



ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), KOLKATA



POSTGRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Politique

2021-2022



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PRINCIPAL
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10th March, 2022

MESSAGE FROM FR. PRINCIPAL

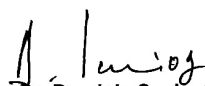
It gives me immense pleasure to know that the annual journal of the Department of Political Science, '*Politique*', is in its sixth year of publication.

I am assured that this journal has proved to be a platform where students have articulated diverse perspectives on issues of political significance, both at the national and the international levels.

I take this opportunity to re-iterate the importance of such endeavours in making the academic journey of a student holistically enriching, and would encourage the Department to continue to extend such opportunities to the students in order to enable them to nurture and exhibit their skills.

I congratulate the faculty members and the students of the Department for their commendable efforts in curating this journal despite the challenges posed by the present times. I hope the students will continue to invest in such fulfilling academic exercises in the years to come.

May God Bless Us All !


Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ
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VICE-PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

I extend my sincere appreciation to the students and faculty members of the Department of Political Science for bringing the sixth edition of their annual departmental journal, '*Politique*' to fruition.

I am certain that this academic exercise has provided a creative outlet for scholarship inspiring young minds to identify, explore and articulate critical thinking on myriad issues concerning matters of national and global importance. I congratulate the students and faculty members of the Department on this achievement and I am sure that such endeavours will continue to extend the horizons of learning and research among students.

Prof Bertram Da'Silva

Vice Principal
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Message from the Head of the Department

The annual journal of the Postgraduate Department of Political Science is the outcome of the creative energies of the students of the Department. The successive editions of 'Politique' and the choice of themes have consistently demonstrated the awareness of our students as concerned and thoughtful citizens of this country and the world at large. I hope this endeavor has kindled the joy of research, writing and publication in them.

I thank Fr. Principal and the Vice Principal of the Arts and Science Department for their continuous support and encouragement. I acknowledge the contributions of our students who responded enthusiastically to the call for submissions. I thank the editorial team for their commendable efforts and on behalf of the faculty members of the Department express my most sincere appreciation to the students who happily engaged in writing and editing their articles with great success. We wish them success in all their endeavours.

Farhat Bano

Dr. Farhat Bano
Head
Postgraduate Dept of Political Science
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)
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From the Editorial Board

We are immensely pleased to present before you 'Politique 2021-22' the sixth edition of the Annual Journal of the Postgraduate Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata.

Politique has been providing students of the department a platform to showcase their analytical and articulation skills by writing on politically relevant themes and issues. This edition contains political articles, poetry, opinion letters and caricatures– divided under three sections: Indian Politics, International Affairs and Creatives / Opinion Pieces. This edition also includes one subsection under International Affairs pertaining to the "Crisis in Afghanistan'. We began work on this edition in October 2021 and we are delighted that it is ready for publication in March 2022. We sincerely hope that the readers will find the contents interesting as well as enriching.

We thank Father Principal and the Vice-Principal (Arts and Science) for their constant support and encouragement. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Dr. Farhat Bano, Head of the Department, and to all the professors of the department, for their guidance and valuable inputs throughout the process of editing and review. Finally, we thank all the students of the department for their keen interest and energetic efforts, without which this journal would not have been possible. A heartfelt thank you for the contributions of each one involved in this much cherished journey.

Warm Regards,

**The Editorial Board,
Politique 2022.**

EVENT REPORTS

Webinar on ‘The Afghan Imbrolio: Implications for India’ And The Launch of ‘Politique 2021’

On the 8th of October, 2021, nearly a month after the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan the Department of Political Science at St. Xavier’s College (Autonomous), Kolkata, organized a webinar on this issue. The webinar was organized on the Microsoft Teams platform and inaugurated by Father Principal. In his inaugural address, Father Principal encouraged the students to confidently move ahead with their educational pursuits reminding them that the pandemic should not inhibit their educational activities or the interactive approach to education that the department upholds. Father Principal welcomed the resource person Professor Dr. Anindya Jyoti Majumdar of the prestigious Jadavpur University (JU) who shared his valuable insights on the topic titled ‘The Afghan Imbrolio: Implications for India’.

In his lecture, Prof. Majumdar shared his perspective on the impact of the Taliban insurgency on the geopolitics of South Asia. He emphasized on how Taliban's occupation of Afghanistan would affect India's foreign policy, particularly amidst the possibility of Chinese and Pakistani attempts at instigating the Taliban to cause disharmony in India. He also drew attention to the surprising withdrawal of the US troops during the course of the rapid takeover of political power in the crisis-struck country. Prof. Majumdar explained how the Taliban insurgency disrupted the Afghan polity's democratic progress towards a liberal society and a developed nation, triggering a socio-political relapse into an orthodox, patriarchal and theocratic Afghanistan that would have negative repercussions for the whole of South Asia. The lecture session concluded with a question-answer session, during

which Prof. Majumdar patiently answered the queries raised by the students of the department.

This was followed by the launch of the fifth edition of the Annual Departmental Journal, 'Politique'- 2021, by Father Principal. The Head of the Department then invited the Student Convener of the journal, Ms. Swati Mishra, to share the experiences of the journal's editorial team. The event finally came to a close with the Vote of thanks delivered by the Head of the Department, Prof. Dr. Farhat Bano. Indeed, such events have been key to ensuring a holistic learning experience in the online mode of education caused due to the pandemic.

Mugdha Malakar

Third Year (UG), Roll Number - 166

Report on Sansad 2021

Inspired by the penchant for discovering the 'extraordinary in the ordinary'; motivated by the urge to debate & unravel a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it, battling many odds & defying many challenges, The Postgraduate Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata plunged into the 'Festival of Democracy' by successfully organizing Sansad 2021- a simulation of the Indian Parliament, in its Third & First Ever Virtual Edition.

The theme for Sansad 2021 was India's Covid-19 Combat Plan: Changing Centre - State Dynamics. The committee being positioned in March 2021 when India had already learnt lessons from the first wave and the accompanying stringent lockdowns but the worst was yet to come, the impending second wave of the Pandemic. Revolving around subthemes of lockdowns and safety restrictions, vaccination rollout, boosting of health infrastructure, revamping the education system and bridging the digital divide, the Departmental Event spanning over two days began on the 7th of November, 2021 and culminated on the 8th of November, 2021.

Organized on Microsoft Teams after a gap of two years but certainly no less in spirit and candor, an orientation programme was held for all participants to familiarize them with the proceedings of the committee chaired by Vaidehi Meharia. A mesmerising Ganesh Vandana heralded the Inauguration Ceremony which was graced by all the Professors of the Department who with their encouraging words set the tone for Sansad'21. What followed over the next two days was exhilarating and exciting debates as the 'leaders of tomorrow' explored the latent statesman in them representing views across the political spectrum.

The first day of the committee witnessed stimulating parliamentary proceedings of the Question Hour, Zero Hour and discussion on the Main Agenda flowing into the second day which involved committed deliberation on subthemes and tabling of bills from both the government and opposition side amidst riveting arguments, rip - roaring democratic dialogue and rounds of 'political cross firing'. An interesting addition to this year's Sansad was the Parliamentary Press chaired by Shivali Gabrani Basu where beat reports, opinion articles and engaging press conferences reflected the dynamism of the world of active media.

After rigorous committee sessions for two days a Mock Election Campaign was held which added greater flavour to the engrossing simulation, redoubling the excitement. In the most awaited Valedictory Ceremony the Department was privileged and honoured to welcome Father Principal who shared his words of wisdom, encouraged students for their participation and announced the winners. The Vice Principal of the Arts and Science Department congratulated the Department for organizing the event. This was followed by such a cultural programme which included a poem recitation, a group song and a dance performance by the students.

The Best Delegate award was bagged by Eshan Bannerjee, High Commendation which was awarded to Ahan Basu and Samiksha Bharti, Special Mentions awarded to Blesson Stephen Joshwa and Arka Palit and Verbal Mention was awarded to 5 Delegates namely Allen David Simon, Sushen Mitra, Prerna Palit, Sudeshna Chakraborty and Shubhayu Saha. Apart from the committee prizes there were awards for the Press participants as well representing various publication houses. The winners included Asmita Khan, Alisha Khan and Asmita Mitra who bagged the Verbal mention, Syamantak Patra who was awarded the Special Mention followed by Manaswita Chowdhury bagging the High Commendation and finally Raina Chatterjee who was adjudged the Best Reporter.

The Convener Soumyadeep Chowdhury and Co-Convenor Deepalika Deb along with the Organizing Committee members - a team of 25 students together with the proactive support of the student's community worked tirelessly to make this 'Dream Project' a reality under the guidance of our esteemed professors who have never compromised on ensuring the all-round development of each student. A Department which echoes the spirit that students learn not just through reading and writing but through dialogue and creative analysis, looks forward to many more such engaging and exciting events in the near future, igniting the zeal for learning beyond textbooks. It's curtains for Sansad 2021 but the nostalgia lives on and so does the quest for nurturing more leaders who do not create followers but more leaders in the days to come!!

Divya De

2nd Year (PG), Roll Number - 101

SECTION - I

INDIAN POLITICS

Understanding the Implications of India's Legal stance on Refugees: At the Crossroads of Internationalism, Nationalism and Sub-nationalism

Muskan Jaiswal

Second Year (PG), Roll No. - 106

ABSTRACT

Post-2019, the political discourse on citizenship and refugees was revamped in India. The legal inertia of not having a National Asylum policy was raised as an issue of concern, that had federal implications setting a new definition of Indian polity (especially in the context of Assam and Mizoram). This article intends to analyse the Government of India's (GOI) legal-institutional approach in terms of Refugee Crisis Management and peruse its scepticism to frame a concrete policy on Asylum or Refugees even after the lapse of 7 decennial. Further, it showcases the federal crossroads alignment, by examining the competitive and cooperative federal dialogues visible in the cases of asymmetrical relationships between the Centre and the States of Assam and Mizoram on Refugees. Withal these, the concluding remarks provide its readers the author's personal observation on how 'adhocracy' and 'case-by-case' approach of the GOI on Refugees has allowed ideological/partisan-based shifts from the idealist lines (of spiritualism/culture) to the hard-core realist notion (of nationalism) under the NDA-II regime.

INTRODUCTION

India extols its experiences of having the world's most diverse and complex migration histories. Embarking on the journey with a grandiloquence of tryst with destiny in 1947, we pledged in unison for embracing a democratic future. Indeed, we are struggling hard to ensure one. Having the third largest international border, India is susceptible to mass influx which is very evident since the 1947, 1959, 1962, 1965, 1971, 1979, 1983, and 2012 great refuge and

asylum-seeking historical moments. According to the UNHCR India factsheet, as of 31st October 2021, India is home to 43,641 registered asylum seekers, consisting of origins from Sri Lanka, Tibet, Myanmar, Afghanistan and others. But, it is to be noted that India "does not maintain any data on refugees centrally". Nevertheless, it wasn't easy for India to administratively deal with such refugee crisis management sequentially, as there exists a number of impediments impacting its overall federal power dynamics.

Until today, India has dealt with the issue of refugees by applying an ambiguous and differential logic on an adhoc and case-by-case basis, as it lacks a national legal framework defining and securing the refugees as a category of concern. However, it can't be denied that there were no attempts in the past to materialise the claims for the protection of refugees in India. There were three such instances when bills were proposed with zeal for national refugees' protection (in the year 1997, 2006, 2015 respectively), but the GOI rejected these proposals citing national security concerns. Yet, the question remains the same as to how India monitors these 'foreigners'? Is there any legal definition that binds GOI to govern these unrecognised immigrants, if yes then what are they? And, is managing foreigners with such legal inertia disadvantageous or propitious for GOI? The following section highlights a few observations to counter the above posed questions.

INDIAN LEGAL SYSTEM MANOEUVRING REFUGEES : THE TRAJECTORY

India legally manages refugees with a two pronged strategy : One, at the international level, and other at the national level.

It's little critical to decipher its strategy at the international level, as India refused to sign the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which are the two most considered global legal documents on refugees, available in the aftermath of the Second World War. The possible reasons as to why India averted its accession, can be well cited by Myron Weiner's remark that "borders in the South Asian region are highly permeable and that each South Asian state lacks the political,

administrative or military capacity to enforce rules with regard to population entry. That the cross border movements of people in South Asia are known to affect political stability, international relations and internal security." Additionally, South Asia's unstable geopolitics, volatile ethnicity, poverty and resource crunch are the most pressing postcolonial challenges for the 'Union of States' like India to handle, making her vulnerable to fulfil the minimum standard of living to the refugees and especially when it is struggling hard to ensure one to its citizens.

The 1971 exodus can be the best example to explain this aversion, when New Delhi expected the international community to refund a major part of the expenses that was incurred to look after the cholera-stricken refugee population along its eastern borders. The then permanent Indian representative at the UN, Samar Sen, requested for international aid. Following which, in May 1971, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadruddin Aga Khan, replied that it would be unrealistic to expect the UN to bear the full responsibility of financial burden. Nonetheless, an assistance of US\$70 million grant-in-aid was provided with a condition (made jointly by the then UN Secretary General U Thant and Aga Khan) that the UNHCR would act as the 'focal point' for the coordination of all UN assistance (by applying Art.35 of the Convention). This absence of direct aid commitment to the Indian government, tied with Sadruddin Aga Khan's visit to East Pakistan on the request of General Yahya Khan made Indira Gandhi suspicious of the 'neutral' operations of the UN. Hence, Indian stance towards the Global Refugee Regime became more sceptical due to the reflections of political realities of the Cold War conditions. As Pakistan, until 1973 held SEATO membership and had an effective liaison with the USA after the signing of 1971 Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty.

However, since 1981 UNHCR has been operating with its offices in New Delhi and Chennai within its private capacities and a limited mandate under the nodal ministries of Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs and NITI AAYOG. Till date, there are no official reasons given by the GOI for this scepticism rather they ascribe to reasons that are generally inferred to its locale and adhere by the commonly observed political behaviour of South Asian countries (except Afghanistan) that defer as a consenting signatory owing to the euro-centric nature of the Convention, and also consider migration as a

matter of bilateral subject discarding the intervention of any international monitoring all together. Though, India is a signatory to the following international conventions which filter its take on humanitarian commitments made for Refugees, namely - Convention on the reduction of statelessness Territorial Asylum (1967); Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1979); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969); Convention on Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women (1981); UN Convention against Torture (1984); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Bangkok Principles (1966).

These conventions envisage the jus cogen of non-refoulement admissible, and also contain provisions relating to repatriation, right to compensation, granting asylum and the minimum standard of treatment in the state of asylum. Among these Conventions, some pertinent provisions under UDHR [Art.13 (Right to freedom of Movement), Art.14 (Right to Seek and Enjoy Asylum), Art.15 (Right to Nationality)]; ICCPR [Art.12 (Freedom to leave any country including the person's own), Art.13 (Prohibition of expulsion of aliens except by due process of law)]; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [Art.2 A (State must ensure the rights of each child within its jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind); Art.3 (In all actions concerning the children, best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration); Art.24 (Right to Health), Art.28 (Right to Education), Art.37 (Juvenile Justice)] and more recently, India became a signatory to the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016), setting the stage for new equitable responsibility for the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) which forms the base of general inferences drawn upon India's socially cohesive international commitments. But the question still remains whether these commitments are aligned with practicalities of Indian federal politics or do these commitments overlap with the powers/duties enumerated under the 7th schedule of the Indian Constitution? These questions can only be answered after analysing the available domestic governing provisions for foreign nationals.

At the national level, despite India's rich history in welcoming refugees and harbouring the idealist ancient moral code of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*', any refugee who enters India is termed as a 'Foreign National'. Hence, there is no

law to regulate the status, entry, rights and rehabilitation of refugees separately. Therefore, all the foreigners are governed by the provisions contained in the The Foreigners Act (1946), The Registration of Foreigners Act (1939), The Passport (Entry into India) Act (1920), The Citizenship Act (1955) and rules made thereunder. This paves a leeway for confusion to exist among the common masses, as people tend to misunderstand the difference between 'refugees' and various 'other categories of foreigners'. Though, there are 4 well defined (generally perceived) categories of 'Foreigners' who are different from 'Refugees' in their definitional aspect. These categories are : a.)Temporary residents, Tourists and Travellers; b.)Illegal Economic Migrants; c.)Criminal, Spies, Infiltrators, Militants, etc; d.)IDPs. According to a reply made by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Nityanand Rai to the questions posed in RajyaSabha, on the maintenance of refugee data, he stated that "since such foreign nationals enter into the country without valid travel documents in a surreptitious and clandestine manner, data relating to foreign nationals residing in India claiming to be refugees, asylum seekers and Stateless Persons is not maintained centrally". This clearly shows that there are spaces of ambiguities left intentionally on the part of the government.

But, this space of ambiguity, from time to time has been filled by the Indian Judiciary in its various judgements, where we see an interplay of Human Rights laws and International Refugee laws. The fundamental rights under Art.14, 21, 22, 25-28, 32 and 226 of the Constitution have been used by the refugees from time to time. As well, their cases have been dealt in accordance with the procedures established by the law. So, let us take a few cases as cardinal principles to substantiate the prominence of verdicts upholding non-citizens' fundamental rights of life, liberty and dignity. In the landmark judgements of the following cases:-

- (I.) Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi Vs. Union of India (1999), the Gujarat HC upheld the principle of non-refoulement under the wide umbrella of Art.21.
- (II.) State of Arunachal Pradesh Vs. Khudiram Chakma (1994), the SC stayed deportation of Chakmas and upheld that the state has to ensure their protection of life and liberty.

-
- (III.) *Malavika Karlekar Vs. Union of India* (1992), the SC stayed the deportation of 21 Burmese Nationals from the Andaman Islands, pending their refugee status determination by UNHCR.
 - (IV.) *Majid Ahmed Abdul Majeed Mohd. Jad Al-Hak Vs. Union of India* (1997), the Delhi HC upheld that food and medical care should be provided to detainees as they are the bare minimum essentials for survival.
 - (V.) The SC bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and A.S. Bopanna in response to a PIL filed by Fazal Abdali (2020), issued a notice to the Centre and several States seeking a response on ensuring 'Right to food' to Refugees and asylum-seekers.

Thus, deducing from these instances, we can observe that the Indian Judiciary has taken a liberal stance on most of the cases concerning the refugees either by mitigating the punishment or ordering release on compassionate grounds. But again, these took a turn after 8th April 2021, as the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India (SC) issued an order allowing the deportation of Rohingyas citing "rights guaranteed under Articles 14 [Equality before the law] and 21 [Protection against deprivation of Personal liberty] may be available to non-citizens, [but] the fundamental right to reside and settle in this country is available only to citizens". Former Chief Justice of India, Sharad Arvind Bobde also referenced "national security ramifications" and said that "India is not a signatory either to the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees 1951 or to the Protocol of the year 1967, so the principle of non-refoulement is inapplicable". This SC judgement passed in *Mohammad Salimullah Vs. Union of India* (2017) case sounds contradictory to the earlier judgements (of *Malavika Karlekar Vs. Union of India/NHRC Vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh/N.D. Pancholi Vs. State of Punjab/ Khudiram Chakma Vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh*) made on deportation. This jurisprudential development highlights a shift from its past generosity of providing relief to refugees to a more security centred outlook.

Along with this, there are instances when discriminatory attitude between refugees of different nationalities is applied when it comes to their treatment under the legal protective measures. For example, the Tibetan refugees have the right to residence and have been granted lands to build their own villages but

others like Chakmas and Sri Lankans are detained in camps and their freedom of movement is guaranteed only inside their camps. These pictorials clearly demonstrate the existence of fallacies and loopholes in legal sensitivity towards immigrants (in matters of detention, medical aid, women and child safety, work permits, freedoms, non-refoulement, timely filing of charge sheet by the prosecution to enable pleading guilty, security against re-arrest on release from detention, etc), that needs a proper policy intervention to avoid discrimination and pay heed to the global commitments.

FEDERAL EXPOSITION ON REFUGEES

India as a State-Nation and not Nation-States (Stepan, Linz and Yadav, 2011) has relied its federal constitutional politics upon integration/convergence and not assimilation/hegemony which got particularly strengthened with the rise of coalitional electoral politics in India. An independent journey from 14 to 28 states, post-1947 was all about the management of 'museum of races' (Joseph Deniker, 1990) with territorial social diversity adjustments on the basis of Language and Tribe. Post-2014, NITI AAYOG as a nucleus of cooperative and competitive federalism, has tried to empower the analogical metaphor of 'salad bowl' by attenuating the 'melting pot' logic with the temporal evolution, but it's just limited to the fiscal front. Whereas, the political intentions seem missing in terms of strengthening the 'salad bowl'. This clearly exhibits the presence of the 'melting pot' logic active at the functional level of politics (visible in political parties and their manifestos or leaders speeches) which is unparalleled to the existing structural ideals mentioned in the Indian Constitution.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 was one such attempt by the Union government that gave rise to the academic dialectics on how 'religion' can convert the idealistic constitutional principles through the realistic functional intrusion of dominant discourses, by using the instrument of 'Representative Democracy' (through policy intervention). This applied legislative 'intelligible differentia' on the basis of religion in the Act, demonstrated the contradictory tones to that of the NRC, which was flagged in Assam by the BJP (State Cadre). Assam became the first state to oppose the CAA, particularly due to the Act's provisions of allowing the 6 communities a safe haven in the country who

entered on or before 31st December, 2014 (including the Bangladeshi Hindus who stands exempted from any criminal charges made under the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport Act, 1920 after 2019) and promised granting citizenship to members of these communities. Thus, the Union's promise of Assam Accord remained unfulfilled. Though, an observation can be made, as the State government viewed this Act as a sign of inclusive strategy of GOI, but the regional aspirations for grabbing power contrasted. As mentioned in the 'Sankalp Patra' (2021 Assam BJP's manifesto), correction of NRC was among the 10 enlisted commitments but it avoided any reference to the implementation of the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act and Clause 6 of the Assam Accord. But, during the 2021 Vidhan Sabha election campaigning, BJP seemed sceptical in proving the NRC's failure (CAA changed the year criteria for illegal immigrants from 1971 to 2014). On the one hand, BJP's President J.P.Nadda commenting on INC's promise of non-conformism to CAA implementation in the state, he said that "by voting in Assam, state legislation cannot change the central legislation" and on the other hand replying to a question on the implementation of Clause 6, he said "it is under process and we are committed to it". The analysis of this case is pretty subtle because the Union and the State, both are ruled by the same party but the stand differs at the central level and state level. Here, the allegiance of State to fulfil the promised indigenous regional claims/demands (case of sub-nationalism in total opposition to Refugees claims) and Centre's commitment towards implementing CAA (case of nationalism, though selective but pro-Refugees) reflected a sui generis explanation of cooperative and competitive federal tendencies.

The case of Mizoram, has a different ethnic story of refugee acceptance from Myanmar that shares a 510 km border (having a Free Movement Regime established) with it. From February 1, 2021 coup d'état began in Myanmar, which led to unrest between the Tatmadaw and the Armed Civilian groups. Following which, on 10th March, the North Eastern Division of the MHA issued a letter to the Chief Secretaries of 4 north-eastern states and the Director General of Assam Rifles. Directing them to strictly vigil the borders and not allow any refugee influx from Myanmar or provide shelter to displaced and also ordered to deport them back to their borders. It is to be noted here that Mizoram is ruled by Mizo National Front (which is an ally of BJP and NEDA). In sharp contrast to the notification, Mizoram CM Zoramthanga described the

situation in Myanmar as a "human catastrophe of gigantic proportions". In a letter to PM Modi, he urged that India couldn't turn a "blind eye to this humanitarian crisis" in its backyard. And especially to the Chin community (one of the 135 recognized ethnicities in Myanmar, in contrast to Rohingyas who are merely treated as an 'associate citizens'), who share cultural affinity with the Mizos. The State government going against the SC ruling and the Union directives gave shelter to the refugees and provided them hospitable services (including education, medical care, shelter, food, ID cards, etc) by arranging funds from local NGOs and Churches. In December 2021, after meeting with the PM for assistance, Chief Minister Zoramthanga said that "he had been assured that the Centre was going to draw up a plan to assist the refugees" also "the Centre is willing to help but it cannot directly help the Myanmar refugees because India is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol". Here, the cooperative and competitive tendencies are clearly visible in terms of handling the refugees. As State's inclusive allegiance to the customary law of non-refoulement and local governance responsibility stands contrary to the Union's international commitment (*Art.51A clause c*).

From the above prolegomena of understanding the GOI's legal approach of dealing with refugees on an adhoc and case-by-case basis at two levels has provided neo-federalism (as a new dimension of Indian Federalism) to set in a new definition of competitive and cooperative federalism. Furthermore, it can be observed that there exists a shift of commitments from the idealistic words of the past "*I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth*" (Swami Vivekananda, 1893), to the exercise of hard core realistic electoral manipulative politics in varied shades of nationalism, especially under the NDA-II regime. As, GOI's focus under NDA-II remains the intra-refugee crisis management (for example, Bru-Reang historic agreement in 2020; NEDA; Development; Border Security and others) rather than the inter-refugee crisis management. Thence, the legal inertia of national asylum policy is propitiously backing GOI's application of flexi-approach, as it is able to balance the trio of: Internationalism, Nationalism and Subnationalism on a spatio-temporal basis, by employing ideology, political interests and attitudes with a constructive force. But, for the sustenance of a true democratic future, India exigently needs a formal policy

intervention to avoid such further neglect, discrimination and ambiguous treatment of 'Refugee' identity.

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Celebutantes in West Bengal Statesmanship

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ABSTRACT

Politics has become an immanent component of Bengal's theatrical limelight and vice-versa, especially since 2011. Hence, political participation of celebrities is germanely a newfangled portent. The juxtaposition of glamour and politics uniquely transform the Bengali political system due to its shift from a star-fan relationship to a politician-voter one. The article fixates on the share of winnability of renowned public figures- actors, actresses, producers and directors of West Bengal when they ingress into politics besides the relevant factors that determine this aspect. Thus, this article gives insight on three important issues related to celebrity politics in West Bengal. First, how the demise of the Left Front led to the rise of Trinamool Congress with its new strategies to bolster power. Second, the share of winnability of the personage contestants over non-celebrity candidates in successive elections. Third, the insights on popular opinions of recent times, concerning celebrity induction in politics and lastly, the principal factors that determine the share of winnability of the luminary figures of Bengali Film industry in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha Elections and 2016 State Assembly Election with acumen on the 2021 West Bengal Assembly Election.

Key Words: Glamour, Politics, Celebrity Politics, Winnability, Popular Opinion

The celebrity politicians, consecrated in politics, are having a magnified impact on its practice. In this noble exercise, the public relations of the celebrities i.e., their esteem and known-ness among the general people are exploited by the political parties to extract more votes, to influence the vote bank politics or to retain their dominance. The fanatic populace is often appropriated by co-opting the luminaries of filmndom, thus, ushering a new kind of politics, embedded in the 'image' of the celebrities to impact the electorate and the course of the political world. In the arena of West Bengal, since 2011, the same trend seems to have continued till date by the political parties, especially, the Trinamool Congress and then, followed by the other competing parties.

ROLLING THE BALL FOR THE 'NEW ERA'

The 34 year-reign of the Left Front in West Bengal - from the 1980s to 1990s, was termed as the 'Golden Age' of Left Front Rule. However, their primacy imploded. Ranabir Samaddar opined that trade unions dilapidated the 'politics of production', the operation of 'governmentality' in the state and the way Left became the sentinel of status quo amidst cynicism, pettiness, iniquity, and apathy. The misplaced sense of priority, overemphasis on votes, populism, hunger, peasant dispossession and changes in the social composition also became ostensible, amplifying contentious politics and leading to the Left-demise (Ghosh, 2013:160). For Dwaipayana Bhattacharya, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) spurned the new class equation where the stock of land reforms was depleting. CPI(M) left the new anxieties of the rural population unaddressed, failing to generate a new popular surge addressing education, primary healthcare etc. Instead, they misconstrued the triumph of 2006 for rapid industrialization by hypothesizing major rural support that it possessed i.e., seizing larger tracts of lands to institute industries, factories thus, expanding the urban territories (Sarkar, 2012: 47). Hence, many small cultivators and sharecroppers commuted leanings from CPI(M) to Trinamool Congress (TMC) and various rural committees were set up to defy the government. Such a united opposition destabilized both the left's electoral base and its 'organizational grid' (Bhattacharya, 2010:52), enabling TMC to usher in esprit and establish its rule with Mamata Banerjee and her 'One-Woman Army' in Bengal. Bengal luminary Prosenjit Chatterjee commented, "It's a great success indeed and common people like us will expect some good work. Everyone who voted for her has a lot of faith in her." (The Hindustan Times, 2011:1). With the advent of TMC, the augmentation of fabled faces in politics was initiated. Though made fashionable by this party, such augmentation of celebrities in politics was also present during the Left-regime. However, the intensity was not that profound. The celebrities were never seen at the forefront of the Leftist vote campaigns. The Left never exploited the popularity of the personages to impact vote banks, unlike TMC. Notable public figures like Chandan Sen, Sabyasachi Chakraborty, Badshah Maitra reflected their propensity towards Leftist ideology. Utpal Dutt, another great repute, known for his ultra-Leftist proclivity, significantly catalyzed the '*Jatra*' ideology - a means for Leftist political and post-colonial readings of history.

TMC's vehement aversion, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) too started accentuating the analogous protocol of co-opting luminaries within the party to reign in West Bengal.

PANJANDRUMS IN THE 'SCRIMMAGE OF ELECTIONS'

Celebrity and power are concomitant. Former embodies the audience, providing alleyways for articulation of power and influence by cultural industries, besides comparison and adaptation to political institutions. (Marshall, 1997) John Street in his 'Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation', highlights celebrity politicians from two facets. One such dimension includes the elected politicians who are based in entertainment and use face value and fame to gain power or to get elected. Also, the elected politicians harness celebrity associations to enhance their image and communicate their message. (Street, 2004) Considering this, celebrities inflate image and communicate with people because the political party feels alienated from the masses which can be an encumbrance in their path to gain power. The personages also bridge the lacuna between the public and the party as well as mediate the nexus between the ruling and the ruled. Political parties fetch electoral support by capitalizing on the fame of public figures, hence co-opting them as electoral contenders. Similarly, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had glitized up the candidate list for the 2014 Lok Sabha, 2016 Vidhan Sabha and 2019 Lok Sabha elections by fielding several renowned faces from the Bengali filmworld who joined the election bandwagon and undoubtedly, their winnability has been comparatively more than their non-celebrity opposition counterparts. Fabled faces like Aparna Sen, Mamata Sankar, Shaoli Mitra, Arindam Sil, Subhadrashanna, Samir Aich were also associated with Banerjee's '*Paribartan*'. Alongside, she also targeted a wider electoral base by rehabilitating the hitherto marginalized Muslim electorate. Consequently, Banerjee fielded the candidacy of Ruk-Ban-Ur Rahaman post the heinous crime on his brother, Rizwan-Ur-Rahaman. The chart below reflects the votes polled by the celebrity candidates against their oppositions in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections as well as the 2016 Assembly elections.

Source of data: Website of The Election Commission of India				
	Celebrity candidate	Votes Polled	Non-celebrity candidate	Votes Polled
2014 Lok Sabha Elections	Deepak Adhikary (Dev) – TMC	6,85,696	Santosh Rana - CPI (M)	4,24,805
	Nimu Bhowmik – BJP	2,03,131	Md. Salim - CPI (M)	3,17,515
	Moonmoon Sen – TMC	4,83,455	Basudev Acharya- CPI (M)	3,84,949
	Sandhya Roy – TMC	5,80,441	Prabodh Panda- CPI (M)	3,95,313
	Satabdi Roy – TMC	4,60,568	Dr. Ilahi Kamre Md.	3,93,305
	Tapas Paul – TMC	4,38,789	Sanatanu Jha – CPI (M)	3,67,534
2016 Vidhan Sabha Elections	Deboshree Roy	1,01,161	Kanti Ganguly	99,932
	Nayna Bandhopadhyay	55,119	Somen Mitra	41,903
	Chiranjit Chakraborty	99,667	Sanjib Chattopadhyay	74,668
2019 Lok Sabha Elections	Nusrat Jahan – TMC	7,82,078	Sayantan Basu- BJP	4,31,709
	Mimi Chakraborty – TMC	6,88,472	Anupam Hazra - BJP	3,93,233
	Dev – TMC	7,17,959	Bharati Ghosh - BJP	6,09,986
	Satabdi Roy – TMC	6,54,077	Dudh Kumar Mondal - BJP	5,65,153
	Locket Chatterjee - BJP	6,71,448	Ratna Dey Nag - TMC	5,98,086
	Moonmoon Sen	4, 35, 000	Babul Supriyo- BJP (celebrity candidate)	6,32,000

FACTORS DETERMINING THE SHARE OF WINNABILITY OF CELEBRITY CANDIDATES IN BENGAL POLITICS

Political representation encapsulates the 'artistry of entertainment in politics' (Hinchman, and Meyer, 2002: 33) wherein politicians/political parties use the formats of entertainment to prove that they have the common touch and know how to relax. For developing a popular relationship with commoners, the celebrities, indeed, require their 'Fans' and the media. The capacity to speak politically requires several factors, structures and the affective bond that is created by the relationship between the celebrities and their admirers. (Marshall, 1997: p. 231). The following factors associated with celebrity fame contribute much to their share of winnability in politics.

First, their adherence to an unwavering screen persona makes them credible among audiences who are unable to distinguish between the stars' public and private selves (Ribke, 2015:116). In the recent scenario of Bengal politics, as noted previously, the margin of votes polled by the celebrity candidatures is comparatively higher than the non-celebrity candidates. 'Exposure' also affects the psyche of the common people (although there are exceptions), compelling them to consider 'Favoritism' for a particular luminary without evaluating the political knowledge of this candidate. In the context of Bengal, a foremost example of this argument can be that of Nusrat Jahan from Tollywood. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, she grabbed a huge margin of votes, defeating Sayantan Basu. During her election campaigns, she was a 'huge crowd puller, characteristically entertaining people with dance and music at election rallies' (*Delhi Post*). However, her attendance in Parliament from '1st June 2019 to 23rd March 2020 has been 28 per cent, which is abysmally below both the national average (84 per cent) and state average (78 per cent)' (*Delhi Post*). Basirhat constituency, from where Jahan was elected as the Minister of Parliament (MP), was primarily plagued with the dearth of educational institutions and drinking water. Although the inhabitants of the constituency regarded her as the 'girl next door' (*Delhi Post*), so far none of the problems seem to have been resolved.

Second, is the success of the film genre. Nahuel Ribke argued that internal dynamics of the Western and action-film genres may also affect the chances of political success for film stars, in two ways. First, a genre's 'prestige' and popularity affect the status of its stars among audiences. A decline in the genre's status, as well as a downturn in the film industry's economic and symbolic power, can damage the attractiveness of film stars as a whole (Ribke, 2015:116).

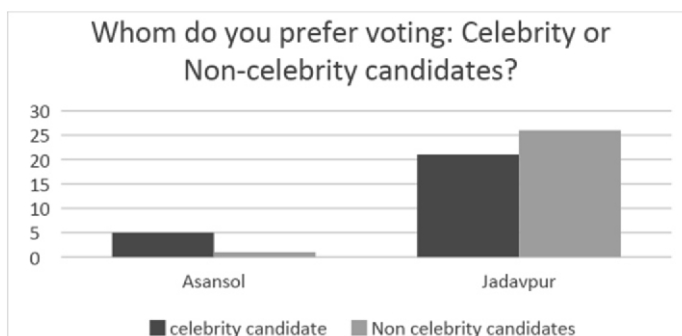
Deepak Adhikary, in Bengal's context, is a foremost instance to this point. The popular success of his films enhanced his exposure before people enabling him to draw maximum votes in the elections. Whereas on the other hand, Moonmoon Sen, who once was very luminous among the populace, hardly has any exposure among people, now. Hence, successful film genres have a significant role to play in pooling votes from the masses.

Lastly, political illiteracy and unawareness of the public lend to the possible winnability of celebrity candidatures. The apathetic nature of people concerning the political issues of their state and their desire to see celebrities on the floor, contribute much to vote accumulation in favour of the celebrities. Due to the dearth of proper knowledge and the spell of popular culture, many people associate their lifestyles with those of the high esteemed personalities.

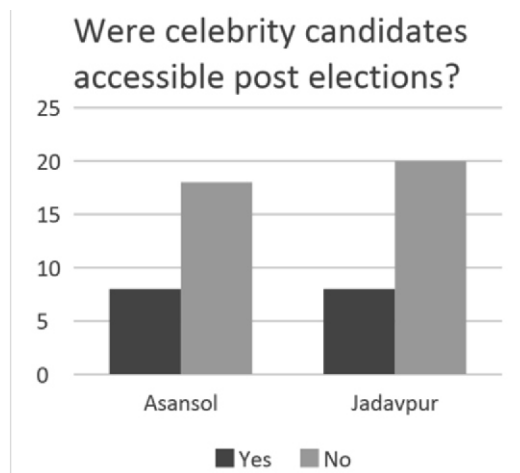
ONLINE SURVEY: POPULAR OPINIONS ON CELEBRITY POLITICS IN WEST BENGAL

Due to covid restrictions, I conducted a survey in an online mode around 30th March 2021, with 55 people from two constituencies - Asansol wherein a celebrity candidate met declination and Jadavpur wherein a celebrity candidate achieved victory. The main aim was to understand people's perception of celebrity politics in West Bengal through a structured survey. In the survey, a brief questionnaire has been prepared with 4 different questions circulated employing google forms across social media, to derive the popular opinions on celebrity induction in Bengal politics. People across gender, age division and different occupational fields have asserted their responses to the given questions.

Preference of voting to a celebrity or a non-celebrity candidate:



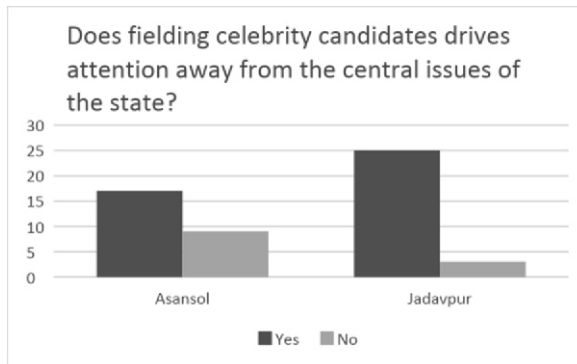
Accessibility of celebrity candidates post elections:



How does glamour appeal to the credibility of celebrities as candidates?

Most of the respondents opined that glamour creates attraction, generates mass followers, converting into more votes. Celebrities promote the parties by fetching the attention of laymen who are politically apathetic/unaware thus incentivized by the emulation of reel betterment into real welfare. The hyped-up fame of personages tends to overshadow the question of their political knowledgeability hence, appeasing the people to cast votes in their favour. Very few respondents opined that since the celebrities are attached to their new profession as politicians thus having a reputation to maintain, they are entrusted to work hard for their constituency. Some promptly responded that the celebrities lure people into seeing them on the political ground 'live', without any tickets. Others responded that glamour mostly appeals to the youth and influences social media, misguiding the people. However, it has to be mentioned that certain respondents reject glamour as the credibility rather believing that attraction through work, skills and passion should be the yardstick while some believed that credibility in terms of glamour depends completely on locality. A respondent from Jadavpur opined, "Glamour is a PR factor". However, worth mentioning, some might be due to security issues or lack of understanding, did not respond to the question.

Driving away attention of people from the issues of the state by fielding celebrities as candidates:



FINDINGS/PATTERNS EMERGED

The survey reflected a mixed outcome regarding the voting preferences for celebrity and non-celebrity candidates. The inaccessibility of celebrity candidates post elections, in both the constituencies (as obtained through the survey), denote ignorance towards their assigned role for the people's welfare thus emphasizing election-winning as the priority. The respondents highlighted that mass appeal is utilized to fetch more votes i.e., fan-following of the celebrity candidates play a principal role in vote bank politics. Some respondents strictly opined that glamour makes the real issues look extremely secondary and the credibility of the glamour quotient largely depends on the locality. Some also posited that people vote for celebrities because they assume that their favourite personage will help them live a better life. However, a respondent, highlighting upon the speech of Satabdi Roy, opined, "People can see celebs in 'LIVE' without tickets." Regarding the question of whether fielding celebrity candidatures distract common people from the pivotal issues of state, the responses are positive in both the constituencies thus reflecting a reality where political parties utilize the fame of the celebrities as a smokescreen for common people.

CONCLUSION

Celebrity engagement in politics is noticeable throughout India. Today, both TMC and BJP are following the exact vogue to facilitate vote bank politics.

However, such a coin has two obverses impacting democracy. In the contemporary system, societal identities and policies emerge through the networking process as a result of discursive engagement among the network elites. There is a shift from an input-output model of politics in which the network elite, operating through the political system, act 'on its terms and its values', thereby shaping and constructing societal interests and identities (Marsh, Hart and Tindall, 2010: 8).

The extent to which celebrity activism trivializes politics is a major question. They divert the attention of the masses more towards their personality, lifestyles and mould the media attention in a more personalized and dramatic style. People are more interested in the luminaries than their chosen cause. Thus, their leadership is embedded in some form of cosmopolitan democracy. Kanti Ganguly (CPIM) from Raidighi worked tremendously hard during the 2009 Aila. But Debashree Roy (TMC), who stood in opposition to Ganguly, defeated the latter by a huge margin of votes in the 2016 West Bengal Assembly Elections even though she did not work for her constituency, unlike Ganguly.

However, celebrity induction in politics is not always detrimental to democracy and representation. Celebrities with their fan following, can appeal and mobilize the masses, encourage them in popular participation, forge their interests in politics, proffer the eccentric state issues and demands of the people in the Parliament at the behest of greater transparency from the policy-makers. Celebrity-led debates educate segments of society on public issues about which they would otherwise remain ignorant thus enhancing their 'monitory' vigilance vis-à-vis the truth claims and executive power wielded by governments and dominant coalitions. Celebrity politics also provide an unorthodox, potentially effective way to splinter the hold of established elites on political agendas and policy. Moreover, it produces placid leaders who are creatures of the media. They are less interventionist and more constrained by the powerful accountability mechanism of celebrity-focused performance expectations, enforced by media monitoring. Thus, co-opting celebrities in politics can also be, to a certain extent, beneficial.

From the Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections of West Bengal, ever since 2014, we can deduce that 'Face Value' of celebrities had been a principal factor in sculpting the mindset of the masses who considered the glamour quotient more attractive than evaluating their representatives' work. However, a converse

scenario is observed in the case of Moonmoon Sen, who won the 2014 election due to her Face Value but was never seen working in her constituency. Her attendance in the Parliament was also meager. Hence, the follow-up 2019 election presented a disheartening picture for her. She was ostracized by the Asansol voters, reflecting how the general public are not emotionally swayed by the glamour quotient alone. Voters are quite politically aware of the benefits they receive. Earlier, it was seen that the rural people were mostly, if not all, apathetic towards the political issues of the state. But later on, it is revealed, even from the conducted survey, that celeb-candidatures hold no tonnage compared to extent of popular development and security. Also, a substantial proportion of voters do not even consider the face value of celebrities when it comes to their representation, for instance, Nimu Bhowmik (BJP) was castigated by his constituency in the first attempt (2014).

In the 2021 Bidhan Sabha Election, TMC again emulsified a handful of personages like Sayoni Ghosh, Kanchan Mullick, Raj Chakraborty, June Maliah, Koushani Mukherjee, Sayantika Banerjee etc. The oppugnant of the party, BJP also incorporated many renowned public figures such as Bengal's Luminary, Mithun Chakraborty, Payal Sarkar, Srabanti Chatterjee, Yash Dasgupta, Bonny Sengupta, and many more. According to the West Bengal Bidhan Sabha Election 2021, it is revealed that the majority of celebrity candidates lost from their constituencies. The chart below reflects upon this fact, based on the data collected from the Official Website of the Election Commission of India. (Election Commission of India, 2021)

NAME OF CELEBRITY CANDIDATE	NUMBER OF VOTES ACQUIRED	NUMBER OF VOTES FETCHED BY THE OPPOSITION	RESULTS: WIN/LOST
Sayoni Ghosh	56166	56354 – Agnimitra Paul	Lost
Payal Sarkar	73540	110968 – Ratna Chatterjee	Lost
Srabanti Chatterjee	56337	97945 – Partha Chatterjee	Lost
Locket Chatterjee	98687	117104 – Asit Majumder	Lost
Koushani Mukherjee	74268	109357 – Mukul Roy	Lost
Rajshree Rajbanshi	64615	112741 – Rathin Ghosh	Lost
Debdoot Ghosh	40597	101440 – Aroop Biswas	Lost
Parno Maitra	48519	81757 – Tapas Roy	Lost
Yash Dasgupta	61771	1031185 – Swati Khandoker	Lost
Anjana Basu	80279	105722 – Lovely Maitra	Lost

NAME OF CELEBRITY CANDIDATE	NUMBER OF VOTES ACQUIRED	NUMBER OF VOTES FETCHED BY THE OPPOSITION	RESULTS: WIN/LOST
Tanushri Chakraborty	82393	114804 – Kalipada Mandal	Lost
Rudranil Ghosh	44786	73505 – Shobhandeb Chattopadhyay	Lost
Chiranjit Chakraborty	104431	80648 – Sankar Chatterjee	Won
Raj Chakraborty	48143	34695 – Chandramani Shukla	Won
Nayana Banerjee	69702	24644 – Debdutta Majhi	Won
June Maliah	121175	96778 – Sumit Kumar Dash	Won
Kanchan Mallick	70468	46356 – Prabir Kumar Ghoshal	Won
Soham Chakraborty	105434	91857 – Pulak Kanti Guria	Won
Hiran Chatterjee	79607	75836 – Pradip Sarkar	Won

In the case of the highlighted section, Anjana Basu and Lovely Maitra, both celebrity candidatures, stood against each other from Sonarpur Dakshin. The latter is seen to defeat the former. In this case, the political party, TMC, might have mattered more than the popularity of the celebrity.

Hence, the graphical pie chart below represents how the equation in the voting patterns of the electorate underwent a considerable change in the 2021 elections, unlike the prior ones (about the celebrity candidates winning and losing elections).

THE NUMBER OF CELEB-CANDIDATURES WHO LOST AND WON IN THE 2021 WEST BENGAL BIDHAN SABHA ELECTION



This reflects that general people prioritise the political party, their benefits and the quality of the candidate instead of 'face value/glamour quotient'. They are pliable by the popularity of the celebrity candidatures during campaigns but while exercising their democratic right, it is proved that they think rationally, giving importance to the possibilities of development, security, welfare and choice of the most deserving candidates.

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Farmers Protest 2020-21: The Historical Struggle of 15 Months

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ABSTRACT

On June 5, 2020, the Government of India proposed three farm ordinances that mainly dealt with agricultural produce, their sale, hoarding, agricultural marketing, and contract farming reforms. These acts came to be popularly known as the 'Farm Bills' and have also been described as "Anti-Farmer" by the farmer unions. This article takes the reader through the various stages of the protest movement, having raised some very significant questions relative to the Centre's intention behind introducing a Bill of such orientation, the distress faced by the farmers and subsequently how the farmers took to protests for nearly 15 months retreating only when the bills were repealed by the state. This article aims to provide an overview of the main events of the protest using textual analysis.

Farmer's protest: a chronology of confrontation and conquest

- June 5, 2020: The Modi government has issued three agriculture reform ordinances.
- November 5: Protests begin. The Farmer's unions seek 'chakka jam'. They later affirm to blockade Delhi.
- November 26: Farmers from Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh assemble at the Delhi boundaries in support of the "Delhi Chalo" campaign.
- December 16: Hearing a plea demanding the immediate removal of protesting farmers owing to commuting woes, the Supreme Court advised the Centre to halt implementation of the new agricultural regulations.
- January 21, 2021: Following rounds of negotiations, the government suggests suspending the three agricultural laws.

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- January 26: Protesting farmers hit the police, causing chaos in the national capital. Protesters scale the Red Fort's poles and walls, hoisting the Nishan Sahib banner.
 - February 18: Farmers blocking railway lines in many states as part of a four-hour statewide 'Rail Roko' protest.
 - October 3: Lakhimpur Kheri Violence.
 - November 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announces that the government would withdraw the three agriculture regulations.

INTRODUCTION

The current political environment in India has been greatly disrupted as a result of the introduction of three legislative articles about agricultural activities in India. According to the Indian government, these Acts would push Indian agriculture to new heights of growth and change the rural economy. It claims that farmers will benefit from the higher prices, their income will increase, agro-processing units will get farm produce at lower prices because of the elimination of intermediaries, and several state government taxes will not apply to private markets operating alongside the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) markets. Farmers' unions, on the other hand, have voiced their concerns over the negative impacts of these Acts that would destroy their livelihoods and corporate takeover of their property. They have organised tremendous campaigns to have these Acts repealed. Thus a vast number of people and prominent public figures support the farmers' position.

The Farm Bill of 2020 proposed three laws namely:

1. The Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act,
2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Service Act, and
3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

In the following paragraphs, the article will provide a nuanced analysis of the government viewpoints as well as the perspective of the protesters.

STIMULATING BACKDROP TO THE FARMER'S STRUGGLE

The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce Bill states that the state government cannot levy tax on transactions performed in these newly formed trade areas like areas outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC). It allows intra-state and inter-state trade, allowing farmers to produce beyond the site of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) market. Having taken revenue from the state government, the bill weakens the *mandi* system thus exempting the traders, who buy from the farmers, from paying any tax to the state government. Under the *mandi* system, each state organises an Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) which establishes markets in different locations within their borders, splitting the state geographically where farmers are compelled to sell their crops at auction so that they can be assured that their produce is being purchased at a reasonable price. It was originally used in 1928 to control commercial activities and to build market yards in rural areas. The government of India buys the produce directly from the farmers at the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (*mandis*) - at what is known as the Minimal Support Price (MSP) which ensures that the farmers obtain at least a minimum profit for their investment. However, the main fear over this bill was that once the government will retreat from the picture, the farmers would be left at the mercy of traders and middlemen. Private retailing companies such as Reliance Fresh would try to negotiate with the farmers to purchase their produce at the lowest possible price and again sell them at higher prices given their intent of profit maximisation.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill provides a legal framework for the farmers to enter into contracts with companies before the production and rearing of their crops. It seeks to transfer market unpredictability from the farmers to the sponsors. It also paves the way for increased cash cropping. As a result, food grain production might shrink because private companies like to focus on profit-maximisation.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill empowers the Centre to regulate food items such as food grains, pulses, edible oils, and onion or impose stock limits in extraordinary circumstances like a steep price rise due to war, natural calamity, black marketing, etc.

Therefore, the government stated that the farmers will get multiple new opportunities such as an increase in private investments boosting and basic farm infrastructures which eventually allow them to earn more from their produce.

FARMER UNION'S DEMANDS

Thousands of farmers, largely from Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, have been protesting and camping at various border points surrounding Delhi since November 26, 2020, demanding a repeal of the three farm laws. They said that the Centre's policies will demolish the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system and that private corporations would dictate the terms and conditions in their way, causing farmers to incur losses on their goods.

They also feared that the demobilisation of the *mandi* system would lead to unfair pricing on their produce. Alongside, they want the withdrawal of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 so that it doesn't end subsidised electricity. Indian farmers were concerned that the new regulations would cause them to lose more than they would gain, so they took to the streets in protest. Besides these main demands, there were other demands where the cut in diesel prices by 50% for agricultural use was demanded alongside the release of unlawfully imprisoned farmers over stubble burning and the withdrawal of all cases against the leaders who were involved in the protest.

Rakesh Tikait, son of the famous farm activist Mahendra Singh Tikait, who is now the national spokesperson of the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (BKU) has been at the forefront of the Ghazipur border protest against the Centre's three problematic agricultural policies since the very beginning. Tikait led BKU activists to the UP Gate, bordering Delhi, on November 28 and had remained unhindered ever since, having demanded a 'written assurance' that the minimum support price (MSP) system will continue.

INCIDENTS/PHASES

Rail roko Andolan and Dilli Chalo Movement:

After this demonstration, more farmers and homestead associations across the nation began joining the protest. On September 25, 2020, farmers associations organised a cross country '*Bharat bandh*'. The dissent took a substantial shape when the farmer's associations framed the '*All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee*', including the delegates of 32 associations, adopting various methods like the '*Rail Roko Andolan*', impeding cost courts and holding dharnas leading to the quick evacuation and arrest of the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Misra, over the Lakhimpur Kheri case. The *Samyukt Kisan Morcha* triggered off a '*Dilli Chalo*' Movement with a 'sea of farmers' walking towards Delhi and arriving at the Singhu line. The Delhi Police *lathi-charged* the farmers however assaults and wounds failed to deter them. They planned to arrive at the *Ramlila* ground yet they were obstructed again at the Singhu line, the 'Mecca of farmer's dissent' in India. In the meantime, farmers from various other states including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand were likewise halted at various boundary focuses, for example, the Tirki line, Ghazipur line, and Shahjahanpur.

