed to by the consumers, companies, and technology of those lying beyond it, it is vital to challenge all perniciously inert established narratives.

A South-up map, particularly one that provides a more equitable projection than Mercator, and is centred around a non-Euro-American latitude, is not merely an artefact of choice or an instrument of inclusivity. It is the need of the hour.

It is a map that allows us to critically reflect on our choices and puts global dynamics better into perspective. It serves as a reminder to us, children and adults, students and academics, northerners and southerners, alike, to be conscious of internalised biases in our choices, be wary of taking any fundamentals for granted, scrutinise latent inequalities, and never stop questioning the *status quo*.

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INCOME INEQUALITY AND MINIMUM WAGE POLICY IN UGANDA

The World Bank report in 2022 indicated that Uganda has not yet attained middle-income status. Uganda's per capita income at \$850 is below the lower-middle income threshold of \$1045 per person. This implies that there is a large number of people who still live below the poverty line.

According to the government of Uganda, the minimum wage is 130000 Ugandan shillings (\$45). Even though this is the official rate, people are paid below that also.

It is also an undeniable fact that there is a small section whose income is skyrocketing every month, every year.

As for the highest wage, The Daily Monitor newspaper, January 19, 2021, said that the highest-paid government workers received 53 million Ugandan shillings per month (\$14,722). This does not include medical allowances, insurance and transport reimbursements.

This means the highest-paid worker receives the salary of 327 lowest-paid workers in one month.

This has led to great inequality in Uganda. People on low salaries focus on managing their basic needs such as food, medical care, and housing. They cannot spend on anything else. Thus, the minimum wage of 130000 shillings



is not enough. It has to be raised to ensure a balance in wealth distribution.

Secondly, because of this low income, it is not easy to send children to good schools. If at all a person manages to pay school fees, it is for a school of the lowest grade. Hence, this child cannot compete with one who has studied in a good school. Economically, this will ensure that the vicious cycle of poverty continues.

So, the minimum wage has to be raised.

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**ART &
PEACE**

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STOMP ONTO THE NEW ARENA

**A TEMPLE-ALLIED VENUE IN KERALA
RECENTLY HOSTED THE BIBLICAL
CHAVITTU NATAKAM**



Peruvanam and Gothuruthu do carry their Muziris-nurtured mores. It's often forgotten or ignored in modern times. **The February 25 staging of Chavittu Natakam at the first-ever Peruvanam International Village Festival was, thus, a reminder of that layered legacy.**



Recently, a heritage spot in central Kerala hosted a pre-classical Christian dance-drama at its key venue for elaborate ensembles traditionally associated with Hindu temples. From a contemporary point of view, the pioneering event at the village close to the State's cultural capital carried the spirit of inviting an 'alien' art. After all, the stomp theatre of Chavittu Natakam typically stages Biblical themes. Peruvanam, just south of Thrissur, is primarily renowned for its grooming of expansive percussive concerts for 1,500 years.

Now, zoom out to take a broader or distant view. The sandy belt of coastal Vadakkan Paravur that has nourished Chavittu Natakam is barely 25 miles south of rugged Peruvanam with its red soil. Both places did share an ethos in a big way till eight centuries ago. That's until a deluge in 1341 wreaked havoc along the parts of Muziris territory.

The disaster diluted the vitality of Kodungallur as a major port town. Between Kodungallur and Paravur of today's Thrissur and Ernakulam districts respectively lies Gothuruthu. It's a marshy hamlet that went on to become the cradle of Chavittu Natakam in the post-Muziris era. That was courtesy of the 1499 arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar and a subsequent spread of the European force down the coast.

In short, Peruvanam and Gothuruthu do carry their Muziris-nurtured mores. It's often forgotten or ignored in modern times. The February 25 staging of Chavittu Natakam at the first-ever Peruvanam International Village Festival was, thus, a reminder of that layered legacy. The hour-long evening show in the middle of the three-day programme sought to link certain lost historical links, winning audience applause. The presentation of the popular 'Carelman Charitham' play at Peruvanam was the latest in a decade's efforts to look at the region's culture from the perspective of erstwhile Muziris.



