



POLITIQUE



Postgraduate & Research Department of Political Science
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata

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POLITIQUE

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RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



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2023

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From the Principal's Desk

PRINCIPAL
ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)



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FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

I am extremely pleased to learn that the Postgraduate Department of Political Science is publishing the seventh edition of its annual departmental journal, 'Politique'.

'Politique' has always been an embodiment of flourishing thoughts and introspections of the students pertaining to the conflagrant issues of the society. The exclusive trait that the journal has acquired in this edition is immensely appreciated as it is not compartmentalized anymore to the field of Political Science rather has transcended the discipline boundary. Thus, it has invited contributions from the Department of English, Sociology as well as B.A. General.

I congratulate all the faculty members and students, for their determination and hard work in bringing together diverse socio-political perspectives in this journal.

I sincerely hope that this intellectual endeavour continues in the years to come. Nihil Ultra!


Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ
Principal
St. Xavier's College
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Kolkata-16

From the Vice-Principal's Desk

THE VICE-PRINCIPAL
Arts and Science Department
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From the Vice-Principal's Desk

I must commend and congratulate the Postgraduate Department of Political Science for the sustained enthusiasm and sincerity with which they constantly attempt to enhance their academic excellence. *Politique 2022-23*, 7th edition of their annual departmental journal, is evidence of this.

The journal, from its genesis, has set and maintained academic quality and integrity. This time round, the journal has broadened its scope by focusing on interdisciplinary investigation and research in other academic areas including society, law and culture.

These new directions will seed new enthusiasm and excitement which will incentivize students to develop their skills and abilities for rigorous research and critical thinking and writing.

Prof Bertram Da'Silva

Vice-Principal
St. Xavier's College
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Message from the Dean of Science

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Message from the Dean of Science

I applaud Postgraduate Department of Political Science for successfully releasing the 7th edition of their annual department journal, *Politique* 2022-23.

The cumulative endeavour of the students and professors in uplifting the academic standard of the Department is extremely commendable. The quality of articles with their interdisciplinary nature, is praiseworthy.

My best wishes to the Department in its continued efforts to enlighten young in the field of research and may it bring greater glory to the College.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line.

Dean of Science
Arts & Science Dept.
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Message from the Dean of Arts

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Message from the Dean of Arts

I congratulate the students and faculty members of the Postgraduate Department of Political Science on the publication of their annual departmental journal "*Politique*".

The department has been evolving steadily in terms of student enrolments, entry of new faculty, launch of new academic programmes, research productivity and internships among students in spite of the 'unusual years' that we have lived through in the recent past. The themes outlined in this journal reflect the critical thinking of the students in understanding and addressing the challenges that have arisen in the past and that we will face in the future. I am certain that this academic exercise has refined the potential of the students enabling them to develop creative solutions that we urgently require. I am confident that this attempt at knowledge sharing will continue in the years to come.

Farhat Bano

Dr. Farhat Bano
Dean of Arts
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Message from the Head of the Department

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From the HOD's desk

It gives me immense pleasure to announce the seventh edition of our departmental journal *Politique*. The journal reflects the academic enthusiasm, passion and vigour of our students in bringing towards diverse political, social and cultural perspectives.

The themes selected by our editorial team reflects the ability of our students to identify and deliberate issues that reflects interdisciplinary research acumen. I congratulate each and every member of the editorial team for their sincerity, endeavour and coordinated effort in bringing together this journal.

I extend my gratitude to the faculty members for their support and cooperation.

I wish the department success in all future endeavours.

Jhumpa Mukherjee
Dr. Jhumpa Mukherjee
Head
Department of Political Science
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous)
Kolkata



Message from the Editorial Board

We are immensely pleased to unfurl before you the seventh edition of our annual departmental journal of the Postgraduate Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata, 'Politique' 2022-2023.

Politique, since its inception, has always been the embodiment of enriching introspections of the students of the Department and also aims to be an extravagant exemplary of students' contributions reflecting their thoughts and research capabilities on the most leading-edge issues of contemporary relevance. Politique contains the valuable contributions of the students in terms of research articles, opinion pieces as well as interesting caricatures of political importance. However, the new-fangled pathway that Politique 2022-23 has laid down is its interdisciplinary nature, i.e., Politique is no more constrained rather has transcended the disciplinary boundaries and encompassing the other areas of social sciences.

The Editorial Board of Politique 2022-2023 has begun their functioning in September, 2022 and we are extremely happy to be able to present you our journal on the occasion of the most awaited event of the Department, Sansad 2023, a facsimile of students' discourse and deliberation on the most galvanizing issues of the present political scenario. For this edition, we have received a wide range of submissions to adorn the journal but it is the inability of the board to accommodate every submission to the journal owing to its dearth of space. However, we are truly obliged to each and every author who have attempted to contribute to Politique, irrespective of whether their pieces have been published or have not been published in the journal. We whole heartedly believe that every contribution is valuable and can never be measured through any stringent yardstick.

We are immensely grateful to our respected Head of the Department, Prof. Dr. Jhumpa Mukherjee for constantly guiding us throughout the journey as well as the entire faculty of the Department for assisting us in every step while sorting through the most desirable articles that will enrich the quality of the journal. We truly hope that you find the contents of the journal extremely enriching and interesting.

Warm regards,
The Editorial Board
Politique 2022-2023

EVENT REPORTS

EVENT REPORTS

The Department of Political Science has witnessed an illustrious rejuvenation after the Covid-19 pandemic, setting forth a benchmark of academic excellence riddled with numerous engaging events. The department has always aimed to prepare a flourishing pulpit for purposeful research, thus promoting a holistic approach with diverse and hitherto unexplored perspectives.

Special Lectures and National Webinars

A very insightful conference was organized by the department on the 27th September, 2022 wherein a special lecture was delivered by Prof. Sudipta Sen, Professor of History and Middle East/ South Asia at the University of California, especially arranged to commemorate the 250th birth anniversary of the visionary Raja Rammohun Roy. This was coincided with the celebration of our numerous historical leaders and their contribution to the making of a glorious, progressive India, under the banner of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', flagged by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Prof. Sen introduced his central theme of Roy's distant promise that he carried with himself to England in his last days, where he lived with the promise and strived for its fulfilment. Prof. Sen then made his 'promise' of returning to the core theme at the end and began his address talking about the several portraits of Rammohun Roy which were crafted a year or two before his demise. The significance of which lies in the perception of Roy by the then contemporary English artists and also how Roy wanted himself to be presented and perceived. Prof Sen also provided a detailed description of how revered and admired was Rammohun Roy in England, like no other Indian before. He further commented on how Roy made his 'last act, last staging and final exit' after favouring a delegated rule of the company with proper checks and balance in the absence of a self-governing body for India. Prof. Sen clarified that Roy's promise was 'distant' in two senses, as he struggled for that 'promise' in a distant foreign land and also 'Liberty' was still a distant dream. Prof. Sen was strictly cautious against the prefix 'Bahadur' in Roy's name, on his tomb in Arnos Vale Cemetery which he termed as a 'shame' and an 'insult' because Roy led his life from an independent position, not representing either the East India Company or the British

Government. He instead represented the 'fallen' Mughal Royalty and the dignity, autonomy and aspirations of liberty of his people and his land. The end of the lecture witnessed several noble observations and intriguing questions-concerning the aspects of racism that Roy might have been subjected to in England, the case of Sati and Roy's view point regarding the history of India and Europe, which were aptly and graciously answered by Prof. Sen.

The National webinar on 'Emerging Trends in the Party System in India' (24th March, 2022), organized by the department is also extremely noteworthy. It was delivered by the renowned speaker Dr. Manisha Madhava, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai.

Research Scholars' Presentation Series

The department for its already set objective to forge academic and skilful all-round development of the students, has organized the Research Scholars' Presentation Series in the year 2022 wherein enriching presentations were delivered by doctoral researchers from across the globe to speak on their research projects and undertake interactive sessions with the students. The series was inaugurated by the deliverance of Mr. Avishek Jha, a very skilled PhD scholar from University of Melbourne, held on 28th September, 2022 and then followed by Ms. Mayuri Banerjee, a researcher at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, (New Delhi) on 9th November, 2022.

Mr. Jha had very meticulously delivered a lecture on Young People's Affective States, Agency, and Inequalities in Meerut (India) and enlightened the students by a very interesting interaction session with regard to the probable crisis today's young generation is encountering such as lack of voice, agency and social acceptance. It was then followed by his meticulous explanation of how one is ought to conduct research, i.e., the various research methods like adoption of ethnography, evaluating the means of beliefs that youths undertake to deal with their divergent beliefs and lastly the analysis of their

actions vis-à-vis the issues they are encountering. Mr. Jha further embellished the session by invoking an instance of Meerut pertaining to the relevance of respect, helplessness, space for anger and frustration among the youths in relation to the policy of post-liberalization that did promise the development-oriented transformations of the then youths but only culminated in the upliftment of the upper middle class. The research workshop concluded with the lessons the researcher had derived from his field study such as negotiating market, liberalism and socio-political liberalism, whether people are the Republic of tough men, how ethical principles are imperative to be taken a note of in ethnography. Worth mentioning, Mr. Jha also highlighted on the role of gender, caste and religion while analysing youth-behaviour, thus making the session more comprehensive and wholesome for the students, especially the postgraduate batches of the department to further their researching capabilities. Another extremely adept researcher, Ms. Mayuri Banerjee had portrayed a very new-fangled arena of international relations by means of her arena of interest, "Remembering 1962 War: War Memory and Trust- Deficit in India China Relations." She invoked memory as a social construction as the means of how we perceive the past as socially constructed and how memory is based on a socio-political context and the one that varied across groups and individuals. Ms. Mayuri emphasized on the ways scholars begun to consider how countries had dealt with traumas experienced in warfare, especially the Second World War. These ravaged societies and the leaders fetched the attention of IR scholars in terms of how they have united the countries by constructing newer identities. Ms. Mayuri further embellished on the study on how the policy makers of United States had to justify the people the reason behind the deployment of uncountable soldiers in the Vietnam War. Hence, policy makers fall back continuously on memories. She elaborated on how construction of memories also institutionalizes memory to disseminate the memories across the generations with an aim to deduce what a memorial opting to convey. Diligently, she had also introduced the students with the notion of collective memories that when get institutionalized, leads to the creation of image or perceptual frame that can be useful in foreign policy formulations, usages of guilt by the state to portray official memories on the world stage and citing several instances like the Nazi rule in Germany and China's portrayal of the image of salvation in terms of National Humiliation

Day or National Defence Day to commemorate West's humiliation. The session wonderfully marked its conclusion by Banerjee's insights on memory studies that involves several research methods like explanatory, exploratory, comparative methods and lastly review. The workshop was indeed very astute and discerning for the students.

Needless to say, the past year has indeed been an eventful, and one could only envision brilliant prospects ahead.

Aishi Sen

Second Year (MPLS), Roll number – 107

Riddhiraj Mukherjee

Third Year (PLSA), Roll number – 177

Shovontika Chakraborty

Second Year (PLSA), Roll number - 101

SECTION - I

INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Indian environmentalism: Conformity between Colonial Laws and Elitism

Samiksha Bharti

Second Year (MPLS), Roll No.- 142

ABSTRACT

Environmentalism is often considered as “elitist” in character. In the context of India, there is a general tendency for environmental reforms to have regressive impacts on marginalized communities. This process is further complicated by the parallel functioning of colonial environmental legislations and mindsets even after seventy-five years of India’s independence, as highlighted through three case studies about – the “racialized lungs” of India, forest acts, and embankment laws. This article attempts to decode the uni-dimensional understanding of environmentalism and environmental laws in the South Asian context.

Key words: Environmentalism, colonial, legislations.

INTRODUCTION

In West Bengal’s post-Independence history, the name of Marichjhapi in West Bengal is almost a forgotten chapter. Neither the elitist Congress ministers at the Centre nor the urban middle class of Calcutta had much sympathy for the Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes refugees who came to settle in Marichjhapi in the Sunderbans. The Left Front Government in West Bengal in 1978 declared Marichjhapi as a reserve forest and the refugees as violating the Forest Acts by destroying “the existing and potential forest wealth and also creating ecological imbalance”. On January 26, 1979, India’s Republic Day, the then Left Front chief minister Jyoti Basu declared an economic blockade of Marichjhapi. The state then carried out a massacre of hundreds of Dalit refugees – ostensibly to protect the forest.¹

1. For more information, refer to Amitav Ghosh’s ‘The Hungry Tide’

This brings us to the core idea of the paper, that is, to understand the interconnected relationship between the continuance of age-old colonial laws in Indian politics, through several case studies and its intersection with a class perspective that permeates the Indian society. When these colonial legislations conjoin with the elitist class perspective, the end result is the economic exploitation and subjugation of the marginalized communities. We must therefore first understand the idea of environmentalism and highlight the two distinct types of environmentalism in the Indian context- an urban elite and middle class concerning itself with aesthetic and health issues like maintaining greeneries, preserving wildlife, and obviously pollution-free environment, and mass-based environmental movements intermingled with rights and livelihood of rural poor. Ramachandra Guha, an eminent environmentalist looks at the idea of environmentalism “as a social program, a charter of action which seeks to protect cherished habitats, protests against their degradation, and prescribes less destructive technologies and lifestyles” (Guha, Environmentalism, 1999). While Guha’s understanding of environmentalism accepts the need for environmental protest movements, in the context of India there exist class hierarchies in the constitution of such movements. It is beyond doubt, as pointed out by several scholars, that there exists an ethnocentric bias in the understanding of environmentalism as a product and phenomenon peculiar to the West which ultimately discredits the Third World countries for generating environmental movements of their own. For instance, observe the following statement by British Historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012):

It is no accident that the main support for ecological policies comes from the rich countries and from the comfortable rich and middle classes (except for businessmen, who hope to make money by polluting activity). The poor, multiplying and under-employed, wanted more ‘development’, not less. (Hobsbawm, 1994)

This article takes a step ahead to point out an additional flawed understanding of environmentalism with regards to an increasing class conflict between rural hinterlands and urban areas in recent times. For instance, the idea of “carbon footprint” has gained relative importance in recent times in order to quantify Green House Gasses (GHG) emissions. Carbon footprint refers to the amount of GHGs produced due to human activities, measured in units of carbon (Muthu, 2016). In the Indian context, research undertaken by the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature has found that the 20% of high-expenditure households

in the country generate nearly seven times the carbon emissions compared to low-expenditure households. What is significant here is that urban pollution gets the attention of the government machinery because it directly affects the urban elite class. On the other hand, glaring issues like poverty which results in malnutrition and stunted growth often get sidelined on the Indian State's political agenda because it is not a concern of the wealthy. The urban middle-class agenda over pollution and GHG emissions is concerned with "we", the affluent who are comparatively less affected by pollution than "other" the poor. Thus, it is evident that the colonial laws have paved the way for the phenomenon of environmentalism to assume an elitist upper-class dimension in present times.

While we have now already understood that the West viewed the experiences of environmentalism in Third World societies as the outcome of the European idea of modernity and development. What we need to contend with here is that this "environmentalism of the poor" in the Third World countries takes the shape of varied forms of social action than those experienced in the West. In India itself, one can find several distinct forms of socio-environment protests. These can be in the form of a characteristic "tree-hugging" style, as in the case of the Chipko Movement in the 1970s or the Appiko Movement in the early 1980s to recent online Internet protests with a hashtag, for instance, the #SaveDehingPatkai movement in Assam in 2020.

THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF INDIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

In "Notes on the State of Virginia", former president and author of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson came up with his hypothesis positing lung differences between slaves and white colonists. The assertion that Indian lungs are different from European lungs reflects a colonial inheritance of assumptions about "tropical otherness". The colonial roots of such racialized physiology in India can be traced to present times. In post-independent India, certain headlines began surfacing such as "World's worst lungs are in India" or "Indians have 30% weaker lungs than Europeans".² This led to the "Three

2. <https://m.timesofindia.com/home/science/indians-have-30-weaker-lungs-than-europeans-study/articleshow/22217540.cms>

Infants” petition, a high-profile air-pollution case submitted to the Supreme Court in 2015 that resulted in a series of bans on firecrackers sale before Diwali in 2016 and 2017. However, a closer analysis of these judicial decrees showcases that, by their very nature, are reactionary and unlikely to structurally modify emission sources, such as reducing the dependence on coal or increase in electric cars or motorcycles. Instead of coming up with viable environmental remediation and emission reduction policies, what we are witnessing instead is the explosion of private corporate investments and technologies aimed at designing prosthetic atmospheres in and around the bodies of those who are capable of paying for them. Once existing colonial bungalows and fortresses to protect the vulnerable European self, are now replaced by home-based air purifiers and personal air pollution masks guarding the middle-class urban society. This is a clear representation of class society transforming itself into spheres of an air-conditioned environment.

The need to modernize colonial-era environmental laws is a long-delayed project in India. In the domain of India’s forest legislation, several policies have contributed to the process of deforestation. The colonial administrators had established state property rights over the forests since the 1860s, prior to which there existed unrestricted use rights of forests. The first Forest Act of 1865³ was replaced by a more repressive Act in 1878⁴ to boost commercial considerations and revenue generation. The classification of forests into reserved forests, protected forests, and village forests was justified to be based on purely administrative grounds. Nevertheless, the commercial motive was easily interceptable. In the reserved forests (Chapter II), the land was primarily the absolute property of the government, motivated by the profit from timber. With time, areas under reserved forests increased. There were 14,000 square miles of state forests in 1878 which increased to 56,000 square miles of reserved forests in 1980 and later to 81,400 square miles of reserved forests in 1900 (Gadgil & Guha, 1992). In post-colonial India, forests continue to be under state property rights and therefore, under the Forest Department. As clearly elucidated by Ramachandra Guha that before 1947, our forests served the strategic interest of British colonial rule, and after Independence, they served the needs of the mercantile and industrial bourgeoisie (Guha, Forestry in

3. A1865-7.pdf (indiacode.nic.in)

4. A1878-7.pdf (indiacode.nic.in)

British and Post-British India: An Historical Analysis, 1983). Further, the recent draft of the Indian Forest Act, 2019 has come under criticism for it fails to get rid of bureaucratic overreach. The powers of the forest officials to investigate, search and seize property, and hold inquiries by forcing attendance of witnesses and evidence have been retained and in parts enhanced. For instance, the colonial provision of collective punishment of communities for crimes committed by individuals under the forest law has been retained. The clause reads, “Whenever a fire is caused wilfully or by gross negligence in a reserved forest, or theft of forest produce or grazing by cattle occur...the State Government may...direct that in such forest or any portion thereof, the exercise of all rights of pasture or to forest-produce shall be suspended for such a period as it may think fit”. Hence, for the past few years, under the guise of “ease of doing business”, several attempts have been made to dilute the legal provisions with respect to diversion of forestland. For instance, the new set of procedures under the Forest (Conservation) Rules, 2022, being pushed by the Central Government will now permit private developers to clear forest land for compensatory afforestation and development and infrastructure projects without the prior consent of gram sabhas, thus violating an important provision of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006⁵.

The Indian state of West Bengal experienced cyclone Amphan in May 2020, the worst ever since 1737, which left a trail of misery in the region. The social media managed to reveal to the world the records of damages to the city but failed to capture the rural Bengal or mangrove Sunderbans, mostly because most islands of Sunderbans do not have the privilege of electricity access, let alone internet connections. Embankments are the lifelines of the Sundarban villages, as they are located on low-lying islands in a brackish water delta with diurnal tides. What makes Sunderban so significant is its unique landscape whereby the forest is a river. During the Amphan cyclone, these embankments developed cracks, broke, and collapsed. Engineering shortcomings coupled with

5. FRARulesBook.pdf (tribal.nic.in)

Chapter IV 6(1) which states that the Gram Sabha shall be the authority to initiate the process for determining the nature and extent of individual or community forest rights or both that may be given to the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers within the local limits of its jurisdiction under this Act by receiving claims, consolidating and verifying them and preparing a map delineating the area of each recommended claim.

bureaucratic corruption resulted in shoddy embankment construction and negligent maintenance. The portion of the Sundarbans in which the residing population face particularly high risks and hardships is referred to as the “transition zone” (Sanchez-Triana, Ortolano, & Paul, 2016). The people within the transition zone suffer from several shortages of economic and livelihood opportunities. The Bengal Embankment Act is almost more than 140 years old, continuing from colonial times to the present day. Under this Act, the embankments are placed under state bureaucratic control, whereby the government is the sole arbiter of where, when, and how embankments are constructed and managed. It doesn’t come as a surprise that these embankments were primarily mud embankments caved in as if they were landslide-prone hills of soft clay and fragile houses toppled like packs of cards. Research has shown a high level of apathy towards the socio-economic development of the region from local government bureaucracy. Most importantly, there is a need for the West Bengal government and other related ministries/departments to promote the spread of awareness about important legislations such as the Fees Regulating Authority among the people of Sunderbans.



Sunderbans are mangrove areas in the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers.

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/fancy-wall-for-sunderbans-38166>

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Environmentalism is not a monolith in its nature, composition, ideology or even impacts. The argument that environmentalism is “elitist” has been made

time and again in many specific environmental conflicts and general debates about environmentalism. It is beyond doubt that the notion of environmental elitism in India coupled with a colonial hangover of several legislations is an immensely complex, multidimensional, and nuanced discussion. India today is in an environment basket-case, characterized by polluted skies, unclean rivers, disappearing forest covers, and so on. The idea of compositional elitism (Morrison & Dunlap, 1986) involves the accusation that sympathizers of environmentalism are drawn primarily from the privileged or upper socioeconomic strata. In the context of India, compositional elitism can be expanded to include dissenters and sympathizers from all strata of society but the idea of impact elitism has confined the benefits of environmental reforms only to the urban corporate elites in India and distributed the costs to the least privileged, clearly identified by the several case studies. Therefore, a new inclusive Chipko movement is desirable to be born.

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New Enigmatic Coalition under the BJP System: The Case of Bihar

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ABSTRACT

Since the Bharatiya Janata Party swept to power in the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections, it has gone on to win more Assembly Elections than it has lost in turn shoring up its Rajya Sabha tally, further consolidating for the 2019 polls. A host of scholars have deliberated upon this changing nature of the party system. Vaishnav and Hinston have termed it as the advent of the Fourth Party System in the country, Chibber, Verma and Palshikar have classified it as the Second Dominant Party System. However, what the contemporary literature however fails to explore is that coalitions are not a phenomenon of the past rather they have only assumed a new shade and character. Where do we locate coalitions in India's new party system? How have coalition building trends and dynamics varied? Why should they be labelled as enigmatic? Taking a political sociology approach, this paper not only attempts to trace the political trajectory of Bihar assessing the shifts in the state's party system, but also provides an explanatory account of the historical specificities and socio - political peculiarities that have shaped Bihar in the post - 2015 period. It concludes upon assessing the implications upon the 2024 General Elections.

Key words: New enigmatic coalitions, BJP System, Bihar's political trajectory, shifts in state party system, fluctuating coalition building trends, national politics

In critical appraisal of Rajni Kothari's polemical work 'Politics in India', Yogendra Yadav remarks that the text is an enigma, a timeless classic, an endless saga waiting to be read... Very few end up reading it, even fewer survive the first chapter while only a microcosm ends up understanding it' - this seems so true not just of 'Politics in India' but for Indian Politics at large. Taking a leaf out of his 'book', as the country celebrates 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' (75 years of Independence), it is time to take a look back at 'Coalition Politics' which

has remained so very natural and firmly etched in the cartography/ canvas of the country.

MAPPING COALITIONS IN INDIAN POLITICAL TRAJECTORY

India's 'tryst with Independence & Democracy' was rather a parallel process. The Congress, primarily an organisation dominated by the 'upper caste, wealthy and English educated' lobbied for greater participation of Indians in the administration and other realms of public life post its foundation in 1885, which eventually provided the grounding for a nationalist mass movement developing itself into an umbrella organisation. Symbolic of 'coalitional tendencies within the party' what Rajni Kothari popularly termed as the Congress system, the party swept to power in all of the first 3 General Elections in a Nehruvian age of consensus. As the baton of the Congress passed onto Lal Bahadur Shastri and then Indira Gandhi - the 'umbrella character and consensual nature' of the Congress seemed on the wane jolting it at the 1967 polls when despite retaining control in New Delhi, the party lost out in as many as 8 - 9 states including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan as Opposition coalitions grabbed power for the first time resembling the 'nascent trends of alliance government' not to mention a coalition of the Left Parties which had previously ruled Kerala and were re-elected in 1967. The experiments were only short term as the Congress consolidated itself with an electoral landslide in 1971 and subsequently in state elections to follow - Mrs. Gandhi's electoral strategies seemed to have paid dividends even as the 'High Command culture' gripped the Congress. The confrontation with Jay Prakash Narayanan and the Emergency Years (1975 - 1977) would be a turning point contributing to the Congress's first ever election defeat at the Centre as the Janata Party - a conglomerate of the Congress (Organisation), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Jana Sangh and Socialists cruised to victory with Morarji Desai as Prime Minister. Rajni Kothari had remarked that '1967 presaged the Congress defeat at the Centre... if and when this happens Indian Democracy shall enter into its third test that of transfer of power at the Centre', the results in 1977 vindicated his foresight. The strains of Coalition Politics would become visible sooner than later, 'uncontained ego clashes' among the top leadership - Morarji Desai, Chaudhary Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram over the position of Prime Minister and extreme factionalism including lack of ideological cohesion ripped the coalition apart as Charan Singh, leader of the BLD walked out to form a minority

Government with outside support from the Congress lasting just 56 days, it was only a matter of time when fresh General Elections ensued and Mrs. Gandhi returned to the helm of affairs. The Congress would go on to restore its dominance through the 1980s at the national level under the pioneering leadership of Indira Gandhi and then Rajiv Gandhi even as it lost power in states - regional parties capitalising on the 'Sons of the Soil' (Bhumiputra Movement) sentiment catapulted to power - the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam to mention a few while the Bharatiya Janata Party would fill the vacuum in the North and West Indian States. Since 1989, the role of smaller political parties would become fundamental in making and unmaking of National Governments indicating the 'Dawn of the Multiparty Coalition Era' - the political discourses revolving around the Janata Dal led National Front / United Front Governments (1989 - 1991 and 1996 - 1998) under Prime Ministers V.P. Singh, Chandrasekhar, H.D. Gowda and I.K. Gujral followed by an interregnum under the P.V. Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee Minority Governments (1991 - 1996, 1996) and later of course the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (2004 - 2014) under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the BJP led National Democratic Alliance (1998 - 2004 & 2014 - till date) under Premiers Atal Behari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi albeit the latter leading his party to consecutive absolute majorities in 2014 and 2019, a feat unattainable in almost a half century. Derived from the Latin word 'coalition' which means 'to grow together', Sanjay Ruparelia's book 'Divided We Govern' throws greater light on the essence of Coalitions - not a legal contract but only a 'political agreement' where each partner reserves the right to take its own party decisions at all times including the continuance or snapping of ties. Coalitions become an unavoidable phenomenon during three situations especially in Parliamentary Democracies when elections result in a fractured mandate with no single party securing a single majority, during national emergencies like war and humanitarian crises what is more popularly termed as a 'national unity government' and even during a deadlock in a two party system to balance between two major players, Ivan Doherty best describes them as 'in government to secure a governing majority, in opposition to provide a credible alternative and in elections to consolidate and maximise support'. Between 1947 and 2022, India has witnessed 13 Coalition Governments and a Minority Government backed by smaller parties at the Centre, counting such instances at the state level becomes a humongous task in itself - E. Sridharan provides a

conservative estimate of at least 157 such notable cases between 1991 - 2014, the numbers have only gone up since. Since 2014, most states have witnessed 2 rounds of Assembly Elections - the 49 State polls held so far have resulted in at least 27 'coalition government' both in partnership with the BJP as well as its opponents not to speak of the numerous smaller and defeated electoral alliances failing to secure power.

THE COALITIONS OF BIHAR

As focus shifts to the Eastern state of Bihar located on the banks of the Ganges, political traits of the 'Hindi Heartland' have become all the more prominent. In a political landscape dominated by the Congress Party until 1967, a watershed year not just at the Centre where the Congress scraped through with a narrow majority but even at the state level with non-Congress governments taking charge in as many as 9 states - Bihar emerged as a fertile ground for political experimentation. With a large Other Backward Classes and Muslim population, and the upper castes constituting less than 20% of the populace - the Congress in its early years remained controlled by the latter despite their “numerical limitations” binding the OBCs in a “vertical top-down patronage relationship”. The key challenge to Congress hegemony would come with political mobilisation of the OBCs - the Janata Party's victory and the election of Karpoori Thakur consolidated this trend signalling a new phase in Bihar's political epoch. The Congress would go onto stage a comeback in the 1980s but short-lived, with the 1990s dawning the rise of regional straps in state politics.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal capitalised on the Yadavs and the Muslims, propelling Lalu Prasad Yadav to the Chief Ministership and his wife Rabri Devi during his stint in prison. While Nitish Kumar's Samata Party, now the Janata Dal (United), consolidated support among the Koeris - Kurmis and a significant chunk of the non Yadav OBCs besides the rise of another important player - the BJP riding high on the Ram Janmabhoomi wave garnering support of the upper castes and bulk of the Economically Backward Castes (EBCs), the Congress reduced to a 'supporting role' as a fourth player pointing to the 'increased fragmentation in the caste matrix' reflected in Bihar's electoral dynamics necessitating coalitional arrangements for stability. The RJD - Congress combine would be followed by the Janata Dal (United) - BJP regime under Nitish Kumar what Kanta Murali conceives as a shift from a 'narrow poor' to

'wide poor coalitions' - the latter securing a landslide victory at the 2010 Elections. Tensions gripped the JD(U) - BJP alliance since the beginning of the second decade of the twenty- first century, with Kumar "announcing the divorce" and the BJP refusing to acknowledge Shri Narendra Modi as the National Democratic Alliance's Prime Ministerial nominee. The BJP would sweep the 2014 Lok Sabha polls single-handedly, winning nearly 40% of the vote and 32 of the 40 Minister of Parliaments, its opponents biting the dust struggling at single digits. The electoral setback came as an 'eye opener' for the Lalu and Nitish camps instrumental to their growing bonhomie maturing into a political alliance - a grand coalition between the RJD, JD(U) and the Congress in view of the 2015 Assembly elections.