The Republic Day demonstration and the tractor rally incident:

Within a few days, Delhi was surrounded by farmers. Between December 3, 2020, and January 22, 2021, there were multiple rounds of negotiations between the Union administration and the farmers, but little progress was made. However, the farmers remained rigid over their demands during the whole fiasco and compelled the government to repeal the laws. The farmers decided to organise a 'tractor rally' on January 26 which became the most intriguing event of this protest. The demonstration was permitted on the condition that it would not disrupt the annual Republic Day parade in central Delhi. Farmers were assigned particular routes for the demonstration, which were mostly on the outskirts of town. However, a number of them gathered around the Red Fort, scaling the fortress's walls and domes, hoisting their flags alongside the national flag. Other demonstrators smashed police barricades and marched towards India's parliament in central Delhi. However, it is still difficult to determine who began the violence initially though there are also several recordings of cops charging *lathis* on farmer tractors and beating them.

According to the farm unions, the tractors that were diverted from the routes initially breaking the police barricades were those of the *Kisan Union Sangharsh Committee* since they had determined the night before to travel on the outer ring road.

In reality, the rest of the farmer unions have accused the *Kisan Union Sangharsh Committee* for taking a pro-government posture since they believed that the government provided the KMSC with a special enclosure to demonstrate and their demonstration began 13 days after the original protest. The major front of the protesting farmers is *Samyukt Kisan Morcha*, and they have accused the Kisan Union Sangharsh Committee of the violence on January 26, 2020. In response to all of this, the *Kisan Union Sangharsh Committee* leader stated that their people were peaceful, but that certain 'anti-social elements' existed.

But then there's the matter as to why, on such an important day as of January 26, 2020, when it came to defending the Red Fort, the police were nowhere to be found?

Such recordings have also appeared, in which police officers are seen resting comfortably on seats outside the Redfort, watching the situation unfold. It is difficult to guarantee whether it was a government-instigated plot that misused the media to tamper the demonstrators as either thugs or *khalistanis* thereby quelling these protests, or whether it was the 'protesting farmers' who indeed orchestrated this rebellious violence.

Responses on social media that have been widely shared:

Meanwhile, many celebrities and public figures all around the world like Rihanna, GretaThunberg, Meena Harris, Priyanka Chopra expressed their concern via social media. Rihanna tweeted, "*Why aren't we talking about this?*" #FarmersProtest, and uploaded a CNN news piece headlined, "*India shuts internet near New Delhi*". Thousands of people flocked around her, half in her favour and the other half in opposition. Following that, numerous celebrities and activists, like Greta Thunberg, tweeted, "*We stand in solidarity with the farmer's protest in India.*" Meena Harris, the niece of Kamala Harris, tweeted, "*We should all be shocked by India's internet shutdowns and paramilitary violence on farmer protesters.*" However, it is evident from these tweets that they are only publicising the propaganda without providing any explicit support or opposition to the parties involved.

Kangana Ranaut has publicly stated on Twitter that protesting farmers are '*not farmers but terrorists*'. The question is whether the government should take action against such hate speech. But, in its aftermath, the government claimed to have reached out to farmers to settle the matter through amicable dialogue. Unfortunately, all of the government's strategies began to backfire. Farmers began to join the protest in larger numbers. Initially concentrated in Punjab, farmers from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, particularly the west, and Rajasthan began to join this protest in large numbers. The issue was no longer restricted to favouring the agricultural bills but encircled over basic human rights and democracy. Will the public's core democratic right to protest be revoked?

Lakhimpur Kheri Violence:

On October 3, 2021, tension gripped Uttar Pradesh when four farmers were killed including a journalist by an SUV and left several others injured in *Lakhimpur Kheri*. The farmers said that State Minister, Ajay Mishra's son, Ashish Mishra was in the car and purposefully ran over the farmers. Ajay Mishra, on the other hand, reported that the farmers began throwing stones at the car, forcing it to lose control and collide with the farmers. However, only one day later, a video become viral on social media where it can be seen that the farmers were peacefully walking ahead with flags in hand when the car came up behind and hit them. Four farmers were killed, two BJP workers were killed, a driver and a local journalist Raman Kashyap were also killed in this incident. Up until that moment, Ashish Mishra had not been arrested, although several eyewitness reports blamed him, and there was video proof that resurfaced on the internet. During this time, two UP-based advocates, Shiv Kumar Tripathi and C.S. Panda wrote a letter to the Supreme Court, following which a PIL was filed on this incident. The Supreme Court has ordered the UP government to produce a status report on this matter, detailing the accused and those against whom the FIR has been filed, as well as those arrested up to that point. Following the Supreme Court's ruling, the police have finally arrested the main culprit. From a moral perspective, many individuals have called for his resignation, including the victims' parents and opposition lawmakers. All of these events present very serious questions, one of which is that if the attorneys had not filed the case in the Supreme Court, the murderer might have wandered freely and the guilt would have been placed entirely on the farmers.

End of the Protest:

After 15 months of protest finally, on 19th November 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi repealed the three farm laws by saying *"Today, while apologising to the countrymen, I want to say with a sincere and pure heart that perhaps there must have been some deficiency in our efforts, due to which we could not explain the truth like the light of the lamp to some farmers"*.

But the PM's declaration has been widely noticed and discussed in light of the upcoming Assembly Elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh in 2022. According to some of the opposition parties like *Aam Aadmi Party* and *Samajwadi Party*, the farmers' protest harmed the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election prospects, which led the PM to reverse his position on agricultural regulations. One continues to question whether it was a political move of the ruling party or just a truce aimed at ending the hardships of the farmers. The timing of such decisions plays a very significant role. If the PM and the BJP thought that the farm laws are detrimental to the interest of the Indian farmers they could have perhaps repealed them six or eight months earlier, which could have saved a lot of lives and the hardship that the Indian farmer had to undergo.

On the 29th of November, both the Houses of Parliament cleared the Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021. The *Samyukta Kisan Morcha* also received a formal letter from the Government agreeing to most of the demands and ensuring a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price including the withdrawal of all cases lodged against the protestors. The farmers won the year-long battle - 'a historic victory'. Later on, *Samyukta Kisan Morcha* decided to call off the protest and leave the site by 11th December 2021. The day was also celebrated as 'Vijay Diwas' marking a day of victory for the farmers.

However, the farmers were still dissatisfied with how the media portrayed the protest. The mainstream media in India infamously sided with the government's narrative and attempted to delegitimize the farmers' protest. They have identified them as separatists, Maoists, and terrorists from Khalistan. It was interesting how every major news station claimed to know that a "solution" was on the way and that they were the first to break the news. They were also quick to praise the prime minister's acumen, sense of timing given Gurupurab's auspiciousness, and man-of-the-land persona.

The government also attempted to portray the entire affair as futile and the

farmers as Khalistanis. But one problem still remained and that was MSP and the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (*mandis*), whether or not the government was considering proposing legislation on farmers' "right to sell at MSP." However, the government eventually assured farmers that it will meet all other remaining farmer demands, including MSPs.

Another instance recently occurred in Punjab on 5th January 2022, when Narendra Modi's convoy was delayed for around 20 minutes on an overpass in Punjab due to a farmer protest further flared the agitation between the protesting community and the state. The cavalcade was stalled, and private cars were observed approaching, posing a huge security risk. Because of the gap, PM Modi was forced to return to the airport in Bathinda. Farmers who barricaded a road in Punjab said that they did not know he would be using the concerned route.

Punjab BJP State President Ashwani Sharma said that the Punjab CM, Charanjit Singh Channi was the mastermind behind this entire plan and dismissed the episode as an "eyewash." Some BJP leaders also urged the suspension of the Director-General of Police for failing to provide necessary protocols for the PM's security, while others claimed that the PM's security breach was a conspiracy hatched by the Congress party and blamed them for creating an atmosphere "worse than an emergency." The BJP loyalists also raised some serious concerns against the state government, stating how it is the state's responsibility to provide a safe route. Notwithstanding, all protocols were ignored, putting the PM in an extremely sensitive and vulnerable security situation where anticipatory life-threatening mishaps could have happened. Based upon this speculation, President Ram Nath Kovind affirmed his displeasure with this rather unordinary lapse and invited the PM for gaining a first-hand account of the incident. Having snowballed into a major political controversy, defence strategists believe that the BJP-ruled state strives to securitise this administrative hiccup as a politically charged vendetta hatched by the agitating farmers against Modi by infiltrating into the constitutionally mandated security protocol of the Prime Minister. Located at the strategic juxtaposition of forthcoming state assembly elections with BJP stakes and the formerly episode of state surrender to the annulment of farm laws, this top-down accusation of an endangered national security courtesy the protesting farmers facilitates the state to cordon off dissent from the civilian ambit and acutely temper its ideological arrogance per the state's convenience.

CONCLUSION

Farmers' year-long struggle will be recorded in the pages of time. The decision by Prime Minister Modi to repeal the three farm laws was perceived as a major victory for the farmers. A significant victory for democracy. Although many individuals were seen cheering after this decision yet many were spotted upset too. Some individuals grew so enraged by this decision that they began referring to India as a "*Jihadi Nation*" and have begun to repose faith in tyranny. But, in terms of content, what was it about the agricultural legislations that many found so disastrous? Why were there so many protests in response to the agricultural legislation? In a nutshell, this legislation would have made it easier for corporations to exploit farmers. In reality, these regulations would have promoted food hoarding by corporations, making it easier to exploit farmers. People in favour of farm laws stated that small farmers with modest landholdings would profit the most from these farm regulations. However, this argument relies on the assumption that the firms with which they would be engaging would treat them properly. Understandably, the protesting farmers could not put their faith in huge corporations. How can a small farmer be expected to keep his end of the contract while dealing with a giant corporation, after all? These were the factors that prompted the farmers' revolt.

It was extremely difficult for the protestors to get public support since people were continuously inundated with reports that the farmers were terrorists and Khalistanis. Notwithstanding, the majority of the farmers stood firm and tried to continue their nonviolent protest. With time, this movement extended to other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra. However, because the Green Revolution had arrived in Punjab and Haryana, the majority of the demonstrations took place over there. The APMC *mandis* were mostly found in these two states, where farmers profit the most from them. The size of farms varies greatly in India. The campaign did not encompass the whole agrarian community; rather, the rich peasants were mostly viewed at the forefront of the protest, most likely to preserve and safeguard their excess product interests by maximising primarily their economic gains.

Another great aspect of these protests were the homemade libraries. Libraries were constructed in protest areas so that protesters may read texts. To combat the bogus news spread by the malleable media, the farmers launched their newspaper, the 'Trolley Times,' a four-page biweekly newspaper. In addition, they launched their 'Kisan Ekta Morcha' digital transactions on social media.

In total, about 600 farmers were martyred during this conflict, but the struggle was ultimately successful, paying off the sacrificed blood. As a result their triumph on November 29, 2021, marked a new momentous chapter in the trajectory of Indian politics.

The battle may have been won, but is the war over? Was it truly a win for all segments of the agrarian community? Or was it only a sectarian victory for the farmers in Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh, since most farmers in other states, such as Bihar and West Bengal, are yet to receive the benefits of Minimum Support Price and Agricultural Produce Market Committee (*mandis*)? The question lingers.

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Gorkha Politics in West Bengal: The 2017 Agitation and its Aftermath

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ABSTRACT

The Gorkhas in India are a minority group consisting of Nepali-speaking Indian citizens, mostly concentrated in West Bengal. The Gorkhas have been demanding a separate state for themselves which crystallized into the Gorkhaland movement, starting in the 1980s. After a few years of no radical action, the Gorkhaland movement was revived in the 2010s by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha under the leadership of Bimal Gurung, which turned into a full-blown agitation in 2017 as a culmination of certain events. The article attempts to provide a recount of these events and analyze the 2017 Gorkha Agitation, while also covering the aftermath of this movement, concerning the Gorkhas and Darjeeling alongside commenting on the changed political scenario in the region. The author strives to clarify the events that led to, and occurred during the 2017 Gorkha agitation, while also providing a commentary to put these events into political perspective.

The Indian Gorkhas are a minority group primarily consisting of Nepali-speaking citizens of the state. Sometimes referred to as ‘Nepali Indians’, the identity of Gorkhas as Indian citizens has often been questioned thus precipitating an identity crisis for this minority group, which has ultimately taken the shape of a full-blown demand for a separate state by the Gorkhas – the demand for ‘Gorkhaland’.

Although the Gorkha urge to have a separatist administrative setup outside of Bengal was raised for the first time in 1907 (Sarkar, 2013), the Gorkhaland movement itself was first initiated in the 1980s by Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), led by Subhash Ghising, wherein the Gorkhas voiced their demand for Gorkhaland to be carved out of the Darjeeling Hills, along with some areas of the Dooars and Siliguri-Tarai region of West Bengal. Following the agitation of the 1980s, the Gorkhaland movement seemed to have died

down, however it was revived in the 2010s by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, headed by Bimal Gurung, finally leading to another large-scale agitation in 2017.

To bring the 2017 Gorkha agitation into context, it was sparked off by the alleged imposition of Bengali language as a compulsory subject from classes 1 to 10 in the local schools of Darjeeling, by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government. As Partha Chatterjee, the then Education Minister commented, *“From now on, it will be compulsory for students to learn Bengali...English medium schools will have to make Bengali an optional subject from Class 1...”* (*“Darjeeling shutdown comes to an end”*, 2017). Additionally, in the civic body polls, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) which was a dominant political party in the Darjeeling Hills, suffered a major defeat in Mirik (Notified Area), where TMC won by a two-thirds majority. Not only that, but TMC also seemed to have gained a significantly larger vote share in Darjeeling, which was concerning for GJM, as they have virtually ruled Darjeeling under the leadership of Gurung, since its establishment in 2007.

THE 2017 AGITATION

In early June of 2017, thousands of Gorkhas, led by Gurung, took to the streets in Darjeeling as a protest against the language policy of the state. Mamata Banerjee, the chairperson of TMC, commented on the happenings in Darjeeling, accusing GJM of misleading the people and twisting the narrative in their favour. Following these comments made by the Chief Minister, the agitation seemed to have turned more aggressive, with people now burning effigies of Banerjee. The agitation took a violent turn when the government decided to hold a Cabinet meeting in Darjeeling, resulting in angry Gorkha mobs, engaged in clashes with the authorities. To keep the situation from worsening, the army had to be called, following which GJM announced a 12-hour strike on the 10th of June. After two days of the shutdown, GJM announced another strike from the 12th of June which was to be implemented indefinitely in Darjeeling.

During this indefinite lockdown, the Gorkhas of Darjeeling could be seen participating in numerous rallies, chanting slogans such as *‘We want*

Gorkhaland’ and *‘Jai Gorkha’*. Sometimes, these rallies also turned violent with the locals clashing with the police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CPRF), deployed to maintain peace. Politically, GJM had become the supreme party in Darjeeling. Led by the ‘charismatic’ Gurung, GJM had become the most popular it had perhaps ever been, rallying almost complete support from the Gorkhas of Darjeeling. Also, setting their differences aside, other prominent parties of Darjeeling such as the GNLF and the Jana Andolan Party (JAP), lent their support to Gurung and the GJM.

In response to this, the government started pouring in more security forces in Darjeeling to try and control the situation. Numerous police raids were carried out in the residences of party personnel, including Gurung himself. As an additional measure, internet services were also blocked in the Darjeeling Hills as an attempt to stop the movement from spreading further. However, these measures only angered the Gorkhas more, who now intensified their agitation, leading the government to issue a look-out notice against Gurung and some of his associates under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

BEGINNING OF THE END

Although the agitation started strong, the continuing shutdown without any major positive outcome seemed to have weakened the resolve of the people. With the tourist season approaching, this shutdown became an inconvenience for the Gorkhas of Darjeeling, most of whom are very dependent on tourists for their livelihood. The people along with the parties themselves started to question the relevance of the shutdown. GNLF even announced its readiness to engage in peace talks with the government, ignoring GJM’s decision to only engage in tripartite talks between the Centre, State and the parties of the Hills.

Cracks had started to appear within GJM itself. As a result of internal disagreements, Binay Tamang, the General Secretary, and leader Anit Thapa, who had an overwhelming influence over the Gorkha youth, were ousted from the party when they decided to announce a partial relaxation of the shutdown. However, calling this expulsion “unconstitutional,” the leaders instead strengthened their hold in the party, leading to a split in GJM - one faction was

led by Bimal Gurung, who at this point had gone into hiding due to his look-out notice, and the other faction led by Binay Tamang and Anit Thapa.

Following this development, the 'Binay Faction' of GJM went on to have 'positive talks' with the TMC government. Additionally, Banerjee appointed Binay Tamang as the Board of Administrators for carrying out development activities in the Darjeeling Hills. Thus, after engaging in various peace talks with the government, the shutdown was finally called off after a whopping 104 days.

AFTERMATH

The end of the 104-day Gorkhaland agitation signaled a new era of politics in the Darjeeling Hills. GJM, which had proved itself to be the most dominant party in Darjeeling, was now split into two factions. This meant that other parties such as the GNLF, JAP and the Gorkha League which had previously been sidelined, were once again in the limelight.

With Bimal Gurung still in hiding, his popularity began to wane, as the trust that he built among the Gorkhas seemed to have been broken. This further meant the rise in popularity of Binay Tamang and Anit Thapa who now had major control over the politics in the Hills. This Binay Faction went on to dominate the GJM, as the Bimal Faction seemed to fade away along with Gurung's relevance.

Also, TMC was now able to effectively set up its board in Mirik, with L.B. Rai, who had previously left GJM to join TMC before the start of this agitation, being thus elected as the Chairman. With the TMC coming to power in Mirik, it gained popularity and spread its support base all over the Darjeeling Hills. Later, GJM (Binay faction) even announced its decision to work in tandem with TMC to bring about more development in the hills.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

One effective method to look into the current political scenario in Darjeeling, would be to analyze the trends with respect to elections in Darjeeling. It must be first noted that the support of the GJM has proven to be crucial for any party to win in the Darjeeling Hills, as it was evident in the 2009 and 2014 Lok Sabha elections, wherein both times BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) candidates were elected as a result of GJM lending them their support. Additionally, in the Assembly elections, the GJM won three out of the five Assembly seats in Darjeeling, first in 2011, and in 2016 again.

Following the 2017 agitation however, the situation seemed to have changed, as the Binay faction of the GJM extended its support to the TMC, while the Gurung faction was still on the side of the BJP. Therefore, just when the TMC seemed to have the upper hand, the situation turned out to be the inverse as the BJP retained the Darjeeling seat in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, with its candidate Raju Bista being elected.

First, these trends clearly show how the BJP as a political party has gained prominence in Darjeeling, solidifying itself as a major political player, and against all odds being able to hold onto its political significance, as is evident from the fact that it was still able to win over two Assembly seats and all five Assembly constituencies in Darjeeling in the 2021 polls. However, it also must be mentioned how the Central government (BJP) is starting to face some obstacles with respect to its popularity, as people in the Darjeeling Hills have started to question the party's promise to find a permanent political solution for the Gorkhas. In fact, it was this growing discontentment of the public that forced Bimal Gurung himself to break ties with the BJP in 2021, to extend his support to the TMC in the Assembly elections.

Next, to comment on TMC, after winning the seat in Mirik in 2017 polls, the party has been able to effectively run the Mirik Municipality for one term, continuing to spread its influence, while also clashing with the Centre, trying to contain the spread of the BJP in the Hills. TMC has also been able to work with the local parties, alongside recruiting numerous well known political personnel of Darjeeling such as former GJM MLA Rohit Sharma and even Binay Tamang himself, who joined TMC in late 2021 (Singh, 2021).

Recently, new political parties have been formed in Darjeeling due to the changed political scenario. In 2021 Anit Thapa launched his political party called the 'Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha' (BGPM), followed by Ajoy Edwards who launched the 'Hamro Party' which can be translated to 'Our Party.' It is to be noted how Edwards, who is the owner of Darjeeling's renowned Glenary's restaurant and also a well-known philanthropist, has come into prominence as a major political personality in the Darjeeling Hills, especially after the 2021 Assembly Elections of West Bengal, rallying major support from the Gorkha youth in Darjeeling.

To further comment on the current political scenario of the Darjeeling Hills, and the Gorkhas of West Bengal in general, a vacuum has seemingly emerged regarding the leadership. Although Bimal Gurung was able to return to the Darjeeling Hills, his popularity and prominence seem to have significantly declined. Also, his stance and agenda seem to have been toned down, as could be reflected by examining one of his speeches from April 2021, where he asked for an extension of the GTA to the Dooars and Terai, instead of any emotive calls for Gorkhaland (Lama, 2021).

The State government (TMC) has come to be a major player in Darjeeling, wherein it has managed to rally most of the prominent Gorkha leaders behind it (Chowdhury, 2021). As most local political parties seem to have become somewhat unstable, other parties such as the GNLF struggle with leadership and organized plans of action. Not only does this mean that there is virtually no strong local political party that the Gorkhas can rely on and pour their support and aspirations into, but the people have also been divided in their support for these different political parties which are now mainstreamed and mostly fighting against each other to come out on top and become the next party that reigns supreme over the Darjeeling Hills.

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Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Indian Economy: An Overview

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Second Year (UG), Roll No. - 140

ABSTRACT

In this article, an attempt has been made to investigate the economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) in India. The motivation behind this is to provide an overview of the loss that occurred in different sectors of the Indian economy to have a better understanding of the issues related to governance.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 which was a new strain of SARS-CoV-2 which rose from Wuhan city of China in December 2019 was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization¹. It had created an environment of instability and unemployment was on the rise. Economic disturbances were extreme in the developing countries of the world and India was no exception. GDP shrank by 7.3% in 2020-21.

India initially had to proclaim a one day “Janata curfew” in March 2020. From there on, a complete lockdown for 21 days was imposed and extended for an additional 19 days and thereafter it broadened with minor relaxations. From June 1 2020, many relaxations were given to proceed with the economic activities. Even if the relaxations were given after a complete halt, an unprecedented loss had already occurred and the economy was shaken badly.

1. World Health Organization Coronavirus (Covid-19) dashboard
<https://covid19.who.int/>

India was under a severe crisis. According to Raghuram Rajan (former RBI Governor)² “This is the greatest emergency for the Indian economy since independence.” This was said to be worse than the economic crisis of 2008, which affected the demand. 2020 was way too different as the Covid 19 pandemic made everyone homebound, leading to forced wage cuts and retrenchments by private agencies. Almost all countries of the world were affected similarly due to the virus in terms of demand-supply shocks and disruptions. India has already had an economic downturn. In Pre-Covid era India was encountering with major macroeconomic issues like a near recession with the sluggish GDP growth rate of 4.7% in 2019 which was the lowest since 2013 (as indicated by the official statistics), high unemployment rate, decline in industrial output of core sectors-the worst in 14 years, stagnancy in private sector investment, decline in consumption expenditure for the first time in several decades. The informal sector of India, the largest in the world, employs nearly 90% of the total working population and contributes more than 45% in overall GDP had been hit by two major reforms, one due to demonetization in 2016 and the other caused by the GST in 2017.

The financial sector was severely affected by the crisis, such as the Twin Balance Sheet (TBS) and high levels of Non-Performing Assets (NPA). Twin Balance Sheet deals with the two balance sheet problems, one with the Indian companies having a high debt accumulation and the other with the Indian Banks. The first reason is the debt accumulation on companies is very high and thus they are unable to pay interest payments on loans and the NPA of the banks which is 9% for the total banking system in India. In the private corporate sector too, firms were financially weak and over-leveraged³. Problems like the IL&FS crisis, decline in commercial credit of around 90% during FY2020(Q1)⁴ etc. With the emergence of such a deadly disease, a new set of challenges were

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2. Raghuram Rajan predicts Covid-19 pandemic worse than 2008-09 financial crisis <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/covid-19-pandemic-worse-than-2008-09-financial-crisis-imf/articleshow/75161296.cms?from=mdr>
 3. Sengupta, R., & Vardhan, H. (2019). Banking crisis is impeding India's economy. In East Asia Forum (Vol. 3). [Google Scholar]
 4. Reserve Bank imposes moratorium on banks <https://www.livemint.com/industry/banking/rbi-imposes-moratorium-on-yes-bank-caps-withdrawals-at-rs-50-000-sources-11583421982753.html>
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ready for India both in the short and long-run. Improvement of the current situation requires major changes like advanced policy interventions including healthcare infrastructure, livelihood of the marginal sections of the population amongst others. An innovative method for financing the deficit by Chakraborty and Thomas is the "helicopter money" that will help in incurring the deficit and would put the economy back on track.

Every sector of the economy was affected negatively, a detailed analysis has been done on the same, under the following headings.

PRIMARY SECTOR

To curb the spread of Covid-19, a total lockdown had to be imposed. It coincided with the peak of the harvesting season of Rabi crops in India, mainly in the north-west, which posed significant losses to the farmers. Relaxations were given to the agricultural sector during the lockdown but transport constraints, mobility restrictions and lack of labour due to reverse-migration of labor to their native places were the major problems faced by the farmers. Farmers in Maharashtra called it a worse situation than that which occurred during the demonetization in 2016⁵. Before this pandemic, the rural economy of India was witnessing a decline in income of mainly casual workers along with declining rural wages. A ray of hope was seen in January 2020 when food prices started rising but all hopes collapsed with the new crisis⁶.

Agriculture and allied activities are not a homogeneous group of activities, in fact, an umbrella of different activities having different dynamics. The impact of Covid-19 on this sector varied according to the set of activities, that is, on crops, livestock, fisheries, and so forth. Horticulture and foodgrains

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production, a part of crops, was impacted differently. Horticulture faced the burnt more because of perishability whereas food grains are non-perishable and apart from problems in harvesting and labor shortage, was not impacted much. Rabi harvesting went well and a Minimum Support Price (MSP) hike was announced for the kharif crops which assured farmers a 50-83% return on their production cost. With declining demand and reduction in export of fruits and vegetables, horticulture was hit hard. Similarly, floriculture was also affected because of fewer demands as the religious places were shut, marriages postponed, and so on and so forth. In livestock (milk, meat, eggs), milk suffered huge losses due to its perishability, meat and eggs had a tough time, due to the restrictions imposed by various states of the country.

Fishing and aquaculture suffered, food grains and livestock witnessed a low impact, and horticulture medium, relatively. Agriculture had a bright spot in India amid the Covid-19 crisis and CRISIL (a S&P company) expected agriculture to grow at a rate of 2.5% in FY2021. (CRISIL)⁷.

SECONDARY SECTOR

The manufacturing sector is a major contributor to the GDP and employment, has been recognized as an engine for vibrant growth and creator of the nation's wealth (Rele).The manufacturing sector is important in the way that it has strong linkages with other sectors, any impact on the supply chain will subsequently affect other sectors as well. Overall, the manufacturing sector is going to be affected badly by demand-supply disruptions and global value supply chains.

Automotive sector, which contributes 50% in this sector, was already suffering before Covid-19 due to low consumer demand, inadequate credit facilities, and more problems due to the Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) crisis. According to the latest assessment related to the impact of Covid-19 done by Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), the sector is expected to

7. CRISIL (2020). Quickonomics: The one bright spot in the economy. CRISIL, An S&P Global Company.

have a decline between 22% and 35% in various industry segments conditioned with GDP growth of 0-1 % for FY2021, said Rajan Wadhera, President, SIAM⁸.

Decades have passed by, China emerged as the epicenter of manufacturing accounting for one-third of total manufacturing over the world. Post the outbreak of the virus, countries around the globe were seen to be inclined towards finding alternatives to Chinese manufactured goods, in hope of cheaper labour and resources. It is time for India to utilize this golden opportunity to introduce “Make In India” globally, which was launched way back in 2014 to transform India into a global manufacturing hub. There is huge potential in India as labour is cheap and raw materials readily available. If proper measures are taken to boost the manufacturing sector, India has the potential of emerging as a new manufacturing hub surpassing China.

The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) altogether form a significant share of manufacturing in India and play a crucial role in providing employment opportunities and also in the country’s exports. MSMEs contribute 30% to India's GDP and 50% in the employment of industrial workers. This sector also has issues like the absence of adequate timely and affordable institutional credit. Although all the business sectors are affected due to the pandemic, it was badly hit due to reduced cash flows, supply chain disruptions, shortage of migrant workers due to reverse migration and subverted demand. Like China, India also was expected to have major damages in these sectors with more challenges to small firms as compared with upstream ones⁹.

It is not easy to restart MSMEs once they are shut down¹⁰. India’s Sherpa to the G20 also said that small industries were most vulnerable and it was difficult for them to survive without financial assistance because of their incapacibilities to deal with sudden disruptions.

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8. SIAM says auto sector left out in economic package <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/auto/auto-news/siam-says-auto-sector-left-out-in-eco-package/articleshow/75806003.cms?from=mdr>
 9. Dev, S. M., & Sengupta, R. (2020). Covid-19: Impact on the Indian economy. Mumbai: Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research. [Google Scholar]
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TERTIARY/SERVICE SECTOR

The financial sector which has the most important role to play in crisis times has also been witnessing huge problems in India like Twin Balance Sheet (TBS), high levels of non performing assets (NPAs) and an inadequately capitalized banking system. In the private corporate sector too, firms were financially weak and over-leveraged. (Sengupta & Vardhan)¹¹. Many problems like IL&FS crisis, decline in commercial credit of around 90% in FY2020-first half, and a near-demise of a well-known and reputed private bank-Yes Bank, and so forth.

To what extent the financial market will be affected depends on the severity and longevity of the crisis, effectiveness of the implementation of fiscal and monetary policies and central bank's reactions¹². There was no such impact on the banking sector, as the banks were on the forefront of public attention; the indirect impact of several other sectors that are hit by the pandemic is likely to cast its shadow on the banks and other financial institutions. Banks are the major sources of help in times of crisis, therefore when all other sectors are hit badly, banks also face the brunt. The already existing problems in the financial sector are expected to multiply due to this draconian crisis. The stock market has also seen the worst in March 2020, due to the lockdown and collapse of various business activities.

It was suggested that around one-third of industrial and services firms had applied for moratorium which would help them in delaying repayment on their bank loans. The stock of non-performing assets (NPAs) may increase by Rs.5 lakh crore even if only a quarter of these were deferred eventually and it is a conservative estimate. Senior bank officials have been quoted as estimating

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10. Chidambaram, P. (2020, May 4). We will never know how many people died of starvation, because no state government will admit to starvation deaths. The Indian Express.<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/p-chidambaram-india-coronavirus-lockdown-migrants-hunger-6390882/>
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that the stock of NPAs could increase by as much as Rs 9 lakh crore¹³. In this case, NPAs of Rs 18 lakh crore, equivalent to around 18% of current loans outstanding. For planning purposes, it is worth considering who would pay for such losses, if they do materialize.

Other important dimensions of the service sector like aviation, transport, travel, and tourism were worst hit not only in India, but globally. The loss to this sector too will be based on the severity and longevity of the crisis. A report by KPMG¹⁴ indicated that around 38 million job losses are expected in India's tourism and hospitality industry.

RAYS OF HOPE

India has to prioritize economic expansion and sustainability for sustained growth and influence on the world stage. The world is now coming to terms with the disruptions caused by the virus. Indeed, rays of recovery are beginning to emerge. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicts that the global economy would grow by 6% in 2021 and forecasted that the Indian economy will grow at a rate of 9.5%. Exponential growth can also be seen in digital services and infrastructure, from the adoption of large-scale work-from-home arrangements to the use of cloud services and videoconferencing.

BRINGING THE ECONOMY BACK ON TRACKS

Various fiscal and monetary policy measures were undertaken and announced by the Reserve Bank of India but prominent economists are of the view that more spending is needed by the government regardless of the GDP numbers

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13. Subramanian, A., & Felman, J. (2020). With Covid-19 crisis dealing sharp blow to struggling financial sector, revival calls for new approach. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-economy-npa-covid-19-arvind-subramanian-josh-felman-6400664/>
 14. KPMG Survey findings
<https://scroll.in/article/959045/indias-covid-19-lockdown-may-cause-38-million-job-losses-in-the-travel-and-tourism-industry>
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and fiscal deficit. More attention is needed towards the vulnerable sections of the society and sectors, especially the poor. MSMEs and the non-essential commodities sector are worst hit in this demand contraction due to the pandemic. Unique, inclusive and innovative measures were the need of the hour. In order to begin afresh, economic packages were introduced by the Prime Minister of India was the Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan or Self Reliant India is an economic package introduced by the honorable Prime Minister of India Narendra Damodardas Modi. On 12 May 2020 a clarion call was raised by the prime minister, to kickstart the Self- reliant India campaign. A special economic and comprehensive package of Rs 20 lakh crores- equivalent to 10% of India's GDP to fight Covid-19 pandemic in India. The research, development and manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines was connected to *atmanirbharta* by the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, and other Union Ministers in separate statements. PM Modi had stated that "Made in India " vaccines are a symbol of Atmanirbhar Bharat".¹⁵

The aim is to make the country and its citizens independent and self-reliant in all senses. It was further outlined into five pillars of Atmanirbhar Bharat – Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand. The finance ministry further introduced Government Reforms across Seven Sectors under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan.

The government took several bold reforms such as Supply Chain Reforms for Agriculture, Rational Tax Systems, Simple & Clear Laws, Capable Human Resource and Strong Financial System.

Two more rounds of this package were announced on 12 October and 12 November respectively in order to boost scope for production and private sector participation in numerous sectors under the label of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan 2.0 and Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan 3.0. The growth of India's personal protective equipment (PPE) sector from limited numbers before

15. What is Atmanirbhar Bharat all about?https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atmanirbhar_Bharat

March 2020, to 4,50,000 pieces a day by the beginning of July 2020, is considered as a fine example of a self-reliant India. The PPE industry in India emerged as a Rs.10,000 crores industry within three months, which was the second largest after China. The Ministry of Consumer affairs, food and public distribution issued a statement regarding food ration and welfare of migrants under the ambit of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The importance of education and research was recognized for self reliance. the new National Education Policy of India was once again connected to creating an Atmanirbhar Bharat, many of the educational bodies like All India Council for Technical Education also focussed on 'swabhasha' that is to read and write in one's own mother tongue and not making medium of instruction English as a compulsion in both school and university level.

In August 2020, the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced that the Defence Ministry was ready for a big push to Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative by imposing import prohibitions on dozens of military items in a staged manner over a period of 5 years, A third list was released in December 2021 New legislation which has been launched are portrayed as initiatives towards increased self reliance. A new category of procurement was created – Indian-IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured). Reform of the Ordnance Factory Board and giving the new defence Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) units large scale orders is a push towards military self-reliance. Various equipment under Indian-IDDM has been handed over to the military.

Targets for self-reliance in fertilizer production by 2023 have been announced. Government backed events to provide for the implementation and promotion of self-reliance and associated slogans such as 'vocal for local' have materialized in the form of the country's first national toy fair which was digitally launched in February 2021. The phrase was also connected to the 2021, and 2022 Union Budget of India.

Both the Union Budgets of 2021 & 2022 were linked with the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. In the budget of 2021, the government along with the Reserve Bank of India had invested an estimated Rs 27.1 lakh crore and that was 13% of the overall GDP of the country. According to the Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitharaman, the contraction in the economy was due to the global pandemic and the government was prepared to support and facilitate economic reset, which would help the economy in gaining momentum. The atmanirbhar scheme would always focus on strengthening existing infrastructure, doubling farmers' income, good governance, opportunity for youth, women empowerment and other developments. The atmanirbhar packages that were announced on May 12 2020, were mini budgets in itself.¹⁶

The Union Budget of 2022 was the booster dose to the Indian economy, it supported the vision of self-reliant India and Make in India as well. A whole lot of changes were made in the custom duties on import of goods into India. The concessional rate of customs duty on import of capital goods is proposed to be withdrawn in a phased manner. The Project Import Scheme providing concessional rates on specified projects will be available up till 10 September, 2022. If the contracts are registered with the customs officer till 30 September, 2022, then the imports can be affected at a concessional rate till 30 September 2023. Post-the expiry of the period, Basic Customs Duty will be paid at the rate of 7.5 percent. Further, customs duty exemptions on multiple products were withdrawn. The amendments under the Customs legislation would increase the cost of imports; consequently, it is likely to provide a boost to manufacturing within the country. The GST amendments will further make the compliance process robust. Reduction in non-compliance added with the boost in the manufacturing sector will further enhance revenue collections.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Covid-19 pandemic has incurred unprecedented loss globally but India being a developing country, the magnitude is likely to be in every sector is likely to be

16. Budget 2021: FM reiterates focus on Atmanirbhar Bharat in the budget; says govt. ready to facilitate economic reset <https://www.financialexpress.com/budget/budget-2021-fm-reiterates-focus-on-atma-nirbhar-bharat-in-budget-says-govt-ready-to-facilitate-economic-reset/2183794/>

17. Budget 2022: Govt provides booster dose to economy; <https://www.firstpost.com/business/union-budget-2022-budget-2022-govt-provides-booster-dose-to-economy-supports-vision-of-atmanirbhar-bharat-10343701.html#:~:text=Business->

disproportionate. Agriculture and allied sectors have been hit disproportionately alongside horticulture. Manufacturing sector, especially the MSMEs suffered more losses due to global supply chain disruptions. Moreover, the service sector being the key driver of economic growth and the largest contributor to GDP growth has been hit hard due to various restrictions on mobility, halting tourism and hospitality sector for the time being, very few transport activities and shutdown of schools/colleges, and so forth. Already existing poverty and inequality is likely to be on the rise with major negative impacts on migrants. The Atmanirbhar Bharat will guide the country towards self-reliance. Robust economic measures and tax exemptions to the middle class would help in leading a quality life, this would automatically boost the demand of production and prices will fall. Income Tax returns have to be more flexible, so that the taxpayers can pay the taxes at ease. Focus should be on collecting a one time tax with rates fixed for different classes of people according to their yearly income instead of taxing on individual commodities, the burden of the middle class purchasing commodities would certainly come down. The quality of foodgrains have to be improved in the Public Distribution Scheme and proper monitoring has to be done on allocation of funds and the type of foodgrains provided to the PDS card holders. Economic packages for the startups being introduced, many are not getting the benefit as the process to get the benefit is way too difficult and time consuming and these startups are not getting.

The main focus now should be on local manufacturing, we as citizens should prefer home made products. This is the time when the country could recuperate from the current Covid-19 pandemic, this would help the Indian economy to be in the top ten economies of the world. Self-confidence begets self-reliance. But it cannot be accomplished with apathy and lack of societal ownership. Perhaps nationalism in the true spirit should withhold us from continuously seeking to feed our inner beasts.

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Condition of Indian Women After 75 years of Independence

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First Year (UG), Roll No. - 172

ABSTRACT

This year the country celebrates its 75th year of independence but the condition of women with regard to safety has remained way back. This paper looks at the various forms of violence against women that are still prevalent in India and takes a bird's eye view of the government's initiative to uplift the condition of women and their effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

We have been acquainted by the epics like Mahabharata that in India women have been often understood as an 'object of pleasure'. From the episode of Draupadi's "vastraharan" in the Kuru court to the recent case at Hathras, the condition of women has remained very disappointing. In a recent survey by the National Family Health Survey [NFHS] it was seen that the sex ratio of women has improved and is 1002 women per 1000 male. This was only one part of the story as it was found out that the sex ratio at birth was still skewed negatively. It was further found that the rural sex ratio is better than the urban, with Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman Diu being the worst performers in the urban areas with 775 women per 1000 men and Delhi being the worst in case of rural compared to all other states. The real question is has there been any development in the condition of women after so many years of independence?

Mrs Smriti Irani on an issue relating to women safety had delivered a ferocious speech in the Parliament against Azam Khan's derogatory comment on women. It seems that the ferocious speeches limit themselves to the doors of the Sansad. For instance the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was

passed in 2005 but in 2021 there have been 3582 cases reported in the months of April 2021 and June 2021. The law though enacted still could not curb the issue of rising cases during the pandemic. In a recent survey by the Bhartiya Stree Shakti under the guidance of the Ministry of Women and Child Development stated that many women who go alone to register cases of domestic violence complain of facing harassment from the authorities. The Internal Complaints Committee [ICC] that was established under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 also has many flaws in it as highlighted in the *Ruchika Singh Chhabra v. Air France India* and another by the High Court which stated that the external member of the committee did not have the required qualification and the proceedings of the ICC were not considered which affected the process of delivering justice by the court.

FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOCIETY

There has been various forms of violence against women in India since time immemorial. There are various reasons why the victims could not get speedy justice or what influenced the victim to raise or not to raise her voice against the wrong.

The UN describes domestic violence as a pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain one's power in a relationship which can be in many forms such as physical, emotional, psychological etc. In India it was found that physical abuse was more frequently practiced as a form of domestic violence before that of sexual abuse and psychological abuse. In India there have been 3748 cases of domestic violence against women according to the National Legal Services Authority report (2020). According to IPC 498A domestic violence is defined as a form of violence which is mainly women centric. It reads as "Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty. – Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine". The tragedy of India is we have many leaders like Smriti Irani, Harsimrat Kaur Badal who fight for the rights of the women among other things in the parliament but the ordinary women are

seldom seen raising their voice for their own rights within their own house. The fact is not that it's only the women of the lower strata of the society who face these forms of violence but also prevalent in the upper classes. It was reported by the wife of a famous cricketer that she was a victim of domestic violence being perpetrated by her in-laws. The act of violence is not only found inter class but also intra class. A total of 3582 cases of domestic violence had been reported between April and May 2021 which is less than that in 2020. In the first quarter of the lockdown period it was reported by the National Legal Service Authority that there were 144 cases of domestic violence in Uttarakhand only. Many researchers have found out that economic stress and domestic violence are directly proportional to each other. In the 2020 lockdown there were many who lost their jobs and by the end of May 2020 we see a huge rise in domestic violence cases being reported. Total 5297 cases of domestic violence had been reported in 2020. Many women also lost their jobs and their economic dependence on their husband forced them not to raise their voice against the wrongs done to them. One strand of opinion holds that women do not tend to complain about the matter to the authorities because they lack economic and other resources. The societal aspect plays an important role here because in India a separated woman is treated with indignity. Underreporting is a major problem in India which is due to personal as well as social factors. The social factors include women being looked down upon by their own relatives and many a times economic dependance forces her not to report as she does not have the means to livelihood. In spite of there being a considerable rise in literacy and economic independence among women, these factors still continue to affect their lives.

Rape has been described as not an act of sex but an act of violence with sex as a primary weapon which may lead one to a wide variety of physical and psychological reactions. Rape is seen as an act of power, anger and dominance over the helpless. This can be best understood in some cases like the Mathura Rape Case in 1972 where a 16 year old tribal girl named Mathura from Maharashtra was raped by a police constable near the police station itself but she did not receive justice as the Apex court stated that there was lack of evidences on her body. The two finger test that was conducted to find out she whether she was raped or not by the authorities is unscientific and illegal in India. The Supreme Court ruled that it may be that the girl was the one who

seduced the two policemen and did not give any concrete judgement. In 2020 a similar instance took place in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh where a 19 year old Dalit girl was raped by 4 men of the upper caste. Her family also could not receive justice since she was cremated without their information and the mismanagement by the police muddled the waters. This is also an example of caste based crime against women. The accused in the Mathura case was a policeman so there may have been an instance that he had used his authority and power in the process of judgement. In the second case also the accused was a man with a lot of power. Be it 1972 or 2020 due to the slow judgement procedure in the country the victims and their families have to wait for justice. In 2012 when a 22 year old girl was gang raped in a moving bus then the whole country rose in protest with candle marches. Starting from late Sushma Swaraj to Meira Kumari protested against it. She commented "The laws at present are not enough, we need stricter laws". On 22nd December 2012 Justice Verma Committee was constituted to make some changes in the then prevailing laws. But sadly the girl did not live up to see the verdict of her case where the accused were given death penalty by the court. Requests to reduce the age of being juvenile from 18 to 16 was rejected by the committee. The committee gave many recommendations such as a rape crisis cell should be set up, all policemen on duty are bound to help the rape victims, all police stations should have a CCTV camera in interrogation rooms and all and also stated to amend Representation of People Act 1951. It also recommended including sex education in school curriculums. Some of the recommendations by the committee were implemented in the Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013 but many suggestions were not implemented. A petition filed in 2020 stated that the recommendations made by the committee in 2013 were not still implemented after 7 years. However, initiatives are not altogether missing. The police department has set up "Nirbhaya" teams of women officers who do night patrolling on roads. There has been more number of registrations of FIR against rape and sexual assault after 2012 according to Delhi police.

In another case known as the Bhanwari Devi case, the accused remained free from rape charges. Further bruises were not recorded and tests were conducted after only 52 hours where it is supposed to be done within 24 hours of the act. Time elapsed in conducting tests by the authorities cost her justice. However, the case forced the Supreme Court to formulate guidelines to tackle sexual

harassment in workplaces. In the Park Street rape case also the accused received 10 years imprisonment and a fine of rupees 1 lakh.

Marital Rape is another concept which is not considered of importance in India. Marital rape is considered legal in India in the sense that IPC Section 375 states that "Sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under eighteen years of age, is not rape." Society believes that this will shake the pillars of matrimony if made illegal. Cases have been filed in the Supreme Court but it has refused to remove the exception. Out of the many recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee that was not implemented the "exception of marital rape" was one. Present Vice President Mr. Venkaiah Naidu said that "the entire family system will be in great stress" if marital rape is criminalised. It is a common belief in Indian society that when a woman enters into a marital relationship with a man she surrenders her personhood and rights. According to World Bank our very neighbour Nepal has criminalised marital rape. 1236 cases of rape or attempt to rape has been lodged in 2020. The "Me Too" movement in 2016 proved that economic difference, caste etc are not the only causes of rape or sexual harassment. Many well established film stars of Bollywood lodged cases of Me Too against many prominent personalities of the country.

The female literacy rate was 70.30% in 2021 and the number of official dowry deaths in India was around 7000 in 2020. The way in which the institutions impart education seems to be not so effective because the ordinary women except a few are not aware of their rights and do not stand for their rights. Education is given to people to make them aware of what is right and what is wrong. But there is an exception to the case where in March 2021 though Ayesha Banu, an MA in economics and economically independent woman, had to commit suicide due to the physical torture she faced at her in laws due to lack of dowry her parents had lodged a complaint regarding domestic violence and demand for dowry against her in laws in 2019. Ayesha Banu had a miscarriage due to domestic violence. This shows that being educated and being socially independent helped Ayesha to raise her voice against the wrong Her husband was booked under Art 360. The government has made laws with a minimum imprisonment of 7 years. But along with that there are many false cases of dowry harassment and domestic violence and as a result of which the justice for the original cases are slowed down.

India has a skewed sex ratio which is largely responsible because of sex selective birth. It is mainly prevalent in the North Indian states. Socially boys have been attributed more importance in the society because they are the ones who will take the family name forward and are also eligible to do the last rites of the parents according to Hindu tradition.. In India where 70.30% women are literate the country still faces the major issue of female foeticide. Though female foeticide is illegal it is still practised in nooks and corners of the country because both the parties i.e the patient and the doctor adhere to similar male-centric beliefs or are often forced to remain silent with bribes. Many programmes have also been implemented by the government to stop this but there are also various loopholes in it. This imbalance in sex ratio has also led to the concept of bride buying in certain states especially Haryana, Punjab and Jharkhand.

In the famous MH Ahmed Khan v/s Shah Bano Case there was a lot of controversy regarding that the courts can or cannot interfere in the Muslim Personal Law or not. Mrs Bano in 1978 filed a petition demanding maintenance from her husband who had separated from her. Her husband's argument in the court was supported by All India Muslim Personal Law Board and it added that the courts decision that he has to pay her a maintenance would violate the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. Chief Justice Chandrachud had upheld the decision of the High Court that maintenance should be given. The Rajiv Gandhi government passed the Muslim Women Act 1986 which stated that maintenance period can only be made for the iddat period.

In 2017 the Supreme Court stated that the concept of triple talaq where a man can divorce his wife by saying talaq 3 times and need not give any reason for the divorce was violative of Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. Soon after that the Muslim Women's Act 2019 was passed by the legislature which legalized the verdict. This has reduced the cases by 82%. However, cases have not all gone down. There has been around 55 cases of triple talaq in Hyderabad itself in 2020 and 2021 even after the Triple Talaq Bill was passed in 2019.

CONCLUSION

On 15th August 2022 India will be celebrating its 75th year of independence but has the condition of women really improved? In 1972 as well as in 2020 the victim of a rape case could not get her justice mismanagement by the authorities, slow judicial system, the time lapse between the actual incident and the FIR being lodged leading to delay in the following processes etc. This year the country is celebrating “Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav” but are the women in a condition or situation to celebrate with regard to their safety. Be it 1972 or 2020 justice for a rape victim is still awaited. The horrific Nirbhaya case which shook the organs of the government took around 7 years to get judgement. But after the Nirbhaya incident there has been changes in the Rape laws in the country but at a cost of 2 college students. In 2021 women are getting divorced by the triple talaq process. India launched 'Mangalyan' few years back but has the real condition of women improved?. Air India had an all women crew flight, the navy has many women in it now but in the same India there lies a girl who is killed before she is born. The Government of India has made many laws and provisions in the Constitution such as Article 14,15,16,39{a}{d}, 42 etc. Many acts have been passed like the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 etc but all have not been adequately implemented. It is also the mindset of the people and the society that needs to be changed. Cash Transfer and overall girl child development programmes like Balika Samriddhi Yojana, Sukanya Samriddhi Account, Delhi Ladli Scheme, etc money was given to the people for the education of girl child in many cases. Certain programs failed because the schemes mainly focused on the lower strata of the society and not women as a whole in the society Violence against women is found in each and every strata of the society. In an individual research by a DU professor it was found that the cash transfer of Delhi Ladli scheme was saved for marriage and not education. Seats have been reserved for women in local self government bodies to give them adequate representation. From getting taunted in public places to facing acid attacks and various other crimes it is the women that face it all. The Government of India launched the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' yojana for the educational and social development of women. The Government of West Bengal has also launched the 'Kanyashree yojana' aiming the same. This is done because it is believed that if the girls are educated enough then they will stand for themselves and education broadens the horizon of mind. The Beti Bachao

Beti Padhao has been successful in the sense that women literacy rate has increased considerably. Let us hope that in the near future a country with utmost reverence for Goddesses, will be a better place for a girl to live in.

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POCSO: Tussle between Consensual Sex and Child Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

Exploring and engaging in sexual acts with a romantic partner is a normal process of development among adolescents. However, in India, the whole aspect of an adolescent romantic relationship is policed by the complex interplay of sociocultural phenomena. Even from the legal point of view as given under the “POCSO Act”, the matter of consent remains a tug of war between the age-appropriate developmental needs and legal obligation for the children in India. Unfortunately, amidst this debate, the real cases of child sexual abuse are getting overshadowed and beclouded. There is an urgent need to address this issue, for protecting the best interest of the children from all forms of sexual exploitation and promoting their healthy development as sworn by the act. This article also explores the feminist standpoint on the sexual rights of a girl child and legislation in India.

A striking feature of the personal growth phase in adolescence is the formation of romantic relationships and sexual instincts towards the same or other sex. Adolescents strive for greater freedom and liberty in making their life choices, more so when it comes to selecting a romantic partner. However, they are often subjugated under the compulsions of deep-rooted socio-cultural conventions, especially during the selection of their spouses/ partners. This often compels adolescents to take recourse to ways such as eloping with their partners, sometimes leading to them being entrapped in the clutches of the legal framework and other complexities.

A decade has passed since the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, popularly known as the POCSO Act, was introduced in the Parliament, which determines the legal age of consent to 18 years, and prohibits any form of sexual engagement even in the context of romantic relationships. Consensual non-penetrative sexual acts such as hugging, kissing or intimate texting, among

or with minor adolescents are also criminalized under the POCSO Act. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019 introduced several amendments to safeguard children from sexual offences, sexual assault, and harassment. This amendment introduced new offences, such as ‘child pornography’ and widened the scope of punishment for ‘aggravated sexual assault’ with the inclusion of the death penalty, in the Act. Although a decade old, very few studies have been undertaken to discuss the sensitive nature of consensual sexual acts under the POCSO Act.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CSA) AND THE POCSO ACT:

The POCSO Act, 2012 is landmark legislation enacted in the country on November 14, 2012.¹⁸ This Act provided an extensive definition of child sexual abuse which include as follows:

- a. Penetrative sexual assault
- b. Aggravated penetrated sexual assault
- c. Sexual assault
- d. Aggravated sexual assault
- e. Sexual harassment
- f. Using a child for pornographic purposes
- g. Trafficking of children for sexual abuse.