Bids to promote Chavittu Natakam as the world's only maritime theatre began in 2012 when India got its first Biennale. Named Kochi-Muziris, the mega art show which started on December 12 featured Chavittu Natakam on the sidelines of its 108-day-programme.

A day after Christmas that year, the organisers convened the first-ever interaction of all the existing schools of Chavittu Natakam. The five-day 'Chuvati 12' at Gothuruth hosted half-a-dozen shows of the five-century-old Kerala ballet that has flourished in a Latin Catholic context and revels in European ballet's aesthetics as well as costumes.

Chavittu Natakam is believed to have originated in the 16th century after the Portuguese invasion, even as its playback scores are in the ancient Tamil language.

The 2012 celebrations saw a day-long seminar on December 29. Scholars, artists, aesthetes and buffs of Chavittu Natakam exchanged ideas that were to be subsequently published in a book.

It also initiated the work of a concrete statue of Chavittu Natakam founder, the medieval-era missionary Chinnathambi Annavi. Coincidentally, 2012 was when Chavittu Natakam made it to the list of arts at the annual State-level inter-school Yuvajanolsavam contest.

Rapid Strides

Two years thereon, Chavittutatakam went a step further to present a Purana story. This was, again, courtesy of the biennale which was in its second edition. 'Sabarimala Sree Dharma Shastavu' lent fresh aesthetics and costumes to the form. No less than 40 artists of the Kerala Chavittu Nataka Academy at Gothuruth danced with vigour, portraying plots around the life of the mythological lord as the child of pivotal Hindu gods Shiva and Vishnu.

Directed by the dance-drama's esteemed guru Joseph Salim, the three-hour show revelled in energetic movements and delivered lyrics in Malayalam. Adding to

“This art came from the efforts of toiling fishermen, who found an interesting myth in the tales brought to their shore by the Jesuit priests during the early 16th century following the arrival of the Portuguese.”



the revolution, Chavittu Natakam became gender-inclusive by staging an all-woman show in 2018.

The Mumbai-based Keli Ramachandran, who was curator of the performing arts festival of the first three biennales, turned out to be the chief organiser in bringing Chavittu Natakam to the February 24-26, 2023, Peruvanam International Village Festival.

“We won’t call it an entertainment show,” the native of Peruvanam said at the outset. “For, this art came from the efforts of toiling fishermen, who found an interesting myth in the tales brought to their shore by the Jesuit priests during the early 16th century following the arrival of the Portuguese.”

If the Chavittu Natakam at the several Kochi-Muziris Biennale lauded the efforts of illustrious George Kutty in reviving the art form in the last century, the late master’s prime disciple Thampi Payyappilly was the central artist at Peruvanam as well.

“The Portuguese in Kerala managed to train local soldiers by taking into their fold Christian youths proficient in the martial art of Kalaripayattu. As a mark of gratitude, they gifted us with this tough art which requires extraordinary physical strength,” explained 56-year-old Payyappilly, who has four decades of experience in the art. “The art faced its bad times even till the turn of the present century, though there were signs of its rejuvenation from the 1950s.”

Today, after the Covid-19 lull, Chavittu Natakam is again walking back to a bright stage.

Sreevalsan Thiyadi is an arts enthusiast based in Thrissur, Kerala.



