



POLITIQUE



JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) KOLKATA

2020-21

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ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE (Autonomous) Kolkata

2020 - 21

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PRINCIPAL
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12th April 2021

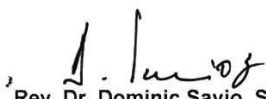
MESSAGE FROM FR. PRINCIPAL

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

I take this opportunity to remind students that all work associated with the publication of such a journal provides students with excellent opportunities to exhibit their skills and garner new ones.

I am certain that this exercise has proved beneficial in inspiring students to analyze various political issues in greater depth and has provided them a medium to present diverse perspectives on pertinent issues in the national and the international arena.

I congratulate the students and faculty members of the Department headed by Dr. Farhat Bano, for their efficient co-ordination despite the challenges of the present times and I am confident that the intellectual endeavours of students will continue in the years to come.


Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, S.J.
Principal
St. Xavier's College
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VICE –PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

I extend my sincere appreciation to the students and faculty members of the Political Science Department for publishing and bringing the fifth edition of *Politique* to fruition during these unprecedented times.

It is my firm belief that such academic engagements not only enhance the abilities of students providing them with a platform where they can identify, analyze and convey viewpoints on crucial matters but it also encourages them to be conversant with the multifarious national as well as global issues that have occurred or are currently transpiring around us thereby contributing to their growth as informed individuals.

I wish the Department success in all their endeavours.

Prof Bertram Da Silva

Vice Principal

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12th April, 2021

Message from the Head of the Department

It is indeed a matter of immense pride and elation that the Department of Political Science has been successful in presenting the fifth edition of the departmental journal, *Politique*.

Even in the wake of a global calamity the students of the department remained undaunted in their journey towards their academic advancement. This issue is a tribute to the enthusiasm of our courageous students who have displayed their resilience under extremely challenging circumstances. I congratulate all members of the editorial team and each student of the department for their participation in this endeavor. I am assured that their creative energy will continue to flourish in the years to come.

I thank the administration, all faculty members of the Department and the students for their constant cooperation and support.

Farhat Bano

Dr Farhat Bano
Head

Dept. Of Political Science

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous) Kolkata.



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From the Editorial Board

It gives us immense pleasure to bring to you the fifth edition of 'Politique'- the annual journal of the Department of Political Science.

Politique seeks to establish a platform conducive to analysis and independent thinking in the different realms of politics and academia, to the students of the department. To that end, the response received by the students is a tell-all to the critical thinking and political analysis that exists within and has been nourished by the department. Thus, it is our hope that the journal continues to advance academic interest among the student body so as to bolster young political science students to apply their knowledge and intellect in order to impact their surroundings in a meaningful manner.

We extend our gratitude to Father Principal and Vice-Principal (Arts and Science) for their constant encouragement and support. We thank Prof. (Dr.) Farhat Bano, Head of the Department of Political Science, for her continued presence and guidance as well as the faculty members of the department for their meticulous efforts and valuable inputs. Finally, we thank the students of the department, whose keen interest and relentless endeavors have been significant in making this edition possible.

**Editorial Board
POLITIQUE 2021**

SPECIAL LECTURE REPORTS

Special Lecture on 'U.S, Presidential Elections'

By Professor David Schultz

Professor of Political Science and Legal Studies

Hamline University, Minnesota, USA

Having quickly and effectively embraced the online mode of teaching and learning, the Postgraduate Department of Political Science St Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata hosted a series of Webinars on the Microsoft Teams platform. The webinars were addressed by eminent guest speakers witnessing proactive participation from students of the Department.

2020 wasn't just the year of the pandemic, it was also the year when the USA was to elect its 46th President. On the 3rd of October, 2020 thus, our Department was honoured to welcome Prof. David Schultz, Professor of Political Science and Legal Studies at the Hamline University, Minnesota, USA, for a Special Lecture on the theme 'US Presidential Elections'. Specializing in American Electoral Politics and Campaigns, Prof. Schultz has authored over 30 books and 100 papers till date. Regularly interviewed by the local, national and international media, three times Fulbright Scholar, he is also the 2013 Leslie A. Whittington national award winner for excellence in public affairs teaching. The webinar was graced by the august presence of Prof. Bertram Da Silva, Vice Principal (Arts & Science Department) who encouraged students to actively participate in such endeavours and make the most of such opportunities from the 'comfort of their homes'. Prof. Sujata Sircar delivered the Welcome Address and conveyed warm greetings to all present on behalf of the Department. Prof. (Dr.) Farhat Bano, Head of the Department, without whose untiring efforts this webinar wouldn't have come to a fruition, introduced the Guest Speaker for the first ever Special Lecture conducted by the department on a virtual platform.

Prof. Schultz focused on 3 major aspects of the US Presidential Election in his hour long lecture - the backdrop and electoral process, specialty of the 2020 Election and the concept of 'Swing States' (currently Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, North Carolina & Wisconsin) which make

or break electoral fortunes. Briefly outlining the history of the Presidential elections in the USA, he explained how America's Founding Fathers had met at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Alarmed over political instability in seventeenth century France and wary of the absolutist British Monarch, the framers of the American Constitution had opted for 'an indirectly elected President' with the constituent states deciding on electors. As the electorate expanded over the years, each State today commands electoral votes equal to the number of Representatives and Senators it has in the US Congress, awarding votes on the basis of 'winner take all method', except Maine and Nebraska which split Electoral Votes by Congressional Districts. The President - Elect is required to win a majority of 270 in a 538 member Electoral College, failing which the race would be decided by the House of Representatives as was in 1820 and 1824. A 2 year long process starting with the declaration of candidatures and a primary season running from January to June of the Election Year, the General Election takes place on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November every 4 years. With record early voting (over 80 million) and the then sitting President Mr. Donald Trump getting infected by Covid-19, the 2020 election year was one of its kind.

A Professor who believes that students learn by thinking by writing and through creative well-reasoned analysis Prof. Schultz addressed a vast array of questions from the enthusiastic audience.

The webinar concluded with the Vote of Thanks. Overall an engaging and informative session, it left a positive impression on students, who look forward to many more of such relevant talks in the near future, igniting the penchant for learning beyond textbooks.

Soumyadeep Chowdhury

2nd Year, PLSA, Roll. No. : 103

Special Lecture On New Public In The Second Republic: Emerging Contours Of Public Institutions In India

by Prof. Manisha Madhava
Associate Professor and Head
Dept. of Political Science, SNDT Women's University

"We are what we repeatedly do; excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." With such impetus, the Department of Political Science organized a virtual Special Lecture entitled, "New Public in the Second Republic : Emerging contours of Public Institutions in India" on 10th October, 2020. The Guest Speaker for the occasion was Prof. Manisha Madhava Associate Professor and Head, Dept. of Political Science SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. She specializes in areas concerning Parliamentary Democracy in India with special reference to Lok Sabha and other political institutions, elections, and higher education, for which she has been awarded and admired for her related academic contributions by renowned institutions like ICSSR, ICCR, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, European Union, Asia in Global Affairs, Indian Political Science Association, Indian Institute of Culture (Mumbai), amongst others. She has also presented papers in international and about 50 national seminars. Her proficiency in administrative and domain knowledge is widely recognized as she regularly contributes to the Washington Post, Times of India, Deccan Herald, Governance Now and Rashtriya Sahara, owing to which she was also invited to review the Constitution of South Korea.

The programme proceeded with an inaugural speech by the Head of the Department, Prof. (Dr.) Farhat Bano following which Prof. Manisha Madhava articulated her views about the symbiotic relationship existing between the 'New Public' and the emergent 'Second Republic'. She presented an amalgamated ideational coterie comprising polymaths like Yogendra Yadav, Christopher Jaffrelot, Pradeep K. Chibber, Rahul Verma, Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Suhas Palshikar about the dynamics of Indian Democracy. She highlighted the contrast between the 'First Republic' (India, post-1947) and the 'Second Republic' (India, post-2014) and discussed how the 'New Middle Class' acted as

a catalyst in regulating the 2014 and 2019 political formations. She aided her arguments with the chronological developments (normative and ideological paradigmatic shifts) with empirical inputs like statistical representation done by State of Democracy in South Asia (Report), the CSDS survey, and the book authored by Kingshuk Nag, 'The Saffron Tide and the Rise of BJP', published on 20th June, 2014. She put forth an enthralling detailed picture of how a 'decolonized nation' depicting the strong state and constitutionality with 'One party system' transitioned to the 'rolling back of the state' representing the political weaknesses based on alliances and coalition which led to the emergence of new demands paving its way to form an assertive leadership to gain global relevance and national prominence marked with growth, development and Civil society engagements. Extending on how this strong participatory democratic upsurge for a powerful State that either partners/co-partners or co-opts democratic institutions shifts focus on the need to reexamine the fundamental values of Indian Democracy.

The programme witnessed an insightful and active Q/A session, which not only encouraged students to become analytical but also responsibly critical at the same time. Following this, the event ended with a vote of thanks delivered by the Head of Department.

Muskan Jaiswal

1st Year, MPLS, Roll No.: 106

Special Lecture On New Media, Democratic Governance And Politics:

Some Emerging Issues

by Professor Partha Pratim Basu

Professor

Department of International Relations,

Jadavpur University

The Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College, organized a webinar on the 17th October 2020 titled New Media, Democratic Governance and Politics: Some Emerging Issues. The lecture was delivered by Professor Partha Pratim Basu, from the Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University.

Prof. Basu while highlighting the important role of the media as an important source of information crucial for agenda-setting laid stress on the role of the New Media marked by interactive features and widely proliferating compared to the conventional media which functions with a stable format. New Media targets specific pockets of the population and may target individuals as well. The act of gatekeeping is absent as the audience can simultaneously act and respond in any online discussion. This affects political intervention. With the emergence of New Media there is active participation on part of the citizens but this emergence is not free from problems. The reliability of the information provided is questionable and polarizing as well. The role of New Media as a watchdog agent is based on sensationalism and scandal mongering. However, New Media has surely shown a rise in public involvement with citizen journalism and digital campaigning.

After having comprehensively discussed the topic, the floor was made open for questions. The students actively participated in the interactive session making it a lively one. Overall, this session was an enriching one and we look forward to more such sessions in the near future.

Divya Dey

1st Year, MPLS, Roll No.:101

Special Lecture On Public Policy And Governance Challenges In The Post Covid Era

by Prof. Rumki Basu

Professor, Dept of Political Science

Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi

The unprecedented nature of the Covid 19 pandemic can hardly be overstated. Not only did it bring a host of hitherto established thoughts and processes to a standstill, in a snap of a finger, but also affected every walk of man's life profoundly. That challenges of diverse magnitude today looks the State in its eye is not an unknown fact, what is important is to be able to identify the same and search for effective solutions. As a step in that direction, the Department of Political Science, St. Xaviers' College, had organized a departmental webinar on 'Emerging Trends in Public Policy', with Professor Rumki Basu sharing her insights on 'Public Policy and Governmental Challenges in the post Covid era.' The idea that the lessons learnt in the Covid era, if deciphered properly, can transform India from a procedural to a substantive democracy, with an effective and efficient public service delivery system, truly responsive and accountable to the people, lay at the core of her argument.

The pandemic while on the one hand has undoubtedly brought state centrality back into focus, on the other hand, however has put the same state's resilience and decision-making abilities to an unprecedented test. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the State today to effectively and efficiently cater to the 1.2 billion people that depend on her for services ranging from primary health care and administration of vaccines to ensuring proper communication, water, food and the like. However, the path to this end is not a smooth one. Policy challenges in the form of climate change, low human development index, erratic systems of health, power, communication etc continue to impede the path of an effective policy cycle. Further, the federal structure imposes the additional problem of 'differentiated citizen entitlement', as result of which the quality of goods delivered under different state governments differ substantially, hampering a uniform execution of policy. The gap in the State's treatment to its poorest citizens, the ones most in need of her assistance, is yet another point of instance. The above and various other fissures, be it in the

realm of health, education, employment or any other, were brought into broad daylight by the pandemic.

With the problems thus identified, the measures of solving them too seems within grasp. Through her analysis of the developments in the Covid year, Professor Basu offered some possible solutions that might not only refine the public delivery system into an effective one but also place the 'New India' in a position of prominence in this era of good governance. Firstly, indispensable in this direction is a centre-state coordination. For policies to be efficiently and effectively implemented, each state along with the centre has to be equally motivated and dedicated to the goal of uniform implementation. The SDG Index of the Niti Ayog can prove to be an effective tool in fostering this cooperative-competitive federalism. Secondly, it is important to acknowledge the role of the bureaucracy and address its capacity and capability crunch, as they are the main implementers of policies. Thirdly, a credible welfare architecture, that is perceived to be and is in practice fair, is the need of this post Covid era. Fourthly, policy issues in the nature of employment generation, universal free health care, regulation of the informal sector and the like demand immediate and fruitful attention. Lastly, democratic policy process enabling public participation in the policy cycle has no alternative today. An 'institutionalised statutory citizen entitlement' system and strengthened electoral accountability are means to this end. These along with the rediscovered strengths of the state manifest in its powerful coercive arms and public support and cooperation, can take Indian public policy to new heights of effectiveness and efficiency.

In the light of the above points, it can effectively be concluded that the post Covid era calls for some bold structural reforms and prioritisation of policy issues. To this end, while on the one hand centre-state cooperation and bold state initiatives is an absolute necessity, on the other a dedicated political will in tandem with administrative structures is also indispensable. It is not only through new policies and laws but also the effective and efficient execution and implementation of the old ones democratically, that the age of accountability, transparency and performance politics will usher in India.

Satantika Biswas

2nd Year, PLSA, Roll No.: 106

Special Lecture On Public Policy Communication In India: A Missing Link?

**By Prof. Dipankar Sinha
Professor, Department of Political Science
University of Calcutta**

Prof. Dipankar Sinha, Professor of Political Science at the University of Calcutta and Director Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities, delivered an insightful lecture on the 31st of March 2021. Speaking on public policy and communication, his was an exploration of the often-troublesome relationship between the need for formulating policy in an efficient and systematic manner and the preservation of the processes of feedback and communication that democracies are so reliant on.

Prof. Sinha began with a look at the normative, an ideal scenario where communication mechanisms essential for the formulation of public policy remain active and intact. Policy can only be formulated with appropriate information — information about the needs, aspirations and grievances of people — that can only be accessed through appropriate communication. In the same vein, he presented a basic definition of the term ‘public policy’ itself. Drawing from Thomas Dye’s assertion (that it is “anything a government chooses to do or not to do”), he refers to public policy as a binary, a purposive course of action or inaction in response to a particular societal problem. This aspect of policy formulation as a response or reaction lends to an understanding of its demand-driven nature; public policy can only exist when it is formulated for someone or to achieve something.

In the context of a changing state transitioning to a free-market economy post-Liberalisation where the shadows of the Nehruvian model still loom large, India is in a particularly vulnerable position by virtue of its developing market-orientation. With the expansion of market influences on public policy, something clarified as “blurry” as against the more forthright nature of state action, added responsibilities are placed on extra-governmental bodies to advise and direct policy formulation. Prof. Sinha used the example of the NITI Aayog which replaced the Planning Commission in 2015. Effectively a national think-tank, it emphasises consulting and seeking assistance from ‘experts’ of various fields, something that, in excess, may lead to an undesirable

bureaucratisation of proceedings. With unnecessary complications such as these lines of communication are, in essence, blurred and policy-making bodies turn opaque in the eyes of ordinary people.

Here, then, the most important foundational question was raised — how public is public policy? Even if policies are made to respond to public problems, decreasing attempts to keep channels of communication open between the makers and benefactors of such policies question the importance of the role of the public in the first place.

The function of public policy according to Prof. Sinha is to enhance social inclusion while slowing down any exclusionary trends existing in society. However even as policy-makers may set out with noble objectives, inadequate communication from the public may cause a lag between the expected and the actual results of policy. Here again an example was raised, that of the drive towards digitisation in India, and the professor remarked on the absurdity of expansive technologies linking every corner of the country while more pressing needs such as that of building schools or hospitals are ignored; to build fruitful policy one must forge human connections before hastening towards technological connectivity.

The importance of public communication, therefore, is self-evident. It filters popular opinion and leads to interest-aggregation, a crucial requisite for democracy. The supreme measure of the success of public policy is ultimately in the hands of public opinion. One was also warned of the dangers of fiery political rhetoric, especially in the context of an India grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, of sweeping generalisations and the half-baked opinions of incompetent politicians, as Prof. Sinha impressed upon the attendees the need for an "argumentative participatory policy practice." The most essential unit of democracy, its people, must be prepared and willing to defend bottom-up formulation of public policy with the voice of the collective being paid sufficient attention to rather than paternalistic top-down policies made by a bureaucracy out of touch with reality.

In the end, a final reminder resonated through the audience — that public policy communication is not an end unto itself, but a means to legitimise governance and to preserve the essence of democracy.

Sushen Mitra

1st Year, PLSA, Roll No. 151

SECTION - I

INDIAN POLITICS

Understanding India's Ruling Party: From Mookerjee To Modi

Soumyadeep Chowdhury

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. - 103

ABSTRACT

'From being the party of the Hindi Heartland supported by the Brahmins, Rajput and Baniyas to emerging as the Pillar of Indian Politics since 2014, the story of the blooming lotus has been phenomenal'. This paper seeks to present before the reader the Trajectory of the modern day Bharatiya Janata Party divided into phases often congruent with the development of the Indian Party System. What has been the role of the Leadership in moulding the party over the years? How have its electoral results varied and the factors which shaped it are few questions which we will attempt to answer.

The Party's Agenda, Ideology and the associated controversies would perhaps require another entire paper. This paper will conclude with an analysis of the 'BJP in States' and a 'birds eye view' of its future prospects.

Tracing its roots : Mookherjee's Jana Sangh and the Janata Party (1951 - 1980)

69 years back on 21st October, 1951, delegates from across the country met near Gole Market at Central Delhi to lay the foundations of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh with Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, a former Minister in the Nehru Government as its First President. The party was born in the 'cradle of the Nehruvian Era' calling for a 'Akhand Bharat', Nuclear Empowerment, a pro - US strategy, Decentralisation of the Economy and favoured Industry led growth which would eventually form its central ideological tenets. Following Mookerjee's death, the party would be led by Deen Dayal Upadhyay and Balraj Madhok with the baton of leadership eventually passing onto Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Jana Sangh's area of influence remained concentrated in the states of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. With a meagre 3 seats in the 1952 Elections and 4 seats in the 2nd General Elections, the party seemed

to be a 'non starter' with the Congress enjoying hegemonic dominance what Rajni Kothari terms as 'The Congress System', even trailing behind the Left - Socialist bloc which had secured in the double digits. The 'breakthrough' came in early 1967 when brewing discontent against the Indira Gandhi led Congress Government would catapult the BJS to victory in 35 seats and enable it to share power at the state level as Opposition Coalitions grabbed power in as many as 9 states.

Mrs. Gandhi consolidated her power in the 1971 Elections offering a severe jolt to the Opposition though the BJS maintained a decent tally. The declaration of the Emergency in India has been conceived not only as a 'watershed moment' for Indian Democracy but altered the very dynamics of the Trajectory allowing the BJS to 'taste power' for the first time at the National Level as part of the Janata Party Government comprised of the Congress (O), Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party besides the BJS. Shri Vajpayee was sworn in as India's External Affairs Minister although the stint was short lived given the 'pulls, pressures and squabbles of factionalism'. Mrs Gandhi swept back to power in 1980 pulling off another 1971 faced with a 'divided opposition'.

Although the BJS, never accepted 'official connections' with the RSS, it is evident to any 'political observer' that the Sangh Pracharaks constituted the 'cadre base of the Party'.

Formation of the BJP and Initial Years (1980 - 1989)

"Mein yahan bhavishyavani karne ki himmat karta hoon ki Andhera chatega, Sooraj Niklega, Kamal Khilega " (I have the courage to predict that darkness will be brushed off, the sun will rise and the lotus will bloom) ~ Atal Bihari Vajpayee on BJPs Foundation Day, 6th April, 1980.

The 1980 disaster didn't 'impair' the Party rather inspired by its leadership, it began to chart out a new course for itself heralding the dawn of a new era almost three decades later when it became the first Non Congress Party to win a Lok Sabha majority in 2014 and the first Non Congress Party to have secured a higher vote share than the Congress, a 'Party of many Firsts' in Indian Politics. One needs to be reminded that the Janata Party previously in power was a merger of 4 mainstream political parties.

The BJP's founding members included Shri Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. The BJP in its initial years was the first Party to oppose tooth and nail the Congress Agenda and slammed the Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi led Governments for 'nepotism, non performance and assaults on Democracy' seeking to project itself as a national alternative. Its maiden election in 1984 was rather a dismal failure winning only 2 seats in a 543 seat Lok Sabha while the Congress won over 400 seats in the backdrop of the sympathy wave following Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. By late 1980s, the once 'political untouchable' BJP had found allies in Bal Thackeray's Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab.

The Shah Bano Case of 1985 gave the BJP further 'ammunition' and it resorted to mass mobilisation on the plank of 'Hindutva'. Following public discontent with the Congress Government and Bofors Issue at its zenith, the Congress emerged as the single largest party in 1989 but was out of power. The National Front led by PM VP Singh assumed power with outside support from the BJP and Left Front. The BJP which had secured 85 seats played 'king maker' and was awaiting its turn in power although it would remain deprived of that glory till the General Elections in 1996. With 1989 dawned the 'Era of Coalition Politics in India'.

'Mandal - Mandir - Middle Class' and the Rise of the BJP (1989 - 1998)

The decade of the 1990s is often associated with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party to prominence. 3 congruent factors seem to have fuelled its rise : the first was the implementation of the reservation for OBCs which sparked the anti - Mandal agitations in the country and the BJP capitalising on the sentiments expanded its voter base to strengthen its position especially among upper caste Hindus. Second, is the Ram Janmabhoomi Issue which for decades had a 'very sensitive' appeal among Hindus who considered Ayodhya to be the birth place of Lord Ram. Shri L.K. Advani's 'Rath Yatra' emerged as 'a tool for mass mobilisation' helping the BJP to win in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. When the Babri Masjid Demolition rocked the country, the Congress Minority Government of P.V. Narasimha Rao was in power imposed emergency in BJP ruled states on account of 'breakdown

of Constitutional machinery'. Not to mention, BJP at this point of time commanded 121 seats in Parliament as the main Opposition Party.

The third and very significant factor was the rising number of the new middle class what Scholars such as Suhas Palshikar, Yogendra Yadav and et al have titled as the 'New Public in the Second Republic'. This neo middle class was heterogeneous in character yet dominated by educated, upper caste professionals impressed by the ideals of the BJP. The 'disenchanted middle class' seemed geared towards nationalism and a unique combination aiming to reconcile 'tradition with modernisation'. Reputed Agencies (CSDS) conducting poll surveys have projected that the vote share for the BJP in National Elections among Middle Classes has been well above 25 % throughout 1990s reaching a new high of 44% in 2019.

The BJP had its first shot in power in 1996 when it emerged as the single largest party but the Government collapsed in 13 days owing to the lack of coalition partners who could propel it to majority status. What followed were 2 short lived coalition governments under HD Deve Gowda and IK Gujral with outside support from the Congress. With then Congress President Sitaram Kesri announcing withdrawal of support from the Gujral Government, the country was bracing for another General Election in just 2 years time. The strains of the 'Gathbandhan Sarkar' (Coalition Government) was 'visible and glaring'.