The Act also incorporated special courts to determine the amount of compensation to be paid to the victim for their medical treatment and rehabilitation purposes. The POCSO Act, through its 46 provisions, has also increased the scope of reporting offenses against children, which was earlier not covered under the Indian Penal Code.

However, one cannot ignore that the POCSO Act does not recognize the evolving capacities of adolescents as it strictly defines a ‘child’ to be any person below the age of 18 years and does not recognize consent given by such a person. It criminalises any consensual sexual relationships between the subject

18. POCSO Act, 2012.pdf (wcd.nic.in)

and a child of similar age (or an adult). In other words, the law does not recognize the right to the sexuality of adolescents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although all feminists debate about empowered female sexuality, they often disagree about the definition of and path to empowered sexuality among adolescent girls. Feminist writers like Sharon Lamb and Zoe Peterson (Lamb & Peterson, 2011) have broached a significant discussion on adolescent girls' healthy sexuality under the rubric of sexual empowerment which includes adequate sexuality education and media literacy education. In discussions on adolescent girls' sexual subjectivity and empowerment within laws and legislations, the term 'adolescent' often is poorly defined. In certain cases, this may contribute to feminist disagreements about what is appropriate sexual exploration for adolescent girls. Further, Michelle Fine in her article "The Missing Discourse of Desire" (Fine, 1988) emphasises the anti-sex rhetoric of sex education and how school-based health clinics do very little to inflate the development of sexual responsibility and subjectivity in adolescents. She calls for the acknowledgement of possibilities concerning girls' desire, pleasure and sexual subjectivity. Fine's article has called upon the feminist researchers to not take this "missing(ness)" of female desire as evidence of a lack, but instead, as a social silence that is established early in life and reconstituted institutionally within the classrooms of the United States.

In South Asian societies, and especially in Indian, due to the collectivistic living, the socio-cultural values practised by the families largely influence the romantic ideologies. Although the concept is evolving, in most Indian communities adolescent romantic relationships are condemned as a taboo against the dignity and honour of the family, more so when social cleavages like religion, caste or class are involved. Indian feminist historian, Uma Chakravarti (Chakravarti, 2002) explain in her works that the idea behind arranged marriages in India is to incarcerate endogamy to arrest marriages outside the narrowly defined 'culture'. Evidently, adolescents face many dilemmas while forming a romantic relationship that is both developmentally appropriate as well as inheriting the so-called value system of the culture they are part of.

However, research studies assessing the grassroots experiences concerning this phenomenon are scarce in India.

CRIME STATISTICS UNDER THE POCSO ACT

For this paper, data pertaining to POCSO has been extracted from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Crime in India report, 2020. The NCRB data showcases that 47,221 cases under the POCSO Act were reported in 28 states and eight union territories across the country. The data also revealed that the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh reported the maximum cases – 6,898 cases of the POCSO Act, followed by Maharashtra with around 5,687 cases, Madhya Pradesh (5,648 cases), Tamil Nadu (3,090 cases) and West Bengal (2,657 cases). Among the Union Territories, Delhi recorded the most cases – 1197 cases, followed by Jammu & Kashmir.¹⁹

Data collected from the District Child Welfare Committee (CWC) also showed a 36.5% increase in the number of POCSO cases registered in the first seven months of 2021 when compared with the cases recorded in the whole of last year. The bench magistrate of CWC also reported that several cases under POCSO were related to sexual abuse and harassment through social media and are mainly targeted towards girls.

In a report published by Praja Foundation²⁰, the trial of 99% of cases under POCSO were pending till December 2020. It also claimed that in 2020, of the total IPC cases investigated, the charge sheet was filed in only 28% of cases, while the investigation in 58% cases of crimes against women and 56% of crimes against children were still incomplete. The Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation also published a report in March 2021, titled "Status of POCSO Cases in India" which also highlighted the incapacity of political institutions to ensure proper and effective implementation of the act to impart justice to the victims of sexual abuse.²¹

19. UP tops in sexual offences against children: NCRB data - Hindustan Times

20. 99% POCSO cases in courts pending trial in 2020: Praja report | India News, The Indian Express

21. Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2017-2019.pdf (satyarthi.org.in)

TABLE 4A.2 (ii)
SLL Crimes against Children (Crime Head-wise & States/UT-wise) - 2020 (Continued)

SL	State/UT	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) r/w Sec. 376, 354, 509 IPC											
		Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (Total)			Section 4 & 6 of POCSO Act or POCSO Act (Section 4 & 6) r/w Section 376 IPC								
					Section 4 & 6 of POCSO Act or POCSO Act (Section 4 & 6) r/w Section 376 IPC (Total)			A) Girls			B) Boys		
					I	V	R	I	V	R	I	V	R
[1]	[2]	[105]	[106]	[107]	[108]	[109]	[110]	[111]	[112]	[113]	[114]	[115]	[116]
STATES:													
1	Andhra Pradesh	454	461	3.0	272	276	1.8	271	274	1.8	1	2	0.0
2	Arunachal Pradesh	28	28	4.7	17	17	2.9	16	16	2.7	1	1	0.2
3	Assam	1496	1527	12.4	1049	1078	8.7	1049	1078	8.7	0	0	0.0
4	Bihar	1591	1593	3.3	628	628	1.3	628	628	1.3	0	0	0.0
5	Chhattisgarh	2049	2059	21.0	1535	1542	15.7	1534	1541	15.7	1	1	0.0
6	Goa	5	5	1.3	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
7	Gujarat	2345	2360	11.2	1871	1881	8.9	1871	1881	8.9	0	0	0.0
8	Haryana	1853	1857	20.3	1101	1103	12.1	1032	1034	11.3	69	69	0.8
9	Himachal Pradesh	5	5	0.2	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
10	Jharkhand	938	941	6.8	681	684	4.9	679	682	4.9	2	2	0.0
11	Karnataka	2104	2159	10.9	1601	1650	8.3	1598	1647	8.3	3	3	0.0
12	Kerala	2163	2209	23.0	1273	1289	13.5	1243	1259	13.2	30	30	0.3
13	Madhya Pradesh	5648	5670	19.6	3259	3262	11.3	3259	3262	11.3	0	0	0.0
14	Maharashtra	5687	5756	15.7	2785	2800	7.7	2785	2800	7.7	0	0	0.0
15	Manipur	75	76	7.3	55	56	5.3	55	56	5.3	0	0	0.0
16	Meghalaya	328	336	23.8	251	259	18.2	247	251	17.9	4	8	0.3
17	Mizoram	105	110	24.9	61	64	14.4	57	58	13.5	4	6	0.9
18	Nagaland	18	21	2.2	15	16	1.8	14	14	1.7	1	2	0.1
19	Odisha	2202	2202	15.3	1629	1629	11.3	1629	1629	11.3	0	0	0.0
20	Punjab	720	726	8.2	549	554	6.3	549	554	6.3	0	0	0.0
21	Rajasthan	244	244	0.9	2	2	0.0	1	1	0.0	1	1	0.0
22	Sikkim	98	100	47.6	70	72	34.0	70	72	34.0	0	0	0.0
23	Tamil Nadu	3090	3143	15.0	2229	2254	10.8	2205	2227	10.7	24	27	0.1
24	Telangana	2074	2096	18.2	1415	1429	12.4	1415	1429	12.4	0	0	0.0
25	Tripura	143	144	11.6	86	87	7.0	86	87	7.0	0	0	0.0
26	Uttar Pradesh	6898	6904	8.1	2630	2630	3.1	2533	2533	3.0	97	97	0.1
27	Uttarakhand	573	573	15.1	396	396	10.4	396	396	10.4	0	0	0.0
28	West Bengal	2657	2722	8.9	1541	1605	5.1	1522	1586	5.1	19	19	0.1
	TOTAL STATE(S)	45591	46027	10.5	27001	27263	6.2	26744	26995	6.2	257	268	0.1
UNION TERRITORIES:													
29	A&N Islands	118	118	105.1	105	105	93.5	104	104	92.6	1	1	0.9
30	Chandigarh	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
31	D&N Haveli and Daman & Diu	42	42	21.9	39	39	20.3	39	39	20.3	0	0	0.0
32	Delhi	1197	1199	21.6	721	721	13.0	721	721	13.0	0	0	0.0
33	Jammu & Kashmir	200	200	4.1	152	152	3.1	152	152	3.1	0	0	0.0
34	Ladakh	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
35	Lakshadweep	8	8	40.2	3	3	15.1	3	3	15.1	0	0	0.0
36	Puducherry	65	65	18.1	44	44	12.3	44	44	12.3	0	0	0.0
	TOTAL UT(S)	1630	1632	14.1	1064	1064	9.2	1063	1063	9.2	1	1	0.0
	TOTAL ALL INDIA	47221	47659	10.6	28065	28327	6.3	27807	28058	6.3	258	269	0.1

Col.105=Col.108+Col.117+Col.126+Col.135+Col.144+Col.153
Col.106=Col.109+Col.118+Col.127+Col.136+Col.145+Col.154
Col.108=Col.111+Col.114
Col.109=Col.112+Col.115

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● As per data provided by States/UTs ● States/UTs may not be compared purely on the basis of crime figures

Crime in India 2020 : NCRB

RECENT COURTROOM DEBATES ON APPLICATION OF PROVISIONS OF POCSO ACT

A recent ruling by the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court in January 2021, interpreting what constitutes a sexual assault with a minor under the POCSO Act, ruled that there must be a “skin-to-skin contact” with sexual intent, and that mere groping is insufficient. A single-judge bench of Justice Pushpa Ganediwala was hearing an appeal against the conviction in a case where the accused had allegedly taken a minor girl to his house and physically molested her while partially stripping her. The court attempted to consider whether physically molesting a child without removing apparel fall into the category of sexual assault under Section 7 of the POCSO Act, which defines sexual assault and articulates the punishment as well. Supreme Court advocate, Sobha Gupta argued that the judgement opened up an interesting debate as to what comprises ‘physical contact’ to qualify as an offense under Section 7 of the POCSO Act. She argued that expressions like ‘touch’ and ‘physical contact’ must be given a purposive interpretation to further and not frustrate the aim of the Section and the Act itself. Needless to mention, this verdict by the Court was met with protests and resistance on the part of women’s organizations, whereby the National Commission of Women (NCW) moved to the Supreme Court against the High Court verdict.

The Supreme Court in November 2021 ruled that ‘sexual intent’ and not ‘skin-to-skin contact’ is necessary for the application of Section 7 of the POCSO Act. The Court also pronounced that giving narrow and pedantic interpretations defeat the very purpose of the Act, especially when nearly 43,000 cases are being registered every year. Even the NCW welcomed this decision of the Supreme Court verdict, quashing the Bombay High Court judgement in the POCSO case.

ANALYSIS

There is no doubt that the POCSO Act being landmark legislation of India, stands out as a comprehensive measure to safeguard the rights and well-being of the children, with a well-set holistic framework. It stimulates a child-

enabling environment during the investigation and trial of offences, thereby helping the victim. The POCSO Act also promotes mandatory reporting, that is, if someone is aware of sexual offence committed against a child and does not report to the police, he or she will have committed an offence under the Act. Mandatory reporting has both pros and cons. While the good thing is that since a child may not be in a position to register an FIR against the alleged offender, it makes the adults responsible for children's welfare. But other problems may also arise, such as due to fear of registration of FIR, the child or child's family may not seek immediate assistance, such as medical attention or counseling. Further, despite the enactment of POCSO, the rate of Child Sexual Abuses (CSA) crimes is alarmingly increasing across. Moreover, granting that the child consensually participates in sexual activities naturally preclude the legal operability of the POCSO as binding law. It only becomes credibly active when one of the participants reports such activity. Here it necessarily transcends from being an activity to an abuse. Unrecognised sexual rights of children do not have to be equivalent to the legal recording of abuses unless one can prove so. Being forbidden and being violated are two mutually contrasting narratives and the POCSO is effective in the latter because the former is not usually registered. In other words, there is no consideration for the sexual rights of the children as they are legally not at the age to consent for any form of sexual engagement till they attain 18 years.

Another important reason for the rise in cases could be the fact that certain actions that were previously not considered offenses under any law are now counted as one and hence, the addition to the numbers. Sexual Health Educator Swathy Jagadesh said children have been facing abuse from relatives in the past as well – *"However, the cases are coming to the fore now. The parents are now willing to report such crimes,"* - she said. Most importantly, as children were stuck at home since the advent of the pandemic and the lockdown, following the closure of schools, the number of crimes against them, especially those registered under the POCSO Act, has witnessed a sharp rise. However, the conviction rates in these cases remain low.

It is also interesting to note that any study of the court cases under the POCSO Act will indicate that girls are predominantly the victims in these offenses, yet social stigma and apprehension of the legal process prevents reporting of

abuse. In the case of boys, it is the fear of his sexuality and masculinity being questioned, and the mistaken belief that he has lost his manhood. This raises a question as to whether a patriarchal system fails to acknowledge a boy child as being equally vulnerable to sexual abuse. The prejudice manifold increases when it comes to the third gender.

CONCLUSION

Child sexual abuse continues to be one of the most pressing concerns in the socio-political landscape of the country. The continuous rise in the number of cases of children who have reportedly suffered some form of sexual abuse highlights the failure of the Indian state and society to provide the children with a holistic environment, conducive to their psychological and physical growth and development, especially under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC/CRC). Data revealed by the Ministry of Law & Justice exhibit that there were at least 389 districts in the country where the number of pending cases under the POCSO Act alone exceeded 100 each. Moreover, in the debate between consensual sexual activity and the POCSO Act principles, there are higher possibilities of poor implementation due to factors such as the misuse of the law under the ground of consent, wastage of resources and their inaccessibility to the real beneficiaries, an overload of the cases affecting the efficiency in the functioning of stakeholders, and so on. As a result, unfortunately, the POSCO Act is reduced to mere legislation because of its poor implementation, practical challenges on the ground of consensual sexual activity, and numerous other system-level barriers.

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SECTION - II

GLOBAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Understanding Barbados: World's Youngest Republic & Its Implications for the 'Postcolonial World'

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ABSTRACT

'An island with endless possibilities for the tourist', Barbados remains no stranger to political analysts and enthusiasts around the world who take active interest in the evolving dynamics around them. This paper seeks to provide its passionate readers with a postcolonial perspective treating Barbados as a case in point - the Island Nation inevitably becoming a much 'coveted destination' post its advent as the newest Republic on the world map. Engaging in a critical academic discourse grappling with socio - economic, cultural and political imprints of the colonial era, generically understood as the 'legacy of Western Imperialism', the focal point rivets largely around body politic unraveling complex but vital questions regarding working of the Constitution, Government and the Party System, delving deep into the foundations of its political culture before rounding off with a blueprint for the future - what 'newfound Barbadian Republicanism' means for the years ahead, the numerous threats and multiple possibilities including its prospects of Democratisation tuned in sync with the postcolonial framework - a domain where much remains to be explored, understood and done, a nuanced analysis in conclusion remaining the author's sincere attempt.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP & PROFILE

In the words of Former US President Theodore Roosevelt, "The more you know about the past, the better prepared you are for the future", Barbados's colonial past holds the keys to understanding its present. Home to nearly 2,80,000 people with its capital situated in Bridgetown city often curated as the 'Caribbean Region' by International Relations scholars, Barbados, which was first discovered by the Portuguese in the 15th century and thereafter abandoned in the 1620s, remained largely inhabited by the Kalinago and

Amerindian people, indigenous groups. Much like the West Indies, the 'unsettling effects of the English Civil War' attracted migrants to Barbados as well. The arrival of the first English ship under John Powell marked the advent of British colonialism in Barbados, a state which would go on to remain under the aegis of the Crown until the 1960s. Has the story of Barbados only been one of 'resistance and defiance' to colonial subordination or is there another side to the story? What are its lingering implications for 21st century Barbados and the Caribbean in particular and for new political societies in general, have remained questions which this piece shall attempt to answer?

THE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

As British Colonialism took flight, sugar, rum and associated by-products emerged as the 'mainstay of the Barbadian economy' in the 1640s. The insatiable appetite for sugar monoculture drove the 'slave economy', condemning thousands to a life of 'exploitation, oppression and alienation' leaving the doors for Rebellion wide ajar. The Sugar Revolution signified a total transformation of the socioeconomic landscape accompanied by several technological innovations to ensure quality and competitiveness in an increasingly globalised market adding a feather in the cap for the 'Project of British Expansionism'. Sugar production required a steady base of labour supply as 'white indentured labourers' came to be replaced by enslaved Africans imported into the British Caribbean, the eighteenth century marking the 'apogee' of such an exploitative regime. As suffering of the natives multiplied manifold, demands for better working conditions, legislation formalising trade unions and widening franchise sparked off 'organised slave rebellions', many of which would be brutally suppressed by the British colonial masters, Bussa's rebellion in 1816 remaining a major instance to reckon with. As 'labour unrest' sent shockwaves across the Atlantic, the Crown responded with 'half hearted concessions' what Menard critiqued as 'sweet negotiations' which deserve to be consigned to the 'historiographic dustbin', until the formal abolition of slavery with the Act of 1833. But as they say, Revolutions with a cause die hard -- early Barbadian activists with an eye on 'economic reform' eventually paved the way for the foundation of the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) and later the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), the two political parties which inherited the legacy of the National Movement eventually pioneering the Struggle for Decolonisation, the working of the party system being discussed in the subsequent sections.

A State of the 1960s, the genesis of the Barbados nation may be traced back to times since the populace 'imagined themselves to be a community' (Anderson 1983), grappled with a common past, and pondered over the present in anticipation of a better tomorrow with the string of national identity binding them together resting on building blocks what Pye and Verba (1969) would construe as 'political culture' - politics operating at the level of the human mind. Besides the 'politics of cane' (Frank McDonald 1969), cricket continues to assert its agency in society, administration, the education system and even beyond - the game of the British Gentleman (ruling elite) transcending weather, terrain and ethnicity to evolve as an 'instrument of resistance', a marker of national identity reworking itself subject to changing times even acting as a catalyst for the National Movement, no wonder that Professor Clem Seecharan (2011) describes "The belt buckle depicts the slave, unmistakably in bondage, with bat in hand, suggests that the creator must have detected in their cricketing endeavours the germ of the quest for self-expression, if not liberation", the interaction between cricket and politics in Barbados seemingly being a 'two-way switch' mutually influencing one another vindicating the vitality of 'identity based politics' in many postcolonial countries of the world as polemical works have shown time and again.

POLITICAL TRAJECTORY AND WORKING OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

The formation of 'organised political outfits' in Barbados remains a tale of the 1940s. The Progressive League and thereafter the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) remain an enigma intertwined with the Decolonisation Movement. With Chrissie Braithwaite and Grantley Adams as its first Chairman and Vice Chairman, the BLP participated at the 1940 General Elections and went onto secure power in the former West Indies Federation with Adams being the First Premier. The short-lived West Indies Federation disintegrated into a number of 'successor States' with the continental island of Barbados emerging as an independent country on the 30th of November, 1966. A 'liberal leaning' splinter group stimulated by Errol Barrow - the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) cruised to victory in 1961, retaining power with increased majorities in 1966 and 1971 respectively, the party's ideology proving to be the driving force behind a 'mixed economy' with a relatively strong private sector. Nevertheless, Government intervention remained prominent in promotion of education,

health and welfare sectors most notably in improving 'life of the working class'. The BLP made a comeback in 1976 under Prime Minister Tom Adams who would hold onto power till his death in the eighties, the baton once again passing onto Barrow and his DLP, the former passing away shortly after the 1987 General Election win with Erskine Sandiford assuming the mantle of leadership. W. Marvine Will (2008) conceptualises the seventies as a 'prolific decade', a critical juncture in Barbadian history heralding the institutionalisation of mass-based political parties monopolising nominative and electoral activities, stepping up political fervency of the colonial yester years. Acting as Gatekeepers amply adaptive to multifarious demands of the day (systemic pressures), the political landscape continues to be dominated by the BLP and the DLP alternating in power. The Owen Arthur Administration (1994 - 2008), a BLP Government making indelible contributions in controlling inflation, introducing value added taxes and at the same time attracting investment to boost tourism and manufacturing, would be followed by a decade of DLP majority under Prime Ministers David Thompson and Freundel Stuart until the 2018 'Red Wave' swept the country as BLP won all of the 30 constituencies with nearly 75% popular vote, an unattainable feat in the 'democratic half-century of Barbados'.

Understanding party systems as configurations/ nexus between 2 or more political dispensations, the criteria for 'counting of parties' may have varied witnessing several reformulations under the aegis of Behaviouralists such as Lijphart (2011) and Taagepera (2007) yet Barbados being a stranger to coalition governments, its political trajectory is a resounding affirmation, a clear validation of the 'Duvergerian Thesis' (1982) postulating the FPTP mechanism as favourable to two party systems pushing smaller players to the fringes. Ofcourse, there have been 'third parties' such as the BNP - a viable conservative outfit in the early years, the People's Empowerment Party (PEP) and People's Alliance for Progress to name a few from contemporary times, perennially struggling to make their presence felt. Even as rigid dichotomies (left - right, liberal - conservative, secular - communal spectrums) fade and lines of distinction get blurred, 'Centre left politics' continues to be the Barbadian mainstream determined more often than not by local issues, personal overtones and charismatic leadership together with able stewardship of the economy. From being viewed through the 'lens of suspicion', perceived as threats for national integrity to emerging as the fulcrum of body politic acting as 'linkages'

between the electorate and their representatives, the citizenry and their government, partisan politics in Barbados has truly undergone a phenomenal transformation.

CONSTITUTION & SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT : AN INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

As the Second Wave of Democratisation crested in the 1960s, nearly two decades after the culmination of the Second World War (1939 - 1945) with 36 recognised Democracies around the Globe, there emerged a unitary parliamentary democracy with 'unwavering allegiance to the British Crown', Barbados continues to be a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The English Common Law and Conventions have tangible imprints on the evolution of Barbadian Democracy, an emulation of the Westminster Model of Representative Democracy vindicating 'elements of continuity' for in an era of rising population, increasing diversities and expanding complexities of governance, the most viable form of government and governance happens to be one wherein power comes to be exercised through people's representatives. The Governor General [Chapter 4] represents the Crown as the Head of State and the Prime Minister (primus inter pares: first among equals) is responsible to an elected parliamentary majority as the Head of the Government. With a bicameral legislature [Chapter 5], the House of Assembly (lower house) witnesses a direct election every 5 years unless dissolved earlier following the First Past the Post System (FPTP), the party winning a majority of the 30 single member constituencies i.e.. : 16 forms the Government with its leader being sworn in as the Prime Minister exercising wide-ranging executive powers and functions [Chapter 6] from appointment of Ministers, top diplomats and officials to assignment of responsibilities and even judicial prerogatives of entertaining Mercy Pleas. The Senate happens to be a 'nominated chamber' playing an exclusively advisory role in financial affairs - 12 Senators appointed on the advice of the PM, 2 on the advice of the Leader of Opposition who commands the largest contingent of MPs after the Government and the remaining 7 at the Governor General's discretion and prerogative accounting for divergent religious, economic and social interests.

As the Supreme Law of the Land governing Barbados - the opening words of the Preamble to the Constitution, " Whereas the love of free institutions and of independence has always strongly characterised the inhabitants of Barbados..." resonates the urge to safeguard the freedom, safety and wellbeing of the Island nation and its people encompassing 10 parts and 4 schedules. Preserving, protecting and upholding fundamental rights and individual liberties, the Barbadian Constitution embodies provisos for a judiciary helmed by the Supreme Court besides providing for Public Service Commissions, complementing and supplementing the Political Executive with a trained and professional bureaucracy. Subject to a slew of Constitutional Amendments over the years - Republicanism of 2021 being the latest milestone reflective of the dynamism of the Barbadian Constitution which appears difficult to discount and disregard.

TRYST WITH REPUBLICANISM

A deeply political question of our times as to whether Monarchies with 'tradition' as their source of legitimacy ought to co-exist with a Democratic System of Government, the latter ideally equated with 'rational- legal authority' in Weberian terms. Envisaged as an 'agent of continuity' - a Constitutional Monarchy endows people with a 'sense of identity' besides acting as 'Guardians of Democracy' - a neutral Head of State capable of rising above narrow partisan interests. Most postcolonial societies have replicated this trend as referendums around the world show that Monarchs continue to command 'popular support' including a 2015 YouGov. Report from Barbados suggests that nearly 60% continue to back the Monarchy, the numbers dwindling in the 2020 Edition whereby over 30% of the populace favours a Republic while an equally large section remains 'indifferent'. Only few have displayed the 'audacity of hope' to reset the status-quo and reclaim what is rightfully theirs, realising a dream long in the making, the country of Barbados has clearly been one of those few.

'Cultural claims' ring hollow when the Crown happens to be a person of a different nationality altogether, the otherness and indifference of the Monarch often being mistaken for 'neutrality' and exercising discretionary powers insulated from public scrutiny prompts Andrew Child (2012) to posit Constitutional Monarchies as 'absurdities', incompatible and incongruent with the very democratic spirit. The quest for a Republic dates back to Former Prime

Minister Errol Barrow's conviction that Barbados "wouldn't loiter on colonial property past closing time", the Arthur Administration initiating plans for a transition in the nineties with the current BLP Government led by Mia Mottley making its intentions clear to accomplish the transition by November, 2021. As the sun kissed the shores of the Caribbean on the 30th of November, 2021, the President replaced the Crown and the Governor General as the 'titular Barbadian Head of State'. A 21 gun- salute reverberated through the warm night air as the Queen sent in her best wishes for a 'nation which held a special place in her heart', the world's youngest Republic beaming with pride redoubling its allegiance to 'self determination'. Nonetheless, the timing of the decision has come 'under the scanner' for at a juncture the economy is in recession and the tourism sector struggles to recover given the impact of the Pandemic, such a mega transformation may have its 'unsettling effects'. The Government's refusal to call for a referendum has invited severe criticism at home from 'Buckingham Palace loyalists' prompting midterm polls this January 19th resulting in another resounding 30 – 0 victory for the ruling BLP, the Prime Minister hailing the 'historic results' as a renewed mandate for a fresh start. The Republican Transition often perceived largely as a matter of 'symbolism' albeit sometimes with vital implications what the current Barbadian leadership accords utmost importance because 'if not now then never' seems to be their guiding mantra finding popular support among the citizens electorally for Barbadians cannot afford to look behind but march ahead in their journey from 'subjects to citizens'.



WHY BARBADOS MATTERS ?

With an interdisciplinary approach and multidisciplinary insights, postcolonialism seeks to articulate alternative modes of theorizing the 'political' that can cater better to the concerns of justice for the formerly colonized and indigenous people, and even those affected by the neo-imperial features of the current global order, making power structures much more amenable to analysis - Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1978) often hailed as a 'monumental contribution' to the discipline. Assessment and evaluation of the political spectrum would reveal a maze, a puzzle of tripartite tendencies meriting analysis of its implications for postcolonial nations at large.

First, the trends of 'visible resistance' to British colonial exploitation as encapsulated by 'organised slave rebellions', identity politics including the evolution of cricket as a 'dynamic marker of defiance' and ultimately political parties, torchbearers of the legacy of the Barbadian Freedom Struggle largely corroborating with trends in many countries around the globe, where the transition to a sovereign & independent State has been accompanied by organised mass mobilisation and sporadic violence including 'episodes of gory bloodshed'. From India and South Africa to the Caribbean, and for that matter even the American Revolution, 'nationalistic uprisings' have spread like wildfire in the British colonies destabilising the British Empire and ultimately a perpetrating its collapse.

Second, the 'tendencies of replication' referring not just to the preponderance of Western intellectual methods in academia but in ideological terms - the realms of Western Liberal Democracy have undoubtedly transcended geographical space. Embracing the very Westminster Model of Parliamentary Democracy governed by similar ethos and rationale, the imprints of the colonial era continue to linger on but the prospects of democratic consolidation seem much more promising for Barbados as compared to many of its counterparts in the Caribbean region and even mature Democracies for that matter, which are gradually slipping into becoming 'facade Democracies' where elections remain a norm but other avenues of political participation have come to be stifled. Enjoying considerable credibility in the 'eyes of the international community' with regard to the sanctity of its electoral process despite recent election results raising concerns as to whether the country is slowly but steadily moving

towards a 'one party dominance/ hegemony', firm conviction with regard to respect for human rights and civil liberties scoring an impressive 95 on 100 as per the 2021 Freedom House Survey Report coupled with 'institutional advantages' is perhaps what stimulates Barbados as a thriving democracy. With reliably high voter turnouts and 'lukewarm levels' of political engagement, the country boasts of over 20% female MP's and 43% women senators approximating the regional average of 30% with exceptions of Guyana and Cuba, the latter being a One Party State doesn't fit into the categorisation - by far outperforming most decolonised States in Asia, Africa and Latin America where levels of political participation, a vital index for the success of any Democracy remain 'low and subverted' while women's representation calculated in percentage struggles to touch double digits.

And third, the 'trends of disjuncture' noticeable years after formal political independence - Republicanism in Barbados adding a new chapter in the history of the Caribbean as Sandra Mason replaced Queen Elizabeth II signalling the advent of a new era, a new epoch altogether 'completely putting behind the colonial past' and snapping its last linkage with the British Colonial Masters, what staunch supporters of Republicanism construe as 'genuine political independence' in bonafide Democracies but the question reverberates, are the Barbadian people really ready for it? Scholars are as much in agreement as they differ on definitive stances, the answer can be both a yes as well as a no. Why similar strategies yield very different results across the world map remains an enigma in itself, Institutionalism which continued to be the backbone of Comparative Studies lacked logical responses until the Behavioural Revolution expanded the horizons locating 'politics outside the State' - the 1980s 'bringing the State back in' with the advent of Neo Institutionalism, thereby proving to be the runway for take-off before spreading wings and charting new territory. The most accepted explanation draws upon the peculiarities of each case deserving to be understood in its own right but often generalised for the purpose of academic convenience - while Barbados formally takes pride in inaugurating an elected and accountable Barbadian Head of State, the British cultural heritage remains, sometimes manifest at other times latent and amorphous. Political culture overlapping to a great degree with the general societal culture holds the keys to unraveling such enigmas by analysing the micro - macro linkages i.e.: relocating the individual's identity and association with the larger

collective, reconciling traditional and modern elements. The 'tendencies of resistance, replication and disjuncture' coming into operation at different points of time in history either in isolation or working in combination, an interplay of these trends breeding 'cosmopolitanism' conducive to accommodation and assimilation lying at the core of 'hybrid political culture', a defining feature of many postcolonial political systems around the world. Nonetheless, what calls for attention is that out of an array of nearly 16 States in the Caribbean only 4 have successfully achieved this feat - Dominica, Trinidad, Guyana with Barbados recently joining the club, an overwhelming majority of the remaining continue to be Constitutional Monarchies under the Commonwealth and so do, much more politically and economically viable States including 'starry eyed' Canada and Australia, whether the Barbadian transition translates into a domino effect is something only time will tell but undoubtedly will provide greater impetus in taking a fresh look at postcolonial nations - big & small located on the world map. The 'embryo in the seed' has just started germinating - opening floodgates for future research and giving newer direction to scholarship, the global community will now have to wait and watch.

ANALYSIS IN CONCLUSION & THE ROAD AHEAD

With the onset of the COVID - 19 Pandemic certainly having enormous ramifications and universal impact yet the magnitude varies as the 'spectre of Colonialism' comes back to haunt the Global South most of which harbours a 'colonial past' not just in terms of reinvoking 'draconian legislations of a colonial mould' but also as Amruta Byatnal & Pratik Chakrabarti (2020) lament, 'the imposition of Western solutions on postcolonial societies' with little concern for their distinct profiles condemning their usage as 'toxic waste repositories' and 'guinea pigs for vaccine testing' not to speak of poor sanitary facilities in many of these countries where 'washing of hands frequently' is a luxury in itself. Posing a unique challenge setting thousands on the 'path of forced migration', exposing the fragility of public health infrastructure and shortcomings of State public policy further deepening the 'income gap / economic divide' born in the cradle of the colonial era, there remain multiple neo - imperial tendencies that Barbados and its 'under - resourced' counterparts

need to battle out as the call for 'decolonising public health' grows louder and so does the need for redressal of power inequalities in the current world order bridging the Global North - South divide.

The associated lockdowns have had a 'crippling effect' on political culture with people seemingly 'bowling alone' (Robert Putnam 2000), the onus of bilateral engagement now rests upon the Government's capacity to reach out and the citizenry's willingness to participate, it's not just a vaccine but only a combination of science and effective public policy that can work wonders - how far postcolonial States worldwide are able to convert these challenges into opportunities putting people and their interests at the heart of affairs shall alone and alone prove to be their ultimate test of nation building, not a one - step stroke but perennial and everlasting, forever remaining in the process of realisation!!

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The Third Time's Not a Charm Disengaging USA from the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict, 2021-22

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ABSTRACT

Sir David Attenborough once said, "If you collect 100 black ants and 100 red ants and put them in a glass jar, nothing will happen, but if you take the jar, shake it violently and leave it on the table, the ants will start killing each other." Premised on the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict, which has seen a dramatic escalation with Russia's reported martial condensation blocking the Ukrainian borders, since early November 2021, this article attempts to problematize the 'Cold War Narrative' the United States has floated meanwhile, relative to this context. What otherwise seems to be an intra-European regional dispute with finite economic repercussions is unnecessarily sensationalised by the United States, into a bubbling chronicle of global warfare, having reminisced people's apprehensive memories from the Cold War era and resurrected its heroic depiction. It is this propaganda, in particular, which the article deflates through historical discourse and deductive analysis thereby surfacing the changing centrality of security politics in the geopolitical silhouette of the East and the West.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, USA, intra-European dispute, NATO, war, international security

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian fracas is a serious joke. Doused in a delectable dollop of nostalgia, while the Russians believe in "*Bog lubit troitsu*" (*God loves the Trinity meaning good things come in three*), this article ensures to resist the colloquial narrative from hat-tricking into the reiteration of Cold War²³ blues between the fallen prodigal, the United States and the trawling Hotspur, Russia. The year, 2021, has been unpleasantly surprising for a couple of

curveballs, piloted by eureka of the omicron variant. However, demonstrative of equivalent calibre in seeking global attention has been the explosion of mutual detestation between Russia and Ukraine with the former manning their shared eastern and northern borders with nearly 1000,000 military (Schwartz) troops from mid-October. So far, heavy military concentration has been amped along the breakaway provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine – the bones of contention between Russian backed separatists and Ukrainian forces ever since 2014. Alongside, the northern state of Ukraine, Klinty, which serves to be a strategic confluence between Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian borders, has seen its share of martial condensation rockets as well. Incompatible political sentiments between the sour siblings, Russia and Ukraine have simmered since the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. While Russia has benevolently encroached upon Ukraine time and again in claims of originally being ‘one’ ethnic identity and party to the ‘Russian Civilisation’ (Schwartz) Ukraine has consistently spurned against this imposition, wishing to maintain its independence and distance from Moscow’s political orbit.

What has necessarily amplified this skirmish in recent times, is the Ukrainian trepidation concerning a violent Russian coup of the Ukrainian capital city, Kyiv – symbolic of the Kremlin's expropriation of both Ukraine’s territory and their political sovereignty. While the article doesn’t waver logical deductions that support the possibility of history repeating itself – especially in traumatic remembrance of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the illegal retention of two poorly governed People’s Republic in Donetsk and Luhansk by the Russia-backed separatists, it strives to problematise the exaggerated narrative of an impending war that is waged by the self-invited cousin of the party, United States. Popping up as the protective ‘Big Brother’ de novo, the United States of America has valiantly threatened Russia with severe economic and armed countermeasures in the eventuality of an invasion, with the shadowed aspiration of wooing over Ukraine into the NATO alliance.

By acting upon its intrinsic anxiety since the Cold War, the United States has proven successful yet again in usurping a crisis-ridden narrative that it is not necessarily involved in, and is inherently intra-regional in orientation, thereby entirely relegating Ukraine's self-sustaining aptitude and voice. The Cold War was distinctively an ideological battle between two contrasting power blocs – possibly safe to say, a trickled stage for burning away the remnants from the

preceding World War vengeance, for good. It is exactly at this point that the current Russo-Ukrainian feud disjuncture from the enticing framework of global warfare because it is essentially a territorial tug-of-war between two neighbouring states induced by some degree of ethnocentrism, making it exclusively and natively an east-European debacle. The absence of an emotive wreath around the existing tensions in the form of an ideological inclination defeats the American validation for its intervention and voluntary encounter with Russia. Furthermore, it must be noted that, unlike the American assertion of sudden Russian aggression that romanticises its immediate heroic resurgence from the Cold War ashes, the Kremlin's current military exhibition is a fraction of a decade-long regional scuffle with Ukraine. Therefore, it certainly is a crisis but not a war, and most significantly, not another instalment of the Cold War.

WHY IS UKRAINE ENDEARING THE POWER FENCERS?

Besides being cradled in the battle of custody between Russia and the United States of America, the Kashmir of Europe, Ukraine is also fretting over domestic anxieties of poverty, plaguing degradation in social and human rights, a strained economy and patently, a medical emergency. Notwithstanding, Ukraine like its women and nuclear plants²⁴, is emblematic of a sharp-edged but seductive beauty, explicitly hauling bickering suitors for a number of political and strategic conveniences – the States firmly attest to keeping foes closer than friends and therefore Ukraine serves their murky security interest in the Eurasian region. A supportive geopolitical ally, Ukraine is the quintessential buffer zone between West and East, depository of raw materials for nuclear arsenals, exporter of lead, iron, and steel, major agricultural supplier of corn and barley that makes up the bulk of American diet and pivot²⁵ of the coveted resource – natural gas. Having understood the gullibility of Ukraine's nascent statehood, The United States strives to till their land through the injection of lethal weaponry and hefty defence aids²⁶. In the process, it hopes to establish the security motives of expansive American surveillance over Russia, under the fraternal promise of NATO membership. Right from the Bush administration, passionately stretched through Obama (The White House) and Trump's (French) internationalism and finally as evident in Biden's discourses, the

acquisition of Ukraine stays a relevant strategic checkbox in order to complete the Euro-Atlantic bucket brigade alongside serving as a repository of resources that would replenish the hitherto American philanthropy.

Consequently, the eminent motivation behind Rasputin's explicit restlessness is to prevent Washington from establishing its hegemonic influence in Ukraine. NATO's ambitious eastern enlargement scheme, expansion of military infrastructure in the Russian territory, and escalated supply of intermediate-range missiles in Europe has further evoked Russian insecurities regarding the stability of Moscow's political orbit. The Kremlin has presided over four waves of NATO enlargement from the Baltic to the Black Sea and Ukraine is the last straw – Putin's redline.

Apart from the apparent political motivations, Russia desperately seeks Ukrainian support in lieu of sustaining the Moscow-launched, free-trade bloc that was initiated with the inauguration of The Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC)²⁷. The creation of such a self-sufficient market space needs a sizable consumer base for continuing the demand-supply cycle that is to be ensured by the populations of Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Having an amicable association with Ukraine becomes strategically advantageous, more so to facilitate the mobility of Russia's Nord Stream II pipeline (Kirby) project which is being undertaken to import Russian natural gas to specifically Germany and the rest of Europe, via Ukraine to boost Moscow's energy revenues. Highly effective as a geopolitical tool, Ukraine's cordial participation in the Nord Stream becomes instrumental for Moscow to not pay the transitional fees to Ukraine - a practice that so far has been eating off large shares from the amassed profits alongside fracturing the US-Germany-Europe relationship over energy security. Russia's sentimentality towards its shared history and national identity with Ukraine where consolidating Ukraine under the Russian state becomes increasingly important in light of socio-political consanguinity and economic propulsion in the 21st century.

NATO'S MILITARY METAMORPHOSIS

The North Atlantic Treaty organization was founded in 1949 by Washington in partnership with Canadian and a few west European governments, meaning to

collectively securitise against the Soviet Union. However, beneath this patriotic exterior, the military intent of NATO has not remained the same and for long. The USA was traditionally susceptible to attacks by nuclear weapons delivered by identifiable systems and launched by an identified adversary. However, the surprise attack of September 2001 reoriented the American security psyche towards unabashed diplomacy of violence wherein NATO became instrumental for cordoning off Europe. Initially addressed as the 'War on Terrorism', The Bush Doctrine (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) was intended to be neither confined against the perpetrators of the United States of America alone nor be exclusive in scope to Afghanistan: it was a worldwide mission on sponsors of military terror. The obscurity in a universally accepted definition of terrorism allowed the United States of America to unleash its wrath on any and all kinds of anticipated rivals. They justified their pre-emptive belligerence on the ground of asymmetrical advantages of terrorism - the terrorist can strike at any time and place, using any conceivable technique making it impossible for the American state to defend at the drop of a hat. Therefore, "the only way to deal with threats" (Northcott) was nothing short of wrecking a preventive war. Official declarations underlined that the accumulation of WMD by any regime will constitute a direct threat. In the American vision, even the acquisition of certain military capabilities was enough to plan an attack on their owner. Naturally, the United States of America faced political, legal and operational obstacles for fighting the regional wars with existing forces. Despite the reliance on their long-range force projection capacities, supported from the American sea or land, political alliances needed to be sought for operations that demanded access to the facilities of land, territorial waters or airspace of other states. Therefore, reborn out of wedlock of the American insecurities, NATO's purpose stood baptised, bringing the widest area of Europe under the apparent discipline of supranational integration and collective defence, since 2002. Given its non-legalistic character, manipulating consensus regarding joint military action becomes all the more concealing, widening NATO's self-assumed role to a crisis management organisation, thereby awarding itself with the privilege of perpetual intrusion in all indirect global conflicts. Russia in the wake of Putin's election, too inherited a pro-western, pragmatic international policy for strategic convenience, having attempted to observe cordiality with NATO given their newfound reconciliation of political principles. This further evinces

the article's conviction that the narration of ideological chasm between the two superpowers is highly antiquated, burying scholarly predictions of a resurging Cold War, for good. Therefore, all the subsequent collisions between the two states, with Europe as its epicentre, have primarily been expansionist in orientation, with the looming question of Russia's compromised security during the American endeavours to maintain its geographical limitations in Eastern Europe. Disabled by the absence of necessary resources and aptitude to genuinely provide for the promised security of a host of European nations, NATO is reduced to being USA's petted watchdog. With the latest military omen of Russians stacking across Ukraine, USA's anxiety is triggered again hence, cajoling belligerence as NATO's extension of charitable hospitality towards Ukraine, without even considering their national interests.

UKRAINE AND RUSSIA: THE STAR-CROSSED SIBLINGS

Debunking the myth of an unforeseen Russian martial condensation, the same can be attributed as an instigated response against the combat usage of a Ukrainian Bayraktar TB2 UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) in the People's Republic of Donetsk.

While armed brawls between these two nations are regular, unlike Ukraine which is impulsive with its military potency, Russia anchors on the game of deterrence. Russia's European strategy is grounded atop the belief that sovereign nation-states will navigate Europe's future, explaining Moscow's insistence on bilateral relations with sovereign member states of the European Union and a subsequent reluctance in dealing with the EU. However, Ukraine's Orange Revolution also referred to as 'Russia's 9/11',²⁸ revolutionised the latter's foreign policy rationale. The Orange Revolution or The Dignity Day was a groundbreaking political reverberation of Ukrainian sovereignty. The 2004 protests toppled the Kremlin-backed Viktor Yanukovich from purloining the Ukrainian Presidency thereby crowning his reformist rival, Viktor Yushchenko, with state power. As a formidable setback to Russian attempts of gaining agency over Ukraine, while it did not spark Putin's military retaliation as is often expected out of him, it massively agitated the Russian vigorously for winning Ukraine, resulting in the forthcoming Crimea annexation.

The year 2014 heralded the birth of a popular revolution against Yushchenko for his discretionary negation of EU negotiations, at Moscow's behest. Unable to tame public hostility, the Ukrainian police engaged in a violent crackdown that in turn backfired into wider international discontentment causing Yushchenko to flee Ukraine. Immediately in order to fill the power vacuum, the Kremlin seized Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula in the Black sea, alongside infiltrating Donetsk and Luhansk on claims of protecting the stranded Russian-origin inhabitants of the region. 8 years since, Ukraine remains a patchwork of diverse geopolitical aspirations from around the globe, especially tethered to Russian sentimentality.

Putin's exhibition of force stems from his frustration with a stagnant diplomatic operation. Moscow's effort to tempt the present Ukrainian President Zelensky to strike a deal on Donbas has been stalled and the latter being an exceptionally mercurial leader, decided to issue armed drones in Donbas which ratcheted up tensions with the Kremlin, at a time when Ukraine cannot afford to incite its neighbour. While Moscow hasn't advanced towards the Ukrainian mainland, its geographic and ethnic proximity and the economic stimulation of Ukrainian gas resources make Russia's proximity to the checkmate more palpable.

Putin's outlook towards global diplomacy was based on sovereign democracy, a security strategy wherein, absolute sovereignty ensured both territorial and political safety. This deviation from a three-century-old foreign policy model based on a precarious interaction between the balance of power and imperial instinct, made way for restricted external interference and increased safety of the state. At the heart of the Kremlin's soft power today lies not the enticement of Putinism as an ideology, but the combined strength of corruptive expertise of the Russian companies and the significance of oil money. At present, Moscow is deeply interested in controlling the energy infrastructures of post-Soviet states while neutralising the unwelcomed Western influence in the region. Therefore, this necessary deficiency of an ideological underscore and the typified geopolitical milieu of the Russo-Ukrainian feud exceedingly contextualise it to exclusively be an intra-European regional power struggle thereby, invalidating any extraneous political interference.

CONCLUSION

As Robert Kagan accurately opines, it is perhaps time to perceive the gaping fracture between European and American political space (Kagan: 03)– while the former is becoming more of a self-contained world with transnational cooperation and negotiations, the latter still operates under the Hobbesian climate, disregarding its international boundaries and rooting charisma in the name of brute force. As the United States trumpets an avalanche of narrative distortion, diverting the Ukrainian crisis to the scale of an international security conflict to endorse the window for American intervention, the feud proves to be nothing more than a territorial competition with an economic texture. This means that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is not imminent. Notwithstanding, Western media’s predilection for picturing Putin as impetuous, he is, on the contrary, calculative and cautious, particularly when it comes to the question of militant actions. Though Putin is not risk-averse – operations in Crimea, Syria and Chechnya are proof – but to him, benefits should outweigh the cost. He cannot be expected to invade Ukraine simply upon West’s instigation, especially amidst a pandemic that heavily dawns on the Russian purse, coupled with a domestic reluctance to man the menace.

It is at this juxtaposition that it becomes imperative to ask on what authority does the United States blame Russia for stocking troops on their border when the former is known to have employed the same tactics of deterrence and build-up in the Gulf region as well as along the Russian border, two years after the Russian occupation of Crimea. This observation makes America’s rant and raves about the Russo-Ukrainian fracas a joke - a hilarious farce. However, as the Russian saying goes – *‘V Kazhdoy Shutke Yest’ Dolya Pravdy’* (every joke has an element of truth), Putin remains undistracted from his mission of resurrecting Russia as the central power within Europe. His actions suggest that his goal is not to absorb Ukraine into Russia but to dominate the post-modern European set-up by redirecting the reins of European security to itself. Therefore, the Kremlin’s encounter with the West is no longer a theatrical grandstanding or an emotional overreaction but a strategic choice. Nevertheless, one quintessential question remains muffled in this mayhem – what does Ukraine actually want?

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Pra Frente, Brasil! Football and the Politics of Identity in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

Football is a global spectacle, but its appeal extends beyond mere sport. Over time it has been consolidated as a cultural, economic and political phenomenon. This article seeks to understand this political nature of the sport through an elucidation of its social history in Latin America in specific. Cleavages of class, colour, ethnicity and nationality and their impact on the social conceptions of football in such countries are traced as well as its abuse in the hands of the authoritarian governments that swept across South America in the 20th century as a tool of propaganda. The article concludes with a brief comment on football in the wider context of globalisation and capitalism in the 21st century and its parallel use elsewhere in the world as a means of trading soft power.

To idle observers, football must seem ludicrous. Twenty-two men chasing a ball around a patch of grass, hot, bothered, sweating furiously, occasionally bundling into one another or, rarer still, wheeling around in celebration when the ball lands up inside the net. Even more incomprehensible must be the thunderous frenzy that accompanies such an event. Stadiums thronged with tens of thousands, young, old, man, woman, all exploding into resounding applause; the stentorian roar, the unbridled joy, the colour, the sound, the fury, the tears, the disappointment, the pride, the shame.

The poet William Carlos Williams, seemingly affronted by the stupidity of sport, wrote acidly:

The crowd at the ball game
is moved uniformly
by a spirit of uselessness
which delights them —

But for the crowd — indeed for a hundred such crowds in a hundred different countries every day — to be moved so deeply by something so trite, football must wield some great power, cast some glorious spell that draws it back again and again, something more than just childish pleasure evoked by play.

In the hundred and thirty years since it was first formalised in England, football has blossomed into a global spectacle, not merely a sporting spectacle but something more profound. If, today, there is a religion that cuts through geography and language, colour and class, it is football. The stadium is a temple, the crest is sacred and players are treated with such reverence that they might as well be gods themselves. Like religion, football disunites just as it unites. Teams besides one's own are profane, their players blasphemous and their supporters heretics; they are to be jeered in the stands and booed on the field, their successes reviled and failures ridiculed. Such powerful emotion cannot be rooted only in sporting performances or rivalries. For better or for worse, it is a cultural phenomenon.

Such cultural centrality accords to football a deep political and social resonance. “Football in any setting provides us with a kind of cultural map, a metaphorical representation, that enhances our understanding of that society,” writes sociologist Richard Giulianotti (xii). The countries of Latin America contain some of the oldest footballing cultures and, from an anthropological point of view, some of the richest. Their stories are ones of strange, circuitous turns as the sport was transformed from a pastime of the local British elite and émigré professionals into a function of Hispanic social identities. Argentina and Uruguay, for instance, established themselves as global footballing powers in the 1930s just as European immigration to South America was growing manifold. In the process these new immigrants, otherwise bereft of any other cultural symbols to identify with, found football as a way to foster a shared national identity. In time such identity spilled over from the nation to the neighbourhood, the class and the family. Football, in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and beyond, is political and to play or watch football is to pick a side — and kick on its behalf.

CLASS, COLOUR & CONFLICT IN LATIN AMERICA

Football, like much else, was brought to Latin America through its ports. In the years after the Industrial Revolution, South America's mineral and agricultural deposits offered lucrative business opportunities to Britain and the rest of Europe. The 19th century saw a steady stream of immigration to the continent as capital, trained labour and industry flowed in to mobilise and export reserves of natural gas, iron ore, copper, wool, fur, hide, cotton, coffee and tobacco. As communities of European expatriates settled in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Chile, they started newspapers and schools, built railroads and telegraph lines, erected factories, ranches and plantations, consecrated the occasional church and established sporting clubs (Goldblatt 126).

In Brazil, football was the game of the rich and the earliest teams emerged out of rowing clubs on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. Fluminense, one of Brazil's oldest clubs, was founded in the early years of the new century by sons of the Brazilian elite who had come across the sport in Europe. Soon, it came to be regarded as the benchmark of sophistication and aristocracy in upper-class circles. Botafogo and Flamengo followed suit in affluent cosmopolitan districts of the city (Bellos 31).

However even as Rio's clubs recruited increasingly from the faculties of medicine, law and engineering at the city's university, football was being democratised. In the working class neighbourhood of San Januario, Portuguese immigrants founded Vasco da Gama in 1898 to commemorate the fourth centenary of Europe's first sail to India. A club that brought together players of different social classes and ethnicities, it was the first team to win the city's championship with a team that included players of black, white and mixed heritage. This racial diversity — and its sporting successes in spite of it — greatly displeased the established elite and Vasco were pressured, banned and even excluded from competition. In the end, however, the club — and all it stood for — prevailed and as the barriers of racism fell by the 1930s, it cultivated the creation of a new, inclusive, forward-thinking sporting culture in Brazil (Bellos 33).