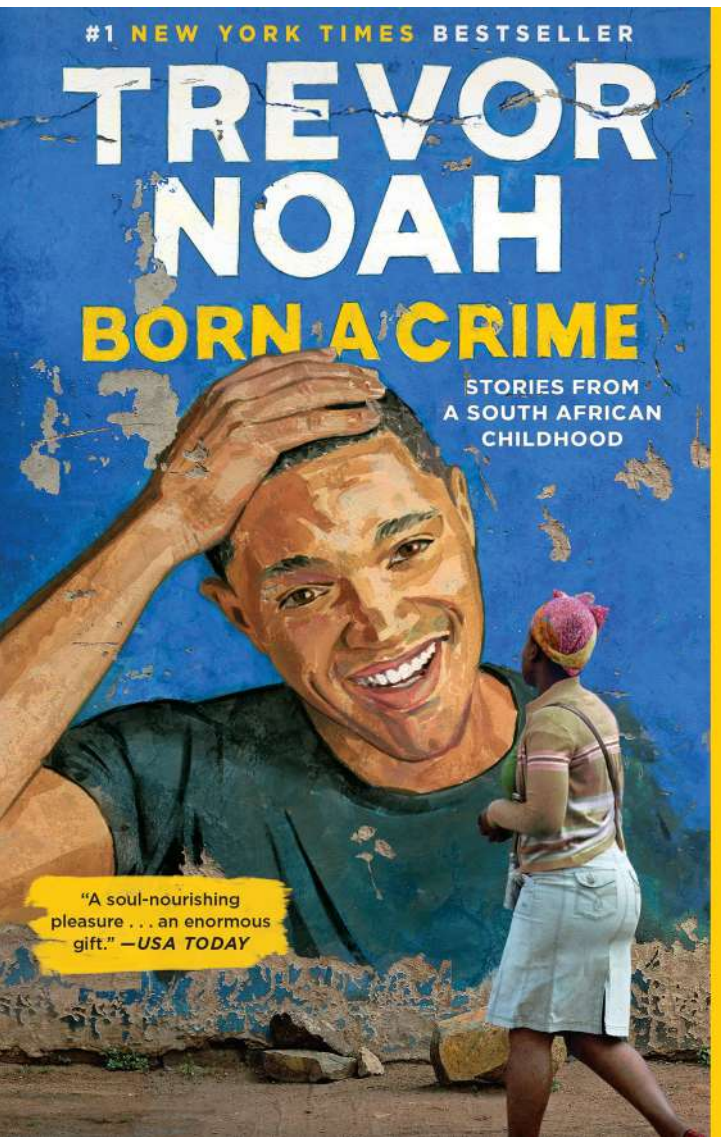
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**BOOK
REVIEW**

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BORN UNDER THE IMMORALITY ACT

**NOTED COMEDIAN TREVOR NOAH HAS
WRITTEN AN ENGAGING AUTOBIOGRAPHY**



‘Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood’ is an autobiography of Trevor Noah, a comedian born in South Africa during the time of apartheid to a Swiss-German father and native Xhosa mother.

The memoirs unfold through various annals of South Africa’s socio-historical, religious, political, and linguistic ruminations, tinted with wit and humour.

The book begins with a vindication of the title of his life story by presenting the Immorality Act of 1927. This prohibited Europeans and natives from sexual intercourse and announcing the same as a crime for which they may be imprisoned for a few years.

Noah’s birth in 1984, violated the legal obligations of a racist government, and thus became a living crime himself. Every personal narrative in the book is supported by a factual description of the social and cultural pressures of his time, which enables the readers to feel an emotional connection.

Trevor strongly believes in the power of language to unite people, as it weaves a sense of oneness among diversified cultures. From his personal and political narrative, he concludes that 'language brings with it an identity and a culture', or at least the perception of it.



Even though the life narrative tries to bring out the character of the author, the one who emerges with great triumph is his mother, Patricia Nombuysele. It was her conscious and brave decision to have a child. Patricia was very well aware of the consequences she had to face once she violated the law.

More than a life partner, Patricia was desperately longing for a child to feel a sense of belonging in this world. She told Robert Noah, the Swiss-German father of Trevor, he need not take care of them or never see his child, and it was not going to affect his life in any manner.

Patricia took sole responsibility for the child and made sure he got the best life when she said, "I chose to have you because I wanted something to love and something that would love me unconditionally in return."

Trevor says, "My mom did what school didn't. She taught me how to think." In a way, he acknowledges the grit and vigour of thought his mother had imparted to him. Her Xhosa name, Nombuysele means 'she who gives back'. Patricia has proved the worth of her name throughout her life by bringing up an 'illegal' child and helping him to come out into the world of opportunities.