CHANGING DYNAMICS SINCE 2015: SHIFTS IN THE STATE PARTY SYSTEMS

MAHAGATHBANDHAN 1.0 (FROM 2015 - 2017)

How and why this affected the state's party system, psephologists Sanjay Kumar and Pranav Gupta offer a tripartite understanding - normally even a 5% lead in the aggregate vote share ensures a comfortable majority in a First past the post voting system, in 2015 the Grand Alliance trounced the NDA with a 7% gap - 41.4 % as compared to the NDA's vote share hovering around 34%. Having an edge in the 'caste calculus' mobilising the Yadavs, Muslims, Kurmis, Koeris and large faction of the OBCs - failure of a Mahadalit consolidation in favour of the BJP and its lead amongst EBCs narrowing down to single digits, 10% lower when compared to 2014 cost the NDA heavily, even amongst the BJP's core urbanite constituencies - it enjoyed only a modest lead while the Mahagathbandhan swept the rural belt - 'Mandal' overpowering 'Kamandal' (Hindutva), the vitality of identity politics reverberated. A second factor to be credited remains the mutual vote transfer between the 3 allies - the Lokniti CSDS Survey pointing to over 60% of the Yadavs favouring the JD (U) candidates in seats contested by them, the OBCs reciprocating support to the RJD, it remains equally important not to lose sight of the popularity of Nitish Kumar - the alliance relying on a prominent regional leader the 'Bihari vs Bahari' propaganda backfiring on the BJP's strategy of excessive reliance on Prime Minister Modi to win state polls, the impressive victory came as an endorsement of the 'Governance Agenda of Bihar's Sushasan Babu (Nitish

Kumar)' who had improved law and order, developed infrastructure and kick-started economic growth leading the state out of the 'wilderness of jungle raaj', hinting at continued bipolarity albeit with changed political equations : a more lopsided JD(U) - RJD - INC combine against the BJP led NDA, the Mahagathbandhan's success reciprocated in subsequent local polls, by-elections and even the Bihar Legislative Council Elections.

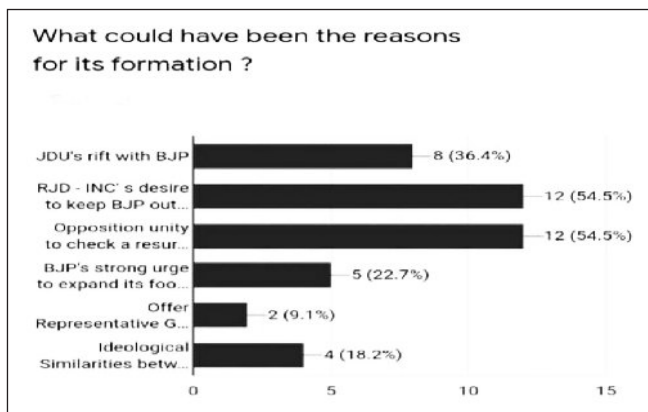


Fig. 1: Reasons for formation of MGB 1.0 (2015 - 2017)

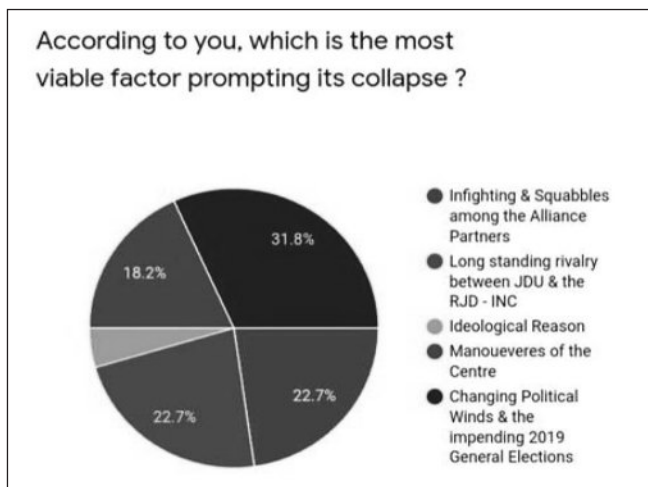


Fig. 2: Factors prompting collapse of MGB 1.0 (2015 - 2017)

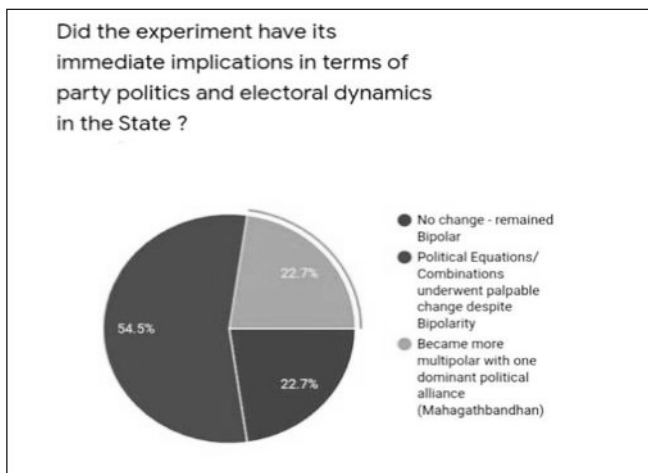


Fig. 3: Immediate Implications of MGB 1.0 (2015 – 2017) on Bihar 's Party System

Interesting outcomes (Fig 1,2,3) followed from a primary survey conducted with nearly 30 respondents. While an absolute majority agreed with changed bipolar equations as results would show, respondents identify JD(U)'s rift with the BJP and the RJD - Indian National Congress's desire to keep the saffron brigade out of power seem as more valid reasons for its formation - a sheer 'political strategy' in other words, ideological affinity and common agenda ranking low in the list. A scam- marred RJD chief heavily asserting its presence on the administrative machinery - the release of RJD strongman Shahabuddin from jail within days of the Government formation came as a blot on Kumar's governance record. Tejashwi Yadav was upping the political heat as a 'leader next in line'. Nitish Kumar's party men side-lined by a more dominant partner the RJD, with his 'ears to the ground' he warmed up to his former ally BJP crafting a plan with his sights set on the impending 2019 General Elections. JD(U)'s open support for the Centre's most 'controversial policies' including the Demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax 'unnerved his allies', ultimately walking out of the Mahagathbandhan and stitching a pact with the NDA returning as Chief Minister for yet another stint.

BIHAR NDA 3.0 & 4.0 (FROM 2017 - AUGUST, 2022)

With Kumar realigning with the BJP, the sharing of portfolios happened equitably on similar lines as the previous NDA coalition. Sushil Kumar Modi,

believed to have brought JD(U) back to the NDA fold once again assumed office as Deputy Chief Minister, the alliance yielded promising results cruising to win 39 of the 40 seats then nose-diving barely managing to retain power at the next Assembly Elections in November, 2020 : the BJP winning significantly more seats than the JD(U), the Opposition parties securing a nearly equitable vote share, RJD emerging as the single largest party in the House perhaps a fallout of long term anti - incumbency and voter fatigue against Nitish Kumar perhaps a division in minority votes especially in the Seemanchal region where the All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) bagged 5 seats and the appeal of brand Modi powered it through. The BJP's upper hand was visible in NDA 4.0s makeup since its inception - replacing long-time Nitish partner Sushil Modi with new faces Tarkishore Prasad and Renu Devi as Deputy Chief Ministers, the saffron party nominated its appointee Vijay Kumar Sinha as Vidhan Sabha Speaker and retained key ministerial portfolios. An avid communication gap between state leadership of both partners and frequent media brawls damaged the coalition spirit, discontent over the Union Ministry reshuffle and amidst growing calls for Nitish Kumar to maintain his autonomy in wake of increased pressure from BJP set the stage for another Mahagathbandhan experiment.

MAHAGATHBANDHAN 2.0 (FROM AUGUST, 2022 – TILL DATE)

A few months into another coalition, this time with RJD as the dominant partner the sailing hasn't been smooth either. Two prominent ministers resigned within a span of two months, and with the JD(U) struggling to keep its flock together, 'signs of discord' remain visible. While Nitish Kumar will have the challenge of keeping his current allies in good humour, the absence of a strong regional leader to attract non - Yadav OBCs coupled with a likely split of the Paswan votes following the death of close BJP ally Ram Vilas Paswan has sent the saffron party back to the drawing board for developing a strategy for the future. With there already being speculations of Kumar joining back the BJP bandwagon on one hand and on the other, there being possibilities of a merger with RJD, the JD(U) has outrightly rejected both claims. What seems even more puzzling is that JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar in the past has often exactly walked the same path he and his party have refuted months back, the story of coalitions in Bihar and their associated enigmas is therefore only likely to keep political analysts engaged for quite some time to come as the political scenario unfolds and unfurls in the state in runup to the Lok Sabha Elections 2024.

WHY CALL THEM ENIGMATIC?

Situating these cases within the broader context and the larger trends of the evolving party system would reveal that coalitions have always been a 'curious phenomenon' for political scientists to explore and unravel. Coalitions under the Fourth Party System have only displayed 'oddities of a new kind' wherein otherwise 'paradoxical partners' have managed to come together hoping to put behind decades of political rivalry - be it the bonhomie between the JD(U) and the RJD or its tie-up with the Congress, the very genesis of these parties may be attributed to counter the other. Two of these in Bihar have been pre - poll coalitions (MGB 1.0 & NDA 4.0), the other two (NDA 3.0 & MGB 2.0) post poll, 2 alliances in operation with the BJP while the other two working against it, there being a continuous crisis- cross of allies not just between two consecutive elections what E. Sridharan would construe as 'incongruent' but also collapsing midway failing the test of stability of tenure, Nitish Kumar remaining the Chief Minister throughout further compounding the enigmas of coalition politics. The MGB 2.0 remains another 'unnatural outgrowth' yet to prove its calibre. The cases in Bihar being 'few' in the multitude of many, there remain numerous such instances across the country which cannot be explored due to time and space constraints overall pointing to two very vital trends of coalition making and unmaking of the era. Alliances are no longer fallouts of mere 'numerical dependence on allies for governing majority' - for the BJP it is more of an expansionist strategy to cover new ground, add newer social groups to its electoral kitty futuristic missions to ensure and ensure sustained dominance evident in the 'surplus majority' coalitions it leads despite commanding a clear majority in most of the states and the centre while the Opposition adopts it more as a survival strategy, a 'defensive armour' to retain ground and block the 'saffron juggernaut' from taking over the reins of Government, bound by an anti-incumbent agenda rather than affinity of purpose in turn plaguing their vitality and survival chances as well, how these shape political discourses in run up to 2024 General Elections remain to be unravelled and investigated in the concluding analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL POLITICS & THE ROAD TO 2024

As we stand in the current epoch of the 21st century, a relook at India's 'tryst with Democracy' assumes vitality as one accounts for a changing electoral

system, party system and the evolving, new and nouveau forms of coalitions. The saffron party's jubilant success since 2014 has set newer trends while reversing previous tendencies redoubling the importance of this study. True, Indian Politics is in a flux post 2014 yet it would be an exaggeration to see this era isolated as distinct from previous paradigms - for the BJP and the Congress the tables have turned in favour of the former as it relentlessly works at maintaining its 'hegemony' in the years to come facing challenges not so much from the Congress but regional players which rule 9 of the 28 states and 1 Union Territory including politically crucial provinces of Bihar (40 LS seats) West Bengal (42 LS seats), Tamil Nadu (39 LS seats) amongst ensuring certain continuity of the fragmentation between the nature of party control at the centre and the states, the very position of 'BJP's strength' and the 'increasing consciousness of their own vulnerabilities' pushing opposition players including reliable BJP allies like Shiromani Akali Dal and Shiv Sena to pursue their own route (Survey Results validate) in terms of creating a 'Third Alternative' - bewildering, enigmatic and often paradoxical multi- party combinations to fight the Modi led BJP which in turn seems 'growing vocal for local allies', not very well known in political parlance while aiming to work with and through newer socio - demographic groups, creating a 'rainbow coalition within the party itself', a point that often misses the 'naked eye' while determinately affecting election results - the emerging trends of the Fourth Party System are seemingly a product of culmination, embodying 'streaks of the preceding Three'. Just like understanding the 'whole requires a concrete understanding of its 'parts', assessing and analysing National Politics without reference to the states and in turn 'regions within regions/ sub regions' would only be a superficial endeavour, this paper has exactly aimed at doing the same aided by a political sociology approach - caste, class, community and social indices playing out latently in determining governmental and party system configurations in the state of Bihar.

According to Suhas Palshikar who is supported by an array of scholars - " a conflation of Indian nationalism, Hindutva populism and a development discourse revolving around social welfarism creating a new class of beneficiaries (labhartis) has become the backbone of this new hegemony" - in the days to come it will no longer be limited to numerical preponderance but capturing 'public minds and popular imagination' - the BJP sets the narrative, the Opposition reciprocates failing to encash on the real issues as it lacks an

agenda, political messaging and a charismatic face to match the stature of the Prime Minister. Hoping for the ruling party to slip on its own would be another 'Waterloo for the Opposition' not to talk of the BJP's 24 * 7 robust party organisation catapulting it to a string electoral victories - the most recent being the spectacular successes of winning a record straight 2nd term in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and a 3rd victory in Goa while the Congress ended up losing Punjab to AAP, the former diluting considerable anti-incumbency over inflation, unemployment and the contentious Farm Bills. The collapse of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi proved another shot in the arm for the BJP marking its return in the western state, Nitish Kumar's sudden switch proves a blot on BJP's mission 2024. While the chances of a single Opposition party or even the blossoming of an opposition coalition to dislodge the BJP seem 'bleak', Bihar with its 40 MPs shall prove vital in the race for Delhi. If current opinion polls by IndiaTV are to be believed, NDA's strength could be halved from its current tally of 39 out of the 40, the only comforting factor being that the BJP alone holds only 17 of them. The Second Dominant Party System has its own set of limitations just like the Congress System did - BJP's vote share nationally is still around 40% benefitting largely out of a first past the post system in wake of a fractured opposition, regional limitations in the South and an unexplored minority vote bank, the Opposition needs to convert the BJP's challenges into its own opportunities. However, whether the new alliance will last and serve as a model for coalition building in other states, or whether Bihar will see newer political formations or even political alliances remaining static in the future, will the state throw up yet another electoral surprise, only 2024 will tell. A week being a long time in politics, the next General Elections are more than a year away, one will have to wait and watch as the party transmutes and transmogrifier, thus stimulating us even further!!

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The Social Media Politics: BJP's Role in Using Digital Media to Allure Indian Voters since 2014

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Third Year (PLSA), Roll No- 145

ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of everyone's life presently. Since the expansion of this media platform, life has become very efficient as communication barriers have been curbed to a certain extent. The role and impact of social media applications like, 'Facebook,' 'twitter,' 'Instagram,' and 'WhatsApp,' have created a space for the public to share their opinion, get updates on what is going around, and sometimes even indulge in debates, etc. However, the politicization of these platforms has been a recent phenomenon in India that has been in trend since 2014. Social Media had a significant role to play in the rise of the BJP in 2014 as they used the platform to woo the young voters who are frequently active. The growth of the digital medium has also led to a lot of conflict among users, especially when the discussion is on political subjects. This article has tried to highlight the role and impact of the BJP in using social media platforms for their political gains.

