

Izzat has no direct translation into English. We only have terms that can broach the same concept such as 'honour' or 'reputation' or 'face': Izzat is so much more than that. It's a zero-sum game of collective honour shared by whole groups of people, all of whom take it very, very seriously. A system like this isn't just foreign to Enlightenment values, but antithetical to every sensible form of governance on the planet. It will destroy any system that assumes good faith.

Izzat conflicts are not about who is right and who is wrong. It's about who wins and who loses. This means it's a zero-sum game where just about any action is justified (including murder) to restore the lost Izzat. Izzat is a limited social currency and the easiest way to get it is to take it from someone else. Winning is righteous in Izzat. Losing is unrighteous. This means that if someone plays the game of Izzat well enough, they can get away with just about anything (murder, rape, scamming, cheating, stealing). The only morality in Izzat is the protection of your group's collective ego. The only appropriate response when your Izzat is attacked is the complete destruction of whoever insulted it.

Two western people get into an argument: they might escalate, but chances are it won't be that bad, e.g. 'Sorry I broke your garden gnome.' With two Indians in an argument, the stakes are always deadly thanks to Izzat. Neither of them can back down, nor can they admit fault. Admitting fault is seen as deliberately humiliating yourself. Not only that, but because Izzat is shared, you are shaming everyone who shares your Izzat. So, admitting fault or taking responsibility for a problem is a form of social suicide. This means even if the dispute was over something completely stupid or trivial (like a broken garden gnome), it could spiral into a decades-long honour feud.

Izzat is also the reason why Indian police are reluctant to get involved in disputes. Because Izzat is a zero-sum game, all participants are involved in the game. If a policeman sides with one family over another in an Izzat dispute, this means that he's deliberately taking the side of that family and dishonouring the other. This marks him for retribution by the offending party. Without parties being able to be impartial, centralized authority cannot effectively function.

Let's say someone in India complains about a broken water pipe. Instead of the problem being addressed, the official responsible for the water pipe denies it's a problem and counterattacks the person complaining instead, because daring to question his efficacy in his role was challenging his Izzat. So the official destroys the person who brought the problem up. The water pipe never gets fixed.

Izzat is also the reason why Indian managers are so infamous for hiring more Indians. It's because, from the manager's perspective, he's using his position to gain an invisible social currency. Merit and actual qualifications come second to that idea. If he hired a westerner, he would not gain or lose Izzat by doing so. However, if he can strong-arm dozens of Indians into a company, he is gaining huge quantities of Izzat and conspirators who owe an absolute debt to him. He has a very strong cultural incentive not to be impartial.

It's not uncommon to see Indians gloat about their success in the west. And yes, Izzat is very much a system that enables short-term success. But the fundamental

reality is the prosperity that these Indians find so attractive in the first place wouldn't exist if the west practiced something similar to Izzat. Our systems can only exist on the assumption of good faith, and not on a majority of people exploiting them for destructive short-term gain. On top of that, if an Indian causes the systems and companies he comes into contact with to collapse, then he can just go back to India with his plunder. He has no stake in the long-term prosperity, functionality, or stability of these systems. The stakes are completely asymmetrical in the Indian's favour.

You may have seen the infamous video of that Indian scamming a food bank. Once again, winning is righteous, losing is not. By employing 'clever' means (jugaad), he successfully extracted more resources for himself and his family. From the perspective of jugaad, a rule is not something to respect, but merely an obstacle to the Indian's own gain. Since he cheated the system and wasn't caught, he is seen as a righteous and dignified man in the Izzat framework.

Jugaad is seen as a clever workaround using limited resources. Indians frame it as being some profound philosophical aspect about navigating their culture, but what it can be more accurately described as is having no scruples and exploiting things for your own gain. For example, with the water pipe problem, you contact a cousin of a cousin, you bribe the right official, and now you can have a new water pipe connected to your house. Jugaad is celebrated among Indians as being resourceful or inventive, as you're beating the system with your own ingenuity. Pulling off a 'clever' jugaad scheme is a way to earn yourself Izzat.

It doesn't matter if your jugaad is ripping off a charity or scamming a dementia-ridden grandmother of her life savings. If it achieves the ends you wanted, then you're celebrated. But when your jugaad doesn't play out the way you want, it's a loss of Izzat because you look stupid. Izzat is about the ends, not the means.

The western idea of merit is competence in a role. Merit in Izzat is determined by what lengths you will go to to achieve a goal, with competence merely being one path. It often becomes a secondary path, as the jugaad of printing a degree that says you're qualified to be a jet pilot is just as good as being able to actually fly a jet in the eyes of Izzat. In other words, Izzat selects for appearance over authentic merit or morality.

I read a story in India about a man offering to pay another man to use a public toilet instead of defecating openly. The latter left and came back with several friends and beat the former to death. The problem was not that he was defecating openly, but that he was criticised for doing so. And with Izzat, it's not an eye-for-an-eye. Izzat is often an eye-for-a-whole-head. Disproportionately and brutally annihilating your enemies is the correct move to make because you take back your lost Izzat and then some. This kind of vindictiveness would be rightly seen as horrifying and disgusting in most of the world.

Izzat is also very successful against more passive ideologies. While there are competing schools of thought in India such as Dharma, the harsh reality is an Izzat adherent who doesn't care about Dharmic values is going to slaughter someone who does with a knife.

There was a story posted anonymously on 4chan: Anon knew an Indian. This Indian would make outlandish claims (he could benchpress 500kg, he was a billionaire, he did arms deals with the US government). Anon said he didn't believe the Indian. The Indian reacted with righteous indignation. The situation escalated to the point where the Indian was emailing Anon death threats. Anon responded by forwarding the emails to the police. The Indian killed himself. Anon was left baffled at the whole situation and had no idea what just happened.

