

Part 3: COSMOS AND HISTORY

Reception of Ancient Cosmological Narratives in the Socio-Political Discourse of India in the 20th–21st Centuries

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The article explores how cosmological and mythological ideas of ancient Hindus influenced social structure and political discourse. An example is the hymn Purusha Sukta, which shows how the image of Purusha's cosmic sacrifice became a way to sanctify the social hierarchy, later reflected in the Manusmriti. The article examines how British colonial researchers and administrators interpreted this myth through the lens of European legal thinking, turning religious texts into tools for governing and classifying Indian society. In postcolonial studies, the transformation of the Purusha myth is analyzed

within modern discussions on Varnas, identity, and social justice. The paper combines philosophical-mythological and cultural-political approaches to understand how myth, power, and social structure interact in the Indian tradition. The authors conclude that ancient India's cosmological ideas were a significant source of symbolic legitimation for the social hierarchy. The influence of Purusha Sukta can be seen over a long historical period — from its institutionalization in the Manusmriti as a normative model of Varna division to its echoes in modern India's constitutional structure. This aims to address the rooted social inequalities. However, this influence is not straightforward; it is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Therefore, the changing interpretations of the hymn — from ritual-cosmological to political — reflect the complex process of transforming traditional ideas of order and justice within modern Indian society.

Keywords: history of Oriental philosophies, historical and philosophical practices, cosmological topics and narratives of Indian mythology, Purusha Sukta, Manusmriti, Varnas/ castes/ Jati, socio-political discourse, identity.

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Introduction

Correlation between cosmological ideas and the social structure of society stems from the concept of the initial universe as a structured hierarchical world in which each element has its own place and function. The first model of a structured world is dictated by myth. This is a narrative that reflects the embodiment of sacred order in nature. Over time, this narrative becomes an ethical standard that defines the proper roles, responsibilities, and statuses of people in society. Subsequently, the standard is codified in the form of rules and regulations, laws that formalize the cosmic order in the political and legal system. Thus, power and governance become sacralized, justifying the social hierarchy as part of the world order. At a certain stage, a philosophical reflection arises that rethinks or casts doubt on the established cosmological and legal foundations, opening the way to new models of social structure. India is no exception in the transition from mythological ideas to norms and laws that regulate social order.

The purpose of the article is to explain how ancient Indian cosmological plots and narratives influenced the historical development of the sociopolitical system and how they are interpreted in modern India's political culture.

A methodological complex, which both contains successful solutions from the previous research of the authors (Petlenko, 2018) and includes contributions specially created to solve the main task of the article, has been applied to achieve the purpose of the study. The methodological complex is based on the functional capabilities of phenomena that are reflected in such concepts and terms as *myth – cosmological myth – topic – narrative – historical and philosophical explication – contamination analysis – discourse – socio-political discourse*. Each of these concepts (terms) has a wide-ranging content and significant representation in scientific databases as well as reference and encyclopedic sources. A concise definition is appropriate only for terms that play a relevant specialized methodological role.

The main attention in the proposed terminological complex is undoubtedly paid to establishment of a connection between the ancient cosmological myth and modern standards and laws of the sociopolitical system of India. The author's approach is based on involving the functional capabilities of current philosophical methods from modern and postmodern teachings, theories, doctrines, and schools. However, the results convincingly prove that the historical and philosophical methods and practices inherent in the Ukrainian historical and philosophical

sphere (Bugrov, 2021; Pobocha & Khmil, 2025) have not lost their creative potential and have stable grounds for renovation. In particular, we used the method of applying terminological and archeographic description of terms, concepts and archival sources (Kononenko et al., 2021) that determine the logical chain of topic development in a particular study. This method is implemented in creating a specific terminographical cloud of the article, which is added to the main content of the study in the form of a printed dictionary. In other words, a specialized reference dictionary is compiled. Moreover, such a dictionary is essential, since it contains concepts from a mental environment that is unusual for European philosophical discourse, which requires special transcultural transcription, establishing conditions for a certain correspondence. However, this circumstance culminated in the developing transformation of the ancient Indian cosmological myth into modern structures of the social and political system, and the role that the British colonial reception of India's cultural heritage played in this, almost a grotesque one!

It is obvious that the source base of the research includes ancient Indian literary texts, which are properly represented in the English-speaking academic environment. For this reason, references are made to English texts and translations with proper commentary. This is particularly important when working with foreign-language terms in the field of Eastern philosophical thought, where semantic complexity and cultural specificity can present significant challenges to interpretation. It is obvious that the source base of the research includes ancient Indian literary texts, which are properly represented in the English-speaking academic environment. For this reason, references are made to English texts and translations with proper commentary. This is particularly important when working with foreign-language terms in the field of Eastern philosophical thought, where semantic complexity and cultural specificity can present significant challenges to interpretation. Accordingly, our study builds on our prior experience with terminology and the analytical issues inherent in the study of Eastern philosophies. (Rudenko & Liashenko, 2020).

An example of a cosmological Chinese narrative that influences contemporary social and political discourse is Pan Xi'an. The interpretation and reception of a cultural symbol is adapted to contemporary conditions. This highlights the need for critical examination of primary sources and their translations. (Rudenko & Zhang, 2022)

However, the methodological historical and philosophical syndrome of untranslatability negatively affects the interpretation of India's mythological, intellectual, and religious heritage. A promising foundation for future research projects is applying the method of describing untranslatable terms to interpretations of Oriental philosophies and cultural heritage examples. This methodological approach in the history of philosophy was introduced by French researcher Barbara Cassin in "European Dictionary of Philosophies: Lexicon of Untranslatables" (European Dictionary of Philosophies, 2009; Cassin, 2016), with contributions from Ukrainian historians of philosophy. Essentially, the issues related to untranslatables and their interpretation in ancient Indian culture have led to results that will be discussed in detail in the article.

The use of the term "narrative" also takes on an independent meaning. The best definition of narrative and its representation can be found in the significant work of H. Porter Abbott "*The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*":

"The universality of narrative. When we think of narrative, we usually think of it as art, however modest. We think of it as novels or sagas or folk tales or, at the least, as anecdotes. We speak of a gift for telling stories. But as true as it is that narrative can be an art and that art thrives on narrative, narrative is also

something we all engage in, artists and non-artists alike. We make narratives many times a day, every day of our lives. And we start doing so almost from the moment we begin putting words together. As soon as we follow a subject with a verb, there is a good chance we are engaged in narrative discourse. "I fell down," the child cries, and in the process tells her mother a little narrative, just as I have told in this still unfinished sentence a different, somewhat longer narrative that includes the action of the child's telling ("I fell down," the child cries").