Key words: Social media, BJP, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has evolved to act as a bridge to reduce the connectivity gap and connect people around the globe. However, with its evolution, the role and impact have severely changed as well. Previously, it was used as a medium to socialise and connect with people along with receiving updates and information, but now it has become more dynamic since politics has added another dimension to this platform. The efficiency of this platform has played a key role in luring people and creating a shift in perception. For example, earlier

people were highly dependent on newspapers, magazines, radios, and televisions for news and updates, but now with the rise of social media, people can get the information with a single click, and what's more intriguing is that it allows the public to have more "interpersonal communication" than the traditional media (newspaper, radio, television). Social media has added fuel to the running engine of democracy, as India is one of the largest democratic nations and considers public opinion and criticism as its backbone. Since its rise to power in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party has used all social media platforms strategically for its gain. The 16th Lok Sabha election was even called the "first social media election" as the role of digital media was very crucial in the "rebranding" of both the BJP and Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.⁷ According to a survey, before 2013, only Shashi Tharoor (member of parliament, Indian National Congress) had a verified account on Twitter and was the most followed politician in India. However, post-2014, after BJP's highly active presence, PM Modi surpassed Shashi Tharoor as the most followed politician in India (Jose, 2021). The BJP has also created a highly active 'IT Cell' on all social media platforms that connects with people on a personal

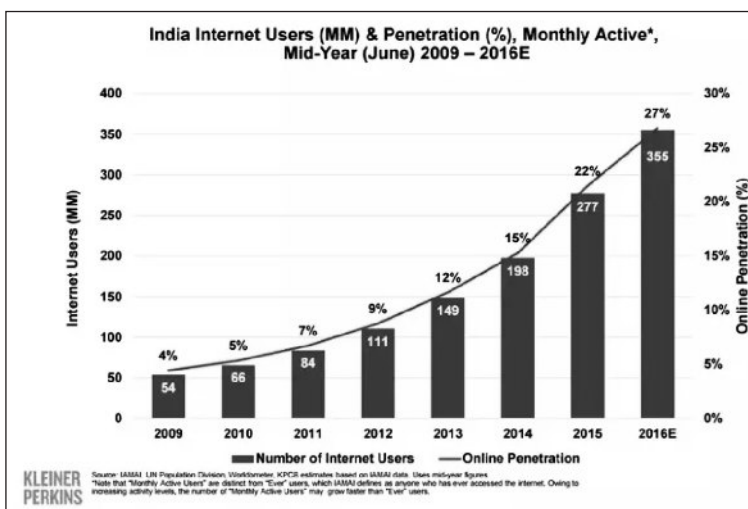


Figure 1: Rise of internet users in India since 2009.
A surreal growth could be noticed in the increase of internet users post-2014.
Source: ET Telecom.

7. Jelvin Jose, "The Politicisation of Media in India," (2021)

level, which helps them to share the party's ideologies and motto colloquially. According to reports, "Internet users grew 7% in urban India, reaching 315 million users in 2018. Digital adoption is now being propelled by rural India, registering a 35% growth in Internet users over the past year" (Kantar IMRB 's Icube, 2018). This growth has had a profound role to play in reducing the digital divide between the urban and rural. For example, previously, the people in the urban region were far ahead and more well-versed in technology and digital media compared to the rural people, but since the advancement of social media, people in the rural region who don't even have proper knowledge or education are highly active on social media platforms.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE RISE OF THE BJP

The 'renovation' of the Modi-regime has been a result of the successful utilisation of all the media platforms [both the traditional media and new media (social media)]. PM Modi's journey from a local leader with a conservative mindset to being the Prime Minister with a vision of development and growth could be divided into three stages. The first stage was the recreation of PM Modi's image as the 'youth icon' (Sinha, 2017). These included wearing extravagant apparel that looked very sophisticated and appealing; being surrounded by laptops and mobile phones that made him look tech-savvy; playing golf and having business meetings via Google meetings. All these 'stunts' left an impact on the minds of the youth as they found him a 'youth model' who connects with the younger generation very closely and this helped him gain a lot of young followers. The second stage was the vigorous efforts of the BJP to use social media applications like WhatsApp and Facebook.

According to reports, the party supervised at least 10,000 WhatsApp groups and over one hundred Facebook pages, storming the entire social media platform (Sinha, 2017). All these groups and pages were used to share the party ideology and uplift Modi's image as the Prime Minister. This move was very well calculated and executed as the other political parties were no match for the

8. Fragile Hegemony: Modi, social media, and Competitive Electoral Populism in India, (Subir Sinha)

BJP in terms of their digital presence. The third stage was the advertisement of both the political party and PM Modi on the different social media handles with catchy slogans, which was very charming. Some of the slogans that spread like wildfire were, 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas' (with all, for everyone's development), 'Abki Baar, Modi Sarkar' (this time, Modi's government), 'Congress Mukht Bharat' (Congress free India), etc.⁸ All these slogans and phrases helped BJP gain a lot of momentum in all the media platforms (both traditional and new media).

THE DIGITAL POLARIZATION

While the opposition made its presence felt on the digital platforms a month before the elections, the BJP was ahead of them as they continuously made their presence felt on all media platforms after spending heavily on it. The rural villages, where there was not even proper electricity or connectivity, knew who Modi was because of the BJP's extensive outreach programs. The creation of numerous WhatsApp groups helped the BJP to create an "army," which would do extensive labour work and campaigning to surpass the opposition (Akram, 2020). According to reports, the internet population in the country significantly grew by around 108% in 2014 from 250 million.⁹ These statistics give a detailed



Figure 2: The highly active BJP IT cell has played a significant impact to distort the minds of the voters.

Source: Forbes India

9. <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/how-smart-viral-content-helped-bjp-trump-congress-on-social-media-1559663323348.html>

analysis of the heavy spending in the digital field by the BJP. The 'digital divide' between the BJP and the Congress is an intriguing aspect to highlight. According to research by digital ad agency, 'AdLift,' the BJP has 142 million followers, including the followers of both Modi and party social media handles, compared to the Congress and Rahul Gandhi's 23 million digital followers.¹⁰

BJP's COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO WOO THE VOTERS

After a successful victory in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the BJP started storming the digital platform by hiring the best marketing agencies to trend on social media throughout.¹¹ PM Modi understood the domination of the media to influence the masses, thus he started various campaigns, slogans, events, etc. Some of the most famous were slogans like 'Main Bhi Chowkidar,' which inspired millions to add 'chowkidar' to the beginning of their Twitter handles.¹² The BJP was successful in diverting the attention of the public from concerning issues like unemployment, poverty, and inflation, as the opposition's attempt to question the government and hold them accountable was not loud enough. Another noteworthy aspect was the utilisation of "radio" as a medium of communication. None of the parties thought of the sheer impact of radio in this modern, fast-paced world. As insignificant as it may sound, it did assist Modi in connecting colloquially with a wider audience, particularly in rural areas where radio was the primary source of information and communication. It helped him gain large support and a fanbase in the rural areas. The '360 degree' marketing by the BJP and Modi had a profound impact on the public as it was backed by both the digital media and the mass media. Apart from the role of social media, the news channels and print media supported the narrative of the BJP to a substantial extent as they were owned either by some party representative or some company that had their allegiance to the BJP.¹³

10. <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/how-smart-viral-content-helped-bjp-trump-congress-on-social-media-1559663323348.html>

11. "Role of Media in Building Political Image of Narendra Modi: A Psychological Study," (Sk Waseem Akram, 2020).

12. "Role of Media in Building Political Image of Narendra Modi: A Psychological Study," (Sk Waseem Akram, 2020).

13. "Role of Media in Building Political Image of Narendra Modi: A Psychological Study," (Sk Waseem Akram, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The present supremacy of the BJP is nothing but their proficiency in using all digital platforms efficiently, along with their understanding of the present dominance of the party in the political domain. They have played a leading role in accelerating the 'social media revolution' in Indian politics¹⁴. While other parties realised the importance of the digital forum, the BJP, by that time, had already created an "army" that could create havoc on the digital media platform (Sinha, 2017). The previous Lok Sabha election is a major example of the surreal superiority of the BJP over the others. Therefore, challenging the BJP presently would be a heroic task provided they have all the media platforms. As the BJP progresses with their right-wing ideology in Indian politics, social media has become a 'fertile ground' for solidifying it. (Jose, 2021). Nonetheless, all opposition parties need to evolve their social and digital media presence to create any sort of threat, they need to widen their virtual existence and get to know their audience personally like the BJP has been doing for years. The opposition need to check on the unfettered dominance of the BJP as they have been fierceful in the previous Lok Sabha elections due to lack of threat by the oppositions. A proper alliance among the opposition parties is the need of the hour as it is not an easy task to fight the BJP all alone with its present strength, thus an appropriate strategy would be needed to tackle the present debacle.

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Tracking the Journey of the Tech-giant: India's Tryst with Digitalisation

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'The biggest part of our digital transformation is changing the way we think'

- Simon Preston Bupa.

ABSTRACT

As the Indian economy slowly draws away from the dark shroud of the Covid-19 virus, one cannot help but look back at one of the key pillars that helped in treating the wounds of the pandemic, i.e., digitization. Digitization or the digital revolution, which began almost a decade ago, is now a global phenomenon to be reckoned with. Fostering connectivity for over 1.4 billion in the nation, and beyond- the digital realm is a success story of its own. While on one hand, the country seeks to improve its dented image on several global indicators (including hunger, corruption, crime and bribery), digital empowerment provides an altogether separate albeit commendable reason for some optimism. This paper seeks to trace certain principal bailiwicks pertaining to digitization in India. First, the humongous growth of digitalization in India. Second, the possible implications and impacts on the foreign policy, and lastly an analysis of the promise that digitization holds for enhancing the country's soft power and global image.

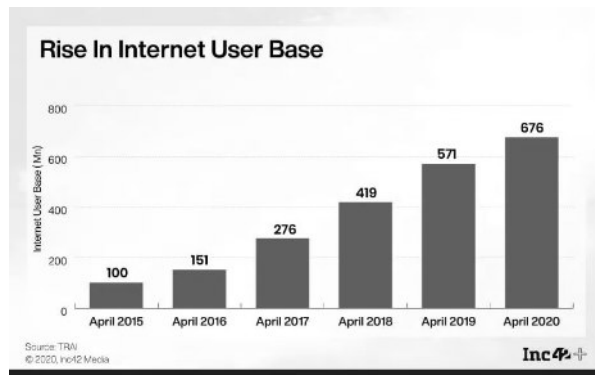
Key words: Digitalization, digital revolution, digital diplomacy, soft power, hegemon, geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

The 75th year of independence provides ample reasons to count the milestones achieved by this fledgling, emerging world power- India. Noteworthy among

these is the high tide of digitization, with its immense prospective in revolutionizing the politico-economic face of the nation, by simplifying policy decisions, amplifying interconnectivity and accessibility. Technology, for the past two decades, has been a ubiquitous part of citizens' lives, intrinsically intermingling with their daily schedules. This makes the sector an arena of pre-eminence, since it carries within it the potential to ensure that the developing economy gains recognition on global forums.

THE GROWING DEPENDENCY ON THE INTERNET OVER THE YEARS



Source: Yatti Soni, 14th August 2020, Title: #StartupIndia : “How ‘Digital India’ and ‘Make in India’ power India’s Tech Juggernaut,” URL : <https://inc42.com/features/startupindia-how-digital-india-and-make-in-india-power-indias-tech-juggernaut/>

THE GROWTH AND APPEAL OF DIGITALIZATION

India's tryst with digitalization seems to have gained pace after demonetization, when widespread panic and cash crunch was juxtaposed with a decrease in withdrawals from Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). It equally boosted the adoption of digital means of payment. Indeed, the country's unparalleled success with regard to open digital ecosystems, such as Aadhar, UPI (Unified Payments Interface), Co-Win and Jan Dhan drew global attention. Technological advancement occupies the center-stage in domestic policy for almost a decade now, owing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to the Digital India scheme. Launched in 2015, the latter is a flagship

programme of the Government of India, which aims to digitally empower the country's teeming millions. The campaign has indeed converted India into a digitally empowered State, with enhanced online infrastructure and extended internet connectivity- which has in turn boosted productivity and eased the lives of citizens. In a country with a literacy rate of 77.7 %¹⁵, wherein a sizable section of the populace remains semi-literate or illiterate, sources identify around 502.2 million smartphone users in 2019¹⁶. This exemplary feat alone justifies the profound impact that digitalization has had on Indian society.

THE COVID BOON

The Indian experiment with digitalization emerged triumphant in the face of the Covid-19 scare- which stagnated life for almost a year and half. As businesses endorsed in widespread retrenchment and citizens quarantined themselves inside their homes, technology came as a messiah in a lifeless India. Barring essential services such as healthcare units, water, electricity and food supply chains, medical stores and police stations, shops and markets shut down -resulting in the proliferation of a host of online services. Indeed, the digital revolution reached its peak of success during the pandemic, owing to citizen dependency and handicap. The boon of digitalization enabled continued education and assessments via a plethora of applications, and transformed work culture in general.

Digitalization proves to be an astounding initiative, which carries within it the potential to pull the Indian economy out of the ravages of the pandemic. The impediments of the SARS-CoV 2 virus imprinted fear on the minds of the populace, resulting in changing consumer behaviour. Digital marketing thus cropped up with enhanced methods for customer engagement using AI (Artificial Intelligence) service portals, gaining customer confidence and trust. The Indian government has rightly capitalized on this lucrative opportunity,

15. Literacy Rate in India 2022 | Kerala & Bihar Literacy Rate 2022. (n.d.). The Global Statistics. <https://www.theglobalstatistics.com/literacy-rate-in-india/>.

16. Smartphone Users in India Crossed 500 Million in 2019, States Report. (2020, January 30). News 18. <https://www.news18.com/news/tech/smartphone-users-in-india-crossed-500-million-in-2019-states-report-2479529.html>.

with the creation and seamless functioning of online portals for almost all sorts of governmental services. The availability of a host of such services- right from ones aiding citizens' identification to taxation goes a long way in aiding centralization and enhancing State control on essential services. The 5G network's vision 'Internet for all', carries within it the government's agenda to bridge the digital divide, and popularize technology as the catalyst to success essential for all sections of the society. Indeed, as pointed out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the National Technology and Futuristic Forum organized by NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies), digitization has brought the citizens closer to the government. Technology also goes a long way in abbreviating the menace of corruption, with greater transparency available on the procurement and tendering process for various infrastructural and developmental projects.

THE DREAM OF AGRICULTURAL REFORMATION

Digitization further envisions revolutionizing agriculture, with a transition from age-old laborious means of farm production, to the usage of drones, robotics, uncrewed aviation systems, sensors and communication networks- for mapping surface area, assessing soil type and devising resource efficient farming techniques. In a prismatic society with heavy dependency on the agrarian sector, technological reforms are a necessity for the country's ever-growing population (now standing approximately at 1.4 billion).

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

Digitization also holds great prospects in revamping the face of diplomacy, an integral ingredient of Indian foreign policy. The latter refers to the conduct of relations by means of negotiation and communication between States and other international actors.

