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## THE RELEVANCE OF EMILE DURKHEIM'S ANOMIC SUICIDE AND COVID-19 IN INDIA: FAILURE OF INDIAN POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE

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### ABSTRACT

**Concept:** This article is a short commentary note on the relevance of Durkheim's anomic suicide in India during COVID-19. The previously disorganized socio-economic upheavals, adding the prolonged lockdown phase strating from three months to an endless restrictive mobility from one place to another stimulated a mental state of alienation and disintegration among the 'Proletariat' class in India.

**Aim:** The paper argues that persistent maniacal policies and unempathetic governance have institutionalized suicide among the destitute prone to individual alienation. The idea pressed by the paper is that it isn't the pandemic that undermines the concept of Durkheim's 'organic solidarity' but the lack of strategic vision to rebuild a malleable community orientation that speculated depression, over-anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among the most marginalized.

**Conclusion:** Durkheim's comprehension regarding the hyper-industrialization in developing societies spur sociological and mental instability that trigger suicide as an eventual destination for a human mind and body struggling from poverty, economic crisis, caste-dilemma so on and so forth. The usual upsurges after socio-economic disturbances or contingent pandemics require deep-seated collective representation advocating egalitarian functioning.

**Limitation of the Study:** The study is not based on primary statistical data due to which a generalization on mass-basis is not possible.

**Keywords:** Anomic Suicide, Organic Solidarity, COVID-19, Social Integration, Collective Representation.

### Durkheim's Typology on Suicide & Collective Representative: Factors responsible for the sufferings of migrant workers, farmers, and destitute during pre- lockdown phase.

The preface of the French edition of 'The division of Labor' by Emile Durkheim (Sociologist) supports the ancient Greek philosophy of '**Polis State**' classifying citizens on different political and economic functions. But a more significant idea behind such functional division was- **Integration or Solidarity** to promote goodwill and happiness in a collective society; Durkheim

called it **Collective Representations.**'

### The Philosophy of the Concept

The study contemplates a thought on the country's pervasive political and administrative action that boosts puny development favoring the lower-income class of society. The concept of collective representation, people-government integration has been hypothetical generating severe socio-economic vulnerability until the fear of COVID-19 waves and mutation ends. The prevalence of discussing Anomic suicide, one of the types proposed by a French

sociologist Emile Durkheim in his work 'Le Suicide,' in 1897 in the Indian context, is analogous sociological grounds of suicidal deaths. The governance action has not only failed in strategic health initiatives (testing, medical equipment, laboratories, etc), but the ill-planned lockdown has exhausted the livelihood of the weaker section of the society.

During the lockdown period, a report presented by Stranded Workers Action Network that 78% of the worker's wages and salaried was not cleared. It has suggested the fact that workers involved in unorganized agro-industrial sectors earning upto 5-8 thousand a month are unemployed. And economist confirms for severe economic imbalances in the first quarter of 2020-21. The country even before COVID-19 was struggling from a structural financial crisis and not an ordinary cyclical slowdown (A dilemma for, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

The close nexus between politics and administration in the country is intransigent and uncoordinated. Recently, the Congress party representatives arranged buses for the stranded migrant workers. These buses were denied entry in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP ruled state government, claiming it a matter of red tape and regulatory formalities (Chaturvedi, 2020)<sup>3</sup>. The helpless migrants were equivalently crucial as the pandemic itself. But egoistic political propaganda during the health emergency and migrant workers' dilemma proved the politics and administrative operations insensitive and responsible for greater humanitarian alienation. Most statistical data reveal a two-fold political system, including significant opposition at the center- the 'Congress Party.' The so-called privileged aristocrats and the 'hyper-religious protectionist party' resounding its victory twice in the general election- the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) could not revitalize the poverty alleviation program improved public education, health, and sustainable functions in India.

Moreover, the country ranks 102<sup>nd</sup> out of 177 countries in the Global Hunger Index, ranks worse than the neighboring country Bangladesh that scored 29 improvement points in the health care system (Yadavar, 2019).<sup>4</sup> It estimates the slowest GDP growth rate in 42 years and is now barely surviving due to unprecedented COVID-19. The sole idea of administrative and political action is the psychopathic glut for superpower, excessive authority without responsibility, and self-improved social status negating Durkheim's collective representation or affirmative social integration.