Further south in Argentina, the biggest clubs were founded by immigrants as well. In the docks of La Boca in southern Buenos Aires, where families from

Italy and Spain found a home, two tiny neighbourhood teams were merged in 1901, their players draping themselves in red and white. Crates from Britain lying in the dockyards lent their name to the newly-constituted club; 'River Plate', they said, the English name for the Rio de la Plata. A few streets away, Greek and Italian immigrants settled on Boca Juniors after much debate about nomenclature and on the chance arrival of a ship from Stockholm, adopted the blue and yellow of the Swedish flag (Richards 10).

In time the River-Boca relationship would be rearranged along class lines and turn into one of the most ferocious and violent rivalries in football. River moved to more affluent areas north, to what is now the leafy suburb of Nuñez, while Boca remained in the docks, wearing its working-class roots as a badge of pride. But as Joel Richards, the Guardian's Argentine correspondent, writes, "The rivalry in fact started as a turf war in the port area of La Boca in Buenos Aires — both were founded by the children of immigrants, both had difficulty finding land in the area for their ground, and both chose to have some English in their name to add some perceived glamour to their club. It started out as a local rivalry before they grew to battle out who the biggest club in the country is" (Kelly).

Clubs were founded at differing times under a variety of circumstances, as a recognition of some commonality or a reaction to difference. In Rio it was colour, in Buenos Aires class; elsewhere it was nationality. The cleverly-named Nacional in Uruguay, for instance, was founded by Hispanic university students in Montevideo exclusively for native players and dressed themselves in the colours of the national flag at a time when most other clubs were peopled by European immigrants. Their staunchest rival, naturally, Peñarol, against whom they go to battle in the Uruguayan Clásico, was originally made up of British employees in the Central Uruguayan Railways (Giulianotti 9).

The first few decades of the 20th century saw the gradual leakage of football from the urban rich to the urban poor. In Brazil, the process was accelerated by the emergence of factory teams in the suburbs of the greater Rio area as British-owned companies increasingly began to field teams with their Brazilian workers. Significantly, this downward diffusion brought about a shift in the nature of the sport in local society. The amateurism, the refinery and the spirit of

fair play that surrounded the game, its treatment as a mere source of detached leisure by the Brazilian and Argentine elite was soon replaced by something more tribalistic. Playing the sport was no longer a marker of a specific (upper) class identity; football coalesced and built local, civic identities around itself in the immigrant and working-class barrios along lines of wealth, ethnicity and neighbourhood (Goldblatt 135-137; Giulianotti 77).

By the middle of the century, football had become a crucial strand of Latin American social life. Wave after wave of migrants from the countryside to the rapidly developing cities found society and companionship in communities based around football. Clubs were concentrated around industrial centres and today no fewer than twenty four are based in Buenos Aires, thirteen in Montevideo and nine in Rio de Janeiro. Membership to clubs was available to everyone with a little money to spare and as a result clubs grew financially, while the lost, the lonely and the confused were bequeathed an identity: an identity based around a football club that was to be cherished, flaunted, protected and preserved.

DICTATORSHIPS & PROPAGANDA

In the '60s and '70s, South America quivered under the weight of Operation Condor, its countries overrun by a deluge of anti-communist military dictatorships. Brazil fell to revolution in 1964 and remained there for two decades, Argentina in 1966 and besides a brief interlude, authoritarian rule effectively lasted till 1983. Both regimes would reap the glories and triumphs of the footballing cultures they inherited.

General Médici revelled in Brazil's 1970 World Cup victory, declaring a national holiday to celebrate. "I identify this victory, achieved in the fraternity of sport, with the ascension of faith in our struggle for national development," he declaimed ecstatically and the tune *Pra Frente, Brasil* ('Forward, Brazil') composed originally for the tournament, was adopted by the dictatorship for itself. General Onganía, meanwhile, saluted the virile masculinity and gamesmanship of Racing and Estudiantes in Argentina (Kuper 179).

Argentina's hosting of the World Cup itself in 1978, darkened by allegations of bribery and corruption in the Argentine FA, was, in today's language, an exercise in political whitewashing. At the risk of running the country into colossal debt — exactly how much it cost to host the tournament remains a secret of the military era — stadiums were erected, roads built and colour TV introduced all while dissidents were 'disappeared', prisoners silenced, slums bulldozed and secret camps moved to remote provinces away from the prying eyes of foreign journalists (Goldblatt 616; Kuper 175-178). In the military regime's facile, fascist view of society, Argentine victory in the final, should have united the country, football's triumph translating into patriotic fervour and support for General Videla.

Yet, even though the World Cup was staged to impress the world, Simon Kuper wryly remarks how all it did was expose the realities of the dictatorship. "People can think", he writes. "If they are poor, frightened, and champions of the world, they are pleased to be champions of the world and upset to be poor and frightened... the World Cup was no coup for the generals. Rather, it helped the rest of the world to see what a nasty lot the militares were... The fans made no mental connection between the national team and the junta. They cheered the players and (some of them at least) whistled at General Videla when he appeared in a stadium... If [the generals] had thought they could save their jobs by spending Argentina's money on football, they were naïve. Their use of the World Cup shows not how Machiavellian they were, but how stupid" (Kuper 179). Within five years the military fell and gave way to civilian democracy.

WEALTH, INFLUENCE & SOFT POWER IN THE WORLD

Today, the spectacle remains — but not much else. The 21st century has thrust football, in South America and the world, into the throes of capitalism. Football teams are no longer just clubs, no longer mere businesses but brands. Clubs celebrate their past but not their heritage, and histories, laced around people, moments and identities of great consequence, are condensed into websites detailing transfers and trophies. A simple football match is a great money-making carnival with billboards flashing on all sides, enticing viewers to wear the latest sneakers or buy the latest smartphone or drink the latest soft drink;

advertising boards, logos, names and website addresses are plastered onto jerseys, shorts, socks, dugouts, bags, tickets and balls; the stadium itself has probably been renamed for a price.

More appalling is the manipulation of footballing culture by governments to enhance soft power. It is common for issues of politics and culture to resonate through footballing identities but recent decades have seen the sport being used as a tool of politicking by entirely disinterested parties. Clubs have become the playthings of the wealthy and the influential, or those who are the former but crave to be the latter; for instance, Silvio Berlusconi's political networks were built through his ownership of AC Milan (Semino and Masci 246-252); Qatar hopes that the West will turn a blind eye to its flagrant human rights abuses and buy its oil because of its ownership of Paris Saint-Germain and its hosting of the World Cup (Cafiero and Alexander); the UAE would have its management of Manchester City stimulate investment and tourism and turn Dubai into a cultural centre in the Persian Gulf (Kodzis). For Moscow, Doha, Dubai and so many others, it is easier, faster and less cumbersome to lobby for favourable transactions through football, circumventing normal diplomatic procedure. In the reserved hospitality boxes at stadiums frequented by celebrities and politicians and overflowing with fine wine and expensive perfume, it is understandably simpler to negotiate difficult decisions involving geopolitics and finance.

In many ways, football has transcended what it was originally meant to be: a game. By virtue of its own intrinsic qualities as well as wider historical currents beyond its control, it has evolved into a phenomenon that is far greater than a mere sport. The immense popularity football came to command as a means of recreation led to the filtering of social identities around footballing clubs, identities that often define what they seem to externally stand for. Football has been institutionalised and, in many cases, clubs exist as cultural institutions. In this regard, Bill Buford's pioneering work on hooliganism within supporter-groups casts them in an interesting anthropological light. So deep is this recognition with club identity and its representation that football matches become literal battlegrounds where fans of rival clubs willingly confront each other in shows of fanaticism, hostility and bloodshed. 'Ultras' groups attired in unsavoury political paraphernalia, often with criminals and delinquents

within their ranks, turn up on matchdays — much to the embarrassment of the clubs they profess to support — to incite violence and revel in its turmoil. The footballing itself becomes secondary to the chauvinistic declaration of identity.

As with everything else — art, literature, cinema and fashion — such chauvinism has been tapped into by those in power for their own nefarious ends, from Médici, Videla and Berlusconi to the state-run Dinamo clubs of the erstwhile-Soviet Union and the Emirs and Sheikhs of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. However in the age of high capitalism, the element of resistance that was associated with the tribalistic self-identification of people in the past seems to be slowly dissipating. Football is malleable. Yesterday it was a blazing banner of cultural pride among the common run of men; today it is fashioned by the political and economic interests of the wealthy and the influential.

In spite of its asininity, Williams begrudgingly concedes that there is some higher art in the madness of sport:

*all the exciting detail
of the chase
and the escape, the error
the flash of genius —
all to no end save beauty
the eternal —
So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful*

If there is one thing that unites Latin American dictators with European communists and fascists, Russian oligarchs with Middle Eastern princes, Swiss bankers with military juntas across the developing world, it is that they have all used it to celebrate, stabilise, protect or legitimise their rule. If there is a global distraction, it is football. If there is a global language, it is football. If there is a global religion, it is football. If there is a global history, it is incomplete without football.

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Debt Trap Diplomacy: China's Neo-Colonialism

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ABSTRACT

The post Cold War Era has seen the rise of a new form of colonialism - one that avoids occupation and colonization by force, but uses other means like globalisation and westernisation to meet its goals. Amidst this, the People's Republic of China has been among those persistent powers which have been making vast attempts to spread the web of its influence far and wide across the needy nations of Asia and Africa. Using its silk route policy of the Belt and Road Initiative, it has several states across Asia under its radar, to whom it lends a helping hand. While this may be seen as something rather philanthropic at the very outset, China's BRI and manner of lending economic aid to developing and underdeveloped countries is a farce at best. Not only do the states in question fall into the trap of heavy loans without collateral, by having to render their own sovereignty to China, the latter itself, is seen to have been struggling with making the BRI and China's influence in the region a success. This paper seeks to analyse China's own form of colonialism - Debt Trap Diplomacy, and its implications on both the countries who are subject to such 'aid' and also Beijing itself.

INTRODUCTION

As we step into the third decade of the 21st century, there is no doubt that economics and economic leverage drive world politics. The Cold War, which spanned over a period of five decades, was characterised by the American policy of 'containment' of the Soviet Union and its allies, which was constructed so as to limit economic contact of those countries. Amidst the tense arms race, it further attempted to cripple those nations' economies at home, while at the same time frustrating their diplomacy abroad (Christensen, 2020). Presently, against the backdrop of an increasingly multipolar world, where the

dominance of any one or two states across the global spectrum has become difficult to identify, the prominence of the use of global economic advantage in order to exert superpower influence, has become more apparent than ever.

Amidst these vast changes, the rise of the People's Republic of China as a global, economic hegemon has greatly come to define the nature of global politics. A leading dimension to China's dominance in the international community can be attributed to the fact that it exerts neo-colonial influence in countries of Africa, Central, and South Asia. Although, it does not have under its control the kind of colonies that the imperial powers of Europe used to rule over in the 20th century (Etzioni, 2020), the general features of China's relations with many countries today, bears close resemblance to the European powers' relations with African and Middle Eastern countries in the 19th and 20th century (Blanchard, 2018).

PREYING ON THE VULNERABLE

The much contested claim, that China, through its expansionist policies of the Belt and Road Initiative, has become a neocolonial power in the 21st century, becomes more apparent in the manner in which China dominates the local economies of these 'colonies' and exerts great pressure on the local political, cultural, and security dynamics. By throwing around its ever-growing economic weight, it has managed to buy goodwill and influence among the economically weaker countries, thereby mastering the art of economic statecraft (Wong, 2021).

Beijing has sought to weaponize its trading relations to cater to its own benefits. Currently, it is positioned as a leading source of imports for more than 35 countries and is also a top destination of exports for around 25 countries (Wong, 2021). Furthermore, it has surpassed some of the largest global creditors in the world, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and also the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. As such, China has managed to emerge as the world's biggest official creditor by extending huge loans to financially and politically vulnerable states. This has allowed China to boost its leverage over them and ensnare some of them in sovereignty eroding debt traps.

China's growing influence, especially in Southeast Asia and Africa, makes it evident that while the nature of colonisation may have changed, there will always exist in world politics, a power, that will seek to dominate others and bring within its umbrella of influence, those states which are financially weak and incapable of sustaining themselves. The venture which has allowed China to fearlessly bring an increasing number of developing and underdeveloped countries under its influence, is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR).

The BRI in itself, elaborates a collection of Chinese-financed infrastructure projects, from railways to ports, that has often been portrayed as a modern day imperialist venture (Wong, 2021). It is the conduit which allows Beijing to weaponize debt as a part of its strategy to expand its economic and political presence internationally (Chellaney, 2021). Rather than evaluating a potential borrower nation's creditworthiness, or whether lending the loans to the country in question would saddle the latter with an onerous debt, China willingly lends to strengthen its own leverage with time (Chellaney, 2021). By inveigling poor countries into taking loan after loan so as to build expensive infrastructure that they cannot afford sustainably in the long run, all end in one singular outcome – Beijing subsequently taking control of those infrastructural assets and imposing its own sovereign authority over the same (Rithmire, 2021).

China's internationalization, therefore, is not a mere pursuit of geopolitical influence, but is in all forms, a weapon – which once unleashed, compels the victim states to yield themselves to China as the latter's puppet. Case in point is Sri Lanka's port Hambantota, a project much promoted by China, but with little prospect for success (Abi-Habib, 2018). Onerous terms and unrealistic debts eventually pushed Sri Lanka into default, making way for Beijing to demand the port as collateral and forcing the Sri Lankan government to surrender the operation of the port to a Chinese firm (Rithmire, 2021).

RULING WITH AN IRON HAND

In its pursuit to replace the United States as the world's leading economic and technological nation, and to displace it as the preponderant power in East Asia,

China has quite successfully ratcheted up its efforts to exploit the openness of democratic societies, to establish itself as the ‘leader of the developing countries’ (Friedberg, 2020). It currently seeks to manipulate the flourishing corruption in these countries to its own advantage and consequently reshape international norms and standards in tune with its own illiberal, authoritarian preferences (Friedberg, 2020). Further, it leverages its position in these countries to advance its trade and geopolitical interests, to realise its strategic objective of making the Middle Kingdom a global power.

One must acknowledge China’s strategic approach to its investments (Choudhury, 2021). Although it waived off debts and loans for several countries in Africa, this trend is not apparent in other parts of the world. The primary reasoning behind this is the fact that the African continent as a whole does not offer any immediate geostrategic opportunities of significance as opposed to the other countries in debt around the world (Choudhury, 2021).

This inference strengthens when Beijing’s attitude towards states in South Asia – specifically in the Indian Ocean Region and the Indo-Pacific, is observed. The former has relentlessly capitalized on opportunities to further entrench its presence, influence, and leverage in the region. Deals which are referred to as ‘purely commercial’ in nature, are in fact quite contradictory to the apparently benign nature of the BRI (Choudhury, 2021).

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

In the midst of what seems like a rather rosy picture for China, what usually goes unnoticed is the fact that the ‘debt-trap’ as an aftermath of any BRI investment on behalf of China, is in fact as much a problem for China as it is for the borrowing countries. The existing information asymmetry in international lending between lenders and borrowers, allows the latter to misuse the loans, while the lenders lack credible enforcement power over international loan contracts (Liao, 2021). China’s excessive capital supply and saturated markets at home have compelled Chinese lenders to look beyond borders for new borrowers, especially from the Global South, despite the glaring risks.

China's attempt at this infrastructure diplomacy has further sparked resistance on various fronts. Many states and their concerned officials have complained of subpar construction, inflated costs, and environmental degradation. With the debacle that was the Hambantota Port serving as a warning for emerging markets looking to make similar deals with China, countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Sierra Leone are now deciding to either cancel or downsize some of the Chinese initiatives and are seeking financing from other sources (Shepard, 2020).

So far, China has mostly been able to achieve only transactional, short-term objectives from its elaborate mechanism of economic statecraft. Outside a small subset of countries with little public accountability, China's long-term strategic influence remains limited (Wong, 2021). By recognizing that the costs to be incurred are much heavier than the long term benefits to be gained from economic engagement with China, countries have not made major shifts in their geopolitical alignment as the former expected, and have at best, offered rhetorical and symbolic commitments (Wong, 2021).

CONCLUSION

From a global perspective, the rapidly expanding Chinese presence overseas, when accompanied by subversion and coercion, has exacerbated the fear that China, under Xi Jinping is now emerging as a colonizer of the first order in the 21st century. While Beijing's true intentions may remain under constant contestation, one thing is apparent – the expansionist trends that China exhibits today, are very much in line with the imperialist trends of European colonizers of the 19th and 20th centuries. 'Neo-colonialism' as a phenomenon, did emerge after the Cold War. The strategy of 'debt-trap diplomacy' which China so robustly pursues, indicates that it has emerged with its own brand of neo-colonialism – one which encroaches upon the sovereignty of a state, without the use of force or the military.

While there are existential flaws in its attempts, and the notion of generation of goodwill by imposed economic development has failed to produce results on several accounts, China's growing economic clout reinforces the fact that it

wants to cement its self-proclaimed position as the leader of the global South. Its central position in a globalised transnational production chain, that includes several countries in the West, makes its predominance in the global economy quite indispensable. Furthermore, the sheer scale of Chinese lending and a definite lack of strong institutional mechanisms to protect the debt sustainability of borrowing countries, establishes the Chinese stronghold in the countries which it has targeted. Until and unless there is an alternate that is presented to China's growth model – one which would emphasise why walking away from the BRI's infrastructure fueled and debt-laden past is more sustainable for developing countries in the long run, Beijing could be seen to exploit a post-pandemic world to its advantage by repositioning the BRI without its flaws.

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The Ikigai of Apathy – the Japanese way of Political Participation

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ABSTRACT

Japan is a cardinal string that pegs the idea of democratic culture in its policy and interactions. However, owing to its domestic democratic practices, concerns have been gesticulated against its dismal performance in addressing political participation among the youth. It is imperative to understand the conditions of such a situation which will be analyzed through the variable of political apathy. Thus, this paper will present a brief conceptual analysis of apathetic attitudes in political activities of the youth in Japan, while briefly presenting the variables responsible for this apathetic syndrome.

INTRODUCTION

Behaviour is revealing; voting behaviour of citizens of a nation is a mirror to its democratic functioning. Democracy is a difficult concept to define, and here only a narrow assumption of one of its features, that being, political participation will be highlighted. Political participation is a standard, and is essential for a democracy to thrive – a standard which is conspicuous and consistent, and it is generally assumed to be a natural feature; democracy without citizen's participation only plays gambles. Political participation is not just a conventional and a composed concept. It is not just about following certain set techniques, procedures, rules, and making and implementing policies, but it is a fluid concept – can exist from a physical space, to virtual, and even in the psyche of the participants. It is about running the political system through feedbacks – an allocative procedure of politics, rather than a gamble. This essay will highlight a trajectory of political participation of the youth, which is deliberate political apathy. Generally, this stems from the practice or idea of participation and interest in politics in general. There are several conditions that press a certain nature of political participation in people, that

often gets reflected through means of their electoral turnout, political awareness, or political attitude in general.

The case taken to study the apathetic nature of voters is Japan, which is claimed to be one of the sustained and oldest democracies in Asia, the rising sun in the global economy, yet portraying a dismal culture of democratic dynamism in electoral politics. The youth's turnout in elections statistically communicates Japan's inadequacy in accommodating new and divergent political aspirations, and its inability to disoblige conservative stances. Particularly Japan is striking in studying political apathy because it presents cultural and social challenges delving into political ones, deeply affecting the interest and psyche of the Japanese youth. Deep down, Japan's politics presents loyalty, adherence, discipline, respect – attitudes which are symbolic to the Japanese way of life. This is why Japan makes an interesting study about how political apathy gets sewed with values and morals.

KAFKA ON THE APATHY

A soliloquy on political participation may often prompt the youth to either interact with the political reality, or prefer a choice of disinvolvement owing to the complications and the pensive interpretations behind what is the right politics. If latter being the case, sometimes a deliberate act of not venturing on the political side of life may be alluring, as well as the peaceful option. It not just gets reflected in their physical non-participation in politics, but in their overall psyche and consciousness – a passivity on the existing status quo. It is because they feel that their participation would not be able to bring any consequential changes in the existing system; citizens even abjure from politics for the reason that they have little to no hope on their 'capacity to influence', therefore, they do not find any meaning in an unproductive activity (Dahl, 1963). Such impregnated thoughts give birth to political apathy, which is a state of voluntary withdrawal from deliberating and formulating public policies, as well as abstaining from electing or voting for representatives. This may be contributed to the inability of the actors in a democracy – that may include the government, institutions, administrative bodies – to suitably connect with the citizens. Parallel or alternative to this, deliberate political passivity or apathy may also generate from influences coming from socio-economic factors (class,

age, gender, place of residence, etc.) as well as cultural ones (traditional beliefs, parochial culture, and so on). Such wholesale amalgamation deeply forms a tissue of restraint in the behavioural patterns of the youth – a generation more susceptible to political predicaments, and in jeopardy in undertaking proper political choices. This latitude of behaviour is reflected, but not restricted, to Japan's youth more because they are constantly pressed between the traditional versus modern dichotomy, as well the dilemma of co-existing with and between the two – making the youth in a state of Kafkaesque quandary in their political participation and behaviour.

WEATHERING WITH APATHY

A major image of participation that we see in contemporary times is an assemblage of youth presenting issues on platforms and demanding changes for the gaps the governments usually neglect. However, Japan presents a silenced image. A subtle factor could be that the present-day young generation show little to no signs on violence and insurgent behaviour generating from their hard political-‘right’ or political-‘left’ ideological beliefs and stances, but stand up for more unconventional issues of Japanese society.

After the devastating World War II, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) to squash ‘militaristic nationalism’ in Japan, initiated a ‘political literacy education’ as a plan to democratize the education system (S.C.A.P., January 4, 1946; Tsukada, 2015). However, that never got institutionalized, and the education committee was terminated and a restructuring was done. This hampered the political awareness / education they were receiving and left a vast generation to be somewhat politically ignorant. Hence, political education remained deficient; though now there is basic education about political aspects and democracy, no application based or logical and decision-oriented education is imparted that would socialize the youth into political decision-making. There have been instances of the Japanese youth being mobilized on the basis of ideological grounds – the extreme case being the barbarous and unfettered Japanese University Protests of the 1960s and 1970s that caused upheavals among the students’ ideological wings, administration, political parties, and the police – the legacy and horrors of which still shakes the generation from the different narratives of the protests.

The spontaneous oppression from the police, and the cancellation of examinations leading to distressing situations of unemployment, not only left an example of administrative dominion in the country, but projected and manifested politics as a fierce business. Keeping this historical context in mind, it has been observed that Japanese youth abstain from conventional political participation (for instance, protests, public demonstrations, etc.), the reason being the fear of protest that has been passed down through generations. Following the post-violence decades, the current-parental generation that matured during Japan's 'bubble economy' were 'satisfied with the status-quo' (Ryall, 2021). Deducing from this, with a pleased outlook, this generation has been unable to socialize their off-springs, which in turn have contributed to the increasing apathetic attitudes among the youth.

The economic and political environment in Japan is largely dominated by the 'iron-triangle' of power that includes three interconnected realms of power holders – the politicians, bureaucrats, and the big businesses (Andressen, 2002). In some sense, Japan's politics is capitalized. Businesses more or less run the political environment – from funding in elections to maneuvering policy frameworks in order to suit themselves. From observing Curtis Andressen's reflections, youth may speculate about their gains regarding the 'sacrifices they will create for the economy', and after finding no genuine rewards, they may turn the trust away from politics (Andressen, 2002).

The party system in Japan lacks dynamism and ambition. Thought leaders or Prime Ministers change, the party seldom changes. It is a dominant-party system, with hardly any opposition. The Liberal Democratic Party had been in power ever since its formation in 1955, with exception of two instances – in mid-1990s and the period from 2009-2012. Though the political system allows for the existence and operation of multiple parties, more or less the aims of the political parties collide, even though the title of their party reflect different ideologies. All the parties largely cater to the conservative sections of the society, and barely any social progressive policies are undertaken. The parties mostly aggregate the interests generating from the ageing electoral base, whereas most demands and disagreements from the younger and working generation are met with perfunctory actions and/or non-responsiveness. The voter turnout in general has itself reduced drastically making Japan the 'fifth lowest' among 41 developed economics in a survey conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) (France 24, 2021). Voter's participation is more for the middle-aged groups and greying population, whereas for the younger generation it is abysmal, whereby even a risk of 'negative voter participation' is predicted (The Mainichi, 2021). Such again can be contributed to the low political efficacy of the parties in aggregating interest. Moreover, there is hesitation and lack of political will among the parties to socialize the youths. For instance, it would be more benefitting for the party/ies if a matured and loyal voter of the ageing group attend elections, than a volatile youth with no party loyalty. The former would at least ensure their sustainability in the center. This is possibly one of the reasons why a 'generation gap' in the electoral realm of Japan's politics is glaring – conservative ideology lurks in top hierarchies of every political party or organization, blatant sexism and discrimination against women still exists, young leadership is disfavored, there is barely any representation of youth and women in general. (France 24, 2021).

Though politics is conservative, however, the economic stances are progressive. At times massive technological developments may create illusions of a functioning and developed nation, while overshadowing the political realities. It is sometimes suggested that the youth in Japan do not find any interest in politics and are better off as long as their technologies are plugged. Politics have been attributed as something 'negative', hence, the impulse to evade from it; yet some research suggests that apathy is a conscious choice and not an indoctrinated belief among the citizens (Tsukada, 2015). For them the world has been reduced to a place where they are passive recipients, without any transparency or measures from the political actors, where policies are made for big businesses, and change is unlikely and avoidable. More so recently, though the digital space has provided a platform for dissemination and deliberation of political communication, Japanese are reluctant to discuss political affairs as they comprehend politics to be a 'private' affair. (Takahashi, 2010; Willnat, 2014).

This all-weather apathetic syndrome in youth however has been addressed by many scholars, commentators, and the media as a warning sign on their standard of democracy. Obsolete political campaign tactics, and a clique type of political agendas merely appeal to the new generation. Japan's youth is more inclined towards opposing racial discrimination, highlights gender issues, advocated environmental agendas, than outrightly opposing the conservatism

and traditional system of authority in their own country. Japan is a 'paternalistic society', in the sense that their individuality is subjugated under the dictates of their socially-standing seniors (parents, school, government, etc.); because of which rules are made for them and are imposed, rather than the youth making the rules (Eldridge, 2018). Such acceptance of top-down rules, not only have made the youth incapable of making political decisions, but have kept them lacking any decision-making knowledge whatsoever. For instance, the National Referendum Act of 2014 called for the lowering of minimum age by 2018, with the reasons for 'more civic participation' for the youth and 'better representation'; and in 2016, the new eligible voters only represented a 2 percent in the ageing country (Eldridge, 2018). Not only were they demographically disadvantaged, but logically and statistically a mere 2 percent was inadequate to upturn the government. Furthermore, this was not a plea that was generated from the youth or citizens, but was deliberate and premeditated by the Diet and the politicians, rather than voters. Nonetheless, after bearing the consequences of this apathy, political parties and institutions are reaching out to the younger voters, in a hope to free the youth from political isolation and 'closing the gap between politics and people' (Kyodo News, 2019). The consequences of this are too early to judge, and better participation turnout among the youth can only be hoped.

CONCLUSION - APATHY AS THE ALTERNATIVE, AND THE ONLY CHOICE

The situations presented here pose being apolitical as an alternative to being political. It is also arguable whether political apathy is a form of political participation, or a complete contrasting conception. If the latter is considered, it could be a contrasting idea to political participation – in the sense that, there is no visible form of participation at all by an apathetic person. On the other side of the argument, a more likely supposition would be that political apathy represents different narratives of attitudes towards the system – people are contented, therefore, they do not participate; or people are hopeless, therefore, they abstain from political participation, inter alia, giving an account of what the political setup is like. Hence, the participation is in the thinking, in the consciousness, and in the action and inaction. In such a rhetorical understanding, political apathy is a variable to understand the mindset in a

democracy. Sometimes, political apathy becomes the only choice, most prominently in non-democratic authoritarian states, where choice is designated and views are superimposed. Japan transcends the presented binaries – political apathy is both a conscious alternative, as well as the only option. People abstain from politics because of distrust; people also abstain from politics because traditional views are overlayed in their socialization with no alternatives presented. There could be many values added to diverse variables ranging from social, cultural, economic – which would all require in-depth examination. However, one common factor in all these would be the political *Ikigai*, or the way of life in Japan, which is condescending. Unless this political culture changes, which of course is taking its course in Japan, political apathy would remain an overarching behaviour initiating questions of democratic practices in the Japanese political system.

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India-Central Asia Relations: New Opportunities and Conundrums

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ABSTRACT

The proximity between the Indian and the Afghan, Central Asian and Chinese civilizations led to flourishing trade relations, which in turn brought about cultural interactions and mutual enrichment in the region since the ancient age. This cultural interchange and deep historical ties between the civilizations is the basis for the continuing amity and cooperation between the Central Asian Republics and India. This paper studies the trade and security opportunities, and obstacles between India and Central Asia. How India approaches the resource rich area and navigates its way among the big power melange will decide its future in the region and in Asia at large.

As India looks East to strengthen maritime security and trade, it has also extended a diplomatic hand to its north-west. Surrounded by belligerent neighbours, India finds in Central Asia, a lucrative opportunity to realign the geostrategic equation in Asia in its favour. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw the birth of 15 new nations, of which five - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan- now constitute what is known as Central Asia. While India had initially welcomed these nations in their infancy, it failed to follow up on building robust diplomatic relations with them. In the meantime, global powers such as China, USA and Russia have built strong economic and security relations with the five Stans, leaving India late in getting a piece of the pie.

On the 27th of January, 2022, India hosted the first India-Central Asia Summit, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi presiding over the virtual meeting with the Presidents of the Central Asian countries. This summit highlighted the historical closeness between the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and India owing to “civilisational, cultural, trade and people-to-people linkages” - a relationship which, according to some research, can be traced back to the

Bronze Age, with interactions between the Indus Valley Civilization and the ancient Turkmenistan region of Altyndepe. The proximity between the Indian and the Afghan, Central Asian and Chinese civilizations led to flourishing trade relations, which in turn brought about cultural interactions and enrichment. This cultural interchange and deep historical ties between the regions are the basis for continuing amity and cooperation between the CARs and India. The five Presidents of the CARs were also invited to India's Republic Day celebration on 26th January, 2022 as Chief Guests, but due to rising coronavirus cases, the visit was cancelled.

In the opening words of the 90-minute summit, PM Narendra Modi celebrated 30 years of diplomatic relations between India and the Central Asian states. He emphasized on the need for developing a mutual vision that can fulfil the ambitions of the youth in these countries. He went on to offer his condolences for the violence in crisis-struck Kazakhstan, a major energy and security partner for India. It is also India's largest trading partner-- as stated by the Kazakh President Kassym Jomart Tokayev, of the \$3 bn trade turnover India had with Central Asia in 2021, 81 % was Kazakhstan's share.

Modi celebrated India's growing and continuing cooperation with Uzbekistan, especially with his home state Gujarat, alluding to the visit by Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the Vibrant Gujarat Summit in 2019, and the collaboration between Andijon and Gujarat in areas of pharmaceuticals, education, agriculture and IT primarily.

Kyrgyzstan offered cooperation in education and high-altitude research. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited the Kyrgyz Republic to discuss issues of bilateral trade and investments, connectivity, development and medical cooperation, joint development projects, promotion of cultural links, defence and security, the Afghanistan crisis and multilateral cooperation.

Tajikistan is a major security ally of India, a sector the two countries are working continuously to build. Farkhor and Ayni air bases in Tajikistan are jointly operated by the Indian Air Force and Tajik Air Force. In addition, India has numerous development, humanitarian and cultural projects in Tajikistan.

Regional connectivity with Turkmenistan is an essential component of India's vision in central Asia. Here, he is referring to the Ashgabat Agreement of which

Turkmenistan is the depository country. This multimodal transit agreement diversifies India's transport routes and positively influences trade and commerce in the region.

He expressed his concerns about the Afghanistan crisis and the need for mutual cooperation to tackle the issue.

He laid out three objectives for the summit. First, making it clear that mutual cooperation between India and Central Asia is inevitable and indispensable for regional security and progress. He declared that India-Central Asia relations are vital to India's vision of an integrated and stable extended neighbourhood. Second, building an influential structure for cooperation in which regular interaction can take place at various levels and between various stakeholders. Finally, emphasizing that a roadmap for cooperation must be laid out. In the next three years, we wish to take an integrated approach to regional connectivity and cooperation between India and Central Asia.

WHY CENTRAL ASIA?

India, along with Japan and China, is to play a major role in charting the economic architecture of Asia in the 21st Century. While India has built amicable relations with most of the Eastern countries, and considerably strong ties with the Middle East, Central Asia is largely untapped potential. A strong alliance with the CARs would check China's unbridled economic and military growth, provide security in the face of rising terrorism and extremism and help improve India's energy security.

Following the creation of CARs, the United States, Russia and China initiated enormous development and investment projects in the resource rich region. India's \$2 bn trade turnover, of which majority is Kazakhstan's energy export to India, pales in comparison to China's \$41bn trade turnover with the CARs. Many of these states are also part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India's concern, at the moment, is to ensure that there is no single power hegemony in the region. With two hostile neighbours (China and Pakistan) in the north and the looming Afghanistan crisis in the West, India must secure its military and economic position in the Central Asian region to stabilize the

power equation. It must close this large deficit with China and achieve a balance of power in the region. Central Asia is, thus, the final piece of the Asian geostrategic puzzle for India.

TRADE AND CONNECTIVITY

At the summit, the need for expanding and strengthening bilateral and regional trade was expounded. As the Kazakh President Tokayev noted, “current indicators do not correspond to our economic potential.”

India is the third largest oil importer in the world, only behind China and USA. The Government has allowed 100% Foreign Direct Investment in the many segments of the energy sector, making it an attractive hub for foreign investors. CARs, sitting on billions of dollars' worth of natural resources, crude oil, coal and uranium resources, find an attractive partner in India, whose energy demands are growing by the day. India receives most of its energy resources from Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kuwait and Iran. Its domestic energy sources are not mature and developed enough to meet its energy needs, making the country reliant on imports. This dependence is a cause of concern for Indian leaders owing to oil price volatility. The Great Central Asian region (the former Soviet republics and Afghanistan) with its new energy resources is key to India's energy diplomacy policy, providing energy security to the country. The TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) is an important project, one that brings into the loop one of India's biggest impediments to relations with CARs- Pakistan. Hostility between the two neighbours has put the TAPI project on hold. Turkmenistan plans to hold an International Ministerial Transport Conference for Landlocked Countries in April 2022, to discuss TAPI further. Other trade and connectivity routes also need to be discussed. There is talk of reviving old trading routes between India and Central Asia, including ancient silk routes. The International North-South Transport Corridor, connecting India and Russia through Iran and Azerbaijan, gives access to member countries of the INSTC project to Turkmenistan's Turkmenbashi Port and the Chabahar Port in Iran, saving India time, cost and the need to use Pakistan as a route for trade. To this end, the India-Central Asia Summit formed a Joint-Working Group. A third trade route is provided by the

Ashgabat Agreement on International Transport and Transit Corridor facilitating transport of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Oman are members of this Agreement.

The Chinese question invariably props up in any discussion about Asian geopolitics and trade. Simply put, Chinese influence is too enormous and formidable to be countered. The Central Asian Region is part of one of the six corridors of the BRI. It is also the largest investor in the region. Just two days before the India-Central Asia Summit, there took place a similar China-Central Asia Summit, where China offered \$500 million in assistance and set a target trade turnover for the year at \$700bn from \$400bn in 2021. Sharing borders with three of the five CARs, China is a suitable military ally too, one with whom the region conducts numerous military exercises. At a press briefing, when asked if deep Chinese engagement in the region was discussed, MEA spokesperson Reena Sandhu responded that India's relations with Central Asia were based on merit and deep civilizational, cultural and historic ties.

Yet, India is an ideal ally for the second political heavyweight in the region- Russia, which has long been discomfited by Chinese domination in the area. An alliance with India, a country with which Russia has had long-standing relations, trust and mutual friendship, would bolster both their positions- economic and military.

TERRORISM AND DEFENCE

Security and defence were also discussed in the summit from the point of view of religious extremism. The region has conducted joint military exercises with India, such as the recently concluded Khanjahan-VIII with Kyrgyzstan, KAZIND-21 with Kazakhstan and DUSTLIK-II with Uzbekistan. There is also talk of an Indian air base in Tajikistan. Analysts believe that such military exercises might be looked upon favourably, even encouraged by Russia, which has considerable influence in the region (since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been working to bring the former Soviet States in Asia under its military umbrella through the Collective Security Treaty Organisation).

Prime Minister Modi expressed concern regarding the Afghanistan crisis. Since Afghanistan is part of Greater Central Asia, consequences of developments in the country affect its neighbours, including the Central Asian Region. Forming a second Joint Working Committee on Afghanistan showed the leaders' commitment to tackling the crisis on a multilateral level. While the six countries were always on good terms, they came much closer after Kabul fell to the Taliban in August 2021. The joint statement²⁹ released after the meeting- the Delhi Declaration of the 1st India-Central Asia Summit- said, "The Leaders discussed the current situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the security and stability of the region. They reiterated strong support for a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan, while emphasising the respect for sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs." They pledged to work together to prevent use of Afghan soil for terror activities. It noted a 'broad regional consensus' over Afghanistan that includes the need to secure education and rights for women, need for an inclusive government representing minorities and women, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, the central role of the UN and providing humanitarian aid and assistance to all affected by the Taliban rule including women, children and minorities.

A POTPOURRI OF REGIONAL POWERS

PM Narendra Modi noted that Central Asia is central to India's vision of a stable Asian neighbourhood. And while it is about time India formalized trade relations with the region, it is by no means the only country with interest in the resource-rich zone. It is joining a region with multiple investors and stakeholders, namely USA, China, Russia, Japan, Turkey, Pakistan and South Korea. Pakistan is one of the biggest obstacles to India's smooth transit with Central Asia, which forces India to use a trade route running through Iran. But as that requires greater investment in rail and road links in Chabahar, India is reluctant to use Iran as a transit route in face of US sanctions. Additionally, India has to be nimble if it wishes to utilize Russia as an ally while exploring the region, as it might raise the hackles on China's neck and provoke the outcry of

29. India, Central Asia to form working group on Afghanistan, TAPI pipeline talks back on table (theprint.in)

containment. How India approaches the resource-rich area and navigates its way among the big power melange will decide its future in the region and in Asia at large.

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Bangladesh's Silk Route to Development?

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Third Year (UG), Roll No.- 161

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh's bilateral relations with once a 'sleeping champion' which is now rated as the 'second superpower' has not been given much importance yet, but its strategic alliance especially under the recent 2016 Belt and Road Initiative is reasonably commendable given especially its growth even during the state of a global pandemic. At this point of time when the other two South Asian nations (Sri Lanka and Pakistan) have fallen prey to the Chinese 'debt-trap', Bangladesh's courage to stand face to face with one of the largest growing economies in the world, and tactfully manipulate its bait to self-advantage is highly appreciable. This paper hence attempts to look at the BRI signed by Bangladesh through a bird's eye view, assessing its development and analysing Bangladesh's skill as a 'cautious borrower' till now.

Keywords: Bangladesh, China, Belt and Road Initiative, Debt-Trap, South Asia, strategic relations, infrastructural development.

The historical Chinese "silk road" which was once famous for its silk trade route connections to the west, returned to life in 2013 as the "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" formerly known as the "One Belt One Road" with a broader agenda of building global ties through the expansion of China's infrastructure, cultural ties and diplomatic policy, which in South Asia, has especially catered to the geostrategic and economic ambitions of Indian Ocean littoral nations. Till now, China's massive investments in Pakistan and Sri Lanka have raised debates over whether the latter is in fact, a massive debt trap under the garb of real time investments. On the one hand, where the answer to this question remains blurred, the Sino-Bangladesh tie hasn't come under suspicion yet. Rather it is being expected that due to this relation, Bangladesh might reach its longstanding goal of a higher GDP with high development index by 2041. Bangladesh's futuristic expectations of development through the BRI is based on plausible factors that have led these two countries to share political, social, economic and defence ties.

THE HISTORY OF SINO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

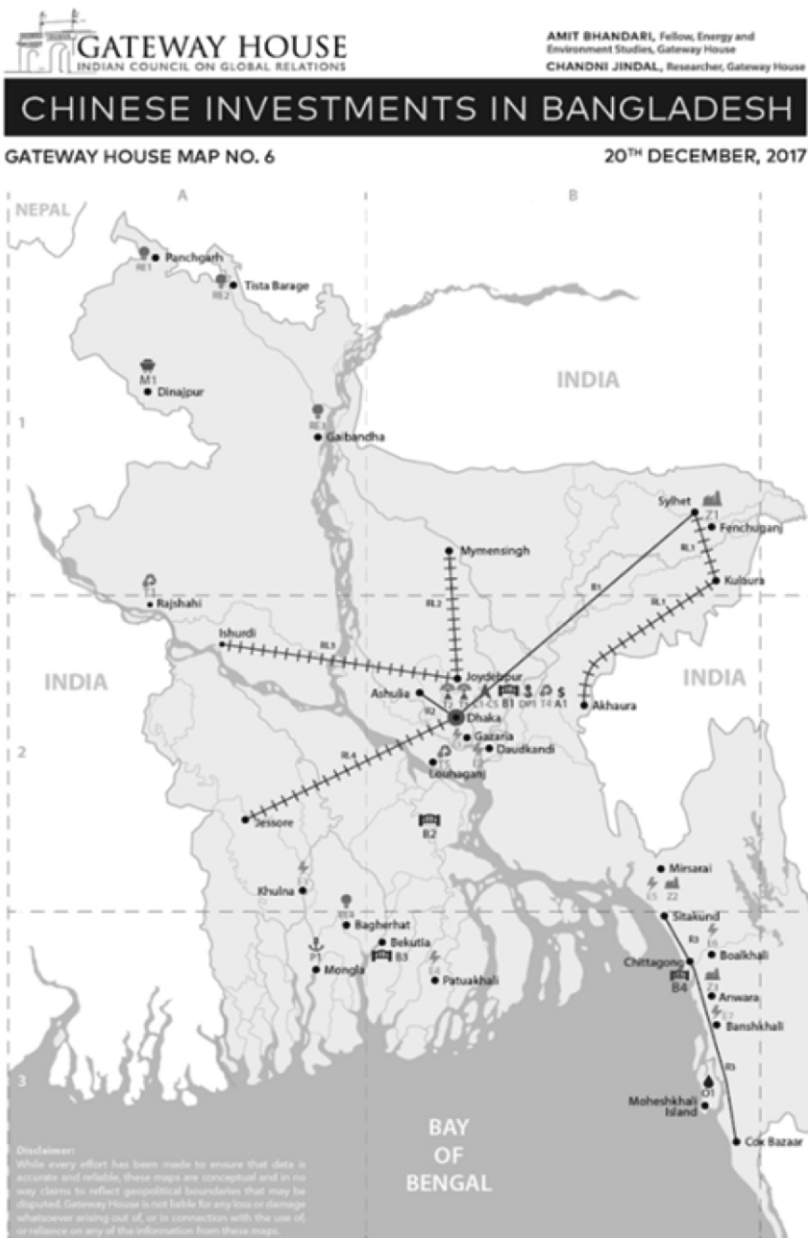
Although Bangladesh's relations with China began not on a smooth note, since China supported Pakistan during Bangladesh's Liberation Movement and also vetoed the entry of Bangladesh in the United Nations, the bilateral relation finally took off in 1977, when President Ziaur Rahman visited China after a few months of the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and which became better with Bangladesh realising its strategic priorities and re-aligning Dhaka's Cold War alignments. Since then, there have been consequent visits made by the leaders of both countries. China became the military ally counterbalancing against the steady growth of Indian military forces. Bangladesh over the past decade has seen China transform into 'a quasi-superpower with deep pockets' (Farooq Sobhan, Bangladesh's former Foreign Secretary) which gives Bangladesh a fair hope to stand out against the Indian 'big bully' attitude in the region.

Besides, China has been the biggest arms supplier, including tanks, aircraft, missile launchers, etc., and has been training the Bangladesh army. Both China and India have been investing in Bangladesh's infrastructure time and again, which ultimately has benefitted the State. From trading ties to giving Bangladeshi students opportunities to study in Chinese universities, China has shrewdly captured the minds of the Bangladeshi public establishing itself as a supporting figure and a non-interfering entity in the internal matters of the State. Trade relations worth billions of dollars have been established within these two countries, of which infrastructural and labour market remains to be of a niche category. This itself created a favourable environment for the ascendance of the BRI in the region.

EFFECTS OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS OF BANGLADESH

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the two nations in 2016 under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in Dhaka under the guardianship of the Chinese President Xi Jinping and Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina marked a new 'Strategic Partnership of Cooperation' leading to China's growing expectation of creating tantamount regional economic partnership Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (one of the six

corridors of the BRI) leading to the linkage of the subregions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. But due to the negative response by India on BRI, this belt of connectivity hasn't been viable and also not discussed in the second BRI forum in April 2019.



PROJECTS	COORDINATES	PROJECTS	COORDINATES
INDUSTRIES & SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES		TRANSPORT	
Z1 Shahjalal Fertiliser Factory	B1	R1 Upgradation of Dhaka-Sylhet highway	B1,B2
Z2 Minsarai Economic Zone	B2	R2 Construction of Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway	B2
Z3 China Economic and Industrial Zone	B3	R3 Construction of Marine Drive Expressway and Coastal Protection Works between Sitakund - Cox's Bazar	B3
UTILITIES		RL1 Conversion of Meter Gauge (MG) railway track to Dual Gauge (DG) railway track in Akhaura - Sylhet section of Bangladesh Railway	B1,B2
T1 Construction of Surface Water Treatment Plant	A2	RL2 Construction of a Dual Gauge (DG) track parallel to the existing Meter Gauge (MG) line in Joydebpur-Mymensingh	B1,B2
T2 Expansion and Strengthening of Power System Network under Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC)	B2	RL3 Construction of Dual Gauge (DG) double rail line in Joydebpur - Ishwardi section of Bangladesh Railway	A2,B2
T3 Power Grid Strengthening Project under Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB)	B2	RL4 Construction of Padma Bridge Rail Link	A2,B2
T4 Construction of Dasherbandi Sewage Treatment Plant	B2	B1 6th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge (Mukterpur Bridge)	B2
T5 Construction of Padma (Jalshadia) Water Treatment Plant	B2	B2 7th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge (Kazirak Bridge)	B2
COMMUNICATION		B3 8th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge	B3
C1 National ICT Infra-Network for Bangladesh Government Phase-II (Info-Sarker 2)	B2	B4 Construction of Multi-Lane Tunnel under the river Karnaphuli at Chittagong city	B3
C2 National ICT Infra-Network for Bangladesh Government Phase-III (Info-Sarker 3)	B2	ENERGY	
C3 Introduction of 3G and Expansion of 2.5G Network	B2	E1 Gazaria Coal Power Project	B2
C4 Establishment of IV Tier National Data Centre	B2	E2 Daudkandi Coal Power Project	B2
C5 Modernization of Telecommunication Network for Digital Connectivity (MoTN)	B2	E3 Khulna Coal Power Project	A2
PORTS & AIRPORTS		E4 Payra Coal Power Project	B3
P1 Expansion and Modernization of Mongla Port Facilities	A3	E5 Minsarai Coal Power Project	B2
DP1 Construction of Inland Container Depot (ICD) near Dhirasram Railway Station	B2	E6 Boakhalai Coal Power Project	B3
OIL & GAS		E7 Barishkhali Coal Power Project	B3
O1 Installation of Single Point Mooring (SPM) With Double Pipeline	B3	RE1 Solar Park at Panchgash	A1
ACQUISITIONS		RE2 Solar Park at Tista Barge	A1
A1 Acquisition of equity stake in Dhaka Stock Exchange by Shanghai Stock Exchange and Shenzhen Stock Exchange	B2	RE3 Solar Park at Gaibandha	A1
		RE4 Solar Park at Bagerhat	A3
		MINING	
		M1 Extension of underground mining operations of Barakupuria Coal Mine	A1



(20 December 2017. Picture source: Gateway House. Bangladesh: Controlling Financial Infrastructure; Picture depicting Chinese investments in Bangladesh.

ImageURL:https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GH_BangladeshMapA3-0803.png)

Bangladesh's participation in the BRI forum of both 2017 and 2019 is a matter of serious relief to China since it remains to be an important tactical position for the BRI connectivity in South Asia. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina seemed to be confident about entering into such a web of relations and connectivity with China while supporting the BRI and said it could have 'significant impact on Bangladesh from an economic and connectivity perspective and the Chittagong Port can act as a central hub to connect Northeast India, Myanmar, Southeast China, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh'. In any case, Bangladesh serves as a natural corridor between South and South East Asia through its lands and water routes, which is one of the befitting solutions for the BRI's aim and also Bangladesh's cordial relations with India, is still trying to act as a convincing chord for the advancement of this initiative.

The Chinese implementation of the various government to government (G2G) and business to business (B2B) projects accounted for about \$40 billion investment wherein an amount of \$24.45 bn was invested in bilateral assistance for infrastructure projects and \$13.6 bn in joint ventures was promised by China, during the visit of the Chinese President in Bangladesh in 2016. Additionally, a \$20bn loan was committed.

Out of the eight projects costing more than \$9.45 bn which were financed by China in 2016, the Padma Bridge rail link was worth \$3.3bn, the power plant in Payra worth \$1.9 bn, digital connectivity worth \$1bn, and power grid network strengthening project worth \$1.32 bn was among the prioritized set of projects (advancement made till June 2020) which was certainly not near the amount of bilateral assistance that was promised, but which could at least advance Bangladesh's trade links and infrastructure, especially during the global pandemic. Before this in 2018, Bangladesh signed its first toll road project, where they signed a contract with the China-Bangladesh consortium for upgrading the 48-kilometres long Dhaka Bypass Road to a dual carriageway which helped to improve the connectivity between the north and the northwest parts of Bangladesh and the Chittagong Port.

Heavy Chinese investments in Bangladesh is creating an environment of competition for India and Japan, who too don't want to lose complete foothold over this strategic deltaic homeland, which is attracting various infrastructural investments from these nations as well. According to the Bangladeshi media,

the Padma Bridge has the potential to single-handedly boost Bangladesh's GDP by more than 1.2 per cent after the completion of it. It is expected to benefit more than 30 million people in the southwest. It is expected to connect 21 districts that aim to become new economic zones and emerge as economic corridors with a manifold increase in job opportunities and income.

Even the investments in the Payra port are turning out to be in Bangladesh's favour as opposed to the other Chinese-sponsored port projects of Hambantota or Gwadar since it has tactfully avoided the usage of the "field of dreams" approach (build it and they will come), which is seen in other BRI projects. Second and most importantly, since Payra is located in depths within the Ganges delta and can be accessed by almost 75 kilometres of canal channelised through the mudflats, this makes it an uneasy plain for a naval base (Chinese security scenario cannot be established). Bangladesh is also expecting the Sonadia container port project, which was previously proposed by China, to be built by a consortium including global investors, which shall also diversify the geopolitical risk.

In general, as China is advancing towards the highly skilled production sector of robotics and artificial intelligence, Bangladesh is being viewed as an alternate scope for its low and semi-skilled industries. Bangladesh's labour force and capital production capacity would allow the growth of such projects, keeping its personal growth as the vantage point, which is supported by the increase of 17.5% export income coming from China, something that wasn't found in the previous fiscal years of Chinese trade with Bangladesh. Importing raw material from China at cheaper rates for the fast-growing apparel industry through the Special Economic Zones and Export Processing Zones of Bangladesh may boost bilateral trade creating avenues for the creation of a newer global exports market. Amongst these developments made in the BRI region, another development for Bangladesh is expected through trade creation via some 5000 specialized products, those which China has authorized duty-free access and which shall take to correspondent global market culture. The BRI shall also help Bangladesh in realising its SDGs solving alarming problems, i.e., income inequality, education, clean energy expected to be solved via the FDIs wherein the BRI shall act as a catalyst, reducing the tariff barriers and leading the way for a better Bangladesh.

HOW HAS BANGLADESH ESCAPED FROM SLIPPING INTO THE 'DEBT TRAP' TILL NOW?

When to fall or not to fall is the question, Bangladesh has been maintaining a safe distance from the pitfall of the famous Chinese 'debt trap' unlike its other regional neighbours, i.e., Pakistan and Sri Lanka mainly by following prudent macroeconomic management.