Digital diplomacy holds great prospects for strengthening India's soft power as technological and digital advancements have become prominent in terms of disseminating messages and reaching out to the global audiences

instantaneously, thus affecting their choices in favor of the country's foreign policy objectives. As an aspiring pragmatic state, the country aims to use digital diplomacy in a constructive manner, which will enable the coalescence of the cultural, the political and the social dimensions of foreign policy. Indeed, digitization brings down barriers between the public and the government, adding a new interface to the concept of communication. Engagement with the masses has been considered to be a vital and conspicuous key to the successful functioning of any thriving regime, and digitization aims to amplify the same. The revolution brought in by social media pioneered the apt and the precise use of technology, to engage with the public on a large scale. With diplomacy being at the core of geo-politics in the contemporary world, India is expected to use digitization as a tool to forward its national interests, and create a brand name for itself on the global front. Cybersecurity, challenges cropping up due to cross-border terrorism, international peace and discriminatory trade practices are some of the emerging unconventional concerns in the globalized, interconnected world of the 21st Century. Contemporary problems require novel solutions- hence the use of digitization for online diplomacy. As a strategic regional power aiming to counterbalance the Chinese influence in South Asia, India must gear up and systematically use available resources for socio-cultural diplomacy, dominance and assertion. India's Look East policy, introduced in the 1990s has evolved into the Act East Policy, with digital diplomacy ensuring faster consular outreach in its neighbouring nations, to whom the country had pledged humanitarian aid during the Covid crisis. The Consular Services Management System (MADAD) scheme, an innovation of the Ministry of External Affairs in 2015, was launched with an aim to improve and escalate the tracking of unresolved cases pertaining to the Indian diaspora. Twitter, too, has emerged as a platform encouraging the expression of radical views, with short messages, hashtags and catchy captions, drawing increased attention to immediate socio-political, or even psychological concerns. A barrage of opinions find expression on these virtual platforms, enabling a coalesce of ideas and the circulation of popular ideologies. Indeed, External Affairs minister Jaishankar adding a multilingual touch to the tweets goes a long way in highlighting Twitter's holistic and personalised approach to diplomacy. Interstate relations and bilateral ties thereby must exist in tandem. Negative narratives and demeaning imagery could thus be strategically used by foreign diplomats of enemy nations, as has been prevalent with a growing

increase in cybercrimes. Since digital diplomacy involves direct engagement with the citizens- India must use the same with utmost care. Regulation of cross- border data flows and efficient e-Governance will make India a lucrative partner for a host of Tech firms, thereby providing it a stronghold on the world forum.

CONCLUSION

As India gears up for heading the G20 Presidency in 2023, the developing nation's success story is worth looking back at. The structural reformation of the country's economy makes it 'a bright spot on the otherwise dark global horizon'. The optimism brought in by digitization, alongside the relaxation of pandemic- based restrictions, have outweighed the rippling effects of geopolitical and global concerns. While regulations on cryptocurrency and focused attention on cross-border payments remain contentious issues, India's current endeavor in the arena of digitization is to leave a lasting imprint on its economy for the years to come. Further developments in the sectors of energy transitions, especially renewable energy and enhanced connectivity with regard to the rural-urban interface will be add-ons to India's soft power in the digital realm.

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Education and Political Corruption: Struggle for Equipose

Shaibal Bhattacharya

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Anurag Ghosh

First Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 165

ABSTRACT

Of the potential questions receptive of the table bangs in a bigger room of representatives, showcasing public interests, education has been a necessary evil quite aptly relevant to what India and its diaspora has been in the global purview. Ever since a long temporal phase, politics and education have shared the equal yoke of mutuality for the Indian storyline. However, such arrangements have ended up into unaccustomed consequences. The unsolicited intrusion of bribery, nepotism, cronyism, patronage, graft and embezzlement has made education, more than just new, an objectionably new conviction. Hence, given the roadblock, this article seeks to delve into three cardinal aspects pertaining to the issue in question. First, a ground breaking resolve for corruption. Second, a better methodology for recruiting educationists and lastly, the need for transparency in the functionality of the educational sphere and human capital formation.

Key words: Education, corruption, India, resource, report, rankings, quality.

EDUCATION AND THE SPIRIT OF THE INDIAN BRAGGART-A PREFATORY INSIGHT

The economical requisite for a lubricated machinery of progress resides effectively in the hands of the demography. Human capital, the asset within every economic territory is a far elaborate blessing for India given the fact that its population size is the second largest in the world succeeding planet China.

The spirit of the Indian braggart shall forever recount what International Monetary Fund predicted of its destiny by 2028:

“India is likely to become the third largest economy leaving behind Germany and Japan by 2028. India's annexation to the 3rd place will be achieved by 2028, two years before expected.” (International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook database, 2022)

An addition to this is a ready projection by the World Bank for India serving as a knowledge driven economy. This very acknowledgement of knowledge as a resource reserve us to realize the value of Education. The Indian convention to this prime determinant of Human Resource Development has embraced a bigger fanbase since the ancient times facilitating the scholarly exchange of ideas and convictions. However, the modern-day lacuna in the quality of education and research has somewhat created a faltering legacy thus blatantly contributing to unsolicited data.

INDIA'S PERFORMANCE IN THE EDUCATION SPHERE: AN APOSTERIORI MORAL

For a perpetual latency of 5 years (2010-2014), Indian universities have been failing their names to be in the top 200, round the globe.

The Times Higher Education (TES) revealed only ten Indian universities, (Punjab University at rank 13 (with 40.4 points), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi (rank 57 with 25.3 points) who have made it to the list (Times Higher Education, 2014). Thus, global rankings of Indian universities are rightfully self-explanatory.

On the other hand, from a rudimentary purview, school level data in terms of enrolments have shown improvements in 2020-21 thus giving out acceptable numbers for Pupil-Teacher ratio, Primary enrolment and Primary to Secondary registrations.

POLITICAL CORRUPTION: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL DETRIMENT AND THE ASSOCIATED RAMIFICATIONS

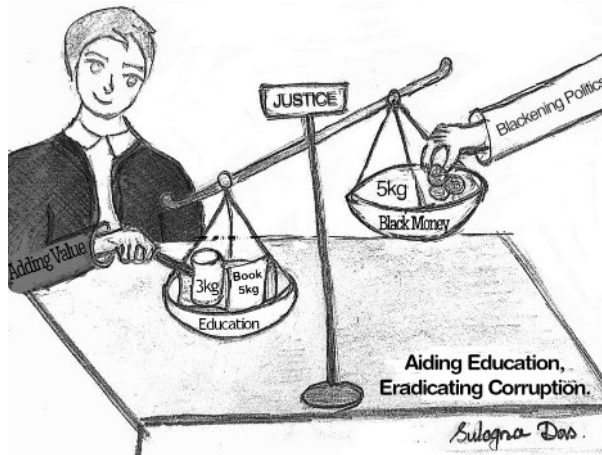
It is corruption, the multidimensional detriment for India, that has largely contributed to the deteriorating quality of education and research. The country has rewarded itself a place in the first 100 corrupt nations according to World Corruption Ranking, 2013 with a recent rank of 85 for the year 2021 (Corruption Perception Index, 2021).

Moreover, the inclusion of a political overtone has furthermore made educational progress treble times incorrigible. Let alone the unavailability of basic infrastructure, the vehement mushrooming of education scams has quite elaborately drawn convoluted colours from the very recent teacher recruitment swindle, the West Bengal epicenter crime of the hitherto venerated state education minister Partha Chatterjee, who held the portfolio of the Industry Minister in Mamata Banerjee-led state government, and his close associate were arrested by the anti-money laundering agency, probing the money trail of the alleged school recruitment scam, on July 23, 2022. The case pertains to alleged irregularities in the recruitment of teachers and non-teaching staff in the state-run schools through the School Service Commission (SSC). Chatterjee was Bengal's education minister when the alleged school job scam took place.

The obtrusion of human resource developers into this babel of malicious politics has created a phenomenal setback. None can ignore the strength of a competent pedagogue. Supplementary tools cannot supplant but supplement the pedagogical competency. Hence, a trained pilot in the devil's hand is detrimental to a progressive multitude.

The year 2013 was the bystander of yet another mass corruption in teacher's appointment in the Northern realm of India. The Former Chief Minister of Haryana, Om Prakash Chautala and his son, Ajay Chautala, and 53 others including two Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, were convicted and sentenced to jail as they were found guilty of offense under the Indian Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Act 1988 for illegally recruiting around 3,206 Junior Basic Trained (JBT) teachers in the state in 2000 (Times Of India, January 22, 2013)

According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Report on corruption in Education in India, 2010, corruption in education has been multifaceted ranging from bribe exchequer by parents to teachers to ensure good grades and examination to the discriminatory profiling of children based on parental educational qualifications, financial standing or social standing.



Aiding Education, Eradicating Corruption
Sulagna Das, Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.-158

THE UTOPIA-AN ATTEMOT TO UNRAVEL THE PROBLEM

Corruption, corruption and corruption: the cycle seems over convoluting in its own right. Nevertheless, solutions dont await tolerances of such vehement crimes and hence deserves a tirade in writing.

Discrimination has forever leased to positive movements. Hence, it is this discrimination that needs to be directed against corruption thereby pretermittig it in every order. A delve into practicality is much harder but attempts must not stop. None but zero tolerance is the way.

Secondly, the institution, which is the realm of human capital formation, should abide by the requisite transparency and accountability. Such checks on liability must be ensured by the venerated authority and even the government with the help of eminent, indomitable and politically unswayed representatives avoiding every middleman in the way, as such the entire business gets solemnized in a neutral setup. The same applies for the governmental grant of educational concessions. Mid way commission cuts are problematic and therefore must be pretermitted.

There should be a Common Eligibility Test for every novice in the field of pedagogy. Tough competition level and assured allowances in a manner that can place teaching next to transferable and non-transferable civil service will not only make it a lucrative proposition but will also help in value creation via job generation. An addition to this is another resolve for neutralizing the urban-rural paradox of unequal provision of basic needs, one of them being education itself. The allowances being the same, pedagogues will not deny their presence in rural counterparts reserving the fear of a less productive employment.

This compact solution, if revered as noticed, shall create phenomenal transitions from the hitherto prospering stance. A journey for the better is that which shall forever remain in consensus.

CONCLUSION

The UNESCO Report of 2007 has ventured us through an issue of controlling corruption in education. The Report primarily observes education to be a lingering menace in the Indian perception. Researching has thus become near to futile an attempt preceding such troublesome and behindhand roadblocks. Brain drain and discontinuity in the context of higher education in India has become quite recurrent because of the unswerving jeopardy of not ensuring a perfect completion to the same in most of the cases. While the Indian conscience is dutiful enough to foster newer overtones to the ready practice of efforts in hand, the end of this stumbling block needs to be realized, albeit impractical in concluding so, to see what the rising sun for sustenance should look like (i.e., Quality conscious and Impartial education). Otherwise, we have readily got the evil conventionalism to continue with: well bribed plenipotentiaries rescue and associated corruption to the rescue.

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Democracy on Decline? An Indian Perspective under the BJP Regime

Atriya Ghosh

First Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 150

ABSTRACT

Since independence, the Indian National Congress, under Jawaharlal Nehru, had a prolonged era of electoral dominance. In the 1970s, Indira Gandhi enunciated concentrated power in the central government and the imposition of emergency in 1975. However, in 1977 Mrs. Gandhi was defeated by a coalition, giving India its first non-Congress government. Rajiv Gandhi re-empowered Congress in the 1985 election, embarking on a new tech-driven era for India. 25 years of coalition governments followed from 1989 to 2014. The 2009-2014 Congress-led coalition, led by Manmohan Singh, was increasingly portrayed by political opponents as representing a decadent, English-speaking elite lacking vision for India. 2014 however had witnessed Modi-ascendancy with Bharatiya Janata Party and Narendra Modi being elected as India's PM. BJP under Modi's premiership reigned the 2014 general elections, becoming an outright majority. In 2019, this majoritarianism witnessed an acceleration with 303 seats but with that, the question of how democratic India is? This article thus focuses on the following two key aspects. First, growing concerns of whether India is really becoming autocratic which is believed to be the current global image of Indian Democracy. Second, how Indian democracy is gradually transitioning under the Modi regime.

Key words: Democracy, India, Modi-regime, Hindutva

INTRODUCTION

Author Atul Kohli characterises India's democracy as "somewhat of an anomaly." Several scholars have highlighted various political variables imperative for a well governed democratic state: quality of leadership, prevailing ideology, degree of intra-elite harmony and so on. Demagogic

leaders can easily exacerbate political tensions within a democracy. India is facing similar tendencies in its nature of democracy in recent times and therefore, has encountered innumerable criticisms in the present times. There have emerged uncountable instances of browbeating of the journalists and activists, and a wave of violence, particularly against Muslims, under the supervision of the current regime. The troubles in India's democracy is clearly visible from recent developments whereby in March 2021, India was demoted from "free" to "partly free" democracy by United States based non-profit Freedom House in its annual report on global rights and liberties. Also, in the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy), India is classified as an 'electoral autocracy'. In 2022, India ranked 93rd in the LDI (Liberal Democratic Index), and figures in the "bottom 50%" of countries, further slipping down in the Electoral Democracy Index, to 100. In South Asia, India is ranked below Sri Lanka (88), Nepal (71), and Bhutan (65) and above Pakistan (117) in the LDI¹⁷. Freedom House highlighted that civil liberties have been in decline since Mr. Modi came to power in 2014, and said that India's "fall from the upper ranks of free nations could have a more damaging effect on the world's democratic standards"¹⁸ V-Dem said the "diminishing of freedom of expression, the media, and civil society have gone the furthest" during Mr. Modi's rule, and that as far as censorship goes India was "as autocratic as Pakistan and worse than its neighbours Bangladesh and Nepal."

HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY OF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

French scholar Christophe Jaffrelot argues that under Shri Narendra Modi, India has transformed into an "ethnic democracy" that identifies the Hindu majority (approximately four-fifths of the population) with the nation, while downgrading Christians and Muslims to second class citizenship, removing them from the national consciousness and subjecting them to vigilante organisations linked to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. They had championed Hindutva, an ideology that privileges the Hindu majority over religious minorities. BJP has passed laws to protect Hinduism

17. <https://www.v-dem.net/files/25/DR%202021.pdf>

18. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2020>

and its symbols both at the Federal and the State level. On 26 October 2005, the Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgement upheld the constitutional validity of anti-cow slaughter laws enacted by various state governments of India. 20 out of 28 states in India had various laws regulating the act of slaughtering cows, prohibiting the slaughter or sale of cows. Now, several BJP ruled states have increased penalties for slaughtering cows, which Hindus worship, and have limited religious freedom to convert from Hinduism to Christianity or Islam. These laws have been passed without altering India's formally secular constitution. The Modi government has also validated the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which is a century old Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation. The Hindu nationalist view of the government could also be seen in the education system. State authorities have been instructed to rewrite history textbooks as they view India's history through the lens of struggle with medieval Islamic rulers, rather than as a multifaceted mosaic with both dispute and coordination. The effects of India's transformation from a secular democracy to an ethnic democracy have been significant for many in the country's 200 million-strong Muslim minority. Several BJP-ruled states have passed laws to prohibit so-called "love jihad," wherein Muslim men court Hindu women as a tactic of social warfare. Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu monk who created an anti-Muslim militia and whose horrifying speeches against Muslims once made him unsuitable for the Chief Minister's chair of Uttar Pradesh. Muslims, according to Adityanath, are "two-legged animals that have to be stopped" (Dhume, 2021). The anti-conversion law, which went into effect in UP on November 27, 2020, provides for up to ten years in prison for anyone found guilty under the Illegal Conversion Act, depending on the gravity of the offence. Furthermore, the guilty may face fines ranging from Rs 15,000 to Rs 50,000. The first case of conviction under the anti-conversion law of UP was reported in September 2022, when a district court in Amroha sentenced a 26-year-old man named Afzal to 5 years imprisonment for the abduction of a 16-year-old girl. Besides the jail sentence, a fine of Rs 40000 had been imposed on the accused (OpIndia, 2022). A case had been registered against a man in Indore under anti love jihad law on the complaint of 25-year-old woman. Kshipra police station in-charge Girijashankar Moghi said that the accused had married the complainant in court but she later came to know that he had hidden his religion. (The Times Of India, 2022). As many as 268 cases were lodged under the new anti-conversion law since it was formulated in

November 2020. While 840 persons were booked and a charge sheet was filed in 176 cases, 27 cases were closed with a final report. At least 153 cases are still under investigation. One of the FIRs was expunged by the police. (The Times of India, 2022).