It is a constructed sense of isolation or alienation among the poor, both from mainstream and center-state administrative decision-making practices. Therefore, it prompted the proletariat class, students, pregnant women, and children to walk thousands of miles through migrating from cities towards their homes. Realizing the pattern of incompetent and unempathetic police and administrative agencies firmly supports the argument of rising suicidal rates in the country.

Generally, numerous studies and data suggest a relative relationship between economic downturn, drugs and alcohol consumption, and fertility rate acting as a significant factor affecting the male-female suicide ratios worldwide. Much of the empirical analysis of unemployment and income increases or decreases, affecting suicidal tendency states' positive and negative outcomes. During the 1997 and 1998 economic crises, many Asian countries like Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea's suicide rates increase with the economic downturn. Countries like Finland with economic enhancement experienced an increase in suicide rates. Also, in several cases, a wealthy class with a luxurious lifestyle witnessed a high percentage of suicide comparatively, with the lower-income group. There are possibilities of antithetical results on large-scale or collectively addressing societies, which

requires a thorough understanding of factors and relationships (Andres, 2005).

#### *Socio-theoretical Perspective*

But on the socio-theoretical perspective, Durkheim was an adamant sociologist deriving 'economic condition' as a provocative catalyst culminating in mental instability due to social disintegration among the people (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016). In his 'Le Suicide' (French book), he emphasized how one should comprehend the psychological condition of suicide to resolve it. Durkheim argued to contemplate how the person prepared to accomplish suicide, the background provoking to kill oneself, discerning whether it was a self-murder, and how the person finally performed it? He critiques by quoting Esquirol (Durkheim & Simpson, 2002)<sup>5</sup> on 'how suicide and mental alienation has mutual characteristics.' A person undertaking self-murder is either mentality divorced, mainly calling it a disease in itself. He refuted this argument by determining a whole phenomenon emanating from multiple previous dimensional causes and varied forms. He instead considered that every person who attempts suicide isn't an insane fellow.

#### *Community disintegration, persistent inequality, and excessive cognitive dissonance among the Indians*

Analyzing the unstable supra-economic crisis pre and during the COVID-19 pandemic did not benefit the impoverished. Before this, the prior maniacal economic decision of demonetization and Goods and Service Taxes (GST), anti-minority riots, unrest due to the citizenship amendment act, and coercive arrest of the dissenters (under seditions and UAPA) was partially a turbulent era for the people and administration. With an increasing COVID-19 cases in India, the migrant workers during the unprecedented lockdown phase are now jobless, fighting for food packets in the railway station<sup>6</sup> out of hunger and starvation, and spending their entire savings on public transport to travel home, etc. (Belagere, 2020).<sup>7</sup> It has developed

a moral struggle in a human mind to believe how unsuitable, misadjusted, and vulnerable social life they have that even the dignified rikshaw-pullers and vegetable vendors are prone to begging<sup>8</sup> due to uncoordinated governance. This overbearing community disintegration, persistent inequality, and excessive cognitive dissonance among the destitute in developing nations is an alarming state of affairs, or definitely would be in the coming hyper-economic slowdown due to COVID-19. Durkheim's idea on the 'Manchester system of political economy' aptly simplifies how Indian society believed in illusionary promises of the major party. making it a five trillion economy by 2025 and administering socialist reforms that did not deliver the subsequent utilitarian modern progress and the greater happiness of good governance and complications. (Liagouras, 2019).

