ViE - Nico Slate

**Arko:** We know that historically disadvantaged groups fared worse than those who haven't been advantaged or haven't been disadvantaged historically. And that's just the way that catastrophes play out. It doesn't affect everybody equally.

**Nico:** because of the dominance of Gandhi and Gandhian nonviolence in how many African Americans and other Americans understood the Indian struggle, caste was, never a, a central piece to how most civil rights activists and others viewed the struggle in India.

**Amit:** Fighting alone has its own, merits, but in a globalized world where capital is moving around and new information is traveling fast, I think it is also important for marginalized groups to come together and, and form coalitions if we hope to think of new and better ways of, of, of fighting, all kinds of oppression, ex and exclusions, which is leading to immense inequalities in the world, which we have seen in in recent times.

**Sandy:** The Samuel Dubois Cook Center was in its birthing stages, and at that point we had a seminar that we'd introduced for undergraduates at Duke, the Global Inequality Research Initiative Seminar, which was an opportunity for Duke students, undergraduate students in particular, to work on original research of their own design. The opening topic for the first GIRI Seminar was, the following: Subaltern people's comparative experiences of African-Americans, Dalits and tribals.

So we started the GIRI Seminar by examining in a comparative way the conditions and circumstances that confront blacks in the United States whose ancestors were enslaved here, and Dalits and tribals in India Today, we're going to try to pursue that and in a sense, coming full circle on the podcast from the Samuel Dubois Cook Center on Social Equity, we're going to pursue that comparative project again. In light of developments that have taken place since the period in which we started the GIRI Seminar.

I think that this particular topic is of vital importance in part because of the provocation that's been given by Isabel Wilkerson's book Caste. Where she has argued that the concept of caste, which lies at the foundation of the inequalities that are experienced and encountered by Dalits and tribals in India, that the concept of caste is actually a more illuminating idea for understanding patterns of hierarchy between social groups across multiple societies.

In her book, she gives particular attention to the experience of African Americans in the United States, but also she describes that the, the conditions of social hierarchy that were associated with Nazi Germany as another instance of, of caste conditions. so I'd like to open the conversation today by asking each one of our commentators to talk about the relationship between caste and race as they see it.

And, if they've had an opportunity to look at Isabel Wilkerson's book, make some comments about whether or not they think her, her thesis about the superiority of caste as a concept for understanding intergroup disparities is, is an accurate one. And I'd like to begin with professor Nico Slate.

**Nico:** The first thing I would say is that we are continuing a rich and historic series of conversations about connections between African American struggles against racism in this country, the United States, and the struggles of people in India against caste oppression and other forms of inequity.

As many of those here know, and I expect many of those listening also know, the great B.R. Ambedkar reached out to W.E.B. Dubois, the African-American scholar and activist back in the 1940s, and suggested connections between racism and Casteism. Since that time there have been many efforts to have formed both analytical bridges and other forms of solidarity between the struggles of Dalits and tribals in India and the struggles of African-Americans in this country.

And I think it's important for us to recognize that long history for two reasons: because we can learn from the way that those in the past have established those, connections and solidarities, But also because recognizing the sheer length of connections between these different struggles suggest to me that there is in fact a lot of utility to making these kinds of comparisons.

So Dr. Darity, do you ask about Isabel Wilkerson's book in particular? I think her central thesis is very revealing. I think, at least I as a reader was compelled that she makes a strong case for the analytical utility and the political utility of thinking about American racism and white supremacy in particular through the lens of caste.

The more specificity we can bring to that conversation, the better because, the, what perhaps the main lesson I've learned from looking at the histories of these comparisons is that they can all too easily degenerate into a kind of defensiveness where on either end of the spectrum people will say, well, I'm sure we have problems, but it's not as bad as what they have over there.

So, Americans, particularly white Americans, often said, well, sure race is a problem in this country, but it's not as bad as that whole untouchability thing. And in India, higher caste folks often said, sure, the cast is still a problem, but well, it's, you know, outlawed in the Indian constitution, it's not as bad as that American racism thing.