Her strength and hope were centred on her faith in Christianity. The author recounts visiting different churches on Sundays, each one offering something different. Amidst the threatening insecurities of apartheid, Patricia managed to construct a secure life of her own.

Trevor strongly believes in the power of language to unite people, as it weaves a sense of oneness among diversified cultures. From his personal and political narrative, he concludes that 'language brings with it an identity and a culture', or at least the perception of it.

A shared language says "We're the same."
A language barrier says "We're different."

Being a person of mixed race, Trevor has confronted many forms of racial discrimination and bullying. At times, he has felt unfit for the space where he was supposed to live. His mother, provided him with chances to learn many African languages and English as well so that he could connect to the place he belongs to and never miss a great opportunity to connect internationally.



As he grew up, Trevor came to know about the sheer impact of language. He said, "[Former South African president] Nelson Mandela once said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." He was so right. When you make the effort to speak someone else's language, even if it's just basic phrases here and there, you are saying to them, 'I understand that you have a culture and identity that exists beyond me. I see you as a human being.'"

The supremacy of the English language has created great waves, even in the minds of a generation that included Trevor's grandmother as well. When her grandchild prayed in English, she believed that his prayer would be answered quickly because she believed Jesus spoke English.

"The Bible is in English," said Trevor. "Yes, the Bible was not written in English, but the Bible came to South Africa in English." So when Trevor, a white child, prayed in English, it was a hopeful combination for the family.

As a child of mixed race, he has always encountered an identity crisis, and the racist ideology underlies every stressful denial or rejection that has ever happened in his life.

He is truly moved when he says, "Racism exists. People are getting hurt. And just because it's not happening to you, doesn't mean it's not happening. And at some point you have to choose; black or white, pick a side. You can try to hide from it. You can say, 'Oh I don't take sides, but at some point, life will force you to pick a side.'"

The school life experiences and age of infatuation have been termed as 'A Young Man's Long, Awkward, Occasionally Tragic, and Frequently Humiliating Education in Affairs of the Heart'. As the lengthy title suggests, a young man's tempestuous and impulsive emotions are portrayed. They elaborate on his trivial as well as his grave emotional ride.

The book takes the readers on a serious journey through a humorous perspective.



At the end, the author reaches the peak of his emotional vulnerability when his mother is shot by her husband Abel. The reader is shocked and intrigued as the narrative progresses in the final chapter.

The autobiography of Trevor Noah throws light on many lives that were kept hidden or escaped from the bloody hands of apartheid. His life narrative skillfully highlights the survival skills of people who embraced life, no matter how intentionally the socio-political and cultural timeline acted against them, creating painful memories.

The author believes he has inherited much from his mother as he says, "I was blessed with another trait I inherited from my mother: her ability to forget the pain in life. I remember the thing that caused the trauma, but I don't hold on to the trauma. I never let the memory of something painful prevent me from trying something new."

These memoirs reaffirm the yearning for a better life, weaved from absolute grit and resilience, and proclaim the possibilities life offers to everyone. As Patricia said, "Learn from your past and be better because of your past.... but don't cry about your past. Life is full of pain. Let the pain sharpen you, but don't hold on to it. Don't be bitter."

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**FILM
REVIEW**

Pax Lumina 4(2) / 2023 / 75-77

PARASITE

CLASS CONFLICT AND WEALTH INEQUALITY

The South Korean film, ‘Parasite’ (2019), a dark comedic thriller drama, won public acclaim as well as critical appreciation. Directed by Bong Joon-ho, who also served as the producer and scriptwriter, the movie is an engaging act with a thought-provoking message on class conflict and wealth inequality.

In simple terms, but in a passionately evocative way, the movie tells the story of the pain and angst of being underprivileged. The film won four Oscars in 2020. These included Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film. This was a new achievement for South Korean movies.