Given the presence of narrative in almost all human discourse, there is little wonder that there are theorists who place it next to language itself as the distinctive human trait. Fredric Jameson, for example, writes about the "allinforming process of narrative," which he describes as "the central function or instance of the human mind» 1 Jean-Francois Lyotard calls narration "the quintessential form of customary knowledge." 2 Whether or not such assertions stand up under scrutiny, it is still the case that we engage in narrative so often and with such unconscious ease that the gift for it would seem to be everyone's birthright. Perhaps the fullest statement regarding the universality of narrative among humans is the opening to Roland Barthes's landmark essay on narrative" (Abbott, 2008).

It is obvious that the theory of narrativism is a productive component of the methodological complex, which contributes to the identification of primitive plots from the mythological heritage of ancient India, and as such, it acquires an extraordinary influence on the worldview of contemporaries. The circulation of primitive plots unfolds in narratives that form behavioral customs and can manifest themselves in the integral structure of a certain type of culture. The concepts of plot and narrative in their use turn into theoretical applications from the European philosophical lexicon to define certain phenomena in a different, in particular Indian, culture. At the same time, they also create the basis for problems of untranslatability.

Although the problems of untranslatability in relation to Oriental philosophies create significant obstacles, the attempt at proper interpretations gradually brings closer the establishment of a parity understanding of equivalent phenomena in the philosophical and sociopolitical context. The next component of the methodological complex is the use of the explication method. This method is associated with Rudolf Carnap, who used it in the field of philosophy of science. On the other hand, the explication method was productively used by Ukrainian historians of philosophy in identifying the hidden structures of historical and philosophical concepts in building a certain presentation on their basis, in fact, the history of philosophy as a set of philosophical narratives in the historical process. Its application made it possible to visualize the leading plot of the Indian cosmological myth, which influenced the formation of the customary culture of society.

The next logical element of the analysis is to study the circulation of language complexes that determine the discourse and mental culture of contemporaries. The research novelty is that the current state of the sociopolitical system of India is determined by the combination of authentic Indian discourse which was formed on the basis of the deployment of cosmological plots from its own mythology and the discourse of British colonial influence that was based on a specific European reception of the cultural heritage of Indian society. This combination now determines the leading trends in Indian society's reflections on its own identity, civilizational perspectives, and relationships with civilizations developed on its own cosmological myths.

Cosmological Plots in Indian Culture

Cosmological ideas in ancient India played a fundamental role in shaping the organization of Indian society. The oldest part of the Vedas – the Rigveda – contains confirmation of this point. It contains a hymn of X.90 – Purusha Sukta, which symbolically reflects the idea of the origin of society as part of the cosmic whole. It is also known as the myth of Puruṣa, the first man sacrificed by the gods to create our world.

The hymn describes how a thousand-eyed and thousand-legged Purusha covers all existence. When the gods perform a sacrifice (yajña) over him, the sky, earth, sun, moon, wind, sacrifices as well as a human society divided into Varnas appear from his body (Griffith, 1897). Within the framework of our study, Purusha Sukta is a very important hymn, because it is the first and only mention of Varna in the Rigveda (Jamison & Brereton, 2014:1538).

It symbolically reflects the idea of the origin of social stratification. The four Varnas – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudras – appear from different parts of the cosmic man's body as described in the line of hymn X.90(12):

*“The Brahman was his mouth. The ruler was made of both his arms.
As to his thighs – that is what the freeman was. From his two feet the servant
was born”* (Jamison & Brereton, 2014:1540).

In other words, Purusha Sukta laid the foundation for the idea of an ontological hierarchy, where each group has its own place in world order rather than just a social role. Thus, the social structure received sacred legitimation, which became the basis of further Doctrine of Brahman.

The vocabulary and rhythm of Purusha Sukta differ from those of other Rigveda hymns, which may be the reason for some researchers to consider it a later inclusion in the collection (Jamison & Brereton, 2014; Oldenberg & Shrotri, 2024). In addition to linguistic and stylistic features, there are other reasons to doubt the authenticity of Purusha Sukta as the original part of the Rigveda. In particular, the ritual and brahmanistic nature of the hymn. The central role of yajña (sacrifice) is characteristic of the post-Vedic period, when Brahmanism is formed. These features contrast with the more archaic hymns of the Rigveda, which are naturalistic and polytheistic in nature, with no signs of abstract cosmological synthesis, suggesting possible interpolation of the hymn in a later period to justify a sacralized social hierarchy.

Other parts of the Samhitas either have no mention of the Varna stratification of society at all or have other explanations apart from the first sacrifice of Purusha. The Samaveda gives no other explanation for Varnas (Stevenson, 1842).

The Yajurveda mentions Varna in the Vajasaneyi Samhita (Griffith, 1899). This explanation has ritual and regulatory value, linking cosmology with social and religious practices. The Taittiriya Samhita, on the other hand, contains two different explanations for the origin of Varnas, which deserve special attention. First, these two explanations do not coincide with each other and moreover demonstrate different conceptual approaches to understanding social hierarchy: one is based on the cosmological principle of sacrifice, while the other rests on the functional and ritual distribution of roles in society. Secondly, one of these explanations completely coincides with the version given in the Vajasaneyi Samhita:

*“He lauded with three: the Brahman was created: Brahmanaspati was the
rule. He lauded with five; existing things were created: Brahmanaspati was
the ruler... He lauded with fifteen: the Kshattra (the Kshattriya) was created:*

Indra was the ruler... He lauded with nineteen; the Sudra and the Arya (Vaisya) were created: day and night were the rulers” (Ambedkar, 2019).

This is evidence of a common tradition or textual relationship between these text corpora. This, in turn, may indicate later editing or borrowing to coordinate various versions of Vedic material as well as the gradual formation of a canonical version of the cosmological myth about the origin of Varnas.

However, another explanation of the origin of Varnas in the text of the Taittiriya Samhita is not cosmological but anthropological in nature, where social order grows out of the experience of a person standing between the world of gods and humans:

“Let the king to whose house the Vratya who knows this, comes as a guest, cause him to be respected as superior to himself. So doing he does no injury to his royal rank, or to his realm. From him arose the Brahman (Brahman) and the Kshattria (Kshatriya). They said, ‘Into whom shall we enter?’” (Ambedkar, 2019).

Here, the central figure is Vratya – a person who is outside the established Vedic ritual system, that is, a kind of extra-social ascetic or hermit, who at the same time has sacred power. This passage says that when Vratya was filled with passions (kāma), from it arose the Varna of the Kshatriyas – Rājanya, i.e., a military, ruling force. Here, Kshatriyas are derived not from the divine cosmos, but from human energy, strength, and passion. The dialogic nature of the question “Into who shall we enter?” asked at the end is quite interesting. This question has a deeply symbolic meaning. The answer thereto can be found at several levels. First, at the social level, it can mean a stage in the formation of a social structure: Brahman and Kshatriya (or their prototypes) ask in what environment they should manifest themselves, i.e., what form of human society to enter to establish their status.