So it's easy to become defensive, and it's also easy to fall into gross generalizations that can skip over the complexities of race and caste and other forms of identity and of inequity in the two countries. So, what I would offer as a, as a beginning contribution to our conversation is, is the importance of recognizing the history of these conversations, rooting ourselves in that tradition, and learning from those traditions, many things. for me, first and foremost, the importance of avoiding defensiveness and of, of recognizing the complexity, Of the identities at play and of, the potential solidarities that people have long tried to forge.

**Sandy:** Professor Amit Thorat, do you have any thoughts about this, this, juxtaposition of casteism versus racism?

**Amit:** I think there are similarities and differences. and I see there are more similarities, in, in understanding identity through either through a racial lens or a caste lens.

And I come from a perspective where I think it's a belief, when you see a particular group, in the case of caste in India, the untouchables, the low caste, are so diverse and spread out across the country that you cannot generalize them into a particular kind of racial or ethnic, identity.

And still, they're identified clearly. they are put in their place, and the social, political, and, norms which apply, through religious law are practiced. People would try to hide their caste in India. We know through studies that they do that while applying for jobs, but it's easily found out.

I think the, the strength of this perspective of belief is so ingrained that I think the similarities are in the fact that, no matter what you do, your level of education, income, intergenerational mobility, we find again and again that no matter how much you strive to be as good or, even better than the so-called privileged groups, the perspective doesn't change.

No matter, what your racial background is, how you look, how, how well you've done over two, three generations. The idea that somehow, a particular caste people or a particular racial group, people, need to be treated and looked in a particular way, just doesn't leave you. And I think that is ingrained in a belief system, and I think they both caste and race are very, very similar.

As someone said very eloquently that you can take Indians, if you take Indians out of India to Europe or America, and you've seen all that happening in America, they take caste with them. Caste I, I feel is, a much stronger identification, at least in the, Asian continent in Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. We see this again and again. and the intermixing is much less, to my knowledge than the racial mixing and, and, and, interactions.

**Sandy:** I think that historically in the United States, the racial mixing that you described finds its beginnings in the period of slavery. and, that racial mixing frequently was heavily coerced. To put a fine point on it, Black women were frequently raped by their owners.

I, I think it's only in more contemporary times that we can talk about, the voluntariness or the mutual consent dimension of interracial relationships, but the historic foundation for race mixing in the United States is perhaps just as violent as the caste mixing that might have taken place in India to the extent that it has.

We don't have the history of purification rituals associated with interracial contact that have been associated with inter caste contact. And so maybe that accounts for the, the, the perhaps lower degree of inter caste mixing. but I think that there's, there's strong similarities in terms of the conditions that have produced those types of intermixture in both societies.

I think you described the phenomenon of passing in the Indian context as people conveying that they have a different caste position to try to gain employment or other kinds of social opportunities.

We have a long history of that in the United States as well. You suggested that people aren't really particularly successful at doing it. Could you comment further on that? You know, why is it that it's very, very hard to, to claim an alternative caste position, in the Indian context?

**Amit:** You're absolutely right, talking about your first point, the notion of purity. This is exactly something which comes from a religious belief system, which defines purity. And it's, notional. it's not based on any germ theory of science or anything that you, you know, get in contact with particular people, they are, you know, carriers of some particular, kind of diseases or viruses. nothing of that sort, but, bodily fluids, blood, spit, sweat, everything is seen extremely, extremely polluting, not just physically, but spiritually and ritually. And therefore, the possibility of people marrying across caste becomes extremely difficult.

Coming to your second point about passing, I mean it a level where, I'd say when, in India, now organization is the norm, and right now about 45% of the population is urban and we expect it to reach 60% by 35. And there a lot of migration is happening because agriculture sector is in distress.

Manufacturing sector in distress, people are having to migrate a lot. And when labor migrates, and, and they're, they're, they're transient from one place to another, they could, try and pass themselves off as someone else because, right now e economy is not doing well, recession is looming, and we have the highest unemployment rate ever since independence.