With the help of its booming economy, Bangladesh's growth is currently around 8-9% per annum, which shall soon accentuate its status into a "middle income" country. This indeed makes Bangladesh's total external debt seem manageable, and hence has been considered at a "lower risk" than the other countries grappling against the debt trap. For example, in the case of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, where the debt ratio to nominal GDP is 104 per cent and 41 per cent, the foreign debt stock for Bangladesh was around \$78.04 bn, which accounts for only 22% of the total GDP of the state.

As of late, China has attempted a safe game with Bangladesh, trying to remain in the latter's good books, and preventing Bangladesh from joining the United States led QUAD, for the latter's ties against the BRI in the Indo Pacific. Since Bangladesh emerged as a new trade hotspot in South Asia wherein funds are being meted out to the state, establishing multilateral relations, especially with India and Japan, who have made large sums of investments, makes Bangladesh propose the rank of priority relation and which is acting as an effective counterbalance to China.

Maybe this is the reason why Bangladesh has had the might to avoid overreliance on Chinese loans, unlike its heavily indebted neighbours. Also, Bangladesh is not intricately linked with the BRI project and "None of the projects the Chinese are executing in Bangladesh has strategic implications" (Ramachandran). It has shrewdly rejected many projects that are not economically sustainable. As mentioned earlier, the deep wetlands of the delta region do not allow for the creation of a naval base which might have promoted the far-fetched security goals of China in the Indo-Pacific. Rather amidst the US-China conundrum in the Indo-Pacific, Bangladesh has till now been able to maintain a balanced "win-win situation" for itself, realising its worth in the correct sense.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bangladesh to date has moved with caution regarding the BRI and is expected to do so in future without falling prey to unattainable dreams that will cause a pitfall into the seemingly unexceptional ‘debt trap’.

When talks about New Delhi’s uneasiness with Sino-Bangladesh’s joint venture came about concerning China’s close presence near Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bangladesh indicated a safer paradigm for India regarding its strategic security. But it has to fulfil its part as a monitor preventing China’s overarchingly aggressive character from ruining its relationship with the immediate “big brother”. The state has to be ready to surpass the image of a so-called India or China-driven Bangladesh, which will ultimately defeat its purpose of creating an independent identity of a South Asian developed nation. Hence now the question might arise, has Bangladesh actually been able to prevent itself from falling prey to the debt trap? Or was it just another Chinese strategy of portraying its complacency as bait?

Answer to this remains enclosed within the unforeseeable future, where Bangladesh’s image as a “cautious borrower” will time and again be tested akin to its real-time development. Though beneficial in many aspects of the BRI, it may cause irreversible environmental damage since the high-tech infrastructure seems to threaten the eco-systems, which especially is harmful to the massively growing fisheries industry. This Bangladesh has to find a plausible counter by negotiating under the Chinese green financing system.

Bangladesh should also remain cautious about transparency and competitive procurement processes while handling the infrastructural projects, which perform poorly in terms of missing timeline, cost overrun and low-quality services, which will ultimately benefit China in the bigger game.

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The Great Replacement – A Siege by Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Immigration has become a vexing political issue over the past few years throughout Europe and the United States. One of the factors linked to the rise of populist nationalist leaders and parties, for instance in Denmark, Norway and France, is that they are staunch anti-immigration supporters. In the 2016 US Presidential election, the issue of immigration, specifically the construction of border-wall, was central. Albeit these are recent examples, increasing immigration from politically and economically unstable countries has seriously brought a demographic shift in these host countries for decades. These changes have generated tremendous pushback politically, as well as social and cultural hostility, if we look at the change in perception by the native population towards immigrants. This has resulted in provoking the dissemination of preposterous theories, inciting hatred and violent terrorist attacks against them, on claims of apocalyptic invasion by immigrants resulting in the elimination of Whites and their subsequent replacement by non-Whites – manifested by the Great Replacement Theory. This article is, therefore, an attempt to fathom the Great Replacement Theory. Furthermore, it explores how the intended or unintended narratives of the theory across all types of media platform have buttressed the white nationalistic ideology in the mainstream.

INTRODUCTION

The Great Replacement Theory is a white nationalist conspiracy theory that generally asserts a deliberate attempt by immigrants from Asia and Africa to replace the White population, resulting in the so-called extinction of the White race. The phrase formally gained prominence through the work of French critic Renaud Camus in his book entitled "Le Grand Remplacement," or "the Great

Replacement," in 2011. In no time, it became a rallying cry for the Identitarian groups in Europe, Alt-right in the United States, and other right-wing extremist groups. They obtrusively demonstrated how an apparent reverse colonisation or in Renaud Camus's words, "genocide by substitution" (Bullens) has metastasized Europe and the United States.

According to Camus - "Individuals, yes, can join a people, integrate with it, assimilate to it. But peoples, civilizations, religions - and especially when these religions are themselves civilizations, types of society, almost States - cannot and cannot even want to... blend into other peoples, other civilizations" (Wilson). He went ahead and argued how immigrants are welcomed by some particularly multiculturalist and globalist elites; referring to them as 'Davoscocracy' - someone for whom people are interchangeable units unconnected from notions of "home" or culture (Williams). Camus has further enunciated how the great replacement is not a concept but a phenomenon stimulated by global process. Thus his antipathy towards migration is driven not only by his anti-immigration stance but also by anti-globalist and anti-modernist stances. "The very essence of modernity is the fact that everything—and really everything—can be replaced by something else, which is absolutely monstrous" (Williams).

The propaganda promulgated by this theory is not new and can be traced back to the early 20th century in works of French nationalist and author Maurice Barres. He expressed how France would be overrun by people not of French identity and how they would triumph and "ruin our homeland" (Bullens). Similar disquiet prevailed in Germany, its next door neighbour. The Nazi Party too feared the waning of the true German identity; they considered Jews as an inferior race that did not belong in Germany and as a result feared the intermixing let alone the existence of Jewish population in Germany. Anti-Semitism became widespread with the Nazis scapegoating of Jews to every plight Germany stumbled upon.

Support for the theory ebbed and flowed after the end of the Second World War. In Europe, there were times it surfaced publicly, while other times it remained an inside movement - influencing and recruiting clandestinely. The infamous "River of Blood" (Stocker) speech by Enoch Powell in 1968 and the French President Charles De Gaulle's concern over "France would no longer be

France” in his letter (Williams) are worth underscoring as they show how political leaders publicly fretted over mass migration and ensuing reverse colonisation.

Over the decade it tried to shed its racial rhetoric by projecting its discourse through the lens of culture – the need to preserve the White culture and identity. This metamorphosis in their public broadcasting made the theory acceptable and allowed it to re-enter the mainstream gradually. One reason that can be pointed out is that racism has more or less taken a backseat and the transmission of racial belief has turned into an unappetizing tool in garnering sympathizing audiences in the public space in Europe and the United States, in effect possible when propagating cultural narrative. “What Mr Camus did was to take a familiar concept and rebrand it in a catchy way” (Charlton). This makes sense as what it did was reignite the already burning flames, fuelling the sparks transnationally.

At the fulcrum of the great replacement theory is an obsession with birth rate. The demographic change in western countries has led to the shrinkage of white culture, because the birth-rate among the white population has plummeted – indicating a lower replacement rate. The supporters of the theory argue that the higher birth rate of non-western immigrants is due to the difference in the structure of social institutions found in these societies – an incongruity in social, cultural, and family setup. Indirectly, it draws attention to its incompatibility with western culture, particularly Muslims, who are singled out as being culturally incompatible with the lives of majority groups in Western countries and thus a particular threat. This is further cemented with the spread of Islamophobia – triggered by the 2001 September 11 attack. Islamophobia is baked into European political life (Massoumi), with policies and acts that essentially single out Muslims. A recurrent theme is the banning of forms of Muslim veiling in public spaces in a number of European countries over the years.

Furthermore, it emphasises on the resistance against Multiculturalism – increasing racial and ethnic diversity threaten the perceived cultural homogeneity of western societies.

The core idea behind this theory has been prevalent in the far right circle for decades. The main advocate of the theory has been ‘Generation Identity’ (GI), which originated in France. It is a youth-led, Identitarian group with chapters across Europe. Generation Identity effectively reshaped far-right activism across the world. It persuasively tried to make the ideology reputable and even aspirational by portraying extremist ideas in a moderate way particularly among the youth; and it worked. They execute publicity stunts to normalise anti-Muslim rhetoric in public space, making Islamophobia normal and more acceptable in their countries. For instance, they conducted high-profile raids in the Alps and Pyrenees to block migrants from entering France. However, as of March 2021, the French government banned Generation Identity.

MEDIA DISSEMINATION

All media platforms have been immersed with the Great Replacement discussion. The entire social media ecosystem – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Telegram has hosted a variety of content lending explicit and implicit support for the theory or using its language. While these tech giants have made attempts to moderate abhorrent contents and at times de-platform such extremist accounts, implicit content specifically, the usage of ‘Memes’ has allowed users to cloak insidious racist ideas in the form of irony and euphemism. For example, ‘Pepe the Frog’ – a cartoon character turned sensational racist meme, the official mascot of far-right extremism in the US and parts of Europe (Notopoulos and Broderick), the ‘OK’ hand gesture (Lewis) which draws the letter W and P – an abbreviation for the word White Power. It has become one of the primary vehicles to spread such ideas and recruit new followers. Apart from disseminating information and messaging in mainstream platforms, fringe encrypted chat rooms like Gab (a substitute of Twitter), Reddit and image boards like 4chan, 8chan have become a portal to diffuse radical ideology and terminology, often in the form of loosely organised communities. The 2019 Christchurch Shooting is a clear example of leeway served by social media sites to Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the terrorist attack. He was connected to fringe platforms and leading up to the attack he put up the manifesto entitled “the great replacement” and leaks of Facebook live stream on 8chan, making its way into the hands of other alike radical adherents,

who are also active users of such platforms. In effect, the Christchurch shooting inspired Patrick Crusius for the El Paso shooting later that year with similar reference to the replacement theory.

There are also television news channels and media commentators and personalities, radio hosts that have explicitly endorsed the theory and its words. Tucker Carlson on his talk show on Fox News has repetitively expressed how “the Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate — the voters now casting ballots — with new people, more obedient voters from the Third World... That’s true” (Anti-Defamation League).

While the conventional tactic of influencing, recruiting and indoctrinating through offline events, rallies, even rock concerts and church congregations were undoubtedly the foremost medium, the pandemic induced a two-year hiatus, augmenting the online presence of far-right activism. However, studies indicate that online extremism spills over into offline harm more frequently and in more varied ways than widely assumed (Karell et al.). And it does not bode well, with the situation getting better; there is an impending pressure of an increase in the dissemination of the great replacement narrative among the extremist circle.

CONCLUSION

The Great Replacement Theory runs deep, as it’s a part of this larger international white extremist ideological narrative and also just another rhetorical device facilitating a sense of urgency, inspiring extreme actions. Fears of racial mixing and the formation of multicultural society have been central to racist nationalistic belief for decades. It’s linkage with other theories prominent in white supremacist, ethno nationalist circles such as those of ‘White Genocide’ and ‘Eurabia’, makes the theory rather ambiguous apart from the core theme as outlined by Camus. The ambiguity allows it to be interwoven with other interchangeable theories, eventually fixating their adherents. Nonetheless, what they profess should not be seen as a fringe campaign. The pay-off is enormous, as it has penetrated not only into the political sphere but also into the social and cultural fabric, fomenting resentment, hatred and

violent terrorist attacks towards immigrant population. Nevertheless, the harsh reality is that it's going nowhere. Broadly, the entire right side of the political spectrum from the centre-right to the extreme is opposed to immigration in varying degrees. Unless radical individuals, groups and organisations are opposed and fringe platforms held accountable for providing a safe haven to extremists, the hyperbolic transmission of any conspiracy theory in general and the Great Replacement Theory in particular is uncurtailable.

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The Military that Possesses A State: Myanmar

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First Year (UG), Roll No.- 123

ABSTRACT

'The struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in Burma is a struggle for Life and Dignity. It is a Struggle that encompasses our political, social and economic aspirations.'-Aung San Suu Kyi

The Second World War ended with the imperial powers of Europe devastated by war, economically weak and militarily exhausted. As imperial grip over far-flung colonial possessions began to weaken, colonies were swept by the spirit of self-determination, resulting in liberation movements against their colonial masters. Decolonization of Asia and Africa saw the gradual withdrawal of foreign powers, giving birth to new independent states. However, post-colonial states, which had been exploited for centuries in the interest of their imperial masters, began the process of state-building at an integrated disadvantage. While some were able to march forward as democratic states characterized by harmonious diversity, others succumbed to their inherited colonial vices of communal strife, want of resources, illiteracy, poverty and weak political institutions and structure. Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) embodies a failed post-colonial democratic experiment. Located in a geo-political hotspot, at the crossroads of the Indian-Subcontinent, China and Indo-China, the modern history of Myanmar is testament to a state embroiled in ethnic conflict, insurgencies, brief reliefs of democracy, military disobedience and state repression of civic liberty under junta rule. This study seeks to explore and analyze the central role of the Myanmar military (or Tatmadaw) in the recent developments, the struggle of the Burmese citizens for democratic governance and the implications of this context for India.

THE PIVOT-TATMADAW

The Myanmar Military is an institution central to Burmese domestic politics. A legacy of General Aung San (the architect of Myanmar's Independence and

Father of the Nation), the Tatmadaw was founded by him with the help of the Japanese in 1941. It played a vital role in Burmese struggle for independence and became the only living legacy of Burma's struggle for independence after the assassination of General Aung San's in 1947. The Tatmadaw symbolized the aspirations of Burma's freedom struggle and enjoyed strong public support and regard as the Institution that liberated Burma from colonial oppression.

Independent Burma faced a plethora of challenges since the beginning. Failure of democratic leadership to federalize governance and the declaration of Burma as a Buddhist State, excluded predominant communist factions and ethnic groups of Burma, leading to widespread ethnic unrest and insurgencies. An unstable parliament suffering from deep factionalism saw the emergence of communist groups in parliament. Anti-communist hardliners and the Tatmadaw considered communist outfits to be a threat to Burma and therefore compelled PM U Nu to 'invite' the Army Chief of Staff, General Ne Win, to take over State Affairs (the 'Constitutional Coup'). Though the caretaker government retired following elections in 1960, democratic rule in Burma was short-lived.

The stint of democracy came to an end in 1962 when Ne Win, having had a taste of power, staged a coup ushering in a stratocracy. The Junta suspended the National Constitution, arrested political opponents, muzzled the press and banned all opposing groups, creating a one-party state. The regime introduced the infamous "Burmese Way to Socialism" – an ideology that closed the economy to international trade and turned Myanmar into an isolated state. Nationalization of industries, corruption and multiple demonetization efforts robbed the population of their savings and caused rapid inflation and food shortages. The Ne Win-led Burma Socialist Programme Party finally collapsed under the shrinking economy leading to economic reforms and liberalization.

Ethnic conflict has been a staple of the Myanmar state since its inception in 1948. Myanmar society is composed primarily of the majority Bamar ethnicity (at about 70%) and a multitude of other minor ethnic groups. The landmark Panglong Conference of 1947 between Aung San and ethnic leaders had brought together Myanmar's diverse ethnic groups to form a Unified Burma with a federal structure of government that allowed communities to govern their own affairs. The agreement, however, fell through after Aung San's

assassination as the Bamar-dominated parliament and later the Tatmadaw refused to delegate power to minority ethnicities. Ethnic minorities formed ethnic armed groups to oppose the military's sustained repression of citizen's rights. Thus, the Tatmadaw retained appeal among the ethnic Bamar majority as 'the defender of national sovereignty' against external and domestic threats. The Junta also inspired loyalty towards the military through fierce Nationalism based on Burma's majority Buddhist identity (90% of population). Often buying Buddhist support by making extensive donations to the Buddhist sangha, monasteries and schools. The need for a common enemy to unite the Buddhist population behind the Tatmadaw, saw the singling out of the Muslim Ethnic Group, the Rohingya, who were not recognised as one of the 135 Ethnic Groups of Burma, considered foreign and denied citizenship (Citizenship Act of 1982), followed by military crackdowns in 1978 (King Dragon Operation) and again in 1991 (Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation), forcing many Rohingyas to flee to neighbouring nations. Persecution of the Rohingyas continued even after restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

The Tatmadaw reign, however, wasn't opposition free. Protests arose following the 1962 coup but were swiftly and violently crushed. Anti-Tatmadaw movements primarily consisted of pro-democracy civilians, students and communists. Violent crackdowns on dissent, imprisoning activists, journalists or politicians resisting authority remained the norm in Tatmadaw's Myanmar. Nationwide protests in 1988 against economic mismanagement were led by student activists who demanded democratic reforms. The protests triggered repressive measures against agitators but failed to silence growing calls for democracy while the Tatmadaw nearly lost all public support. The 8/8/88 protests centred around the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of national hero, General Aung San. Suu Kyi acquired the image of a pro-democracy icon and the dutiful daughter who rose to the occasion to liberate her country. Having captivated her people's imagination with her political integrity and resilience in the non-violent path, Suu Kyi founded the National League for Democracy (NLD), under whose pressure the Junta conducted democratic elections in 1991 to constitute a constituent assembly. Somewhat unsurprisingly the Junta refused to recognize the elections when Aung San Suu Kyi-led NLD won an overwhelming victory. Refusing to transfer power to the democratic government-elect the Tatmadaw

placed Suu Kyi under house arrest and imprisoned other democratic leaders. The Junta regime continued – through Sein Lwin, Saw Muang and lastly Than Shwe till 2011. The 1962 coup, heralded one of the longest periods of uninterrupted military rule in modern times. The Tatmadaw remained in power until democratization in 2011.

David I. Steinberg considers the cohesion among senior Tatmadaw officers held together despite ideological disagreements, Tatmadaw's admiration for its leader, personalized leadership, formation of capable entourages, corruption that 'greased relationships', absence of effective civilian leadership, ability of the Tatmadaw to control social mobility through economic and educational restrictions, emphasis on paternalism that contained popular will, efficient utilization of propaganda which always portrayed the military as 'loco parentis' (Military slogans: "Only the army is mother. The army is father") and firm grip on resources is the cause for the centrality of the Tatmadaw in the Myanmar Polity.

Political legitimacy in any state is never static and must constantly be reaffirmed through actions, attitudes and policies. Tatmadaw's possession of 'ana' or coercion and 'awza' or moral legitimacy, which it drew from its founder-Aung San Suu Kyi and its historic contributions to the nation, gave longevity to its rule.

THE UNSAVORY REALITY

Democracy returned to Myanmar following a series of anti-government protests in 2007 often called the Saffron Revolution. The mass political agitation was a consequence of the high-handed response of the Junta to initial demonstrations against rapid increase in fuel prices. Failure of repressive measures to discourage dissent and mounting international pressure forced the Tatmadaw regime to give into the popular demand for democracy. The Tatmadaw single-handedly drafted and imposed upon Myanmar a pseudo-democratic constitution. Myanmar's third constitution gave way to democratic elections in 2010. However, in a bid to prevent Aung San Suu Kyi from competing, the Junta disqualified all citizens married to aliens from contesting as candidates. The national hero married to an English husband stood

disqualified and the NLD decided to boycott the elections, handing an easy victory to the military-sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Party. Further political reforms in the early 2010s created an environment for free and fair elections in 2015. NLD's overwhelming victory in 2015 gave them control over both chambers of Myanmar's Parliament and Aung San Suu Kyi became the State Counsellor (equivalent to PM).

Long-standing ethnic conflicts came to an abrupt end as ethnic leaders trusted Aung San Suu Kyi to fulfil her father's promise of federal governance and swore allegiance to the democratic government. Democracy boosted international trade, intensified economic growth and restored civil liberties giving citizens and global audience hope in the new Myanmar. However, the Rohingya Crisis of 2017 orchestrated by religious extremists, Buddhist nationalists and the Tatmadaw culminated into a 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing'. Aung San Suu Kyi's failure to acknowledge systematic state violence against the historically persecuted Muslim minority ethnicity- the Rohingyas and defence of Tatmadaw actions greatly diminished her global reputation while giving a boost to her domestic popularity.

The 2020 general election bore testament to Myanmar's perception of Aung San Suu Kyi as a national hero of democracy and defender of the nation's honour on the global stage. Suu Kyi's second term, however, was cut short when the Tatmadaw under Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing displaced the civilian government in the early hours of February 1, 2021. The rising popularity of Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD's strong conviction for constitutional amendments that threatened military's privileged position and personal fears of Commander-in-Chief of prosecution following retirement the next year, instigated the Myanmar military to swiftly remove President Win Myint and consequently arm-twist the acting President Myint Swe to proclaim a year-long State of Emergency and anoint Min Aung Prime Minister and the Chairman of the State Administrative Council that formed the caretaker government. Aung San Suu Kyi was detained, on charges of but illegal import of communication devices (six ICOM devices and a walkie-talkie) and violating the National Disaster Act while the President and his cabinet members were detained for violation of campaign guidelines during pandemic. The coup was followed by numerous changes in laws in favour of the military regime and dismissal of

ongoing criminal charges against military leaders. The Military suspended telephone lines, broadcasting channels and bank services while the internet was disrupted. The Military-controlled Myawaddy TV which remained operational, justified the Military overthrow of the civilian government by accusing the NLD of wide-scale voter fraud in the general elections, threatening national sovereignty. The Tatmadaw declared the 2020 elections invalid but promised to hold fresh elections the following year.

The coup attracted fierce civilian opposition in form of boycott of the military ('Stop Buying Junta Business' Campaign), a Pot-Banging Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement by netzines, Red Ribbon Campaigns, public protests, labour strikes by civil servants, later extending to private firms and factories and protests by students and youth groups. The 'Kabar Makyay Bu' Song and the Three-Finger Salute were adopted as symbols in defiance against the Tatmadaw. Initial mild restrictions imposed on dissent were substituted with violent crackdown on protests as criticism of the Tatmadaw intensified, leading to clash between armed forces and civilians. Globalized Myanmar civilians, refused to give up on democracy and utilized the internet to share the brutality of the Junta across the world, while Buddhist monasteries and educational institutions, that wield immense influence in Myanmar, denounced the coup and joined the resistance. The Myanmar diaspora actively advocated measures against the Tatmadaw, however, economic sanctions imposed by nations and international bodies on Myanmar increased the burden on ordinary civilians who were already hard-hit by the pandemic. The Tatmadaw went back on its word and extended the State of Emergency till 2023 as resistance to the Junta regime continued to grow. The ethnic minority militias were reanimated and took up arms against the Junta, swearing allegiance to the NLD-led shadow government. Brutal government actions have also resulted in emphatic military and police personnel deserting their posts in order to join opposing militias or seek refuge from neighbouring India, along with fleeing civilians. Protest and defiance against the Myanmar Military continue.

The Tatmadaw had managed to remain the driving force in domestic politics even after Democratization. The 2008 Constitution drafted by the Tatmadaw was modeled after 'dwi fungsi', that ensured the military a lead role in decision-making under the guise of 'Disciplined Democracy'. The 'fraudulent' Burmese

Constitutional Referendum (2008) that imposed upon the nation its third constitution, reserved 25% of seats at parliamentary national and subnational levels for the military, granted the Tatmadaw control over the mining, oil and gas industries, power to appoint one of the two Vice-Presidents of Myanmar and reserved the Ministries of Home, Defense and Border Affairs to be headed by serving military officials. These provisions ensured financial independence of the Myanmar military from the state budget, with a steady flow of resources and complete control, assured the Tatmadaw de facto veto over any constitutional reforms (which required $\frac{3}{4}$ majority to be accepted) and control over national security. Tatmadaw grip over the economy only increased with economic growth under democratic rule. Lack of clear symbol of popular control, long and sustained tenure in power and active combat history owed to ethnic insurgencies, have created an institution experienced in combat, with unchecked control over infrastructure and proactively disobedient in character. The democratic system established by the 2008 Constitution left the Tatmadaw in excess of autonomy in operation and actions, making military intervention inevitable and a matter of when, not if.

REPERCUSSIONS

The international community condemned the coup and voiced outrage against human rights violations in Myanmar. While most democracies refused to recognize the Junta takeover as legitimate and demanded reinstatement of the democratic NLD government, the emerging Asian Powers of China and India took a more measured approach to the unfolding situation. India condemned the violence but steered clear of explicit or harsh criticism of the Tatmadaw. China, on the other hand, proceeded to sugar-coating the coup as “a major cabinet reshuffle” in order to strengthen its relations with the Tatmadaw.

The People’s Republic of China intends to utilize the crisis to further its economic and military interests in the region. China realizes the geo-political importance of Myanmar as a bridge to the Indian Ocean, ergo, its ports in Myanmar that provide a buffer for China against India’s presence in the Bay of Bengal, strengthening its ‘string of pearls’. Additionally, China wishes to control the Myanmar corridor that will benefit its landlocked western

provinces and provide a solution to China's overdependence on the narrow Malacca Strait for sea trade with the west and fuel supply. Further, Myanmar provides a ready market for Chinese commodities and has potential to become a key source of timber and gems for China. Reliance of Myanmar on the CCP has steadily increased since the 2000s as economic sanctions piled up against the Junta regime for Chinese investment in infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative and for diplomatic support, even more so following the Rakhine State Crisis. Though the Tatmadaw has been suspicious of China's intentions ('Myanmar's role in regional security: Pawn or pivot' by J.M. Malik, 1997) for financing and arming ethnic armed groups in the country's north and criticizing the NLD for the nation's increased reliance on China, it seems increasingly open to Chinese friendship as most countries isolate and distance themselves from the regime. Beijing's pragmatic approach and transactional nature of its relationship with Myanmar, translated into closer ties with the Tatmadaw, even though it found Myanmar's civilian government more conducive to Chinese economic expansion, through limited criticism and blockade of meaningful United Nations Security Council resolutions against the Junta. China's lack of efforts in condemning the coup d'état and suspicious visits by the Chinese Foreign Minister to senior military generals have fuelled speculation on their approval and role in the coup. Virtual Chinese support to the Junta have also resulted in Anti-China sentiments within Myanmar and its diaspora, resulting in active campaigning against Chinese influence in Myanmar politics through boycott of Chinese-owned businesses and demonstrations outside Chinese embassies throughout the world. China's attempts to strengthen grip over the Indian Ocean presents a contemporary threat to India and its South-East Asian rivals.

Neighbors- India and Myanmar, share an intertwined history and cordial relations. India-Myanmar relations have evolved over the years. Burma entered the 20th Century a province of the Crown Colony of British-India and the countries began as close allies in the Non-Aligned Movement as neutral, new-born states. However, Burma's silence during the Indo-Chinese War strained relations characterised by 'stagnancy bordering on the margins of cordiality'. Violent purge of the Burmese-Indian Community under Junta rule and crackdowns against civilian opposition during the 8/8/88 Protests forced India to align itself firmly against the regime that presented itself as a threat to

democratic values, granting refuge to fleeing Burmese activists. The BJP Government in the 1990s, however, diverged in approach from its predecessors to re-establish warm relations with Myanmar. Willingness to engage with the Tatmadaw was not evidence of India's lack of commitment to democratic ideals but rather an attempt to realize India's strategic ambitions in South-east Asia, whether Myanmar fell under military or civilian rule.

India has vital interests in its immediate neighbour and benefits by keeping multiple channels of communication open with all stakeholders. Myanmar occupies territory of immense geo-political significance, acting as a corridor between South and South-East Asia. The long border shared between Myanmar and North-East India provides cover to various separatist groups and facilitates cross-border movement of militants, illegal arms and drugs via the porous border. The Indian Army has long relied on the policy of 'constructive engagement'- to conduct joint military campaigns to combat extremism in the North-East and in turn aiding the Tatmadaw to contain Myanmar's ethnic insurgencies. Moreover, New Delhi already faces the Chinese threat along its Northern frontier and the Pakistani threat from the West, and is reliant on cooperation with Myanmar to ensure its Eastern front. Increase in Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean would threaten Indian Security. Myanmar sits at the intersection of India's "Neighbourhood First" Policy and her motivating heavy investment in Myanmar's economy through the SAGAR Vision. Importance of Myanmar to India impels her to actively engage with the Tatmadaw. Primacy of Beijing in Myanmar's economy and its virtual support to the Tatmadaw, leaves India hesitant to alienate the Tatmadaw. According to Dr. Bibhu Routray (Director of Mantraya), India is unlikely to deviate from her policy of non-interference and will, in all likelihood, continue to call for peace without taking any steps to condemn or undermine the Tatmadaw.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

"The play is over, but the audience is forced to remain in their seats, and the actors refuse to leave the stage."

-Col. Kyi Maung on the role of the military in Myanmar.

Finer considers 'Independent political activity by the armed forces', 'frequent', 'widespread' and 'long-standing'. As a specialized branch of bureaucracy that embodies national interests and the primary custodian of chief instruments of coercion, the military exercises constant influence on policy and decision-making. However, excess military intervention threatens Democratic Processes and Rights of Citizens. Acknowledgement of military primacy in Myanmar and appropriate constitutional limitations may prevent future Burmese democracies from the same. Military structures throughout the world are generally headed by an elected civilian head of state, in their capacity as commander-in-chief or supreme leader, and led by a civilian minister or secretary of defense, ensuring civilian ownership of the armed forces. Myanmar's military lacks any semblance of civilian ownership while its simplistic constitutional structure, low pace of socio-economic growth and glorification of military leaders provide passive support to Junta takeovers. Constitutional Reforms that clearly establish civilian control over the Military, limits the influence of armed forces in power politics are vital changes for a renewed and enduring democracy in Myanmar. Myanmar's ethnic diversity also commands any future democratic Myanmar must adopt a constitution-federal in letter and in spirit, so as to resolve ethnic conflict through a combination of shared-rule and self-rule.

Entrenched nature of the Tatmadaw and its history suggests a return to democracy is unlikely in the near future, with no indication that it will play any less a decisive role than in the past. Predicting the future of a country is no less a feat than palm-reading, and should be left up to mystics. I place immense trust on the people of Myanmar to chart their own course of action to achieve sovereignty over their national destiny. Having been through multiple Junta regimes, the Burmese people are resilient in their commitment to finding freedom in a democratic set-up. A decade long experience of democracy and an educated population connected with the global community ensures more capacity to mobilize people and resources, spread awareness and communicate through networks throughout the world in support of their efforts. Unprecedented cooperation among ethnic and religious groups has shifted dynamics in favor of the people. The Tatmadaw now faces organized public resistance and a community of nations that has refused to recognize its

legitimacy. I for one am optimistic, hopeful and confident in a democratic future for Myanmar's citizens.

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**SUBSECTION
ON
THE CRISIS
IN AFGHANISTAN**

A follow-up to the Taliban attack on Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present to its readers the political and military advancement of the Taliban in Afghanistan. After a 19-year and 10-month insurgency against NATO and Afghan Armed Forces, the conflict ended with the Taliban seizing power. It was the longest war in US history, lasting around five months longer than the Vietnam War. The final section of this article will discuss how India has developed a coordinated diplomatic response to this development in South Asia.

BACKGROUND

Taliban originated during the civil conflict that erupted after Soviet soldiers withdrew in 1989, primarily in the South-West and around the Pakistan border. They promised to eliminate corruption and increase security while adhering to a strict interpretation of Islamic law. They gained almost complete control of the country by 1998. Their early popularity was largely due to their success in stamping out corruption and curbing lawlessness. However, they also implemented or supported punishments in accordance with their harsh interpretation of Sharia law, including as public executions and amputations for those found guilty of stealing, causing widespread dread among the community. Oppressive policies towards women and minorities led to rampant human rights abuse and deplorable living conditions.

THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS AND THE U.S.- BRITISH INVASION

Following the 11 September 2001 World Trade Centre attacks in New York, the

world's attention was focused on the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban were accused of providing safe haven for the main suspects, Osama Bin Laden and other members of al-Qaeda.

On October 7, 2001, a military coalition led by the United States commenced assaults in Afghanistan, and by the first week of December, the Taliban administration had fallen.

U.S. TROOP SURGE AND THE END OF U.S. COMBAT MISSION

When Mr. Obama entered office in January 2009, he directed a veteran intelligence analyst, Bruce Riedel, to do a rapid policy review on Afghanistan. But, even before it was finished, he approved a Pentagon plan to deploy 17,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan, raising the total number of American forces on the ground to over 70,000. By the fall of 2009, with the Taliban gaining momentum, Mr. Obama's military leaders, supported by the elders on his war council, including then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, were pressuring him to go far further. Mr. Obama had developed to the point where he completely accepted the notion of "Afghan good enough" by the conclusion of his first administration. The phrase, which has been bandied about the White House since 2010, alluded to a policy that was happy with taking out terrorists, stopping the Taliban from overrunning the country, and putting a focus on getting the soldiers out. Afghanistan had improved by that new criteria. By August 2010, 100,000 American forces were on the ground in Afghanistan, driving the Taliban back in key regions.

The Navy SEAL mission that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011 reinforced Mr. Obama's belief that he was on his way to ending the conflict. Air Force One pulled out from behind a hangar at Joint Base Andrews at midnight on May 1, 2012, to pick up the president for a covert mission to Afghanistan. He was due to sign a strategic partnership agreement with Afghan President Hamid Karzai that would lay out the conditions of ties beyond 2014, when the US was supposed to remove its combat forces and hand over security to the Afghans. The pact promised a "enduring relationship" between the US and Afghanistan, including American assistance in strengthening the Afghan economy and public institutions.

In Doha, Qatar, on February 19, 2020, the US and the Taliban signed a peace agreement. The United States' priority was to safely exit Afghanistan with its troops and diplomats. In exchange for reassurances from the Taliban that transitional terrorist groups would not be allowed to operate on Afghan land, the US promised to withdraw its forces by May 1, 2021. The agreement was also reached in the midst of Afghanistan's precarious political environment. Internal strife existed within the Ashraf Ghani administration, and the results of the past two presidential elections, in 2014 and 2019, were contested. During a military effort against the Afghan government that started in May 2021, Taliban troops took control of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. His government resembled a loose confederation of many fiefdoms. The American forces were what kept them all together. The administration's fractures started to grow as it became evident that the Americans were departing.

On April 14, 2021, US President Joe Biden announced the withdrawal of US soldiers from Afghanistan, which would begin on May 1, 2021, and end on September 11, 2021, bringing an end to America's longest conflict. Biden removed not only American air support, but also intelligence personnel and contractors assigned to Afghanistan's warplanes and helicopters.

On May 1, 2021, the Taliban began their onslaught. Their plan was to capture the rural areas first, then lay siege to the cities, which collapsed one by one.

TALIBAN'S TAKEOVER OF AFGHANISTAN: A TRAJECTORY

The Taliban had ringed Kabul on August 15, 2021, after capturing the crucial Eastern city of Jalalabad and gaining control of other cities. The Taliban forces seized the Presidential Palace almost immediately after it was vacated by then President Ashraf Ghani. On the very same day, the Afghan army handed over the Bagram air base to the Taliban. The militants invaded the outskirts of the Afghan capital, declaring that they were waiting for a "peaceful handover" of the city after agreeing not to seize it by force. Residents rushed to the exit, while personnels fled government buildings and helicopters landed at the US Embassy. The Taliban had beaten, co-opted, or driven Afghan security forces from large sections of the country in a week-long national operation. According

to a spokesman, the Taliban is seeking the central government's unconditional submission. He refused to provide details about any potential conversations between his soldiers and the administration.

Former President Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah were among the government negotiators. In a video address, acting Defence Minister Bismillah Khan attempted to reassure the population. The Taliban made promises that their militants will not invade people's houses or interfere with commercial operations. They also made offers of "amnesty" to people who have collaborated with the Afghan government or international forces. Despite the guarantees, fear spread. Hundreds rushed to the Kabul airport to flee the country, the only way out of the nation with the Taliban controlling every border crossing. People gathered in front of private banks to withdraw their life savings, as several ATMs stopped dispensing cash. The Taliban's banner was flying high above a key mosque in Pakistan's capital, just days after the Taliban conquered Kabul. Khalil Haqqani, a Pakistani trainee, is one of Afghanistan's new rulers. On August 23, 2021, Taliban described August 31, 2021, deadline for evacuation as a 'red line'. After discussions with G7 colleagues, President Joe Biden said on August 24, 2021 that he has chosen to stick to his August 31, 2021 timeline for withdrawing American soldiers from Afghanistan. The United Kingdom, France, and Spain were the most recent countries to finish their exodus from Kabul.

On 26th August, 2021, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for a suicide bomber who crashed through crowds outside Kabul Airport, killing hundreds of civilians and 13 US service members. On September 2, 2021, Taliban soldiers and fighters loyal to local leader, Ahmad Massoud clashed in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley. Both sides claimed substantial deaths in recent days, fighting in the final region opposing Taliban administration.

Following these incidents, India and Russia discussed the potential risks from terror groups like JeM and LeT, which are engaged in lethal cross-border terror activities from Afghans' territory. India has described the situation in Afghanistan as "extremely precarious," emphasising on the need for the Taliban to adhere to its vow of not using the Afghan soil for terrorism. This was part of the first comprehensive analysis of the Afghan situation undertaken by

NSA A.K. Doval, the current National security advisor.. It was a collaboration between the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and Security Services, as well as Russian NSA General Nikolay Patrushev. Russia is among the important players in Afghanistan, it may be recalled that Moscow had played a key role in negotiating with the Taliban to facilitate movement of Indian diplomats including the envoy from chancery to airport on the night of August 16 following the Taliban takeover. The Taliban declared a caretaker government in Afghanistan on September 7, 2021. Hibatullah Akhundzada became the Head of Afghanistan's Islamic Emirates, with control over all political, military, religious, and administrative appointments. There are two Deputy Prime Ministers, Abdul Ghani Baradar and Abdul Salam Hanafi.

The Taliban takeover of the state authority in Afghanistan has raised issues that rarely confront global regimes. In particular, international attention was drawn to the announcement that the acting head of the new Afghan government and several ministers are on the UN's proscribed list. Akhundzada, his deputy and the various ministers, including those handling foreign affairs, are restricted from travelling abroad once the waivers lapse for some of them. Second, the Taliban have accumulated arms supplies that are more than adequate to hold Kabul for two years. Third is the range of decisions relating to Afghanistan's funds and financial assistance that has been frozen. The IMF had stopped the transfer of \$460 million. An IMF spokesperson had explained that there was a "lack of clarity within the international community regarding recognition of a government in Afghanistan, as a consequence of which the country cannot access SDRs or other IMF resources."

With a humanitarian crisis brewing in Afghanistan, all these murky issues need to be addressed early. The US announced that it will resume some funding for humanitarian needs through multilateral agencies handling food, migration and health in Afghanistan. The US Treasury is also reportedly assuring aid organisations working in Afghanistan and banks handling their accounts that it is taking a non-enforcement posture. These are executive actions. Other states, keen on humanitarian support but finding they need to adjust national regulations, will follow as Security Council resolution 2593 adopted on August 30, 2021, which calls upon all states to provide humanitarian assistance. The UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths was in Afghanistan to

work out appropriate arrangements. The Secretary General called for a ministerial meeting on humanitarian assistance on August 13.

However, as the experience most recently in Syria highlights, the linkages between the humanitarian, the political and the security elements in such situations open cleavages that already exist and can further complicate the Afghanistan crisis that has been brought to the global high table.

The Taliban flag waved over the Afghan Presidential Palace, the same day the U.S. and the world marked the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban flag was raised on 10th September, 2021, and could be seen waving over the Presidential Palace in Kabul the next day. The militant group also painted their white backdrop flag on the wall of the US Embassy building.

On September 24, 2021, The Taliban's new defence minister issued a rebuke over misconduct by some commanders and fighters following the movement's victory over the Western-backed government in Afghanistan last month, saying abuses would not be tolerated. Kabul was taken over by the Taliban less than six weeks ago.

Afghans are concerned about a return to the Taliban's brutally harsh regime of the 1990s. The Taliban claimed to be more moderate this time, yet they have already limited Afghans' liberties. Even people who are concerned about the probable re-introduction of penalties such as cutting off criminals' hands claim some security has returned to Kabul. The Taliban arrested 85 alleged criminals, some accused of petty crimes, and others of murder, kidnapping and robbery, said Noor Ahmad Rabbani of the Taliban's anti-crime department on October 4, 2021.

The Taliban have stated that they will reinstate their former sentences. The only question is whether they would be carried out openly, according to the former Justice minister. Taliban with guns have taken up positions at checkpoints across Kabul. Some have been forced to wear uniforms, signalling the start of a new national security force. Many worry they will put a stop to corruption, but so far they appear to have avoided overt bribery. The military's rampant fraud was one of the reasons it crumbled so fast in the face of the oncoming Taliban.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

On September 11, 2021, the Taliban informed China that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) militants from the volatile Xinjiang province who reportedly converged in Afghanistan have left the war-torn country after being asked to. Since seizing power in Kabul, the Taliban have been facing intense pressure from the Beijing, which have been vocal in expressing its concern over the Uyghur militants of the ETIM fighting for independence of Xinjiang, regrouping in Afghanistan under the rule of the Afghan militant group as the volatile province shares a narrow border with the war-ravaged country.

Suhail Shaheen (a Taliban member) said in future, the counter-terrorism work will be conducted by the country's ministry of defence, ministry of interior and intelligence department. "They will be working together to ensure that no one uses the soil of Afghanistan against other countries." India and Australia called for the Taliban to guarantee safe passage for foreign nationals and Afghans wanting to leave the country, as commercial flights resume from Kabul and scores of foreigners fly out of the Afghan capital. This categorical reference on safe passage was announced by India and Australia in their joint statement following their maiden 2+2 ministerial (Foreign & Defence Ministers) dialogue on September 11, 2021. On September 12, 2021, border forces and armed police units were deployed in the counter-terrorism grid that have been directed by the central security establishment to prepare and administer a new training module on the Taliban and its modus operandi to the troops in view of the "emerging" scenario following the Islamic militia taking over Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan on 18th September, 2021, said that he has "initiated a dialogue" with the Taliban for an inclusive government in Kabul that will include Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks, a day after the SCO member states said that it is critical to have an inclusive government in the war-torn country with representatives from all ethnic, religious and political groups. The Taliban, which seized control of Afghanistan mid-August, had promised an "inclusive" government that represents all.

A lone wolf terror attack was carried out in the diplomatic zone of Bangladesh capital Dhaka on 20th September, 2021, weeks after the Taliban captured power in Kabul. This was the first instance of a terror strike in South Asia outside

Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. On September 21, 2021, military spokesman Major General Babar Iftikhar said that the Taliban have reiterated on several occasions that no group or terrorist organisation will be allowed to use Afghan territory for any terrorist activity against any country, including Pakistan. Pakistani newspaper Dawn reported that one of the country's major concerns has been the presence of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorist group in Afghanistan.

INDIA'S RESPONSE TO THIS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

Afghanistan was a loose coalition between Kabul's democratic government, the West, and other democracies like India. However, the world is likely to witness Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and China teaming together to play the next chapter of the Great Game. Given the country's poor ties and border issues with Pakistan and China, the Taliban's defeat might be especially difficult for India.

Some in India see this as a loss for Delhi and a big win for Pakistan. But former Indian diplomat Jitendra Nath Misra said that was too simplistic a view, because the Pashtun-led Taliban has never recognised the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, creating discomfort for Islamabad. "Pakistan would want to get the Taliban to accept the border and this will be a top priority," he said.

But it's also true that the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan gives Pakistan strategic depth against India. Islamabad has got what it always wanted, said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Wilson Center think-tank in Washington - a government in Afghanistan that it can easily influence.

"Pakistani officials may show this off as India's loss, but then there are bigger strategic goals for Pakistan," Mr Kugelman said. "It really sees itself as the biggest regional winner at the moment." Experts say Pakistan was not happy with the growing ties between the US and India, or former Afghan president Ashraf Ghani's lukewarm relations with Islamabad. The country's struggling economy also made it feel vulnerable.

Now Islamabad has reasons to believe that it's the winner because its "all-weather" friendship with China will be useful in Afghanistan. Moreover, Beijing is not shy of showing its might anymore. "China can and will play the game now according to its own rules," Mr Misra said. India has long been interested in strengthening security and cultural connections with Afghanistan, but Delhi today has no viable choices. Russia and Iran appear to be on the same path; neither has evacuated its embassy, and their ambassadors remain in Kabul. China also has economic interests in Afghanistan, which can help meet its ever-increasing need for minerals, but more crucially, it can put pressure on the Taliban to prohibit the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) from operating on its territory. "There are bad and then there are worse options," according to Misra.

The biggest challenge India will face is whether to recognise the Taliban government or not. The decision will get tough, especially if Moscow and Beijing decide to acknowledge the Taliban government in some form. Experts say Islamabad is likely to officially accept the Taliban government, as it did in 1999. India's best option at the moment seems to keep a channel of communication open with the Taliban. But it will be an uneasy relationship, considering the history between the Taliban and Delhi. The Taliban's provision of a safe passage to the hijackers of an Indian Airlines plane in 1999, in particular, is an incident that remains etched in the collective memory of Indians. Not to mention, Delhi has always kept close ties with the Northern Alliance - a group of Afghan warlords that fought the Taliban between 1996 and 1999, a cause of irritation for the militants. India also needs to formulate a strategy to ensure that the thorny region of Kashmir doesn't become the next rallying point for the mujahideens. There are no easy options for India, but its decisions will have consequences on regional peace and global geopolitics.

An interlinked set of mitigation strategies could help India to protect its interests:

- **Broader Diplomatic Engagement:** India should consider appointing a special envoy dedicated to Afghan reconciliation. The envoy can ensure that Indian views are expressed at every meeting. By organising broadened engagements with the Afghan government and other political actors to reach out to certain Taliban representatives.

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- **Continued Training and Investments:** India should provide more military training to Afghan security forces and invest in longer-term capacity-building programs. It should actively support and invest in the National Directorate of Security (for example, by providing training and sharing intelligence). Finally, given the continued levels of violence and the impact of the Corona Virus on the Afghan economy, India should expand its development assistance.
 - **Working With and Through Others:** India should look to broaden its engagements with Iran and Russia, explore more opportunities for cooperation (as limited as they might be) with China, and find common ground with the United States on Afghanistan's future. This does not mean forcing competing interests to align; it means investing in a wider diplomatic initiative with the view to carve out areas of convergence.

The Modi government's "Neighbourhood First" foreign policy strategy emphasises on sustaining regional stability and mutually beneficial ties. It invests billions of dollars in nations ranging from Bhutan to Nepal through the budget of its external affairs ministry and other agencies. One fundamental objective of this strategy to Afghanistan has been to prevent the nation from falling into the hands of the Pakistan-backed Taliban or another similar entity. That dread is now a reality that India must deal with. Its security system must determine if Kashmir will be a flashpoint again, as it was three decades ago, when Islamist terrorists focused their attention to the area following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, India's investment has not put it in a position to handle this risk since New Delhi has failed to establish the strategic presence it need in Afghanistan. While Modi's administration has always stated that such diplomacy is not about reciprocity, the fact is that as Afghanistan devolves into anarchy, India lacks power to guarantee that the nation does not become an even greater security problem across South and Central Asia. S. Jaishankar, India's external affairs minister, stated that India has simply invested in its friendship with the Afghan people and insisted on receiving the full value in return. For the time being, India would "wait and watch," he said. From January through April, India's foreign policy programme Vaccine Maitri distributed 6.64 crore doses to 95 nations around the world. The Afghan administration has changed, but India is unlikely to modify its attitude

on "keeping the neighbourhood secure," S. Jaishankar said. India's approach in Afghanistan was mostly based on soft power. Along with the parliament and the dam, other community projects and schools were established, and Afghans, of course, like Bollywood. Nonetheless, India's middle-of-the-road strategy has resulted in a diplomatic dead end.

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Taliban Resurgence and India

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide a description of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of US troops from the country after 20 years of war. Against the backdrop of an already dire situation, following the 40 years of war, economic decline, inflation and rising poverty, in 2021, Afghanistan faced intensified conflict, the withdrawal of international forces and in August the takeover of the country by the Taliban. With the Taliban forming the government, this paper discusses the problems and challenges the government faces in running the country, the responses of other countries especially India to the new developments focusing especially on the security situation which remains highly uncertain and the humanitarian crisis ravaging the country. It also suggests what India can do in this regard.

TALIBAN TAKEOVER OF AFGHANISTAN AND US WITHDRAWAL

Afghanistan, a country in south-central Asia, one of India's neighbours, has been taken over by the Taliban (a Deobandi Islamist religious-political movement and military organization) which had earlier ruled the country from 1996 to 2001 when the US war against terrorism was started by George W. Bush, following the the 9/11 terrorist attacks (on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the USA) by the Al-Qaeda operating from Afghanistan, the US crushed the militant rulers and permanently staffed its troops there and set up a democratic government.

In 2009 US President Barack Obama began deploying tens of thousands more troops in Afghanistan to weaken the Taliban. In May 2011 Obama announced he would begin bringing US troops home with a goal of handing off security responsibility to the Afghans by 2014. Over the next years troop levels declined steadily. Next President Donald Trump vowed to bring the American troops

home but fulfilling this promise remained difficult as Taliban continued to surge. A deal was struck in February 2020 that set the course for a full American withdrawal in exchange for guarantees from the Taliban it would reduce violence and cut ties to terror groups. As the US troops began leaving the Taliban gained strength.

In April 2021, US President Joe Biden announced the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11, effectively winding down the conflict 20 years after it began. This sparked off insurgencies in rural pockets of the country, eventually spreading with the Taliban rapidly advancing across the nation, conquering province after province. The rate of Taliban resurgence shocked intelligence agencies across the world.

On 12th August 2021, Taliban forces captured Kandahar and Herat, the country's second and third largest cities. On 15th August 2021, the Taliban entered Kabul, prompting President Ghani to flee along with several other government officials. The insurgent group claimed that "the Afghanistan War is over," with them having complete control of the country following their storming of the capital. The terrorists seized Bagram air base, which was the largest US military installation in the country, and released the 5,000 prisoners held there.

Scenes of Taliban brutality shocked the internet. The Islamists shot dead protesters and whipped crowds in Afghanistan after the initial charm offensive, where many mothers hurled their babies over wire fences to get them to safety. The evacuation of Afghan refugees by US and UK forces were in full swing. Panjshir became the last holdout of anti-Taliban forces and it remained the only province the group had not seized during their takeover of the country. Despite Taliban claims of having taken charge of the whole of Afghanistan after seizing complete control of the province of Panjshir - the leader of National Resistance Front (NRF) rejected such claims, calling on Afghans to "rise up" and resist Talib tyranny.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION

In September 2021, the Taliban announced the formation of an interim government composed of hardliners, where they also turned the regime into the 'Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan'. Though, the Taliban previously said that the government will be led by a religious leader and draw its legitimacy from clerics. Adding to this, no women or officials from the preceding government and only a few representatives from ethnic minority communities will be included in the Taliban's cabinet.

The Taliban's new thirty-three-member caretaker cabinet includes men who are considered terrorists by the United States and who are sanctioned by the United Nations. Of these, the most notable is Mohammad Hassan Akhund, the acting Prime Minister. Taliban cofounder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who headed the Taliban's political commission, is Akhund's deputy. Sirajuddin Haqqani—who is acting head of the Haqqani Network (a militant group in Afghanistan's southeast and Pakistan's northwest with close ties to the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and Pakistan's intelligence services) is the acting Interior Minister. Mullah Muhammad Yaqoub, Omar's son, is serving as the acting Defense Minister.

Mullah Mohammed Hasan Akhund was named as leader of the new government, while Taliban co-founder Abdul Ghani Baradar was named as his deputy. The Taliban's inner working leadership have long been shrouded in secrecy even when they ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.

Until their takeover, the Taliban primarily earned revenue through criminal activities, including opium poppy cultivation, drug trafficking, extortion of local businesses, and kidnapping. They have also supplemented their income with illicit mining and donations from abroad, despite imposition of strict UN sanctions.

The Taliban have sought to boost diplomacy with countries in the region, such as China, Pakistan, and Russia. However, the United States and other Western countries have not yet recognized the Taliban as Afghanistan's government nor have they defined what kind of relationship they will have with the Taliban.

WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR AFGHANISTAN

Reports of targeted killings in Taliban-controlled areas fueled the exodus of thousands more refugees to Kabul's airport. On 26th of August reports emerged of two blasts near the entrance of Kabul's airport. U.S. military officials placed the blame on ISIS Khorosan, otherwise known as ISIS-K – an offshoot of the Islamic State operating in Afghanistan which later did claim responsibility for the suicide bombing.