NDA under Vajpayee (1998 -2004)

In the ensuing 1998 General Elections, the BJP romped home with 182 seats and a 26% vote share surpassing its 1996 tally. Together with 23 parties mainly the BJP, AIADMK, BJD, Shiv Sena, Haryana Vikas Party, Shiromani Akali Dal, Samata Party amongst others, the first NDA Government was formed under the leadership of the 'moderate' Vajpayee. A year down the line, following AIADMK's withdrawal, Vajpayee lost the confidence motion by a single vote but swept back to power in 1999 with a stable coalition majority without the AIADMK and was the first non Congress Government to complete a full 5 year tenure.

The 'Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation' Policies adopted under Narasimha Rao continued in full swing and India's first nuclear bomb was

tested in Pokharan coupled with triumph in the Kargil War. As John Woods observes, 'The fragmentation of Indian Politics' is evident during this period. While the regional Parties represented a different kind of fragmentation, ideological parties like the BJP were likely to pursue pragmatic politics once in power. This was perhaps true of the BJP under Vajpayee governing according to a Common Minimum Programme and constrained by the pressures of Coalition Politics.

The 1990s is characterised by the Vajpayee - Advani duo. Bhairon Singh Shekawat served two terms as Rajasthan Chief Minister before being elected Vice President of India in 2002. Another prominent figure in the BJP and a founding member, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi served as HRD Minister and even Party President playing a commanding role in the Party Organisation as well as in the Government. The 'communal colours' in the Indian landscape which seemed partially diluted post 1947 but flared up once again following the Anti - Sikh riots and the Babri Masjid Demolition reaching its zenith with the Gujarat Riots in 2002. Political Observers have commented that it was the democratic spirit of Vajpayee which inspired Non RSS stalwarts such as Arun Shourie and Yashwant Sinha to join the BJP and it was Vajpayee's statesmanship and astute diplomacy which steered through the Government and the country in such 'politically volatile and turbulent times'. It was curtains for 'Abki Bari Atal Bihari' when the slogan of 'India Shining' failed to capitalise into electoral gains for the BJP in the 2004 General Elections but as Chris Ogden commented it left behind a 'lasting legacy' redefining and re-orienting Indian Democracy and Politics.

Decade of Interregnum : BJP back in Opposition benches (2004 - 2014)

In the 2004 General Elections, the Congress led UPA edged past the NDA winning 216 seats compared to the NDA's 181. The results reverberated the emerging bipolarity where power primarily rotates between 2 major outfits. Structural weaknesses of the BJP in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu compared with Congress's 'smart alliances' hurt its prospects in the elections. The Congress led UPA under PM Manmohan Singh secured a second term in 2009 which propelled a 'structural reorganisation' in the BJP with Gadkari and Rajnath Singh's rise as BJP Presidents and as Amrita Basu writes

RSS functionaries were appointed to key party positions. The 'silver linings' during this period were marked by the BJP's victory in the 2008 Karnataka Legislative Assembly Elections, its first in a Southern State and its hat trick in Gujarat under CM Narendra Modi in 2012. Led by L.K. Advani and Sushma Swaraj, the BJP continued to be a pioneering force in Indian Politics.

The role of the Opposition is to 'oppose, propose and depose'. The BJP vehemently criticised the Congress Era schemes including the MGNREGA and the AADHAR - UIDAI scheme which albeit it pursued with significant alterations in the future and accused the Congress of 'minority appeasement and nepotism'. The BJP encountered shortcomings in proposing policy alternatives, a characteristic feature of Opposition Parties in India since Independence with the contemporary Opposition being no exception. As far as 'deposing' the Government was concerned, the BJP between 2004 and 2014 was one of the strongest Opposition Parties in Parliament keeping the UPA Governing 'on its toes' but its shot at power would come again only with the ascent of Shri Narendra Modi as the BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate.

The Modi Era (2013 - till date)

The Congress led UPA suffered a historic defeat in the 2014 General Elections but the 'chinks in the armour' had started appearing since 2011. The India Against Corruption Movement spearheaded by Anna Hazare gained momentum and the economic turmoil coupled with record inflation hurt the Congress's prospects. As Pratap Bhanu Mehta comments, 'the rise of Narendra Modi was a response to these antinomies of Indian Politics'. Shri Modi's rise came as a flicker of hope for millions, perhaps Modi seemed the only man who could make things happen. His election to the BJP's Parliamentary Board and declaration of his candidature for the Premiership perhaps proved to be the 'last nail in the coffin' for the Congress. Observers have noted that Mr. Modi ran a Presidential style campaign and the Congress top brass was no match to his astute organisational skills and his charisma which made Modi a 'mass leader' in almost no time. BJP's landslide in the Assembly Elections to 5 states held in December, 2013 was another shot in the arm for Modi who addressed some 425 public rallies across 25 states covering lakhs of kilometres in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls of 2014, something unprecedented and unheard of in the last 70 years.

The BJP single handedly won a massive 282 seats and the NDA's tally was at 336 with the Congress at a dismal 44. Rajdeep Sardesai sarcastically remarks, 'Even the summer temperatures of the national capital seem to be higher than the number of seats the Congress has in the Lok Sabha'.

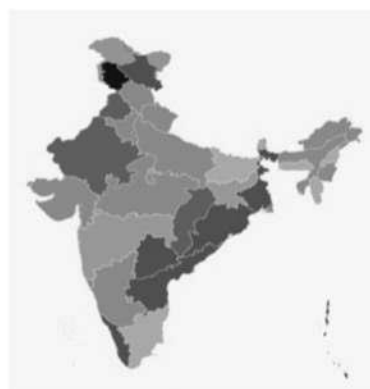
5 years under the Modi led BJP focussed on long pending reforms such as introduction of GST, radical measures such as Demonetisation and 'Muscular Nationalism' at display during the Surgical and Air Strikes. The BJP over the years took control of majority of the states although in the last 2 years its fortunes at the state level has been noticeably fluctuating. The 2019 Election as the Western Press would put it was about whether the 'lotus would bloom or Modi would be doomed'. Ultimately, a lacklustre opposition was no match to a charismatic Prime Minister with the BJP's support base transcending boundaries to include not only the upper caste and urban citizenry but even the SCs, STs, Dalits, Adivasis and the rural belt. The BJP won 303 seats on it's own riding the 'saffron wave' giving it two consecutive terms with absolute majority, posing a question whether this signifies 'the End of the Coalition Era'. Certainly it does at least at the national level if not at the state level where opposition parties and even the BJP run a number of coalition governments. It would be perhaps important to name another BJP Leader, Shri Amit Shah often termed as the modern day 'Chanakya' who as a master strategist and BJP President spearheaded a number of successful campaigns over 5 years and is credited to be the 'Man of the Match' for delivering such a mammoth victory at the 2019 General Elections besides reviving the BJP in Uttar Pradesh- a state with 80 Lok Sabha seats crucial for securing power at the national level. The Modi - Shah duo continue to dominate the BJP Government and hold the reins of the Party as Prime Minister and Home Minister respectively.

What differentiates the BJP under Vajpayee and Modi is that while the BJP was 'accommodating' and 'reliant' on alliance partners earlier given the dilemmas between winning and governing, the BJP under PM Modi is far more assertive, stronger and politically viable. If Vajpayee laid its foundations, PM Modi scaled new heights beyond the saturation point and the dilemmas between winning and governing seem largely diminished given its staggering majority in Parliament. Modi's BJP has successfully woven the contemporary political discourse around itself and its leader, so when the electorate votes it's either for or against the Modi led dispensation.

BJP in the States

An analysis of the Bharatiya Janata Party would remain inconclusive without considering its electoral performance and political fortunes at the state level. The map uses four shades : orange to indicate states with a current BJP CM, skin colour to depict states which previously had a BJP CM, red to indicate those without a BJP CM and grey indicating centrally administered territories. The Bharatiya Janata Party has steadily expanded its footprint across regions since the 1990s and especially post 2014.

Currently it has 12 Chief Ministers in office and also rules as part of the NDA coalition in 6 more states of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim and Nagaland. Shri B.S. Yediyurappa (Karnataka), Shri Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh), Shri Shivraj Chouhan (M.P.), Shri Vijay Rupani (Gujarat) are some prominent state leaders of the BJP serving as Chief Ministers. Previously the BJP also had Chief Ministers in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand but could never have BJP Chief Ministers in West Bengal, Odisha, Southern states barring Karnataka and some North Eastern states as well although currently all 7 North Eastern states are ruled by BJP and its allies (NEDA - North Eastern Democratic Alliance).



Current ruling parties in India



The BJP stormed the Left citadel of Tripura in 2018, is in pole position in Nagaland and no Government in the North East can run without strategic partnership and support from the BJP. Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal and NEDA Convenor Himanta Biswa Sarma have emerged as BJP's 'Go to Men' in the North East. A predominantly tribal Christian region couldn't remain insulated from the Modi wave rather with time, saffron is getting etched with identity politics in North East very surreptitiously yet skilfully as evident with the BJP's sweep in the Tiwa District Council polls and scoring impressively in the recently concluded Bodoland Territorial Council elections. It

dumped old ally BPF to partner with UPPL to run the Council. Besides majority Governments in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur clearly vindicates that the 'Sun in the North East is shining brightly on the BJP' with the leadership leaving no stone unturned to win the Assam Assembly Elections in 2021 faced with a stiff challenge from a united opposition which is aiming to check the BJP's further 'expansion plans' in Assam in particular and in the North East at large.

Control at the state level is quintessential for commanding a majority in the Rajya Sabha and with the ruling party's declining fortunes, Opposition Parties / Alliances also lead a number of states including few big states like West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. In the recent Bihar Assembly Elections the BJP- JDU Alliance won a narrow majority with overwhelming support among women defying most Exit Polls setting a new trend in voting patterns and staging a comeback. In early days, Chief Ministers would be leaders elected by the MLA's in their own right but under Narendra Modi and Amit Shah one can see 'Centralisation of State Politics' where the Parliamentary Board appoints the CM nominee something not uncommon of well established National Parties where the High Command has the final say in decision making quite evident in their role in managing, spearheading and campaigning for State Assembly Elections.

Analysis in Conclusion: Future Prospects

Milan Vaishnav in his book, ' The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism' tries to analyse the prospects of Secularism at a time many countries worldwide are grappling with 'majoritarian nationalism'. It's true while the BJP has managed to bring the Upper castes, Dalits, Adivasis and the Scheduled Castes under its umbrella and considerably bridged the 'rural - urban divide', the question of the Minorities in a BJP led Political System remains open ended and contested. As a Political Party its strengths are evident on the ground and its 'organisational/ election machinery' has helped it attain the status of the World's Largest Political Party in terms of primary membership. 'The Party with a Difference' as it proclaims itself, is still out of touch with the majority of the South Indian electorate barring Karnataka where albeit it is trying to weave strategic alliances to make its presence felt. The BJP's 'Mission North East' has been a success and today as a viable opposition in West

Bengal and Odisha, it is aiming to secure power in these states. By consolidating its hold over traditional bastions and charting new territory, the BJP could well ensure its dominance in the years to come. However, whether 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' is able to translate into 'Sabka Vishwas' (PM Modi's slogan concerning inclusive development and securing the trust of the electorate) is something only time and the janata (public) will answer.

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India-China Standoff 2020: A Repetition Of 1962?

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Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. - 106

ABSTRACT

2020 has thrown various hitherto known and unknown challenges for both individuals and states to overcome. One such disturbance among many is the skirmishes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China. Various thinkers have been perplexed with the question as to whether these minor disturbances will lead to a major armed conflict between the two nuclear powers. This article attempts to assess the same question by drawing possible parallels of the present developments with the causes of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 in the light of the neorealist systems-level approach.

The skirmishes along the LAC, talks among the top defence and diplomatic officials, severed trade links and often contradictory statements from the Indian MEA and Chinese MFA since last May, have led to apprehensions at all levels regarding the future relations of the two “aspiring hegemonic powers” and neighbours, India and China. The “Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai” solidarity came under serious stress since the latter part of the 1950s culminating in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. In spite of various diplomatic attempts, the present relations between the two are tainted by mutual suspicion and tension in the background. The major bone of contention between the two nation states is the historical legacy of unresolved border disputes, with both countries claiming overlapping parts of territory as their own. The 2017 minor fallout at Doklam and similar other hiccups time and again, along with all the others mentioned in the course of this essay, can be seen as immediate causes behind the largest military build-up near the LAC and the resultant Galwan clashes.

A closer look at these developments underlines certain stark similarities with the immediate causes of the 1962 war in terms of border ambiguity and resultant tensions, mutual suspicion with respect to Tibet, major intelligence faults and the like. However, differences in terms of leadership, military

robustness, past experiences and the like cannot be ignored. A detailed analysis of the similarities and differences of the two is out of the scope of this essay, but it can be broadly observed, keeping the minor particularities aside, that the border ambiguity and mutual suspicion formed the overall backdrop of the clashes on both instances. Having established that, the rest of the article will focus on understanding the course of present developments in the light of Kenneth Waltz's neorealist systems level approach and thereby enquire about the possibility of a war in the present circumstances.

Waltz's, in his book "Man, the State and War" provides for a systemic framework to the understanding of the various causes of war and ways of bypassing it as the "final arbiter of disputes". He highlights that a correct understanding of an incidence of war demands the study of the influence of the "society of states" on a particular state. In doing so he asserts that an incidence of war does not depend on the individual states or the attitude of its leadership but on the overall nature of the international system and the role played by the same in shaping the responses of the states. Building his analysis of the causes of Sino-Indian War 1962 in this light, to which we shall return shortly, Aldo D Abitol opines that in the absence of an international government, the basic characteristic of the international system is anarchy. In such given conditions, individual states are responsible for their own security in the face of unending threats. The two main indices of understanding the causations of war, in neo-realist terms, are "security dilemma" and "deterrence". The third variable index is the contemporary system of division of power.

Applying the same to the war of 1962, Abitol came to the following conclusions: One of the main causes behind the war was the adversely affected national security interests of both countries in the face of the Tibet Uprising, Forward Policy and other similar implementations leading to a subsequent security dilemma caused by border ambiguity and mutual suspicion. Secondly, the various political developments in the 1950's, the growing Sino-Pak nexus, the bipolar international order and the like determined the policy of both the countries of waging the war. Thirdly the Indian interpretation of the international system made her confident of the superpowers' support in case of a war. Similarly, Chinese interpretation made her "rightly" believe the contrary. Besides these, regional variables like ideology, leadership and so on must be taken into consideration. Abitol further applies the same indicators to explain the factors that constrained the war in scope.

The present political developments can be applied to the same tripartite frame to analyse the possibility of a war between the two countries. The abrogation of Article 370 and the subsequent transformation of Ladakh into a union territory with the inclusion of the Aksai Chin region was not taken in a good spirit by China. Unambiguous borders are the primary necessity of a nation state system, as they clearly demarcate the extent of sovereignty of a particular state. While India repudiates all the Chinese claims, treating the matter as completely an internal one, China does not see in the same direction. Treating the same as a direct threat to her territorial sovereignty, China thus is seen to ramp up her border infrastructure along the LAC. Similarly, the Jinping initiated Belt and Road Initiative and the CPEC were seen by India as a bolstering of the Chinese “String of Pearls” and thus a “strategic threat...to her status of a regional maritime hegemon”. This recognition shapes New Delhi’s passivity towards what it sees to be a “unilateral” foreign policy initiative. While China still considers the Tibetan sovereignty with reservations, India’s refuge to Dalai Lama adds to the contentions. The compromised national interests of both the countries fuels the mutual suspicion and the logical result of increased border infrastructure further aggravates the “security dilemma”.

The role played by the international structure in shaping policies of individual states lies at the heart of neorealism. However, a correct understanding of an ever-dynamic international structure, reeling through a raging pandemic amidst various other challenges, is nuanced. With the probable US-China trade deal “put to ice” and the ongoing Trade War between the two leading economies, various thinkers have highlighted the possibility of bettering relations between the two countries, irrespective of the US election results, to be nil. The West is seen to further encourage India in becoming a major alternate strategic power in the South Asian region. The recent 2+2 talks between USA and India and the subsequent open condemnation of the “expansionist” China by both, is seen to further consolidate the ties between the two. On the other side a growing Russia-China nexus has infused a new dimension to the entire system. The past two decades saw Beijing’s denial of a “geopolitical world it did not create” leading way for a creation of a multipolar world. This foreign policy attitude of China, marked with “muscle flexing...assertiveness” of a kind, is seen by experts to go against her prior “goodwill diplomacy”. This highlights China’s need to embark on a more Jintao style “harmonious world”, according to experts. Thus, her own foreign policy concerns and “core interest” in

harbouring energy resources constrains China more than ever to diplomacy and talks, as any passionate use of force will only amount to a costly loss of face in the international system.

While both India and China are nuclear powers. China, the second largest military force, is arguably superior to India. However, India too is not a meagre power. The past decade's successful defence deals, the "new India" attitude of no-tolerance to border aggression consolidated further at the Uri episode, the growing Indo-US affinity further strengthened in the 2+2 talks and closer ties with Japan in the face of the BRI highlights the same. Both countries have much to lose if they choose to go to war. The global pandemic and related problems of building a sturdier healthcare structure, economic revival and a host of domestic concerns can further be seen as dissuading factors. In other words, the second index of deterrence is quite high in the present times, unlike in 1962.

One final consideration, in this regard, is how the two countries interpret the present international system. The discussion above indicates the constraints of the same places in China. A correct interpretation of this would mean a bent towards the use of diplomacy than hard power. The present Chinese attitude to some extent highlights the same. While China still continues to bolster her defences at the LAC, and whatever the outcome, she has shown interest in talks and bilateral settlements. Many onlookers have highlighted the near silence of the Chinese media on this matter as an attempt by the government to contain nationalist sentiments and pressures. As for India, she has enough reasons to be sure of foreign aid, in shaping her war policies towards China. However, the experience of 1962 highlights that help from allies is guaranteed only as far as such help positively benefits them. Further, the position of Russia in this regard is ambiguous. A close assessment of the present situation asserts that Russia, one of the major voices in favour of a peaceful settlement, is bent towards taking a neutral stance towards this conflict otherwise. The alleged silence of Prime Minister Modi in taking any concrete retaliatory step by "throwing out" the Chinese off India's territory, can be seen as a recognition of these dynamics.

The present border aggression is a serious threat to both the countries' sovereignty and thus a security dilemma of a serious nature, quite similar to one of the major causes of the 1962 war. However, it is of equal importance to recognize that the world of 1962 and 2020 is starkly different. Both the countries are major nuclear powers in an evolving multipolar world, thus rendering the

deterrence factor quite high, unlike in 1962. Coupled with these, the pandemic induced challenges further deter the possibility of any war. The level of deterrence therefore is as high or more than the security dilemma, faced at the moment. The 1962 war imparts the lesson of judging the possibility of international help discreetly. Though the present situation offers the possibility of a large western support to India, will it be the same after a successful US-China deal, if any? It is imperative for the Indian leadership to understand this dynamic and not repeat the diplomatic blunder of 1962. Global thinkers and onlookers are nearly unanimous in pressing for a de-escalation and solution of disputes "through high level talks". Taking into consideration these factors and the lessons learnt from 1962, and weighing them in the light of neorealist indicators it can be concluded, that in the present circumstances the probability of diplomatic resolution of disputes is higher than a full scale war, the latter being too high a price to be paid in unprecedented times as these.

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Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Draft 2020: Is It Undemocratic?

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Third Year (PLSA), Roll Number: 153

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the Environment Assessment Impact (EIA) draft 2020. It begins by introducing the history of EIA in India and explains what it is. It sheds light on the question the new draft poses and the various reactions that it has triggered. Whether it is regressive and anti-democratic in nature or not is the big question that needs to be answered. This article elucidates the various proposals of the draft and aims to give a balanced perspective on this issue by including sources that support the draft and cite reasons for it. The EIA draft has been an issue of debate for these past months and there seems to be no consensus regarding it. Environmentalists and activists are protesting against it as they consider it to be detrimental for the environment. In addition, it gives unilateral power to the government specially, pertaining to infrastructural projects. On the other hand, some others believe that these protests are 'premature' as it is just a notification and not an act.

At the California wildfires briefing, former US President Donald Trump retorted to questions about climate change saying– “I don’t think science knows”. This dismissive attitude of most people in the world regarding environmental crisis is the primary issue being faced by the world. Ecological concerns are a ‘fantasy’ to them and they repeatedly fail to realize how real the problem is. Global warming, wildfires, earthquakes and environmental degradation have been the order of the day for the last few decades. Amidst this environmental crisis came a blow in the form of the Environment Impact Assessment Draft 2020. To understand its implications one has to look at its history. First the EIA process was initiated through the National Environment Policy Act, 1970. Thereafter, the Environmental Clearance (EC) made any activity related to old or new projects mandatory in 1994 which finally kicked off the EIA in India.

EIA is the process of research and evaluation that analyses the possibility of any adverse/harmful effects of the proposed infrastructure projects or activities on the environment. By identifying the possible environmental effects, it ensures environmental protection and facilitates proper utilization of resources. It saves time and cost by mitigating a project early enough, if it is found to be detrimental for the environment. The EIA boosts community participation and enables the construction of only environmentally sound projects. EIA has greatly evolved over the years and there have been several amendments to this policy.

The EIA draft was released by the Indian government on 12th March, 2020, just before the nationwide lockdown was enforced due to the global pandemic. However, the draft was considered problematic for various reasons thereby engendering protests by enraged masses and climate activists. The bigger question is- why is it so controversial in the first place? Simply put, it proposes to revise the process of ‘environmental clearance’ for various categories of projects.

The regressive nature of the draft intends to weaken the existing policy. Though it aims at increasing transparency, it proposes the removal of several activities from public purview. It excludes a host of projects like roads, pipelines, irrigation, flyovers, highways, renewable energy projects and other constructions from public scope. Additionally, the period for public hearing has been reduced to 20 days. The EIA draft also proposes to exclude reporting complaints of violations and non-compliance. Moreover, it permits post-facto clearance i.e. a project can go forward without any environmental safeguards or clearances. The new draft has been called “anti-environment” and “pro-industries”, and has been referred to as a ‘rubber stamp’ which aims to legitimize environmentally harmful projects. This draft has been accused to be a tool of the government for expanding its political control and favoring corporate giants and businessmen.

There have been numerous man-made disasters in the past decade which have caused immense loss of life, property, greatly increased environmental hazards and health risks. The non-observance of environmental protocols has, time and again, jeopardized the livelihoods of thousands. The leakage of natural gas in Assam (Baghjan Oilfield Fire) on the 27th of May, 2020 and the styrene gas leak in Visakhapatnam on the 7th of May, 2020 are recent incidents.