A large section of ‘Parasite’s’ first half is a comedy-drama with an engaging story and provocative topics. The movie succeeds in vividly portraying the sheer lack of resources for a family to survive and live with dignity. The Kim family struggles to put food on the table while living in a basement.

All the while, they take up odd jobs such as folding pizza boxes and so on. They survive on unprotected wi-fi networks and show their street smartness in using insecticides used for street sweeping to keep their home free of insects. The son, Ki-woo, receives a suseok, often known as a scholar’s stone, from a friend and a recommendation for a position as a tutor for an affluent family.

The hilarious but anxiety-ridden episodes of escapades of the clever Kim family provide a nail-biting watch over the unfolding scenes. The long-running con begins when Ki-woo and his sister Ki-Jung fabricate their credentials for the position. One by one, each member of the Kim family infiltrates the wealthy Park family.

Ki-Jung starts working for the Park’s as an instructor of art therapy. Similarly, Chung-sook, the mother, replaces Moon-Gwang, the housekeeper who has worked at the Park’s home longer than the Parks have even lived there.



Ki-Taek, the father, starts working as the Park family's chauffeur after the family fires their previous chauffeur. As soon as the entire Kim family starts working for the Park family, the lower-class con artists start to adopt a fake identity of affluent people.

While the Park's are away, they occupy the wealthy house as their own. Viewers are kept on the edge of their seats by Moon-Gwang's return to the house and the final revelation of the hidden basement, which effortlessly transitions the drama/comedy in

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the first half into the thriller/tragedy of the second half. With this mid-point conversion, Bong Joon-ho effortlessly demonstrates his mastery over a variety of genres and tones and provides a total cinematic experience.

The Kim family is motivated by the compounding effects of money, but the Park's are motivated by the compounding consequences of trust. The need for trust is a metaphor for other desires such as ease, self-assurance, companionship, connection, and business success. The foundation of human engagement is trust. In addition to liking communication with assumptions, trust increases the likelihood of conflict.

This movie is based on social class inequality. It tells the tale of poverty and the disparate treatment of the rich and the poor. It's more accurate to say that this movie satirises society's social lives in an abstract or metaphorical sense. As it must end in hope, 'Parasite' exemplifies how the capitalist system and socioeconomics operate.

The way Bong Joon-ho depicts societal inequality is analogous to how society in South Korea and the world functions: poverty, injustice, and inequality.

Based on their behaviour towards Kim's family and how they are portrayed, the wealthy Park family can be judged. It demonstrates that although the wealthy family is foolish, the low-income families are cunning and dishonest. Kim's family is intelligent, but they are marginalised and live in abject poverty with no recourse to education and social uplift.

The egoism from both sides shows that their personalities are the same no matter what social inequality inflicts on both of them. The movie demonstrates inequality through various symbolic representations of social life.

Kim's family resides downstairs, or perhaps we should say in the basement. The entrance is challenging, vulnerable to flooding, rundown, and filthy. The house is small, packed, and claustrophobic. They still struggle to make ends meet due to the meagre income from their part-time jobs.

By this, the underprivileged are forced to mean acts for survival, throwing away age- old conventions of ethics and socially accepted behaviour, which is yet again a social fabric created by the privileged class for their safe upkeep.

It demonstrates how, despite everything, people with lower incomes continue to struggle owing to social injustice and poverty since they are unable to maintain even the bare necessities of life.

The director has developed the theme of the politics of the dwelling place. The dwelling has slowly emerged as a very significant defining aspect of one's social status and dignity. The expansive, opulent mansion on the upper floor and slope where Park's family resides is a representation of the upper class.

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The sun and the mansion are additional symbols of the superior lifestyle enjoyed by the affluent.

It demonstrates how the Park family is better off socially, physically, and geographically. This is a goal of lower-income families and one that wealthier families accomplish in life. The street and stairs that ascend to Park's home and descend to Kim's home have vertical relationships, or perhaps we should say vertical distances, which are a representation of class division and inequality.

