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THE CLUELESS CLASS

Dictionary meaning of the word “clueless” is “having no knowledge, understanding or ability”. For this article, I would like to modify the meaning to “having impractical-half knowledge or being ignorant.” In monetary terms, everyone knows that there are three classes, the lower class, the middle class and the upper class and that there are three classes in the middle class— the lower middle class, the middle middle class and the upper middle class. We can identify ourselves in any of the above classes and may endeavour to improve our situation. But there are situations wherein either we believe we have absolute knowledge of something (which may not be true) or we accept something as it is so strongly that even sub-consciously we won'tever think of questioning it (i.e. being ignorant)

Let's take a test

One fact which school has taught us is that we should brush our teeth at least twice a day at morning and at night. But how many of us were taught that we should keep a gap of minimum half an hour to consume anything after brushing?^[1] And that we should brush our teeth at least after half hour oflast consuming anything?^[2]

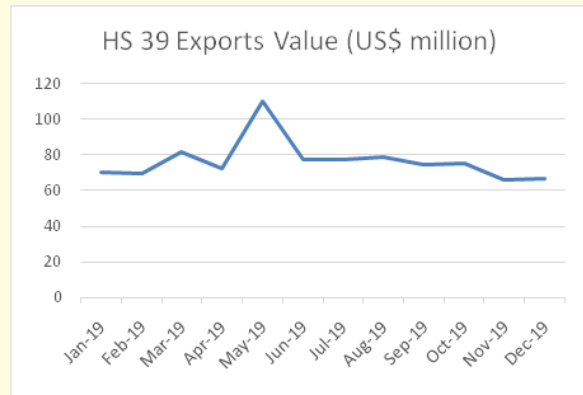
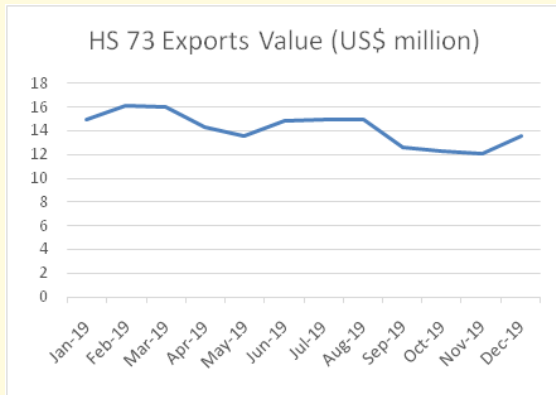
If just like me, you weren't taught the above facts, congratulations! We have half knowledge of things.

Let's take another test

Many of us must have read in newspapers that after deliberations since April 2018,under the Trump administration, the USAremoved India from its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) in June 2019. Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce then pegged the loss of duty benefit because of such removal at around \$190 million per annum.^[3] Assuming an exchange rate of INR 70 per USD, loss comes to around Rs. 1330 crores per annum. Interestingly, this figure is only of the loss of duty benefit and not loss of business, as increase in duty can make India's products expensive compared to Chinese or other countries' products.

There is no official number indicating business loss.However, from the data of exports, as on the website of United Nations Commerce & Trade (comtrade.un.org/data),it can be concluded that exports of articles of iron and steel (HS Code 73) and plastic articles (HS Code 39) have reduced on an overall gradual basis, especially after June-July i.e. after removal of India from GSP. Majority of exporters of these products are actually MSMEs and this is their business loss.

We are taught half-knowledge from school and lack of questioning makes us ignorant.



(The unnatural spike seen in May 2019 in HS 39 is because of re-classification of certain items to this HS code.)

While India was suffering as above, our Honourable Prime Minister in his official capacity in September 2019, quite literally and cheekily did an alleged election campaign in favour of the same Donald Trump whose administration inflicted this loss. "Abkibaar, Trump Sarkar". How many of us, without accepting this as regular propaganda, actually thought of questioning the government? How many of us did actually care if the opposition questioned or the PMO or MoEA gave its official statement?

My answer is that I did not think of questioning and I didn't even care if anyone else questioned or any official clarified. If your answer is the same as mine, congratulations! We are ignorant.

So, we have half knowledge of things and we are ignorant, therefore we belong to the clueless class.

What is the clueless class about?

Say there exists a Multi-National Conglomerate FMCG company "U". It sells its products (with similar ingredients and purposes) under various brand names targeting towards men and women, young and old, families and individuals and other bifurcations. In this example, there are five brands having products of beauty and personal care, three mainly targeted towards women, one towards men and one is unisex.

Brand "D"

- If you love your body, especially your skin and its colour, "D" products are meant for you.
- We will advertise "D" on those platforms which claim that they stand for women's rights, as if we really care.