The new draft curtails the fundamental right of citizens to a clean environment mentioned in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. It additionally undermines the guidelines formulated by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal. The public feedback window was extended to 11th of August by the Delhi High Court. Reports suggest that a record-breaking 17 lakh (approximately) complaints and comments were received by the environment ministry. On 13th August, the Supreme Court rejected the petition of the Central Government that had challenged the Delhi High Court's judgment of printing the EIA draft in 22 different languages. When The Mint spoke to environmental lawyer, Ritwick Dutta about the legal contradictions of the draft, he said- "The principle aim of the draft EIA notification 2020 is how not to do an environmental impact assessment." The EIA notification draft exempts projects from impact assessment which the government categorizes as 'strategic'. No information related to it will be provided to the public thus making their intentions to provide transparency seem rather dubious.

Public participation is the key part of the process of EIA and the new draft intends to go against the very essence of the policy. Joy Daniel Pradhan commented on the draft saying, "Weakening the EIA process means abating democracy." Though the coronavirus pandemic has restricted social gatherings, it has not prevented the public from protesting against the draft and displaying their displeasure with it.

Environmental experts have also criticized this draft as it encourages environmental violations and have demanded for its withdrawal. The EIA draft 2020 additionally supersedes the 2006 notification by aiming to dilute environmental priorities and going against the international regulations for environmental protection.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi urged people to oppose the EIA draft and said that its consequences would be 'catastrophic' and 'loot the nation'. He said-

"The EIA 2020 draft is a disaster. It seeks to silence the voice of communities who will be directly impacted by the environmental degradation it unleashes."

His comment highlights the views of most environmentalists, activists and mainly, the masses. The conflict between the protesters and the central government got serious when the 'Fridaysforfuture.in' website, which is part of an Indian youth campaign, was blocked. The website was considered – "dangerous for the peace, tranquility and sovereignty of the (sic) India".

However, some others are in support of the EIA draft 2020. The Times of India wrote that ‘its critics are barking up the wrong tree’. Many other sources also seem to support the draft on the grounds that sometimes it takes years to get environmental clearances, therefore delaying the construction of important projects and impeding the goal of development. These sources claim that the protests are ‘premature’ as it is merely a notification and not a draft. Moreover, they are of the opinion that the issue has been unnecessarily politicized, when the need of the hour is to strike a balance between protecting the environment and infrastructural development of the country.

The impact assessment of any project has to go through a rigmarole of formalities and procedures that delay the entire process of infrastructural development. This might have prompted the BJP government to make drastic changes and introduce rigid measures in the draft. However, the government must have done this in a balanced way. Their proposal of excluding most areas from public purview is unacceptable and it makes the purpose of EIA redundant. It also considerably curbs the rights of people.

The EIA draft was a raging concern back in August 2020, but as in most cases, this issue has totally fizzled out. But this is not something that can be ignored. One of the most important characteristics of the environmental crisis is that it affects all mankind on a global scale without regard to any particular race, religion or country. The government must take a reasonable decision because assessing the environmental impacts of any project is supremely important now for maintaining a balance in the ecosystem. The most important characteristic of the environmental crisis is that it affects all mankind on a global scale without regard to any particular race, religion or country. The government, the opposition and the various political parties fail to understand the urgency of the situation and they just unreasonably twist the issue and undermine its importance to meet their own ends.

The EIA, therefore, must strive to be multi-dimensional. It must be more representative of the environmental impacts of any project, irrespective of direct or indirect impacts on the environment or the biodiversity. For more transparency, efficiency and accountability in the environmental assessment process, the Central Government must formulate an ‘accreditation’ system of recruiting personnel for proficient and unbiased examination and evaluation of environmental impacts.

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The Verboten Gender

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ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to understand the plight of the Transgender Community, under the recent Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019. After decades of structural discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation, the government has failed to bring about a policy that rights the wrongs done to this community. Through this essay we look at the background on how this Act came to be formulated, the problematic clauses it possesses and what it has done for the problems that the community faces today.

Looking back at history, we see how the transgender community has been betrayed time and again. They have been strictly alienated and peripheralized, the reason being how they choose to identify themselves against societal constructs. This community is looked at as lesser beings, as some of the basic human rights have been denied to them. Instead, their identities and bodies are violated through forces of rape, mutilation, murder and much more. Hence, looked to as the "verboten gender", by society.

Such atrocities towards this community can be eradicated through an active effort of the state, to recognise and provide the corresponding necessary requirements for this community to be at par and looked at as equals. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, was passed by the Indian Parliament on 26th November 2019, and received the President's assent on 5th December, 2019. After years of mistreatment, finally there was a bill that sought the upliftment of the transgender community. Yet, this has met with a lot of criticism by the transgender community itself labelling it as regressive. Grace Banu, a Dalit transgender rights activist called the Act a "murder of gender justice".

BACKGROUND

After decades of discrimination, it was only until a few years back that this community gained recognition. On 15th April 2014, the Supreme Court's judgement in the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India (UOI) case, which -

- recognised transgender community as a "third gender" in India.
- declared for this community to be treated equally and have the right to self-determination.
- also put the community under the social and economic backward class, thereby making them eligible for reservations.

In 2014, Tiruchi Siva (Dravida Munnetra Kazagham leader and also member of the Rajya Sabha) introduced a private bill for the welfare of the Transgender community in the Rajya Sabha, and was passed unanimously on 24th April 2015. Some important provisions of the bill were:-

- it provided for 2% reservation in educational institutions as well in jobs.
- Formulation of a Special Transgender Rights Court.
- maximum imprisonment for hate speech against this community would be upto 1 year.

However, this failed to garner any support in the Lok Sabha.

The Bill was reintroduced in the Lok Sabha by the BJP in 2016. The 2016 Bill proved to be even more regressive, as compared to the 2014 Bill. Hence, the Bill was met with a lot of criticism and protests by the Trans community, and was thereafter referred to a Standing Committee in July, 2018. The Bill was again tabled and passed in the Lok Sabha with 17 amendments on 17th December, 2018. The Bill was again met with a lot of protest and criticism as it overlooked the recommendations made. The 2018 bill as well as the 2014 bill lapsed due to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. Following the General Elections in 2019, the Bill was reintroduced on 19 July 2019 by the Minister of Social Justice and

Empowerment, Thawar Chand Gehlot. It was approved by the Union Cabinet on 10th July 2019, and passed by the Lok Sabha on 5th August, 2019, passed by the Rajya Sabha (without any amendments) on 26th November, 2019 and met the President's assent on 5th December, 2019. One important point to be noted here is that this Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on 5th August - the same day the centre also abrogated Article 370 (special status of Jammu and Kashmir). Hence, this Bill was passed very easily in the Parliament without much debate and one can understand how much media attention the Act gathered.

Third parties all agree that this Act went against the minimal achievement in the 2014 Supreme Court judgement. The opposition in the Parliament too advocated for a change, but having a sweeping majority does provide one with the ability to be ignorant. The former maker of the Bill, Tiruchi Siva in his argument said that a Select Committee should be formed and the bill should be revised. But the members of the BJP stuck to their ground and said the Bill was progressive and gave all the required rights to the Trans Community. Derek O'Brien, Trinamool Congress MP stated, " The message is, rape a woman; yes very bad; rape a child, worse; but the transgenders, these people are on streets, they are begging, they are under high risk, and what is this bill that we are passing?"

PROBLEMS

So now let's look at the Act that has angered and deeply hurt the transgender community.

The following are some of the main provisions that the transgender community have outright rejected as being absolutely regressive in nature.

Gender not defined accurately

The definition of 'transgender' itself is vague.

According to the Act - " a transgender is a person whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth, which includes transman and transwoman." It is a definition that is mixed with one of an intersex person.

This definition is irrelevant, as being a transgender has nothing to do with your reproductive anatomy often discovered at birth, rather it is the way one seeks to identify himself/herself irrespective of it.

Gender roles and stereotypes are highly fluid and can change over time. Gender is a spectrum, and this Act fails to see it as such. Instead, it further distances the transgender community from realising their identities. They are instead looked at as a Verboten gender, giving impetus to our conservative societal constructs. Hence, met with a backlash by third parties.

Recognition of identity

The Bill also states that transgender persons should have the right to "self-perceived" gender identity. But according to this Act, the change of gender identity in documents could not be done without a certification by the District Magistrate after proof of a sex reassignment surgery. In other words, a third person (the DM) is given the power to identify and certify one's gender identity. This was an outright infringement upon one's right to identity as well as one's right to privacy. Jaya Bachan, member of the Rajya Sabha said, "Certification itself is discrimination. It's a humiliation of a human being".

After an uproar by third parties, on the 25th September 2020, the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment notified the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules 2020 for the removing of such a requirement. Now, the District Magistrate could process an application of a gender identity, purely based upon an affidavit submitted by the concerned person. No medical examination is required.

Identity cards

For issuing identity cards, there is the requirement in the Act that a trans person seeking such, would have to be a resident of that particular place for at least an year.

Two concerns regarding this:-

- 1) Other certifications, like the one required for civil marriage, license have much lesser period of residence requirement.

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- 2) The Expert Committee on Issues related to Transgender Persons (2014) and the Supreme Court NALSA judgement opined that it is difficult for a transperson to reside in one place for too long because of the discrimination against them.

This has proved to be fatal, as the issue of identity cards is important to avail basic civil rights such as the right to vote, or the right to education. And stands in the way of employment opportunities for them. This clause is discriminatory, hence protested over.

Protection against discrimination

The 2019 Act uses the term discrimination very liberally, yet the nature of discrimination is subject to much contestation. It prohibits discrimination against transgender persons with regard to things like education, employment and the ability to rent or buy property. However, it fails to provide for reservations as per the Supreme Court NALSA judgement in 2014.

Hence, trans individuals face stigma and systematic exclusion leaving no room for them to even try. The Act also explicitly mentions welfare schemes and programs, yet they remain vague as to what these welfare measures are, or when should the government work to implement them.

Transgender minors

The Act also mentions for transgender minors to co-habit with their natal families.

However, families and communities are more often the primary source of gruesome violence against this community. It is to be noted that the term 'family' has not been defined accurately.

Most transpersons are not living with their immediate family because of such violence and discrimination, and hence, live with a 'chosen family' which actually gives them the support they need. The freedom to have a chosen family is not mentioned and often the only alternative is rehabilitation centers.

Here again, there is really not much done for this community. The Act has been

passed incompetently, without even trying to understand what a trans person faces.

Healthcare

Trans persons face immense difficulty while accessing healthcare services. Health care vulnerabilities include diseases such as HIV, rectal gonorrhoea, and various forms of sexually transmitted diseases. HIV prevalence among India's transgender community is 26 times higher than the national rate. Yet there is no single protocol guiding the medical community on healthcare for transgender persons, as well as limited mental health facilities. No system of insurance is provided.

The Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment Thawar Chand Gehlot highlighted - According to the 2011 census, there are more than 4 lakh transgender people in the country. Yet this Bill gives only a budget of 1 crore for the formation of all schemes and policies.

Offenses and penalties

This Bill criminalises sexual abuses against a trans person with a imprisonment period from six months to two years. It is discriminatory in itself as imprisonment for a sexual abuse against a woman or child varies from seven years to lifetime. Which, therefore, reiterates the idea of trans lives having a lesser value.

Though this Bill has removed the criminalisation of begging and sex work, replacing it with a new section that criminalises "compelling and enticing a transgender person to indulge in forced labour." However, a pre-existing Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act exists which itself criminalises such acts of bonded labour, which was intended to be applied without discrimination, making this portion redundant.

National Council for Transgender Persons

This council was to be formed to aid and advise the government on formulation of policies and programs for the upliftment of this community. However, it is known to lack independence to carry out its functions. Out of 30 members only

5 are persons from the transgender community. All of which are nominated by the Central government, thus, being questionable on its separation from the government.

Apart from such provisions, the Act also fails to incorporate:-

- Basic civil rights like marriage, adoption, social security benefits and so on. With the exception of Maharashtra.

- No reservation for this community, as prescribed by the 2014 NALSA judgment, under the social and economic backward class umbrella.

Grace Banu pointed out - "Everyone is aware that we beg and do sex work and pay taxes from that money. If there are no reservations then how do we uplift ourselves?".

- No provision for the demand of low cost sex-reassignment surgery has been met.

- No proper allocation of funds.

This leaves the transgender community hopeless and betrayed. The perennial struggle of the community to secure themselves through a legally protected and respected system still has not been secured. The situation is far behind when it comes to equality, liberty and justice achieved.

Trans activist Rachana Mudraboyina, one of the founding members of the Telangana Hijra Intersex Transgender Samiti and founder of Transvision, in her words - "The law is being used as an effective mechanism to validate our existence, but places us at a place lower than which the rest of the society rests on, thus, legitimising the violence that we are put through." This echoes how history has looked at this community, and encapsulates what the Act is. Forgotten, otherwise subdued, prohibited. The whole Act put into perspective, has questionable assumptions on 'gender' and 'equality'. Hence, the whole movement has received a setback and has gone against what the transgender community demanded. This Bill has therefore been criticized not just by the Opposition, but by organisations like Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists.

On 27 January 2020, the Central Government was served with a notice by the Supreme Court questioning the constitutionality of the Act, on petition filed by Swati Bidhan Barrah, a transgender activist. Another notice was again issued to the government on the same grounds on 12 June, 2020.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

While there was a stimulus package of 1.7 lakh crore with special provisions for the vulnerable groups such as below poverty line, the disabled, older persons, farmers, it left out more than 2 million people of Indian's transgender community, with the exception of Kerala. Most trans persons are daily wage workers. As a result of decades of discrimination they find no other work and are left to depend on begging, offering blessings during traditional celebrations and sex work. Hence, the brunt of the pandemic was felt very hard by this community. In spite of such a stimulus package existing, they were unable to access help because they do not have identity cards. That is the gruesome reality we live in. The threat they feel is greater than the threat of contracting Covid-19. There is no food, shelter or medical facilities, neither other basic necessities are available to them. The fear of discrimination is also a major factor that does not allow them to access such facilities provided.

'Social distancing' is a new norm for us today, yet this is a term that is not new for this community. For years they have lived independently, amongst discrimination and violence, with little to no support. This Act furthers this by violating their identities, bodies and their lives. The greatest flaw lies in our societal notions of how we look at gender, sex and identity. Our education system does not educate us enough on our own bodies, and hence it is no wonder how our society looks at Trans persons today. Gender sensitisation towards our transgender community is the need of the hour. Once we are able to recognise and break away from these societal constructs, then only can we move forward. The incorporation and acceptance of this community, along with an end to looking at them as the Verboten Gender is the need. But one can only hope.

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Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan '20 - Philosophy To Policy

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ABSTRACT

Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan can be seen as an immediate response to the twin problems of the covid pandemic and a security threat from China. However, it is crucial to understand the meaning of the proposed self-reliance in distinction with its Nehruvian connotations of economic isolationism or extreme protectionism. It embodies the long-term economic as well as political vision for India in its journey towards consolidating a position in the changing international order.

The coronavirus pandemic that has been ravaging the world since December 2019, continues to cast its shadow on our lives. The unprecedented magnitude of this global health crisis necessitated prolonged national lockdowns and restrictions on cross-border mobility. Commercial activities at the domestic as well as international levels came to a standstill for months. For India, security threats from neighbouring countries like China also became an issue of immediate concern. The Indian government, like its counterparts globally, has been formulating several policies to tackle the unforeseen problems in the light of these circumstances. At the macro level, an important policy announced by the government in its response to the crisis at hand is the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan or the Self-Reliant India Mission was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12th May, 2020, while he announced the covid-related economic stimulus package worth INR 20 Lakh Crores, which is itself aimed towards achieving the mission of self-reliance. The Prime Minister elaborated on his vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat again during the Independence Day speech.

The philosophy of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'- What it means for the domestic sphere:

To understand the philosophical basis of Atmanirbhar Bharat, it is important to dissociate the concept with the Nehruvian model of import substitution, economic isolationism or domestic protectionism. This is far from a return to the centralising "Licence Raj", which had its adverse impacts on the Indian economy. Both Nehru and Indira Gandhi attempted self-sufficiency, which did not work well for India. In fact, it is necessary to overlook the socialist era connotations of the term and focus on an earlier era of thinkers like Swami Vivekananda or Mahatma Gandhi, who were chiefly driven by the sentiment of national pride even at a time when the country was under colonial rule, and upheld our national strengths at the global stage in their individual capacities. (Sanyal, 2020) A similar sentiment underlines the vision of the policy at hand, which includes having active engagement in the post-Covid global supply chains and attracting FDIs. However, it wants India to become "a bigger and more important part of the global economy" through resilience, efficiency and competitiveness. The idea is to leverage our strengths to carve out an attractive image of indigenous brands and commodities in the global market. Local capacity-building in growth-critical sectors like defence, agriculture, health, education, energy, aviation, etc. would bear results in the long run. As opposed to being self-contained, the mission aims at furthering a self-generating domestic business sector. Some popular slogans, 'vocal for local', 'local for global' and 'make for the world' for instance, resonate this essence. In the domestic realm, liquidity infusion and cash transfers through the economic package are claimed to be acting as immediate shock absorbers for those in dire need, as also in reviving economic activity following the covid-led breakdown. The five pillars of the mission as announced by the government are economy, infrastructure, technology-driven systems, vibrant demography and demand.

Some of the prime illustrations of the Atmanirbhar Bharat resolve include:

growth of India's personal protective equipment (PPE) sector from zero in March, 2020, to more than four lakh pieces/day in July, the Defence Ministry's announcement of imposing an import embargo on 101 defence items in a staged manner and increasing FDI in the defence sector, development of India's own

5G network by Reliance Jio , to name a few. In fact, this is being showcased as an opportunity to capitalise on our unique contributions in the cultural and scientific realms amongst others, with the knowledge of yoga and ayurveda, for instance, and export them to the world with due economic and political credit.

Atmanirbhar Bharat stimulus package for Indian economy - highlights:

Following the announcement of an economic stimulus package under the Atmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan by the Prime Minister, Finance Minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman announced the details of the package through five press conferences. Catering to the interests of the migrant workers, middle class, MSMEs and industries, the policies under this package focus on land, labour, liquidity and laws. Policy highlights include privatisation of public sector enterprises except the ones working in strategic sectors, Rs 3 lakh crore collateral-free loan facility for MSMEs and other sources of fund liquidity for businesses, making reforms for improving ease of doing business for corporates, concessional credit boost and agri-infrastructure funds for farmers, financial support to the people involved in fishing/animal husbandry, etc., One Nation One Card policy, free food supply and affordable rental housing complexes for migrant workers, schemes for civil aviation, energy sector, public health, allocations for MGNREGA and technology driven education through schemes like PM e-Vidya, among others. The 20 Lakh Crores' package announced to boost the economy did not have entirely fresh funds. It included finances related to some previously declared policies and also, the liquidity generated by measures announced by the RBI. (PRS Legislative Research, 2020)

The Need for 'Atmanirbharta' - foreign policy perspective:

In the realm of foreign policy, the concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat was an immediate response to the Covid health and economic crisis, and to a military emergency involving China. Both of these issues have political as well as economic aspects that are crucial to a discussion on the need for Atmanirbharta in Indian foreign policy.

The Covid crisis is triggering some monumental changes in the international order. As is evident, the world is facing a leadership vacuum. The USA is no longer playing a pivotal role in shaping the world's response to the crisis at

hand as it did during earlier periods like the post-WWII scenario. Its credibility as a leader has been maligned due to its ineffective management of the Covid pandemic in its own country and also due to its policies for large-scale cornering of rare Covid drugs for its own citizens. In fact, wealthier countries like the USA, UK, France and Germany practicing 'vaccine nationalism' today despite its ethical conundrum, displays a dearth of commitment on their part to the spirit of globalism. The EU has been embroiled in internal tensions for some time, with Brexit being critically analysed for its de-globalising implications for Europe. It is also common perception that international organisations like the UN, WHO, WTO, etc. have miserably failed at managing the Covid crisis, repeatedly succumbing to power politics at the behest of China. WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was forced to declare an international public health emergency only at the end of January after calling it off just a week earlier under pressure from Chinese authorities. He repeatedly defended China's handling of the crisis with the WHO even tweeting in mid-January that "preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission". Tedros had suggested at the end of January that "WHO doesn't recommend limiting trade and movement".

This lack of leadership shown by Washington has created a vacuum that is furthering the Chinese cause of setting up its domination over the world. China was already the second largest economy in the world in 2019, next only to the USA. But the pandemic gave it a unique headstart over other countries. It was allegedly the point of origin of the virus and also recovered soon, while countries around the world continue to battle the deadly virus even after prolonged lockdowns. Now even though the international community is unanimously demanding an investigation into China's suspicious role in the spread of the virus, no such steps have been materialised yet and it continues to pursue its unilateralism.

For India, the emergence of a stronger and more assertive China is one of the most concerning foreign policy issues. The turbulence in Sino-Indian relations is historically situated. Despite PM Modi's persistent diplomatic efforts at improving relations with China since 2014, the Chinese have continued to attack Indian interests in the geopolitics of the subcontinent as well as on

international platforms like the UN. Since border tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in India's Ladakh region escalated in April 2020 and have continued since, diplomatic relations between the two countries have gone further downhill. While India is struggling with the Covid crisis, China is creating more problems for us at the borders. China is India's second largest trading partner, and India records trade deficit with it. In 2019, India's deficit with China was a massive US\$ 56.95 billion. To understand the implications of this, one could look at the heavy tariffs totalling about 80% that China has imposed on Australia after the latter advocated an independent inquiry into the origin and initial handling of the Covid-19 outbreak. This incident has been looked at as amounting to economic coercion. It is amidst this multi-faceted crisis in the Sino-Indian relations with the backdrop of a rising China, that our dependence on Chinese supplies and the vulnerabilities of this dependence must dawn on us. (Raghuramaraju, 2020)

While interdependence certainly is a hallmark of globalisation, it is important to achieve this in a way that does not threaten the integrity and survival of the own, especially in the context of the global supply shock caused by the pandemic. Instead of a complete import substitution, thus, the Atmanirbhar Bharat philosophy implies that India shall develop quality indigenous brands in diverse sectors that don't just prevent us from depending on other countries for critical commodities or raw materials, but that sell globally to ensure a favourable trade balance for India. In the domain of foreign policy, a parallel would be to maintain 'strategic autonomy' and self-determination rights - rights that India had preserved even during a rather polarised climate induced by the Cold War.

Countries are also developing other ways of responding to these changes in the international order. Japan's 'Supply Chain Resilience Initiative' (SCRI) 2020, a trilateral approach to trade with India and Australia as partners, is an example of such an initiative.

Limitations:

The policy is not immune to shortcomings. Its major limitations pertain to the objectives of the economic stimulus package. First, a major portion of the economic package is composed of monetary policies, whereas liquidity

infusion through monetary policy is not an efficiently implementable process in India. Second, while the government has formed various credit boosting schemes for businesses to recover, widespread unemployment and poverty is preventing the aggregate demand in the market from rising. Unfortunately, the government has been focusing on boosting supply by extending various short-term fiscal benefits, but the demand side of the economy has not received due attention. Another limitation of the policy is that apart from making large investments in the commercial sectors of the economy, it lacks any major investment plans for the social sector or realms pertaining to the environment. A long-drawn neglect on these fronts could have adverse consequences for flow of financial capital since research shows that capital flows to such destinations where the progress towards achieving SDGs are better. The Covid pandemic has exposed the grave inequalities that prevail in our country, and any initiative for economic restructuring at this juncture must incorporate attempts at addressing these injustices.