This is a moment of self-awareness of social functions, where Varnas not just arise, but look for their place, forming an ordered system. Second, it is the level of world or cosmological order. From this perspective, the question expresses the desire of the principles of being of Brahman (spiritual power) and Kshatriya (power, energy) to find a receptacle in a person or world. That is, they are looking for someone to implement their action in creation. This is the moment when cosmic forces are embodied in social order, turning abstract categories into specific roles in society.

Although differently expressed in Purusha Sukta, the interpretation of the origin of Varnas in the Yajurveda reflects ideas about the ordering of the world and society according to a single creation principle. That is, the division of society according to certain criteria is not just an agreement or a historical fact. It is the embodiment of the primary order of existence. In it, the spiritual, vital force finds its place. Thus, Varnas are interpreted as reflecting the general structure of the world, establishing a link between spiritual knowledge, power, and ritual action.

We also find interpretation of the origin of Varnas in the Atharvaveda. This collection mentions the birth of Brahmans and Kshatriyas (Rājanyas) as (spiritual, political or secular) power holders. However, Brahmans were born first: “He was the first to drink the soma; that did render poison powerless” (Bloomfield, 1897). Soma is a drink that has a sacred meaning and power. Therefore, the first person who drank it was filled with wisdom and spiritual strength. Warriors are born second, but they are born bound, because this is a power that even the gods

try to tame. Therefore, they should be guided by the wise advice that they will receive from the Brahmans. Two conclusions follow from this. First, Brahmans have a higher status because of the primacy of creation and drinking a sacred drink. Second, spiritual power legitimizes secular power and therefore can influence it. The power of Kshatriyas depends on the spiritual authority of Brahmans, but it also has its own origin and energy. This is the justification for interdependence of the two highest Varnas, where spiritual and political forces have common roots, but different functions.

The point to note is that the division of society into four Varnas is not common for different parts of the Samhitas. Purusha Sukta from the Rigveda and explanations from the Atharvaveda include that clear list. However, other places also mainly concern Brahmans and Kshatriyas, who are also called Rajanyas, or the division is replaced by the generic community of “descendants of Manu”. This may indicate that the system of four Varnas was formed gradually, and initially Vedic thought recognized only two poles of social order – spiritual (Brahman) and power-military (Kshatriya), while Vaishya and Sudra appeared later based on social concretization of ritual and economic functions.

Along with Varnas, the term “jati” is used. In our opinion, the division of society into Jati is more consistent with what Europeans will call castes and what functions as the term “caste” in modern discourse. In the texts of the Rigveda, jāti has the meaning “origin”, “kind”, “type”. The single-root words can be also found such as “jan” (to be born) giving derivatives that later form the word “jāti”. In other words, initially this term indicated the origin of something. Professor Paramba Shri Yogamaya analyzes the meaning of the term “jati” in the Rigveda and the Vajasaneyi Samhita and concludes that the term is associated not so much with social belonging to a certain group, but with identity and identification. This is how the qualities, responsibilities, and characteristics of something were designated. The division of duties became the reason for the stratification of society. This system determined the characteristics of different castes. For Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, for example, they are based on the qualities of Rajas. And since the Vedas this determines their nature. In other words, the term “jati” in the Vedas is understood as an inherent and fundamental quality or role characteristic of a particular entity or group rather than a purely social category (Yogamaya, 2025).

In the research of European scientists, the term “caste” is increasingly used, which often means “jati”. In the classic work of Louis Dumont “Homo Hierarchicus”, the distinction between varna and jati is specified. Moreover, “jati” equals to caste: “Note that this is strictly accurate: a matter of situation no doubt, but jati (‘caste’) connotes above all birth, the hereditary group, and while it corresponds mostly to endogamy and to bilateral transmission it in no way excludes unilateral transmission and exogamy” (Dumont, 1970 :62-63).

The two-volume encyclopedic work of Arthur Anthony Macdonell and Arthur Berriedale Keith, which systematizes the notable personas, terms, social institutions and religious concepts mentioned in the Vedic texts, contains the following definition of “jati”: “Jati, which in the Pali texts is the word denoting ‘caste’, does not occur at all in the early Vedic literature; when it is found, as in the Katyayana Srauta Sutra, it has only the sense of ‘family’ (for which cf. Kula, Gotra, and Vis). For the influence of the family system on the growth of caste, see Varna. To assume that it was the basis of caste, as does Senart, is difficult in face of the late appearance of words for family and of stress on family” (Macdonell & Keith, 1912:281-282). Thus, jati as a social group or criterion for dividing society arises much later.

Thus, the term “jati” originally meant a species trait or identification characteristic. However, over time, it has acquired the meaning of an inherited social group. These groups are a fundamental characteristic of India’s social structure, and there are thousands of them.

The key features of Jati are heredity, specialization (for example, by profession) as well as religious and ritual components. The latter characteristic is just related to the myth of Purusha, and the appearance of Varnas since Jati can be interpreted as fragmentation inside Varnas. The Brahmanic tradition largely legitimizes the stratification of society as “natural” and cosmically conditioned. The Manusmriti, for example, recorded the ritual duties of Varnas, which were specified in Jati.

In political terms, the strengthening of the Jati system was associated with the growing complexity of state entities, the development of a ritual-oriented monarchy and bureaucracy as well as the economic differentiation of society. Acting as ritual experts and legal authorities, the Brahmins contributed to the institutionalization of social norms, which ensured social stability, but at the same time fixed inequality.

Although the term “jati” is used in the context of social structure of society, it can also be applied to refer to other associations formed by birth or origin criteria, in particular religious or language groups.

Thus, the Vedic tradition explains the very origins of such a structure and humanity in general through mythological narratives.

The version of human creation from the body of a cosmic Purusha, as we can see, is not the only one. Another explanation for the origin of humans and the society they formed is related to the figure of Manu, the progenitor of humanity. In the Vedic tradition, Manu appears not only as the first person, but also as the first sacrificer, lawgiver and bearer of moral order, through which the connection between gods and people is established. It is he who begins the sacrifice (yajña) – the act that becomes the model of creation and foundation of the human community: “He is essentially the first of sacrificers, and the establisher of sacrifice, though he appears with other old sacrificers” (Keith, 1925: 228).

According to the Vedic story of Manu, he escapes from water-flood with the help of a fish that was the avatar of Vishnu. This highlights the importance of his status and value for all future generations.

The question of the connection between Vaivasvata Manu and Manu as the author of the Manusmriti remains controversial. Traditionally, these figures are merged into one, thereby giving the text of the Laws a sacred status and a divine origin. In other words, he is also considered to be the author of the most famous normative text, which Indian thought treats as the first set of social and moral precepts that codifies the idea of dharma, i.e., a universal order that encompasses both the cosmos and society.