So I would imagine that if there are fewer jobs and there is a competition for jobs, the social networks and caste networks would come into play. And the backward and former linkages between rural and urban areas would imply that you would try and get a job through your caste networks, but if you have to then transcend that, you would have to either lie about your cast, take a different name, et cetera. So some of that might be possible for people who are low-income group, or just about the poverty line and doing three, four jobs as manual laborers, et cetera, on construction or other places.

When we look at the middle and upper middle class, who are second or third generation, beneficiaries of, say, the reservation policy for Dalits for instance, at the time of independence, a great leader, a great academic, Dr. Ambedkar who came from the Dalit community, extensively educated in the west, he was charged with the task of writing India's constitution. And because he came from untouchable or a Dalit background, he ensured that when India, becomes independent and goes on a path of development and et cetera, the fair share of representation should be given to Dalits, tribals, because they had historically for almost 3000 years been excluded from any kind of, access to educational or ownership of assets, wealth, land, et cetera, imagine anything and they were denied access to that.

So in order to change that historic reality and bring these communities into the mainstream of economic development and growth, a policy of reservations was introduced, which meant that a particular share or a particular percentage of jobs in the federal or the government sector or educational institutions by the run and started and funded by the government and in the legislature would be reserved for people belonging to ex enslaved or ex untouchable communities as well as tribal communities.

**Sandy:** Another, another way to think about this is that this is the Indian variant of what we refer to in the United States as affirmative action.

**Amit:** Exactly.

**Sandy:** and, and yeah, and interestingly enough, it actually long predates the implementation of affirmative action in the States.

**Amit:** Yes. Yes.

**Sandy:** Yeah. so I'd like to encourage everybody to jump in, but I'm, I'm gonna turn next to Arko, who, Arko Dasgupta, who have not had an opportunity to hear from yet. There's, an observation that that Professor Slate made a moment ago about this notion that, frequently people in the more privileged or advantaged positions in a society say, well, things aren't as bad as they used to be. And in the US context, I think we sometimes refer to this as a post-racial narrative. Is there a parallel post caste narrative in India? What's the evidence on, on the way in which that type of narrative might be mobilized there, vis-a-vis the mobilization of the post-racial narrative in the United States?

**Arko:** Before I respond, to that specific question, I just add that the Indian counterpart to the affirmative, action, policy here in the United States called reservations is one that holds that caste can be the sole criteria to advance a historically disadvantaged people.

Whereas here in the United States, the Supreme Court has made it explicitly clear that race can be only one such criteria, but not the sole criteria for advancement. and of course, it is the subject of current conversation here in this country. The very arrangement of reservations is sometimes invoked to put forward a post caste narrative in India.

 So for instance, people who come from historically advantage castes often think of reservations as some sort of poverty alleviation program and, submit that, okay, you've had a generation or two of reservations, benefiting, say a Dalit family and now they are economically better off.

Why do we need, this arrangement to be in place any longer? And that, of course, does not fully, make peace with the foundational principles on which the reservation system works. Also I'd like to, if I could respond to the initial question you had asked, with respect to Isabel Wilkerson's work, connections between the intellectual and experiential, lives of Dalits and African-Americans have been made for over a century. Political and cultural representatives like Ambedkar, and Dubois, as Nico mentioned, thought out these questions and scholars like Oliver Cox worked on the subject too.

Lloyd Warner once famously remarked that regardless of the economic, status that an African American man might achieve in, relation to or with respect to cast, he's always going to maintain an inferior position, in relation to a white man. Isabel Wilkerson, like John Dullard, suggests that the institution of caste originates, or finds place in the American story in the American South.

But unlike John Dullard goes on to say that it then spreads everywhere. There are some points that Wilkerson makes with respect to the idea of caste that I don't think is fully replicated in the American experience. So, for instance, notions of pollution and polluting as sociologist Dipankar Gupta has articulated in the past, even in the Antebellum South, you would have an African-American cook or an African-American wet nurse. it'd be unthinkable for a Dalit Cook or a Dalit wet nurse, to serve at, an upper caste household. And then Wilkerson, I thought in her text, did not fully flesh out the Middling caste.