So, without Izzat, this looks like an utterly insane and pointless sequence of events. But with Izzat? The Indian's actions suddenly make sense. He was boasting to increase his Izzat, and when Anon simply stated his disbelief, it was seen as a vicious attack on his Izzat. The Indian escalated the situation to restore the lost Izzat. When the police got involved, the dispute had become public, so the Indian's shame at having his jugaad exposed had increased to unbearable levels. He committed suicide in order to save his remaining Izzat. Anon had no idea what Izzat was, or if he did, he didn't mention it, yet the Indian's actions perfectly align with this framework. This is what makes me believe the story was genuine.

Now, a counterargument an Indian might make to all this is 'Izzat is a dated word' or 'We don't use that word' or even that Izzat is actually Pakistani or confined to certain regions of northern India, but the same concept exists in the rest of India under other names, such as 'maana'. I like to compare it to the word 'vendetta'. Vendetta in Italian has a very specific meaning: a familial blood feud where revenge must be taken to restore honour, etc. This word would not exist if this didn't reflect a specific facet of Italian life. Izzat is no different. Izzat isn't an archaic term either. It's well and truly alive in the modern Indian lexicon.

One of the subtleties to keep in mind about this topic is that it's about a system. Indians may claim 'not all Indians' as a quick deflection, but that's not the point. The point is this system exists and it's had real, serious consequences for generations. If it wasn't a real phenomenon in Indian society, Izzat wouldn't exist as a term.

If Izzat were regularly discussed openly, this would be considered one of the greatest possible insults in the Izzat framework. Izzat is why Indians do mass reports, death threats, false flags and various other underhanded tactics when a westerner exposes something they don't want people to see (such as the now-infamous poop-throwing festival, or widespread academic and professional cheating). If I knew something like that existed in the west, I would say 'wow that's disgusting, we should stop this'. But to Indians, the problem is not the point. The point is the problem being exposed and the perceived insult to Indian Izzat from exposing the problem. The water pipe never gets fixed.

The one saving grace is Izzat performs awfully in the long term. Once Indians displace you, they will go back to playing this insane game among themselves. It's what happened to companies that got hit by Izzat. This is also why there aren't any homegrown Indian companies that have the same influence as Microsoft or Google. Whenever they start getting ahead, their companies implode from infighting, nobody doing their jobs, everybody trying to cheat each other and nobody addressing

critical issues. Systems that delegate authority and work on good faith eventually win out over zero-sum honour feuding. Izzat cannot maintain complex systems because its players are only concerned with short-term gain.

With the west, the issue is that it often fails to live up to its own ideals. It's not a perfect system, but we can course-correct and address problems pragmatically. With Izzat, Indians live up to those ideals very, very often. When you see the dysfunctionality of India, remember that it's a feature of Izzat, not a bug.

There were several similar practices in the west (like the aforementioned vendetta) which were eventually eradicated because these groups were unable to resist the state's monopoly on violence. As I said before, because the police are also dragged into Izzat, the Indian state is unable to intervene or destroy Izzat. Izzat thrives in places where a central authority is unable to step in and stomp it out.

Izzat and the Indian caste system go hand-in-hand. Your caste determines your Izzat. Let's take Dalits, for example: the 'untouchables', the lowest caste. They are treated as living, breathing Izzat blackholes. Them acting beyond their station (e.g. dressing nicely, growing a moustache) is seen as an collective affront to every other caste's Izzat. A Dalit man refusing to let his daughter marry a higher caste Indian is instant grounds for an Izzat feud, one which the Dalit will most certainly lose for the crime of being born into a lower caste.

There was another story, of a Dalit man who owned a horse. Everyone around him screamed at him that he couldn't own and ride a horse because he was offending everyone else's Izzat. He refused to stop riding the horse, so on the day of his wedding, he was hacked to pieces with machetes. Izzat acts as the brutal enforcer of caste. The pointless cruelty inflicted on Dalits is really sad.

If, say, a Dalit man questions a Brahmin man's work, a man of the highest, most noble caste: this isn't just an affront to the Brahmin's abilities, it's an affront to his honour as a person and the honour of his entire caste. If he concedes, he's losing large chunks of Izzat for his entire caste, while the Dalit questioning him doesn't really gain anything. He's not benefiting from questioning someone's work, there's no transaction here. In order to gain this Izzat back, or to get even more out of it, the Brahmin group is incentivised to avenge with the utmost brutality imaginable. The Dalit would not only face punishment, but everybody associated with him would also suffer collective be-izzati (dishonour) from him daring to question his Brahmin superior. There's no gain to be had from criticism, so what Izzat does is dissuade people from speaking their minds out of fear of punishment.

You could absolutely weaponize Izzat against Indians. However, the best and most pragmatic approach to dealing with this system is enforcing impartiality. Hit them hard with anti-conspiracy laws. Izzat absolutely qualifies as a cultural conspiracy. Singapore was able to reform itself thanks to brutally rooting out corruption.

If you want to find more academic sources on the concept of Izzat, you need to search for 'honour culture' or 'honour culture south east asia', honour culture being the more formal academic term for the Izzat phenomenon. You'll find a lot of results for honour killing (practiced in order to restore Izzat).

The Chinese concept of 'face' is similar, but the biggest difference is how they react to such dishonor. You can find similar honour disputes in Indonesia too. The Philippines has a term called hiya. But the Indians, by far, are the worst about it, and certainly the most pernicious and immediately dangerous to the west.