However, modern researchers do not fully share this view (Davis, 2010; Olivelle, 2005; Lingat, 1973). Most likely, the Manusmriti was created by the Brahman schools between the second century BC and the second century AD, and Manu is just a “figure of authority”, rather than a real author. This attribution is typical of the Indian tradition. To give text or ideas importance, they are put into the mouth of a Rishi sage or a person with a connection to the gods. Although the authorship of the text is controversial, its importance and authority are undeniable.

Cosmological images of the creation of humanity from parts of the body of Purusha became the basis for the varna hierarchy. And the Manusmriti enshrined the rules of conduct and duties of each varna. “For the growth of these worlds, moreover, he produced from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet, the Brahman, the Ksatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra” (Olivelle, 2005:88).

Each Varna has the corresponding duties and functions assigned to it: Brahmins – training, rituals; Kshatriyas – protection; Vaishya – trade, agriculture; Shudras – service. This is an

indication of how the cosmic law – Dharma – is embodied in the social stratification of society. And maintaining such an order is a sacred duty, because the stability of the world in general depends on it. In this sense, the social system appears as a reflection of the cosmic structure, and social roles are not just functional or economic categories, but ontological ones. Through the Varna system, the principle of *rta* – dharma is implemented. In the same way the cosmos is based on harmony and complementarity of elements, human society must maintain a balance between groups, each of which performs its intended function. A violation of this order is perceived not only as a social deviation, but also as a cosmological deviation that disrupts the overall balance of being. In other words, in the text we see the justification of social inequality as a natural order.

It is important to clarify the concept of *rta* since the Manusmriti continues the tradition of Upanishads and uses more the concept of Dharma. However, “*rta*” also means law, order, harmony and correctness. Moreover, for the Rigveda, this very concept had a cosmological, epistemological and ethical meaning. The order of the cosmos ensures that the sun rises, the seasons change, and light appears:

“From fervor kindled to its height eternal Law and Trus were born: Thence was the Night produced, and thence the bellowy flood of sea arose. From that same billowy flood of sea the Year was afterwards produced, Ordainer of the days and nights, Lord over all who close the eye. Dhatar, the great Creator, then formed the new order Sun and Moon. He formed in order Heaven and Earth, the regions of the air, and light” (Griffith, 1897: 609).

At the same time, “*rta*” has the meaning of the ritual order by which sacrificial actions bear fruit, and the moral norm that makes the action right or good, and the correctness or truth of things, i.e., their correspondence to nature. In other words, it is the fundamental Vedic principle of the cosmic order, from which the concepts of Dharma, ritual law and social organization have developed. Early Indian texts build a bridge from cosmology to society through “*rta*”, showing that the human community must recreate the order of the universe.

Cosmological narratives in the Samhitas and later in the Dharmashastras and the Manusmriti received the status of apologist of the Varna social system as a defender of *rta* and dharma. It laid the idea of society as a cosmic model, which should be arranged in a certain way, and a person does not live by himself, but as part of this community, being a part of the “great order”. The social hierarchy becomes sacralized, and any social transformations or attempts to revise it are interpreted as interference with cosmic harmony.

Starting with the Manusmriti, the cosmological narrative is superimposed on the political and managerial ones. Fulfilling one’s duties to the state means fulfilling one’s dharma. This is simply the consolidation of the status of an individual in society according to birth. But the status of *rta* and dharma is higher than that of the King. A state that deviates from the principles of dharma is doomed to decline in the same way as the cosmos in the event of a violation of *rta*. Therefore, the cosmological model is not an abstraction: it defines standards of behavior, the structure of power, moral standards, and the legitimation of political decisions.

Thus, the cosmological model is transformed into a legal and regulatory one. We observe the imposition and penetration of cosmology into the sociopolitical sphere rather than their differentiation. Social order is conceived as an ordered projection of the cosmos, and the cosmos – as an example of harmonious interaction of elements that serves as a model for human community. That is why maintaining the established structure of Varnas and observing

dharma is not only a political or ethical task, but also a metaphysical one that supports the integrity of the world.

Transcultural Untranslatability: Western Interpretation of Oriental Narratives

Evidence from regulatory and historical sources indicates that India's development as a colony of the British Empire occurred through several interconnected stages. The first stage was the emergence of European interest in the Indian subcontinent during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British trading companies vied for control of key ports and trade routes. The subsequent major stage was the rise of British East India Company dominance (1600-1858), which, after securing a monopoly on trade, gradually evolved from a commercial enterprise into a military and administrative power, establishing effective control over significant territories in India. After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British Crown took over, which marked the beginning of the British Raj period (1858-1947) – a centralized, bureaucratically organized and strictly controlled colonial system (Petlenko, 2025).

Such changes in the state and political atmosphere of India affected the perception and functioning of traditional social institutions. The concept of caste came into common use, and the structure of Indian society was defined precisely because of it as caste system. In the hands of the British administration, it has become legally codified and bureaucratic. The processes of colonial systematization, population censuses, “discovery” and classification of local customs became key mechanisms by which Varnas and castes were transformed into stable, rigid categories that determined the social status and legal status of individuals.

It is important to note that the analysis of how castes and Varnas functioned during the colonial period of Indian history is curial because it answers two questions. The first one is how British rule reorganized the political system in India, formed the idea of social hierarchy and traditional order. And the second – how this reorganization and impact affected the change in Indians' understanding of their own social structure, their own cultural categories, and ultimately how they began to understand themselves within that system.

From a historical perspective, two approaches can be distinguished, which define what a caste used to be during the colonial period. Nicholas Dirks mentions ethnographic criteria and understanding through categorization (Dirks, 2001).

Until 1857, when the East India Company began to collapse, British officials in India, missionaries, and Orientalists used their own epistemological approaches to understand the Indian social structure.

One of the earliest British attempts to understand the social structure of India was the work of an officer of the East India Company Alexander Dow “The History of Hindostan” (1768). Based on the Persian chronicles and mentoring of Brahman-Pandit, Dow represented Indian society through textually fixed concepts of Varna and hierarchical “traditional order” (Dow, 2021). However, the main drawback of the work was its appeal to texts rather than “field” research.

Thus, caste was originally an ethnographic concept based on a review of textual sources of Brahmanism and Hinduism. The lack of information about the difference between Varna and Jati, incomprehension of local, regional differences and the multiplicity of Jati led to a simplified understanding of Indian social organization. The European understanding of the nature of hierarchy and order has become the common denominator for the entire complex

Indian structure. In other words, early Orientalist studies created their own description and interpretation of how the Indian world existed.

After the inclusion of India in the British Empire, the model of governance changes towards centralization and bureaucratization. British pedantry and the desire for structuring are also reflected in the change in the status of caste concept in social, political and research terms.

Caste replaces the terms of Jati and Varna, as it is closer for Europeans. It is used in population censuses. Bureaucratic classification makes castes fixed, rigid, and hierarchical, whereas they used to be contextual and locally variable. In new discourse, the term “caste” becomes the key to understanding Indian society, unifying what has historically been diverse.