Taliban have created an exclusive battalion of suicide bombers that will be deployed to the borders of Afghanistan particularly in the Badakhshan. Afghanistan's heritage is at risk which now is in the hands of the Taliban. Everyone is gravely worried about the social and economic welfare of the Afghan civilians as the Taliban had imposed the hard Islamic Sharia law, when earlier in power and strove to impose it again where the rights given to women were negligible with them being forced to wear the burqas, being denied basic education and employment opportunities, and restraining their movement outside to only in the presence of at least 1 male member of the family. The Taliban is estimated to have control of 65 percent of the country, according to the European Union. Around 400,000 Afghans have been displaced from their homes.

The Taliban celebrated Afghanistan's Independence Day by declaring it had beaten the United State. But challenges to its rule, ranging from running the country's frozen government to potentially facing armed opposition, have begun to emerge. From ATMs being out of cash to worries about food across the nation of 38 million people reliant on imports, the Taliban faces all the challenges of the civilian government it dethroned, without the level of international aid it enjoyed.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS THAT AFGHANISTAN NOW FACES

Some 360,000 people in Afghanistan have been uprooted from their homes by conflict since January, and an additional 30,000 are reportedly fleeing the country each day. Afghanistan has already produced the second-largest displaced population in the world, after Syria, and this number is expected to

rise exponentially. Schools are closed, food shortages abound, and people are turning to desperate measures such as child labor and early marriage for girl due to the extremely dire economic situation in Afghanistan pushing more families deeper into poverty and forcing them to make these desperate choices. Afghan children are subject to extreme poverty and violence. Child mortality, malnutrition, forced marriages and sexual abuse are on the rise.

Attacks on minority communities are on the rise and the Sikhs and Hindus are faced with the option of leaving or remaining in their homeland. The birth of the Taliba proved to be a nightmare for the Hazaras, Afghanistan's third largest ethnic group constituting 20% of the population who were subjected to repeated tortured, humiliation, threats and repeated persecution.

For years Afghan women have been subject to persistent human rights violations and brutal discriminations. During the Taliban's regime draconian rules were imposed on women. women were not allowed to work and girls were not allowed to attend school. Women were required to cover their faces and were denied basic healthcare. Women are subject to brutal punishment for breaking the rules set by the insurgent group. Afghan women and girls fear the return of their dreadful days with the return of the Taliban.

Eighteen million people in Afghanistan are in dire need of humanitarian assistance—a situation that is only worsening as the conflict intensifies. The crisis ranks second on the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) 2021 Emergency Watchlist, a global list of humanitarian crises that are expected to deteriorate the most over the coming year. Humanitarian organisations like the IRC are committed to remaining in Afghanistan and delivering support to its population. It is vital that world leaders do the same. In addition, these leaders must welcome Afghan refugees to resettle in their countries for a chance to rebuild their lives. World leaders must ensure aid organisations have access to deliver life saving support to people who need it. They must also advocate for an immediate ceasefire and support a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Afghanistan needs sustained aid and diplomatic support from both Western and regional powers. Without this, there remains little chance that needs will be met and peace will be found.

INDIA'S STANCE TOWARDS THE EMERGING SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE THREAT IT INDIA FACES

After the collapse of the government in Kabul, India has adopted a 'wait and watch' approach in its dealing with the Taliban. What is being overlooked is that "strategic patience" cannot be an alibi for inaction. The question is how long will India 'wait and watch'?

No other power from the west to the east has considered India's interests while charting its course on Afghanistan. India has found itself cut out of several quadrilateral arrangements: the main negotiations held by the "Troika plus" of the United States-Russia-China-Pakistan that pushed for a more "inclusive government" including the Taliban. The alternative grouping of Russia-Iran-China-Pakistan that formed a "regional arc" that has today seen them retain their embassies in Kabul. Neither India's traditional strategic and defence partner, Russia, nor its fastest growing global strategic partner, the United States, thought it important to include India in these agreements. It is time to accept that India is in need of a new diplomatic strategy.

India now faces a "threat umbrella" to its north, including Pakistan's cross-border terrorism, Afghanistan's new regime and China's aggression at the Line of Actual Control. Despite the current unpredictable political climate, India's years of investment in infrastructure and grassroot development could act as a building block for cementing relations with the new regime in the coming years. In particular, India must continue to facilitate medical visas for Afghan patients and extend the education visas for students who are already admitted to Indian colleges. It is India's soft power, strategic autonomy or non-alignment principles and assistance to those in need, particularly in its neighbourhood, that has been the strongest chords to its unique voice in the world. The moment to make that voice heard in Afghanistan is now.

India should prioritise the welfare of the Afghan people, whenever the opportunity presents itself. As a close neighbour, India has keen stakes in ensuring a stable, secure and developed Afghanistan. As the rotational President of the UN Security Council for August, India had an opportunity to engage important stakeholders on the way forward. Beyond that too, India's

presence in the UN Security Council till the end of 2022 will provide a platform to explore options with greater flexibility.

For India, the main interest is in preventing Afghan soil from being used by the anti-India terror groups. Taliban want to continue Afghanistan's political, economic and cultural ties with India. It would be right for India to wait patiently on the Taliban's ability to deliver on these promises and stand up against the Pakistan army's pressure to keep India out of the Afghan-Pakistan agreements..

India and the Central Asian States share common concerns about Afghanistan overrun by the Taliban. Their common concerns are the worries of battles at their borders, safe havens for jihadist terror groups inside Afghanistan and the spill-over of radicalism into their own countries. It is necessary for India to work with them, and other neighbours to shore up finances for the government in Kabul, particularly to ensure that the government structure does not collapse. Cooperation on anti-terrorism, as part of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), India must also step up its engagement with the Central Asian countries on fighting terror. India can support the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in terms of airpower. South Asia must learn from Central Asia's recent example in knitting together this region more tightly, a task that can only be completed with better ties between India and Pakistan. India's furtive discussions with the Taliban leadership in Doha make little sense unless a less tactical and more strategic engagement with Pakistan is also envisaged.

To safeguard its civilian assets in Afghanistan as well as to stay relevant in the unfolding 'great game' in and around Afghanistan, India must fundamentally reset its Afghanistan policy. India must, in its own national interest, begin 'open talks' with the Taliban before it is too late. Open dialogue with the Taliban should no longer be a taboo; it is a strategic necessity.

India has been using soft power strategies like the vaccine maitri to its advantage. India has also decided to provide wheat to Taliban lead Afghanistan. India understands that hard and soft power cannot be an alternative to each other, rather the combination of the two in a non-coercive,

cooperative manner, often termed as smart power, can be the right strategy in Afghanistan.

In the end, India's engagement with the Taliban may or may not achieve much, but non-engagement will definitely hurt Indian interests. India must actively contribute to the SCO deliberations on Afghanistan, but must temper its hopes for a collective regional solution. At the same time, Delhi should focus on intensifying its engagement with various Afghan groups, including the Taliban, and finding effective regional partners to secure its interests in a changing Afghanistan. In conclusion, for a patient, open-minded and active India, there will be no dearth of balancing opportunities in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, the Afghan problem remains complicated and existential and is a major threat to peace in the region because the local stakeholders failed to recognize the need to resolve the issue through a process of dialogue. It is not only the ethnic predicament of Afghanistan which is compounding the problem but failure of the Afghan leadership to settle things on their own instead of providing space to external players in sustaining their involvement is also true. There is no quick fix solution to deal with the Afghan problem but the efforts to counter regional extremism, violence and terrorism along with the issue of corruption, nepotism, war lordism and bad governance must be in the right direction. Again, it is the responsibility of Afghan leadership, whether belonging to the government, opposition or other groups to ensure the rule of law, justice system, good governance and pro people social and human development. Once the people of Afghanistan are involved in the process of genuine development, the menace of violence, extremism and terrorism will go away.

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The Afghan Labour Vexation: a BBIN Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Afghanistan became the epicentre of global attention with the resurgence of the Taliban in August 2021. As Kabul fell, the war-ravaged country moved towards an ambiguous future, making hundreds and thousands of migrant labourers drown in a consequent predicament. The plight that followed thereafter was a scenario of lawlessness and immobility in the country, making global governments join hands together for rescue operations, primarily targeting their own stranded citizens. This paper chiefly attempts to analyse the condition of the migrant labourers from the BBIN Countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) in Afghanistan, their journey back home, and the innuendo that it might bring for South Asia as a whole.

Key words: Migrant labourers, lawlessness, immobility, BBIN Countries.

ANALYSING THE MARE'S NEST

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on 15th August 2021, deranged the international community as Islamist hardliners gained control of Afghan territories. The withdrawal of the United States forces, following peace talks with the Taliban (February 2020), heralded a resurgence of apprehended lawlessness, threatened human rights and narrow political freedom, with the displacement of millions. Even though the Taliban were initially welcomed by the masses, they failed to fulfil their promises of restoring peace and security and harped upon extremist ideologies. The Taliban's involvement changed the face of the country, resulting in a political, cultural and economic upheaval. The militant group has further been forced to change tactics, following the 9/11 terror attack, changing its strategies from a series of complex attacks in cities to a wave of targeted assassinations that terrorized Afghan civilians. Despite

grave concerns over the vulnerability of the situation, the newly elected United States President Joe Biden urged the American troops to withdraw from Afghanistan.



PICTURE 1: Fear Spreads in Kabul as Taliban Take Charge

Source: "Fear spreads in Kabul as Taliban take charge,"

The New York Times, August 16, 2021,

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/08/16/world/taliban-afghanistan-news>

This transition has affected thousands of migrant labourers from other South Asian neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (the BBIN countries), who were working in Afghanistan, ultimately being forced to flee in fear of Taliban tyranny. Though Afghanistan has a high unemployment rate itself, migrant workers from neighbouring countries sought employment in odd jobs in Afghanistan. As a result, since 1990, the nature of migration in Afghanistan changed drastically. While in 1990 Afghanistan had around 3,80,000 economic migrants, the number rose to around 1 million in 2000, and to 2.25 million in 2015. This trend represents a net annual flow of 85,000 Afghans over the last 15 years. Currently, the Afghan labour market is under significant stress due to unemployment (20%) and job scarcity. Thus, Afghanistan's biggest asset- an underage (hence under-utilised) labour force, has paved the way for outsiders to come in and make their way up in the labour market. Consequently, labour migration has flourished in Afghanistan, with 16 percent of the households having their roots in different

countries, with various nationalities. Labour migrations have helped immigrants secure temporary and legal jobs for their surplus labour, enabling them to earn higher wages, send remittances back to their families, save for future investments, gain first-hand experience and upgrade their skills.

The BBIN countries have been vital partners in supplying migrant labourers in Afghanistan, as well as boosting their own GDP in return, making it a win-win situation for both. A country wise perspective would help us in understanding the present scenario better.

ANALYSING THE NEPALESE STANCE

As countries urged the swift evacuation of their distraught citizens from a chaotic Afghanistan, the Himalayan country of Nepal has also been following the lead. The Nepalese Minister of Home Affairs, Bal Krishna Khand, has made adequate arrangements for the rescue of the stranded workers, out of which an average of 1500 to 2000 work in the formal sector. Their arenas of work consisted of consular services of various foreign countries such as Canada, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the US. They were also deployed as security guards for the US and British defence contractors based in Kabul, Bagram Air Base, Kandahar and other military installations. Logistics companies such as Texas-based Fluor or Turkish sub-contractors also attracted a vast majority of the Nepalese working in the organised sector.

According to the Department of Foreign Employment, in the last fiscal year, ending mid-July, 1073 Nepalese had obtained labour permits to work in Afghanistan. The department's statistics show that in the last seven years, more than 8,000 Nepalese have been issued labour permits to Afghanistan. Since there are no figures of the undocumented Nepali workers, estimates suggest there could be more than 14,000. Afghanistan is one of the key countries, despite high risk, where Nepalese prefer to go due to high pay.

Nepal's turmoil also stems from the inefficacy of its leadership, with the core reason being the internal dissent being harboured within the Nepali Congress. The Sher Bahadur Deuba government lacks ministers at three essential levels, namely foreign affairs, labour and tourism. This, and the absence of a direct

diplomatic channel with Afghanistan may compel the country to seek foreign aid in evacuating its citizens from the war-ravaged land. Nepal could rebuild a liaison with its immediate neighbour, India, thus rekindling the warmth which may have faded in the recent years due to border disputes (such as the Kalapani dispute).

BHUTAN'S LABOUR SITUATION

The chaos that erupted at the Kabul International Airport following the Taliban takeover, with all the commercial flights suspended, made it impossible for the lone Bhutanese workers to flee the country. Estimates suggest that around 130 such employees of the United Nations were stranded in the war-ravaged country, and were asked to remain in the UN compound at that time.

THE BANGLADESHI DILEMMA

The withdrawal of the last batch of US troops from Afghanistan engendered a plethora of concerns for most South Asian countries. Bangladesh too was not an exception. Following a 'wait and watch' policy, the country had been keenly monitoring the developments following the Taliban takeover. Bangladesh's preference for a policy of no-interference allowed the Foreign Minister of the country to believe that Kabul's political scenario was unlikely to affect Dhaka in a considerable manner. While there was the odd social media post that sympathized with the Taliban, claiming their victory to represent the victory of Islam as a whole, the country feared the rise of 'violent extremism', with the re-emergence of home-grown radical Islamist groups. Thus, Bangladesh needs to be wary of the repercussions, such as the resurgence of indigenous groups like the Harkat ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (Huji-B), which may unleash new waves of terror akin to those observed in the 1990s.

Bangladeshi nationals have been contributing to the socio-economic, and educational development of Afghanistan for decades, primarily as employees of BRAC (Bangladeshi Rural Advancement Committee), one of the leading NGOs of the country. Six of the nine Bangladesh's BRAC staffers managed to

return home. Around 3000 staffers worked across 10 provinces in Afghanistan. Of the 14 expatriate staffers working in Afghanistan, 12 were Bangladeshis, according to the statement issued by BRAC. The organisation took steps to ensure adequate security measures for its personnel in the face of growing violence in Afghanistan ever since the formal withdrawal of troops began, said the BRAC International Executive Director Shameran Abed.

UNDERSTANDING THE INDIAN POSITION

Amid reports of clashes between Taliban militia and the Afghan Army in regions such as Jalandhar and Khost, the Indian authorities desperately tried to follow the lead in bringing their citizens back home. As reiterated by the External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar, evacuating stranded Indian workers was to be the Government's top priority. Despite the fact that the Indian Embassy in Kabul closed down, an 'Afghanistan Cell' had been set up to coordinate repatriation and related matters.

Accordingly, India evacuated a total of 565 people, including 438 Indians, of which we find the mention of 110 people from the Sikh community, from Afghanistan, under "Operation Devi Shakti". The Special Afghanistan Cell remained in touch with the remaining stranded Indians, as well as the members of the minority Afghan community. The External Affairs Minister also clarified that the Cell had been actively responding to queries and desperate phone calls, wherein around 3,436 telephone calls, 9,581 Whatsapp messages, and 4,569 emails were attended to.

CONCLUSION

Except for Nepal, all the other BBIN countries had well-established formal diplomatic channels with Afghanistan. However, most of the migrants who settled in Kabul and its peripheries went through illegal routes because of the sensitivity of the region, as has been realised in the past few years. In this scenario, India was one of the most important countries in South Asia, helping in the repatriation process, because smaller neighbours apparently lacked a

primary emergency response team. The US acknowledged the support of several countries, including India, for their 'generous efforts', in providing aid to at-risk Afghans and helping relocate them during the critical operations.

The idea of regionalism and sub-regionalism had seemed viable right from the end of the Second World War. Deriving inspiration from the reconstruction of the European economy, South Asia realised the need for promoting economic growth, coupled with social progress and political development in the region. Accordingly, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was formulated. However, factors such as poor trade performances, inadequacy in terms of bilateral cooperation, and most importantly, the Indo-Pak inertia acted as inhibitions in the journey of SAARC. As a result of this, countries decided to engage in sub-regional cooperation. Thus Nepal asserted for a South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ), consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India, during the SAARC Foreign Ministers' Conference, with an aim to improve cross-border connectivity, enhance trade, and strengthen sub-regional economic integration.

Given its sheer size, technical advancement, and unwavering commitment to economic integration, India has always been at the centre-stage of affairs in South Asia. Accordingly, it has been keen on taking up asymmetrical responsibilities, including opening up of its markets to its South Asian neighbours, without insisting upon reciprocity. In this regard, the country has come across as a potential host and leader in filling up the vacuum that has been caused by the fall of Afghanistan as a potential destination for economic gains. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka (and even Pakistan) further emphasised upon India's desire to look into the interests of its immediate neighbourhood (India's Neighbourhood First Foreign Policy), thereby showcasing the pragmatism present in its policy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. India's soft power approach can catalyse the process of the BBIN Multilateral Framework, which has been in stagnation for a very long time. The relative openness of economies of the BBIN countries with India bearing the asymmetrical responsibilities, and an improvement in infrastructure and connectivity will automatically result in better access to the large Indian market for smaller member states. Landlocked states such as Nepal and Bhutan would thereby be greatly benefited by the

presence of a multi-modal transportation system, on being able to avail cheap transit services to ports in India and Bangladesh. Cooperation in energy sector, including the harnessing of the hydropower potential of Nepal and Bhutan, and the thermal power capabilities of India and Bangladesh could prove to be mutually beneficial for all the member countries.

This initiative is important for India in terms of improving sub-regional connectivity. Additionally, India's North-East would benefit from the reduced transportation cost, thereby leading to better communication networks in the region. Given that this region of the country is literally landlocked, and precariously connected to the mainland only via the narrow Siliguri Corridor, enhanced access to the North East would be highly advantageous for the country. At the same time, the efforts shown by India in helping its smaller neighbours tide over the Afghan crisis may be seen as an affirmative for the country to shed its image as a South Asian 'big brother', thereby making this area a zone of collaboration and peace, of greater integration and not contention.

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 18. ILLUSTRATION: PICTURE DEPICTING THE CHAOS THAT ERUPTED AT THE KABUL AIRPORT POST THE DEPARTURE OF THE TALIBAN- THE NEW YORK TIMES <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/08/16/world/taliban-afghanistan-news>.
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Taliban 2.0: The Indian diplomatic imperative

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ABSTRACT

The swift and dramatic resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan following a hasty withdrawal of the USA, has brought to the surface a plethora of strategic, security, and geopolitical concerns. Amidst these, India finds herself in a peculiar position. This essay attempts to study the Indian position vis-à-vis the Taliban 2.0 and also assess the options open to India to bolster her diplomatic relations in this backdrop. This is done by taking into account the recent developments in Afghanistan and their implications on the major world powers with special reference to India.

AFGHANISTAN UNDER TALIBAN 2.0: BACKDROP AND PRESENT SITUATION

The Taliban advanced with a speed of light between May 4th and August 15th, bringing one province after another under its control, starting from Nerkh district and stopping only after the capture of Kabul.³⁰ The abdication of President Ashraf Ghani further smoothened the process of the Kabul takeover. This was followed by a spectacle of frantic Afghans crowding airports in desperation to leave the country, fearing the resumption of the atrocities of 1996. Before advancing further into a discussion of the present state, let us first take into account what led to the hasty withdrawal of the USA and the resurgence of the Taliban.

The 2021 US withdrawal though hasty, was not sudden. The 'Baradar-Khalilzad Pact' signed between the Donald Trump administration and Taliban, to end the decades-long war, among other things provided for complete

30. Timeline: The Taliban's Rapid advance across Afghanistan", Reuters, August 16, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/timeline-talibans-rapid-advance-across-afghanistan-2021-08-15/> Accessed on 6th October, 2021.

removal of US troops from Afghan soil, within May 1st, 2021. Joe Biden, on assuming office, was faced with a choice of either to 'end war' or 'escalate' it by breaching the agreement. He chose the former, by announcing US withdrawal by September 11th³¹. However, senior Pentagon leaders have highlighted, that these concrete dates had a role in demoralizing the Afghan troops, which the US Generals failed to assess. Thus, explaining the rapid fall of US-trained Afghan troops when faced with the Taliban insurgency.

Once in occupation of the Presidential Palace, the Taliban demanded a complete vacation of Afghanistan soil by the US within the 31st of August. This was carried out with a lot of swiftness, even amidst external disturbance and pressure on the US to extend the date by several western countries, including Johnson's England. Following this, the next major task was the formation of a caretaker government. This process was however punctuated by the activities of the National Resistance Front (NRF) – formed in Panjshir, the only holdout region against Taliban – under Ahmad Shah Massoud, and self-proclaimed caretaker President and erstwhile Vice-President Amrullah Saleh. The NRF was successful in annexing Andarab and two other districts in Baghlan. Negotiating talks having failed, the Taliban launched a brutal offensive, where both sides incurred heavy losses. NRF suffered a setback as most of its leaders were killed. Massoud called for peace talks, however hours later, the Taliban declared the fall of Panjshir and formal completion of the takeover of Afghanistan. The ethnically different population of Panjshir was however assured of safety by Zabibullah Mujahid, the Talibani spokesman.

After a series of discussions and negotiations, allegedly mediated by Pakistan, the caretaker government was announced on September 7th, 2021, and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan took shape with Mohammad Hasan Akhund as acting Prime Minister, Abdul Ghani Baradar as his deputy, Amir Khan Muttaqi as foreign minister, Mullah Yaqoob as defense minister and Sirajuddin Haqqani as interior affairs ministers. The government thus announced, far from being 'inclusive' consisted of Talibs exclusively. Further, the crucial position given to Haqqani, and not making Baradar the Prime minister despite his leading role in US withdrawal and talks, hint at a close Pakistani influence in

31. Reuters

the decisions – the former being a close ally and latter not so close to Pakistan. The government thus formed is evidence in point as to how problematic it is to expect the Taliban to act according to the face value of their promises, as on several previous occasions spokesperson Zabibullah Mujahid, has promised the formation of an inclusive government. It was a few weeks later, in the face of mounting pressure, that non-Pashtuns from Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek were included. However, there are still no women in the government.

Akhund was quoted celebrating the “withdrawal of foreign forces ... and complete liberation of the country”, by the Times of India. The frantic urge of the Afghans to leave the country, the demeaning patriarchal rules imposed on women and female students, the several sanctions on media, however, present a different picture, quite opposite to ‘liberation’. In recent press releases, the government has highlighted its major concerns to be border security, ensuring peace, prosperity and development, and good mutual relations with neighbours. However, all these will be exclusively in accordance with the Talibani interpretation of Sharia.

Distress is visible in Afghan society. The position of women especially remains suppressed. They have not only been imposed with strict dress codes, kept distant from educational institutions but also away from any prominent public role. This has led to various women-led protests in the country, which have in turn been ruthlessly suppressed. The question of effective governance too is at stake, as the Taliban lacks any practical knowledge of major governance sectors including IT. The economy of the country is badly hit. The US has frozen its assets, thus resulting in extreme hardship for the people. Afghanistan, being a country majorly dependent on foreign trade and help, is suffering, so much so that the people of Kabul are seen selling their belongings in open markets to provide for their families. The harsh, public punishments are adding to the public distress. Only recently, bodies of four executed kidnappers were hoisted in public squares to send a message against such activities. Minister of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, was quoted saying that amputations and executions were necessary, and would continue. The press suffers an equal predicament. The media on various occasions was seen to be beaten up and silenced. A new framework of rules has been imposed on journalists, which restricts them on various fronts, and

reduces them to mere propagators of the governmental message. Independent press is past in the country, with media personalities (especially women) fleeing for their lives. Female Journalist Beheshta Arghand, the first woman journalist to interview a Taliban official had to immediately flee the country post the interview. She revealed how the press had been asked not to report about the Taliban takeover. She further highlighted that there was no freedom of the press alongside rampant discrimination against women professionals.³² This comes despite promises of human rights and free press. The internal factions within the Taliban are adding to the instability. The recent fallout between Baradar and Haqqani is a case in point.

To conclude this section, some observations are in order. Foremost, the government announced is far from inclusive, contrary to what was initially promised. This directly has bearing on the endless power and hold of the radical extremist group on the country and marks a lack of any substantial check on its activities. Second, while the Taliban have asserted to allow no country to interfere in its internal matters, the visit of ISI chief General Faiz Hameed, under the garb of 'bilateral talks', when talks on government formations were hampered by internal differences, speaks otherwise. Pakistani influence is visible in the composition of the government as well. All this, along with the silencing of media, removal of the ministry of women affairs, etc despite promises otherwise, highlights that it is difficult to expect the Taliban to stick to its promises. Under such circumstances, the uncertainty with regards to its promise not to allow terrorist groups to operate on its soil stands as a major concern for the world community.

THE WORLD VIS-À-VIS TALIBAN: POSITION AND APPREHENSIONS

This section attempts to analyze the position of the United Nations (UN) as well as some major world powers vis-à-vis the Taliban, and the major concerns and apprehensions on the part of the former.

32. "She interviewed the Taliban, then fled". Brut India. September 9th, 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8mP1CFjfr4> Accessed on 6th September, 2021

Political instability, refugee influx, terrorism, and humanitarian crisis are some of the major concerns facing the countries in general and the UN in particular. The world body is in a dilemma as more than a dozen members of the interim government are on its blacklist or are proclaimed terrorists. The concern of the UN found expression in the unanimous agreement of the Security Council reiterating the need for an inclusive government. It is the only way of ensuring female and minority rights and a moderate government. The UN has further promised aid to refugees. Antonio Guterres has asserted that the UN will continue to aid. It has also passed a resolution against negative use of Afghan soil, however, Russia and China abstained from signing this. Thus, hinting at a new dimension. The UN further highlighted that it was far from recognizing the government by not allowing the Taliban representative to speak at the September General Assembly gathering.

The USA, though shares the concerns of terrorism and humanitarian crisis, still asserts its decision to be “logical, rational and right”³³. Llyod Austin, US Secretary of Defense, recently raised concerns over the possibility of Al-Qaida’s comeback in the region. The UK more or less shares the same concerns. Both Biden and Johnson have been indicating that they will base their future decisions on observation of Taliban actions and not words.

On the other hand, a new axis of China-Russia-Iran-Turkey-Pakistan is on the rise. While China and Russia have celebrated US withdrawal as their defeat, the others have supported Afghanistan ever since. It can be pointed out that China is attempting to fill in the US shoes, via the aids it is providing, but observers have pointed that China hardly sees Afghanistan as an area of opportunity. On the contrary, its major concerns are security-related, as it fears that the Afghan soil can be used by the recalcitrant Uyghur Muslims against China. Proximity with Afghanistan will also strengthen the Belt and Road Initiative, and substitute some of the set back suffered due to India’s reluctance towards the initiative. The proposed Kabul-Peshawar Road exemplifies the same. China further eyes to exploit the mineral reserves of the country, especially the lithium reserves, for the benefit of her industries. Russia on the other hand, though

33. “Afghanistan crisis update”, TheHindu (August 19, 2021)
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/afghanistan-crisis-august-19-live-updates/article35990756.ece>. Accessed on 5th October, 2021

celebrating the US withdrawal, has expressed concern along with India over the humanitarian and refugee crisis. Iran, though supportive of the Taliban tacitly condemned Pakistan's presence in government formation negotiations and the violent takeover of Panjshir. Turkey too pressed on the demand of the inclusive government to restart its promised airport deal. Pakistan, on the other hand, had never left the side of its "inseparable brother"³⁴ and has remained a close ally to Afghanistan always. Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan was quoted by various newspapers, rejoicing over the US withdrawal, and granting of full autonomy of Afghanistan. Pakistan's major interest in the region is preventing the growth of the pro-India government on one hand, and checking anti-Pak activities on Afghan soil on the other.³⁵ However, post-August 15, attacks on Pakistan too have increased, owing to the instability in the border regions, giving more scope of action to militants. The refugee influx is another problem the country is apprehensive about. The relations between the two are furthering becoming close with Taliban negotiation talks between Pakistan and its enemy Tarikh-e-Taliban Pakistan.

To sum up, none of the major powers are eyeing Afghanistan as a bed of opportunities. On the contrary, the turbulent region has caused apprehensions among all. Various nations have pledged donations to Afghanistan with qualifications that further help would be based on the Taliban's adherence to human rights and minority rights. Further, while some countries have celebrated the US withdrawal, they remain apprehensive about the region's stability and its implications. In sum, the world finds itself at present on a very fluid stance vis-à-vis the Afghan region. Having thus taken this cursory look at the position of various world powers, we now turn to India and attempt an understanding, where the country finds itself in these times, and what are the probable problems it might be encountering.

34. "Afghanistan: What rise of Taliban means for Pakistan", by James Landale.<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58443839> Accessed on 3rd October, 2021

35. "Afghanistan: What rise of Taliban means for Pakistan", by James Landale.<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58443839> Accessed on 3rd October, 2021

THE INDIAN LENS: IMPLICATIONS AND APPREHENSIONS

India finds itself in a peculiar position vis-à-vis the current socio-political development in Afghanistan. This section takes a closer look at the various probable challenges facing the country today and their probable implications on the future course of our foreign policy.

The Indian problem owing to the developments in Afghanistan has the following major axes: economic, political, and national security. The economic axis is in terms of the major investments India had made in the region, then under the democratic US aided government. At the Afghanistan Conference in Geneva, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was quoted saying, “no part of Afghanistan today is untouched by the 400-plus projects that India has undertaken in all 34 of Afghanistan’s provinces” – such is the enormity of Indian investment in Afghanistan, which is in total estimated to be around 3 billion dollars.³⁶ Some major investments include the Salma Dam or the Afghan-Indian Friendship Dam (2016), Zaranj-Delaram Highway, the Parliament building, Stor Palace, Power and Health Infrastructures, transportation, etc. In 2019-2020 the bilateral trade was up to 1.3 billion dollars. India has over the past 20 years invested in the region bit by bit to consolidate a good relation with her neighbour. However, all this suffered a major setback post-August 15. Not only did trade come to a standstill, but the very question of further relation between the two countries is problematic. Though Mr. Jaishankar has asserted that Indian investments in the region for good relations will surely bear benefit³⁷, the entire situation remains highly uncertain.

Viewing the political axes of the situation from the Indian lens, highlights the country’s discomfort vis-à-vis a militaristic, anti-India group, coming to power. Further, the Taliban being an Islamic radical group further adds to the

36. “Explained: What are India’s investments in Afghanistan” by Nirupama Subraminiyan <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-indias-afghan-investment-7406795/> Accessed on 9th October, 2021

37. “India’s only investment in Afghanistan is on its people, will get full value in return: Jaishankar”, by Shishir Gupta. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/indias-only-investment-in-afghanistan-is-on-its-people-will-get-full-value-in-return-jaishankar-101629975634988.html> Accessed on 9th October, 2021

discomfort of various right-leaning members of the Indian ruling elite in particular, and even a secular and moderate India in general. The “most important man” in present Afghanistan, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is completely opposed to India and closest to Pakistan.³⁸ This has left India in a “tough strategic state” despite its good relations with the previous democratic government.³⁹ India had through the last two decades helped in consolidating a democratic, stable Afghanistan via various diplomatic efforts. It was among the countries that had rooted for Afghanistan’s inclusion in SAARC as well. However, the political, as well as diplomatic interests of India, are hit hard with the Taliban 2.0 coming to power.

India shares the world’s concern regarding national security and increasing terrorism as well. Immediately after August 15th, defence minister, Rajnath Singh, had tacitly indicated the increasing security threats to India. Pakistan’s influence over the ruling Taliban is another major concern for India, especially with regards to Kashmir. She fears, that the Taliban’s success will act as a motivation to various extremists, especially those trying to create disturbances in Kashmir in their attempts of liberation. This fear was further concretized by Sayed Salahuddin, leader of rebel groups in Kashmir, who while celebrating the “extraordinary and historical” Taliban victory added that “the same way, shortly, India too will be defeated by Kashmir’s holy warriors”.⁴⁰ It is also feared, that Taliban victory will embolden terrorist groups in Pakistan, thus endangering the Indian region of Kashmir. Kashmir has throughout been a contested issue with both India and Pakistan claiming it to be theirs. In the 2021, September session of the General Assembly, India again in unequivocal terms asserted Kashmir to be her “inalienable” part, in response to Prime Minister Khan’s indication that Pakistan was the rightful owner of Kashmir. Kashmir

38. “Most important man in Af now is one whose outfit hit India’s interests max”, Times of India, September 9th, 2021.

39. From India to China, the Taliban’s return leaves Afghanistan’s neighbors scrambling to adjust” by Saheli Roy Choudhuri
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/18/afghanistan-taliban-impact-on-pakistan-india-china-russia-iran.html> Accessed on 3rd October, 2021

40. “With the Taliban’s rise India sees a renewed threat in Kashmir”
<https://www.npr.org/2021/09/14/1036877490/with-talibans-rise-india-sees-renewed-threat-in-kashmir> Accessed on 4th October, 2021

has throughout been an area of national security concern, with its significance heightened during these times. Owing to the close relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban, it is feared that Afghanistan will aid Pakistan in winning over Kashmir. Presently India finds itself in stifling conditions with the growing axis between Afghanistan-Pakistan-China. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has indicated the same in his talks with Vladimir Putin while indicating that terrorism should not be allowed to move across Afghan borders.⁴¹

THE INDIAN IMPERATIVE VIS-A-VIS APPREHENSIONS

Such being the range of problems, we now turn towards some probable solutions. However, given the fluidity of the circumstances, and rapidly changing global order with every passing day, these solutions are kept generalized and subject to further change or alteration.

Writing is a working paper, in the backdrop of the Doha Agreement, Rudra Chaudhuri and Shreyas Shende, highlighted border diplomacy, continued training and investments, and ‘working with and through others’ as three main ways in which India could deal with a US-free Afghanistan. A lot has changed since last year, however, some of their recommendations still hold importance. Building on their analysis, this section highlights the following as the major possible Indian initiatives to address the challenges faced by the country in the face of a Taliban 2.0 government and further consolidate her diplomatic positions.

BOLSTERING BILATERAL RELATIONS

As highlighted in the second section, the world today shares some common concerns vis-à-vis Afghanistan – terrorism, the humanitarian crisis being some of them. In such a situation, India can use the same grounds to bolster her

41. “India Fears Kashmir terrorism after Taliban resurgence” by Mouru Baba <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Afghanistan-turmoil/India-fears-Kashmir-terrorism-after-Taliban-resurgence> Accessed on 9th October, 2021

relations with her allies, especially the USA, Australia, and Russia. Ever since August 15th, India and Russia have come closer in their joint efforts to create conditions for a peaceful settlement on the basis of intra-Afghan dialogue. Closer relations have also been sought via transparent and close bilateral relations. Russian National Security Advisor Nikolai Patrushev has expressed “common concerns” as India, about terror flow in Russia and Kashmir. CIA Chief Bill Burns, in his urgent meeting with Indian NSA Ajit Doval also highlighted concerns of terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Even US Vice President Kamala Harris, has ‘Suo Motu recognized the problem of terrorism and India’s apprehensions, in her dialogue with Modi.⁴² Australia and Germany too are on the same page, alongside the UN. In a recent meeting, Rajnath Singh and his Australian counterpart Peter Dutton highlighted that defense and security partnerships will be taken to “newer heights”. It is an ideal time for India to bolster its bilateral relations. This will in turn give her a stronger hold. During the sidelines of the first in-person Quad meeting, Biden had affirmed Modi of his support for India’s position as a permanent member of the UNSC. This indicates that India is cautiously playing her cards in bolstering her diplomatic relations and position. In short, the Afghanistan situation has in a way provided an opportunity for India to enhance her relations, which if done well, can further strengthen Indian position in the region.

STRENGTHENING MULTILATERAL TIES

In this regard, the QUAD deserves special mention. Growing Chinese influence in Afghanistan has put China in a stronger position in the region. It is on the US, Australia, Japan, and India to counter the Chinese rise. Recent attempts in this direction have been taken by the QUAD’s plan of infrastructural development of Indo-Pacific. This is also a major counter to the Chinese BRI. Further, the AUKUS deal of providing Australia with nuclear warships, something that even China lacks, puts India (though not part of AUKUS), a major defense ally

42. “In talks with Modi, Harris ‘suo motu’ raises Pak terror export” By Chidanand Rajghatta. Times of India, September 25th 2021.

of Australia in a much stronger position. Though these developments are not directly influenced by Afghanistan, such developments will surely be a deterrent to Pakistan and China, who otherwise might have caused troubles in India with the support of the Taliban.

India has used the BRICS platform to further voice her concerns of the possibility of using the Afghan soil for terror activities, while condemning the August 26th Kabul airport attack and stressing the need for refraining from violence. She also highlighted the threat of “cross border movements of terrorists” – this is in particular important for India in the context of Pakistan-based terror groups.

In his address at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Modi urged the community to “not rush”⁴³ in recognizing the Taliban on the grounds of lack of inclusiveness of its government, thus leaving no doubt on India’s stance on the issue. He called the SCO member states to develop shared and strict norms, based on zero tolerance, capable of serving as a template for global anti-terror efforts.

Thus, India must further strengthen its multilateral ties, as it puts it in a much better position in the region. She can do this by its promised counter-terrorism activities in partnership with USA and others. This will, on the one hand, provide a solution to terrorism concerns, on the other hand, bring the critical allies together.

INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

It is true, that in today’s integrated world, self-sufficiency is not much of a possibility. Having said that, it is also equally important to bolster one’s indigenous capability. Under the ‘Atma Nirbhar’ project, India has achieved some major heights in the area of defense. The INS Anvesh is one such achievement. India’s first floating missile test range has taken to the seas already. It can fire target missiles while afloat. This has bolstered India’s

43. “AF govt not inclusive, don’t rush into recognizing it: PM at SCO” by Sachin Parashar. Times of India, September 18th 2021.

offensive capacity, while her defensive capacity is bolstered by INS Dhruv – the first floating missile tracker technology. Alongside these India has constantly been increasing its border security as well. India also executed its first trial of her 5000-km Intercontinental Ballistic Missile by the Name Agni-V. The Tata airbus deal – of manufacturing IAF fighter jets, first time given to an Indian company – is another point in instance. These achievements not only have defense implications but also put India in a stronger position, thus also can be seen to credit her diplomatic prospects as well.

MAKING NEW ALLIES

Chaudhuri and Shende, had in their analysis highlighted the possibility for India to affect limited cooperation with China on the issue of curbing activities of IS-K, and with Iran as well. However, though logical, given the present conditions, India and China coming any closer, especially in the presence of China's 'all-weather ally' Pakistan, is a distant possibility. Similarly with Iran; India's laying off of the Iranian request for vaccine help has caused alienation between the two.⁴⁴ Many commentators have also highlighted a need for direct dialogue between India and the Taliban. However, given the latter's proximity with Pakistan, any concrete help for India is unlikely to develop.

CONCLUSION

The discussion above tried to take into consideration the various developments the world has been witnessing since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban. It is starkly visible, that so far, the Taliban has broken more promises than it has kept in terms of inclusivity of government, freedom of women, independent press, etc. Such factors have given rise to major instability in the region. The victory of the Taliban has only angered its opponents, like the IS-K. Chances of further fallout in the region cannot be ignored. The Kabul airport bombing exemplifies the fact. Further, the factions within the Taliban too are problematic. In such a

44. Rudra Chaudhuri and Shreyas Shende, "Dealing with the Taliban: India's Strategy in Afghanistan after US Withdrawal", June 2020.

situation, stability in Afghanistan seems a distant possibility for the time being. However, this instability is a major cause of concern for the world in general and India in particular. Most importantly, the instability is likely to induce both flow of migrants as well as terror. This is much more problematic for India, and she apprehends that Pakistan can use her influence over the Taliban to complicate the Kashmir issue and attempt to wrest it from India. The targeted killings that have recently started in Kashmir have added to the apprehensions of many.

India still is on her wait and watch stance, though in some instances the leadership has directly called on to the world on its concerns over lack of inclusiveness, the position of women and minorities, humanitarian assistance, etc in Afghanistan. Having said that, it can also not be denied that this situation has presented an opportunity for India to enhance her diplomatic relations, as illustrated in the course of this essay, which she on various occasions has exploited well. Many such developments position her more firmly in the region, and better equipped to face challenges. However, India must continue to work closely with all its allies to hold this position. However, it is worth reiterating that the solutions mentioned above are subject to alteration based on changing circumstances. Opinions are even not rare that probably very soon the west will again need to re-interfere in the region. However, many of these concerns and apprehensions are at least in this present stage, no better than speculations. The situation remains extremely fluid, and it is imperative upon the world to wait and let the situation unfurl before taking any concrete action.

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Taliban: The 'New Guardian' of Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The Taliban have successfully returned to power in 2021 after being ousted by the U.S. troops in 2001. With the capture of Afghanistan by the Taliban - the social, economic, political and cultural conditions in the country are in turmoil. Several people have lost their lives and rendered homeless. Specifically talking of the women, they are the most vulnerable section of the community right now. With their basic rights being jeopardized, the women are fleeing the country to save their lives. Development is lagging behind as the country is suffering from severe food, health and financial crisis. This paper seeks to unfold the harsh reality of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The 'new' government has claimed to be different from their first regime but reality tells a different tale. Through this writing, I have tried to bring out the plight of the people in Afghanistan and also how democracy is being threatened with the Taliban insurgency.

Keywords: Taliban, Afghanistan, capture, turmoil, women, crisis, insurgency.

The chain of events that have unfolded in Afghanistan in 2021 has surprised all the important players directly involved in the last 20 years of war in the country, a historic battlefield where the "Great Game" has been playing out for quite some time. All of these events have their roots in the 9/11 terror attack, which brought the United States of America to Afghanistan.

The US-sponsored government in Afghanistan, established after the fall of the Taliban regime in 1996-2001, collapsed before its architects left the country. All political experts predicted that the previous government, with 3,50,000 US-trained security troops, would be able to repel Taliban invasions of cities. They were all proved wrong. Kabul had surrendered without resistance on August 15, 2021. Even Panjshir valley, which vowed to battle the Taliban to the last man, had to finally surrender on September 6, 2021.

Before we delve any deeper we should first know, who are the Taliban?

The ‘Taliban’, a word meaning “students,” was established in the southern Islamic State of Afghanistan by Mullah Muhammad Omar, a one-eyed Islamic cleric who became a mujahedeen commander during the war against the Soviet-backed regime within the 1980s. In 1994, Mullah Omar formed the group in Kandahar with fifty followers; most of them were clerics or students of Islam from the country’s southern Pashtun heartland. They pledged to finish the warfare between rival mujahideen factions that followed the ouster of Soviet-backed President Mohammed Najibullah in 1992 and to revive security across the country. The country was under their control from 1996 to 2001 when they were ousted by the U.S. troops, but in August 2021 they recaptured Afghanistan.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT

After the breakdown of the American-accredited system, the country was without a central authority for 3 weeks. On September 7, 2021, the Taliban introduced its new, completely male cabinet. It consists of 33 ministers. Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund (one of the movement’s founders and is on the United Nation’s blacklist), is chosen as the interim Prime Minister. Abdul Ghani Baradar and Sirajuddin Haqqani (leader of the deadly Haqqani Network) are appointed as the Deputy P.M. and interior minister respectively. The Taliban has again expanded its interim cabinet on 21st September to satisfy the global community which has been insisting that their government should be inclusive. However, not a single woman has been included in the cabinet till now.

The previous Taliban regime was characterized by “terrorism”, “oppression”, “torture”, “murder” and uncontrolled use of “power”, but this time the Taliban is making concessions to modernity. Independent broadcasters are allowed to operate, smartphones are freely available in Kabul, the internet remains uncensored etc. While the Taliban have permitted elementary schools for boys and girls to reopen, the middle and high schools for girls remained closed until recently in November, 2021 they announced the reopening of schools for the girls for grades 7-12 in Herat. The Taliban say their goal is to restore the strict Islamic regime in Afghanistan and have ruled out holding elections. They have

also announced an amnesty for the toppled government's officials and their security services, and have urged former government employees to return to their jobs. Taliban leaders want to focus on rebuilding Afghanistan and not interfere in the affairs of other nations. With the Taliban strengthening their hold on Afghanistan, their main driving force is slowly emerging. There is a serious humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan, and women are the most affected. Minorities are neglected, anti-Taliban protests are banned, people's voices are suppressed, killings continue - all these pose a serious threat to democracy. Most countries have left their embassies in Afghanistan and ordinary people are left behind. Shocking images of citizens fleeing the country have also emerged.

SHARIA LAW: TALIBAN VERSION

For Muslims, Sharia law is not traditionally imposed by the government. Instead, it is a set of rules by which Muslims live their personal lives. Sharia advises Muslims about marriage, food, property ownership, clothing, and even companionship. Despite assurances that the Taliban have reformed more extreme methods, their rise to power also means a return to the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia. They have claimed the right to impose Sharia on others, which is fundamentally not a historically Muslim attitude of Islamic governments.

LAW AND ORDER

After the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, an urgent discussion swirled around the new government's legal system about its treatment of women. Taliban's commander-in-chief Waheedullah Hashimi said that a council of Islamic scholars would drive the legal system and an Islamic government would be guided by Islamic law, not by democratic principles. During the group's first press conference, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has assured the women that their rights will be respected "according to Islamic law", adding that - women would have the right to education and work. However, Taliban officials remain vague about the rules and restrictions and how Islamic law is

enforced. So, it's not clear what life will be like in the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (the name that the Taliban uses to refer to the country).

In an incident on September 26, 2021, the Taliban hung the bodies of four kidnappers after killing them in a shooting rampage in Herat, western Afghanistan. On their chests was written, "Abductors will be punished like this". This display across several squares in the city is the most high-profile public punishment since the Taliban swept to power, and it is a sign that Islamist hardliners will adopt fearsome measures similar to their previous rule.

BOUNDARIES FOR WOMEN

The acting Minister of Higher Education Abdul Baki Haqqani has ensured that women will be allowed to study in universities. However, separate classes will be arranged for men and women because women cannot come in contact with unfamiliar men. Wearing a hijab will be mandatory. On September 29, the Taliban announced the temporary adoption of the 1964 Constitution that granted women the right to vote, but removed elements that violate the Sharia. Further tightening restrictions on women, the newly appointed Taliban president of Kabul University, Mohammad Ashraf Gairat, had announced that women will be banned from schools indefinitely as teachers or students unless a "true Islamic environment" is provided for all women. Ghariat even called the country's schools "centers of prostitution." This pejorative comment clearly explains his attitude towards educational institutions. Moreover, in a mass protest organized by women, the Taliban openly assaulted them. Even during their earlier regime, women were beaten for failing to cover up their body properly and walking outside without a male close relative. The torture on women has not seem to change even if the Taliban has promised to do so.

CHANGE IN CURRICULUM AND CULTURAL MUTILATION

The Taliban also mentioned revisions to the curriculum, which could further delay the education of students. The group's acting minister of education, Mawlavi Noorulla Monir, said on social media: "No Ph.D. degree, Master's

degree is valuable today. You see that the mullahs and Taliban that are in the power, have no Ph.D., M.A. or even a high school degree, but are the greatest of all.” The Taliban are counter-cultural, they reject movies, music and art. In July 2021, the Taliban killed comedian Nazar Mohammad, known as Hasha Tswan, and in August 2021, Baglan region folk singer Pawad Andharavi was murdered. The musical instruments stored at the National Conservatory of Music were also damaged. Many professors at Kabul University are concerned that the Faculty of Sculpture, Music and other Arts could be shut down by the Taliban.

SLAUGHTERING OF HAZARA ETHNIC GROUP

Shortly, after coming to power in Afghanistan, the Taliban killed at least 13 Hazara people, including a 17-year-old girl, in central Daykundi. On 30th August, a convoy of 300 Taliban fighters entered the Khidr region and killed at least 11 former Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) members, nine of whom were transported to a nearby river basin but executed shortly after the surrender. During their five-year reign in the 1990s, the Taliban were accused of slaughtering hundreds of Hazaras in Balkh and Bamiyan provinces. These cold-blooded executions are further evidence that the Taliban have committed the same horrific abuses that they used during their previous reign in Afghanistan.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN JEOPARDY

The media has faced new challenges as the Taliban have claimed power over Afghanistan. Despite promises to protect media freedom, Afghanistan's press freedom has been seriously threatened by the Taliban after reporters were beaten by extremist Islamists. In August, a Taliban fighter chased a DW journalist and shot dead a family member of the same and seriously injured another. Taliban members banned at least two female journalists from working at public broadcaster Radio Television Afghanistan. Alongside, the Taliban declared 11 new guidelines for the reporters to follow, thus restricting the media freedom.

REFUGEE CRISIS

The United Nations warned that up to 500,000 Afghanistan could flee the country and called on neighboring countries to keep their borders open. The current crisis comes on top of the 2.2 million Afghan refugees already in neighboring countries and 3.5 million forced to leave their homes within the Afghan border. After the Taliban ruled the capital on August 14, more than 1,23,000 civilians were evacuated by the US military and its coalition partners, but it is unknown how many of them were Afghan citizens. The United States said that about 80,000 civilians, including about 5,500 Americans and more than 73,500 Afghanistan or other foreigners, had flown out of Kabul. The British Ministry of Defense said more than 15,000 people were flown out, including about 8,000 from Afghanistan. At the height of the operation, the United States said military planes would leave the airport every 39 minutes, but a suicide bomber outside the airport on August 26 killed about 170 people, including 13 American soldiers and slowed down the evacuation process. The United Nations has called on member states to support Afghan people in "their darkest hour of need".

COVID-19 SITUATION

Given the Taliban's hostility to vaccination, WHO (World Health Organization) and medical professionals fear the rapid and uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 in Afghanistan. WHO recorded 1,52,411 cases of COVID-19 and 7,047 deaths confirmed in Afghanistan between January 3rd and August 19th, 2021. People do not trust the health system and avoid going to hospitals. Moreover, the national health system cannot provide oxygen and other medicines that need to be imported. Also, most Afghans do not believe in preventing the death from the virus by vaccination. These two factors of no vaccination and no self-protection will surely result in disaster. However, one 'unintended consequence' of people staying at home is due to fear of the Taliban that might help in social distancing and hence reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Till now no country has formally recognized the Taliban government, while billions of dollars in Afghan assets and funds abroad have been frozen, even as

the country faces a severe economic and humanitarian crises. With dissolution of the Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaint Commission, regulation of press freedom and curtailment of women freedom, democracy in Afghanistan can be stated as non-existent. The most astonishing factor is that the whole international community is silent and the United Nations has once again failed to deliver its purpose. It can be seen how the U.S. has brought the United Nations down to its knees on numerous occasions. Unfortunately, it is the conflict zones and countries like Afghanistan that pay the price for the nonchalance of the United Nations and its leaseholder, the United States of America. The United Nations initiated an emergency meeting of the Security Council to discuss the Afghanistan crisis. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres showed concern for the people of Afghanistan and urged all the member states to stand united. However, mere exclamations and statements only go so far in exacting the rehabilitation of the displaced and the pain of the lost. In a country where democracy is threatened and individual rights are in jeopardy, the future remains much hazy. All the countries and the UN need to join hands and fight against such terrorism. The countries should deny the legitimacy of the Taliban government. Measures need to be taken to protect the human rights of the citizens in Afghanistan. Along with all these, the refugees should be given shelter by the respective countries until the situation in Afghanistan improves. Finally, it is only a matter of time to see where this 'new' Taliban government leads the country to.

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SECTION - III

**OPINION AND
CREATIVES**

Biometrics and Politics of Identity

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Second Year (PG), Roll No. - 107

The present times are witnessing a shift from the disciplinary societies as was exercised through educational institutions and prisons, to control societies, where we are controlled through our freedom. The evolution has led to stronger interest for more reliable means of securitizing identity, underpinned by a variety of risk-based reasons and technology-driven explanations. The rising global mobility, advances in new technologies, dispersion of information networks, the increasing need to control access to social benefits and entitlements, the changing scene of borders and states are all some of the many factors behind the arguments for the deployment of biometrics and the reconfiguration of the means by which the state connects to its embodied (non) citizens and regulates the flows of their mobility and transactions. In this respect, the emerging identity systems are part of a large-scale direction towards governance (Lyon, 2004) in which the management of the life of the population through risk is the primary objective, and the securitization of identity through biometrics is one of its main features (Ajana, 2013).

Foucault have administered discipline to be tied to productive and self-amplifying circuit, forging a specific technology of power that enhances the economic utility of the body in proportion to the degree to which it is politically subjugated. Foucault has defined 'technologies of self' by the way they 'permit individuals to effect, by their own bodies, their own soul, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power' (Lemke and Butler, 2019).