She make, she makes references to the Middling caste, but caste is an arrangement and institution that is not bipolar and needs a complex, set of dependencies on a range of castes and sub castes in order to function, including the Midland castes. And finally, since you, professor Doherty very explicitly mentioned the example or the invocation of Nazi Germany that Wilkerson draws out in a book, I found that to be a little misplaced.

I think it's a hard case to make that there was ideological symmetry between and among Nazi Germany, the American South, and, India. I thought she was more intent on geologically tracing the inception of racist legislation or the new principles to racist legislation in the American South, which there has been work on.

But, caste does not need legal sanction to operate. You had laws that the Nazis enshrined, which very clearly disadvantaged certain people, but caste as an institution does not need the sanction of laws or codification to function and operates outside the purview of, a centralized state that has, such statutes in place.

**Sandy:** If I put the adjective structural in front of racism, would I be talking about exactly what Wilkerson is claiming to be discussing when she uses the notion of caste or Casteism. and I certainly don't think in the US context that you necessarily need the sanction of law for structural racism to operate and have its effect.

**Arko:** Yes. and similarly in India, you don't need, the sanction of law to have casteism, play out in the public and private spheres. There can be a case made for an argument that there is an attempt to highlight structural cost and structural racism that operates beyond, statute books.

And, yeah. but if one then returns to a scholar I mentioned like Oliver Cox, he's very adamant in maintaining, of course, he wrote this 60, 70 years ago, that caste and race operate in two vastly different ontological universes that cast can only operate in, Hindu, broadly speaking, Indic society with Indic values and faiths and race, for instance, can only operate under conditions of capitalism.

 It's a lot more complex than that. But, this is the very subject or, or the very nature of the debate where you have a range of scholars thinking that, these are concepts that, have overlaps, more overlaps than differences, than those believing otherwise. and the conversation is of course, ongoing. And, Wilkerson has injected, new life into a debate that has been on for over a century.

**Nico:** It strikes me that even let's say 10 years ago in the United States, one could say that the most dominant form of racism in our society was structural racism that we had managed through the civil rights era to eliminate many of the, more overt forms of discrimination, but that we still had these, structural forms of racism built into, for example, our criminal justice system, our educational system, et cetera.

But recently I, I find, I think like many other Americans, that one of the most troubling, dimensions in our society is a resurgence of more outright forms of white supremacy and discrimination, right from, you know, the former occupant of the White House to you know, people in, forms of, you know, cultural power across our society.

And my sense as an outsider is that you might see a similar trend in India that there is more willingness to openly advocate casteism and caste, sort of hierarchies. And I would, I would just love to pose that as a question is, are we seeing a resurgence in India of more overt intentional casteism as versus more structural forms of caste and caste inequity?

And, and I, and I'm also just curious how these things relate to each other. How, how more structural, more, you know, built in forms of inequity relate to people openly advocating white supremacy in this country, for example, or cast and casteism in India.

**Amit:** Nico, you're right. This, it is, it is both, I think with the present dispensation, which is, whose political mandate or whose politics is of polarization of all kinds. It is intellect, ideological, left versus right. It is religious, Hindu versus Muslims, and it is identity politics, groups versus others.

It is becoming more structural in the sense because in the last eight years we have seen, there was an attempt at doing away with reservation where I think the high court went on to say something about that reservation should not be there or stopped. I'm not very clear, then it was struck down.

we know that the historic allocation of funds by the government. There were special allocations, which we call the sub plans for the Dalits of the caste and tribals that, a particular amount of the annual budget was earmarked only for these groups and different policy measures had to be funded to, that has been done with it.