Though the idea of self-reliance is not new, this is the opportunity for it to influence mass conscience in India, and ensure that the philosophy transcends the realm of rhetoric and materialises into a concrete long-term policy within the globalised capitalist system. Atmanirbhar Bharat necessitates a balance in approach between protectionist policies in limited sectors such as in the defence sector on the one hand, and a simultaneous process of making domestic production more low cost, quality-oriented and competitive on the other. While many of the recent policy announcements reflect the former, a stronger commitment to reducing cost of production along with fulfilling other parameters like greater ease of doing business is required to be reflected in the government's policies in the future. For India to consolidate its position in the rapidly changing international order, treading the path of Atmanirbhar Bharat is expected to be instrumental if well implemented. But the chief questions remain that will essentially quality and cost-centric citizens of the present time undertake independence-movement-like sacrifices in favour of the costlier and lesser preferred indigenous products, and whether it is practical to expect it from them. If not, then how shall the trajectory of the policy be determined until objectives of lower production costs and better quality for indigenous products are achieved, and will this indeterminacy harm India's response towards Chinese growth and aggression?

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SECTION - II

GLOBAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Another War In The Making Why The U.s. Military Drawdown From Iraq Is Not A Right Option

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ABSTRACT

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States of America has tried to maintain its hegemonic dominance in the world. The Middle East is the focal point of Great Power competition [1] along with Iraq as a hub of competition. The United States place in the world has been greatly shaped over the last 17 years by its presence in Iraq. The “endless war” left a trail of destruction and chaos which still haunts Iraq and the region. Iraq became the pivotal point for the US-Iran adversarial fight and the birthplace of the most gruesome organisation of the 21st century---the Islamic State; whose remnants are still pervasive. The recent proposition of a drawdown will be another folly in the long chain of mistakes--- beginning with the Iraq war. Leaving Iraq for the second time in less than a decade could have a rippling effect in the country and might spill over to other Arab countries already facing a crisis with Lebanon at the brink of a failed state and Yemen facing the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The purpose of this article is to exhibit the possible implications of the US military drawdown from Iraq and how this premature withdrawal could change the United States predominance in Iraq leaving a void for other powers to fill in.

INTRODUCTION

The West Asian region, popularly known as the Middle East has been a conflict-prone zone for decades because of their attempt by foreign powers to control its natural resource and its geopolitical strategies. The United States has been significantly involved in this region since the Cold War with every recurring President leaving remarkable as well as controversial precedents such as the

Oslo Accord, the Iran–Contra scandal, to mention only a couple. After the September 11 attacks, the USA launched a ‘Global War on Terrorism’ which changed the dynamics of the international order drastically. The Middle East became the centre of armed conflicts and civil wars; when the world was grappling with a new threat to security – Global Terrorism. The repercussion of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent rise of Daesh (or The Islamic State) has left Iraq in wreckage.

THE US INVASION OF IRAQ

The Iraq War, also known as The Second Persian Gulf War, was an armed conflict that began in 2003. The conflict consisted of two phases – first, the invasion phase led by the United States along with coalition forces consisting primarily of the United Kingdom, Poland, and Australia; and second, the post-invasion – insurgency phase.

The first phase began with the shelling of numerous precision-guided bombs on 20th March 2003, after Iraq failed to comply with the UN resolution for inspection of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs).

The grounds for invasion set by the coalition forces were---

- To supplant the Saddam Hussein from power and establish a democracy
- Alleged possession of WMDs by the said regime
- Assertion that Iraqi officials collaborated with Al-Qaeda

However, the accusations were only ostensible and were eventually proved wrong. The invasion ended with the collapse of the Ba’athist regime. However, the crime against humanity that occurred during the initial phase was unforgivable and indefensible. Significant number of civilian casualties occurred during the air campaign in Iraq which was against the regime despite using precision guided bombs. The notorious facility – the Abu Ghraib prison; once the crime hub of Saddam’s regime came into limelight after it was propagated in the global media for its horrific atrocities committed by the coalition force. They conducted routine abuse, torture, rape and other human right violation. Other incidents worth underscoring are the Mukaradeeb wedding party massacre, Haditha killings and Mahmudiyah rape.

The second phase was the occupation by the coalition forces. Restoring law and order was a strenuous task for them as the fall of the regime created a power vacuum in Iraq – one that was filled by multiple groups, leading to armed struggle or insurgency against the occupying forces. Since the first election, after the invasion in 2005, insurgent attacks and sectarian strife have augmented. The various armed groups or militias turned to guerrilla warfare leading to civil unrest. After the formation of a permanent government, the Iraqi authority approved an agreement with the US and set a timeline for the eventual withdrawal of US troops. Thus, by 15 December 2011, the US occupation ended with defence and security powers transferred to the domestic forces, while remaining sceptical of their capabilities and their dependence on the US military.

AFTERMATH – POST US OCCUPATION

The drawdown of the US forces was a perfect timing for the resurgence of militant groups in a more organised way, with little to lose and no external interference. One such group was the Islamic state of Iraq, officially known as the Islamic State (IS). The failure of the Shia majority government allowed IS to reconstitute itself. They recruited thousands of Sunnis from beyond Iraq's border. By June 2014, IS took control of a third of Iraq. Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi declared the creation of the Islamic state in Mosul. They revealed a reign of terror that included rape, torture, extortion, ransom, smuggling, executions, kidnapping, among other horrific acts. The rise of Islamic State further divided the Iraqi society and resulted in foreign intervention for the second time.

The reinstatement of the US troops happened again in Iraq under the Obama administration in 2014. The premature and hasty decision brought the US back to Iraq. After five years of fierce battle against the Islamic States, the last IS stronghold was destroyed. However, it did not give the assurance that the Islamic State was defeated. Its physical caliphate was dismantled but the radical ideology remained intact – a tactic with which they are still recruiting thousands of individuals from around the globe. The threat still looms large.

This leaves us with greater questions such as: Was the invasion of Iraq “justifiable”? Was the suffering and fatalities experienced by both parties justified. Was the multitude of factors leading to war against Iraq, simply a way

to suffice their “hunger for oil”? Who is to be blamed for the rise of Islamic state? Was it the US occupation or the entrenched dysfunctionality in the Iraqi society?

It is our assertion here that the invasion was not justified if we look at the ramifications. The United States went in following a non-sectarian policy, and to endorse democracy. However, the result was separatism furthering disunity in Iraq. In addition to this, one cannot refute that the US did not occupy Iraq, because it did--whether benevolent or not. Moreover, if we consider “oil”, there is no war or conflict in the Middle East which is not directed with the intention to have some sort of control over the oil fields and gain profit, which is why oil is called ‘Black Gold’. If we look at greater West Asia, all the contemporary issues are the creation of the historical and functional realities generated over the years. The gap between the state machinery and society, and identity politics engendered a perceived threat leading to the formation of a collective framework; one such framework lies in radical, terrorist organisations.

THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION: 2020

The year 2020 has been tumultuous for international politics, and the beginning of the unpleasant series of events, starting with the assassination of Qassim Suleimani, the Iranian Quds force commander on 3rd January 2020. The Iraqi parliament called for the ejection of foreign military forces specifically the US forces from Iraq, after their disenchantment with the targeted killing of the Iranian top commander along with the deputy chair of Iraq’s Popular Mobilisation Force and the commander of the Iranian-backed militia.

The White House had also announced the plan to cut troop size by the end of the year to 3000 down from around 5,200 in September. The Trump administration had plans to bring thousands of troops from Iraq before the November election to fulfil his pledge to end the “forever war” that the United States plunged into two decades ago. One of the arguments for the withdrawal is the US “Pivot” to Asia, especially to the rising power of China---to counter its predominance in the Indo-Pacific, the South China Sea and the greater maritime zone.

Firstly, if the US withdrew, Iran’s influence would increase substantially, and

this foolhardy departure is what Iran would precisely want. The killing in Baghdad escalated the already tense relations between the US and Iran and its proxies in Iraq in addition with the revocation from the Iran Nuclear Deal, imposition of sanctions to restrain Tehran from proliferating its nuclear missiles and conventional arms. Here, one may ask what role Iran plays in the fiasco that the United States has been embroiled in for decades, and what Iran could get with the US withdrawal. Well, Iran has been playing a crucial role in the events that have unfolded in Iraq for a long time. Iraq is one of the few Shia majority countries in the region full of Sunni populated countries. Iran has tried to influence Iraqi politics by working with Shiites, seeking to maximize its influence over the Parliament and the cabinet. It is a way to counter Saudi Arabia and pro-western influence in the region. As Iran gaining predominance in Iraq would enhance its capacity to project power in the region and consolidate its presence in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Iran is using the “Hezbollah” model [2] in Iraq to allow a pro-Western government to rule in theory but Iran-backed militias wield real power [3]. In Iraq, militias such as Kata’ib Hezbollah and Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq have enticed sectarian violence and political instability.

Secondly, it may have an impact in the counter Islamic State campaign. With the alienation and repression of the minority Sunni community in Iraq, they would turn to extremist group like the Islamic States for protection. Smaller factions of Islamic States continue to operate in urban and rural areas of Iraq, organising and conducting attacks though they are limited in number. However, the US troop’s removal would embolden the Islamic State. Even after the demolition of the Islamic Caliphate, the aspiration to restore it again and defeat the West is very much alive. As an organisation, the Islamic States still direct and inspire international terror attacks. Prominent attacks are the Manchester Arena bombing and 2018 Strasbourg attack.

Thirdly, the preponderance of United States nemeses such as China and Russia would increase. China sees the Middle East as a strategic partner in its One Road One Belt economic expansion program. Russia is also strengthening its interest in the Middle East and competing with the United States through proxy wars in the Syrian and Yemeni region.

The US President’s swearing-in ceremony was held in January 2021, but the change in leadership would not change the foreign policy of the United States

and the status quo would remain untouched. Both the candidates have similar policy towards Iraq---to bring back the troops home. The only difference would lie in their treatment towards Iran. While Joe Biden definitely wants to have a stronger dialogue with his Iranian counterpart and would likely seek to revert the Iran nuclear agreement, the nature of this deal will impact Iraq.

Ironically then, the title of this article would probably become a reality, if the United States withdraws. It is ambiguous – what the second post-U.S. withdrawal would look like for Iraq. Will the Iraqi security forces be single-handedly capable of administering, directing, and overseeing the Iraqi society, and prevent and deter terror attacks? Will it be able to secure Iraq’s sovereignty without external assistance? How will humanitarian efforts be handled with the coronavirus pandemic still widespread?

CONCLUSION

The United States’ withdrawal does not bring any propitious outcome in Iraq and definitely not in the region. The two-decade long misadventure in Iraq has had an obliterating consequence. President Trump clearly preferred to cut the troop size to zero. However, it was an ineffective goal that the United States had set yet again. Leaving Iraq would not ensure stability; the United States has many important interests in the region like averting terrorist attacks, guaranteeing steady supply of oil, and restricting Iran’s sway beyond its border. Withdrawal would severely undermine the United States’ regional and global credibility. The best way to reduce the chance of getting dragged into another conflict is to maintain a substantial portion of troops on the ground with strategic clarity. The United States must push for a more non-sectarian state, reinforcing transparency, and providing aid in areas such as communication, intelligence, defence, security, logistics along with the assistance from European alliances and other governmental and non-governmental organisations. The United States must also avoid dragging Iraq into its extensive campaign against Iran. The preferable option is to remain in Iraq for the time being and focus on to revitalize and rebuild its shattered infrastructure and drained economy and assist with integrating it more in the global economy; instead of active military combatants and commit solely on counterterrorism efforts.

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Lover Of Gloves Not Veils, Eh? Decoding French Secularism In The Context Of Samuel Paty's Public Decapitation

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the evolutionary history and technicalities of Laïcité, or French secularism in an attempt to expose how problematic concerns lie at the crux of the concept itself thus explaining how Muslim marginalisation in French society is now a tradition alongside being the foundational stone of its changing constitutions and not merely a recent, politically motivated construct of the Emmanuel Macron Government in light of the betrothal of Samuel Paty. This essay also attempts to vindicate President Macron from hateful allegations of mismanagement about this religious feud according to the larger global opinion contrastingly portraying with the help of evidence his guiding intention of protecting the republican state of France. Importantly, highlighting the less popularised dimension of his goodwill to recognise Islamic presence and their needs in his country, a conversation convincingly brushed under the silencing garb of Laïcité.

Before the essay spirals into the *Ces cerises sont si sûres qu'on ne sait pas si c'en sont* (a classic French tongue twister meaning that the cherries are so sour that it's dubious whether they are cherries or not) of French secular politics, here's a peace offering of relatability – much like the recent snippet revealing Donald Trump and Marla Maple's guest appearance on Will Smith's *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* where he was ritualistically awarded as the whipping boy for just about anything and everything off and on the chessboard of politics, France's youngest head of state after Napoleon, the 8th president under the 5th republic, Emmanuel Jean Frederic Macron, serves to be a befitting competitor, up for grabs for this infamous entitlement. While the checklist to substantiate such political baptism ranges from his mismanagement of the economy to

international deadlocks with the Middle East, the championing reason in the current context is the chaotic spat over secularism à la French style! While public institutions like trade unions, education centres and local newspapers are conventionally expected to incubate the sense of responsibilities of citizenship in democracies, France has proven to be a rebel. These structures have now risen to be prickly reminders of stigmatization and disenfranchisement felt by the sheltered French Muslims who have been historically woven into the residing population of the country, representing Western Europe's largest Islamic community. Admittedly the initial curiosity to sneak a peek into the vaunted Laïcité stemmed from the déjà vu of the Charlie Hebdo attacks – October 16, 2020, repeated the gruesome history of similar Islamist attacks of 2015, where French citizen Samuel Paty was publicly decapitated by an 18-year-old Russian Muslim refugee of Chechen ethnicity, Abdoullahk Anzorov since he had shown pupils a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad in a civics lesson on freedom of speech from the above mentioned satirical magazine and subsequently how President Macron alongside his centrist government had sworn to fight against such overt Islamism. However, in the opinion of this essay, the rabbit-hole of French archives discloses that the premise of this precarious practice of secularism journeys back to the juxtaposition of transitioning constitutions of France between 1954 - 62 and its subsequent presidential superintendence thus justifying Macron's present intention when he says that the state will allow blasphemous cartoons as a defence of "the freedom to speak, to write, to think, to draw" as an attempt to right traditional wrongs and importantly not to fulfil a sudden contemporary political vendetta of waging a holy war against the French Muslims in particular as mistaken by popular global opinion. Though the proposed promulgates for the protection of Laïcité by Macron's government has been appropriately criticised in this essay, yet keeping on the frontline of the central argument, the governing intention behind these policies, following ahead the essay provides supporting evidence to prove how the French brand of secularism is built on a set of contradicting beliefs (hence the introductory riddle) therefore validating the current praxis rather acknowledging Macron's initiative to recognize what appears to be more of an inherent Islamic problem and find its antidote – a conversation usually brushed under the silencing garb of Laïcité.

Beginning at the beginning, the wiser decision to proceed will be with an attempted de codification of la Laïcité – as a centrepiece of the 1946 Republic Constitution. Secularism was inaugurated in 1905 as a symbolic victory of anti-clerical republicanism which stigmatised the Roman church to be the bastion of reaction, ignorance and superstition thus enshrining three key principles, namely: the separation of church and state, freedom of conscience and freedom to observe any faith of one's choice. The 1882 Jules Ferry law also grows in definitional importance as it officially mandates the separation of school and State allowing free, mandatory education and secular instruction. As a greatly lived socio-political fact, the prime focus of early twentieth century Laïcité was the “disappearance of the religious in France” [the French Archipelago, Jerome Forquet, 2019] that is specifically the obliteration of Catholicism rather than equal recognition of all religious identities.

While drawing inferences from this piece of history, what seemed surprising just as much as interesting was how the cementing concept of secularism which birthed life in the Fourth Republic ended up being so polluted in its use that in turn, it suffocated the whole constitution to its doom in 1958. The supporting evidence the essay provides in this regard whilst proving that wobbly French secularity is now a culture of centuries rather than an immediate political invention to secure state mandate is undoubtedly the Algerian War Of Independence circa 1954 – 62: the final nail in the coffin of France's fourth republic, yet again the *donneuse de Naissance* (birth-giver) of the Fifth Republic, the very historical junction of documenting the first-ever Muslim traces in French residency and indefinitely the cooking time for complicating la Laïcité. Spearheaded by the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), this controversial militarised decolonisation conflict saw brutal methods employed by the French forces to win hearts and minds in Algeria, likewise combated by Algerian determination to break free, therefore, discrediting French prestige internationally and rapturing an internal crisis leading to its constitutional breakdown. Despite a unified national objective, Algeria herself was also plagued by a civil war between OAS and the dissociating fragments of FLN like MNA and PNC. Therefore, the important takeaway from this war-ridden picture for this essay was the large scale exodus of the *Pied-noirs* and the simultaneous expulsions of the *Harkis*. While *pied noirs* were people of French and other European origins who were born in Algeria during the period of the

French rule and had to flee to France in fear of karmic retaliation from FLN, the Harkis were native Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries in the French army and after the Algerian independence, were considered as traitors to their homeland, thus, disowned by the Algerian State and hence was rehabilitated in the Republic of France. Therefore, a couple of very minute observations which needs to be kept in mind at this point are: a) the pied noirs received a benevolent welcome from the state of France and were soon entwined within the already existing French community, b) though banished by betrayal from the homeland, the first generation Harkis, however, did not want to relinquish the control of Islam. As a result of this, the French brand of secularity, especially the concept of separation between the state and church would be safe to say was as alien as unacceptable to them, and c) the French Government under Gaulle at that moment severely suffered from the pangs of migration accommodation. Therefore, the receival of these Harkis welcomed a mixture of resentment and embarrassment. For the Left, they were a representation of those Algerians who revived under the protection of the colonial government acting as the local enforcers of *Algerie c'est la France* and for the Right, the Harkis were a humiliating reminder of the failed colonial war and a distinct counter to any description of anti-French immigrants.

Since the ruling president at the time, Charles de Gaulle, was a staunch rightist himself, there was naturally an administrative botheration by the presence of such a large number of French Muslims. Hence the radically modified French urban policy of the 1950's was meant to create segregated settlement patterns for the French Muslims as well as facilitate the policing of these groups to promote acculturation into French lifestyle thereby explaining the observable continuities between colonial and mainland practices. Therefore, the concept of *la Laicite* that officially originated to disengage state dispersion of services from any sort of religious prejudices was metamorphosed to legitimise the state strategy of totally effacing the religious existence of Muslims in the country only to specifically shrug off the responsibility of serving them according to their needs. Thus, the hairline difference betwixt equality and equity when stated that France "shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion" is the arming smokescreen of French secularity, constitutionally diluting the visibility of an Islamic diversion present in France - "The [French] state still does not acknowledge the fact that

Islam is a religion of France, that it is not wise to systematically remind or refer to French Muslims by their racial or geographic origins, and that French Muslim issues are inherently French issues” [Ali Saad, *The Citizen*]

To assert a few of the state policies capitalized in this regard are the gestured grant of French citizenry as a trade-off for Muslim conformation to fettered Laicite, the compulsion to adopt French first names; a couple more schemes screaming censorship behind secularity in the contemporary era would be lack of any organised Muslim organisations in France, so much so as parliamentary under-representation is an open secret, all public holidays being largely Christian in orientation and lastly, the 2004 legal ban in state-run schools on wearable "conspicuous" religious symbols served as the cherry on the cake. Laicite has, therefore, trickled to mean the management of ethnic differences in the society – a paradigmatic shift from the Anglo-Saxon community-based approach of Britain and the USA. The inherent notion of this essay is undoubtedly the fact that secularism as a concept is selfish – it befittingly keeps oscillating between definitions of recognition of religions or not in defence of its existential accuracy without a universally sanctioned guidebook to look up to in times of crisis. However, it is in this scope of ambiguity in secularity that wise statesmen find leases of legitimacy to validate their interpretations, as one has profoundly seen in the term of Emmanuel Macron, at least. Therefore, a one-liner takeaway would be that Laicite of the 21st century has been remodelled to believe that state machinery is against an organised projection of any religion in particular but is not so explicitly against the belief in faith, thus reducing consideration of religious necessities to condemnable identitarian politics only. -As one French Muslim taxi-driver said to Martin Evans: ‘Why is Zinedine Zidane French while the Kouachi brothers are Algerian and Muslim. All three were born in France’ [History Today].

At this intersection, the French Muslim community could be viewed as two different strata, much like the classic Crème Brulee itself (well at least the French government could be patronised having succeeded in amalgamating French Muslims and French desserts for starters) – a crisp and crackling top of the second generation postcolonial immigrants, more generally, the children of the Harkis inclined into activism against the state, and a condensed bottom of mundane Muslims who have accepted the hypnotising Laicite and refuse to be associated with Islam, frequently analogous with jihad.

Analyst Khosrokhavar, therefore, believes that France's aggressive interpretation of secularism has paradoxically triggered the radicalization, fertilising the breeding ground for French jihadism to repeal the constitutional provision of Laïcité and instigate the residing French Muslim civilians to obliterate the agency of the state. As rightly put by president macron in an address to this Islamic aggression, “I hear your anger, but won't accept violence’ [Sarah Rose, Michael White, Reuters]

The foundational piece of evidence that the essay can provide to substantiate how French Muslims are more in danger of extermination from within their community itself than as alleged under Macron could be found in researcher Hugo Micheron’s new book, *Jihadisme français*, whereupon interviewing a jihadist inmate, he discloses how this homebrewed jihadism stems from the perception of France as the ‘ideal factory of the western world’. Hence, their need to mechanize strategic conflicts that will break the country into a civil war, weakening its social contract and serving as a welcoming hug for jihadism to take over. Clearly Paty’s coerced execution cannot be justified as a befitting act for having overstepped into the trigger area of secularity as fed by the French Muslim rage but a sinister conspiracy of Islamism validating macron’s stance on tightening the leash of the 1905 law and ‘reform Islam’ [The Washington Post, 2019].

Blasphemous cartoons are old villains of Islamic prestige. However, as derivable from Laïcité, the same is a matter of personal offence subjected to civil resolution in case of heightened disrespect. But the moment a state subject unreasonably loses his life over it (given he wasn’t even the creator of the cartoon), quite unwantedly yet necessarily truculent measures of safekeeping are immediately dispensed as the prime most state concern because from the other side of the mandate, it is nothing but a case of misguided hostility with the convincing potency of a security breach which not only should be resisted but inspiringly curbed. With this logical backing, Macron’s proposal to reform Islam is rather aimed at protection than plotting – a common misconception of criticisms. His prompt decision to ascend from state-sponsored secularism to momentarily militant secularism though looks stringent, yet is the only plausible alternative against foreign outbursts of religious aggression, thus legitimising the swap with communitarianism with separatism in his lexicon.