The concept of decisive government action and welfare schemes must be promoted rather than disillusioned socio-economic growth. Herbert Spencer and Clemence Royer shared similar thoughts on incompetent progressive social evolution where erroneous welfare schemes and disguised protectionists act as a multiplier in expanding challenges for destitute (Hawkins, 2009). a recent case of two young men arrested being involved in snatching was not born criminals, prior Anil and Rahul were a pizza delivery person and salesperson, respectively.<sup>9</sup> But joblessness, alcoholism, and unstable moral conscience produced lamebrain, loafers, and criminals due to exigencies of hyper-modernization and fading trust in good governance at the right and required period. Therefore, Durkheim collective-communication which is deep-rooted in stimulating collective normative and moral consciousness to annihilate deliberate denial of a decent standard of living and constant state of agitation, depression, anxiety, irritation ceasing suicide (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016).

### **The classification of Anomic Suicide and related cases in India: Pre-During-Post lockdown phase - An Evaluation.**

*'Suicide on social grounds, factors, and social outcomes was the finest reasonable attempt by Durkheim analyzing the endless transformation of traditional to an industrial society, in all ages. It was considered more as a sociological phenomenon involving fundamental social institutions like family, education, religion, politics, law, and governance, and not simply a psychological turmoil but encircling an action-orientation or functionality to evident voluntary deaths. Suicide is practically defined as how social institutions, norms, and governance (collective-social self) can impact an individual (singular personal self) to attempt suicide.'* This human-made destructive COVID-19 is affecting and impacting society primarily on the socio-economic sphere in developing economies. This chronic economic anomie decelerates greater humanitarianism, compassion, and empathetic governance, creating severe social detachment and alienation among farmers, workers, and lower-income group people in India.<sup>10</sup>- (Durkheim & Simpson, 2002).

While Durkheim's rigorous findings and analysis on suicide were based on Catholics and Protestants, where he concluded that rates are higher in Protestants than Jews and Catholics due to robust social integration and community interdependence. Also, suicide death rates are more common in men, mostly due to employment-related depression and frustrations than in women. Extreme isolation or being detached from a community can lead to egoistic suicide. Excess of social integration can lead to what he called altruistic suicide, typically common in Scandinavian countries. And too much social regulation or unnecessary suppression and oppression can lead to fatalistic suicide (Evaluation of, 2019).

Durkheim argued that a whole society in transition or a small group of people could be affected on two principal grounds: social integration and social regulation, not specifically psychological state of mind only. He explains how society in socio-economic transition or struggling with the social or economic disorder or development can cause collective anomie impacting on the individual state of mind and normative conscience. During these periods of social changes, expected rates of suicide are usually high as both the integration and regulation levels are transitional (Hodwitz & Frey, 2016). The people who focus on disguised civil society, mainly through industrialization, are called 'the rational fools or homo economicus, 'resembling political-economic governance. It has been forgotten that 1.3 billion of the population is dependent on agriculture. Calculating the numbers, 45.1% of the farmers are self-employed and cultivating on their land, rest, 54.9% are landless agriculturalist laborers and workers.

The study outlines a constructivist approach to suicide in the agricultural sector, followed by an anomic pattern of social disintegration. It is mainly due to excessive economic failure and declining administrative support. The Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh reported the suicidal death of seventeen farmers within two months of the pandemic. The field survey by Rythu Swarajya Vedika (RSV), a farmer's association, revealed excessive economic debt and pressure of repayment along with the loss of crop, these onion and tomatoes growers committed suicide (Reddy, 2020).<sup>11</sup>

In almost all pandemic and great economic recessions, the developing countries, especially the South Asian countries, have been reported among the most afflicted ones. It has been estimated that there would be greater inequalities and deviant behaviors<sup>12</sup> among the people (Kang & Thosuwanchot, 2017) already recounting during the COVID-19. It essentially requires a parallel central and