Uh, as Arko was mentioning, we recently have now reservations, for the upper caste and, and so-called the poor upper caste. The justification that is given by the Supreme Court is that this is for the poor people but because there is reservation for the marginalized communities like the Tribals, et cetera, this, and they cannot get double reservation because of their poor status.

This should be confined to the upper caste. And, and I was in recent conference where, ex Supreme Court judge was speaking, who was on that case. And he said, be under no illusion that this is, we have reservations in government jobs and other places for differently able people, children of ex-servicemen, if you are a sports personality and all these are, can apply, multiply, and if you're women also.

So a woman who is, whose parents are from the army background, and if she's differently able, could avail three different kinds of, reservations or, you know, in combination. However, that has been overlooked. And, the, the EWS reservation only applies to the upper past. So with all these legislative changes, judicial so-called intervention, we see that there is a huge political drive in a structural, kind of a push to change constitutional norms, legislative policies, funding, et cetera, in a massive way. So there, yeah, definitely. I would agree with you.

**Sandy:** There was something that struck me in Professor Thorats's last remarks where he mentioned the inclusion of women as a category, that would be eligible for the benefits of Indian affirmative action. That struck me because here we are, a group of four men discussing these kinds of issues.

And, I wanted to get, I wanted to challenge each one of us to provide some reflections on the gender dimensions of casteism and racism, in a comparative vein. And perhaps, the best way to start is to actually get some data about this. And I know, professor Thorat, that you are, one of the world's experts on The Indian Human Development Survey.

 so I was curious as to whether or not you could give us some insights about the disparities that are associated with the intersection of caste and gender in the Indian context.

**Amit:** I mean, I don't even need to cut it by gender if I just put some figures in front of you. For instance, if I just look at, yeah, if I just look at wealth. and there is a, national sample survey, official, wealth survey. the last one was done in 2013 and we hope something else will happen soon.

But, hardly any surveys are happening these days. we all the official surveys, which were happening except one, everything is on hold. So we don't know how, what is the poverty level? We don't know many things. but, from 2013, which is called the Debt and Investment Survey. The survey, what it does it at, at the household level, it looks at the land ownership, buildings owned by households, shops or, or, or other buildings, livestock, farm, non-farm equipment, transport vehicles, and financial assets like shares, ventures, deposit, et cetera, and goal ordinance.

And it looks at all these assets in the household and then it values them, and then it creates an average or a share of who, who owns how much. And we find that in 2013, if you just look at Shudras caste, population in the country, they own 7.6% of the total wealth as compared to say the upper caste Hindus. Who owned 41% of the total wealth, so 7% versus 41. And, this is household and if you

**Sandy:** How does this compare with their, populations share?

**Amit:** Drastically the, the, the Shudras cost are about 16 to 18% now. And the upper caste, would be about if you take, the forward cast and the Brahmin together, 10%, Brahmin would be about 5%. and forward cast would be about 30%.

They're about 30%. SCs will be about 20%. So, 30% population having access to almost 40% of the share. And if I am sure, if I disaggregate this entire 30% by Brahmin and forward cast, the share of the Brahmin would be even much more higher, disproportionately higher to their population share. If you look at the average value of assets per households, this translates to about 6,200 rupees for the lower caste as compared to 27.7, thousand rupees for the upper caste.

And typically in an Indian household being male dominated. And if you look at the data from the same round only about 10% or odd households were female-headed households. So you can imagine that the, the gender dimension, the, the, the female population is almost 50/50 in India.

So the disadvantage of, say, woman who's tribal or Dalit and it is three times, as a woman, as a, as a Dalit person and as a poor person or a wealth or income deprived person. And the same patriarchal norms of, ownership of assets or decision, intra household decision making et cetera, apply across social groups in India.

Uh, I wouldn't say that the Dalits are more, they're not as patriarchal as the upper cast, though that may not be cased with, of the tribals. many tribal communities are known to be much, much more egalitarian, in terms of gender, norms and relations. And there are other metro or, societies as well in Kerala or in the Northeast.