Having peeled the dimensions of this scheme, the dominant intentions are to restrict foreign funds to Muslim boards to disentangle the external influence of radicalisation, thereby severing ties with countries of Muslim origin like Morocco and Turkey (the cause of recent brawl with Erdogan and call of French boycott). In fact, Catherine Fieschi believes this is a quieter initiation of multiculturalism, fundamentally misunderstood in France. Therefore, Macron's active inclusion of the Muslims into the tent of national agenda is a pivotal moment redeeming years of constitutional mutilation.

Notwithstanding, President Chirac's declaration of the state ban on wearable conspicuous religious symbols in school in 2004 was tantamount to direct imposition of state will, it served as the fire and brimstone for French jihadism to validate their fundamentalism to a large extent. The foundational fallacy of this law is baked in its direct confrontation with Laicite's allowance of 'freedom of speech, expression and belief'. Whilst wounding crucifixes around one's neck is a matter of personal choice, wearing a burqa or skullcap is obligatory to observant French Muslims – a formality that doesn't fall under the rubric of proselytism as wrongly interpreted by the Chirac government. Therefore, the burning question that continues to freshly barb the French conscience is: will Macron's one heroic pledge of religious rehabilitation thus serve as a Band-Aid or a Boost?

Dedicating the concluding paragraph of this essay to a prediction of the French future – electoral annexation swings between centrist macron who is desperately attempting to gain political ground by fanning down the flames of Islamophobia and France's very own lady Trump, rightist Marine Le Pen of the National Front with her ideological roots stooped in Nazi Vichy's authoritarianism with an uncoy expression of muscular secularism. Since there is an absence of any organised Muslim community in France, to concretise a 'Muslim vote'(Brookings,2020) is rather tough. However, tracing patterned behaviour reveals an exclusive electoral loyalty to the left, therefore leaving them with fewer choices and even lesser hope in the ensuing year of 2022. Another flipside of this dichotomy is naturally the sturdy stroke of separation in the electorate - the repercussion of which could be a manifestation of secular laws extremist in nature especially if le Pen's government comes to power with a promised eradication of Muslims and immigrants alike. Therefore, Macron

isn't that bad after all. He indeed broke decades of concealing French silence thereby accepting on a global platform that Maurice Audin's (a French mathematician and contrastingly an anti-colonialist activist of the Algerian Communist party) death is to be conscientiously shouldered by the republic of France. Hence, in the opinion of the essay and substantial evidence as provided, president macron is not always rightfully subjected to the hate hashtags and harsh global condemnations in the light of Samuel Paty's murder because upon decrypting his policies, the guiding psychology reveals his larger intentions of ironing out centuries of systematic suppression under the cloak of Laicite, his small way.

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2020 Belarus Protests: Another Soviet-like End To A Dictatorship?

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ABSTRACT

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 heralded an era where countries in Eastern and Central Europe would actively start democratising and make conscious efforts to do away with their Soviet roots. While this was true for most countries, there still remain, some governments in the region which have not been able to fully democratise and adopt the government forms which are vital in the 21st Century. One such state is Belarus. This paper looks into the history of Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko and examines the effectiveness of the recent protests around the country in overthrowing a dictatorship. It draws references and further makes comparisons with the former satellite states through their processes of democratisation. By putting forward the examples of present-day governments with authoritarian or semi-authoritarian tendencies, it finally concludes that countries with dictatorial roots as deep as those of Belarus, have not been able to do away with these centralising tendencies, even if they are 'democracies' on the surface.

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1991, brought a 'wind of change' for various nations, previously incorporated within the Soviet Union (Aliyev). This group of countries which for forty-five years after the Second World War had existed on the other side of the Iron Curtain, saw dramatic changes in their political systems in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These changes took various ways or shapes and the question which these countries faced was quite complex: would they be able to develop forms of rule and structures of participation which would allow them to replace the authoritarian rule of the communist years? (Stephen White). While particular countries, such as Poland, Hungary and Slovenia have engaged in economic pluralisation and democratisation as whole, the same cannot be said for countries like Russia,

Belarus, Azerbaijan and Central Asia still remain controlled by authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes to this day (Stephen White).

The Belarusian Dictatorship Under Lukashenk

Among the states which have not succeeded in doing away with their Soviet roots, the case of Belarus is particularly noteworthy. Not only is it a country which was a former Soviet Republic since the end of the Second World War, but it has also seen little democratisation since the end of the Cold War, making it largely similar to the kind of governments which characterised Eastern European polities all through the latter half of the 20th Century. Alexander Lukashenko, often referred to as ‘Europe’s Last Dictator’ came to power in July 1994. Since then, the Parliament has become weaker, political opponents have been driven into exile or disappeared, and the media has been silenced. He also happens to be the only head of state in Europe to use the death penalty – a bullet to the prisoner’s head and employ the state sponsored secret service to maintain his grip on power (Goncharenko). If these totalitarian measures of the state were not enough, Lukashenko has also turned Belarus into a miniature version of the Soviet Union, as the country’s industrial and agricultural sectors are heavily subsidised and benefit from close ties to Russia (Åslund). Furthermore, what definitively determines the state of Belarus as one of a dictatorship is the lack of free and fair popular elections ever since Lukashenko came to power in the 1990s.

The 2020 Presidential Elections and the Belarusian Political Awakening

This lack of electoral and political freedom has proven to be a major cause of discontentment among the Belarusians (Rice-Oxley). The protests against the rigged Election Commission of the State in August 2020 were not unprecedented. Tens of thousands of demonstrators had gathered in Minsk for the very first time in 2010, when Lukashenko’s Election Commission announced him as the winner even before the polls had closed (Rice-Oxley). This time, the cause of animosity is along the same vein, except it is

accompanied by the President's complacency to effectively deal with the coronavirus pandemic and the growing frustration of the citizens over the country's stagnating economy (Dickinson). Not only did he refuse to accept the coronavirus as a potential threat by dismissing the eminent fears as 'psychosis', but also resisted the pleas to implement nation-wide lockdowns, saying that the damages on the economy would be worse than the virus itself (Deutsche Welle). The widespread allegations that the 2020 elections were fraudulent, especially after polling stations around the country seemed to have confirmed the same, has added to the growing dissatisfaction with the long serving dictator. Poll workers were pressured to sign documents with falsified results in favour of Lukashenko, or sign documents where the vote totals were left blank, even before the voting finished (The Irish Times). Lukashenko, like all other dictators before him, blamed the cause of the unrest in the country on international interference. Every expression of outside sympathy was repackaged and reframed as akin to intervention, giving him the pretext to quash dissent, even if doing so required force.

However, amidst the protests arising out of the fraudulent 2020 elections, it has become apparent that there is a clear indication of the democratic awakening of the people of Belarus, who have begun to recognise the urgent need for a change of government and participatory structure within the country (Dickinson). To further this need for change, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the leader of the opposition, went to great lengths to assert that their revolution "is not geopolitical but democratic" (Serhan).

The End of the Last European Dictatorship?

The nature of the existing government in Belarus that sparked pro-democracy movements in various parts of the country and the gradual but recognisable thrusts of the West to encourage the movement, seems all too familiar. It takes one back to the changes in the political dynamics of Europe and Russia back in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Alexander Lukashenko's idea of a planned economy, marginal market economic elements, abnormal focus on the industrial sector, is in many ways, similar to the Soviet economy (Åslund). Thus, the major cause of discontentment arises from the repeated economic

failures and the increasing political repression which were also the reasons for the outbreak of separatist movements within and outside the Soviet Union thirty years ago.

The question however remains whether or not, after these pro-democracy movements (if successful), the country will be able to completely wash its hands off of the long-lasting autocratic history and establish a political system with maximum public involvement, thus adhering to the basic tenets of democracy. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, countries in Eastern Europe did go through a systematic transit to popular democracies and worked hard to dissociate themselves from the Soviet ties (Aliyev). While in comparison, it would seem that Belarus may be able to adopt a similar approach as the former satellite states of Eastern Europe, Belarusian politics has aligned itself quite differently in the past thirty years of post-communism to be able to do the same. Not only has it gone through another thirty years of authoritarian rule as opposed to the forty-five of the now democratic satellite states, it also lacks the presence of a strong domestic structure or a movement to spearhead the process of democratisation which existed in the formerly satellite states, much before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The ongoing protests against Lukashenko are fresh, triggered by the ill handling of the pandemic and the economic downturns of the country. It lacks the backbone of a national movement which was seen in countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Moreover, this process of democratisation has not always proven to be successful even in those countries which have succeeded in embarking upon the process (Aliyev). Post-Soviet regimes such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have succeeded in bringing democratic reforms which are easily reversible and are extremely fragile, such that they have been described as 'hybrid' or 'transitional' regimes (Aliyev). Studies conducted in the area have also conceded that the majority of post-Soviet states end up as regimes with little or no resemblance to a democracy (Aliyev).

Another important factor to consider here is former dictatorial regimes themselves. Countries with a long-standing history of a single-party rule or a dictatorship, such as Russia and China have gone through their respective phases of democratisation. They have allowed dissent, popular elections, and

free functioning of market economies. However, the past two decades, in the context of Russia and China, paints a different picture altogether. These political systems may very well be democracies on the surface but, due to their integration in an authoritarian structure of governance for more than seventy years in Russia and almost forty years in China, totalitarian tendencies remain deeply rooted in their political systems. Furthermore, they have evolved to name themselves as ‘hegemonic presidency’ in Russia and a ‘socialist consultative democracy’ in China (Ye).

Conclusion

In line with the history of how the political systems of Europe have developed in the post-Cold War years, and in context of how autocracy is deeply rooted in Belarusian politics, it seems unlikely that even with the dismissal of Alexander Lukashenko that Belarus will be able to take that definitive step towards a democratically elected government. However, the efforts of the popular movement led by Svetlana Tikhanovskaya cannot be discounted completely either. According to Geoffrey Pridham, it is important to emphasise on the predominance of reformist forces or alternatively old-regime elements and the emergence of civil society (Stephen White). While in this context, countries in the region (Slovenia, Poland, and Hungary) have democratised successfully, Belarus lacks the pre-existence of such fully developed structures and agencies which can initiate change and democratisation at this point. The pro-democratic protests against the State is a step ahead but there is still a long way to go, especially if the last dictator of 21st Century Europe does not succumb to both international and domestic pressure.

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Cancelling Cancel Culture

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ABSTRACT

This essay attempts to explore the various dimensions of the pop-culture phenomena, 'cancel culture', that has gained mass popularity in the 21st century. Its aim is to debunk the fallacies propagated by the culture, in particular, its quest for justice. The essay also focuses on the effects of cancellation, and whether the 'movement' is a binding one.

Key words: cancel culture, call-out culture, restorative justice

WHAT IS CANCEL CULTURE?

The term 'cancel' has been in existence for almost a decade, with its origins tracing back to Black Twitter. However, the essence of cancellation as it stands today was popularised by the 2013 Tumblr blog 'Your Fav is Problematic'. In its purest form, this pop-culture corrective serves as an expression of agency and control. By withdrawing your approval of someone, based on differing moral values, cancel culture acts as a compelling tool to reclaim power – especially at the hands of those who have traditionally been oppressed by our society. In pursuit of this ideal, cancel culture aims to create a centralized infrastructure for public accountability, without the need for institutional intervention. It is in part, a fight to eradicate deep-seated societal injustices, and in part, a result of the lack of real consequences for powerful people and their problematic statements or actions.

Yet the reality of cancel culture as it exists today is far from the ideals it had set for itself. In its most radical forms of boycott, cancel culture thrives on the untenable assumption that those subject to cancellation are unwilling to change. Barack Obama calls it a movement based on how judgemental we can

be of one another, in order to satiate a false sense of activism. Real institutional and systemic change requires robust engagement with the issues that impact us, directly or indirectly. Cancellation, however, is reactionary, and not robust. It perpetuates an environment of shaming, ostracizing, and essentially silencing those who are cancelled. If you falter on the slippery slope of perceived morality, you are out – there is no coming back. The goal is not to criticize or analyse; it is to excommunicate. Thus, the ethos of cancel culture as it stands today lies in the fact that you cannot learn from your mistakes because you cannot make any mistakes. In an interesting departure from democratic principles, cancel culture does not aim to win over the other side, rather banish it. The assertion, then, is that once the mighty have fallen, they must remain pinned to the ground.

THE CONTEMPORARY IMPACT OF CANCEL CULTURE:

In conversations with friends and peers, one glaring facet of cancel culture that gets highlighted is the fear of being cancelled. The culture assumes change by instilling this kind of fear within people. Yet one must stop to ask themselves: is this sort of ‘change’, sustained by fear, a legitimate one? Or is it a performance of political correctness, to prevent oneself from becoming the next in line to be cancelled? In a marketplace of free ideas, when being right becomes a ‘competition’, superficial forms of social awareness take precedence over the actual internalization of social consciousness. Its reactionary nature impedes any form of actual growth or learning, and the fear of being cancelled, or completely dismissed, may often lead to hesitation from future discourse.

Currently, cancel culture addresses wrongdoing by tapping into the feeling of shame as a consequence, which seldom helps an individual to learn or make positive changes to their behaviour. Professor Brené Brown, who has spent two decades researching vulnerability, shame, and empathy, says that shame is rarely constructive. “We think that shaming is a great moral compass, that we can shame people into being better, but that is not true,” says Brown in an episode of her podcast, ‘Unlocking Us’. She believes that guilt acts as positive reinforcement for changing one’s behaviour, wherein shame only creates feelings of resentment and anger, leading to no long-term transformation.

Essentially, shame renders cancel culture ineffective when it comes to social justice, which is its end goal. Subsequently, by creating a constant pressure to be ‘politically correct’ at all times, perpetuated by fear and shame, the culture in itself does not address the root cause of an issue, as much as it does the optics of it.

When claims of moral wrongfulness assume centrality in a debate, it distracts from the crux of the debate itself. Consider a discourse on racism, wherein an individual says something that offends another. The issue of moral wrongdoing (the perceived slight or offence) takes precedence over the discussion of the issue at hand (racism). In this manner, by picking on an individual’s comments, one detracts from looking at the larger institutional problem (White supremacy). Subsequently, this radical and reactionary mechanism of instant gratification disregards the complexity and nuance of looking at people as whole human beings. The context under which a person may have behaved a certain way is never scrutinized. The conditions of an erroneous system, which enables people to cause harm, thus go largely unchecked. After a point, we must begin to look at how systems have failed individuals rather than focusing simply on how individuals are failing themselves. Thus, cancel culture overlooks injustices perpetuated by systems unto the very people it seeks to hold accountable.

THE PROBLEMS OF CANCEL CULTURE:

This culture is often considered to be a method of achieving justice for marginalised groups or people whose identities are frequently dehumanised by microaggressions. However, this notion does not hold much weight. Celebrities or public figures, who are the easiest targets of cancel culture, are often the least impacted by their cancellation. Of those who have been ‘cancelled’ in recent years, many have continued to work and maintain their success as it existed prior to their cancellation. Most have not seen any long-term boycotts – Cardi B still makes music, Woody Allen still shoots films, and Ellen DeGeneres still hosts her talk show. This calls into question whether cancel culture is a binding movement or a social media frenzy that blows over once it has lost its heat. The real impact of cancel culture thus prevails over your

everyday ‘Karen’. J.K. Rowling was not successfully cancelled by the internet for her transphobic comments, but a lesser-known author lost her job for tweeting out in Rowling’s support. It is these people on the fringes that face the brunt of cancel culture’s effect.

The culture is also marred with the problem of oversimplification. Since the term is so broadly used in so many varying degrees, it is eventually rendered meaningless. For example, R Kelly who was cancelled over decades of sexual assault is clubbed with Jodie Comer, who was cancelled for dating a Republican. When used as an umbrella term for several contexts, both heavy and light, cancel culture loses its essence in terms of proportionality. There exists no statute, no regulation, and no context-driven analysis of the cancellation. Each instance bears the same consequences, and on some occasions, the punishment outweighs the crime.

If the end goal of the cancel culture trope is to hold individuals accountable, then the act in itself defies its purpose by relieving the individual of any form of accountability. Rather, it serves to provide a false sense of accountability without actually ensuring that any real amends are made. One must ask then, if cancellation is an act of justice in itself, or if justice encompasses what happens after the injury, through restoration and amends? Propagating redemption, acceptance, and demanding change is a much more powerful way to seek justice, instead of just deleting a human being for their bad optics and poor decisions. This does not mean that people should not be held accountable for their questionable views or hurtful actions. Call-out culture promulgates exactly this idea of challenging someone’s opinions or actions without expunging them, therefore providing them with room to grow and learn. Most individuals, I would like to believe, behave in ways that can be reasonably unlearned. For these people, it is also worth thinking about accountability in terms of restorative justice.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO CANCEL CULTURE:

Restorative justice, arguably considered to be the future of criminal justice systems, acts as a true medium of accountability. It shifts the focus from the

crime committed to the harm done, and this includes harm not just on the individual but a community of people as well. It focuses on resolution and amends rather than punitive measures. Since it is survivor-centric, it ensures that communities of both the victim and the offender can learn and heal by being a part of the resolution. Restorative justice thus helps address the underlying cause behind problematic actions and provides a path towards redemption. It sets the ball rolling on how to break the chain of social injustice and create safer communities. This channel of justice truly commits itself to the creation of a more equitable society.

To support cancel culture is to support the notion that human beings exist in simple binaries of right or wrong, and that they are largely flawless. The standard that cancel culture sets then seems impossible to achieve. Personally, I subscribe to Jameela Jamil's declaration of being a 'feminist-in-progress'. To me, that represents the desire to create a better and equal world, while acknowledging that mistakes will be made along the way. Furthermore, I believe that no one can ever have a monopoly over the information that makes a particular stance. There are books to read, ideas to explore, and experiences to have. This means that conclusively upholding any one stance, without making space for nuance, hinders everyone's process of learning, unlearning, and relearning.

Cancelling someone based on what they said or did years ago, then, seems unfair. A prime example of this is Jimmy Fallon, who was recently cancelled for his 10-year old impression of Chris Rock in 'blackface'. Fallon, while acknowledging and apologising for the 'clearly racist act', also raised his apprehensions of how he would deal with the cancel culture mob. "The thing that haunted me the most was, how do I say I love this person? I respect this guy more than I respect most humans. I'm not a racist. I don't feel this way.", said Fallon. One must also acknowledge that when this skit was performed, we as an audience lauded it, and laughed along in praise. Blackface and other such racist phenomenon are being condemned widely today, and rightfully so. To dismantle systemic racism, such kind of denunciation is a must. However, does Fallon deserve to be cancelled over it? Or does he deserve the space to acknowledge his mistake, and do better hereon?

The flip side of being flawed lies in the fact that we as human beings can do and be better. While writing this article, I have felt that my opinions on cancel culture may, in turn, get me cancelled – the irony of which feels cathartic. However, that should not be the case – not for me, or anyone else. Political philosopher John Stuart Mill once observed: “The usefulness of an opinion is itself a matter of opinion: as disputable, as open to discussion, and requiring discussion as much, as the opinion itself.” Assertions of immorality, offence, and harm are all subject to debate. Likewise, my thoughts are not absolute and they are always open to change, simply because I am open to change and learning. When considering cancel culture, I invariably reel back and ask myself: who am I to cancel somebody? If I were being cancelled, would I like to be treated the way I intend to treat the person I’m cancelling? I like to think I am receptive to being held accountable for my words and actions – so I do not want to assume moral superiority by presupposing that others may not be.

In its present form, cancel culture holds no place for reform. It is exclusionary, frequently disproportionate, and divisive – and in effect, defeats its purpose. If this culture continues to permeate our social fabric, then we – as imperfect human beings navigating through rapidly changing social norms and conventions – will only find ourselves more polarised, separated, and unattended. What we must do now is listen, regardless of which side of the debate we fall on. Being told that you are wrong is not the same as being cancelled. It is time to listen, forgive, constructively criticise, and most importantly, create space for betterment.

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A Crisis Of Violence

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ABSTRACT

2020 has been a challenging year for the entire world with the onset of covid 19 and for this almost all countries have placed their citizens under lockdown this has caused an adverse effect for women all around the globe, they have been locken in their homes with nowhere to go and thus cannot escape their abusers. Most countries irrespective of poor or rich saw an upsurge in domestic violence cases and calls at helpline numbers for domestic violence. Though governments have tried to put measures in place it is grossly insufficient. Civil society groups and NGOs have had an increasingly difficult time to meet the needs of women who have been victims of such violence, thus making the pandemic has magnified the risk of violence to women worsening their condition significantly.

For the untold stories of thousands of women around the world, the pandemic has meant a double edged sword: the risk of contracting a deadly virus coupled with the danger of being locked in an enclosed space with a violent abuser. The pandemic has caused profound global challenges all around the world. It has brought about varied emotional financial and physical stress for millions all across the world. Among this is the unprecedented growth of domestic violence against women. Statistics showed that a third of women around the world experienced some form of violence in their lives. The issue affected both developed and poorer economies. Nearly a quarter of female college students reported having experienced sexual assault or misconduct in the USA, whilst in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, partner violence was a reality for 65 percent of women. Domestic violence though widespread has almost become an accepted character of all societies but the pandemic has made this more vivid than ever. Despite countries making progress for equality of the sexes violence and harassment occur publicly and privately with maximum cases not getting

reported more so during the pandemic. Since the pandemic the UN reported that Lebanon and Malaysia, for example, have seen several calls to helplines double, compared with the same month last year; in China, they have tripled; and in Australia, search engines such as Google are seeing the highest magnitude of searches for domestic violence help compared to the past five years. In Argentina – a country where before the lockdown it was estimated that every thirty hours one woman was killed by a man – Al Jazeera reports that the national emergency number for victims of domestic abuse saw a 60 percent surge in calls in Buenos Aires province immediately after the lockdown. Meanwhile, Kenya is said to have experienced a 34 percent increase in calls for help related to domestic violence during the first three weeks of the country's dusk-to-dawn curfew.

Women as a section of society have always been severely disadvantaged but being locked in close quarters with very minimal chances of stepping out of homes causing women around the globe to be with their abuser. The consequence being the increased violence on women. On the other hand, homeless women have had to face increased emotional and sexual harassment.

Violence against women is one of the worst evils of modern society the pandemic has brought about some horrific cases of this while the UN has advised countries to direct Covid 19 relief measures for the prevention of such violence. It has made little difference. Less than 40 percent of women who experience violence seek help. Less than 10 percent of those women go to the police. Under the current circumstances, reporting is even harder, there are increased limitations on women's and girls' access to phones and helplines along with disrupted public services like police, justice, and social services. These disruptions may also be compromising the care and support that survivors need, like clinical management of rape, and mental health and psycho- social support. They also fuel impunity for the perpetrators. In many countries the law is not on women's side; 1 in 4 countries have no laws specifically protecting women from domestic violence.

In India the National Commission for Women (NCW) has reported having seen a twofold rise in gender-based violence during the pandemic, the particularly horrific crime of the upper caste violence in the recent Hathras case left the

country in turmoil more so due to the complete mishandling of the case by the police forces and the government. In India, Canada, UK and South Africa, the lockdown has seen a steep rise in violence against women. Despite these countries having legal measures for the punishment of such offenses and active civil society groups for this the Oxford Human Rights Hub talks about how the pandemic has given rise to increased challenges for such organizations.