Love Jihad laws or the Anti conversion Law is breaching the personal lives of the citizens. It is also creating more conflict, tensions and communalism which is already present in India to a great extent because of BJP's anti-Muslim policies. Notionally, this law applies with equal force to all interfaith marriages. However, for all practical purposes this would affect Muslims, as Islamic personal law requires a non-Muslim to convert to sanctify the marriage. So far, enforcement has targeted only Hindu-Muslim marriages.

ELECTORAL AUTOCRACY

India has been labelled as an electoral autocracy by the V-Dem. During the elections, the government appoints alleged supporters of the party to the Election Commission and penalises those who protest against it. The ruling party also has a significant financial edge over its opponents as it has introduced a new type of campaign finance known as electoral bonds, where donors can deposit amounts into the political parties' registered bank accounts. Unlike other kinds of campaign funding, such as cash donations, these bonds may be tracked by government-controlled institutions. This puts those who provide substantial sums to the opposition at risk of government retaliation. India's 2019 election cost \$8.6 billion, more than the \$6.6 billion spent on the 2018 presidential election in the United States. (Gupta, 2019). The Association for Democratic Reforms, an Indian watchdog group, stated that in 2017–18, the BJP accounted for about three-fourths of all income recorded by national political parties, roughly five times more than its closest rival, the INC did.

MEDIA AND PRESS CENSORSHIP

Amidst receiving condemnation from global and domestic observers over inept handling of the COVID-19 situation, the besieged and embarrassed

government blocked 100 critical tweets including those from opposition Members of Parliament (MPs), journalists and other civil society representatives. The government forced Twitter to suspend 500 accounts and prevent access to numerous others who had tried to emphasise the government's inadequate handling of the Indian farmers protests. When Twitter went against the government by disagreeing with their evaluation of the legality of the content and unblocked the accounts, the government gave Twitter a non-compliance notice, threatening prison for the executives. The Modi government to a great extent has used Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 that allows the government to block public access to an 'intermediary' for a variety of vague reasons like national security, defence of India, and public order. The government has recently added the IT (Intermediaries Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules of 2021 in India's censorship arsenal. The rules were enacted in February following the government's confrontation with Twitter. They seek to create a supervisory and blocking mechanism for digital media, social media intermediaries and over the top (OTT) service providers, establishing a regime of "self-censorship" by the media and OTT platforms, failing which government-controlled bodies retain emergency blocking powers with severe penalties for non-compliance. The rules force intermediaries to violate end-to-end encryption to identify communicators on instant messaging apps, a provision over which WhatsApp has also chosen to sue the government. The rules limit free speech and user privacy and represent an extension of the government's power to control the flow of digital information. If India continues down this path, it seems to run the risk of moving to a Chinese-like model where the government can break encryption to monitor its citizens.

The government also keeps much of the media on a leash. It intimidates the press with tax raids, temporary TV channel bans and pressure on media moguls to fire uncooperative journalists or risk harming their business interests. It attracts the media with its huge advertising budget, which is then used to influence political coverage. A new generation of pro-government propaganda channels are working around the clock to vilify opposition leaders and glorify Modi's virtues. In 2020, four journalists of Caravan, an investigative news magazine which has often been in the crosshairs of Mr. Modi's government were attacked in two separate incidents as they reported on the aftermath of

religious unrest and a protest over the alleged rape and murder of a teenager in Delhi (Biswas, 2021). The ruling party nullifies journalists being targeted and considers such happenings as ‘orchestrated propaganda’ against the government. Many believe that India is becoming dangerous for journalists.

As media influence transcends human reach, the fourth pillar of democracy takes pride in being fair, impartial, and presenting the facts. However, as recent events demonstrate, media is confronted with several challenges that jeopardize its very own function, including the current test of nationalism in the name of religion, hate crimes, and social evils; the media has played a disastrous role, whether it is through the propagation of religious ideologies, poor reporting in sensitive cases or investigative cowboy journalism that harmed the media's credibility.

CURB ON CITIZENS’ RIGHTS: DEBASEMENT OF INDIA’S DEMOCRACY?

Although BJP’s version of Hindutva appears to be gaining traction as the dominant expression of Hindu Nationalism, it has failed to persuade people from all sections to blindly support the policy measures the government undertakes. The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 is an instance that created magnified political upheaval in India. Although it was ostensibly designed to enmesh a benevolent fabric to Indian citizenship for certain minority sections who fled religious persecutions in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, the policy was seen as a deliberate stunt by BJP to shun the Muslim minorities in India from their citizenship rights. The protests at Shaheen Bagh, the hub of Anti-CAA protests, started on December 15 as part of nationwide demonstrations against the CAA that was passed on December 11, 2019 and the National Register of Citizens. The protests were uniquely peaceful in manner and were led mainly by Muslim women - a section of society that was rarely seen at the forefront of protest before this. On 12 December, a large protest gathering was organized outside the Jamia Millia Islamia campus witnessing an attendance of almost 800 students. The Jamia Teachers Solidarity Association (JTSA) hailed for a sit-in protest to be held on December 13. The protest recorded a great turnout from students and teachers alike. However, a

march that began later was disrupted by the police. Several students were brutally assaulted. According to a fact-finding report by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), at least 100 students were injured that day. But the students of Jamia did not back down. (Ladegaam, 2021). Farmers' protest is another instance. The enactment of the three contentious agriculture laws: Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020; and Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 agitated the farmers that the laws would lead to the abolishment of the minimum support price (MSP) guaranteed by the government on select crops, and leave them at the mercy of big corporates. The protests first gained momentum in November last year when farmers tried to march into Delhi but were stopped by police at the city's borders. Since then, they had stayed at the edge of the city and had sustained the protest against all odds from braving scorching heat to the deadly second wave of COVID-19. Despite attempts to convince the farmers about the benefits of the laws, Mr. Modi declared the repeal of the laws on 19 November. A bill to cancel the reforms was officially passed in Parliament on 30 November, thus marking a victory for farmers and also highlighting how mass protests could still successfully challenge the government. (BBC, 2021).

It is evident that India would become autocratic if the people's right to speech and expression is denied. It is very important for the people to have the power to criticise the government's actions in a democracy as Abraham Lincoln posits, democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. India is facing such issues as there is no strong opposition party that could challenge BJP at the national level. A weak opposition is giving unrestricted power to the ruling party.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Modi-regime post-2014 period of Indian history has redefined the nature of politics in India in three different respects. First, it has transformed the nature of political and electoral competition. Second, has altered the way by which political power is exercised. Third, has transformed political and social realities

on the ground, thus conglomerating to infuse a change in the nature of the Indian State. India is characterised by the twin problems of illiteracy and poverty which makes it easier for any government powers to manipulate the masses and provoke religious sentiments to influence vote banks. Any government policies and centralisation of power could only be checked by a strong opposition and the strength of the popular voice which, at this moment, seem to be lacking in India. India has entrenched a parliamentary system and an extensive and liberal constitution which are seeming to wither away owing to the usage of religious sentiments and extreme ideologies like Hindutva to gain support for their Right-wing policies. I believe it is very important for the people of India to be aware about syncretism and how its presence in the Indian landscape could make our country truly democratic. Today, religion is mainly manoeuvred as a discriminatory weapon for fulfilling self-interests, undermining the democratic and secular fabric of India. India is a pluralist state studded with varied culture and religions. Thus, it should be beneficial for any ruling government to accommodate that tenet. The Modi government has undoubtedly garnered the image of Indian culture globally by means of utilising soft power tenets like Yoga, taking digitization one step further and even vaccine diplomacy during COVID-era. In terms of Modi's technology and digital developments, there feebly lies a similarity, I find, with Rajiv Gandhi tech-driven era who similarly brought about remarkable technological changes to make India self-reliant just like Mr. Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat. But certain aforesaid laws cited in this article seem to underestimate the facets that India truly stands for, i.e., equality, unity and liberty. I opine that any person, promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, and by doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony should be charged under 153A of Indian Penal Code with stringent measures. However, one must understand that it is a far-fetched idea to call India an autocratic nation. Indian constitutional law is of immense historical, practical, and theoretical significance. We must invest our faith in India's Constitution as the framework through which the world's largest and one of its most contentious democracies was brought into being.

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SECTION - II

**GLOBAL AFFAIRS
AND
INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY**

The Sahel – A Template of Security Crisis

Jigyasa Maloo

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.-109

ABSTRACT

A Land of Opportunities, Sahel has become an epicentre of security challenges. Tucked between the Sahara Desert and the Savanna, the region stretches from Africa's Atlantic Coast in the west to the Red Sea in the east and comprises Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, The Gambia, Senegal, Guinea and Mauritania. The region is endowed with plentiful natural resources such as uranium and oil; they have a significant demographic advantage since they are among the youngest countries in the world. Despite the opportunities, the only means of survival is often through humanitarian assistance. For a decade now, states in the Sahel have been plagued with chronic insecurity – poor governance and internal political breakdown leading to military coups, insurgencies and armed conflicts in effect leveraged by terrorist groups and criminal gangs, the existential climate crisis compounded with the humanitarian exigency. This article is an attempt to understand the current volatile situation in the G5¹⁹ Countries in the Sahel, how the Western Security engagement has exacerbated the situation and the urgent need to reset the policy approaches toward this region.

Key words: G5 Sahel, Mali, ten years regional instability, security initiatives, policy approach, security forces, failure of state

A DECADE IN RETROSPECT

The ten-year regional instability had its genesis in Northern Mali with the insurgency led by the Tuareg separatist group in 2012 and subsequent military putsch triggered by the army's frustration with President Amadou Toumani Toure's response to the northern uprising. The triad – MNLA (the National

19. a regional partnership created in 2014 comprising five thousand troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger
<https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-know-about-crisis-mali>

Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), the Islamist hard-liner group Ansar Dine, and the terrorist organization Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – capitalized on the political vacuum the coup created in the capital and nearly captured all of the north and asserted independence, though the alliance between MNLA and jihadist groups was short lived. The stress is therefore on the fact that toppling of Toure’s government had gradually set in motion a spill over effect reverberating to other parts of Mali and eventually in the neighbourhood.

Burkina Faso sharing a long porous border with Mali bore direct ramifications – with massive influx of Malian population and infiltration of Islamic terrorist groups. In Niger, communal violence erupted in the border region of Tillabéri. The case in Liptako-Gourma – a tri-border region of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, escalation of violence has grown to be a reigning feature. These are large patches of ungoverned and inhospitable territories where state sovereignty and control is essentially non-existent – underlining the failure of the state in discharging basic primary services such as food, shelter, healthcare, education, employment and security. The inefficacy of the state had led to resentment among the local communities which has been substantially exploited by armed Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama’a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin’ (JNIM), Islamic State and Boko Haram to name a few. Presenting themselves as saviour, these non-state actors have entrenched themselves in these local communities which include the Fulani found in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the pastoralist Tuaregs, Arab tribes, and Songhai (Nyadera and Massaoud). By assuming control, they have targeted the grievances and disenchantment and instituted a parallel structure – substituting state authority, imposing Sharia, and even forming socio-cultural ties. As a result, they have built legitimacy, dependency, fear and terror to operate freely in these ungoverned spaces. By thriving in these areas, they have further reinforced themselves - establishing an informal economy and siphoning profits from illicit products, levying taxes on the locals, diffusing anti- state propaganda and radicalising and recruiting the younger generation by exhorting extreme Islamic ideology. These events marked the beginning of a new form of conflict in the Sahel: insurgency steeped in militant Islamist ideology. (Eizenga, 2019)

This underscored the incapacity of the state to mitigate effectively the rise of Islamic militancy in parts of the country, as well as the malleability and durability of the Islamic terrorist groups to withstand counterterrorism efforts.

Therefore, when stemming the context of the state collapse in Mali, the underlying structural issues related to historical dysfunctionalities, the nature of state building, lack of territorial unity, inter community violence, systemic inequalities, geographic isolation, poor governance, lack of social cohesion, economic resentment - grappling the Sahel region cannot be turned a blind eye. Structural factors are punctuated by proximate causes related to specific events, actors, movements, empirical realities, and moments. (Economic Commission for Africa, United Nations, 2019) And these factors coalesce and magnify the prevalent agitation and grievances; inciting violent actions at many levels of society. In the Sahel, therefore state fragility is an enduring cause of protracted conflict dynamics.

WEST LED FOOL'S ERRAND

The fall of Bamako brought about the ascendance of Jihadist militancy, which transpired as a huge shock to the Western countries since Mali for long had been considered the bastion of democracy in West Africa.

The erstwhile colonizer – France intervened at the behest of the Malian Government in January 2013. France stationed ground troops and launched air campaigns against the jihadists as a part of Operation Serval. Along with soldiers from Niger and Chad, France successfully liberated northern Mali from the jihadists grip. ‘Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali’ (MINUSMA) – a peacekeeping mission mandated by the UN Security Council to ensure stability in Mali and a series of training and advisory mission was set up namely ‘European Union Training Mission’ (EUTM) initially in Mali, later partnering with other Sahel countries as well. The G5 Sahel Alliance was formed anchored on twin cooperation of development and security needs. Operation Serval was rebranded as Operation Barkhane in 2015 – it became a crucial counterterrorism operation across the G5 Sahel countries.

A key highlight of the mediation effort undertaken by France in 2013 was that it set forth a string of national, regional and international security initiatives. However, hounding on an exclusively military-first approach with an overwhelming emphasis on building security and military forces' capabilities (Montanaro, 2022) - centred on rooting out extremist militant Islamic groups. This had been endorsed categorically by the French defense minister Florence Parly, when he stated "Violent extremist organizations are our first concern." The assumption is that the capacity of state security forces is a prerequisite for stabilisation and development. (Montanaro, 2022)

The optimism towards the success of counter-terror operations far exceeds the operations on the ground. This is particularly identified by the rampant corruption within the ranks of the security forces, lack of morale and unity, untrained in western military equipment, security forces' linkage with militia groups, abuses perpetrated by security forces to civilians and structural impunity. Consequently, it is impacting the efficiency with which these security forces deliver the outlined goals and further aggravates the state-society gap and citizens' distrust of government. In 2020, more civilians were killed by state security forces than by extremist groups in the G5 countries.

The perpetual fallout of this approach is how it has contributed to the cycle of mutually escalating violence and has fuelled inter-communal conflicts. (Montanaro, 2022)

The drawdown of the last French military unit on 15th August, 2022 concluded the operation Barkhane in Mali. Once again Mali has fallen into the abyss. Two coups in eight months, Burkina Faso is now the hotbed and a microcosm of the deep-rooted problems of governability and state consolidation across the Sahel. (Obadare, 2022). Even the noise of Russia making its foothold through Wagner Group is conspicuous and steadily growing.

It has been a foolhardy venture. A military victory against terrorism is veritably elusive. With templates of recurrent failures of the security approach whether in Afghanistan or Iraq, the lessons learned have never been fully and rationally integrated into future policies. The West yet going ahead with this myopic framework in the Sahel shows little appreciation of the complexity of the crisis unfolding there.

