

BY SAARANG CHARI '26

## THE CASTE SYSTEM: THE EFFECT OF THE EWS

Since its creation in 1949, the Indian Constitution has contained provisions for promoting social and economic equality through affirmative action in a deeply unequal society. Affirmative action in India is not wholly unlike its counterpart in the US – it aims to increase the representation of historically marginalised groups in public institutions and in fields such as education, healthcare, banking, insurance, and the like. While affirmative action in the US focuses on issues of racial and gender-based discrimination, in India it has historically focused on that of caste-based discrimination. This is implemented by the provision of “Reservation Quotas”, through which a percentage of places in public or state institutions are reserved for people belonging to communities classified as Scheduled-Caste (SC), Scheduled-Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). In 2019, however, the constitution was amended by the Hindu nationalist government to include a new category under this system of Reservation – the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category. This addition is significant because it deviates from the historical function of affirmative action in India. Instead of addressing caste-based inequality, EWS was designed to address class-based inequality. The introduction of economic/class based affirmative action has produced new tensions



in Indian politics. Anti-caste Dalit activists, however, argue that by the inclusion of a broad category of citizens defined as Economically Weaker Sections of society is a ruse designed to mask the interests of privileged castes who have historically been anti-Dalit and been opposed to affirmative action for Dalits. Amidst these protests, in November of 2022, the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutional validity of EWS in a 3-2 verdict. The anti-Dalit thrust of EWS-based affirmative action is apparent from how it has been implemented by the Hindu-majoritarian Bhartiya Janata Party government, which enjoys widespread support from upper caste and upper and middle class Indians.

Primarily, while the EWS feigns to represent “class inequality”, it is clearly divided on caste lines. Instead of representing the economically weaker sections of India as a whole, it only includes the “general category”. The general category refers

to all of the caste-communities that do not come under SC, ST, or OBC categories. Thus, by solely representing the “forward castes”, the thinly veiled argument for the supposed concern for class inequality dissolves for what it truly is – a form of reservation for the “non-beneficiaries of reservations”, the upper castes. Dalit activist Suraj Yengde thus questions the claim that the EWS it is creating a process for establishing social democracy. Rather, he says, “Looking at the evidence, it seems that the beneficiaries of the EWS will be used to channel further hatred towards the SCs, STs, and OBCs as incompetent and undeserving of the caste-based reservation.”

Such rhetoric of hatred, which is critical of caste-based reservation, is not only prevalent in the public but also within the discourse of politicians and members of the judiciary. Notably, Justice J. B. Pardiwala, one of the justices from the bench of

the Supreme Court evaluating the constitutional validity of EWS has said, “If I am asked by anyone to name two things, which has destroyed this country or rather, has not allowed the country, to progress in the right direction, then the same is – Reservation and Corruption.”

The embeddedness of this rhetoric in the implementation of the EWS is further apparent based on the judiciary’s decision to change the poverty index. By creating a ceiling of eight hundred thousand INR for qualification within the EWS category, the index includes a majority of the population. Thus, activist Asang Wankhede states that this high-income ceiling “would ensure that middle classes, and not the poorest, end up syphoning the benefits.” This solidifies the argument that EWS is simply a form of caste-based reservation for the upper castes while masquerading to be a new form of class-based reservation.

BY ESA CHEN '25

## BUBBLE MILK TEA: THE HISTORY OF BOBA



Bubble Milk Tea, also known as Boba Milk Tea or Pearl Milk Tea, is famous and popular among many countries worldwide. Even so, do you know anything about where it all started?

Bubble Milk tea is a beverage that was first created in Taiwan in the 1980s. It is typically made by putting chewy tapioca balls called pearls or boba into various kinds of tea. The most common varieties are to put black pearls into milk tea and white pearls into green tea. There are hundreds of different combinations and flavors to try. Many shops offer sizes and flavors of pearls as well as various kinds of teas both with or without milk. The drink can be customized even further by choosing how much ice and sugar is added. Due to its special and sweet taste and aesthetically pleasing appearance, it has become popular in many parts of the world. World Tea News predicts that the market for bubble milk tea will be worth \$4.3billion by the year 2027.