The 1871 census is very important in the context of our research, because it not only officially consolidated the caste stratification of society, but also showed epistemological shortcomings and miscalculations made by the British.

The census was a centralized procedure that had a certain scale and criteria for classifying the population, which were religious affiliation, occupation, and caste. It was an attempt to squeeze a diverse and flexible Indian identity into the bureaucratic framework. The next large-scale census was conducted 10 years later, in 1881:

“The Census of the 17 February 1881 was the first synchronous enumeration which has been attempted for all India... But the enumeration in the various Provinces and States has been effected at different times and by independent agencies. There had too been no attempt to secure uniformity in the arrangement of the statistics then obtained” (Plowden, 1883).

We can distinguish the following main tasks of censuses. Administrative planning and governance required data on mobilization resources, taxable population, and resources for local infrastructure. The next task was to create quantitative population registers that would unhide public structures and facilitate control for the authorities. This gives the appearance of a deep understanding of the real social stratification in India by the colonial authorities. And finally, an academic and ideological goal. This facilitated the work of ethnographers, historians, and all Orientalists as well as fueled the scientific and political strategies of imperial power. This task concerned what was called “official anthropology” and was intended to justify the inclusion of India in the British Empire:

“The declared, double purpose of official anthropology was always to contribute to scientific knowledge and to strengthen and improve British rule. This anthropology reflected and reinforced British ideas that ‘traditional’ Indian society – the antithetical ‘other’ of modern European society – was made up of separate religious communities and separate castes, which were the most important social groups, together with a tribal periphery” (Fuller, 2017: 4).

The conditions for censuses conduct were based on unified procedures, as in England. However, difficulties arose at the questionnaire and survey stage. “In England the vast majority of the inhabitants fill in their own schedules for the Census; in India the cases where such a course is possible are rare” (Walby & Haan, 2012:301). Often the data was recorded by local officials or village elders but interpreted through the prism of British administrative logic. Thus, the choice of terms, counting and names of castes were recorded according to the colonial mapping of society. There was confusion with local names and the overlap of the

concepts of jati/occupation/varna. In British interpretations, conflicts and discrepancies were simplified. The caste unified all these differences and appeared as an “objective” fact precisely at the suggestion of the British interpretation.

This had the following consequences. First, the consolidation of social labels. The officially fixed name of the caste became an administrative identifier. It was used in documents, the education system, and at work. Second, the rethinking of the social and political field. Various castes used census data to substantiate their claims. And critics pointed to the colonial nature and constructivism of these categories (Dirks, 2001).

Thus, the census not only recorded social realities but also actively created them, turning the mobile social structure of India into a standardized system that was convenient for administrative governance.

The imperial power regarded castes as an indicator of the “backwardness” of Indian society. However, at the same time, for the British, it was the caste that became the basic unit of social organization and the only “correct” way to describe Indian reality. Moreover, the British believed that it was the caste system in their own bureaucratic sense that could properly represent India. The colonial authorities not only classified but also actively reconstructed castes so that they corresponded to their idea of social order and could function as a convenient model of civil society. To reinforce their positions, they used the Manusmriti as a source of Hindu law, but they made two mistakes. First, they underestimated regional customs and traditions, which, in part, were much more important in legal proceedings or governance than the Manusmriti, because the latter was just a collection of instructions and recommendations. The second, dharma and performance of duty for Indian thought have more ritual and ethical status rather than being a codified law.

Thus, the British reinterpreted Indian traditions through Western confidence in rationality and textuality. The Manusmriti became the main source of information only because there was a need in one clear and understandable code as a basis. Certainly, the social structure of India, which was represented by Varnas and Jatis, existed before the arrival of colonialism. However, modern understanding of what exactly the caste is, what it defines, and how it functions in society is a product of the colonial epistemological approach.

Postcolonial Modernity – Reconstruction of Cosmic Myth

The trend set by the first censuses remained relevant until 1931. The caste was a mandatory administrative label. The new legislation was the engine of inevitable changes, because the British did not just observe and describe Indian society; they actively transformed it. This transformation also affected the caste system. We can agree with the authors of the article “*Colonial legislation and the erosion of Brahmanic dominance: Transforming the caste system in British India*” that the new identities were invented:

“The British colonial legal framework was significant in changing the caste relations that were situated within the Hindu society. Measures like the Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 and the Hindu Widow’s Remarriage Act of 1856 were the beginning of legal attacks on the rigors of Brahmanic law that promoted enhancements of mobility and rights of individuals. However, while these laws sought to minimize the oppressive features of the caste system, they established in their place new legal modes of caste identity” (Kalwar et al., 2025: 804).

In the 1940s, when the Resistance movement in India was gaining more strength, such a categorization of society gradually lost its expediency. Detailed caste data were no longer entered in the 1941 census. However, the imposed ideological imprint has gained considerable political weight. In particular, based on the obtained statistics, the concept of “Scheduled Castes” became current (Government of India, 1935).

The British understanding of what and which India is has become the basis for scientific research related to Indian culture, philosophy, religion, etc. However, this also had the opposite effect. The Indians themselves, who were educated in Europe, sought to be understood. The twentieth century gave many researchers of Indian philosophy who were Hindus but wrote in English for the European reader. This means that such well-known researchers as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Radhakrishnan, 2008a; Radhakrishnan, 2008b), Satischandra Chatterjee, and Dhirendramohan Datta (Chatterjee & Datta, 2010) worked within the methodology and requirements for academic textual sources laid down by European discourse.

The situation arose when the British Orientalist discourse took the shape of a “framework” of knowledge about India. Researchers from other European countries joined it as well. But they all described India as “different”, culturally distinct, static, traditional, and chaotic, one that requires rational European regulation. For this reason, Indian studies developed mainly as philology, comparative religion, and normative philosophy in European universities (Oxford, Cambridge, Hamburg).

This has the opposite effect as well. Indian intellectuals adopt the norms of Western academic presentation of material, and their goal is precisely to become clear to the West. Therefore, they write their works mainly in English, apply the methodological approach inherent in European universities (logical analysis, commenting on texts, comparative studies), and use the terms of European philosophy to explain Indian concepts (for example, ethics, metaphysics, logic, or even philosophy). This created the first generation of “Indian mediator philosophers” acting as intermediaries between tradition and the West.

As a result, Indian philosophical thought of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries appears both as a continuation of the age-old tradition and as a product of the Western academic way of presentation and description. Thus, we see the answer to the above question regarding self-understanding within the framework of the new system formed by the British authorities. The adoption of European criteria of rationality and scientificity is combined with the simultaneous opposition of one’s deep spirituality and appeal to the religious and philosophical heritage of Western intellectualism.

Thus, modern Indian philosophy was formed as a space of dual affiliation. It sought to meet the requirements of European discourse but at the same time asserted its own difference, looking for resources for national and cultural self-identification in classical texts. This tension between the internal and external visions of India becomes the key to understanding twentieth-century Indian thought.