Foucault analysed biopolitics as developing out of and complimenting two modalities of control, sway and teach. While sway alludes eventually to a control to require life and teach to a frame of control coordinated at preparing the body. Biopolitics concerns the administration of a populace, which within

the 18th century, got to be conceivable for the primary time through the advancement of modern rationalities and methods that pointed to degree, measure, classify, and assess the intrinsic characteristics of a given region. The development of unused measurable devices and measurements such as birth rates, passing rates, etc, were rendered into a field of perceivability and intercession, which, in turn, implied that populaces and subjects came to get it themselves and their activities through these unexpected and subjective measurable categories. Foucault's development in considering biopolitics in this way is that it uncovered the degree to which control got to be worked out not as it were through particular advances of information, but, unequivocally, through hones of security endorsing a particular political economy: empowering and permitting certain sorts of circulation to happen inside a domain by the quasi-natural premise of the economy through State inaction. Put in an unexpected way, instead of working exclusively, or indeed fundamentally through constraint and/or direction, biopolitics constituted the premise of progressivism as a craftsmanship of governmentality that recognized opportunity itself as a significant landscape to run the show. (Means, 2021)

Biometrics, in our opinion, is the need of the hour to specify one's entitlements from the government. The citizen has the right to hold the government accountable for their actions and so to give a numerical value and unique identification in a large crowd of citizens shouldn't be questionable. The Indian society, its governmental structure with an inherent centralizing tendency, along with the colonial hangover had led the government to corrupt practices and deliver benefits as per one's best connections with the higher officials. What it does is, it snaps the person's right to benefit from the State. People's Right to Information tagged along with digitization would empower the citizens to hold the government accountable when they were not at the receiving ends. This would bring forth a larger question of whether the government would educate the citizens on the latest technocratic developments of Government functioning or would keep them uninformed about how governance is progressing. Therefore, it is needed to bring in more research in the field which would be comprehensive in nature and help in providing a multidimensional understanding of the new modes of governance. Technology is developing at a faster rate than ever and to keep pace with the

developments, it is necessary to have established a technocratic orientation in studies of politics and public administration.

Governments have evolved from theoretical pen and paper modifications of classical theoretical acknowledgements to setting up an ecosystem, working to meet the demands of the citizens and its need to carry forward the future policies of a state. The anxiety linked with the model is the incapacity of social science to quantify data. The conventions of society have been changed and the behaviour of the masses have been shaped by the Big Data Framework. Right to privacy issues can be coped by centralising citizens' dataset while decentralising services. The Public-Private Partnerships could pose threat to the data being accessed by private institutions so the entire project framework before the service delivery could be centralised, while the Service delivery could be decentralised by the government entities with setting up of Data Security Units which permits and restricts data flow within the larger digital framework.

Within the broader perspective of public interest and prevention, identity systems are often framed within a certain political and regulatory rationality that partakes a wider and ongoing efforts to socialize security, regulate the access and infuse a sense of 'prudentialism' while being continually open to the conduction of new problems and the marketing of new solutions (Rose, 1999). Thus, identity systems are often promoted as a kind of panacea to social ills and a solution to the various problems brought about by global mobility, terrorism, technological advancement and so on. With the significant rebranding of social history, categorizing bodily features have been tied to technological developments with advances in biometrics with the twin objectives of governing and surveillance. An entire crowd of citizens, when codified through data variables, enables the government to segregate as per geography and other social identifiers to administer and deliver better. Biometrics in the form of iris scan, facial recognition systems, and fingerprinting technology have given ways to organize identity constitution, corroboration, and mobilization. Biometric Identification Model entails the broader prospects of marketization of the state. It functions within a framework of streamlining service delivery to the citizen while redefining state and subjects in a transactional fashion. Technology in itself does not function in a vacuum but is

tied within a larger ecosystem of people and other technologies. States and biometrics have given way to legitimize citizens, through bodies. And, given the technological jargon for the common man to decipher, it would almost feel like being landed in a technological dystopia. With ample news flooding in with regards to our bodily information being accessed by third-party sources, the government should step in, to clarify the working of biometric future, allowing more research in the field.

Digitization is the need of the hour, not only to make tasks easier but also to program things better. Biometric technologies have generally been attacked for concerns of surveillance, privacy, and data security; but there has been far less discussion of the uncertainties and faults of the biometric recognition systems. Our very existence is determined by politics and the common citizen would not want to indulge in the leisure of even a trivial fault on part of the government in the wrong identification of a citizen due to a faulty system. The larger the database, the vast the results and there has not been the proper formulation of guidelines whether the dead is removed from the living database. But it is also important to maintain the link between the dead and the living to identify families. Given that, it brings in the question of whether the constitution upholds the 'Right to be forgotten'.

Governments are remodelling governance through forms of Coded citizenship. Solinas, Srinivasan, and Johri define Coded citizenship as translation of human populations into data, resulting in the legibility of Citizens as machine-readable data ensembles (Solinas, 2018; Srinivasan and Johri, 2014). State-recognized Unique Identification Number gives an individual his identity in the global sphere and only with time, it will help to place individuals in the broader dimension of a globalised world with authentic unique identification. Remodelled administrative forms using technology, block off the future prospects through predictive approaches, exclude or include particular types of identities unevenly, and prevent engagement with the core causes of socio-political problems by deploying these technologies in numerous sectors of society, notably at the border.

The book "Governing through Biometrics: The Biometrics of Identity" (2013) by Btihaj Ajana praises the relationships between bodies, information, and

identity, as well as the ontology of the body as information. Ajana advocates for the protection of the self-attesting components of identifying oneself and who they claim to be against institutional identity impositions. Biometric technologies cannot access this type of identity (ipseity), but they are used in procedures that impose recombinant identities on persons (Ajana, 2013). Here, the employment of the notion of narrative ethics is very important. Aadhaar in recent times has been able to call for subtracting a group of citizens due to system failure. Aadhaar-based biometric authentication system was made mandatory in the Ranchi district in Jharkhand in 2016. Since then, there have been complaints of not receiving proper service delivery as was guaranteed in the articulate advertisement of one-way ticket to all problems. The systems ensure that there is no excess fraudulent delivery of food grains to one family through digitization using electronic Point of Sales (PoS), but it also fails at times to identify these persons and it raises the intriguing question of whether or not biometric and government assemblages are capable of being epistemologically 'humble'. (Deshpande, 2022)

Institution based disciplinary regimes of individualised surveillance and normalisation interact with and give way to broader biopolitical technologies of power that target the entire population and large groups. Subjects are invited to actively plot themselves on curves of normativity that are produced through big data frameworks of knowledge. Norms may form a central point in a distributional variance, and normativity is produced through proximity to the norm rather than coherent identity performance. Codification of population identity gives the government the upper hand in administering the politics of inclusion or exclusion. In the words of Jeffrey Friedman, an Exitocracy is a regime in which the rationale for policies of government is not a liberal goal, such as maximization of freedom or equality as an end in itself, but the technocratic goal of minimizing human distress. By conferring equal power on people to solve their problems in the private sphere, an exitocracy would live up to the egalitarian premise of all forms of utilitarianism and of socialism. Academic circle should, therefore, call for further discussion on how to sustain exitocracy without generating distrust among citizens (Larson, 2020).

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Football, a Plastered Foot and a Tagore Doppelganger

Bipsan Chatterjee

Second Year (UG), Roll No.- 114

"I'm trying to think, don't confuse me with facts."

- Plato (in '*The Republic*')

This is not an analysis, no. This is not a political narrative either.

This is, arguably, the most dramatic Legislative Assembly elections to be ever held in the state of West Bengal - through the eyes of a nineteen-year-old undergraduate student who grew up in a humble middle-class household in the gullies of North Calcutta, amidst the '*Nandigram*'-s, the '*Singur*'-s, the '*Bangla Bandh*'-s and the '*Taslima*' riots. This is my story, my experience - as a first-time voter in the "world's largest democracy".

Since gaining political consciousness, the 2019 Lok Sabha election was the first major political event I closely followed. My smartphone would brighten up with Tweets and pictures of colourful rallies with brightly-dressed politicians flaunting their '*56-inches Chest*'-s at huge rallies all across India. I learnt about the significance of culture and identity in winning over the people. Perhaps, nothing could teach me this better than the 2021 Legislative Assembly elections, right here at home in West Bengal.

'Didi O Didi' V/S. 'Khela Hobe': the match-winning blood-warmer

From Cabinet Ministers to chiefs of parties from, what geo-linguistically connotes, the '*Hindi belt*' of northern India - flew in at regular intervals to roll their dice and try their hand at '*Bangla*' - the language, the culture; the People. Unfortunately, '*Bhanga Bangla*' (improper Bengali) has never gotten anybody very far.

Slogans and Indian elections are synonymous – the 2021 elections are emblematic of the same.

What some called a '*catcall*', the Prime Minister's tease of '*Didi O Didi*' while taking on the Trinamool Congress' (hereafter, 'TMC') 10 years' rule in Bengal under '*Mamata Didi*' - was fought back with a power-packed slogan which now is known to people all over the country - '*Khela Hobe*' ('Game On!') (Ramesh, 2021). Soon a catchy song which echoed even at the remotest villages of Bengal, the TMC played a wonder-card by linking the song with football, a sport most Bengalis cherish and take pride in. Footballs were distributed at TMC rallies and Smt. Mamata Banerjee herself was seen dribbling a football on stage during the launch of '*Khela Hobe Divas*' on the 16th of August, 2021, which marked the beginning of a football championship, funded by the Government of West Bengal, amongst athletic clubs all across West Bengal (Dutta, 2021). While the TMC persistently denied all colours of politics to this initiative, the political narrative was too apparent.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (hereafter, 'BJP') tried to counter this monstrous narrative by their meagre '*Khela Shesh*' ('Game Over') slogan which, however, did not fare too well.

The '*Bengali Bhadrolol*' - from Tollywood to the Intellectuals

Panellists at almost every Primetime show on national television pointed at, what they called- the '*Bengali Bhadrolol*', or the educated Bengali middle-class, as an important determining factor in the elections. Known forever for their art, intellect and might - a powerful blend of the three brought up a music video created by popular Bengali artists across all political lines (*except the BJP*) titled '*Onno Kothao Jabo Na, Ei Deshe tei Thakbo*' ('I shall reside nowhere else but, in this country'), calling out the flagship CAA propaganda of the BJP government and other pressing hate symbols upheld by the Right in India in the recent times.

One of the lines from the song - '*Tomar kono, kono, kono kotha shunbo na. Jotheshhto Bujhi kishe bhalo hobey, nijeder moto bhaabho.*' ('We won't listen to any of your sermons. We know what's good for us and shall reason for ourselves.') -

portrays precisely why the 'Bengali Bhadrak' is indeed an important independent force to reckon with, in Bengali politics.

The BJP had tried to counter this by releasing a music video of their own featuring Shri Babul Suprio, but the response was dismal at best.

The 'No Vote To BJP' campaign which is rooted in the historical Indian Coffee House in Calcutta, bears special significance in the elections. It was started off on the internet as a hashtag which grew into a mass movement beyond West Bengal on Twitter and Facebook, by students from top universities in and around the city. It was special because it was essentially a forum run and organized by citizens instead of a political party. It was probably first of its kind - if not in the country, definitely in the state.



**The entrance to the Indian Coffee House,
Kolkata. March 19th, 2021. (self-clicked)**

In attempts to win over the 'Bengali Bhadrakalok', the BJP, from behind the veils of the 'Central Government', had begun their efforts from the very beginning of the year. From a gala celebration of Netaji's 125th Birth Anniversary at the Victoria Memorial, to regular visits by 'Modi and Co.' at the Belur Math and houses of famous Bengali personalities – they really did pull out the big guns.

'Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chai'

"Everything is image, image is everything."
- Dhingra ('Rockstar' (2011), Dir. Imtiaz Ali)

State assembly elections, for long, have been an '*insider v/s outsider*' ensemble. I personally have witnessed it happening during the campaigning for the Tripura municipal elections in 2021 and the Punjab assembly elections in 2022. Though the Bengal elections may seem to be no different to the eyes of an experienced voter who witnessed enough of the 'dance of democracy' over the years, for a flirt-time voter - it all built up to an intriguing macabre of the Indian politics. In this regard, a special mention needs to be addressed towards the role of I-PAC (Indian Political Action Committee). The involvement of private-owned electoral consultancy service in the Indian elections, I believe, marks an important landmark in the history of our democracy. The eagerness and sheer desperation with which political leaders have contracted Mr. Prashant Kishore and his team at I-PAC, makes a young student of Political Science question - 'how '*democratic*' is this phenomena, really?', 'does it seem fair to push delicate leverages for votes and highlight only what, *statistically*, the people would like to see, for electoral gains?', 'does this not come dangerously close to an accusation of sophisticated manipulation of the simpler minds?'. However, very soon I find myself jogging out of such utopian interludes and remind myself of a headline I had read as a child from a news article by the NDTV in 2009 - '*All's fair in elections!*'.

I-PAC and Mr. Prashant Kishore had worked closely with the client - the Trinamool Congress and kept devising effective strategies to maintain the '*image*' of Mamata 'Didi'.

From 'Kanyashree' to 'Laxmi-r Bhandar' - Smt. Mamata Banerjee's administration has been on their job to maintain her feminist image as a protective and caring 'Mother'-figure who pays special attention to women's needs. The slogan 'Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chai' (Bengal wants its own Daughter in power) was, therefore, a perfect rhetoric. The I-PAC was, therefore, pretty appropriate, accurate and effective in their strategizing.

As usual, the rallies conducted by 'Didi' saw massive female turnouts -leaving national media houses awestruck.

Cartoonists across the country represented her rigour with – 'a plastered foot on a wheelchair, kicking a football' – an image encompassing the accident that Smt. Mamata Banerjee had reportedly encountered while campaigning at Nandigram, along with the 'Khela Hobe' rhetoric (Mehta, 2021). That is perhaps the best possible summary of how her image was perceived during the last leg of the campaigns. The Bengal BJP, however, very conveniently painted the narrative as a gimmick, asking Madam Chief Minister to wear 'Bermuda pants' instead, to "show off her legs better".

While speaking of images, it would be rather harsh and unfair not to mention the spectacular attempt of our Prime Minister in resembling Tagore with his grown beard and hair - a look to carefully behold. The BJP, for sure, had hoped for it to fare off well.

'Olympus marked itself safe': Winner Winner Steak Dinner!

Towards the end, it became a simple 'Us v/s. Them' battle. From tea stalls to corner-street *addas*, 'Didi, na Modi?' reverberated on all lips. It was a standoff between the programme which the two sides fundamentally upheld; what the manifestos said was barely relevant.

On the day of counting, once the TMC was in a confident position to secure a win, a cheeky social media post by the page – 'Kolkata Sutra', which said – 'Olympus marked itself safe', came as a dig at the BJP's latent propaganda on consumption and sale of beef. The post was highlighted by renowned

filmmaker Srijit Mukherji - quite emblematic of the stance taken by the '*Bangali Bhadrolok*'-s on the elections.



The famed Instagram post. (Instagram/srijitmukherji)

Besides the sudden perfidious affection from the BJP-led Central government and the inhumane post-poll violence; the inept political presence of the Left was overwhelming for someone like me, who has spent a majority of his life under the Left rule. Once known for conducting lustrous rallies at the Brigade grounds, the rally held by Communist Party of India (Marxist) prior to the elections, presented a deserted look promptly after Abbas Siddiqui, leader of

the allied party ISF (Indian Secular Front), was done addressing the crowd. An extremely disheartening picture to behold, indeed.

Spewing between a 'vote for us if you wish to avoid a Centre-State political deadlock' and a 'vote for us to avoid any opposition at the State-level governance', the CPI(M) could have possibly 'capitalized' on the opportunity and provided for a docile middleground for the working and middle-class voters. But there seemed to be a genuine lack of clear vision for governance amidst the Left.

Notwithstanding the dramatics of the 2021 elections - the pomp, the show and all its glory; for someone who casted their very first vote, I could have never hoped for a better opportunity to have done so. To have to be choosing, what most voters claimed to be, 'the lesser evil' - at the end of it all, I cannot help but get reminded of a beautiful song by Leonard Cohen called 'Democracy' from his album 'The Future' (1992). I end with a few lines from the same.

*" And I'm neither left or right,
I'm just staying home tonight
Getting lost in that hopeless little screen.
But I'm stubborn as those garbage bags
That Time cannot decay.
I'm junk but I'm still holding up
This little wild bouquet.
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A."*

- Leonard Cohen

If I may have swayed in favour of any political stand owing to my upbringing, surroundings and personal leanings – I issue my sincerest apologies for the same.

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State Sovereignty in the Digital Age

Swati Mishra

Second Year (PG), Roll No. - 111

The evolution of the human civilization through the centuries is periodised largely along the tectonic shifts in the broader politico-social structures across times. Change is perennial, but certain developments stand apart as they redefine the overall course of human society, their impact gradually altering the fundamentals of all crucial realms.

Generally born around the change of a rather eventful millenium two decades back, I can claim on behalf of my generational peers, to have been witnessing one such extremely remarkable transformation in the basis of human society, as computers, mobiles, internet and social media emerged and took over every aspect of the regular life at a lightning pace. The merit accrued to these developments for facilitating the global information revolution and ensuring worldwide interconnectedness is undoubtedly valid. Beyond this, however, the impact of an expanding digital space on the incumbent socio-political structures in general and on the nation-state system as it currently operates in particular, are worth assessing. Milan Babic et al. (2017) interestingly note that while there is a wide range of literature investigating 'States versus Markets', scholars of global political economy have hitherto not studied the 'actors' that constitute the market. This reflects a conservative "tendency to analytically prioritize the actions of policymakers over those of market participants" in understanding politico-economic phenomena. This bias emerges, as Benjamin Braun puts it, from political economists' limited understanding of the political sphere in the contemporary context: 'market participants' such as corporations are not perceived as analytically important or 'political' enough for a politico-economic analysis. However, this theoretical fallacy must be overcome soon, and such an assessment should be rooted in the inevitable reality of the rapidly expanding influence of the Big Tech and social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Apple, Amazon, Google, amongst others, many of whose economic worth exceeds the GDPs of several smaller countries– on the functioning of the

global political order as well as on the domestic policies of several nations, especially pertaining to the regulation of digital space.

In this context, there are numerous issues and debates pertaining to the digital domain that have gained prominence in the public discourse in recent years, an example being the debate over the virtue of use of cryptocurrencies globally. Most of the governments have delegitimize their use within their respective domestic economies since their exchanges not only by-pass the institutional authority of the central banking structure of the nation-states, but they also lack any governmental or institutional agency themselves.

While there are numerous such issues that trigger the question over a possible threat to state sovereignty in the digital age, one issue that has been a pressing concern of late has been the impact of social media giants on international and domestic political decision-making, as well as their relationship with nation-states over regulation policies for digital platforms. In fact, certain recent interactions between social media companies and governments of various nations over regulatory policies have even been hostile — the clash between the Government of India and Twitter in 2021 over the latter's defiance of the new IT Rules, arbitrary removal of the 'verified' badge from the twitter accounts of several Constitutional authorities in India including the country's Vice President and some Cabinet ministers and defiance of certain official guidelines issued in the interest of public order during the farmers' protest by claiming to be safeguarding liberal democratic values. These were some of the recent instances where the tech giant resisted putting its foot down quite vehemently. Further was the aggressive reaction by Google and Facebook against the Australian government's February 2021 policy 'News Media Bargaining Code' that required social media and internet giants to share revenue for the news content being shared on their platforms. In response to this, Google had threatened to withdraw its primary search engine operations from Australia, and Facebook announced a ban on news content on its platform in the country. After much pressure from governments of several countries and following prolonged negotiations, however, both companies decided to strike deals with local media portals. The Australian government, however, had to adopt some relaxations in its policy. Similar reactions by the digital media giants were also noted in response to proposals of revenue sharing models in France and other

European Union (EU) countries. Another country where the power of these digital media MNCs has been particularly noteworthy is the US, from where nearly all of these digital space giants have originated and are headquartered. Their exercise of autonomy is so manifest that there is barely any need to delve into the details of the policies – Facebook and Twitter have time and again unilaterally suspended and banned accounts of several political leaders, celebrities, activists, artists etc., often without much transparency. These are recent incidents that have constantly alarmed governments worldwide regarding the growing bargaining power that tech and media giants have begun to yield as our societies increasingly become reliant upon, and even addicted to, these platforms.

Whether or not these exchanges reflect an imminent threat to the sanctity of State Sovereignty by the rapidly expanding digital realm is an issue that remains open to further exploration. One guiding consideration in attempting to answer the question would be to understand the policy approach being adopted by nation-states on the matter, as it shall allow us to assess the perception that they presently harbor towards media giants. Largely driven by the State's political interests as much as by public concerns over cyber security and privacy, countries around the world have begun establishing and/or strengthening regulatory frameworks over the functioning of social media and other digital platforms. India's enactment of the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, comes along the lines of regulations adopted in Australia, EU, South Korea, etc. that have all pushed for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to censor wrongful content, objected to encryption algorithms, and generally sought to establish the State's regulatory authority and set avenues for the State to exercise control over the platforms with legal force. The United States may not have as cohesive protocols, but its corresponding policies concerning privacy rights, rights of children, etc. impose necessary restrictions on the platforms. Some rather intense examples of regulations are the absolute nationalization and State control over digital media under authoritarian regimes in China and North Korea, inter-alia, which again reflect one extreme of the answer to the question, even though these countries generally constitute exceptions to the value direction of the international order. What I deduce from here, thus, is that there exist no international standards on social media and big tech regulations yet

even though individual state efforts are beginning to speed up. Further, the regulatory policies of respective nations towards social media are largely mirrors to the prevalent political and social culture in those countries.

There are no definite answers to whether Big Tech is posing threats to State sovereignty presently, although subtle trends may be observed. Interestingly, despite upfront clashes on several occasions, the balance has hitherto usually tilted in favor of the nations. We must be cautious, nonetheless, of what Milan Babic (2017) had to say on this issue– that globalisation has reduced the agency of the State and increased that of the MNCs. He urges political scholars to integrate corporate power in international politics by giving it a relevant place as a ‘juxtaposed actor’ to State power in the international environment, wherein both exercise power over each other in specific spatio-temporal settings.

The latent political potential with the tech giants is immense-- amongst others, one of the most powerful instruments in their possession today is the authority to regulate the nature of content on their platforms, which allows them to mould public perception by subtly dictating moral standards and influencing the dominant narratives and the popular discourse. This role is only expected to expand in scope as we head towards greater digitisation in all realms, also explaining the sheer incentive that the giants have in pushing back interventions by the State and society. Besides these intrinsic functions, how visible their direct political interventions will be shall depend upon the stakes involved as governments continue to armor themselves with regulatory policies. On a different note, in fact, while I have only focused on the impact of digitisation on the extent of state sovereignty, I would encourage the readers to delve into a value judgement of the roles of the two sets of actors from the purview of protecting democratic rights and liberal values in the evolving society, and take a call on which one would be the lesser evil!

It would be important in the coming years to observe beyond face value and locate the real sources of power, in order to assess the impact of digitisation on the incumbent political framework. It would be most vital to preserve the essence of human ethos as any power transition takes place in the coming time.

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More Women in the Indian Armed Forces?

Aishi Sen

First Year (PG), Roll No. - 107

Traversing all socio-economic echelons, women in India face far-flung discrimination, whether in their job choices, exercising political rights or exacting their rights. They encounter inequality of variable magnitude when it comes to cultivating themselves in any facet of life. Women's empowerment is, thus, in the foremost necessity to elicit the best potencies of women in India, not only in sharing political power to administer the nation, improving economic standards at par with men in terms of job choices and employment but also in defending the nation.

Defence, in general, is concomitant with masculine power, brawniness, fortitude and a stringent mindset in terms of guarding borders, confronting lethal assaults from enemies, either as ambushes or at warzones, notwithstanding the time of the day, but still enduring the strength to forfend the nation from all odds. That is what our Indian Army does every single moment. Such an essence is clearly reflective of the motto,

'Service Before Self' and the *Three Ns* for which the soldiers do or die, without questioning – *'Naam'* (name-honour of the Army), *'Namak'* (loyalty to the nation) and *'Nishan'* (insignia – flag of the soldiers' regiments and of the nation) (*Join Indian Army*)

India ranks fourth as the most powerful militarily equipped nation in the entire world after the United States, Russia and China (*Deccan Herald*, 2022). India is armed with virtuoso arms and commanders, thus combatting the incursions in the best possible ways. For the recruitment of the adept officers into the Army, various scrupulous examinations are conducted to select deserving candidates. Every year, the Union Public Service Commission conducts the examination of Combined Defence Services to enable competent candidates to undergo the premier officer training in the most esteemed academies associated with defence such as the Indian Military Academy (IMA), the Officer's Training

Academy (OTA), the Air Force Academy (AFA) and also the National Defence Academy through the NDA examination to be accoutred with strength and erudition to serve our nation.

Back pedal to the antecedent

The ubiquitous mindset of people would associate strength, abidance and defence with men. Women are not usually thought to be inducted into the army for combat. However, women have contributed significantly to the Indian Army since 1888 with the institution of the Indian Military Nursing Service during the British reign. They were recruited as officers but were not conceded to serve in the combat units, rather, they served in armoured corps and mechanized infantry (except the MARCOS, 'Garud Commando Force' etc) (*Diplomatist*, 2020).

Another important instance of women's empowerment in Indian defence is the Rani of Jhansi Regiment related to the Indian National Army (INA) propounded by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. He meticulously prepared the archetype for the mission to free undivided India from the sway of the East India Company. Bose, a significant nationalist leader, who was keen to refurbish the fledgling of INA that comprised the Indian Prisoners of War (PoW) from the trounced forces of the British in Singapore and the Indian Independence League. He entreated women to come forward as spearheads to defend the nation and also to form women's societies. In 1928, Bose organized a 300 member women's section of Bengali Volunteers who would parade on Calcutta streets on the day of the Indian National Congress' synod. This was the earlier paragon of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. While steering the soldiers on the first INA in Singapore Padang, Dr Lakshmi Swaminathan was announced as the Supreme Commander of INA. Bose emphasized that the composition of INA would not be limited only to Jawans but to both males and females to defeat the assailants. In Swaminathan's words, therefore, "if it was to be a true Indian National Army, every physically fit Indian should enlist. Above all, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment must be raised to dispel all talk of the INA being a puppet army. He stressed the need for this over and over again". Bose stated that he had great veneration for women and felt that, 'given the opportunity,

there was nothing they were not capable of doing'. Men and women were two equal halves of a whole' (Rettig, 2013: 628, 629, 633). Therefore, he believed that in the scrimmage for independence, women should not remain bystanders and instead they 'should play a positive role' (Rettig, 2013: 628, 629, 633). Women empowerment was equally accentuated by Bose while battling for independence. Rani Of Jhansi remains a paramount instance of women engagement in battling and defending the nation.

Women in the Indian Defence Forces

In 1992, women were first initiated into the armed forces as officers. The Central Government had previously cited numerous dialectics for not allocating major locus to women to serve in the Indian armed forces, thus demonstrating gender disparity. Traditional norms and societal values that are assigned to women are the principal constituent behind not permitting them to join the combat and armed forces. The Central government has already intimated that the ranks in the armed forces are predominantly conquered by men who are recruited from remote areas and their mindsets are not fashioned to accept females as commanders and officers, indicative of violation of gender equality.

Moreover, the cardinal reason that the Government has cited is the obstacles that soldiers encounter being PoW as discerned from past incidents. Since 1992, though avenues are built to enable women to join the defence forces, they were not permanently commissioned. In spite of the magnificent view at the Republic Day Parade 2021, where women cadres were seen marshalling the contingent, there has remained a lacuna in permanently commissioning women in the services. However, India's Army accounts for 1.3 million active personnel and women make up to 3% of the Army according to 'New Delhi Television' compared to 4.5% in China, 16% in the USA, 40% in North Korea and so on (Army Technology, 2018). Whenever there has been any attempt previously, uncountable intransigence has lumbered in. The often-touted demurrals range from the decrementing of physical standards, acclimatization of work culture norms suitable to women, refusal of rustic soldiers to take orders from female officers, fetters on a soldier's freedom, tension, courtships, invidiousness, favouritism, disintegration of hierarchies, unenforceable codes

of conduct leading to resentment and opprobrium. Lt. General Pattabhiraman's remark regarding women officers that "we can do without them" is extremely reflective of these facts (Chowdhry, 2010: p.18). This highlights how democracy and equality stand suspended in the domain of defence. Even if political reforms within the Army were made before pertaining to women engagement in combat roles, such attempts were not the accepted mode of modernization of the army by the army reformers.

Newfangled thruway in empowering the women

In order to vouch for gender parallelism in the defence forces, the Government of India has announced a grant of Permanent Commission to women officers in all the branches of the Army and Defence Services. This was done in addition to sanctioning the first batch of 1,700 women in the Military Police Corps in a 'phased manner' in January 2020 and training them for 61 days in basic military and advanced provost training on par with their male counterparts in Bengaluru (ANI, 2021). The Supreme Court also rescinded the Army's discriminatory criteria for the selection of women officers in Short Service Commission (SSC) i.e., requiring them to match the lowest merit of male officers and to be in 'SHAPE-1' (*Hindustan Times*, 2021). The court ruled that all the candidates not granted permanent commission must be considered afresh based on their medical standard as prevailing at 5/10 years of service, and all their annual confidential reports must be evaluated. Such a benchmark verdict will definitely conclude years of legal battling with respect to gender equality in the WSSCO in Defence services, licensing them to serve according to the terms of the policy.

In another landmark bench on 18th August 2021, the Supreme Court posited directives to enable women defence aspirants to take the NDA examination that was held on 14 November 2021. The notability of this statement lies in the fact that the Pune-based NDA has always been a gender-specific reputed defence institution that has been bringing forth proficient army officers for years now. The two-judge bench chaperoned by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hrishikesh Roy took up a plea to permit eligible women candidates to sit for the November 2021 NDA examination. Previously also, for granting permanent

commission to women candidates, the judgement was passed by the court to direct the Army for opening pathways for women cadets. At this, Justice Kaul enquired. "Will the Army only act when a judicial order is passed and not otherwise?" (*The Indian Express*, 2022). At this deliverance, Captain Shalini Singh, a retired SSC officer hailed the decision and ascertained, "At the same time, it's not a very easy feat as NDA is male dominated academy. There will be challenges, but as the army chief has said, they should be welcomed on an equal and fair footing. Biological differences will be there but let there be a level playing field..." (*Hindustan Times*, 2022). Following the lifting of the gender barrier, about 178,000 women defence aspirants enrolled for the entrance examination. It is worth mentioning that when the NDA results got published on the official website of Union Public Service Commission on 15th December 2021, as many as 1002 women entrants qualified for the examination amongst 8000 candidates, making the alleyway to be featured in the list. They will be surfacing for the Short Service Selection Board Test and the medical tests. However, only 19 of the women qualifiers will be shortlisted for this year's NDA course to join the Forces.

A number of women officers, recently, have become the fountainhead of galvanization and motivation for all those women who purport to join the Forces. Lieutenant Madhuri Kanitkar being the foremost among all women is the third women Lieutenant General in India and has been serving for 37 years in the Defence Services of India. She served as the Dean of the Armed Forces Medical College and is currently posted in Udhampur's Army Command Hospital. Another personage who doles out a wave of momentum to many is Punita Arora who was the first woman from the Indian Navy to get the highest rank in the Armed Forces, first Air Marshal of Indian Air Force and the second woman to be promoted to a 'Three Star Rank'. Bhawana Kanth is also the first woman fighter pilot who became a part of the Indian Air Force Tableau along with Captain Tania Shergill who became the first woman to lead the male contingent in the Republic Day Parade 2021, fetched the attention of many and incentivized many such women aspirants join the Forces and offer their services to the nation and defend her.

India is becoming more avant-garde in spending on defence and importing arms. The verdicts are indeed the beneficial climacterics in permitting women

in the Forces. The problem may still lie in the operation of the women officers in terms of night shifts, accommodation in tents, security and so on. The dynamics of international security change rapidly and so are the techniques of warfare and diplomacy. The ventures undertaken by the state will, no doubt, open up avenues for women in the nation, notwithstanding the biological contrariety (physique and energy) will be present. However stringent it may seem, proper upgradation of infrastructure is needed to further increment the avenues of opportunities for women. Amelioration of discrimination in training should also be observed alongside to do away with any gender disparities. Given that India has witnessed the glorious eras of eminent women power such as Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu, and Beena Das, more prospects for women should be channelized. Reputed defence Academies like the IMA which is also, till now, gender specific – only male CDS qualifiers are recruited as gentleman cadets (GCs) – should widen their scope of inducting women cadets too like the OTA. This opens up pathways for utilizing women's contributions in the defence to make the Army all the more powerful and well-equipped, and a body that will encompass the knowledge, strength and mindset of both the genders, male and female, making India, truly, an unstoppable nation!

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Bengal's Man of All Seasons

Riddhiraj Mukherjee

Second Year (UG), Roll No.- 177

From being referred to as one of the two sons of the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to being regarded as the mentor of the incumbent West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, political veteran Subrata Mukherjee's 50 year long run in politics ranged from being the youngest minister of the State to being termed as the best mayor the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) has ever produced, and finally being considered the guardian of West Bengal's Panchayat mechanism. Mukherjee's journey, however, was not without its own share of impediments. This piece accentuates the reasons as to why he was considered the man of all seasons.

Mr. Subrata Mukherjee first appeared on the political scene in the late 1960s as a youthful and fiery student leader who gained the trust of the Congress leadership by virtue of his caliber to take the party to newer heights. Mukherjee was one of the three young Turks in the Congress – the other two being Shri Somen Mitra and Shri Priyaranjan Das Munshi – who were widely regarded as the party's future leaders in the state. Dasmunshi and Mukherjee were such close associates of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that a phrase circulated inside the West Bengal Pradesh Congress: Indirar dui putra: Priyaranjan o Subrata (Indira's two sons: Priyaranjan and Subrata).

The South 24 Parganas native Subrata Mukherjee was born in Sarangabad on June 14, 1946 and earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology before completing a master's degree in archaeology. As a pillar of Bengali politics, his career lasted more than five decades, starting as a student leader during the turbulent 1960s. After being initiated into politics as a student leader at Bangabasi College in 1967, during West Bengal's first non-Congress administration, Mukherjee progressed fast through the ranks of the party, alongside late union minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi and former state Congress president Somen Mitra.

First elections

Mukherjee, representing the Congress, contested his first election from Ballygunge (West Bengal) in the 1971 West Bengal Legislative Assembly elections. As a popular figure and a youth leader, Mukherjee had negligible opposition, paving his way to become the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) at the age of 25. When the government was dismantled, Bengal went for an election in the next year. Shri Siddhartha Shankar Roy led the Congress to a comeback with a massive mandate, and went on to become the 6th Chief Minister of West Bengal. It was in his cabinet leadership that history was created. The 26 year old Subrata Mukherjee became the youngest minister of the state with responsibility of 6 departments such as the Home department, Information and Culture department, the Sports department etc.

After losing in the 1977 elections, he rebounded by winning the follow up Assembly election from the Jorabagan seat in 1982. He kept the Jorabagan seat until 1996, after which he moved to Chowringhee.

Becoming the Mayor of Kolkata

Shri Subrata Mukherjee joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2000, under the leadership of his former mentee Ms. Mamata Banerjee, after more than 30 years in the Congress. In the same year, TMC won the municipal elections, and Mukherjee became the city's first non-Left Mayor since the CPI(M) took control in 1977. Mukherjee received widespread acclamation for his extraordinary administrative ability, practicality, and efficiency. As a Mayor of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation(KMC), he campaigned for measures to get rid of corruption in the KMC and make it more efficient among many other decisions catering to regulatory functions of the municipality. His notable works as a Mayor include solving water logging issues in various parts of the city like Southern Avenue, pushing proposals for the construction of an India gate in Kolkata (which later could not see its construction due to the budget of the then government).

Being mentor to Mamata Banerjee

Credit for Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's first ticket for Lok Sabha elections also goes to Mr. Subrata Mukherjee. Ms Banerjee's talent was recognised by Mukherjee when she was a student leader at Jogamaya College and he was the President of the Chhatra Parishad. Later, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi desired a strong female candidate to challenge the CPI(M)'s Shri Somnath Chatterjee for the Jadavpur Lok Sabha seat, it was Mukherjee who recommended Mamata Banerjee's name. When Shri Pranab Mukherjee asked Subrata Mukherjee whether she was up to the assignment, he answered that she was the only one who could pull it off, and he was proven correct: she stunned the Communist establishment by beating the seasoned heavyweight. "Our connection was never comparable to that of a Chief Minister and her Minister," she said. I always saw him as an older brother who would correct my errors," Mamata Banerjee said. He remained one of her most trusted counselors and someone she would always turn to in times of distress. Mr. Abhishek Banerjee, Mamata Banerjee's nephew and the TMC's all-India general secretary, and a person considering Mukherjee as his 'guru'(mentor) characterised Mukherjee's demise as the end of an era. "To all of us, he was like a protector, like the roof over our heads. "The gap he has created will never be filled," he said.

Last Election

Subrata Mukherjee's last election was the 2021 West Bengal Assembly polls against great competition from the BJP. Contesting from the Ballygunge constituency, the masses already showed massive support to Mukherjee prior the elections and belted out anti - Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) slogans against the opposing BJP candidate from Ballygunge. The locals chanted, 'Subrata da lockdown e amader binamulle mask diyeche, sanitiser diyeche, chakri bachiyeche, dada amader pashe chilo, roj bikele amader shathe boshe chaa kheten ar ki kaaj tini korte parten jate amader bhalo hoy sheta jigeshe korten. Amra dada chara ar kauke chaina'(Subrata da helped us with free masks, sanitisers and jobs during lockdown. He used to drink tea with us workers in the evening and used to ask what else he could do for us).

Mukherjee took his last oath as a minister on May 1 after regaining his Ballygunge constituency by around 72,000 votes, making another record and got appointed as head of four departments, among them panchayat and rural development

Ekdalia Evergreen and Football

Apart from being a politician for all seasons, Mukherjee was a colourful, dhoti-clad gentleman who took a personal interest in the Ekdalia Evergreen Club community Durga Puja in South Kolkata and the famed Mohun Bagan football club. The Ekdalia Puja is a crowd favourite which focuses on the original “roop” (form) of Goddess Durga. Mukherjee himself used to do the rituals; even in 2021, one month before his demise, the minister was seen performing every ritual himself while visibly not at the best of his health. When asked about his Minister of state counterparts like that of Janab Firhad Hakim and Shri Partha Chatterjee conducting Durga Puja with considerably more advertisement and decor and if he saw that as any kind of competition, a smiling Subrata said, “Ora utshob kore, amra pujo kori” (They conduct a festival, we conduct a Puja).

How Mukherjee helped in the making of Satyajit Ray’s “Sonar Kella”

It was the year 1973, Satyajit Ray was writing the script of 'Sonar Kella' and selecting the lead actor, but he was not getting any producer. At that time, Subrata Mukherjee was the Minister of Information and Culture in the West Bengal Congress cabinet. As soon as the news reached his ears, he went to the then Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Roy and said, “সত্যজিৎ রায় ছবি করবেন বলে স্ক্রিপ্ট নিয়ে বসে আছেন, প্রযোজক পাচ্ছেন না। আমরা ছবিটা করতে পারি না?” (Satyajit Ray is sitting with the script to do the film, but can't find any producer. Can't we do the film??)

In fact, after paying for the Pather Panchali film in 1954, the government was complacent and did not show interest in investing in another film. As a result, the government's film department was rendered ineffective.

Siddhartha Shankar and Satyajit were not only childhood friends, but also they were relatives. He said, “যাও, একবার মানিকের সঙ্গে কথা বলো।” ('Go, talk to Manik (Ray) once.')

Ray agreed as soon as he got the offer. About 20 years after 1954, the West Bengal government came forward to produce the film again. As a result, the late Subrata Mukherjee should always be remembered for our favorite Bengali film 'Sonar Kella'

Representing Bengalis in space through NASA's Voyager

Around 44 years ago, in 1987, NASA sent a pair of special spacecraft into space named the Voyager 1 and Voyager 2. They were special because their structure and purpose were different from the rest of NASA's artificial satellites or other spacecraft. Their purpose was to observe every planet in the solar system up close and to take pictures of them and send them to Earth. Since there is no atmospheric constraint in space, 44 years after Newton's first lawful launch, Voyager is still moving at a tremendous speed to an uncertain destination, and this motion will continue indefinitely without colliding with any other cosmic object, perhaps destroying the Earth by then. Voyager has now crossed the boundaries of the solar system.

When Voyager was about to be made, a strange thought came to Carl Sagan's mind. He thought that after a while it would pass through the solar system, surpass our galaxy and even the Milky Way. Earth may not exist then, but if Voyager finds an advanced alien civilization billions of years from now, how will they know that there was an advanced civilization on Earth? So he wanted to leave some message for those distant aliens in Voyager's chest. Through various studies, it was decided that Voyager will be fitted with a golden disk that will not be damaged even in extreme weather, and this disk will be filled with various pictures and sounds of the earth. This work was done in a way that is unparalleled in history. Recorded on the disc were pictures of sunrise, pictures of sunset, pictures of human bones, DNA, pictures of males and females, pictures of breastfeeding, pictures of animals, birds, cries of baby, sound of rain, sound of wind blowing, call of birds, call of dog, human sound of

laughter. More music was incorporated, including Mozart. Further, alongside the messages of the President of the United States and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, there were short messages in 55 different languages of the world. Among these languages was our mother tongue Bengali. The message in Bengali was – “নমস্কার, বিশ্বে শান্তি হোক” ("Hello, peace in the world") and this message was voiced by Subrata Mukherjee. Voyager 1 has long since escaped the illusion of the solar system. After a while, Voyager will be lost in the land of stars forever.

Many people associated with Voyager are no more, such as Carl Sagan, who departed in 1997. And Subrata Mukherjee, who gave voice for the whole Bengali nation, has left home on Earth to reside in the land of stars. Even if he leaves, his voice will continue to represent millions of Bengalis in the future.

Concluding Thoughts

Mukherjee, an anthropology graduate with a master's degree in archaeology, was a colourful storyteller who strongly believed in the existence of ghosts. His love for sweets was known by all and his residence, which did not require any appointment to visit like that of other ministers of the state, was often filled with sweets being gifted from all over the state and he did make sure to taste each and every variety, often stealing some sweets from the boxes so as to not get caught by his family. His contribution to the development of West Bengal is by far unmatched and people remember this man as their leader who fulfilled his promises. Subrata Mukherjee will be remembered as a man of many seasons who glided through the state's politics for more than 50 years as a smart politician and capable administrator.

Between Scylla and Charybdis : The Voters' Dead End

Alisha Khan

First Year (UG), Roll No. - 115

"Evitata Charybdi in Scyllam incidi"

- Desiderius Erasmus, Adagia(1500)

Having escaped Charybdis, I fell into Scylla

It has been two years of global crisis, pervaded with unceasing days of duurance, despair and demonstrations, of deaths and tears as well as of failing economies. With massive unemployment and the health care in shambles, disdain and ennui ride high. Undeniably, the consequences of callousness are jarring. Neither has the world faced anything like it before nor have the circumstances ever felt so hopeless. All global citizens call for reprieve.

There is a need for change in the system, which people often cry about in unison. But, it is the people who are capable of heralding change by means of voting in and by voting out. Hence, elections serve as sieves to sift the good from the worse. This has been acknowledged throughout—good leaders, neoteric and dynamic, are the need. For the Indian youth, however, the choices are far too many, yet regrettably too little. Futile decision making, false promises and lack of accountability have made many Indians, especially the youth disillusioned with the leaders, today. This is not restricted to one party or one government, but to all. It is not hyperbolic to allege that India has been facing a 'leader deficit' for years, made more profound during the pandemic (Basu Roy, 2021). The pandemic, thus, has emerged as an effective yardstick for any leader's true calibre. Despite being acknowledged by many, nothing much has been done in this regard. Precisely because Indians still end up voting for the 'lesser of the two evils', a phenomenon seen in politics worldwide (Niyogi, 2021).

In a country of 1.38 billion people, a truly 'good' leader seems to be absent. To even think of one is considered illusory. With politicians having long histories

of bigotry, criminal records, abysmal education qualifications and an unparalleled knack for fallacies and misnomer, the general norm has become to settle for the one least harmful.

“If not x, then who?” is more often the common retort among people.

However, in this very retort, the true essence of democracy gets lost. The spirit of democracy lies in choice—the choice to avail one’s political will. Voting on the basis of the ‘lesser evil principle’ has turned into a fallacy, which for the worse part plunges the very system of choice into a binary paradigm.

However, choice cannot really be exercised when choice itself is restricted. Not bringing good leaders to the forefront is equivalent to restricting people’s voting choices. This very notion is attributed to the failure of the system that so many passionately crib about on social media and in living rooms. Perhaps, through our voting patterns, we as voters, albeit unconsciously, pull ourselves into this vicious cycle of anger vote, where votes fail to translate into something substantive, when we only end up as mechanisms rejecting parties and leaders for another, furthering the same pattern. It is then that elections merely end up acting as something turned punitive. Nothing good comes out of such a trend or pattern. The layman simply ends up jumping back-and-forth from the frying pan into the fire. The 2020 United States Presidential Elections attested to the very same: Joe Biden was favoured over Donald Trump in spite of both having similar blemishes on them. The anger vote and lesser evil principle played a remarkable role in Trump’s ousting and Biden’s victory. Yet, two years later, ‘Biden’s job approval rating is 12 points lower than when he took office—now just 41% (around where Trump was for most of his presidency)’ (Reich, 2021). Instances in India do not seem much different, either. For instance, the most prevailing narrative about the Bharatiya Janata Party being considered as a better alternative than the Indian National Congress despite having glaring failures in administration and public policy.

An uncertainty, however, perennially looms in the midst of such a leadership crisis, one concerning the likelihood of the common citizen to facilitate, effectively, the curation of sound leaders. Although there is no doubt that leadership in a democracy is difficult to put into practice, it is not impossible, either. The collective voice of the people needs to reach the political parties and

their candidates, if at all they are willing to lend their ears. Mechanisms like the None of the Above (NOTA) helps to attain the very same idea of enabling the people with a voice which reverberates their wants loud and clear — only if they were given the proper power they require, rendering them something more than just paper tigers with no claws of their own.

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India's 'Endangered' Democracy: The Lakhimpur Kheri Case

Anushka Banerjee

First Year (PG), Roll No.- 162

"Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

- John Adams, 17th December 1814

The above quotation seems to have materialised for democracy in India. Yes, the world's largest democracy is on the brink of extinction. The outcome of several past incidents in the nation has shown India's democracy to be 'endangered'. Such an event is the incident of Lakhimpur Kheri. To explain why this mishap exposes the endangered condition of India's democracy, a brief elaboration of the event is necessary.

On 3rd October 2021, throngs of farmers in the Tikonia area of Lakhimpur Kheri district were returning after staging protests against the 'Three Farm Laws', passed by the Union government on 18th September 2020. On that very day, a total of eight people breathed their last in a hit-and-run incident by the convoy of Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya. Four farmers and a journalist, who was there to cover the incident, were among the deceased. Two of the cars reportedly involved were identified to be owned by Union Minister Ajay Mishra. His son Ashish Mishra was also spotted in one of the cars in the minister's convoy (Frontline 14 January, 2022: "Conspiracy Exposed", Trivedi, Divya).

After filing two FIRs against Ajay Mishra, Ashish Mishra and around twenty unnamed men for rioting, rash driving, death by negligence, party to a criminal conspiracy, and so on, as well as due to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court N.V. Ramana's emphasis on a federal investigation into the incident, the

Government of Uttar Pradesh appointed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Uttar Pradesh Police. And, as investigated by SIT and its forensic team, the Lakhimpur Kheri incident was identified to be not a case of death by negligence, but a pre-planned conspiracy and a deliberate act of homicide. In an application filed before the Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court in Lakhimpur, the SIT said that it appeared from the probe that had been conducted and material collected till then that the said act was not a negligent act committed by the accused, rather, it was done intentionally as per premeditated plan to kill. (Frontline 14 January, 2022: "Conspiracy Exposed", Trivedi, Divya).

In the initial phase of this article, we used the adjective 'endangered' to describe India's democracy. We have reasons to use such an adjective. Recalling the Lakhimpur incident, we see that the protesters' right to life and livelihood was threatened. Nobody in this country, whether they are an influential personality, or a common individual, possesses the right to take away other persons' right to life and livelihood. But, unfortunately, this incident suppressed the protesters' right to life and livelihood.

The farmers were carrying out a peaceful protest. The journalist, who faced an ill fate, too was doing nothing but carrying out his duty. So, basically, people who were actually exercising their right to peaceful protest and demonstration and right to work, were restricted from such an exercise and were killed. It is quite unfortunate that even after it has been proved that the Lakhimpur Case was nothing but a cold-blooded murder of innocent people, justice is being delayed. These are not the things that are tolerable in a democracy.

Now, one cannot call a political regime to be 'democratic' where citizens' legal, as well as fundamental rights are not protected. Here, peoples' lives are getting threatened just because they are exercising their rights which they are entitled to, as citizens. And, this is something that nobody expects from a democratic regime.

After repealing the 'Three Farm Laws', the law-makers involved in the process admitted that passing of these Acts was not fair, which reveals the fact that the point of view that the protesters shared is absolutely right. Hence, the protesters are not meant to face any kind of violence. Moreover, almost 70% of the Indian population is engaged with the agrarian sector, for which farmers

hold a special position in our society. So, if the farmers carry out a peaceful and unarmed protest to place their demands, it should be taken note of. But, instead of that, if incidents like Lakhimpur Kheri take place, the political regime does not remain democratic. In fact, apprehension arises that for incidents like the one of Lakhimpur, if justice is delayed, we will not remain in a position of taking pride in living in the world's largest democracy. Hence, The aforesaid quotation by John Adams is realised for India's democracy.

On a concluding note, as far as politics of India is concerned, questioning the governmental Acts, carrying out protests against controversial decisions, independence of the media, and so on, all frame up the democratic politics in the nation. But, as is evident since 2020, be it protest against the NRC-CAA-NPR, or protest against the passing of 'Three Farm Laws', the ruling party is leaving no stones unturned to suppress people's voice. The only time it is paying heed to citizens' demands is at the time of elections, which highlights the fact the Union government envisages the citizens as nothing but mere vote-banks. This is something that is undesirable in a democratic regime. As said by great leader Abraham Lincoln, democracy is government for the people, of the people and by the people. So, the government must work for the people not only during elections, but throughout the five-year time. It should design policies that cater to weaker sections of the society more than the privileged strata. Instead of suppressing popular revolts, the government needs to pay heed to the demands of the people involved in such movements, and carry out required negotiation with them. Then only we can save India's democracy from 'committing suicide' and preventing Adam's words from getting materialised for the world's largest democracy.

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Article 21: A Neoteric Ascendancy on the State?

Ahan Basu

First Year (UG), Roll No.- 103

“The Indian Constitution is first and foremost a social document”.

- Granville Austin

This article would concentrate on Article 21 as the pivot of discussion, which guarantees Protection of Life and Personal Liberty of all citizens and foreigners. But, considering the tide of inclusions of numerous rights under Article 21 (through jurisprudence), to what extent has that encumbered the state from a somewhat untroubled administration, given the added obligations, is the question. Also, are such inclusions recent or quite prevalent even before the dawn of the present century, is what is explored in this article.

The very essence of the Indian Constitution is to bring about social changes as the state progresses with time. Part IV of the document dealing with the Directive Principles of State Policy, hereon referred to as DPSPs, are a testimony to that idea of social change given the moral obligations they imply, coupled with the lack of justiciability. On the contrary the more legal nature of the Fundamental Rights, given their enforceability, segregates itself from the DPSPs on the question of justiciability.

The idea behind keeping the provision under Part IV (Article 36 – 51) non – justiciable was to keep a room for further social development without impeding the State’s flow of functioning. Such directions were idealized as to be possibly achieved by the political parties in the system, by way of presenting their election manifestos, portraying their agenda, which ideally should be developed upon the premise of making transitions from DPSPs to Fundamental Rights (on the question of justiciability and legal weight).

If we retrace the verdicts aimed at widening the scope of Article 21, we can definitely spot the necessary inclusions. But that should not blind us of the few

controversial additions. This can be attributed to the vigour of judicial activism initiating from the late 1970s. In the *Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India*, AIR 1978, where the definition of life and personal liberty was ascertained as the right to live with human dignity, it intrinsically linked Article 21 with Articles 14 and 19, thus widening the scope of Right to Life.