The roots of Bubble Milk Tea can be traced back to the 1940s. In 1949, a man, Chang Fan Shu opened a tea shop selling iced tea mixed in cocktail shakers. This method added a silky

and rich texture and fine air bubbles on top of the iced tea. The resulting iced tea was named “Bubble Tea,” which serves as the basic element of Bubble Milk Tea. Who added the tapioca balls to the Bubble Tea? As a matter of fact, there are two businesses that claim to have invented Bubble Milk Tea. The tea shop Chun Shui Tang in Taichung claimed that Bubble Tea was invented by Lin Hsui-Hui in 1985 when she added milk and tapioca balls to black tea. Initially, she shared the recipe with friends who were addicted to the “QQ” texture of bubble tea; “QQ” being a colloquial description for foods with a chewy texture. Because of its popularity, the store added Bubble Tea to its menu in 1987. The Hanlin Tea Room in Tainan, Taiwan claimed that Bubble Tea was invented by its founder, Tu Tsun-Ho in 1986, who was inspired to add white tapioca balls that he brought at the Yamuliao market. He found that adding cooked tapioca balls into milk tea would add texture. Because the round shiny black and white tapioca balls resemble pearls, Bubble Tea is also marketed as Pearl Milk Tea in Taiwan. For both these tea houses, claiming to have made “the world’s first cup of Bubble Milk Tea” has been very important to their business strategies and they

have gone to court to secure their claims. After 10 years of litigation, the court finally determined that because bubble tea has a long history and is not patented, anyone can prepare and market it. Soon, another kind of tapioca ball that is larger and chewier than the one called pearls appeared on the market. In order to distinguish them, people called small-sized ones “Pearls” and big-sized tapioca balls “Boba.” According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word Boba is borrowed from Chinese bōbà and is alleged to be colloquial or slang for “large breasts” (a reference to the spherical shape of the tapioca balls). Thus, Bubble Milk Tea is also known as Boba Milk Tea.

In the 1990s, beverage shops began using automatic sealing machines to mass produce “take-out Bubble Milk Tea,” which became very popular. With the entry of large chain stores and beverage manufacturers, Bubble Milk Tea has become one of the best-known Taiwanese beverages. Due to its unique texture, the introduction of numerous varieties of flavors, and its Instagram friendly aesthetic Bubble Milk Tea is popular in Asia as well as the rest of the world.

BY SAIGOPAL RANGARAJ '23

## DIWALI: THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Diwali, widely known as the “festival of lights”, is a religious festival celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, as well as many Buddhists across the world. The word Diwali is derived from the Sanskrit word deepavali, which translates to a “row of lights”. Diwali falls sometime in October or November each year, with the specific day being determined by the Indian lunisolar calendar. Diwali was celebrated on the 24th of October this year, with festivities occurring in the weeks immediately preceding and following that date. Despite common associations with fireworks, lamps, and a celebration of the triumph of light over darkness, the manner in which Diwali is celebrated varies greatly across communities and religions with different deities being honored on this day. It would be remiss to not note that there are also countless other people who

view Diwali as a secular holiday.

Despite vast variations in how it is celebrated, this festival brings together people across the world. On campus, Diwali was celebrated by holding both a pooja (prayer) at Shove Chapel where students in the Hindu Student Association conducted an aarti (a prayer where a flame is offered to a deity), while the South Asian Student Association held a Diwali celebration in Bemis hall. The Diwali festivities featured many popular Bollywood tunes, South Asian food and desserts, as well as mehndi designs. These events provided a space for students with shared identities to come together and celebrate a space that represents their shared backgrounds.

The importance of celebrating events like Diwali cannot be understated at predominantly white

institutions (PWIs) such as CC where only a small minority of the student body identifies with the South Asian identity. Having intentional spaces to share, celebrate, and reconnect with their identities allows for students at CC to feel welcome and at home despite being half a world away. Zoraiz Zafar '24, who typically does not celebrate Diwali at home in Pakistan, attended the SASA event as he wanted to connect with other South Asian students and find community at CC. He said that the event was “really meaningful” and that he “had no idea that there were so many South Asian students”.

Despite the positive role that festivals like Diwali play in making people feel welcome, they also risk reinforcing practices of harm that are employed in their home countries. In 2019, the South Asian community at CC chose to not celebrate Diwali due

to the role that the festival plays in reproducing caste and religious hierarchies. Balancing the positive aspects of community and inclusivity that these festivals may provide, with some of their problematic histories is a challenge that all diaspora communities have to contend with. In the long term, campuses that foster spaces that promote cultural events are more likely to welcome students from more diverse backgrounds, however, it is crucial that we are intentional in acknowledging how these events have been used to discriminate in the past. To that end, we should ensure that there is more awareness about these festivals and the baggage that they come with to ensure that we are providing a welcoming space to all students, while ensuring that we do not import the hierarchies and discrimination that may accompany them.