Various obstacles and challenges are being faced by civil society organisations who have been working to provide support to victims of gender-based domestic abuse. a. A complete shift to counseling through phones and on online platforms, highlights the inequalities in access to channels of communication for women, as it leaves women from the underprivileged/vulnerable communities with no or limited means to reach out. Women on the wrong side of the “digital divide” can struggle to access digital resources on domestic violence. b. In the UK, women’s frontline support is reporting a reduced service due to staff shortages and challenges in adapting to remote delivery. c. In Canada, another challenge has been implementing social distancing measures within domestic violence shelters; in some parts of the country, there is a significant shortage of beds in shelters.

Social media also saw an outflow of outrage in support of domestic violence victims which took the form of the black and white challenge, Turkey has seen an alarming amount of domestic violence with more than 470 women dying in the last year due to domestic violence. Law enforcement officers recorded a total of 88,491 domestic abuse-related incidents between January 1 and May 20. Supporting women victims of abuse has never been a priority for the government. This has not changed during the pandemic. Despite there being legal provisions, the women in Turkey today suffer because of the faulty implementation of rules and regulations.

The Secretary-General of UN António Guterres pointed out that violence is not confined to the battlefield, and that “for many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes”. Amidst this crisis, some governments have made valiant efforts to address violence against women. In Argentina, pharmacies were declared safe spaces for victims of abuse to report. In France, where grocery stores are housing pop-up-services

and 20,000 hotel room nights have been made available to those women who cannot go home. The Spanish government has exempted women from the lockdown if they need to leave home because of abuse and both Canada and Australia have integrated funding for violence against women as part of their national plans to counter the damaging fallout from COVID-19.

Many civil societies all around the world have made increased efforts to address violence against women during the pandemic but despite there noble efforts the pandemic has created such conditions that have led to the rise of violence on women. There has been a severe shortage of funds, shelters have been overfilled and most governments have made very little efforts to address this 'shadow pandemic'. The world right now is suffering like never before the uncertainty which has characterized this year has been faced by all, but women all around the world have been the worst affected. Their basic human rights have been neglected. Thousands of women live in fear and pain and this has only been amplified during the pandemic.

The lack of proactivism regarding women's security begs the question why is women's security such a neglected concept in the context of international security. There is a tendency to look at security from a gender neutral manner where the focus is more on state security rather than look at security in nuanced manner or a gendered perspective where conflict situations affect women differently, women as separate section is not featured in most states security perspective. Thus it is not surprising domestic violence is pushed to the domain of private and thus does not feature in the states sphere of operation in the public domain thus there is a creation of a atmosphere where states lack the righteousness to make laws in such aspects making women security feature not so prominently in the aspect of human security of states. Hence when a circumstance like the pandemic hits the state approaches it from a gendered neutral perspective giving no space for how this would affect different sections differently. So the pandemic far from being an equalizer puts Women in a vulnerable position in society where they are exposed to a slew of challenges. As a result, societal fault lines are exacerbated rather than changed by ruptures such as pandemics making women's security increasingly unsure during the pandemic.

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The Green New Deal: Technological Innovation And Political Roadblocks

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ABSTRACT

This article briefly looks into the highly reported resolution of the United States Congress - the Green New Deal. While it has started a much needed conversation about the adverse effects of climate change, it has also been largely divisive in its politics.. The politics of climate activism has altered significantly over the past decade, especially in the United States The results of the Presidential elections and the Democrats' victory have brought a renewed hope for positive policy action. The following article takes a look at the major provisions of the Green New Deal Resolution, its plausibility, and the extent of its importance. It also seeks to explore the political rhetoric that surrounds the Resolution, and which side is to benefit from its implementation.

In the 21st century, climate change is arguably the greatest threat to mankind, pandemic notwithstanding. As time seems to be slipping away like sand, we must ensure that necessary steps are taken to preserve the planet for generations to come. This seems to be the vision behind the 2018 US Congress resolution, the 'Green New Deal', which was proposed by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) and Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Massachusetts). The resolution is a non-binding document adopted by the Congress as a road map towards a zero-emission America within the next decade and simultaneously aims at improving America's technology, society and economy.

The primary aim of the Deal is to actively promote and work towards controlling climate change and boosting energy efficiency. This implies that conventional, non-renewable sources of energy must be phased out gradually to make the USA a net-zero emission nation. For this, natural and renewable sources such as solar, geothermal, hydroelectric, wind, and biomass need to be

expanded while natural gas and coal must take a backseat. The United States spends billions of dollars on containing the effects of climate change and is expected to spend even more if the percentage of natural energy does not drastically increase from its current 31%. (Friedman)

A proposition that has been continuously misunderstood and misreported by many is the stance on the emissions from the agricultural industry. Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming and chairman of the Committee on Environment and Public Works warned that ice cream, cheeseburgers and milkshakes would be a thing of the past because under the Green New Deal, "livestock will be banned." In reality, the provision aims at "working collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the United States to eliminate pollution and greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector as much as is technologically feasible". This means that the greenhouse gas emissions from the beef industry and such others will be reduced with new technological advancements and be brought down from its current 41%.

The lesser technologically dependent solutions include increasing soil carbon storage through afforestation and preservation, reducing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, restoring and protecting natural ecosystems. These are all proven techniques that are already in practice in several parts of the country, but they need a major boost accompanied by sufficient awareness and education about the procedure and its urgent need.

The resolution also targets a reduction in pollution by dealing with the emissions of transportation through the promotion of clean and easily accessible public transport, zero-emission vehicles and the infrastructure needed to make and use them along with a high-speed rail to reduce dependence on flying due to its high use of fossil fuels. Under the current administration, this has become rather difficult considering their disregard for standard emission rates, non-renewal of tax incentives on electric vehicles and low prices of gas.

The non-environmental provisions make the issue of the resolution much more politically divisive. It asks for a minimum family-sustaining wage, family leave, retirement benefits, and other such perks that will add to the costs borne by the government. It also calls for the strengthening of labour laws and policies, for unionization to provide security and prevention of discrimination

in all joint sectors and industries. Furthermore, it proposes free, quality higher education for all citizens, especially for the "frontline and vulnerable communities" to ensure equitable growth in society and the economy. These provisions aim to ensure a secure and dignified life for citizens that are continuously exploited by industrialists in the field of natural energy. A shift in dynamic from the non-renewable to renewable energy industry foreshadows the danger of the energy giants taking over power in the new industrial structure on the basis of their capital. This is why it is imperative to provide them with enough resources and legislative support to protect them from further exploitation.

On paper, the Green New Deal is the ideal way forward as seen by climate activists, scientists and political progressives in the United States, but its economical plausibility is questionable. This is a question that has been asked by both parties and it is partly justified when one looks at the trillions of dollars that need to be spent. Since it is a non-binding resolution, there are no specific costs given by the sponsors, but considering the kind of infrastructural revamp that it mandates, the Green New Deal is going to warrant a lot of investment. While some conservative Republicans have entirely disregarded any legitimate means of financing the provisions of the resolution, others are apprehensive about what economic changes will have to be made to accommodate the Green New Deal. There is a dire need for a shift in taxation policy from the current structure that puts a majority of the weight of taxes onto the middle and lower classes, to a more progressive policy that taxes the rich. A taxation rate such as that in the pre-Ronald Reagan era, where the rich were taxed at far higher rates (Rubin), must be implemented to collect sufficient federal funds for financing an ambitious project of this scale. Such an extreme policy measure is bound to take time and a more progressive outlook by all three entities of the government-the Presidency, the Senate and the House of Representatives. The drastic shift of ideology and policy under Donald Trump and a Republican Senate headed by Senator Mitch McConnell provide enough evidence to suggest that finding a middle ground with the Democrats is not an option for them. President-elect Biden's promise for bipartisan cooperation seems to be more of an ideal dream than a plausible political reality.

What must also be considered in the political spectrum is the impact of the gross mismanagement by the Trump administration with regard to climate policy.

The wildfires of California in July 2020 were a harrowing reminder of just how damaged the environment is and how little we have been doing to prevent it from destruction. There has been a change in the perception of the Green New Deal since early 2019 when the bill was first introduced. From marginal support within the Democratic party to becoming a major point of debate in the presidential elections, the resolution has gained political leverage. With one of its signatories, former California Senator. Kamala Harris as the next Vice President, laying a foundation for the Green New Deal's provisions seems more likely. President-elect Joe Biden seems more open to making the preliminary \$3 trillion investment to lay the groundwork for technological development to move towards a cleaner environment. While these investments might seem like a huge sum, the consensus has been that spending trillions of dollars for preventing the climate catastrophe predicted by the UN report on climate change in 2019 is better than spending much more on damage control after things have gone out of hand.

These sudden and extreme taxation and policy changes will take time but are not impossible. Despite the divisive political environment, the changes at the top of the political order are a ray of hope for a more sustainable, environmentally friendly approach to economic and social policy. What makes the implementation of the provisions somewhat more viable is the availability of the necessary technology. Experts across the country believe that while the timeline of the resolution (10 years) is a bit outlandish, the technology needed for facilitating a shift to a zero-carbon economy can be created and put into use within the next two to three decades. Policy experts and environmental engineers have been working on several plausible plans to put the climate plans into action in accordance with the resolution. If implemented correctly and diligently, the country can be made 100% carbon-free by 2050.

The Green New Deal has gained a great deal of voter support during the election campaign. A poll in the third week of October 2020 showed that around 64% of voters were in favour of the implementation of the provisions. A huge chunk of young voters have been especially supportive of the resolution, running awareness campaigns and spreading credible information explaining why it is so necessary. Its most vocal advocate in politics has been Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who said that it is "...one of the only plans that is actually in line with scientific consensus and the UN's IPCC report"

and that it "...creates the maximum amount of prosperity for working people and marginalised communities...". Thus, what must be understood is that climate change cannot be considered a partisan, divisive issue. It needs to be dealt with without the considerations of the campaign fundings that politicians receive from the fossil fuel industry or their own benefits from ignoring the effects of climate change. The Green New Deal is an attempt to curb climate change and global warming, while also ensuring that the disproportionate effects of these two phenomena are also reined in significantly to prevent major health hazards for the frontline communities. It is a unique proposition that, if followed seriously, could pave the way for a safer, healthier, and cleaner planet for generations to come.

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U.S. Presidential Elections: A Pause For Station Identification

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ABSTRACT

By the time one would read this essay, Joseph Robinette Biden Junior has been sworn in as the 46th President of the United States of America. Perhaps he has already signed a slew of ordinances to reverse some of the decisions of the Trump administration (The Quint). However, with better hindsight, one can grapple with the questions birthed by the election results better. The question posited here pertains to the role of values vis-a-vis electoral politics and political behaviour at large. To interpret it, turn to Biden's victory speech for the terms into which such values are coded. Relating those values to the outline of political trends would induce a rubric to address the question. It would also suggest a key variable that may affect the result within that constraint. Conceptualising the variable would then leave a plausible approach to delve into the aforesaid issue of values.

“Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives.”

- Nietzsche, 1861

Following this, consider two statements from Biden's acceptance. First, he called for an end to the 'grim era of demonetisation' (Raj). It responded to the stark polarisation in American political discourse, underlining the need 'to give each other a chance' (ibid.). Though deep ideological divisions were implied, the picture is more complex compared to the US Politics of the 60s and 70s.

This difference was encapsulated in the early fall of Bernie Sanders' as a Democratic Primary. His envisaged 'class' rally did not materialise. Instead, the Brookings study by John Hudak discovered a net loss in his performance

compared to 2016 (Hudak). The left, in general, had a lacklustre performance despite apparent popularity of issues like affordable health care and race. Nevertheless, the results were in line with the general trend of decline in voting along class lines (Mayer). Instead, matters of identity loomed large. The Labour rout in 2019 United Kingdoms' General Elections was also consistent with these findings; like a dress rehearsal for the failure of 'Democratic Socialists' in America.

Rise of Biden, on the contrary, was attributed to the colour coalition and integration of 'Never Bernie' and 'Never Clinton' votes (Herndon) (Pinto). Although the jury is still out on why and how this materialised, it catapulted the moderates to power. This brings us to the next highlight of Biden's speech: 'Americans have called upon us to marshal the forces of decency, the forces of fairness and marshal the forces of science, and the forces of hope in a great battle of our time.' (Feiner) On the surface, it is in line with his projected image of a 'healer' and unifier (Lindahl). At one level, it urges compromise, even reaching out to the other side, in contrast to his determination to reverse Trump's major policies. This could be interpreted as anywhere in between discrediting 'Trumpism' or taming Mitch McConnell by reaching out to moderate Republicans like Romney, to generate bipartisan support that can contain the radical elements of his own party.

However, reading his two statements together, two acute problems come to fore. First, of value-judgement in terms like 'decency', 'fairness' and 'hope', and second, more difficult problem of value-comparison of those terms as indicators of a desired situation vis-a-vis the 'grim era of demonetisation'. Whichever way the solution to them is approached; it will remain woven around the notion of Trump, Trumpism and the Republicans at large for some time. Thus, to understand them, studying their theoretical roots becomes imperative.

Given the dominance of the 'anti-intellectual' (Beres) strain on Trumpism, this exercise seems counter-intuitive at first. Nevertheless, it does have an understated academic base (Swartz). In theory, however, the links are across the board; the latest find being the Israeli writer Yoram Hazony (Beauchamp). These links are derived from the structures they are placed in. Hazony's link, likewise, is a product of globalised conservatism where the likes of Viktor Orbán, Netanyahu and Trump are seen to grow closer as a result of a growing

‘nationalist international’ against the Liberal-Progressive globalisation. Though the proposition is plausible, it is primordial at the moment.

A more continuous root is closer home in late Leo Strauss and the ‘Straussians’. The Chicago professor himself needs little introduction to those wise in the ways of political philosophy. He evokes reverence and revulsion in almost equal measure. As Kenneth Deutsch (et al.) notes some saw him as a ‘savant for the perplexed’, rescuing them from the ‘contemporary liberalism devoid of purpose and sense of duty’, while to others, he was a cultist who was bent on containment of relativists and nihilists and who questioned contemporary American egalitarian and democratic practice. Interest in him spreads across the political spectrum. He has been bequeathed titles like the godfather of neoconservatism, an anti-modernist and even an untimely liberal (Schiff) (Lilla). His enigma could be decoded elsewhere. Here, it is sufficient for the moment to consider that he was an unusual influence on the movement, and our understanding of ‘Trumpism’ would benefit more by understanding than critiquing his ideas.

The more problematic figures are his disciples [not necessarily students]: the Straussians. Though Strauss himself had little to do with them, like the diversity of his work, they came in different shades with substantive differences. Public glare fell on their present form after Strauss’ death in 1973, with the invasion of Iraq in 2004 under the Bush Administration. Those responsible seemed to be the ‘a secretive circle of advisors and public relations experts within White House and Pentagon, and among Supreme Court Justices, giving rise to all kinds of conspiracy theories and debates.’ The names included the likes of Clarence Thomas, Paul Wolfowitz, Abram Shulsky, Harvey Mansfield and William Kristol. Their Jewish sounding names also fuelled the conspiracy of the Zionist takeover of the US Government (Sporl). Their proximity to the seats of power made them identifiable as the ‘East Coast Straussians’. Strauss himself did not leave behind any body of work. The Straussians instead derived their notions from his interpretation of the [Western] ancient texts. One of their alleged notions was that elites had the ‘right and even the obligation to manipulate the truth’ like Plato in his use of ‘pious lies’. However, Gerhard Sporl found this attribution to Strauss misplaced and traced the link to other aggressive realist professors and peers of the then Chicago University. Strauss, to him, was a more secluded soul living amongst the philosophically sublime ancients (Sporl).

Nevertheless, it does help to somewhat explain the recent attempted mainstreaming of the vulgar conspiracy phenomenon from the supply-side. Meanwhile, people on political extremes have shown a great appetite for them (Prooijen). Within the government, the growing disconnect between Trump and administration's policies was often seen as a handiwork of Straussians, prominent being the case of National Security policy in 2017 (Drezner). However, the desired effect was never guaranteed. To the likes of QAnon, the news came across as 'evidence' against the 'American deep-state' instilled by liberals. Thus, for a vivid picture, consider the other side.

Carrying a similar Straussian legacy remains California's Claremont Institute. Dubbed by Jon Baskin as the academic vanguard of the Trump Administration, it is populated by the likes of Michael Anton and Charles Kesler. They are the 'West Coast Straussians' who gained notoriety for making a (neo) conservative case against the war in Iraq. They seek socially conservative grassroots activism and advocate ultra-nationalist-protectionist foreign policy' (Heer). The 'Flight 93 Election' (Anton) published in 2016 turned out to be a 'founding document of Trumpism' (Baskin). It held that Trump's vulgarity was 'a godsend' with which they could 'hang their public opposition on his obvious shortcomings' and 'ignore or downplay his far greater strengths'. It described the traditional conservative media as a 'nullity' and the alt-right as left's fall guys. Decrying third world immigration to the US, it further called for the construction of the Mexican border wall. The essay, in fact, posited the 2016 election, like 2020, as the 'final test' of any 'virtù' in the 'core of the American nation' (Anton).

This East-West divide was less intellectual than the original 'Crisis of Strauss Divided' (Jaffa) – a quarrel between academic heavyweights Harry Jaffa and Allan Bloom. Neither are they united in support for Trump. Their policies say more about them than Strauss. However, what they speak of this 'neo-conservative' sect is intriguing. The traditional conservatives have ritually attacked the postmodern left for their addiction to bring down the establishment. This habit, Baskin notes, seems to have spread to the right as well in the form of these 'Leo'-conservative 'Claremonsters' (Baskin). This preliminary understanding prompts us to see the contested nature of the value propositions in Biden's speech from a Trumpian perspective, and trace how the Republican [GOP] party that stressed 'character', 'family values', 'constitution' and 'law and order' came to endorse Trump's moral degeneracy, disregard for checks and balance, and politicisation of the executive. Prima-facie this has all

attributes of a hegemonic project that seeks to uproot the present social and state establishment for a concoction of their own. Enduring public support has helped them steam roll all opposition, especially within the party. Cases in point are the fall off Jeff Sessions and taming of Senator Lindsay Graham at the hands of Trump (Lemann).

The story could have been concluded had this been so straight forward a case. The Trump administration, unlike its predecessors, is more difficult to understand and partly the constructs applied to understand it has only added to the problem. He has attributes of post-modernism but incoherence and inconsistencies within postmodernism makes the decoding difficult and unreliable. His relativist reasoning is a challenge to the timeless morals derived from the foundation of the US constitution. 'Never has an American president located himself more squarely beyond good and evil.' This, according to Baskin, ill-fits the agenda professed by the 'Claremonsters' (Baskin). With the conclusion of the Trump administration, studying this phenomenon has become more difficult as support for Trumpism remains intact (Smith) while its locus in the White House is lost. Like the headless 'Hessian' from 'Sleepy Hollow', the direction of Trumpism has become more difficult to ascertain. While some hope for a restoration of the GOP after Trump, there are many, like Ted Cruz and Trump Jr. who can take the mantle of Trumpism. However, the hallmark of Trumpism has been 'not establishment' and there is no reason to believe that the Democrats cannot have a similar phenomenon of their own.

Here, engaging with Strauss than confronting him makes much sense. Machan and Melvin Rogers see him as a defender of liberal democracy rather than a neoconservative and esoteric (Machan) (Rogers). To them, he was more of a guard against the very need for esotericism in society than someone instilling it as a public virtue in Drury's more adverse presentation (Minowitz 219). Strauss' own take, in fact, problematised the premise of liberal democracy based on his first-hand experience of the fall of Weimar republic. His reading of Aristotle presented that the people had no epistemic base in knowledge and were guided by common beliefs or doxai. Thus, his political science, or rather political philosophy as he would have preferred, began from political opinions in context of controversies on vital issues of community well being. Latent in those issues were questions like who gets what when and how. These debates revealed that the choice of the regime was the most fundamental decision of a community and in turn the regime shaped the thoughts and practices of that

community. Thus, social phenomenon, for him, can only be comprehended in relation to the regime that shapes them, and engaging in those debates makes uncovers of the other competing regimes (Deutsch et al.). Thus, Biden's initial valuing of 'decency...fairness...and hope' will be shaped by the regime he finds himself in after Trump.

This reflects Strauss' larger considerations on human thought and Being where he puts Platonic essence in human creativity and impersonal natural forces at par with historicism of concrete dynamic context (Lawler). Back in his time, it shaped his attacks on the dominant orthodoxy of Behaviouralism, citing relativism in its fact-value dichotomy. Today, it may help to relate with the reality of polarised American politics and perhaps open up other possibilities. For instance, Strauss saw the need for such philosophy to permit the interaction and contest between Reason and Revelation (Sorensen), and Biden, in his victory speech, has said, 'The bible tells us, to everything there is a season' (ANI).

As one connects with the developments which have already occurred in the Biden Administration, if it seems that the new administration continues to reside in the rubric of fierce contest in values under the influence of Trumpism, as was for some time with the Modi administration after toppling the Congress (Koppikar), then it may be worthwhile to analyse with Strauss, how values shape the political controversies and people's behaviour, in turn re-imagining the associated matter itself.

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Role Of Memes In Politics And Its Impact On The Youth

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ABSTRACT

This essay attempts to demonstrate the impact of memes on today's youth, the role that memes play in making people who are uninterested in politics politically aware, in communicating various political issues, influencing the political perspective of the public and in motivating people to use their voting rights. This essay also analyses how political parties and leaders engage in sharing memes in order to reach out and relate to the youth and stresses on the rapid manner in which memes are created and shared prior to elections and how that gets conversations on politics started in the context of India and USA. This essay also explains the way in which memes, if not authentic, can spread misinformation and how that can impact our meme consuming youth in a drastic way.

Memes as a political tool

In the words of Doyle Canning who wrote the book, 'Re:Imagining Change' on using memes for political movements, "now politics is just a battle of the memes." In today's day and age, if you are interacting with social media, you are automatically interacting with memes. The word 'meme' was coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book 'The Selfish Gene' to explain the way cultural information spreads. Dawkins drew a parallel between memes and genes, because like genes, memes also carry and disseminate information, are replicated and are circulated from one person to another, and they have the ability to advance, mutating at random and experiencing natural selection. Primarily, a meme is a type of idea regarding a particular event or phenomenon, laced with undertones of humour that spreads through the

internet, and usually through social media platforms. Fundamentally, memes combine humour and relatability which work on and appeal to the youth in a way that long-winding facts and figure-laden analytics cannot. The history of humour being used as a coping mechanism can be traced back to the stories and pictures in Anti-Nazi comics but the tendency of Millennials and Generation Z to approach serious issues with jokes add another layer to political discourse. It's all just a part of how our generation understands and acknowledges the reality around them. The language of social media is not like other forms of traditional media, and the manner in which people now interact with this manifestation of media is something that could define our age. Pop culture now hugely affects political language. There's nothing that cannot be 'memed' today. Thus, memes have gradually become a universal language.