Such duality was traced not only in the intellectual sphere but also in the sociopolitical one. One of the most striking examples was the transformation of ideas about caste during the period after gaining independence.

However, independent India tried to distance itself from the colonial, Europeanized interpretation of the caste. But it has retained its basic administrative infrastructure. These were lists, registers, definitions, and legal criteria created by the British. It was impossible to reject these tools, since they had become the basis for the implementation of social justice policies. In the second half of the twentieth century, this led to new forms of political activity. For example, Dalit movements or regional parties that represented the interests of individual

caste blocks (Yadavs, Jats, Vanniyars, etc.). Thus, the colonial setting of caste standards created long-term sociopolitical structures that continue to influence modern India.

Analyzing cosmological narratives, such as the Purusha myth, we see how they first influenced traditional Indian society, were later revised and reinterpreted by the colonial British authorities, and are now present in the political rhetoric of independent India. It is important to answer the question of what channels or ways of this influence remained in postcolonial India. This will help connect ancient narratives and modern intellectual and political discourse.

We propose identifying such channels of influence as institutional, ideological, and local practices. Institutional ones lie in the consolidation of castes through legal norms and state institutions. After gaining independence in 1947, the Indian government faced many challenges and problems that needed to be addressed, including the question of what to do with the colonial heritage in various spheres: economic, political, social, and cultural. The inherited social reality represented the caste not just as a religiously conditioned but as a political category. It was engaged in administrative governance, the tax system, as a mobilization tool, etc. It was too difficult, even impossible, to abandon caste labeling at the beginning of the formation of independent India, since such a decision would simply be declarative. Therefore, the articles 341–342 of the Constitution of 1950 retained the concept of Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes: “The President may, after consultation with the Governor or Rajpramukh of a State, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State” (Government of India, 1950a). Based on these articles, the President issued the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, which formalized lists for reservations and legal protection purposes. Thus, the colonial practice of caste categorization was adopted and continued by the new state, but with a different legal and political context (Government of India, 1950b).

Such implementations, known as positive support measures, have strengthened the system of positive discrimination. These include quotas in education, public service, and political representation. Therefore, the caste has become a normative category of the modern state, but with a modified role — not for creating hierarchies, but for addressing structural inequality.

When considering how the legislative consolidation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and later Other Backward Classes took place, through which the caste received a new normative function within the new political model, it is worth paying attention to such a phenomenon as reservations.

Certainly, reservations did not appear during the period after gaining independence. “In the Indian context reservations were introduced during the last decades of the 19th century at a time when the subcontinent could be broadly divided according to two main forms of governance – British India and the 600 princely states” (Das, 2000:3831). However, over time, the reservation originally intended for registered castes and tribes evolved to include other “backward” groups (OBCs). As a result, the document “Communal Award” was prepared in 1932. It introduced separate electorates and representation quotas for different religious and social groups. There, for the first time, reservation of seats in legislative councils was institutionalized for the untouchable, Muslims, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, etc. (Nugent, 1979).

The reservation was further amended in the 1950 Constitution of India, including paragraph 4 of article 16: “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State” (Government of India, 1950a).

In the twenty-first century, the expansion of quotas was justified by an amendment to the Constitution in article 15. This allowed for reservations for SEBC (socially and educationally backward classes), SC (Scheduled Castes), and ST (Scheduled Tribes) in educational institutions. This paragraph is also relevant to the latest version of the Constitution.

Therefore, the issue of reservations, quotas, and caste benefits is quite critical for modern India. The last census was conducted in 2011, and the column about caste remained there. However, there are discussions about replacing the concept of caste with an economic criterion. One of the speakers of this idea was the former Prime Minister of India, the leader of Janata Dal (Secular) Deve Gowda. He emphasizes that people suffer even despite existing reservations and that the focus should be on those who live in real poverty (NDTV News, 2024).

Political leaders and ideologists sometimes turn to traditional narratives about social order to defend their position on the institutional consolidation of various levels of social assistance for the population. For example, references to the Manusmriti, the Dharmashastra and the Vedic canon are used to politically legitimize their position both to preserve the traditional social system and to implement reforms. In this context, movements for caste rights, in particular the leaders of OBC, SC and ST, also cite ancient texts to emphasize that support for marginalized communities has a long moral and cultural basis. Such rhetoric allows politicians to justify reservations and other institutional measures of social support through the prism of tradition and religiosity. Vedic and cosmological narratives in this sense become a tool for forming the regulatory framework of policy, influencing legislative decisions, the quota system and state practices of social protection. In other words, ancient texts act as a symbolic support for modern institutional mechanisms of social justice.

The ideological channel of influence manifests itself in the use of images of Vedic cosmology and ideas about dharma and rta in political projects and the formation of a new postcolonial identity. The use of Vedic images in the political rhetoric of modern India is quite common. The most illustrative one is the Hindutva movement – an ideology of Hindu nationalism, and there are several parties and organizations in India that support it or are associated with it. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the main leading political party that defends the Hindutva ideology. They build their position around the idea of the unity of Indian civilizational culture as the unity of the nation. The rejection of pro-Western positions is combined with an appeal to tradition, mythology and cosmology. There are also organizations associated with the ideology of Hindutva. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a volunteer organization that supports the ideology of Hindu cultural nationalism through a network of cadet trainings, educational and social programs. It acts as an ideological center and has a significant influence on political structures, in particular, on BJP. Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is a religious nationalist organization established to mobilize Hindu religious institutions and communities to protect Hinduism and promote Hindu identity. VHP organizes religious campaigns, social movements, and engages in politically sensitive issues, including interreligious conflicts and temple movements.

Hindutva ideology uses symbols taken from Vedic culture. Here are some examples. The saffron flag Bhagwa Dhvaj is associated with the veneration of one of the most popular Rigveda gods, Agni, and this color was also associated with sannyasin – ascetic sages. Along with this, the sacred symbol AUM ॐ is used. Images of Rama, Krishna, heroes of epics and Puranas are used for cultural consolidation. Gatherings and processions are often accompanied by such symbols to emphasize the connection between religion and national identity.

Representatives of Hindutva also appeal to such cosmological narratives as the “principle of natural order” or Rta. It is used to emphasize that Hindu civilization is based on an ancient

cosmic order – as if the “Vedic rhythm” serves as the foundation for the ethical, cultural and social order of modern India. In other words, cosmology here is not just a myth – it is the basis of the idea that ancient Vedic knowledge is not only religious, but also has a universal, fundamental nature, providing a connection between the cosmos and the social order. References to *Purusha Sukta* have the same purpose.