RESETTING THE POLICY APPROACH

European Union Special Representative Angel Losada has described the Sahel as a “polygon of crises,” which includes governance, security, economic, demographic, humanitarian, migration, and radicalization crises. It naturally calls for recognition of the multifaceted nature of insecurity (Economic Commission for Africa) as well as multifaceted response to these challenges - a widening and deepening of security as advocated by Barry Buzan. The policy approach ought to be reanalysed, revised, and reset, rather than relying on a heavily militarised response. The crisis is multidimensional and cannot be tackled by addressing a singular facet. There is an urgent need to move beyond the dominant narrative of securitisation. The over-determined focus on terrorism and violent religious extremism risks ignoring the failings of regional governments to provide the public goods needed by their citizens and in turn perpetuating, or exacerbating, the root causes of conflict in the region. (Eizenga, 2019)

Interestingly, several peace and security initiatives for the Sahel in recent years incorporate the Human security approach – focusing on people’s needs and experiences as the main referent object. However, in practice, implementation and operationalization are impeded by the weak institutional foundation susceptible to corruption and built upon distrust. It has been far easier to engage in short-term solutions than wrestle with difficult questions. Though terrorism is jeopardising stability, the greatest threat to stability is the structural factor – the weakening nature of the state. Because international operations can only last so long and cannot substitute regional governments in the long run, the objective should be to support governments in fulfilling their core functions (Schiller, 2020) that includes security, development, and specifically governance. It is through proper governance initiatives by addressing core functions such as the legal system, education, territorial administration, health care, and central government institutions, that the state–society relation can be restored and re-developed gradually. And to strengthen the institution’s capacity in public service deliveries, the priority must be to allocate resources for the needs of the people by the government; however, the will to do so is necessarily absent. In the Sahel, it is not the lack of strategies but rather the lack of political will, trust, and coordination that are major bumps in any sustainable

resolutions. The risk of competitiveness within the government and with external stakeholders for resources overrides coordination in the implementation of a constellation of policies – national, regional or international.

As a result, the balance between the priorities of stakeholders and the needs of the local people ought to be clarified. More focus must be placed on increasing engagement with affected populations and activating civil society participation in the decision-making process; (Montanaro, 2022) this would help in addressing fundamental drivers of violent conflict as well as deeper socio-economic grievances.

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Brand Buddha: Dhamma Diplomacy in India's Soft Power Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The enchanting appeal of Buddhism in the world, especially in East and South East Asia, has provided India with a potent tool for furthering her diplomatic and strategic interests. India takes pride in being the cradle of Buddhism but a dedicated shift towards leveraging it as a strategic soft power resource is a recent phenomenon. As opposed to other soft power tools resorted to by India like Bollywood or yoga, which involve the 'export' of some cultural commodities to other states, the Buddhist component of Indian soft power pertains to the strengthening and promotion of already existing historical, religious and cultural ties that cut across political boundaries. With special emphasis on the redevelopment of the Nalanda University and the transnational Buddhist tourist circuit, this article seeks to provide an overview of the plethora of means by which India, especially since 2014, has been passionately striving to reclaim its position as the 'land of the Buddha'. It also tries to shed some light on the Sino-Indian tug of war for claiming Buddhist leadership in the world and the corollary economic as well as symbolic benefits that flow from it.

Key words: India, Soft power, Buddhism, Nalanda University, Buddhist tourist circuit, China

BACKGROUND

New Delhi has traditionally had a lackadaisical and ad hoc approach towards incorporating India's multifaceted soft power²⁰ resources in general and

20. The term 'soft power' was introduced by Joseph Nye in the late 1980s. It is a country's ability to make other countries want what it wants, through co-option rather than coercion. A country's soft power rests on its culture, its political values and its foreign policies.

Buddhism in particular, in her diplomatic discourse. Despite its rich civilizational heritage, which has the potential of catapulting India to a commanding position in the global soft power index, India's soft power story is a story of lost opportunities. India's inability to efficiently wield its 'soft power toolkit' and create an enabling political environment for its foreign policies can mainly be attributed to the lack of sufficient conventional or hard power to 'undergird' its soft power strategy and the 'confusion' pertaining to the image that this multi-ethnic nation wants to project in the outside world (Mukherjee, 2013).

However, India has made significant strides in this domain in the recent past, especially since 2014. The Global Soft Power Index 2022, published by Brand Finance, ranks India at the 29th position (out of 120 countries) with a score of 43.2 out of 100 while USA tops the list with 70.7²¹. New Delhi has come to realize that India's ambitions of strengthening its soft power credentials in the world is, among other factors, dependent on how efficiently it is able to leverage Buddhism as a geopolitical and diplomatic asset.

WHY BUDDHISM?

The modern trend of tapping Buddhism as a geo-strategic resource is in turn the result of the 'large-scale faith diplomacy campaign' carried out by Buddhist monks and disciples which led to the dissemination of the Buddhist faith from India primarily to South, Southeast, Central, and East Asia and to a lesser extent, to parts of Africa and Europe (Zhang, 2012). Today, Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world and its adherents represent 7% of the world's total population.

Despite the retreat of Buddhism from India, it still enjoys a privileged position as the focal point from which the light of dhamma radiated to the rest of the world. Seven of the eight holy places of Buddhism, the 'Ashtamahasthanas'²² – Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushnagar, Shravasti, Rajgir, Sankasya, and Vaishali –

21. Global Soft Power Index. (2022). Brand Finance. <https://brandirectory.com/softpower/>

22. These are the eight most important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists. One of them, Lumbini (the birthplace of Buddha), is located in Nepal.

are located in India. Besides, there are numerous other Buddhist shrines, monasteries and places of Buddhist importance like the Ajanta and Ellora Caves and the Nalanda University.

The nascent Indian state took baby steps towards leveraging Buddhism in its foreign policy, which is reflected in the organization of conferences like the International Buddhist Conference at Sanchi in 1952 and Nehru's 'relic diplomacy' (Ramachandran, 2019) in the Himalayan countries. The trend of hosting academic conferences and relic tours continues to date. Nehru's touted foreign policy of Non-Alignment can also be traced back to the Buddhist ideal of 'Madhyamika'. (Stobdan, 2016)

Moreover, India gained an enormous reputation among Buddhist followers in general and Tibetan Buddhists in particular, for granting asylum to the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959. This bold move by India at a time when Sino-Indian relations were guided by the romanticized idea of 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai' added a new dimension to India's Buddhist diplomacy.

A NEW DAWN

"The 21st Century will be Asia's century and without Buddha, this cannot be Asia's century." - Narendra Modi

The highly underutilized Buddhist dimension of India's cultural diplomacy has gained momentum since 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi's inclination towards cultivating and strengthening Buddhist ties with India's neighbors is in tune with the government's foreign policies of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East'.

Incidentally, the first country that Modi visited after taking oath as the PM was Bhutan, which is a Buddhist country. In 2015, Modi became only the third Prime Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru (1956) and Manmohan Singh (2007) to officially commemorate Buddha Purnima or 'Vesak' day²³. Moreover, the government resolved to hold international Buddhist functions every year to

23. Centre to mark Buddha Purnima as important event. (2015, April 30). The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Centre-to-mark-Buddha-Purnima-as-important-event/articleshow/47102461.cms>

celebrate the auspicious day of Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and salvation. Modi has also been conscious to include Buddhist sites on the itinerary of his diplomatic tours. For instance, he visited the Big Wild Goose Pagoda and Daxingshan Temple in China in 2015 and Myanmar's iconic Shwedagon Pagoda in 2017.

The government's commitment to Buddhist diplomacy is also reflected in bilateral pacts such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India and Bhutan for the development of the Nalanda University in Bihar (2014)²⁴ and the \$15 million grant to Sri Lanka for bolstering of Buddhist ties between the two countries (2020)²⁵.

Besides, India has also been actively engaged in academic initiatives like the 'Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness' in 2015, the 5th International Buddhist Conclave in 2016, and the seminar on 'Buddhism in the 21st Century' at Rajgir, Bihar in 2017 which are magnetic attractions for Buddhist monks, scholars and academicians from around the world.

NALANDA: THE 'UNIVERSITY OF FUTURE'

The idea of reviving the Nalanda University (NU), the first residential university in the world, was first floated in 2005, by the then President of India Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam. The interest and enthusiasm of member countries like the Philippines and Thailand at the Second and Fourth East Asia Summits respectively, culminated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar, China, Japan, Korea, India, New Zealand,

24. India, Bhutan sign MoU on establishment of Nalanda University. (2014, November 7). The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/india-bhutan-sign-mou-on-establishment-of-nalanda-university/articleshow/45071438.cms>

25. Chaudhury, D.R. (2020, September 26). India extends \$15 million grant for promotion of Buddhist ties with Sri Lanka. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-extends-15-million-grant-for-promotion-of-buddhist-ties-with-sri-lanka/articleshow/78334018.cms>

Australia, Russia and the United States of America in October 2013²⁶, for an international collaborative endeavor for the re-establishment of the Nalanda University as an international centre of excellence.

Besides India contributing Rs.684.74 crore, the project received voluntary contributions from Thailand and Laos and million-dollar contributions from both China and Australia (as of August 2016). The academic session of the NU was inaugurated in 2014 by Sushma Swaraj, the then External Affairs Minister, and the work on the new 455-acre campus, which was started only in 2017, got completed in 2022.

The revival of the Buddhist monastic university which was the confluence of diverse Asian cultures between the 5th and the 13th centuries also indicates the coming together of the Asian community tied by enduring religio-cultural threads.

RELIGIOUS TOURISM: THE BUDDHIST CIRCUIT

Tourism, by virtue of its capacity to enhance people-to-people connectivity and facilitate image-building of the destination country, has a vital role to play in any nation's soft power strategy. Out of all the religions that spread out from the subcontinent to other parts of the world, Buddhism offers the most promising prospects with respect to enhancing India's international religious tourism. This is because India is home to only a minuscule of Buddhists (0.7% as per the 2011 Census) and 97% of them are concentrated in East and Southeast Asia.

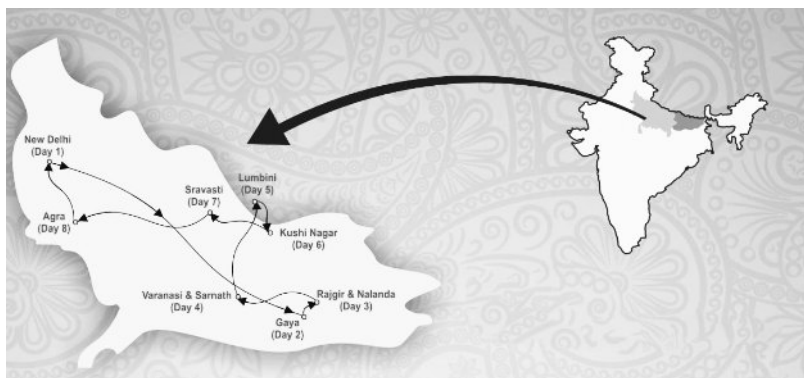
While seven out of eight most significant Buddhist sites are situated in India, it receives less than one percent of the global Buddhist tourists. The more attractive destinations are Southeast Asian countries like Thailand and Indonesia and even China, which has proved successful in attracting more Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian tourists than India. India's surprisingly

26. Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of Nalanda University. (2013, October 23). Ministry of External affairs, Government of India. https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/22373/Memorandum_of_Understanding_on_the_Establishment_of_Nalanda_University

poor record can primarily be attributed to inadequate and substandard infrastructural facilities and a lack of awareness.

In a bid to rectify this anomaly, the Ministry of Tourism identified the Buddhist Circuit as one of the fifteen thematic circuits under the Swadesh Darshan scheme launched in 2014-15. Initially, it was envisaged to cover only seven pilgrimage sites in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh but it was gradually expanded to other states like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, etc. and eventually became India's first trans-national tourism circuit, connecting sites of Buddhist significance in Nepal and India. Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation's transnational Buddhist circuit train made its inaugural run in 2019 and the Bharat Darshan Special Tourist Train, covering Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India and Nepal, was launched in 2021. It is noteworthy that the simmering tensions between India and Nepal over the border areas of Lipulekh and Kalapani since 2020 have not led to a disruption of such train services. This points to the potential of cultural diplomacy to act as an adhesive and bring countries together on a collaborative platform even when there is disagreement on graver issues.

The Buddhist Circuit combined with other endeavours such as the development of the Mahabodhi Convention Centre at Bodhgaya, the development of Buddhist sites across several states under the PRASHAD Scheme and capacity building for Linguistic Tour Facilitators in languages such as Thai, Vietnamese, etc. augurs well both from the economic as well as the diplomatic point of view.



IRCTC Buddhist Tourist Train Route

Source: IRCTC. <https://www.irctcbuddhisttrain.com/#/index>

BUDDHISM: A NEW THEATRE OF SINO-INDIAN CONTESTATION

The complicated relationship of cooperation, competition, and conflict between the two Asian giants, India and China, spills over to the realm of Buddhist diplomacy as well. A good illustration of this complex relationship is the Nanhai University built in 2017, which was projected by Beijing as an alternative to India's Nalanda University, even though China itself was a part of the abovementioned initiative to revive Nalanda.

The 14th Dalai Lama's escape from Tibet and the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong, which was responsible for the persecution and destruction of Chinese Buddhism, earned Beijing the disrepute of being an anti-Buddhist country. In fact, the officially atheist Communist Party of China's (CPC) recent Buddhist outreach can be partly explained as a means to 'counterbalance' (Ramachandran, 2019) the 14th Dalai Lama's worldwide popularity not only as the paramount leader of Tibetan Buddhism but also an ambassador of peace and a symbol of resistance to Chinese belligerence. The World Buddhist Forum organized by China, every two years since 2006, is being used by China to gain at least some respect if not recognition for Gyaltzen Norbu, the CPC's candidate for the 11th Panchen Lama²⁷ (Dorjee, 2018).

However, more worrisome from New Delhi's perspective is China's tactful deployment of Buddhist soft power to veil its 'debt-trap diplomacy' symbolized by Xi Jinping's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In Bangladesh, China funded the excavation of a 1000-year old Buddhist site²⁸. The Lotus Tower in Colombo, meant to be a Buddhist symbol of peace, has been dubbed, by Patrick Mendis, as a 'Trojan Horse' from China. (Mendis, 2018)

China's \$3 trillion development project for Nepal's Lumbini kills two birds with one stone. On one hand, it helped Beijing to gain the acceptance of the Nepali government for the BRI, and on the other, it may help in the diversion of

27. In the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, the position of the Panchen Lama, with respect to spiritual authority, is second only to the Dalai Lama. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima went missing at the age of six, just three days after he was recognized and announced as the 11th Panchen Lama, by the 14th Dalai Lama.

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tourists from Bodhgaya to Lumbini (Shi, 2019). Nepal has been brought under the BRI umbrella through the project of linking Lumbini to the Tibetan town of Kyirong on the Chinese-Nepali border.

The use of Buddhism as a geo-strategic resource is set to gain further currency in the days to come, especially after the meltdown of the Sri Lankan economy, which might engender an attitude of skepticism towards ostensibly lucrative Chinese loans. China needs to convince the BRI states that it is not a hegemon pursuing expansionist aims but a state with a shared history desirous of mutual benefit.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The very fact that the two Asian giants are vying for Buddhist leadership in recent years is indicative of the rise of Buddhism as a prominent soft power resource. Despite the fact that India cannot compete with China in terms of economic prowess, the former has an edge over the latter owing to its repository of Buddhist heritage and its international image of a benign nation and not a belligerent power. As compared to the authoritarian Chinese state, India's democratic principles and multicultural ethos appear to be more in sync with what the Buddha stands for and it must strive to maintain and improve these credentials. The Indian establishment must realise that "world opinion punishes inconsistency between words and deeds" and it cannot afford to pursue a domestic policy which is contradictory to what it preaches on the global stage (Mukherjee, 2013).

The noble Buddhist philosophy should not just be seen as a means to an end but also as an end in itself. At a time when the world is reeling under the forces of intolerance, violence, aggression, and expansionism, the Buddhist principles of compassion, non-violence and peaceful co-existence can act as a soothing balm for a fragmented and blistered world. While Buddhism itself has become a front for rivalries between countries aiming to further their own national interests, the power-hungry world must realize that the crux of the Buddhist ethos lies in cooperation, not conflict.