The entire phenomenon of memes began in the early 2000s when user generated content began to dominate the internet scene. Political humour for a long time has been an important part of political discourse in society. It not only attracts those who play an active role in politics, but also helps those who are apathetic in forming their opinions. Political memes can increase civic participation of citizens by expressing their political opinions and can be a part of debates which cannot be done through traditional mediums. Mostly, it acts like a primary source of information as digital natives read more news on the basis of the memes made on it. Given that memes are used as an instrument to persuade and convince citizens to vote for a particular political party, and also is used as a political weapon to woo first time voters. Being exposed to political humour increases political attention and helps in learning about different governmental issues which in turn increases interest in national and international happenings. Political humour being a mix of humour and user generated content, includes the opinion of the masses and hence has a deeper impact on the audience. In this way, entertainment is used as a medium for helping people understand politics. The frequent manner in which memes are used in everyday online vocabulary explains the extent to which they help in influencing people's mindset towards the said issue and sometimes just reaffirm existing political leanings. Memes are now being called a new genre of political communication. Though it is hard to believe that memes that are shared on social media sites could really influence our political views but studies have concluded that the majority of the young population in countries

get their news on social media. The touch of humour in them is exactly what makes even the apolitical take notice of political happenings, further encouraging them to take a stance and form opinions. Jamie Withorne, a research assistant at the Middlebury Institute Centre for Non-proliferation Studies, believes that memes can be an important player in young people's news consumption. In a study conducted on whether memes really help raise political awareness among the youth, these are the reviews of the youths of our ages- Shriyam Dalal, a young Mumbai-based architect is of the view that, "Memes have definitely kept me informed about the latest happenings in India's politics and it's mainly through Facebook and memes that I get the latest news and happenings." Sandesh Samant who teaches at a college in Mumbai calls the culture of memes a "welcome change" as they connect with young people and help bring them into the political climate. Yamini Krishna, a PhD scholar in EFL University, Hyderabad says, "The youth loves to share funny and quirky memes, and by sharing memes, they find ways to engage with peers." This popularity of memes may however be attributed to the short attention span of human beings and especially the youth. For example, earlier last year when tensions between India and Pakistan reached an all time high, it resulted in an online warfare where comment sections of social media posts were filled with Indians and Pakistanis hurling abuses and colourful memes at each other. It is also important to note here that this political awareness does not necessarily translate into political preferences, i.e. it does not influence people to support or oppose a particular political party. Apart from its entertainment and informative value, memes have a rare direct impact on the political choices of the youth. Memes have also come to play an irrefutable role in election campaigns and politics. Political campaigners use memes as a mode of communication with the netizens, to help create public opinion and as a tool for propaganda. Memes, thus, function as modern embodiments of similar campaign tools used during the 1st World War, wherein artists were hired to create cartoons which could be publicised through posters and newspapers.

Use of memes in US elections (oldest democracy)

Political memes were used like never before during the 2012 US Presidential elections. Though initially, they were used just as a form of entertainment, the

purpose of these memes changed and became much more prevalent with the 2016 US Presidential elections. News headlines were dominated by memes and they were used to influence the political views of social media users. Millions were invested by Palmer Lucky, founder of Facebook's Oculus product in groups responsible for creating and spreading anti-Clinton memes. Donald Trump's controversial statements and celebrity feuds in competition with Hillary Clinton's more traditional political style was a golden opportunity for meme makers. One of the popular memes from the 2016 elections was the 'Bernie or Hillary?' meme where each candidate's stance on some amusing "issue" was below their pictures. These memes in a way fortify the candidate's existing cultural image and may subconsciously influence people who engage in this world of internet satire. Memes have the potential to be powerful in an era where likability can be a deciding factor in elections.

Although memes may not effectively determine political opinion, one cannot turn a blind eye to the role played by memes and social media in influencing political perspectives. It isn't a surprise, then, that in the 2016 US Presidential elections, when young voters were exposed to memes as a political tool on a large scale, they showed a record turnout. Therefore, memes have the potential to sensitize young adults to political news and events, subsequently influencing larger voter turn-out and aiding political mobilisation. Since the number of youth who go out to vote has the potential to sway the outcome of the democratic primary, the rise in the youth votes is no small feat. For instance in 2016, Sanders won 80% of the youth vote in New Hampshire and Iowa. Hence during the 2016 elections, memes were not just a means of entertainment, rather they became a tool to influence voters. Interestingly, there have been instances of politicians themselves creating or sharing memes. Hillary Clinton's tweet directing Trump to "delete your account" immediately became a meme, giving way to thousands of variations. Sometimes they can also be used as a form of propaganda, for example, Trump has retweeted various negative memes including one of him "eclipsing" former president Barack Obama and one of him hitting Clinton with a golf club. When politicians share memes they must also keep in mind its consequences and how it will be interpreted over time. Hillary Clinton's attempt to engage with young voters backfired when she tweeted "How does your student loan debt make you feel? Tell us in 3 emojis or less." It was criticised as condescending and a diversion

from her actual policy proposal to make college more affordable. As much as memes help in communicating with the youth, politicians must be careful so as to not get off on the wrong foot and face ridicule.

During the 2020 US Presidential elections, the internet had seen it all. The number and reach of memes have increased dramatically since 2016 and that will now likely be the trend henceforth. Since the past year has been very eventful, the meme masters have captured almost every moment that was meme worthy. Political memes reached a new pinnacle after the 2020 presidential debates. The candidate's interaction was just what was needed for state-of-the-art memes. The meme makers on the internet took it upon themselves to recap the debate's highlights through memes. Donald Trump, amid a pandemic, criticized Joe Biden for wearing "the biggest mask ever seen." The Internet did not spare this quote, and edited strange, big masks to Joe Biden's face. However, the best meme undoubtedly has to be Biden's iconic line "Will you shut up, man?" with multiple reiterations circulating the web due to its ridiculous relevance. Since the support of young voters is important for political parties, they need to connect to this age group even if it means joining the meme bandwagon. In an attempt to do this, Joe Biden reposted the meme clips from the debate. Andrew Yang, another presidential candidate, focused on his persona as a memeable person. Donald Trump on the offence, made headlines after tweeting out an ironic meme that reads "Biden for Resident" with the image showing elders in a nursing home. Trump's team has also strategically utilized memes in his last election and during his presidency.

Use of memes in Indian elections(largest democracy)

In the Indian context as well, memes on different political events and news have become popular. It is estimated that the 2019 Lok Sabha elections saw about one crore first-time voters, and to influence them, both opposition and ruling political parties, resorted to bombarding social media applications with different kinds of memes. Millennials all around the world are extremely fond of memes and it is no different in India. In a review conducted by The Print, these are the opinions of our youth with regard to the impact of memes. Rahul, an M.Sc. student from Chandigarh, says memes can explain any topic in a

simple manner. “Reading an article takes some time and effort. For example, Let us assume a pacesetter like Rahul Gandhi has said something funny about water and a meme is made for it. Most of the online users will understand the whole issue with just one look at that meme,” he says. Ghanshyam, who operates several pages on Facebook, adds: “People relate and react to political matters in a better way with the help of jokes and memes. Memes attract a larger audience, which ends up staying connected. Keeping people connected to a long political post is a tedious job.” IIT graduate P.C. Yadav says: “Election time is the best for creating and sharing memes. Often, one meme is enough to elucidate an entire issue. People don't have enough time to read and understand an in depth analysis.” Jay, a Delhi resident who reads tons of memes, says: “These memes often tell you about the character of every individual politician. For example, memes based on Arvind Kejriwal’s habit of speaking too much are funny. They fit in our daily lives too — for example, if a friend is talking a lot, we say ‘Don’t act like Kejriwal’.” In the years preceding the 2019 elections, memes played a huge role in creating a ‘Pappu’ image for Congress President Rahul Gandhi while glorifying Narendra Modi as a powerful leader. What set apart the 2019 elections from the 2014 one was the power and influence that social media exerted over the entire campaign. The opposition came together to present a united front and the BJP and its allies came up with its own war cry. The last year of the elections saw various events and the memes that were made in response to those events were as unapologetic to the Prime Minister as they were to Congress President Rahul Gandhi and other political leaders, which shows that memes capture all kinds of political leanings. There is never a dearth of issues in India to make memes on, so whether it was criticising the opposition rallying together, mocking the political ramifications of the standoffs between Kolkata Police and the CBI, Rahul Gandhi hugging the PM in Parliament or even PM Narendra Modi’s unintentional remark about the ‘radar’ during the Balakot strikes, memes took social media by storm. In an interview to DNA India, Ashish Merkhed, State head for IT and Social Media Head, Maharashtra BJP said, “The BJP has been utilising memes since the last 2-3 years. Memes will help us attract first and second-time voters, who frequently consume them on social media. Recently we posted a meme that garnered around 1200 shares and six lakh views. The important point is that we didn't even promote it. That is the power of memes.”

We have been getting extremely positive feedback on memes from youngsters, which we believe will also convert into crucial votes in the upcoming polls.” This reinforces the fact that memes in some way or the other have become a part of our political language and at least help in generating awareness among the youth, if not a political opinion.

THE DOWNSIDE OF THE IMPACT OF MEMES

While memes can communicate nuanced ideas, create a sense of cultural belonging and educate people in political matters, there is an obvious massive downside of memes that cannot be ignored. Memes can easily be misused to run false news during elections and therefore creating a specific image for a political leader and the common public then starts looking at them in that particular way. In this age of whatsapp forwards and fake news, the message spread through memes may be perceived as the truth. Even though the meme might be forgotten, the false narrative is consciously or subconsciously retained. It is very challenging to hold meme creators accountable as memes are open to interpretation and creators can get away with spreading false information. It all boils down to the amount of truth displayed. Memes offer a limited space for nuance which leads to oversimplification of issues and that in turn can lead to doubts concerning the veracity of a meme. Consuming politically incorrect and factually invalid memes can only add to the uninformed polarisations that we see breaking out all over social media. Since memes can rarely be fact-checked, creators can simply shrug it off as a harmless joke. Given the persuasive power of memes, their ability to spread rumours is frightening. This fear of disinformation, that can have grave consequences especially when people are not exposed to diverse opinions online, must be taken seriously “as young people have expressed that social media today is their primary source of news”. Terri Towner, an associate professor of Political Science at Oakland University is of the opinion that, ‘Humour can create cynicism and can increase mistrust in government and if you’re cynical about the government, then maybe you won’t consider being a public official or participate, and that’s concerning. What is that going to do for democracy?” (Makayla Gubbay) There’s no doubt that political memes can translate complex news stories into easily understandable posts, educating those who are

unaware, thus changing the way society views news. However, their risks are just as impactful as they can turn matters of importance into jokes with no credible information.

In conclusion, now that memes have become an inherent part of this generation's social media diet, they cannot simply act as humorous coping mechanisms and be separated from the sphere of politics. Memes today are a part of our culture and represent the character of the people creating and consuming them. Since it's a well established fact now that memes have the ability to disseminate authentic and genuine information, the meme makers as well as the consumers must take the responsibility upon themselves to create and consume politically correct memes. The youth of today doesn't just consume the superficial politics of memes since memes are one of the primary methods that they adopt to engage with politics. With the sort of power and influence that memes have in today's world, it is time to re-conceptualise them as the powerful communication tool they have come to be. Humour has always been an effective instrument in engaging the public in fields that might otherwise be of little public interest, and memes are no exception. The fact that memes have revolutionised the way we communicate via politics, cannot be denied. Ultimately the world needs to come to terms with the potential and influence of memes where memes are slowly replacing nuanced political debate. This essay, thus, has attempted to explore the essential role that fact-based and authentic memes play in communicating different political issues, making the youth aware of happenings in and out of the country, influencing the political perspective of the public and encouraging young voters to make use of their voting rights.

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Understanding Race Relations

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ABSTRACT

The recent COVID-19 is not the only threatening virus amongst us. The “Black Lives Matter” movement and George Floyd’s “homicide” by a man in uniform has turned masses against the authorities and people have come to the streets to demonstrate against the systemic racism that is rampantly spreading across the world. Racism as a concept has evolved from the biological sphere to include the social, political and religious spheres as well and has acquired what is understood as the ‘new racism’ or the ‘cultural racism’ that goes beyond biological markers of racism and focuses on other criteria. In countries like India, problems of caste and cultural differentiation question the evolution of hidden forms of racism that needs world attention.

“I am the least racist person in this room.” – Donald Trump

Race as a category for identifying and classifying humans, as we know today, came to be popularly used in the early 1700s. The trade of slaves from African countries to America and other European countries, forceful use of colonized people in wars, and passing racial legislations were on the rise. The problem of slavery was haunting almost all the under-developed countries. It was at this juncture in history that Abraham Lincoln came out as the abolitionist of slavery. Many people think that since Lincoln championed the cause of abolishing slavery, he was also against racism. However, his debate with his opponent for the U.S. Senate in 1858 says otherwise. In his speech, Lincoln has clearly mentioned that –

“I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and Black races...nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes... or intermarry with white people” (Lincoln 354).

No wonder African Americans got their voting rights as late as the 1960s. Much of this effort should be credited to Martin Luther King Jr. who worked against three evils throughout his life – Racism, Poverty, and War. Luther’s stand against illegal arrests, color segregation, humiliation of Black people in public spaces, and the over-all systemic racial discrimination against African Americans attracted many and gave his protest a mass appeal.

In other parts of the world, countries like Nazi Germany were devising gas chambers from the helm of political power for exterminating Jews as a race in Europe. The dreadful Holocaust of approximately 6 million people was unimaginably carried out because of deep-rooted hatred towards a particular race.

Fast forward to contemporary times, we need to understand the nature of racism that exists today at so many levels and in so many different ways. Racism has evolved from the biological sphere to include the social, political and religious spheres as well and has acquired what is understood as the ‘new racism’ or the ‘cultural racism’ that goes beyond biological markers of racism and focuses on other criteria. Imperialism and colonialism may have pushed the boundaries of racism further in countries like India, where a hidden form of racism had already existed since the Vedic age and continues to exist in the contemporary era. The Indian society has been a witness to the imposition of superiority of the ‘Aryan Race’ over the other, the subjugation of ‘lower’ castes like Shudras in the Varna system, practice of ‘untouchability’ and using racial epithets like “Chinky” to call out north-easterners.

The ‘Hidden Apartheid’ in India – Dalit Oppression

In India, there are two major social problems that have been impeding the development of an egalitarian society – the “politics of pain of the Dalits” and the “cultural difference (racism)” in north-east India. Let us have a look at each of these problems one by one.

In India, caste and the practice of untouchability have been the hidden apartheid which the international community has failed to acknowledge. According to some scholars, caste is synonymous to race because due to inter-caste marriages and blood mixing, there has been a change in breed and blood

which means that there has been a change in descent. Descent relates to blood lines and it is due to descent that caste can be related to race. The segregation of Dalits as chandalas, harijans, achhuts, and untouchables have been embarrassing to the universal picture of India yet the state has comfortably relegated the problem of caste to an “internal affair”. The ancient India’s Varna system or the social conditions put forth by Brahmanas towards Vaishyas, Sudras and untouchables are classic examples of racist formulations in a social setting. A king in those times could not belong to a caste “lower” than Kshatriyas. Inter-caste marriages were not allowed. All inferior duties were allotted to the lower caste. In fact, the population of ‘untouchables’ were not recognized in the Varna system itself! Even today, Dalits are considered as untouchables and face restrictions in marriages, dining, and even jobs. They are associated with the dirtiest jobs of scavenging and tanning and are prohibited from using wells, rivers and other public resources. (Karenga, 1985)

According to the report “Quest for Justice” published by National Dalit Movement for Justice, the rate of crime against the Dalits and Adivasi women have increased by 6% from 2009 to 2018. (The Hindu, 2020). The National Crime Records Bureau data has shown that there has been an increase of 7.3% in crimes against Scheduled Caste which includes Dalits. Uttar Pradesh has emerged with the highest number of cases against people belonging to Scheduled Caste. The recent rape cases in Hathras, Balrampur and Lakhimpur Kheri have forced people to question the systemic oppression against Dalits. (The New Indian Express, 2020)

The Indian state is a welfare state and has always stood against racism, colonialism, and Apartheid but its failure to deal with an entrenched system of oppression against the Dalits in spite of having constitutional mechanisms in place to deal with such oppressions have time and again proved India’s hypocritical position as an ardent believer of Gandhian principles and a supporter of Mandela. Currently, the tussle between the Indian state and Dalit activists is on the claim to see Dalit oppressions and caste as universal phenomenon and include caste as a fragment of race. The Dalit Movements have been attacking the UN to identify caste under the International Convention for Elimination of Race, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The attempts of globalizing the plight of Dalits have been

dominating the Dalit movements at present and Dalit activists have been looking forward to reinvent something close to Gandhian or Ambedkar's Dalit politics. (Visvanathan, 2001)

Cultural Racism in India

Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic dawned upon us, there has been an increase in racial discrimination against the north-easterners. Recently, a Manipuri-woman was spat on and was called 'Corona Virus' because she has different phenotypical features. (The Print, 2020) In another incident, a group of north-easterners were beaten in Kolkata after being harassed and mocked as 'Corona Virus' and were asked to leave the premises as soon as possible. This level of intolerance has only been increasing in the Indian mainland and the problem is not treated as racial discrimination, but rather is dismissed as a problem of cultural difference. In 2014, Nido Tania got into a fight with shopkeepers in New Delhi who called him 'chinky' and beat him badly until the police arrived. Later on, Tania succumbed to his injuries and died. This caused an uproar in the north-eastern region and forced the Delhi High Court to look into the matter. According to the High Court, there were cultural differences between different states of the country, but these cultural differences should not be sources of hatred and conflict, rather they should be harmonizing elements in a society. Here again we see that the problem of cultural racism was dismissed as mere 'cultural difference'. (Bora, 2019) After the Nido Tania case, the use of racial slurs was made unlawful. But even though racial slurs like 'chinky' may be unlawful in the country, it is still being used openly against north-easterners. The phenotypical features of north-easterners may be different, their culture may be different, but that does not mean that they are 'Mongolian', 'Chinese', 'foreigners' or 'traitors'. The activists against racial discrimination faced by north-easterners, just like Dalit activists, are fighting for justice and inclusion of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe under the purview of Article 1 of the International Convention for Elimination of Race, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. (Bora 2019) Just as Dalit activism and Dalit studies have been questioning Dalit oppression in all walks of life, the categories of tribe in India also need to carry out activism independent of caste.

The biological understanding of race needs to be crushed and cultural racism in India needs to be acknowledged.

Racism – A Legacy

The extermination of the Uighur Muslims in China and Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar reflect the static position of the world in terms of actual progress in evicting racism of all forms. The plight of Dalits in India and how North-East Indians are differentiated on their physical appearances and cultural distinctiveness need to be identified as racial oppressions. The recent killing of George Floyd by an officer in Minneapolis triggered an upsurge of mass protests against racism in the world, especially in the U.S. The famous ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement took to the streets, the internet, and the news channels. The movement also attacked the Former President of the United States, Mr. Donald Trump, for being a white supremacist, and not addressing racism in the nation as a head of state. The main aim of the Black Lives Matter movement is to eliminate all forms of racism that exist in the world.

In the final Presidential Debate, when asked about some of the racist tweets posted by Mr. Donald Trump, he very truthfully sidelined the matter by calling himself the “least racist” person in the room. Well, I do not understand what is more controversial – Trump calling himself the least racist or calling himself a racist?

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SECTION - III

**OPINION AND
CREATIVES**

Withstanding Power

Pritha Mukhopadhyay

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 162

I was once a man who pledged for peace
Had compassion for every victim of fleece
Was young and just and filled with Reese
To work for men and seek their release
In hindsight, I forgot to kill my greed
Alas, power corrupts indeed.

My might shall grow and fame follow
My grandeur and treasury overflow
Suck lives out of the destitute below
To quench my thirst through their sorrow
Upon countless sinless souls did I feed
Overpowered by my greed

I see what's happening everywhere
Teachers butchered like pigs and hare
The rebels held in iron snare
Spineless crowds will stand and stare
I see it all and still don't care
For I need more innocent lives to bleed
How else shall I, survive the lie;
Built on my power and misdeeds?
Yet cannot relinquish my greed
Power corrupts indeed!

Neo-Newspeak World: Reflections On Suppression In Contemporary World

Deepalika Deb

Second Year(PLSA), Roll No.- 145

“The mutability of the past is the central tenet of Ingsoc”

- George Orwell, 1984.

This essay advances my opinion on the rampant shielding of facts, illicit layering out of contestations, and the use of sanctioned violence towards protestors. In this essay, it is not my intention to identify and ambush a regime or a Government of a particular state. Instead, it presents my disagreement on the idea of repression and concealment of dissent. The incidents that I have put forth are merely suggestive examples, and not my biases or of any other.

George Orwell, in 1984, first postulated the literary term of a fictional language ‘Newspeak’, which in the text commences the deletion of the publicized language and formatting a new speaking vocabulary without containing any word of contrast or dissimilitude – in a setting of an extremely authoritarian regime in a deficit of fundamental rights of life, property, equal status, personal freedom of thought, expression, opportunity, safety, etc. It is from here that I propose to present a Neo-Newspeak picture of the contemporary world. Although not centered around a terminologically-fixed authoritarian state, my endeavour is to explore the landscapes of democratic nations where although the rights have been constituted, there is the curtailment of opposition and protest voices by sanctioned offenders [generally, the police forces and other law-watchers] with close to no media coverage of the same.

In recent times, dissent has drifted away from the wave of air due to extreme suppression of opinions and has lost itself amidst the shouts of the indoctrinated conformists. In my belief, it’s always the powered minorities with their propaganda who get the majority of the support untainted and unchallenged. Dissident vocalization can at the most spur momentary defiance

to the transgressing draft resolutions and laws passed by the legislators, yet most of the time it hardly affects the final judgments. It is mostly because the regime in power is almost intolerant to opposition, uses means of threats and arrests of leaders as well as protestors to prevent institutionalized opposition from pressure groups, interest groups, unions of students and workers, etc. Major political opposition parties do little here. In fact, they often fall into the same ocean of greed and political intolerance when in power, and at times mould their propagandas the same way. For instance, one of the most serious anti-government protests has been observed in Belarus (in 2020), where the government has been held guilty of election rigging. Furthermore, widespread and repetitive suppression, human rights violation, detention, ‘disappearances’, elimination of protestors, and so forth have been the major highlights of the government’s attempt to interdict disagreements on the part of its citizens. The United States of America has recently witnessed the upswing of one of its historic movements against systemic racism with the George Floyd protests and the re-advancement of the Black Lives Matter movement which have been highlighted since the beginning of the 21st century. Even during the protests, the protestors were victims of constant harassment from the government officials and police forces. There have been numerous cases of police resorting to bullet guns to inflict pain on the protestors, which according to my judgement is seemingly out of order and a clear violation of their authorization. In the promise of a remedy, more brute force was intensified - which led to distrust among the protestors against the sanctioned peace-keepers.

Alternate political expressions, too, have always been subjected to criticism from the supporters of the authority at the centre. Often in libertarian and far-Right states, and in socialist states too, supporters of a contrasting ideology are detained for unjustified reasons. The outreach of media is extensive, and to curtail that, legislatures often propose to regulate media content, even in those states which outline press freedom. Examples of these through the pages of history are numerous. The End SARS (Special-Anti Robbery Squad) Protest in Nigeria is one particular ongoing instance of protest, wherewith numerous protests over social media, the legislators and governors of the states have proposed the censorship and strict regulation of social media to prevent spreading of ‘fake news’. This encapsulates what Orwell phrased as

“mutability” where the ‘truth’ (news and facts) w liable to change according to the situation. Mutability is so rampant and repetitive that it becomes habitual and convincing. Such ‘firehosing’ can be represented in the event of Demonetization in India that was initially validated to expose black money, and then later to expand the tax base. Unfortunately but evidently, it was a failure, and even though questioned, remained unanswered with mended facts.