The narrative of the world ages – the Yugas – and the “Golden Age” is also actively turned to advantage. Each yuga is a specific period measured by days and nights of Brahma. There are four of them forming one big cycle – Maha-Yuga. However, each subsequent yuga is worse than the previous one. The Bhagavad Gita contains an analogy of a four-legged table with how the Dharma functions in each era. In the first – the golden – one, Dharma stands firmly on all four legs, so everyone lives happily. However, in our time of the last Kali Yuga, this table stands only on one leg, so moral norms and customs are shaky, and people are unhappy. This was interpreted by the ideologists of Hindutva in the form of an “ancient perfection” narrative. Proximity to tradition and religion is proximity to truth. This means that a return to one’s roots is the basis for a revived national integrity and identity. Thus, cosmological Vedic narratives in Hindutva are a way to legitimize the idea that “we are the heirs of the Vedic cosmos”, and this knowledge can be trusted as a basis for self-identification and self-awareness.

Hindutva is the most prominent ideology in the context of our research. It is part of the larger civilizational unity project. This project is not just a specific party program or organization charter. This is a combination of ideas aimed at developing political, cultural, and social reforms under the conditional slogan of “return to the real India and marginalization of alternative narratives and programs (Islamic or European ones)”.

For this purpose, such cultural levers are used as the construction of large statues, temple complexes, memorial parks (Statue of Unity; temples of Rama, Shiva, Vishnu), the use of the image of Bharat Maha (Mother India) during official events (Ramaswamy, 2010), visual design of state programs in the style of Vedic symbolism (Hansen, 1999), purposeful change of school textbooks: replacing historical photographs with iconography of Hindu deities or epic heroes (Kumar, 2005).

These measures create the effect of filling the public space with Hindu narratives. Visual images and visual expression give the impression that there is a canon of national identity created. Its repetition in political and social discourse reinforces the vision of the foundation for national identity in its return to tradition.

And finally, the third channel of influence is represented by local practices. At the level of towns, villages, or other small settlements, ancient cosmological concepts convey everyday norms and rituals and are also the basis for grouping the population by a certain attribute (professional, caste, origin, etc.). Such local practices can be a mainstay for various political or social movements, e.g., the movement for the rights of Dalits (untouchables) or for reforms and social protection. They can also amplify inequality. In the current situation, this is exemplified by several practical cases: campaigns for land redistribution, political activity of OBC/ SC/ ST (Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes) or other castes, ritual strategies of mobility (Jodhka, 2025).

Local campaigns for land redistribution work as follows. In rural areas, the caste hierarchy has effect through land relations. Large landowners are often representatives of dominant castes such as Jats, Yadavs, Marathas, Kammas, Reddys. Although they are divided into Sudras in the Varna hierarchy, some of them derive from Kshatriyas, while landless or land-poor ones are just antecedents of Dalits or other OBCs. Thus, the caste system is being transformed today through the criterion of resource ownership, which means that it is becoming more economical.

However, property, including land ownership, has always been a sign of privileged Varna. The Manusmriti mentions the rights to own property and to the possibility of its inheritance for each social stratum. And the reason for this lies precisely in the cosmological myth of Purusha. In modern India, caste and Varna relations are physically reproduced through local practices of access to resources, such as land. This includes labor obligations, discrimination or privileges of the labor market, opportunities to rent or own land, etc. In a specific way, this is a reproduction of the identity policy that was laid down in the ancient ideas about the origin of human beings. Although the prize in this struggle is a material resource, the origins and causes are rooted in the traditional structure of society.

The next local practice is the political mobilization of OBC/SC/ST groups. Regardless of the party's level or influence, whether it is BJP, INC, or regional parties, gaining voter support often involves caste identification. The work of Surinder S. Jodhka¹ has shown that different mechanisms are involved for gaining voter favor based on caste differences. For example, Caste caucuses are not political organizations, but they have influence over who is supported by a particular local community. In most districts, the victory is gained by the political force that "covers" the votes of two or more castes. This is called caste-block voting. From this perspective, we can see that the caste has become an electoral unit, and the vote of each such unit is a political resource. In other words, the mechanism of political influence on voters grows out of the idea of society as a "body" (the sacrificial body of the first person – Purusha), and each part of it acts correctly and smoothly, only in connection with the other. Therefore, winning the favor of several such parts by a political party is a step in maintaining order and fulfilling dharma. Like the Manusmriti, modern caste caucuses perform the function of organizing group behavior, discipline, and representing the interests of the community. In this sense, parties that seek to "cover" the votes of several castes in fact reproduce the principle of dharmic balance between social strata, only in the political plane. Caste consolidation (from campaigns for land to electoral unification) becomes an inversion of the traditional hierarchy, which is paradoxically enshrined in the language of Vedic harmony and integrity. □

Ritual mobility strategies highlight and display certain symbols and practices that emphasize belonging to a particular caste. The Dalit assertion rituals may be the most illustrative ones. These are political gestures rather than religious rituals. The Dalits are a group that takes origin from *achhuti* or untouchables – groups of people who, in ancient India, were outside the Varna system and were subject to the greatest number of restrictions. However, nowadays they are performing certain actions that were forbidden for them in traditional society. For example, if white or gold clothing was previously banned for them at festive events, today they wear it ostentatiously. These practices also include secular honoring of human rights defender and father of the first Constitution of independent India – Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who was a representative of this caste. The creation of new practices that become outstanding for a particular group can be called Re-ritualization (Jodhka, 2025).

Another practice that presents a block of ritual mobility strategies is Sanskritization. Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas suggests this term to explain the phenomenon when a group begins to perform rituals of "higher" castes (vegetarianism, rites of purity, veneration of certain deities) to increase symbolic status (Srinivas, 1952). The ritual becomes a way of political articulation, through changing rituals groups declare their dignity and right to status.

Thus, in postcolonial modern India, caste continues to serve as an element of stratification of society. However, the form of this activity is changing. Although in the ideology of the Hindutva type, the main feature is just an appeal to tradition and emphasis on the importance of observing dharma and *rta* (the fundamental cosmological concepts of Vedic thought). However,

in the settings of modernity and the course of mundanity and secularism set by Indian political leaders after independence, the caste takes on new connotations: as an economic component, as an electoral unit, and as a symbolic project. Therefore, notwithstanding that officially public governance is aimed at reducing and blurring the boundaries between different social groups, in practice it remains and increases, albeit in a somewhat transformed form.

Conclusions and Discussion

The analysis of cosmological narratives of ancient India and their impact on sociopolitical organization shows deep integration of mythological thinking into the social structure. Vedic ideas about the cosmos are not purely religious metaphors but determined the way to understand the social order, legitimize power, distribute responsibilities and status of a person in society. The divine sacrifice of Purusha, the embodiment of the law of cosmic harmony Rita, the logic of existence and living in this world Dharma became typical narratives, by the circulation of which Indian tradition explained various aspects of social existence – starting from functions of the ruler to the role of the individual in the community. That is why the Varna system appeared not as a simple social construction but as an embodiment of a deep cosmological principle, primitive order, harmony and correctness.