Thereon we find several verdicts widening the scope of Article 21 with time. For instance, in the *Olga Tellis & ors. vs Bombay Municipal Corporation & ors.* 1986, AIR 180, the Honourable Supreme Court in its verdict recognized Right to Livelihood as a part of Right to Life under Art. 21. Furthermore, we find verdicts in the form of *Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka*: AIR 1992 and *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal*: 1997, (Law Times Journal, Abhishek Kumar) which made Right to Education and Right of prisoners and right against illegal detention a substantial consideration under Right to Life and Personal Liberty. In the former case, the logistical compatibility of the Indian state to allow such changes to be implemented does not seem to be in place. In the latter verdict, the question of freedom versus security of state arises to a considerably large extent. Therefore, the question arises whether the complexity of procedures as laid down by the Court for the Police to arrest an individual, in a way hampers the state's ability to identify and arrest individuals for their misdeeds and gets somewhat blurred in emergency situations, wherein urgent actions are necessary although, the counter-argument of the vitality of the rights of the citizens needs to be catered to, held precedence to some extent.

In the *Hussainara Khatoon v State of Bihar*: AIR 1979, (Law Corner, Zara Suhail Ahmed) the apex court held that the Right to Legal aid and speedy trial also needs to be classified as a right essential for more than mere human existence. But the consideration also should be there that, it would necessarily imply inducting more judges and other associated courtroom officials, so that delivery of justice gains momentum, wherein the question arises as to whether the state governments have adequate finance to support such appointment procedures. The answer seems to be, no. That can also be attributed to the fact as to why vacancies in such judicial posts remain to be meagre.

With the verdict in the *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India*: 1996, (Indian Legal Solution) the Honourable Supreme Court held that the right to live in a clean and healthy environment is a part of Right to Life, which was

intrinsic to uphold the concept of more than “mere animal existence” (Legal Services India: E-Journal, Alefiya Kurabarwala) as described in the *Kharak Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh* verdict. But the idea seems conflicting with the *Olga Tellis* verdict wherein the Court had refused for slum clearance during the monsoons to protect the natives’ right to livelihood (as a segment of Right to Life) and therefore the question arises, how can people living in slums be guaranteed the same level of sanitation as the people living in city centers? And if such an uniformity is unattainable, in the practical walk, is it justified to make it a right for those who can have access to it, given the fact it categorically falls within the scope of Right to Life, which should be omnipresent? Even if we are not expressing concerns over similar levels of sanity, a basic denominator of sanitation levels is also bleak as a scope in slums. This would therefore, in a way, undermine the lives of those who are living in deplorable conditions with very little room for improvement without substantial changes like slum clearance.

In the landmark *Justice K.S. Puttuswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India* (2017) (Centre for Law and Policy Research, South Asian Law Database) verdict, the apex court held that Right to Life includes right to privacy, as the nine judges constitutional bench held in this case. The mandatory linkage of Aadhar Card with bank and other personal details was to be done away with as violative of privacy of individuals. Such a verdict definitely favours the citizens from becoming a prey to unnecessary government surveillance, which given the political situation can be explained to be reasonable. But there arrives a subtle premise for the state security versus privacy argument. The case was explicitly based on the Aadhar Act and the fact that the government could have utilized such surveillance methods for the security of the state, was a primary contention to a substantial extent in the hearing, from the Attorney General’s side. But precedence was given to the privacy of the citizens which again, given the political situation and a spree of hegemonic legislation seems reasonable. This verdict therefore can be said to pass the test of reasonably upholding privacy by ruling against the government.

If we carefully scrutinize the chronology of adaptivity of Article 21 to social changes, it will reflect the fact that it is not a very recent phenomenon. The idea had gained momentum in the post-General Emergency period of 1975 and had

started to burgeon thereon. In recent times though, it has procured vital grounds and roots in newer venues, paths and avenues of life, with the urge of defining and redefining what more than mere animal existence would mean. And such definitions have essentially violated the amicable divide between Fundamental Rights and DPSPs. The perception of provisions under DPSPs as mere socio-political obligations, changes when such provisos are brought under the purview of the Fundamental rights, which the State has an onus to fulfill. And here arises the question, does the state have adequate resources (capital, raw materials, etc) in order to address such issues? The response is glaringly pessimistic.

When the apex court of the country is increasingly involved in adjudicating over the Fundamental Rights violations of the citizens every now and then, is it not a proof of logistics and infrastructural lapse at the State's disposal which leads to shortcomings in its ability to guarantee such rights to the citizens? Hence, if further obligations are burdened on the administration, which is apparently unnecessary for dignified human existence, by jurisprudence, such actions are sure to backfire with massive and monumental collapse of State machinery in due course of time. It seems that the Court has taken a probable pro-people stance in such cases, which seems somewhat deliberately shortsighted in few instances, especially when there is an incentive of a possibility of it being enshrined as a strong, publicly favoured organ of active decision-making in the administrative affairs of the State.

A collision is also observed here, with the Fundamental Duties enshrined in the Constitution and Article 21. If we examine Article 51(A) (g), it speaks of protecting and improving the natural environment despite it also being a right under Article 21 that the citizens are entitled to. Then what is it at best, a right or a duty (of the citizens)? If we opine the provision tends to be both, that fuels the vital question vis-a-vis Article 48(A), a directive asking for protection and improvement of the environment.

In conclusion, the question remains as to whether one matter of concern, in practicality, can be addressed as a Fundamental Right, a DPSP and a Fundamental Duty at the same time or not. Herein it is observed that in such a case paramountcy has almost always been given to the responsibility of one

which supersedes the other two and history lays out how and why the Indian State has had to bear the burden, every time the question has arisen.

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Higher Legal Age of Marriage: A Victory for Women Empowerment

Deep Dhara

Second Year (UG), Roll No.- 130

On December 16, 2021, the Union Cabinet of India approved a proposal to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21. The much-needed proposal reflects a new perspective wherein the soaring aspirations of the women in India will not be limited by societal norms. Here the question crops up as what does this move bode for the women of India? It is a moment of celebration and significance for 600 million of its citizens. This has been an opportunity for the Indian mainstream to witness the unravelling of some of these unspoken norms about sexual crimes. A balanced, inclusive society stems from the very idea of equality. Documented history has been vocal about the patriarchal system and how it created a gap between the two sexes. The constitution guarantees prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex (Article 15) – yet for years men always had a position of higher privilege, until, hopefully, this law chose to alter entrenched beliefs. Union Minister Smriti Irani said that “as a democracy, we are 75 years late in providing equal rights to men and women to enter into matrimony” (Asianet Newsable, 2019).

South Asia as a region has undergone massive economic and social transformations in the last several decades. Women as a collective have seen their lives evolved as a result of accelerated development and economic growth. Unfortunately, with context to legal marriage age, there has been a deficit of inequalities. For instance, in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan the marriage age of females is 16 years. It does reflect the inadequacies and stereotypical notions. On the other hand, Bangladesh put forward 18 for girls and 21 for boys. Bhutan and Sri Lanka being the only nations to assert 18 years as the legal marriage age for both men and women (WION).

Forced marriages are an issue to draw our attention to. Families eagerly wait for their daughter(s) to turn eighteen and when she does, she is married off.

Human rights are violated – the right to make decisions, the right to choose, the right to education, the right to voice out freely. In my opinion, an eighteen year old is too young to connect with the outside world, with no exposure, no degrees or experience as such. In literal terms, she just came out of a volatile period of life i.e., teenage life. Often families keep aside these deficiencies and push their daughters into a relationship. Such practices further perpetuate gender inequalities.

According to the 2014 National Health Survey out of all the women aged between 20-24, one fourth were married before 18 (UNICEF). Early marriages can lead to early pregnancies in some women and in some cases, by not receiving proper medical care, they may develop massive health complications. They might go through excessive mental trauma. Is an eighteen year old equipped well enough to handle such travails? That is something to ponder over. Those marrying early may be more susceptible to domestic violence, poor mental health and malnutrition.

The minimum marriage age was formally established to prevent child marriages. In 1978 it was amended to make the legal marriage age 18 for girls and 21 for boys. A sample survey from 1998 presented by the International Center for Research on Women-UNICEF estimated India's child marriage rate to be 47%, while the United Nations reported it to be 30% in 2007 (Ministry of Women and Child Welfare). The advent of globalization has had an immense impact on free thinking, the need to build a livelihood of one's own volition and the importance accorded to constitutional rights. The consequent focus on socio-economic disparities and means of empowerment have done much to defy archaic cultural practices that have been detrimental to, in this context, the betterment of women. One way this advancement has been manifested is in the raising of the legal age of marriage.

Blindly accepting tradition causes an emptiness that has snatched away the dreams of so many. The 15 year old Priyanka from Malda, West Bengal who wanted to be a doctor, did not get the opportunity to get her ambition fulfilled when her parents married her off. There are so many like Priyanka whose voices have not reached us (Vice Asia). Stereotypes are rife in this regard: beliefs such as that of a woman losing her charm or being unable to find a partner if married too late, or that of parents being humiliated for not marrying their

daughter off early. One has to examine the situation rationally and be cognizant of reality in order to separate fact from fiction.

The law is not enough. According to me, there has to be an effort to ensure that it is well implemented in practice and the administration is firm with their actions. In villages, people often fail to avail of the laws. At times, the victim is abused or cursed for not listening to her parents. Such activities need to be checked to let one be at peace. Stricter laws and public vigilance can create all the difference.

However, if one digs deeper, one finds that it radiates a dark truth: the fallacy of the system. At the economic level, the families have to reckon with inadequate incomes and uncertain livelihoods. HER marriage is seen as a source of relief and a way to reduce the burden by the ones hailing from the low income group. That very aspect could not be a factor of discrimination as I believe, regardless of whether one is male or female, one deserves to be treated and nurtured in the same way. So to protect victims from such oppression, an organization has been set up which regulates the entire process of locating and saving the needy. To connect with the organization one has to dial 1098 (National Childcare helpline number), one call can save a life. We should come forward to take action against such ills/injustices with children like the child marriage or violence since making the authorities informed about it may possibly prevent such ills from taking place further on.

The role of the political executive has become extensive from building infrastructure to implementing policies in real terms. Women-centric reforms pave the path towards enlightenment and bring about a holistic change. As the saying goes, “if you educate a man, you educate an individual... however, if you educate a woman you educate a family” (Suen, 2013: Vol.1.no.2). Women are essential elements of both our family and society – and they make a positive impact through their inherent discipline and dignity.

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Changes Necessary in the Appointment of Election Commissioners in India

Shivam Roy

Third year (UG), Roll No.- 132

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has been entrusted with the supervision and control of the entire procedure of elections in India. The Election Commissioners hold the office for a fixed tenure of 6 years or until the age of 65 years, whichever comes first. The President is empowered under the Constitution to determine the condition of service of Election Commissioners and Regional Commissioners. All the above mentioned facts indicate towards the idea that the Election Commission of India is an independent public institution and its sanctity is safeguarded through constitutional provisions. Here the question arises – can the constitutional safeguards ensure the free and fair working of public institutions? It seems to be a topic for debate amidst the current political environment of the country. From various political parties to retired Chief Election Commissioners, the role of the Election Commission has been under constant scrutiny by many. The controversy and deep-rooted mistrust regarding the use of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) serves as a testimony to the erosion of faith in one of the most important public institutions of this country.

This question echoed in the uproar that followed the virtual meeting between P.K Mishra, principal secretary to the prime minister and Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra and Election Commissioners (EC) Rajiv Kumar and Anup Chandra Pandey. Even though the government later explained that this meeting was an “informal meeting” called for the discussion of electoral reforms, questions were raised regarding the summoning of Election Commissioners as the Election Commission usually maintains a distance from the Executive to ensure autonomy of functioning. This was hailed as a breach of propriety by former CECs (The Hindu, 2021).

Unfortunately, this was not the first time that the sanctity of the Election Commission was questioned since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. The Madras High Court had to direct the ECI to probe allegations against BJP in Puducherry on the grounds of stealing Aadhar details of voters for targeted campaigning. A writ petition titled as 'Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India' filed in 2015, had sought the Supreme Court to issue a writ to command the State to make a law for ensuring a fair, just and transparent process of appointment by constituting an independent collegium to recommend the members of the Election Commission.

At present, the Prime Minister with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers makes the appointment of election commissioners. It is obvious that when the members of a public institution, entrusted to conduct free and fair elections are appointed by the executive then questions regarding the freedom and rectitude of the institution will be raised. After all, in our democracy, the members of the executive are directly or indirectly elected by the people and if they have absolute control over the selection procedure of the members of the institution entrusted with the conduction of these elections, then the freedom and fairness of the institution is jeopardized.

The demand for changes in the process of selection of the election commissioners is not a new one. In 1975, the Justice Tarkunde Committee recommended that Election Commissioners should be appointed on the advice of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Lok Sabha opposition leader, and the Chief Justice of India. The Fourth Report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended that the Law Minister and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha should be included in the collegium.

In our opinion, the need of the hour is that the Executive should let go of its absolute control over the selection procedure of the Election Commissioners. The Judiciary, on the other hand, has been somewhat indifferent in the context of this issue. The judgement on Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India keeps getting delayed and the hope that the judiciary will enforce the necessary changes languishes. The inaction on the part of the Executive should prompt the judiciary to step in and order the government to promulgate necessary legislations that would ensure the adoption of a more transparent selection

procedure of the Election Commissioners. What I feel is that the Judiciary needs to show more promptness while dealing with cases where the sanctity of the ECI is questioned. Furthermore, a committee should be established to look into the loopholes of the constitutional safeguards of the ECI so that a public institution of such importance and stature is not under constant scrutiny.

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An Open Letter From An Equalist

Ahan Basu

First Year (UG), Roll No.-103

TW: Mention of rape, sexual assault, molestation, domestic violence.

My biggest personal battle while penning this down was not to be misconstrued because of the views put forward here. But then the realisation dawned on me that at the end of the day, it is not in my power entirely to prevent that from happening. Hence, an earnest request to all the readers would be to not go about this with any preconceived notions whatsoever regarding the condition of men in today's society, especially in India. The simple attempt here has been to highlight the plight of men in India today, given the way society perceives them, which is generally considered to be favourable to them.

This is a story of Avadhesh Yadav (Bhardwaj, 2015), a hardworking bank employee from Jhansi for whom marriage became the sole reason for his end; a literal and lethal end. A false dowry case was filed against his family. His wife's demand could be settled only through transfer of his father's property, earned with years of hard work. His father suffered a heart attack and he hanged himself a few days later, leaving behind a suicide note urging the National Human Rights Commission for investigation as to whether he was at fault or not. Avadhesh and his family members were turned into criminals by the mere statement of a woman.

While on the one hand, there are several cases of false rape allegations being imposed on men, in our country a man cannot be officially raped by anyone. Sec. 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) dealing with rape mentions of sexual violation of women only and not men. In fact, there is no such legislation that allows petitions to be filed for the rape of a man, because laws are deficit in recognizing the fact that a man can be sexually violated. I cannot be subject to cruelty as Sec. 498(A) of the IPC excludes me. A study carried out on a 1000 married men, in rural areas of States popularly identified as male-dominated societies such as Haryana (Gupta, 2020), revealed that 52.4 percent of males have experienced some sort of gender—based violence. But our protection against such violations has fallen on deaf ears.

Though I strongly condemn and oppose sexual harassment, assaults and violation of women's rights, the fact continues to remain that the law does not recognise the possibility of men being sexually assaulted or domestically violated, just like it did not when Jyotirmay Majumdar (MDO, 2020) was domestically violated, including being burnt with a cigarette and poked with pins by his wife in Kolkata, with the police unable to take any legal action whatsoever. The rhetoric became one of jesters and light-hearted entertainment then, with me simply imagining the reaction had the genders been reversed. I question the notion of social equality when a retired Army Major begs for help (MDO, 2020) on facing false dowry and domestic violation accusations by his wife.

I have a contention with regards to Section 375 of the IPC that declares it to be rape when a man has sexual relations with a woman on the premise of marrying her and then fails to keep his promise. The silver lining here in few of these cases is the fact that the Courts have identified compelling circumstances in which a man justifiably cannot keep his promise of marriage.

Rape, by nature, is something that involves non-consensual force. Any verdict on the basis of violation of promise for marriage is an extremely dicey ground to qualify the test of beyond



reasonable doubt, a must fill up obligation in criminal cases. In fact, there have been instances where cases are promised to be withdrawn on the transfer of properties or a huge sum of money. The question then is, was it really a forced brutal incident, non-consensual in nature, or just a pretext to land someone in trouble and ask for monetary benefits, satisfying both sexual and financial needs? The answer seems to be, in several cases, the latter one, with strong probabilities of legal terrorism as the Honourable Supreme Court has also pointed out (Chugh, 2012).

We have had to, as men, hear a lot about male privileges*.

Until 2018, by virtue of Section 497 of the IPC, a man could be held criminally liable for an adultery case, but not the woman involved in physical relations with him. Provisions in the IPC such as Section 354 (A) speaking of sexual harassment, Section 498(A) speaking of cruelty, amongst others, hold explicit bias against men by excluding the probability of men being violated sexually and domestically.

Section 304 (B) of the IPC talks of dowry death, which has a noble cause to stem the practice of dowry related deaths in India. But it is the same legal system in India that makes it compulsory for a man to pay maintenance (alimony) to his divorced wife even if he is financially unable to support himself, which has the potential to, and even in practice has resulted in a substantial number of men committing suicides. The law, in my opinion, has inherently been indifferent towards male victims, time and again compelling their fall into the trap of social and financial injustice and crises, ultimately leading to increase in suicides.

So, do I have anything against these laws dedicated to ensuring women's safety? No, absolutely not. But at least their ethical use should be guaranteed and provisions should be made for men to get their side of the story heard and grievances addressed appropriately.

We tend to overlook incidents like the Amity gang rape case (Anand, 2015), wherein a Delhi Court acquitted two accused in the case, due to lack of evidence resulting in a false rape case. These two accused, Prashant and Milind, had to spend fourteen months of torment in prison. The Court called out the Investigating Officer (IO, Delhi Police) of the case saying "She (the IO) has betrayed the trust reposed by the public upon a police official. The aim of the police officer should be to collect evidence, not to create it..." The court also suggested the acquitted to ask for compensation from the plaintiff for the losses they suffered by serving a sentence in Tihar, which is considered to be one of the most notorious prisons in India. And now I ask you this question. Is that enough compensation? Can money compensate for the social segregation they had to face because they were falsely labelled as sexual violators? Would society trust them again? And whose fault is it then finally?

Indian Law nobly disallows media from expressing identities of rape victims, but should not a similar approach be taken to safeguard the identity of the accused at least till the verdict is out, in case he is acquitted, the probability of which is considerable (Mehta, 2016)?

My intent is not to trivialise criminal offences against women. Such false accusations in fact put women in danger of not being heard when the real need arises. It is such false allegations that desensitise crimes. The older moral stories hold some significance here, wherein a shepherd was punished for giving fake warnings of wolves approaching his herd, which ended up in him not being believed when a pack of wolves in reality ended up attacking the herd. Today, we find society randomly aiming their fingers and labeling others as Nazis simply because of a standpoint of theirs which might not have any bearing on Nazism whatsoever. It simply trivialises Nazism and disrespects the sufferers under such a regime.

I have a contention when my brothers are falsely accused with no recourse in cases like the Rohtak sisters (Bhardwaj, 2019), when two sisters beat up three young men alleging harassment and get titled as “brave”. A few days later they were found harassing (kicking) a boy in another video and they finally ended up going for a narco-analysis test, ending with them failing the polygraph test. Finally, the accused were acquitted by the court for lack of evidence. By then Rs.31,000 each had been awarded to these girls by the then Haryana Chief Minister. The accused had lost four vital years of their lives. What happens to them? Education gets hampered when their parents say that any such incident can happen again and they cannot pay for it. What then?

I am not a fan of using tags. But if an “ism” tells me #NOTALLMEN is demeaning and #RohtakBravehearts is empowering without even being acquainted with the original story, in my opinion, that is somewhat inherently incorrect.

And dear MEN, be proud of who you are because being a man is also difficult. We don’t see a spree of candle marches when our brothers fall prey to incessant misuse of laws. Our privileges seem to have taught us to live without them. But be careful with any step you might take. The situation is precarious for us. And do speak up. I am proud when I find several women speaking for us, but we need to learn to speak up for ourselves when we get called out and harassed in public for visibly nothing and have to gulp that in by virtue of our “male privilege”. Be discontent when the need arises, when you are purposefully wronged. Take care.

Regards,

One of “NOT ALL MEN” (No Tags Attached).

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The Mahabharata: A Guide to Political Life in the Past and Present

Sauradeep Majumdar

First Year (UG), Roll No.- 118

The phenomenon of politics is bound to be present as long as human society exists. Mahabharata has occupied a vital position in reflecting India's art, culture, heritage and politics. This Sanskrit epic is not only the world's longest epic poem with 1,00,000 couplets but it also encompasses the varied political flavors prevalent in the Indian citizens. But how can Mahabharata (Kashidashi Mahabharat) be relevant even today in Indian Politics? Let us approach the epic through an interdisciplinary method.

The epic revolves around the dynastic struggle for the throne of Hastinapura between the Kauravas on one hand and the Pandavas on the other, resulting in the eighteen-day battle of Kurukshetra. The Pandavas, however, hoisted the flag of victory at the end of the war. The battle was actually reflective of the sagacious political strategies of Lord Krishna and Shakuni, the maternal uncle of the Kauravas. But ultimately, Krishna's wisdom gave a hard blow to the Kauravas, thereby successfully establishing the moral code of conduct or dharma in the society.

The epic also articulates the ideas of freedom, autonomy, social and economic justice, equality, fraternity and sovereignty, depicting that it was the key duty of a Rajan / king to make their subjects aware of social ethics, state laws, rights, freedoms and welfare. Moreover, the characters in Mahabharata embody the significant facets of the society. For instance, the story of Karna symbolizes the fact that our birth cannot decide our status. He was adopted by a lower caste family and thereafter, he practiced archery and the usage of weapons. However, such rights were only awarded to the Kshatriyas in ancient India. Karna combated the rigid social traditions to carry out his personal rights. The character of Eklavya, a tribal boy, is similarly eminent besides Karna's. He was granted the heinous punishment of losing both his thumbs just because he

employed secrecy in learning archery from Guru Dronacharya without his knowledge. Both their stories depict the inequality that was so deeply-rooted in ancient Indian society. Even as the society today has undergone changes overtime, weaker sections of the masses, the lower castes like Dalits and the tribals, Scheduled castes and the Scheduled Tribes must raise their voice against any discriminating policies because every being has potentialities and no one is superior or inferior by birth. The Indian Constitution has, thus, formulated a number of provisions related to positive discrimination in favour of the weaker sections of the population. The prohibition of untouchability (Article 17) is the foremost among all. The Parliament enacted the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in 1989 in order to eradicate the practice of untouchability, and the Bonded Labour System Act of 1976 to identify, liberate and rehabilitate the bonded laborers. Other provisions such as Article 23 (prohibition of human trafficking and 'begar' or any form of forced labour) have special significance in this regard (National Commission for Scheduled Castes). Reservation of seats in the Parliament for the SCs and STs (Article 243 D) in the local, state and union territories as well as the legislative assemblies is also an attempt to ensure equal educational opportunities and safeguard of economic interests as enshrined in the constitution (Article 46).

Furthermore, the character of Draupadi is of great importance from a feminist point of view. The epic warns the society regarding the ill-treatment of women in our societies. For instance, the disrespect of Draupadi in the Kuru Raj-sabha ultimately led to the Kurukshetra battle which destroyed the whole of Aryavarta. In that sense, I believe, the society has to bear a huge loss if it remains inclined to any form of discrimination and wrong doings. In my opinion, rules and customs should be interpreted flexibly. Following the directives of the epic, India has ensured the safety of its women citizens and the safeguard of their interests. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees Right to Privacy and Right against Sexual Harassment [Section 354 A of the Indian Penal Code added through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013]. The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1983, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 and Dowry Prohibition Act 1963 have sought to safeguard the interests and rights of women in our society. The government's schemes including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save girl child, educate girl child), Women Helpline

Scheme, Mahila Police Volunteers (Woman Police Volunteers) as well as the states governments' schemes such as Kanyasree (West Bengal), Khusi (Odisha), Annai Teresa Orphan Girl Scheme (Tamil Nadu), She Pad Scheme (Kerala), Majhi Kanya Bhagyashree (Maharashtra) have all been implemented to encourage women empowerment.

Another relevant principle in the epic is that of commitment. The persona of Bhishma is noteworthy in this context. He had completely devoted his entire life to serve the kingdom of Hastinapura and its people. In my opinion, this somewhat conveys the message of commitment to leadership facilitating nation's development. The constitution of India incorporated the chapter of Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) in the Part IV of the document. The constitution clearly spells out the directives to be followed by the state (India). Some of the directives include making provisions for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42), securing a living wage and a decent standard of life, social and cultural opportunities for all workers (Article 43), raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of people and to improve public health (Article 47). In my opinion, the constitution of India, in enumerating the DPSPs, directs the state to keep the instructions in mind while formulating its policies in order to contribute to the welfare of the citizens, thus accelerating the qualitative development of the nation as a whole. The society has to be flexible in accepting diversities and changes in fashioning life and its tradition with the flow of time.

Even the Indian freedom struggle took inspiration from Mahabharata and initiated various secret societies to liberate India from the clutches of colonialism. Freedom fighters like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Lokmanya Balgangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghose, Khudiram Bose and many others encouraged the youth of the nation to study the epic. Mahabharata's teachings have also played a significant role in the Swadeshi movement because the youth was inspired from the phase of Karma Yoga of the Gita, which is an important part of the epic. It has conveyed how to carry out our responsibilities without expecting results (1905 - 1917 AD).

Today, we are celebrating Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (Elixir of energy of Independence) to commemorate the 75th national independence. But, are we

all aware of our duties and fundamental rights as citizens? Accelerated cooperation with each other is now the foremost need to ensure mass education and make people aware of their duties and rights so as to spark the spirit of righteousness amongst them. In my opinion, the principles of righteousness as reflected in Krishna's acts in the epic, the role of the personalities in the epic contribute significantly in understanding the present world– how important is the role of women in the society, and how important is protecting the rights and giving a voice to the interests of the masses (without discrimination) are in the overall metamorphosis of the society. No doubt, the teachings of the epic have fluently put forward eminent principles that are highly required in enhancing the development of a man and correspondingly contributing to the overall health of the society, especially in the present time.

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India and Secularism: How far is India secular today?

Dipanwita Banarjee

First Year (PG), Roll No.- 151

Secularism is a concept which entails a separation between politics and religion- the nature and extent of separation differs from state to state subject to diverse interpretations of the term. Secularism accepts at its core the notion of religious neutrality on the part of the State. Neutrality here means, the aloofness of the State from any religious commitments i.e., the state shall neither promote nor discourage religious events, beliefs or customs. Unlike religious identity which was regarded as the sole identity marker of any individual in society, identities based on nationality acquired importance in the later part of the 17th century in Europe. The overarching role of religion started to dismantle with the advent of modernity. If modernity stood for newness, abandonment of age-old faiths, it was only with enlightenment that the way was paved for a new way of thinking characterized by objectivity and rationality.

Enlightenment or simply the Age of Reason refers to the intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the late 17th century and early 18th century Europe. Secularism emerged as an important idea of the enlightenment movement that drove the emphasis on values like liberty, equality and fraternity. Over time most countries across the globe began to adopt secular principles and the principle was also accepted as a guiding philosophy of the Indian Constitution in the post independence period..

The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 inserted the term secular into the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. Indian secularism is unique in its interpretation as it enables the functioning of the state along the proposition of principled distance. To put simply, principled distancing of the state is an endorsement of equal respect towards all religions and their practices. Thus, while the Indian State recognizes, respects and treats all religions of the country equally the state has the right to intervene in religious matters, wherever such intervention is considered necessary.

Such state intervention is intended to weed out the social evils which plague the society. These social evils crafted out of religious dogmas get reinforced within the society over time. Continuity of these practices leads to social stagnation which in turn inhibits the growth of modernity. As these socio-religious practices are deeply rooted in the individual psyche, state interference becomes necessary in this regard. India has legislated a number of laws based on this understanding; the most recent being the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act that has nullified the system of instant divorce (uttering 'Talaq' thrice) in the year 2019.

While legislation in the religious domain is usually not welcomed by religious communities (reactions may either be positive or negative depending upon cultural affiliations and political context) it is interesting to see how a secular state may also utilize religion to secure political ends. A case in point is the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019). The Act aspires to guarantee citizenship rights to persons from the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or the Christian community from the states of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh- who entered India on or before 31st December 2014 and who could be subject to various provisions of the Act now benefit from Indian citizenship. The inclusion of "religious identification" as a determinant of citizenship led to widespread opposition against the law which was perceived as anti secular for its sectional alignment with a few religious communities. As a response to the law, protests were organized in several parts of the country with the Anti-CAA protests demonstrating widespread popular outcry against the attempts of the ruling dispensation to weaken the secular fabric of India.

This discussion poses several questions that defy an easy answer. First, is cultural secularism still a myth in India? Second, has India failed to practice secularism in real terms? Cultural secularism is about revisiting cultural commitments by redefining the notion of religiosity. It speaks of crossing the mere realm of practice and rituals with a view to broaden the scope of religion. Religion is not only about practice and rituals, it has a lot more to convey. Earlier, the scope of religion was reduced to realms of practices only. Cultural secularization has helped to broaden the horizon of religion by incorporating universal objectives in it such as fraternity of mankind across religions. The declining faith in religion for its overarching character takes a new shape after easing of religious practices. The dismantling of religious practices is at the heart of secularization. Cultural secularization is about dilution of practices

thus enlarging its scope by inclusion of universal ideas. Cultural secularization hopes for a society driven less by religious sentiments rather builds upon mutual services crossing communal ties.

Cultural heterogeneity manifests itself in India in the existence of multiple religious, linguistic, ethnic groups representing the cultural differences distinctively. The diversity within the country often leads to communities coming into conflict with one another. If we take a close look at the patterns of population distribution, we find that states are not culturally uniform. No state is solely marked by the presence of any one religious community. Each community has their distinct dispositions in terms of faith, beliefs, rituals and religious commitments. This uniqueness hinders the growth of cultural homogeneity whereby community obligations restrict one from embracing the rituals of others. The fear of alienation from one's own group compels one to go by the dictates of the community, as a result of which cultural differences continue to get sharpened and the feeling of oneness remains unrealized. While complete submission to religious practices makes the process of secularization stiffer, state policies aid the process of polarization.

An example is the law on Cow Slaughter, 2005. This law upheld the constitutional validity of the anti-cow slaughter law in different Indian states advancing the provisions of Article 48 enshrined in the DPSP of the Indian constitution. Article 48 directs the Indian state to make efforts to put an end to cow slaughtering along with other milch and draught cattle. The rift between Hindus and Muslims got highly entrenched as both the communities harbour different views on the issue. Apart from Muslims, other minority populations stretched their affirmation on treating this law as anti-secular as many of them think this law is essentially against the secular tone and a threat to their cultural security.

The situation around us is quite complex and compelling at the same time. While state policies derived from religious motivations challenge the secular spirit, the complete separation of state and religion may also bring in dreadful consequences with no space for dialogue between the realms of religion and politics. The state rather than imposing a set of values from above could do well by leaving them open for public debate and discussion. By and large, in my view, dialogue between the state and religion may help to retain the secular fabric intact in the recent context of India.

Dynamics Of Politics In India: An Endless Saga

Asmita Mitra

First Year (UG), Roll No.- 198

INTRODUCTION: ROOTS OF INDIAN POLITICS

The roots of Indian politics can be traced far back to ancient times. The vast subcontinent has witnessed the development and evolution of politics for ages. Politics and diplomacy can be backpedalled to the glorious times of Chandragupta Maurya's regime when the great philosopher Chanakya wrote the famous Arthashastra wherein he mentioned about the economic policy, science of wealth, the nature of government, law, ethics, the text even incorporated Hindu philosophy included details on agriculture, mineralogy, mining, statecraft and military strategy. Every glorious dynasty in India from the Cholas to the Chauhans have shown excellence in the field of politics through their marvellous administrative skills. The idea of politics is so deep-rooted in the traditions of this old nation that even the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata are all about politics and the art of diplomacy. This shows how the Indian traditions and customs have been a part of administration and diplomacy since ancient times. So, the idea of Indian administration and governance is deeply entrenched in the nation.

TRENDS OF POLITICS

The trend of politics has undergone drastic changes, from monarchism to colonialism followed by developing the nation as the world's largest democracy. The political journey was never smooth; it had many ups and downs. During the early ages, political power was in the hands of the Indian kings who ruled a vast empire and expanded their territories through wars, matrimonial alliances and other diplomatic means. Later on, during the colonial struggle, people across caste, creed, religion and gender got united to

fight for the greater cause of India's independence. We owe a lot to each and every Indian who directly or indirectly revolted against the oppressive British government.

POLITICAL DIVERSITY

Post colonial India has been witnessing different political visions. Various political ideologies have been present in India, making it more diverse and interesting. Left wing politics in India have seen high dominance especially in the states like West Bengal and Kerala. Though the Left wing has never been able to dawn in the centre, left leaning or left accommodating governments have come and gone in the trajectory Right wing ideology has largely prevailed especially in the current scenario where the Bharatiya Janata Party government is reigning in the centre.

PERSONALITY POLITICS

India has always witnessed the rise of powerful leaders from various political parties who have helped India reach higher levels. India has been witnessing the eras of the politics of personalities since decades. Leaders with strong character and charisma have made their way to success. In a democracy like that of India, I believe, popular support is everything, regardless of identities, gender, religion, caste or skin colour. If someone can reach out to the people and connect to them, fulfil their aspiration and needs then they have won. Winning elections is all about right issues, and right candidate coupled right moment to turn tides to your favour. One instances would be the way even after the disastrous impact of the National Emergency in 1977 and the victory of the Janata government, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made her way back to power which I believe was possible only because of her sheer ability to create strong public relations with which she painted a larger-than-life persona. Another similar instance would be the way Srimati Jayalalitha went from being an eminent and gifted actress to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu 5 times. On 25th March, 1989 she was assaulted by 41 Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader in

the Tamil Nadu state assembly because she was the 1st woman opposition leader, but the pictures of her in torn saree and messed hair flooded the media and created a people's sentiment of how she fought as a woman in a patriarchal society, leading to her landslide victory leading her to become the Amma of Tamil Nadu (Economic Times, 2016).

The political trend in India in the 21st century has seldom discriminated against leaders and politicians on the basis of gender. However, in ancient times women had faced extreme discrimination and oppression which had forced them to stay away from political arenas but today they too stand strong. The road may not have always been easy, but if they have potential no one can ever succeed in stopping them. India has seen the rise of many vehement women leaders from different parts of the subcontinent. Women from different walks of life have entered politics. Women leaders like Smriti Irani, Jayalalitha, Hema Malini came from a completely different sphere of performing arts yet through their sheer capability made their way through politics.

YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION

India has also seen the rise of active student politics and youth taking interest in shaping the nation. Demographically, India is a very young nation, the census [Census Of India, 2011] shows that the average age being around 29 years, so youth participation is a crucial element in politics. Every political party has their own student wing like the BJP has Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Congress has National Students' Union of India, Communist Party Of India Marxist has Students' Federation of India and many others. A lot of great leaders have been shaped politically from a young age through student politics, which helped them gain experience and political knowledge, for instance, Shri Narendra Modi himself had begun his political career at a very young age by joining RSS at an age of 19. Young political activists like Aishee Ghosh the Indian politician and student activist she is the president of Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union and Kanhaiya Kumar have been successful in creating their space in Indian politics.

POLITICS AS A DYNAMIC GAME

Politics in India is not permanent or predictable. For instance, the Indian Congress Party (Indian National Congress) which has dominated political spheres in India since pre-independence period is now slowly fading away into the pages of history; it could not even secure the position of leading the opposition in 2019 general elections. The unpredictability of politics is also clear in the way how Lok Sabha elections trend completely differ from the trends in the State Assemblies, for instance, if we look into the state of West Bengal then we notice how in General Elections BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) has been successful in creating a huge public consensus whereas in the State Elections the TMC (Trinamool Congress) has swept past the poll giving no chance to any of its oppositions. This clearly signifies the difference in people's priorities in the state and centre governments [Biswas, 2021]. Politics has always been a blend of ideologies and diplomacy; every party or individual has their own set of views but that has to be presented and promoted in such a way that the opposing force does not feel disrespected. In my opinion To survive in politics, it is essential to observe and listen to all, creating enemies is easy but the strength lies in creating friendly relations with all including the opposition. Atal Bihari Bajpayee mastered this art.

POLITICS OF AGENDA

I am convinced that It has never been easy to govern 1.3billion people with such large-scale diversity. Some agendas have always been an integral part of Indian politics since the very onset such as religion, nationalism and the Sheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Dalit issues. Several issues such as religion, nationalism and caste differences have acted as political agendas for parties all through these years. Political parties from time to time have used these aspects to suit their propaganda. However, it has been noticed time and again that in a secular nation like that of India, one cannot work for Muslims, one also cannot work for Hindus, if they want to survive and flourish, they have to work only for Indians. Religion appeasing politics have witnessed failure for instance in Bengal state elections of 2021 when BJP tried to put an extreme Hindutva

approach it failed miserably especially because Bengal has a large minority population.

REAL ESSENCE OF POLITICS

Politics is not only about glories and achievements. But it is also about a lot of sacrifices, sometimes sacrifice of personal life due to the extensive media coverage, public interactions, of privacy and comfort as a leader has to work day and night to achieve their goals and aspirations and help the people with what they need. It is rare that India has witnessed the rise of economically privileged individuals' in the field of politics unless he/she has belonged to a politically established family. However, politics has witnessed that one can only be successful if they are worthy and loved by the people, in this case, legacy has no role to play. As our national security adviser Ajit Doval once rightly said, in a press meet in the year 2021, 'We are not governed by people's representatives, we are governed by the laws made by these representatives and therefore, the rule of law is extremely important'[Brut India,2021]. In a democracy like that of ours, nothing is above the people and the constitution.

UPHEAVALS IN POLITICS

It has to be noted that politics is a very sensitive issue in India - people have often been found uncomfortable when it comes to discussing political opinions, views and inclinations. There can be a few reasons for this. First, if one observes politics in India carefully, the extensive political violence due to political rivalries leading to unfortunate heinous political crimes.. Second, political parties have also at times used their muscle power to influence people. Third, sometimes mere intolerance of people towards each other's political views have also ended up making people a little conscious when it comes to discussing or deliberating politics. However, such political conflicts have also given rise to some seasoned political leaders like Ms. Mamata Banerjee who gained huge limelight due to the violence inflicted on her by the Communist Party (Marxist)'s youth wing in 1990 the man who inflicted the attack was Lalu

Alam. TMC supremo's image as a fearless fighter took shape after this incident [The Economic Times, 2021].

SPHERES OF INDIAN POLITICS

Politics of India is not only about national affairs, international influence and cooperation also play a significant role in moulding the nation's political scenario too. Relations with neighbouring nations are something that every government has paid attention to, as these agendas greatly affect public opinion. Especially in today's globalised world, inter-governmental relations, bilateral and multilateral treaties, agendas and diplomacy is a key element in the politics of a nation. Being the 3rd largest economy in the world today, India has inevitably had to accord high importance to international spheres. It has a key role to play in India's international existence as the largest democracy and a rising superpower. Indian politics is inextricably linked with global politics and the same can never be overlooked.

STORY OF INDIAN POLITICS

Indian politics have seen the rise and fall of numerous leaders but nothing has been able to stop it. Politics in India has never been a story about leaders, kings and emperors, it is a story about excellent strategists and advisors who have made the path for their leaders. From Bairam Khan the chief advisor to Akbar, Bajirao's advisor Chimaji Baht, Malik Khafur for Allaudin Khilji, to Mr.Prashant Kishor to Mamata Banerjee, Amit Khare to Prime Minister Modi. Each of these people has played a crucial role in formulating the agendas which helped these leaders turn the tide in their favour. All of them together make Indian politics a glorious story.

UNENDING TALE OF INDIAN POLITICS

No institution can exist without politics. In any system where humans have to co-exist, politics is inevitable, from an institution as small, intimate and

compact as a family, to something as vast as the United Nations, politics and diplomacy have had, is and will always be an integral part. India has also seen the rise and fall of hundreds of political regimes- their leaders and empires, but at the end of the day honest and sincere politics which is beneficial to the world at large, can only save mankind from the DOOMSDAY.

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The Covid Irony

Pritisha Sikdar

Third Year (UG), Roll No.- 144

The rise in covid cases due to the Omicron variant has led the state governments to impose guidelines and protocols, including night curfews and other restrictions to keep the surge in check. Uttar Pradesh along with seven other states had their Assembly elections in February-March 2022. The government of Uttar Pradesh (UP) along with seven other states are also taking such steps to fight the Covid strains, amidst preparing for the upcoming Legislative Assembly elections in 2022. The state government has instructed the traders in the market to adhere to the rule of 'No mask, No goods'. The government has made wearing masks compulsory for those moving in markets and roads. Despite all these restrictions on Sunday alone, Covid cases in UP crossed the five-hundred mark, taking the total number of active cases to 1752.

This article tries to bring to the forefront the shabby and questionable actions on the part of the UP government--people are made to follow such Covid protocols, while the government rallies are still permitted. Expressions like "Ma'am where is your mask? You can be fined," are often used. This is a good start to curb the spike, but why does the narrative change when party rallies are taken into account. Last year's scenario during West Bengal elections amidst the pandemic is still fresh and the devastating memories are inextricably ingrained in our minds. The gigantic crowds, political parties have resorted to undertake massive rallies for campaigning to gather more people as a projection of mass support. The "500 people limit" which was breached in Bengal elections is being imposed now on UP.

On April 16, 2021, only after the daily case count had crossed two lakhs, the Election Commission, for the first time, acknowledged an 'unprecedented public health situation' (Chopra, 2021). But the restrictions were imposed only for activities between 7pm to 10am, barely affecting the rallies. Bengal had to witness a sharp rise in Covid cases much owing to all the rallies, the image was

quite disturbing and disheartening – the hospitals witnessed a shortage of vaccines (both government and private hospitals). The ‘alarming’ condition of Bengal post-elections was all due to roadshows, rallies and other political events. The elections had left Bengal ravaged.

Now the questions arise as - are we set to see another such ravaging situation? Is depiction of power more important than the lives of people? Did ‘For the people’ get excluded from our democracy?

Uttar Pradesh has been witnessing the mass gatherings for past weeks (2nd and 3rd week of December, 2021) due to several development programmes being inaugurated across the state – Yes, hearing about development just prior to the elections is quite archetypal. December 13- “landmark day”, this was communicated by the Prime Minister through the PMO (Project Management Office) on 12th of December, 2021. He had visited Varanasi to inaugurate his ‘dream project’, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, during his two-day visit. During Modi’s visit, Varanasi was decked up with massive murals. In his tweet on 12th December he urged people to join him, which led to the spike of Covid cases in the area. On 21st December, 2021, there was a rally in Prayagraj spearheading the election campaign. Prime Minister Modi was participating in a programme which the government termed as “one of its kind programme” (Outlook, 2021), that was attended by lakhs of women – not to mistake “one of a kind” with sorcery that can cure covid. Uttar Pradesh is one among eight states to report an R-value of land above indicating that Covid is spreading faster in UP. On the 22nd of December, 2021, UP’s active Covid cases increased to 216 and seven cities accounted for 148 of these cases, according to data from the state health department. UP being a centre of powerplay may see more ravages as compared to any other state. Are we set to see another such ‘sacrificial ritual’ as we had witnessed earlier or even worse?

Elections could have been deferred to stop the surge of increasing covid cases. Allahabad High Court had made a plea to the Election Commission of India to defer the polls in UP on 23rd December, 2021. This was done keeping in mind the huge population of the state with less than thirty percent of the population being fully vaccinated. The plea came to be dismissed after a discussion with the representatives of various political parties who insisted the elections be

held in its due time. The rampant violations of Covid restrictions are on at the political campaigns and rallies in UP. Visuals of these rallies consist of people packed together, no social distancing and only a handful of them wearing masks. The eagerness among the members of the political parties to go as per the decided schedule amidst the increasing cases ushers in the possibility of a severe third wave hitting India post polls.

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Concept of Political Equality: The Indian Aspect

Shubhayu Saha

First Year (UG), Roll No.- 148

It has been an intrinsic nature of humans to strive for equality. It is understood that human beings are rational, and the concept of equality must come naturally to them. However over several centuries this concept of equality has been imbued with modern connotations of justice, liberty, etc. A correct definition of equality in the society can be the uniform apportionment of resources.

One needs to distinguish between what is uniform and subjective in this regard.

Therefore, there is an element of justice which is intrinsic to equality. This realization of austere equalization being infectious was synonymous to a communist society which advocates for a classless social system and which in the opinion of Immanuel Kant was an utopian idea. If we investigate more on political equality, then it may imply the equality of rights pertinent to the political sphere accorded to the citizens on account of the citizenship of the nation state. It incorporates rights such as access to political offices for all, universal adult franchise, one man one vote and other civil liberties.

In India, political equality was well thought of by the Constituent Assembly, and thus, the Universal Adult Franchise (UAF) was adopted by the Constituent Assembly without any discrimination between man and woman. At that time, India was far ahead with this decision, unlike many of the western countries which could provide people with UAF; for instance, even Switzerland which has been known as the land of direct democracy denied women the right to vote until 1971. India never had any such restrictions, at the commencement of the Constitution - it had provided UAF to all including women. According to Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly elections were "a weapon in the hands of the most oppressed sections

of the society" and voting rights would provide for politico-legal equality for all. UAF did not differentiate between Gender, religion, caste, creed, etc. and thus, empowered the most oppressed sections of the society with voting rights to choose their representatives to the legislations (Iyer, 2020). It served as an emancipatory mechanism for the most oppressed as the political leaders could no longer disregard their interests.

Notwithstanding such positive aspects there are also some impediments to the realization of political equality, and the biggest among them is dynastic politics, because it often obstructs the growth of people from apolitical backgrounds within the various parties because the recruitment is often based on the dynasties they are from. Most political parties, barring few like the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Left Parties which are cadre-based parties, rely on dynastic politics for their success. In our opinion, this ushers in a lack of democratic environment within the parties. Moreover, there is a prevalence of patronage-based party structures and these political families at the top of the party hierarchy enjoy unquestioned authority, which is extremely harmful for the aspect of political equality.

Another significant impediment is politics based on primordial identities such as caste and religion. The equality which was provided by the UAF was misused by political leaders to divide and rule the mass of India for their petty political benefits and vote banks. People have been misled to vote according to their caste or religion and have been used as mere tools for securing votes. In order to keep this process intact, those masses have been kept in the darkness of non-transparency of information dissemination which binds them in the shackle of ignorance. Another problem in the Indian aspect has been the presence of a low number of female legislators in the parliament. Even among them most of them have been from the upper caste or the elite sections of the society, and representation from other sections have been comparatively low. Needless to say all these impediments obstruct the smooth functioning of the democracy, as the needy may not get enough representation in the national legislature.

Though the intention of UAF was a noble one and the principle of one man, one vote was aimed towards empowerment for the masses of India, but the naïve,

ignorant, and the illiterate masses of the country have been misled and misused by political leaders since independence. It is really unfortunate that over the last 74 years of independence, the impediments mentioned above still create division among the masses. From Vedic times (1500-500 BCE) India has always talked about the Universal Unity of consciousness which forms the bedrock of equality. This is engraved deep within the Indian psyche. We hope that India will reach her glorious heights and reaffirm its philosophy of Universal Unity and Equality for all.

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Long live the Revolution (?)

Pritha Mukhopadhyay

Third Year (UG), Roll No.- 162

Revolt! Revolt against what's robbed your life and smile,

That made you suffer without a crime,

Only to protect you overtime.

Revolt till you haven't killed the vile.

Yet, again, a query appears,

Be tolerant to which and to which rebel?

Hazing lines between the two labels

Breeds mayhem until it clears.

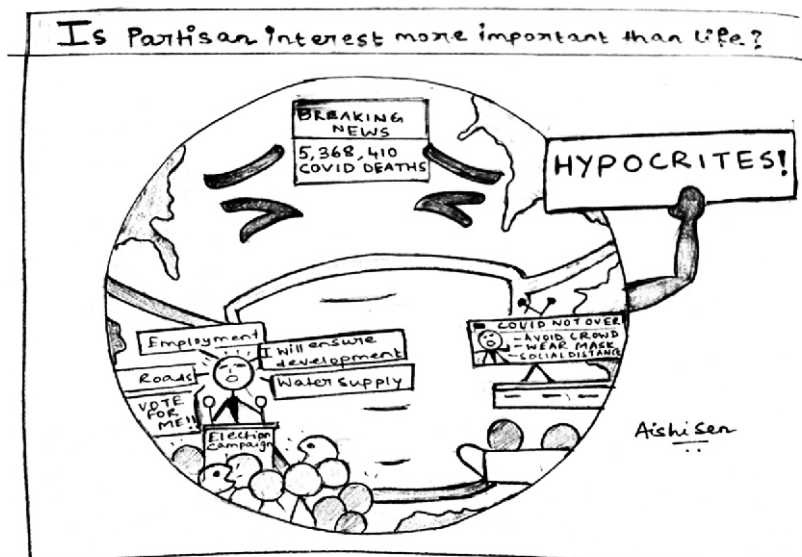
The eternal questions go unresolved,

What is right and what is wrong?

Should then the revolution prolong?

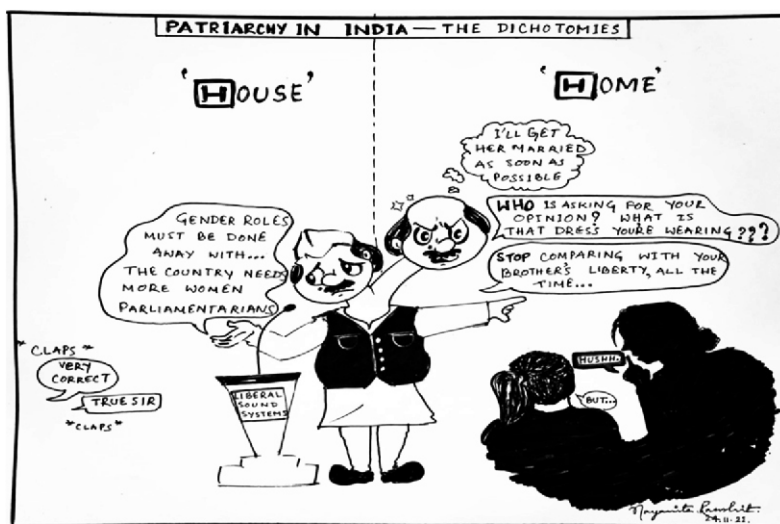
They arise as quickly as they dissolve.

POLITICAL CARICATURES



Is partisan interests more important than life?

Aishi Sen, First Year (PG), Roll No. - 107



Patriarchy In India : The Dichotomies

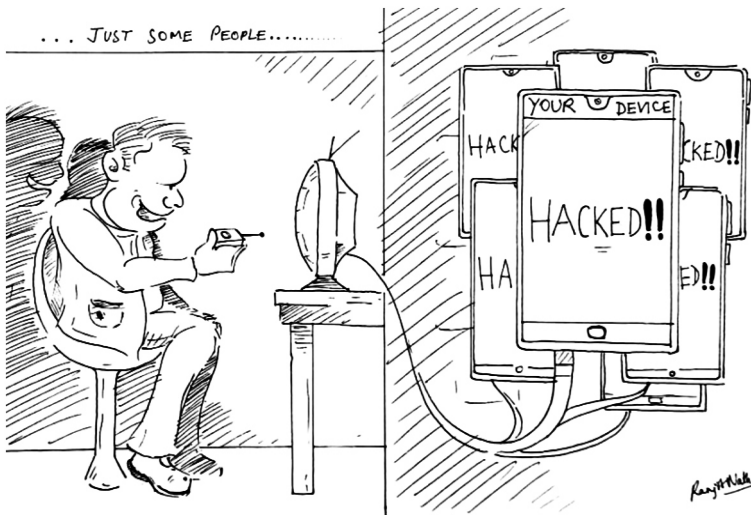
Nayanita Rakshit, First Year (UG), Roll No. - 185

A Gargantuan Loss



A Gargantuan Loss

Adarsh Prasad, Second Year (UG), Roll No.- 179



Privacy - A Right to be enjoyed or encroached?

Ranjit Nath, Second Year (UG), Roll No. - 139