The basement in the Park's family house shows the social inequality that is existing in this world. With little regard for their social status, lower and upper-class people can coexist peacefully, as shown by the movie's emblems. There aren't any vertical gaps between us because this is just a way that society separates classes in real life.

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**LETTERS
TO THE
EDITOR**

Pax Lumina 4(2) / 2023 / 78



Dear Editor,

Many congratulations on bringing out another enriching issue of Pax Lumina on 'Technology and Peace'. The wide variety of articles opens up possibilities for using various forms of modern technologies and scientific innovations for the promotion of peace rather than for war, weapons and destruction. Thanks to your team for this wonderful effort.

Best wishes,

Denzil, Delhi.

Dear Editor,

It's a beautiful production, I am honoured to have a small part in it.

Bro. Guy Consolmagno,
Vatican Observatory.

Dear Editor,

The article on 'Smart Farming' in the January issue of Pax Lumina was very informative. The possibility of e-Crop sounds promising with the help of AI. Developed countries have already jumped into it. The popularization and materialization of this remains a challenge for others.

Frederick, Mumbai.

Dear Editor,

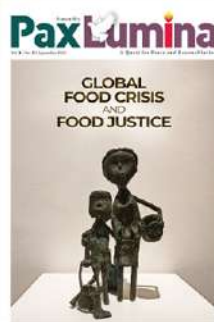
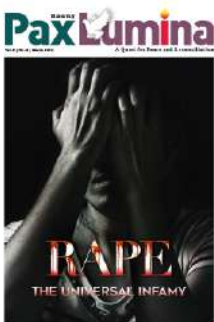
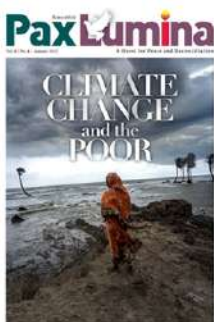
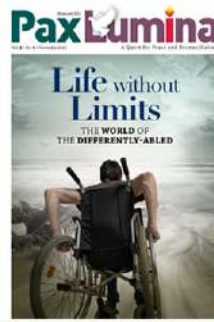
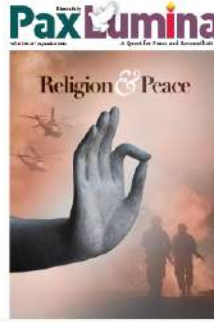
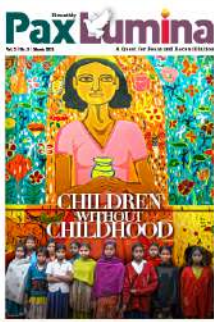
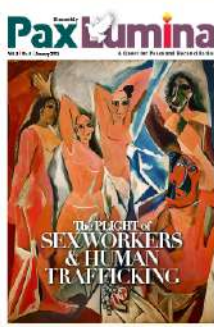
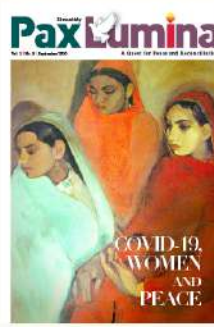
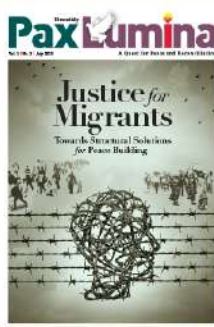
The international coverage of the magazine is highly appreciated. The articles from Colombia, Spain and Africa are real eye-openers. It has brought to light how the use of technology varies from culture to culture. I thank you for the beautiful composition.

J. Felix, Sri Lanka.

Dear Editor,

The article on Social Technologies published in the January issue of Pax Lumina is unique in content and approach. It has broadened the spectrum of sciences and technology to the wider realms of society and culture. The feature on AI, Technology and Peace is very timely. Thanks to team Pax Lumina.

Calude-Lein, Germany



As algorithms push humans out of the job market, wealth and power might become concentrated in the hands of the tiny elite that owns the all-powerful algorithms, creating unprecedented social and political inequality. Alternatively, the algorithms might themselves become the owners.

Yuval Noah Harari



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