But I feel the, the group that therefore suffers the most, which are called triple oppressed in India by a lot of women organizations, are the women from the Dalits and the tribal communities, especially those who are in the lower income groups or below poverty.

**Sandy:** Professor Slate. I, I'd love to come to a topic that you and I discussed in a previous conversation, which is the position of iconic figures in the rights movements that took place in the United States and in India.

So the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Dalit rights movement in India, in particular iconic figures. You know, we have made a, a, a lot of mention of Dr. Ambedkar who, was the great dot leader, and the person who essentially wrote the reservation scheme into the Indian Constitution.

But we haven't said anything about the figure who most people associate with the Indian Independence Movement, Gandhi, and I was hoping you might talk about Gandhi's relationship to Martin Luther King Jr. In the United States, perhaps with Malcolm X, who is usually positioned as the, the counterpoint to Martin Luther King Jr., and also, Gandhi's relationship with the D community in India. So that's, that's kind of a, a lot of stuff, but

**Nico:** is a lot. It is a lot, but I very much appreciate the question. I'll try to be brief. I would start by saying that as you suggested, most Americans are familiar, to the extent that they're familiar at all with the Indian independence struggle, they're, they're familiar with Gandhi and they associated with Gandhi, and that was true for most African Americans as well.

Gandhi became a huge figure for many African Americans, including famous leaders like, Martin Luther King and others. And the way that Gandhi was understood matters. many people at the time, understood Gandhi not just as a paragon of nonviolence, which is how I think most people think of him today, but also as a leader of what Dubois famously called the dark or colored world.

Gandhi was seen as a man of color who had stood up against white imperialism and white supremacy, and you see that in the way that African-Americans looked to Gandhi in the 1920s and 1930s, but also how many of them looked to Gandhi in the 1950s and 1960s. Martin Luther King included, was drawn not just to Gandhi's nonviolence, but also to his positionality in opposition to white supremacy.

What is lost in that translation, and I do see it as a translation from the Indian context into the American, anti-racist struggle. What is lost to a large degree is caste and casteism. Gandhi's relationship to cast is extremely complicated. To boil it down briefly and, and oversimplify it, I would argue that Gandhi starts off very much a casteist who believes in caste hierarchies.

He's a critic of Untouchability, but not of caste itself. And you can find him early on saying that he believes in caste prohibitions regarding marriage in, in prohibitions regarding dining. Over time, I would argue Gandhi evolves in his views on caste. He becomes more critical of caste itself as an institution.

He comes to actually embrace inter cast marriages and inter cast dining, but I would argue he doesn't come as far as one might hope. I'm, I, personally, I think he remains quite patronizing in his views of cast and the cast struggle. When he looks at how a figure like Ambedkar is championing the rights of Dalits and others in India, he can be again, surprisingly patronizing, but also critical of the same kinds of methods that Gandhi would advocate using against British imperialism.

So he supports nonviolent civil disobedience against the British, but not within the struggle against caste and casteism. So he has serious limitations, if you, if you want to put it that way. And others, I think would be, even more harsh in terms of how he approaches caste. I think it's important to recognize his progress, but also to recognize his limitations and in terms of how he's then picked up in the American context.

I think because of the dominance of Gandhi and Gandhian nonviolence in how many African Americans and other Americans understood the Indian struggle, caste was, never a, a central piece to how most civil rights activists and others viewed the struggle in India. But I think that that has changed over time.

I think that, over time, largely as the result of figures like Ambedkar and, and later Dalit activists, the Dalit Panthers, for example, in the 1970s and later, there has been a more concerted effort to shift how Americans and particularly African-Americans and other civil rights activists in this country understand India and Indian society.

And I think you find many more African-American anti-racist activists today and other anti-racist in this country who are more knowledgeable about caste and casteism and more willing to stand up and argue against it. So my own sense is that the prominence of Gandhi was a stumbling block for many African Americans in their conception of caste.