A brief description of the pacing of the cosmological myth in the design structures of the sociopolitical structure of modern India can be provided in the following sequence of final conclusions:

- Cosmological ideas of ancient India played a fundamental role in shaping the organization of Indian society;
- Along with Varna, the term Jati is used. The division of society into Jati is more consistent with what Europeans call castes and what functions as the term “caste” in modern discourse. In the texts of the Rigveda, jāti means “origin”, “kind”, “type”. Single-root words can also be found, such as jan (to be born), which gives rise to the word jāti. In other words, initially, this term indicated the origin of something;
- The term Jati originally meant a species trait or identification characteristic. However, over time, it has acquired the meaning of an inherited social group. These groups are a fundamental characteristic of India’s social structure, and there are thousands of them. The key features of Jati are heredity, specialization (for example, by profession) as well as religious and ritual component. The latter characteristic is related to the myth of Purusha and the appearance of Varnas since Jati can be interpreted as division inside Varnas. The Brahmanic tradition largely legitimizes the stratification of society as “natural” and cosmically conditioned. The Manusmriti, for example, recorded the ritual duties of Varnas, which were specified in Jati;
- The cosmological model is being transformed into a legal and regulatory one. It is not the differentiation that is being tracked, but the overlap and penetration of cosmology into the sociopolitical sphere. Social order is conceived as an ordered projection of the cosmos, and the cosmos – as an example of harmonious interaction of elements that serves as a model for human community. That is why maintaining the established structure of Varnas and observing dharma is not only a political or ethical task, but also a metaphysical one that supports the integrity of the world;
- Caste replaces the terms Jati and Varna, as it is closer to Europeans. It is used in population censuses. Bureaucratic classification makes castes fixed, rigid, and hierarchical, whereas they used to be contextual and locally variable. In new

discourse, the term “caste” becomes the key to understanding Indian society, unifying what has historically been diverse;

- Vedic and cosmological narratives become a tool for forming the regulatory framework of policy, influencing legislative decisions, the quota system and state practices of social protection. In other words, ancient texts serve as a symbolic support for modern institutional mechanisms of social justice;
- There are modern appeals to such cosmological narratives as the “principle of natural order” or Rita. It is used to emphasize that Hindu civilization is based on an ancient cosmic order – as if the “Vedic rhythm” serves as the foundation for the ethical, cultural and social order of modern India. In other words, cosmology is not just a myth – it is the basis of the idea that ancient Vedic knowledge is not only religious, but also has a universal, fundamental nature, ensuring a connection between the cosmos and the social order. References to Purusha Sukta have the same purpose.

The colonial power of the British Empire at one time gave ancient ideas new contexts and interpretations, often fixing the social structure of India in the form of a rigid caste scheme. Anthropological classifications and population censuses of the nineteenth century contributed to the categorization and fixation of flexible social identities, giving them attributes of constancy and immutability. Colonial administrative approaches interpreted the caste as a tool of governance, which strengthened social boundaries and reduced the space for mobility. At the same time, resistance to these practices contributed to the formation of political movements of self-awareness and emancipation, which in the twentieth century turned the caste issue into a key plane of public debate.

In the 20th–21st centuries, the reception of cosmological ideas takes place within the framework of a broader socio-political discourse, where caste problems become a platform for ideological struggle, reforms and constitutional changes (Liakh & Khmil, 2025). Indian thinkers, politicians, ideologists and scholars rethink ancient narratives, emphasizing their historical changeability and contextuality. Political parties, social movements and human rights organizations of the twentieth century actively use the topic of caste to articulate issues of equality, justice and access to resources. This has become a platform for transformation and interpenetration of cosmological narratives and political rhetoric. In the twenty-first century, the issue of caste affiliation and the rights and obligations associated with it is entering a new plane. This is the sphere of identity politics, national consciousness, issues of unifying ideology, and along with this, an economic factor, a lever for regulating the social sphere. Modern reception is increasingly calling into question the universality of traditional interpretations, combining them with global concepts of human rights, social inclusion and anti-discrimination strategies. At the same time, the difference in political decisions at the state and local community levels is significant. Communities are often more traditional. Thus, ancient cosmological narratives continue to influence the socio-political discourse of contemporary India. However, their content is being reorganized. The reasons are colonial legacies, democratic reforms, or intellectual debates. The Indian discourse of the 20th–21st centuries shows that it is the interpretation and rethinking of tradition, and not its literal reproduction, that determine the direction of development of social thought and political practice in the country.

Glossary

Brahman — relating or belonging to the Brahmins or the sacerdotal class peculiar or favourable to or consisting of Brahmins Brahmanical, relating to Brahman, sacred to the

veda divine relating to brahma or brahmA scriptural holy relating to sacred knowledge, sacred belonging to an inhabitant of brahmA's world, prescribed by the veda

sacred word, god brahmA, Brahman priest, prayer, absolute of the universe, substrate of the universe, holy life, devotion.(Kononenko et al., 2019:126)

Darsana – view, philosophy, anything seen, observation, semblance, apprehension, appearance, understanding, perception, understanding, color, foreseeing, seeing, noticing, teaching, looking at, showing, exhibiting, knowing, eye-sight, act of seeing, meeting, sacrifice, dream, intention, way of looking at the world, ocular perception, showing a mirror, becoming visible or known, eye, aspect, presence, visiting, doctrine, intellect, observing, audience, experiencing, sight, philosophical system, vision, examination, sightseeing, judgment discernment, opinion, being mentioned.(Kononenko et al., 2019:130)

Dharma – manner, nature attribute, practice, property, religious merit, Law or Justice personified, to become, religious abstraction, bow, devotion, associating with the virtuous, character, law, observance propriety of conduct, upanishad, peculiarity, statute, morality, which is established or firm, ninth mansion, observance, justice, right thing particular ceremony, ethical precepts of Buddhism, steadfast decree, duty, good works, usage virtue, peculiar condition or essential quality, customary observance or prescribed conduct, moral merit, law of Northern Buddhism.(Kononenko et al., 2019:131)

Sansara, samsara – secular life, worldly existence, metempsychosis, passing through a succession of states, worldly illusion, passage, transmigration, undergoing transmigration, going or wandering through, cycle of worldly existence, life, course, circuit of mundane existence, rending crushing, breaking (Kononenko et al., 2019:138).

Rta – order, rhythm, rule; truth; logos, representing the principle that governs the universe's natural, moral, and sacrificial order

Varna — color or shape, derives from the root vr, which means to cover, count, or classify, an ancient system of grouping individuals. The four traditional varnas are Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and nobles), Vaishyas (commoners or laborers), and Shudras (servants).

Jāti — is derived from jāta, born or brought into existence, and indicates a form of existence determined by birth, genus, description of any group of things that have generic characteristics in common.

Purusha, Puruṣa – man, human being, or person in a literal sense, but it is also a complex concept with spiritual meaning the true self, consciousness, the cosmic being, or the universal principle of life.

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