state administrative coordination with the local bodies securing the nation's federal structure.<sup>13</sup> Indian political and administrative services were aware of the socio-economic conditions of the poorest of the poor and could have designed 'destitute-friendly or empathetic governance action accordingly. The shortage of farm labor during rabi crop harvesting season, farmers inaccessible to local mandis for sale, ineffective government schemes for employment to jobless laborers, non-availability of universal ration card to curb poverty and hunger pushed many to a moral and emotional breakdown (Lal, 2020).<sup>14</sup> The intense migration of laborers from farm fields and factories caused scarcity of auxiliary services in many northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana from March and onwards. If we keenly observe what Durkheim has been emphasizing in his *'Division of Labor in Society,'* is evidence of deliberately pushing the destitute of India towards the crisis of 'organic solidarity' (i.e., crisis of the people being cohesively dependent and connected in a work chain, depicting integration and social Solidarity).<sup>15</sup> It heightened the socio-economic disappointment among the rural masses and urban lower-middle class antagonistic to the standardized dystopian situations. A case of a farmer suicide was reported from Uttar Pradesh, Jaari village, who hanged himself due to shortage of laborers (auxiliary assistance) for harvesting his crop, sale them to produce a return, and repay his debt during the lockdown.<sup>16</sup> The condition is more alarming in Maharashtra, where two hundred and thirty-one farmers ended their lives from January to April 2020, failing to reach out to the mandis for selling and getting their profits. Thirty-six suicide cases were reported during the lockdown in the Marathwada region, including eight different districts; Aurangabad district alone reported thirty-two cases (Joshi, 2020).<sup>17</sup> Distressed by his sugarcane dues and crops rejected by the Khatauli sugar mill, farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Om Pal, commit

suicide due to the deceased system of supply chains (Agarwal, 2020).<sup>18</sup>

The BJP government has been reluctant to disclose the post-2015 data on farmers' suicide. In one of his recent books, named 'Farmer's Suicide in India: A Policy Malignancy,' P.C Bodh remarked how India would be the farmer's suicide capital globally, estimating seventy to seventy-five thousand cases from 2016 to 2020. The apathetic politicians, corrupt bureaucrats, and industrialists have sidelined the gigantic agricultural sector and their rigorous contribution projecting harrowing figures of suicide (Joy, 2019).<sup>19</sup> This class's persistent agrarian crisis and psychological agonies have been ignored by feigned civility and polished polity cloaked under lame excuses for years. Indebtedness and excessive economic loss during the lockdown phase to control the novel coronavirus has been considered as the common cause of suicide for such food soldiers in states of Punjab, Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, etc.

**The financial distress among the low-income group of people. Revisit the cases and control suicide endemic in India.**

The implicit idea of the proactive functionalism of Durkheim's institution should primarily deal with persuading individual behavior. A belief that human existence can perpetuate social outcomes, mainly the decent living standard of the people. But the contemporary passive governance in India has failed to control the diffusion of suicide as 'the easy escape way' affecting multiple classes of people, including the daily wage workers. They committed suicide due to increasing unemployment, poverty, and starvation.

Raju Devasia, a fifty-two-year-old man, committed suicide after losing his job, working as a waiter in the southern Indian state, Kerala. The suicide note confirmed his grievances due to ineffective governance amidst COVID-19 (Emmanuel, 2020)<sup>20</sup>, asserting the failure of our political and administrative management overlooking the notion of 'all lives matter,

vulnerable are surviving' instead of the lives of 'elites and aristocrats, thriving for luxurious gains.' Similarly, Mukesh, a painter by profession in the Gurugram district of the Northern region, had to sell his cell phone to buy food for his wife and children. Mukesh committed suicide after two days of running out of money and essentials for his family (Haider, 2020).<sup>21</sup>

Usually, it has been found that voluntary suicide increases with the increase in prices of necessary essential items, currently visible during the lockdown due to higher land transportation cost, restricted interstate border crossing, labor shortage for loading commodities, so on so forth. U.N.'s Food and Agricultural Organization reports a rise of 10% in the food prices corresponding to household expenditure (Haq & Dutta, 2020).<sup>22</sup> Hence, the suicide rate among the weaker section is expected to rise, hustling with poverty, criminal outcomes, or voluntary suicide. But, Durkheim gave conclusive reasoning of poverty ascents protection and persuasion for empathetic value generation. A sympathetic understanding would be muddle collectivism above individualism in more significant development and disturbances lacking moral turmoil<sup>23</sup>. Usually, the suicidal tendency is directly proportionate to economic agitation, evident in several cases during the lockdown phase in India. Ajay Sarwan working as a housekeeper in Elante Mall in Chandigarh committed suicide after losing his temporary job. Alone, Chandigarh city in the northern state of Punjab has recorded thirty-four suicide cases during the lockdown phase due to the financial crisis from March 24 till May 10. The city of Rajkot witnessed three separate suicide cases of a tempo driver, a tailor, and a factory laborer within 24 hours in Gujarat ('financial death, 2020).<sup>24</sup> Both thereason and the suicide itself remain usual for the government and people as they were merely conscious about mental and moral stability before the arrival of COVID-19. The virus is related to people's health, but realizing its impact on developing

countries is multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary on socio-economic grounds.