And, and actually one last thing, I'm, I'm struggling to be brief, but I'm trying. he wasn't the only stumbling block, you know, quite famously when Martin Luther King, and Coretta Scott King visit India in the late 1950s, they have a conversation with Jawaharlal Nehru that, touches on issues of cast and Nehru explains to them that yes, cast was a problem in India, but it was outlawed, there are these new reservation policies and they're doing all they can to fight it.

And the Kings leave India with, I think two rosy an impression of, of India's progress against caste and Casteism. And in that case, the impression isn't one they get from Gandhi, it's one they get from Nehru and other leading Indians at that time, most of whom are themselves upper caste.

**Arko:** if I could, few years into Gandhi's, returned, to India from South Africa, and he begins to be consistently covered by the African American press and the figure of Gandhi looms large over what is later called the Civil Rights Movement. you have larger than life figures like MLK, who are incredibly in awe of Gandhi and figures that are more critical of Gandhi, like Benjamin Mays, who feels that Gandhi has done much to prevent the practice of untouchability, but does not go far to, critique, criticize the institution of caste as, Nico, mentioned. and then there are figures who shift in their, understanding of Gandhi over the course of a decade or two. And I have in mind, someone like a Langston Hughes, a communist, and then, by the early to mid-1940s, is writing in admiration of Gandhi and his fasts against the British Empire.

I also recall Reverend James Lawson saying, sometime ago that, reading Gandhi's autobiography in the 1940s as he did convinced him that Gandhi was very explicit in his condemnation of caste and race. And there are those, of course, who will dispute that, but there is no denying the fact that. A: Gandhi is someone who is intensely debated and discussed in the African-American press, including in, news, papers like the Pittsburgh Courier that was published from the city I am now in. and B, that Gandhi was for a long time the only major, national figure who was debating Ambedkar. There were many others who were simply not engaging with Ambedkar in the public realm.

And that is something I feel should also be submitted. Also the famous meeting that Gandhi has with the Thurman's in 1936 with Howard Thurman and, Sue Thurman, where he suggests that it is quite possibly through the African Americans that the unadulterated message of nonviolence may, be spread to the world and three decades hence, that is exactly what happens, courtesy Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement.

and before I finish the thread, I'd also like to mention figures who are otherwise not, as discussed, who are otherwise not as prominent. some of them happened to be women, figures like Punnai and over here Diane Nash, who sought inspiration from Gandhi's concept of jail, no bail, and went to jail even when she was pregnant with her child and refused to pay bail money to get out.

so it is a wide cast of, prominent figures and figures were not as prominent. And I think an obsessive focus on MLK and GHI sometimes has a tendency to obscure the rest, which we should be cautious about.

**Sandy:** Well, there, there is one fundamental chain of events that I think we have to discuss with respect to Gandhi, which is his consistency in going on fast in opposition to communal roles for the Dalits in the parliamentary system. I think that that's something that's unambiguous and has to be treated as, as a real critical point in looking at Gandhi.

 One thing I want to make sure we get in is a discussion of the linkage to the pandemic and, an analysis of how the pandemic has influenced inequality, particularly caste disparities in the Indian context so that we can set up a comparison with the other work that we've done in this podcast on how inequality has been increased in the United States as a consequence of the pandemic.

**Amit:** I'm, during the pandemic, I mean, it was tough to do any kind of research, ground level research. But I managed with a few students of mine to do a telephonic survey during the second phase of the lockdown. And we were actually looking at people's ability to find work, get access to healthcare, and access to education for their children.

I mean, everything went online and the government kind of advocated online education through internet and smartphone, et cetera. I think our study was one of the few studies which looked at identities explicitly and the problems that emerged during the pandemic were, the pandemic was a great equalizer everyone faced all the same problems. However, we found that by the second, phase where transportation had stopped, supplies of essentials, food, medicine, et cetera were not coming forth.

Shops and city centers were restricted with the amount of stock they had, but a lot of people wanted to access that stock of medicine or food, et cetera. And we found that when the stocks were getting dwindled, the shopkeepers, were choosing who to sell those things to.