Opposing and dissenting are not ‘thought-crimes’, but contributions to the existing ways that would assist and not imprison variant views and demands. How to get the center to pause the suppression of opposition? This is in-fact a question that I wouldn't be able to answer with limited words, without action and insufficient research. However, I keep this subjective, as long it is ethical, it is in my belief that opposition of all kinds should be heard, and modest explanations must be given by the legislatures and regimes even if it doesn't plan to accommodate.

Waiting On The World To Change...

Tithi Sen

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 144

“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own”

-Audre Lorde

“Your father/husband allows you to do this?”

A woman's identity for generations has been defined and validated by the men in her life. From being the ‘daughter of’ to the ‘wife of’, we are taught from the very beginning that our identities are ascribed and not achieved. Owing to this, women seldom develop an autonomous sense of social or political identity of their own.

Society is responsible for creating a sense of dependence that is obvious yet implicit. The notion that a woman cannot possess an identity that is exclusively hers, is embedded in the minds of the people. What is it about an empowered woman that threatens society so much? Why do we always feel the need to ‘tame’ her and bring her down?

“Don’t be so aggressive! A woman should be nurturing.”

In recent years, we have witnessed several women reclaiming power from the clutches of society. These women, through their minor acts of defiance, have rebelled against the dictates of society and have successfully established ownership of their identities. However, instead of being praised for their achievements, these individuals have received substantial backlash from society by virtue of their gender. Trailblazing women such as Fatima Sheikh, Tarabai Shinde, Natalie Wood, Marilyn Monroe, who, in the past have attempted to reject the stereotypes of gender roles and assert their individuality were criticised and labelled as unsuitable role models, endorsing unacceptable

behaviours. This conveniently relegated the rest of us to the position of defeated soldiers, who wouldn't dare come in the line of fire. The sense of fear is surreptitiously instilled in the minds of women. It works as a shackle, ornamentally placed around our ankles preventing us from progressing towards societal freedom. Women feel the need to dial down their identity for the sake of appeasing those around them because, in the end, they are always perceived as the 'daughter of' or the 'wife of'.

"Empowering women is important but your safety comes first."

Women's position in society has undeniably improved over the centuries and the battle continues against the repressive and ever-evolving Patriarchy. Despite all of the victories, the paternalistic treatment of women and their identities continues to be relevant in society. The constant reminders of 'protection' and the need for 'security' act like small pins being stabbed into our backs every time we cross the threshold set for us by society. The association of femininity with weakness and helplessness conveniently undermines women's requirement of an autonomous female identity. The idealisation of women as symbols of sacrifice and selflessness in countries like India helps further the societal agenda of setting unrealistic standards of expectations from women vis-a-vis their male counterparts.

"Our empowerment does not undermine yours."

The empowerment or recognition of the female identity does not serve the interests of the power holders in the state or society. The world has been tailored to fit the requirements of the privileged male section of the elite few in society, thereby ignoring the needs of the rest of the humankind. Basic essential needs of women are considered a luxury. There has been put into place mechanisms that help apprehend any form of growth or change in the position of women in the socio-political milieu. However, this suppression, in recent years, seems to have boomeranged and become a stimulus for change.

“Our identity is not yours to define.”

Women have vigorously taken to social media and media in general to express their identities. Platforms, which have ironically been used to objectify and marginalize us for generations. The media has also been infamous for assigning derogatory labels to these women for being outspoken. However, some brave women valiantly wear these labels or stigma awarded to them, as their self-worth and dignity is no longer dictated to them by society. The expression of the female identity is taking form in the most unpredictable and creative ways and this is just the beginning. Be it social media platforms or political protests on the streets, women are ready to be heard. Women are wielding the potential of social media, to create their identity which has not only given them power over self-expression, but also a sense of control over their identity. Strong women leaders such as Indra Nooyi, Chanda Kochhar, Zia Mody, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jacinda Ardern, Kamala Harris to mention a few, have substantially asserted their identity and power in highly misogynistic environments, thus providing hope for a whole generation of young girls. Women and men no longer fear speaking up against their perpetrators on various platforms in the form of ‘call-out’ posts (where individuals take to the internet to oust their perpetrators). Social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Reddit have helped connect women across the globe, thereby creating a global community of women who are united in their endeavour for social change. These communities have naturally provided a safe space for women and men alike to express themselves without the fear of judgement leading to the creation of highly impactful movements such as the “#MeToo” and “#WomenSupportWomen”. Social media helps to engage its users in a dialogue and this in turn strengthens the feminist movements. The resounding success of the “#MeToo” in the USA (the case of Harvey Weinstein) is testament to the collective power of women. Though these movements have not had the same impact in the more conservative societies, however, the awareness that it has created is a step forward nonetheless. We are no longer merely going to remain the ‘wife of’ or the ‘daughter of’ men in our lives. There will come a day when a woman's identity will be hers alone.

“We are feminists and we proudly believe in equality.”

No matter how deplorable the situation may appear, all is not lost and there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. The female identity shall not stay repressed forever. Like an ember in the ashes, the fighting spirit keeps growing in the women across the globe. The issue of the female identity transcends all borders and is something that affects us all. The struggle for equality, representation and identification are manifold. The years of conditioning do not disappear in a moment. Women must take responsibility to educate those around them and help unlearn years of conditioning and bias. We need to realise that we are not alone in our struggles. The girl we sit next to on the bus or the lady who stands at the corner of the street selling flowers is plagued by the same problems. We must wrest power and take control over what is rightfully ours.

The fight is not against any one individual or entity. Both the state and society are equally responsible for curbing our identity. The triviality with which the female identity is treated can be understood by the lack of political rights accorded to them. The basic respect for being an individual or an entity is not accorded to them. This may seem alarming or even shocking to most of us but it is the reality of several women even now.

The state and society manufacture individuals who unquestioningly follow the norms and rules meted out to them. It does not show mercy to those who stray or rebel. Hence, it is always less troublesome to let the status quo continue as we all are averse to change. The silent apathy on the part of the community is deafening and needs to be brought to an end for the sake of these suppressed identities. It is important that people stand up against this grave injustice that these women face on a day to day basis. The current social narrative will only undergo a transformation when we're all equally empowered and accepting of each other.

North East India- A Land Neglected And Misunderstood

(An open letter from an Indian residing in North East India to the people of mainland India)

Monalisa S Hereh

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 130

Dear brothers and sisters,

Through this letter, I would like to draw your kind attention to a few pertinent issues affecting the lives of the people of the North-East. First of all, a brief introduction of the North-Eastern region and its geography, natives and cultures, is very important for understanding the aforesaid issues.

The North-East region comprises the state of Sikkim and the seven sister states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It is a land of gripping scenic beauty formed by high hills, cascading waterfalls, undulating streams, serene lakes, vast green plains and exotic flora & fauna. It is regarded as one of the most beautiful and mysterious parts of India, inhabited by equally fascinating people, untouched by modernity or else its authenticity spoiled by sudden encounter with it. Some of the well known landmarks of the North-East are: the Kaziranga National Park (world famous for its one horned rhinoceros, Majuli (the largest riverine island of the world), Living Roots Bridges, Loktak lake, Kamakhya temple, Tawang Monastery among many others. An interesting fact to be noted here is that the North-East is the only part of India where World War II was fought. Many Indian soldiers of the INA (Indian National Army), under the leadership of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, laid down their lives fighting the Imperial Japanese Army. The INA memorial at Moirang near Imphal and the war cemetery at Kohima are an indelible testimony to their supreme sacrifice for India.

The North-East is bounded in the north by the great Himalayas and in the East by the Patkai Hills. People (mostly tribals) are ethnologically and culturally not much different from the Tibetans and the Mongoloids. More than 200 tribes with their distinct languages, attires and cultures live in this region. Some of the prominent tribes are: the Apatani, Nyishi, Adi, etc. of Arunachal Pradesh; the Angami, Ao, Kuki etc. of Nagaland; the Khoibu, Maring, Rongmei, etc of

Mizoram; the Khasi, Garo, Jaintia of Meghalaya; the Tripuri, Riang, Chakma, etc of Tripura; and the Boro, Dimasa, Chutia, Sonowal, Tiwa, etc. of Assam. Mask dance is a common feature of these tribes like pulong cholom from Manipur, Satriya Nritya from Assam, Naga Dance from Nagaland and Bamboo Dance from Mizoram etc. Whether it is the food habits or attires, everything is different and distinct from each other. Any tradition or cultural practice is always performed as a community. Therefore, the community life seen in these regions is very strong and is what binds them together.

Having said that, we must revert to the issue at hand- the problems plaguing the North- Eastern part of OUR country. The difficult terrain of the region has been a hurdle in the construction of proper roads and railway systems. The region is beset with internal tussles between various ethnic groups, each striving hard to maintain its distinct identity, to be recognised and given its due. The issue of continuous illegal infiltration of Bangladeshis into the region is real and dangerous. Due to government apathy, no tangible economic development –by way of infrastructure development and setting up of major industries- could be seen for many decades. This has resulted in growing unemployment among the educated youth who have resorted to violence in order to be heard and recognized.

As a result, the people of the North–East have generally felt neglected, misunderstood and ill- treated by their fellow countrymen. It is observed that the rest of India knows very little about the North-East region and its inhabitants. Their ignorance about North-East is due to the lack of sufficient information and coverage by the Print media and Television channels. The little that trickles out from the media is mainly negative in nature- news about bomb-blasts, insurgency, ambush, killings, kidnappings etc. The burning issues of the North-East, like the under-development of the region, unemployment, reasons for insurgency, illegal Bangladeshi infiltration etc. have not been highlighted in the correct perspective. The negligence of both the Central and State Governments in projecting and highlighting the issues of the region have also contributed towards the ignorance of the mainland Indians about the North-East.

The immediate fall out of this situation is that much misinformation about North- East has been gaining ground which has engendered a sense of dislike for individuals belonging to the North-East region. The victims of this dislike are generally the young students and migrant workers from this region, who have migrated to some of the major cities of India for higher studies and job opportunities. In 2014, Nido Tania, a young student from the North-East was

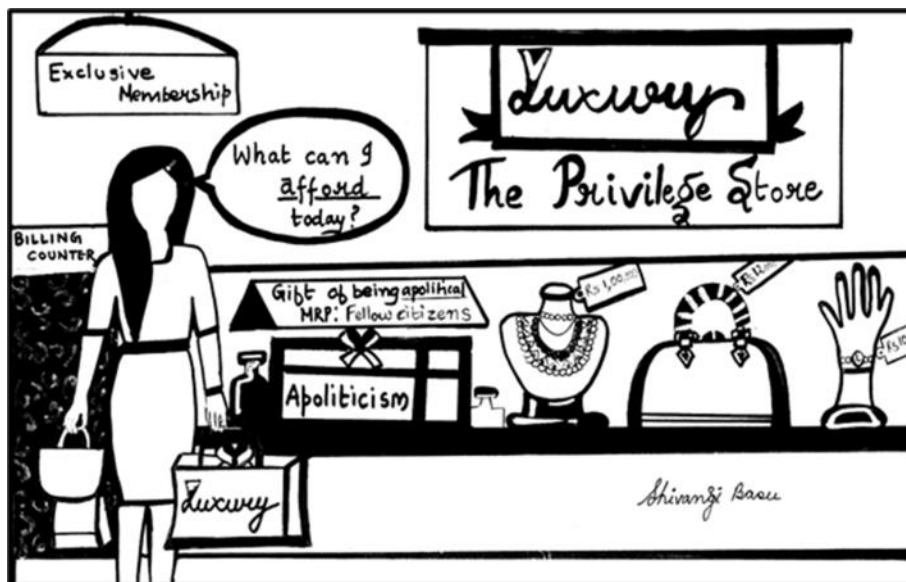
beaten to death in New Delhi owing to his distinct physical appearance. In Bengaluru, another student from Arunachal Pradesh was made to lick the shoes of his landlord. In Goregaon, two students from Nagaland were brutally tortured for hours by some locals, in order to teach them a lesson that they do not belong here. Many have been denied entry or accommodation into hotels, because they did not “look like Indians”. Owing to their different look, people of the North-East are often addressed using slurs like, ‘Chinki’, ‘Chinese’, ‘Nepali’ etc making them victims of racism in their own country. Of course, it is worthwhile to mention that the people of other parts of India have also encountered a hostile reception while in the North-East. However, these sporadic incidents are mainly due to ignorance and disrespect of local cultures by the visitors from other parts of India.

The negligence of the North-East by successive governments has greatly hurt residents of the North-East. It is true that in the past a few stray initiatives have been taken up by the governments for the development of the region but these have not proved sufficient. The present Government has given thrust to the infrastructure development in the North-East through its 'Act East' policy. It's my belief that more and more result-oriented steps such as exposure of the North-East in National events and functions, and organising more interactive programmes & cultural exchanges, are required to bring the North-East into focus. The government needs to review its policy of pacification in dealing with various intra-ethnic struggles and moves for independence by various ethnic groups. This will go a long way in ending continuous separatist movements and usher in lasting peace and stability in the region.

Finally, North-East India has many famous personalities in various fields such as singing, acting, politics, sports etc. Some of these famous personalities have not only made North-east India proud but have also made the whole of India proud. Bhupen Hazarika (singer), Bhogeswar Baruah (athletic), Danny Denzongpa (actor), P A Sangma (politician), M C Mary Kom (boxing), Baichung Bhutia (football), Hima Das (athletic) etc. have excelled in their fields and made India proud. The people of India have readily and heartily recognised their achievements and accepted them as one of their own. Let us remember that the people of the North-East are very proud to be Indian. They are as Indian as you are. Your acceptance of this fact and a little effort to know more about the North-East and its people will go a long way in creating a congenial atmosphere for your fellow compatriots so that they can feel and grow as an integral part of this great country, India.

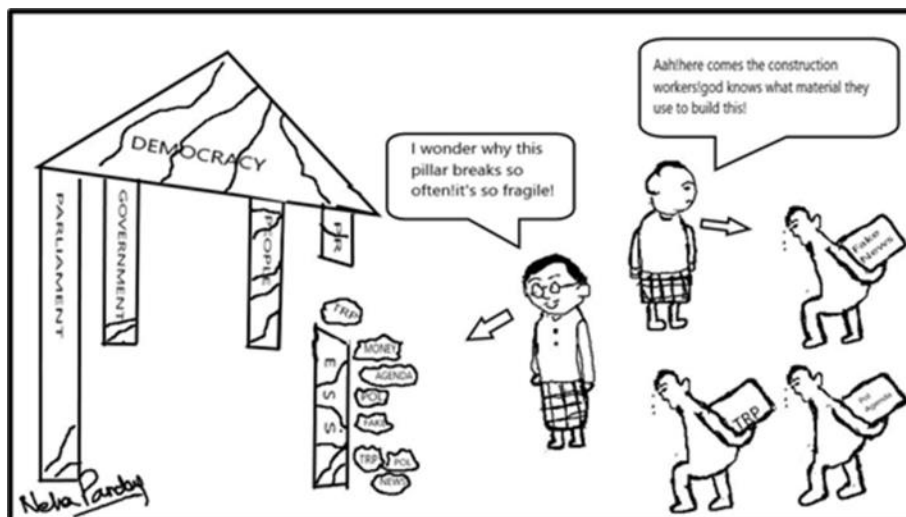
Yours truly.

POLITICAL CARICATURES



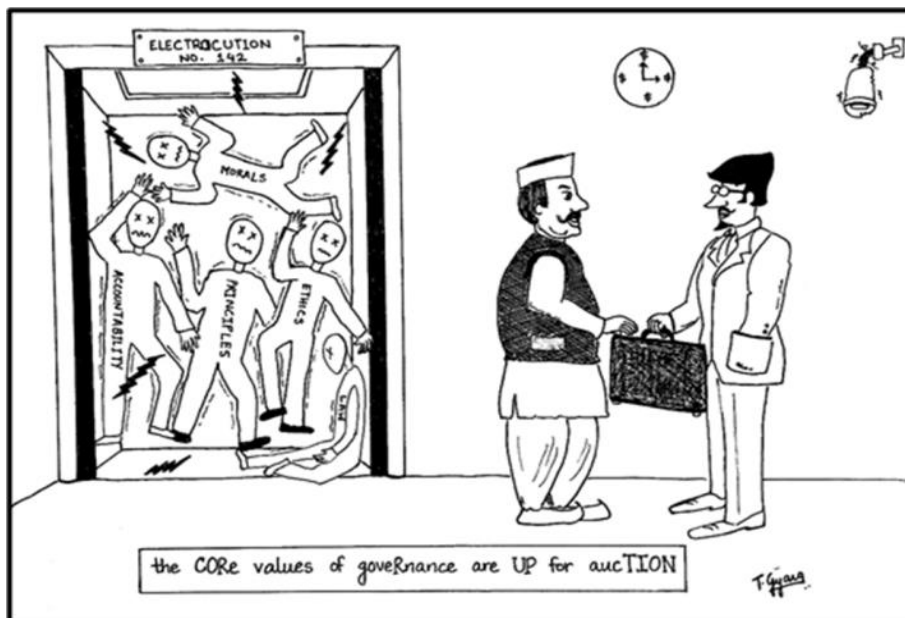
Devils Wearing Prada > Devils in Politics

Shivangi Basu, Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 110



A Slant Media is Unhealthy for the Realization of Democracy

Neha Pandey, Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 138



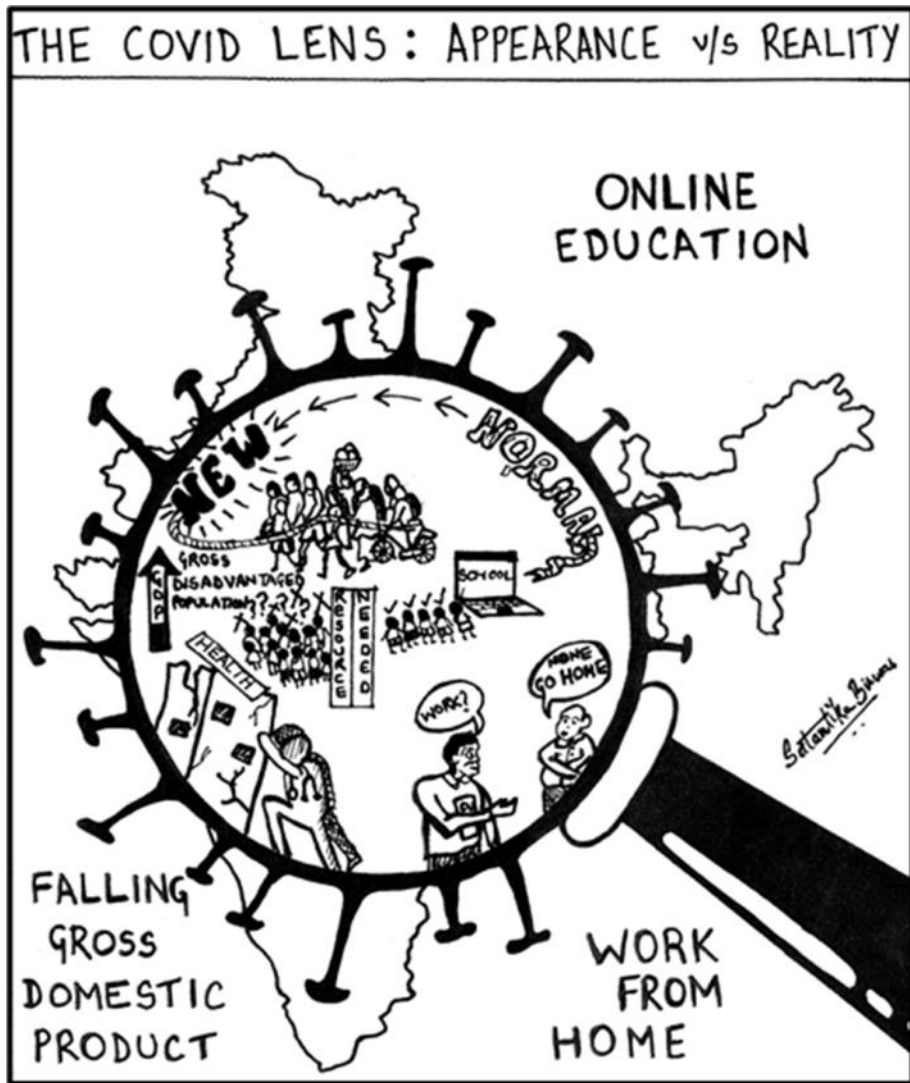
The CORE values of goveRnance are UP for aucTION

Tanaz Gyara, Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 159



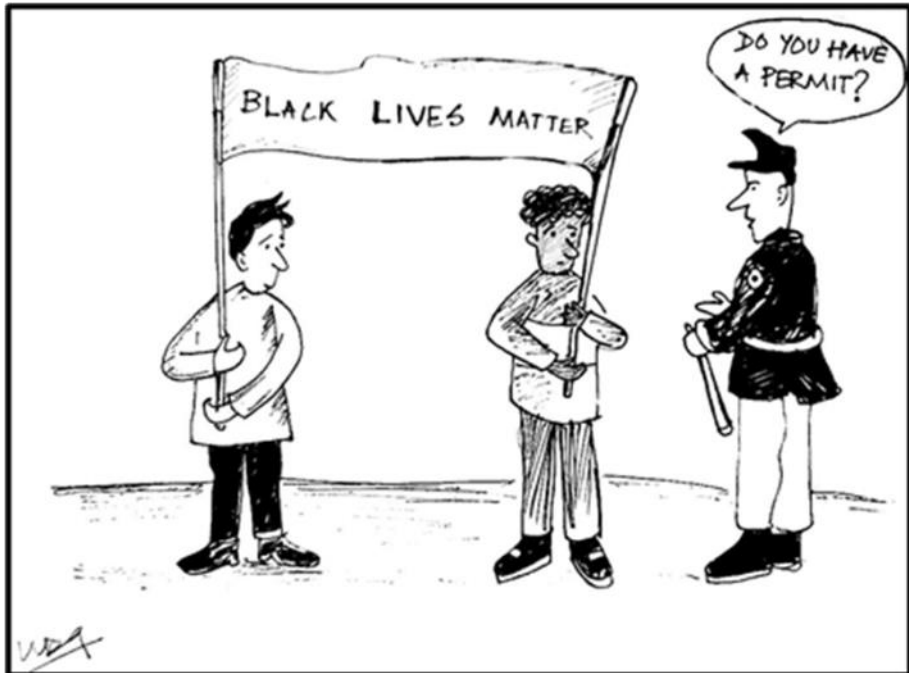
Campaigning- Two peas in a pod

Veronica Shrabanti Tarafdar, Second Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 110



The COVID Lens- Appearances versus Reality

Satantika Biswas, Second Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 106



Black Lives Matter- Do you have a permit?

Upasana Dasgupta, Third year (PLSA), Roll No.- 142