Brand "F"

- If you don't like your skin colour, "F" products are for you, because this is what your success depends on.
- Oh wait! We will now just change the name from "F" to "G", what is in the name, right?

Brand "C+"

- You love your family and especially your young daughter, "C+" is meant for you.
- Encourage her to use our detergent- Sodium Lauryl/Laureth Sulfate based shampoo which (can actually damage her healthy scalp but) will help you maintain healthy relations with her. How? Well, we don't know!

Brand "X"

- You are a teen/young adult guy who has realised how his biology is. The next thing you want is to attract the similar-aged opposite gender, right? We have the right product— "X" deodrant.
- Don't worry, the opposite gender is not really interested in anything else other than your smell. They don't actually have any brains, just by our "X" they'll all be crazy for you!

Brand "A"

- You don't care about branding but want products showing respect to nature and cultural heritage. Brand "A" is for you, advertised by a self-proclaimed non-citizen patriot.
- How much of the content of our product is actually natural and how much of it is regular chemicals (used in above brands' products as well) is something you shouldn't think about and even if you do, we've got the labelling provisions of the law in our favour!

Found it funny? Ridiculous? Whatever you found the above description of the brands' marketing, it doesn't really matter. Because for majority of the readers of this article who invest in shares, such an FMCG stock would always be in their portfolio for long term. It would be in my portfolio too for long term. Somewhere we know that the company will make more and more profits in coming years. Having said this, we actually approve of this ridiculous marketing and also acknowledge that by such means our society at large can be induced to consumption.

Induced to consumption. The consumer will feel happy as the brand's product either supports his/her insecurities (attract someone, skin colour leads to success) or supports his/her ideologies (standing for rights). Every consumption demands an expenditure, which means paying to buy the products. Products when consumed will give the feeling of happiness. An average person of the clueless class thus relates consumption with happiness and payment is the more prominent word in his/her mind. Something which the companies providing digital transaction processing services have very well understood.

Google **Pay**, Phone**Pe** (pay), **Paytm**, Airtel **Payments** Bank. United **Payments** Interface (UPI), etc.

The clueless class is more into consumption and less into production. Here's another test. When was the last time that you checked into your social media like Facebook and Instagram and actually did something of what you considered productive while checking? In case you actually did something productive after learning from social media, how much time did the production take? And by how much is this time less/more of your daily average time spent on such social media?

An education system serving half-knowledge and people being casually ignorant, perfect recipe for any dictator to herd the people and swing their consumption (here consumption includes preferences and opinions too). This is why people who have some clue tend to woo and rule the clueless.

“Desh ka jawaan desh k liye seema pe khada hai, to kya tum desh k liye bank ki line mein khade nahi reh sakte?”

(Political propaganda asked this)^[4]

“Nahibhai, seema pe jawaan khade hone sey desh ka faayda hai, par mera mere hi paiselene k liye bank ki line mein khade rehne sey desh ka kya faayda hai?”

(But nobody said this as the answer)

An average person finds more happiness in consumption than production.

All of us— the clueless, ignorant of any logical argument, had to stand (or make someone stand) in those long queues and get our monetary transactions done.

Ten-Fifteen years ago, there would hardly be any advertisement of products specifically for people suffering from sensitive teeth. Now you have many, because a generation exists who did not know proper brushing ritual and hence irreparably damaged their teeth's enamel layer.^[5] The clueless— now have to consume a more expensive product for self-inflicted harm, because of half knowledge.

Herd is here i.e. the clueless class. But who are those with clue?

Those with clue are few, can be counted on finger-tips.

We wakeup and use many products of those few big FMCG companies in our morning routine. We go to work in any vehicle of those few automobile manufacturing companies. We directly or indirectly pay for fuel to those few petroleum companies. We work using electronics like laptops and mobile devices, manufacturers of whom are few. Capital goods' producers are few. Banks are few. We come back from work and unwind. Television channels are few. Social media options are few. When we think of our country, mainstream political parties are also few.

The clueless are in billions, but those with clue today were also once clueless.

But the clueless are in billions. Congratulations!

The biggest criticism which I have received of this theory of the clueless class is that, a common person cannot afford to be all-time vigilant and doesn't really have the time and energy to check whether he/she has absolute knowledge of anything related to him/her. I just have one answer, which is that those with clue have made the education, social, economic and political system so complex, that the clueless trying to show some endeavour are bound to face the affordability, time and energy issues. However, just remember one thing, those with clue today were once clueless, there is always hope for a better future!

Point to ponder:

We need to have more clue of our everyday life by being mindful of our consumption and increasing our focus on production. But, till what extent are we ready to endeavour?

Think over it. Think different!

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