So in fact, when people were trying to access things, food, medicine, et cetera, through credit or even access credit, we found that shop owners would, they were basically being biased and just selling their, whatever they had to say their own community people. And the worst amongst these were the Muslims and the Dalits. They were refused systematically medical care, medicines, even fruits and vegetables and credit, et cetera.

**Nico:** Well, I'll, I'll build on what, professor Thorat just shared and say that I, I think that in this country, in the United States, the pandemic was yet another, a moment at which suddenly it seemed impossible for white Americans to continue to ignore the racial inequities in our society.

And yet, I think what we've learned from history is that there's this pattern where a crisis, whether it's, the pandemic or a hurricane, or, you know, the, the murder of George Floyd or we can go back to the civil rights era and look at the urban uprisings in the late sixties, or even earlier look at the, the civil rights crises that were generated by the sit-ins or the Freedom Rides.

These are all moments in time when the presence of American racism is suddenly Visible in ways that it had been purposefully not visible for some time. And I think that the, the challenge for all of us that want to confront racial inequity in this country, or injustice and inequity in other parts of the world, is to find ways to make these injustices more visible on a more permanent ongoing basis in a way that people are forced to deal with them.

Because I think it's all too easy to forget. And I think in this country, certainly we're already starting to forget the pandemic and the, and the profound inequities in terms of health, in terms of poverty, in terms of other structural forms of racism and injustice that were revealed in those times we're already, being encouraged to move on and move forward.

And I think, as a historian, but also as just a concerned citizen, I think it's vital that we try to learn from these crises in ways that we can, confront the underlying roots of these problems. The underlying, again, to go back doc, Dr. Darity, to your emphasis on the structural, those underlying structural forms of inequity and injustice.

So, I, I, I hope that we all in this country, in India and in other places in the world, can do what we can to fight, not just end these moments of crisis, but also, afterwards, to combat those forms of structural inequity and injustice.

**Amit:** It's a tough, it's tough to think about, racism and classism in today's time because, it, it continues after so much struggle, so much immense losses of lives and, and, and everything. And it, it changes forms. As Nico was saying, this, you know, the structural racism in America has continuously, you know, changed forms.

And the same thing we find with casteism. People thought that with cap, capitalist liberal economy, there'll be, it'll act as a melting pot and cast will go away. But we find that it has found new ways of, expressing itself. I think it's very important, for groups across countries, across continents to, realize that unless, the struggles of people who suffer from racism or casteism or similar, you know, marginalizations, it is extremely important, I think in, in now that, people who are active in the, in the, in these struggles form solidarities.

Fighting alone has its own, merits, but in a globalized world where capital is moving around and new information is traveling fast, I think it is also important for marginalized groups to come together and, and form coalitions if we hope to think of new and better ways of, of, of fighting, all kinds of oppression, ex and exclusions, which is leading to immense inequalities in the world, which we have seen in in recent times.

**Arko:** In many ways, although historians are very, very, of using the expression unprecedented, the Covid 19 pandemic was with the suspension of international flights and, the imposition of lockdowns in many parts of the world. But I think we must bear in mind that the pandemic was not a great leveler and that different groups were affected differently. Of course, this is further complicated by the presence of a first world within the third world and the third world within the first, but other, sources of, potential destruction that, have, the, the ability to wreak havoc in the way the pandemic, had, over the last two years and I have in mind, particularly climate change, operates the same way in which people who have, been historically. disadvantaged, continue to feel worse off.

Climate change very particularly was exacerbated by colonialism. The latest IPCC report explicitly mentions that. And, I think it'd be nice for us to be sensitive to these, realities and those who are better off for them to have a sense of obligation towards those who haven't been as, blessed, philosophically speaking. So yeah, I'd like to end there. Thank you.

**Sandy:** Okay. My, my ending comment is the following, that I think that there's a sufficient degree of similarity between the processes of Casteism and the processes of racism. That it's fair to describe the Dalits as the, as the blacks of India and, the African Americans as the untouchables of the United States.