The relative application of Durkheim's different types of suicide following on social regulation grounds results in fatalistic suicide (excessive control or curbing human liberty)<sup>25</sup> would be even more dreadful as the elementary governance system in the country seems functionally complex. But, anemic moral regulations due to irrational governance cause people-institution disintegration or disconnection, allowing a person to kill oneself in a desperate state. Durkheim's social integration is derived from multiple sources family, religion, and politics (Kang & Thosuwanchot, 2016). Both societal-individual responsibilities complement each other; society balances individual sentiments to resolve a struggle between individualism and collectivism. So, Durkheim somehow wanted to reflect suicide on sociological grounds in variant transitional periods. With this culmination of overly economic deadlock or socio-moral confrontation, the weaker section is inaccessible to physical, psychological, and financial stability.

The articulation of institutional racism is typical in American history (very recent is George Floyd's case) (Hill et al., 2020)<sup>26</sup>, unjust discrimination with the Black-Americans. A pattern of treating suicide as regular among the weaker section is persistently incompetent state action (ignoring farmer's indebtedness for years, joblessness among youth, and unchecked moral depression due to the acute economic crisis). Thus, an emerging institutionalized aspect of suicide silently promoted in many countries considering an easy plan to control population explosion, also remarked by Bodh' India, very soon will be the capital city of suicide in the world.'

#### Extended Discussion

The critical aspects of good governance have invariably been in books and papers and less on active local action upholding the worst cases of economic crisis, communal riots, and



shameful media reporting against minorities during the pandemic in India. United Nations during the 1980s made it imperative for almost all nations to stabilize the federal Solidarity & integrity, engaging local bodies' participation in policy formulation, 'meant for the general public at the local level.' This democratic process of destitute-friendly or responsive lower-class & caste-centric policy applies accountability by the state institutions needs cumulative 'politics-administrative action. Instead of regularizing suicide as a common societal phenomenon, an immediate reparation to the fear of starvation, disintegration and joblessness should be addressed (Agarwal, 2020).<sup>27</sup>

Though the destitute have been partially assisted by the general public unsystematically during the lockdown through NGOs or community-centric organizations. The partial collective assistance, persistent fear of hunger, joblessness, and moral depression among citizens, demand strategic reparative vision. Noble laureate Prof. Abhijeet Banerjee has supported such discussion; Amartya Sen and former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan suggest to resume the economy by providing cash in hand to people, making a universal public distribution system and urging the government to utilize a maximum percentage of its GDP. Alike the Americans using 10% of it (Phukan, 2020).<sup>28</sup> Nikhil Dey, a co-founder of Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, suggested an urgent opening of urban kitchens on roads and crowded places (Agarwal, 'Coronavirus,' 2020) to survive homelessly beggars and destitute in urban localities.

It needs to realize that surviving among global advancement is to focus on capacity development within civil society. Governance is not just about gaining power and authority but action-oriented field researches and incorporating the adaptability of emerging direction as a 'strategic vision' for a valuable organization of human resources (Pomeranz & Stedman, 2020). The democratic governance in developing countries should never be coiled

within the clutch of communalism and cursory of half-baked progress. Active participation in public affairs gives a sense of belongingness, putting a check & balance on the damage done to the current valuable human resource and disciplining a depressed-driven society (Hope, 2009). Hence, a consistent cross-sectional individual-private-public responsibility and flexible community integration should be a regular activity. It might develop an easily connected community and empathetic administration to reach out for assistance before anomic reflections.

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