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The Indian Ocean: An Ocean of Opportunities and Tussles

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary era, maritime domain has acquired adequate prominence in directing trade relations, security bailiwicks and geopolitical strategies among the nations. Of this, the Indian Ocean has emerged as the most conflagrant issue, having a geopolitical significance for the nation states surrounding the ocean. This research article explains three aspects concerning the significance of the Indian Ocean. First, it analyzes certain prominent hindrances like overfishing, piracy and maritime terrorism, that make the IOR politically and economically volatile. Second, it portrays the growing significance of the Indian Ocean and explores some of the key developments undertaken by nation states, particularly 21st century China, India and the United States and extra regional and regional actors. While some, under the veil of national interest, have indulged into activities that give birth to newer threats to collective security, others' continuous efforts to counter those have destabilised the region. This argument has been extended further, since, thirdly, the article delves into the analysis of why China's 'String of Pearls' initiative, to a certain degree, needs to be countered and how India's 'Necklace of Diamond Policy,' Information Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) can play a part in it alongside highlighting Indo-US cooperation.

Key words: IOR, maritime piracy, maritime terrorism, overfishing, String of Pearls, BRI, Necklace of Diamond, Defensive military stance, Strategic culture, choke points, net security provider.

INTRODUCTION

Alfred Thayer, in his theory of sea dominance, once propounded, "whoever conquers the Indian Ocean, will dominate Asia" (Katoch, 2020). It seems like time is proving the statement to be true, which this article attempts to explain.

Several state-driven activities have instilled security threats and distorted peace in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Interestingly, the actors engaged are both from within the specified zone and foreign to it. The Indian Ocean is the world's third-largest body of water (*Albert, Council on Foreign Relations, 2016*) and has become a competing ground for China and India specifically. But the story gets more complicated as many extra-state activities have distorted peace and stability in the region. Not only that, these have also retarded the pace of probable prosperity in the region, as they divert the spendings of the developing nations towards defence, rather than mutual prosperity. For a convenient understanding, it is better to approach the threats to the IOR from two broad perspectives— firstly, the Non-traditional and secondly, the traditional issues, posing threats towards the security concerns of this region—the home to almost one-third of the world's population.

THE NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS TO STABILITY

Human Issues: Overfishing, Piracy and Maritime Terrorism

Overfishing, caused by overpopulation, is not just a grave environmental problem but it also places nations at loggerheads. According to the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) reports, there have been 379 and 213 incidents of the illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUUF) in IOR in 2020 and the first half of 2021, respectively) (Kanodia, 2022). Seafood serves as an important source of protein for the global population. Overfishing and pollution have resulted in the gradual deterioration of marine biodiversity. The uncontrolled and illegal intrusion of the 'big fishes' has ruined the economies of the comparatively smaller states, gradually pushing them towards the state of food insecurity. For instance, "Beijing's Distant Water Fleet (DWF) has around 17,000 fishing vessels registered in China, while close to 1,000 vessels are lodged under various flags of convenience, as per satellite data. On the other hand, the European Union and the USA have only 289 and 225 registered vessels, respectively. The anticipated figure for China is much higher due to its many unregistered vessels tagged as ghost ships" (Kanodia, 2022); "The EU has faced criticism for being hypocritical and accused by the coastal states of its neo-colonial behaviour. EU members France and Spain fished 70,000 tonnes of

yellowfin in 2019, which exceeds any resident state's numbers" (Kanodia, 2022). Intrusions in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) have engendered port securities for many littoral states as deep-sea mining and ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance) activities are carried out under the veil of fishing. "According to the reports, a Chinese research ship Shi Yan 1 was found in Indian waters, west to Port Blair in November 2019. Port Blair is strategically important for India due to the presence of INS Jarawa, a major Indian naval base. Furthermore, about ten Chinese fishing vessels were also seen fishing illegally in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)". (*India-China Power play in the Indian Ocean*, 2021)

A special mention can be made of the ongoing India-Sri Lanka contention regarding the violation of the demarcated International Maritime Border Line (IMBL, 1974, 1976) and the location of the Kachchatheevu island²⁹. Marine territorial boundaries are hard to maintain, unlike the in-land territories with clearly demarcated boundary lines. The uncontrolled exploitation of marine resources in Indian waters have compelled the fishermen to invade further, hence sometimes unknowingly reaching Sri Lankan waters, which in most cases do not go unnoticed by the Sri Lankan Navy. As stated by the Minister of States in the Ministry of External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan, "...210, 74 and 159 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively and a total of 73 Indian boats (42 in 2019, 11 in 2020 and 20 in 2021) were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities. In 2022, so far, a total of 80 fishermen along with 11 boats have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy" (Muraleedharan, 2022).

Another fly in the ointment is the piracy problem, in turn leading to maritime terrorism. "According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Annual Reports, the Straits of Malacca, South China Sea and the Indian Ocean are the areas that have been most affected by piracy". A special mention can be made of the Somali Modern Piracy problem, off the coast of Horn of Africa that attracts multiple international players in the counter-piracy measures in collaboration with the UNODC Maritime Crime Programme. Findings, when analysed, point towards the Somali Government's inefficiency to eradicate

29. Granted by the Government of India to the Sri Lankan Government in 1974.

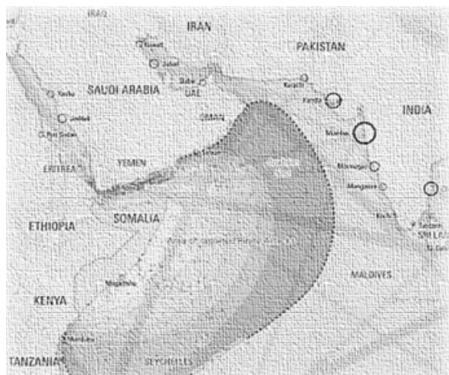


Fig:2 : Showing location of Somalia and reported zones of attacks
SOURCE: <https://menafn.com/1100282438/The-Problem-of-Piracy-in-Somalia>

poverty and create employment opportunities, dragging the nation's youth towards anti-social and anti-national activities. Reports show that Somali fishermen target the traversing ships to extract ransom money (in the form of 'tax') from the shipping companies by holding the crew and cargo hostage (Ghosh, 2014). This has been a transnational concern as Somalia sits at the entry point of the Suez Canal, through the Gulf of Aden, the maritime trade route connecting Europe with Asian countries.

However, in the past few years, the number of reported piracy attacks have gone down considerably, along with continuous adjustments of the High-Risk Area boundary lines. The reason can be attributed to the initiatives undertaken according to the United Nations Resolution 1851 (January, 2009) with more than 50 member countries and 6 international organisations, that took to the path of using military forces to tackle this socio-economic problem (Ghosh, 2014). "The number of attacks off the Somali coast fell dramatically to just eight in the six-year period between 2016 and 2021. Piracy attacks in Somali waters peaked in 2011, when 160 attacks were recorded, and incidents had soared to 358 during the five-year period between 2010 and 2015." (Number of actual and attempted piracy attacks in Somalia 2010-2021, 2022).

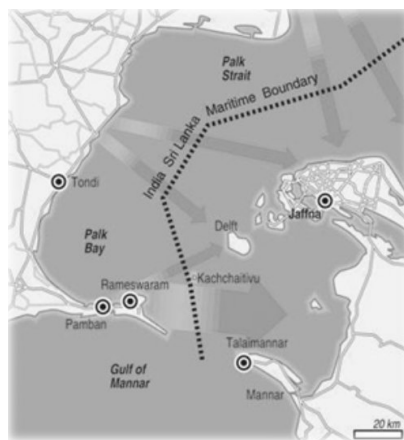


Fig:1 : Showing IMBL and contesting zones between India and Sri Lanka
SOURCE: <https://www.iasparliament.com/current-affairs/gs-ii/india-sri-lanka-fisheries-issue>

However, this is a "temporary respite" since connections between the Somali pirates and terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab have put maritime peace and security at stake. Gunrunning by sea is considered to be the

most convenient method for supplying arms illegally. The terrorist organisations have close connections with drug cartels, leading to the problems of narco-terrorism. Thus, even if it has lost its intensity, piracy in the IOR couldn't still be dismissed as "romantic folklore". (Ghosh, 2014).

A Region with Great Potential, Checked by Hindrances

Currently, one half of world's container shipments, one-third of the bulk cargo traffic, two-third of the oil shipments are carried through the waters of the Indian Ocean. In the case of India, 90% of her trade and 90% of her oil imports are carried out through these waters (*Affairs*, 2015). It has one of the world's most intense oxygen-deficient zones at the intermediate depth in its northern part as well as vast gas hydrate reserves along the margins of several Indian Ocean rim countries housing unique biodiversity (*Saraswat, Nanajkar, R.Damare, Khare, & Lei*, 2022). This region is also the home to some of the growing economic and military powers of the world; home to about 2.5 billion people (*Tourism and Cultural Exchanges*, 2017), with diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic, social backgrounds. Hence, this region is also capable of providing a good supply of human and environmental resources.

Unfortunately, these potential resources are nullified, thanks to another stumbling block of human rights violation, in addition to the above-mentioned problems! As per UN Secretary General's report on "Children and armed conflict" (*Agenda item 70(a)*), there have been 3340 verified cases of grave violations against 2687 children in Somalia, including 604 children as victims of multiple violations, that include rape, attempted rape, involuntary military recruitments, abductions, forced marriages, denial of basic human rights and needs (*General*, 2022). "India is caught between the three largest heroin and opium producers in the world such as the countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar, resulting in conflicts on her borders adjoining major drug production /transporting areas" (*Biswas*). Thus, the future of the IOR is unstable, what we can do is to aspire for inter-state cooperation for mutual development.

THE TRADITIONAL ISSUES LEADING TO SECURITY THREATS IN THE IOR (Inter-state Competition in the zone)

The Chinese “String of Pearls”:

There are certain ‘choke points’ all across the ocean that could disrupt the smooth running of the world maritime trade in one go. Some states have undertaken ambitious projects to dominate these strategically significant ports. A mention can be made of what is popularly called the ‘String of Pearls’³⁰ strategy, or in Chinese terms, the “defensive military stance”, a part of their policy of “strategic culture”³¹ (Ashraf, Winter, 2017). The Chinese undertaking of Pakistan’s Gwadar port on a



Fig:3: China’s Naval Network

SOURCE: <https://drmjournal.org/2019/08/26/the-chinese-string-of-pearls-or-how-beijing-is-conquering-the-sea/>

lease for 40 years strengthens the Sino presence near the Strait of Hormuz that connects the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, and hence the Middle East with Asia. The Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean in the south east, and if one goes further towards Europe, there lies the Suez Canal, one of the world’s most heavily used shipping lanes (Smith, 2022). The Chinese People’s Liberation Army Support Base in Djibouti, operated by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is in close proximity to the US Camp Lemonnier (Cabestan, 2020) even though Beijing refers this to be a “support facility” or “logistic facility.” The ‘dragon’s’ presence is also witnessed in the further south-eastern IOR as China maintains

30. China’s ambitions in the IOR have been described by many scholars by the “string of pearls” metaphor, which holds that China is taking on economic and investment projects with Indian Ocean states to secure ports or places where its military forces could set up naval facilities or at the very least, refuelling and repair stations. (Albert, *Competition in the Indian Ocean*, 2016)

31. (1988 onwards)

a good strategic relationship with Indonesia, hence gaining hold over the Straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok. The Chinese have also stretched their influence in Sri Lanka through the Hambantota port and in Myanmar the Kyaukpyu Port. In addition to these, some locations have been strategically chosen so that the landlocked provinces are better connected and developed economically. Mention can be made of the construction and upgradation of commercial and naval bases, roads, waterways and pipelines, linking the Bay of Bengal and the Yunnan province of China, as well as the operation of surveillance facilities in the islands of Bay of Bengal. Reports also show Myanmar's junta receives both financial and military assistance from Beijing. (Kaplan, 2009)

Why have these developments become the source of perturbation for the global leaders?

The Indian Perspective: 'Necklace of Diamond' Strategy:

India, indeed, is in a state of uneasiness because of her lack of trust in the Chinese leadership, especially after the recent Galwan Valley escalations³². The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)³³ of the Chinese have added fuel to the already existing fire. In



Fig: 4: India's "Necklace of Diamond Policy"

SOURCE: <http://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/necklace-of-diamond-strategy-1592404137-1>

the past few decades, China has focused to establish good political, economic and strategic relations with India's immediate neighbours – Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh – and has also extended her supportive hands towards

32. A violent skirmish between Indian and Chinese troops broke out in the Galwan Valley on June 15, 2020, resulting in losses on both sides and marking a new sour turn in China-India relations. (Pandey, 2022)

33. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road, is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived. Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the vast collection of development and investment initiatives would stretch from East Asia to Europe, significantly expanding China's economic and political influence. (McBride, 2020)

India's long-time ally, Russia, in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War. It is quite evident that India is one of the most important players in this particular zone, since "A strategic advantage for New Delhi is its geography and historical and political ties with littorals and islands in the Indian Ocean" (Baruah, 2022) and has also helped India to continue her friendship agreements, especially with the countries of IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association, March 1997). India's gradual development in the field of "nautical engineering" and "industrial potential", after her independence is worth mentioning, that has helped India to strengthen her position as a rising naval power. India is expected to have both long term and short term policies in regards to naval matters. The long term policy is to emerge as a "supreme power" in the IOR, by utilising her achievements and defending her interests. The short term policy is to secure the commercial routes and strategies of "global naval warfare", in the Indian ocean, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea. (Panikkar, 1945, #) China, despite being a foreign power in this zone, has tactfully strengthened its presence in the IOR. Had the Indo-China relations not been bitter, India might have followed the path of cooperation with the Chinese in this case. A free nation is never ready to surrender its sovereignty, and the way the Chinese encircle India from the south, it is indeed a matter of concern, both from economic and political perspectives. The words of the Chinese officials have put India in an "unnerving" situation, along with their actions. The competing and sometimes overlapping commercial and political interests of both the countries have become prominent in the "naval realm" rather than the land. (Kaplan, 2009, #). Beijing considers India to be her "most realistic strategic adversary", and as Zhao Nanqi, former director of the General Logistics Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army points out, India's "eastward strategy" would have a particular impact upon China. Thus, "Beijing already considers New Delhi to be a major sea power". (Kaplan, 2009, #). Hence, rather than cooperation, a sense of suspicion engulfs the activities of both the countries.

To counter the problematic growth of the 'dragon,' India has also engaged herself in the IOR strategically. India's access to the Chabahar Port in Iran and the Port of Duqm in Oman (as a centre of maritime trade and naval base) have been quite important. These help India to have a hold on the maritime trade route connecting Europe and Asia by keeping vigil over the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, the Chinese Djibouti base and the Gwadar port – a dual benefit. India has

also set her foot in another ‘choke point’ through the Changi Naval Base, having both military and trade access, as per the agreement between the Governments of India and Singapore (2018). The Sabang port in Indonesia lies in a very close proximity to the Strait of Malacca, and the Indians have set their foot here as well. The interesting part to note here is that the majority of maritime oil supply and trade of China pass through this region and the Indian presence definitely hasn’t pleased the Chinese authorities. Alongside these, India has involved herself with mutual diplomatic, strategic and defensive agreements with the Governments of Vietnam, Japan and Mongolia³⁴. Altogether, these attempts of India to not lose her foothold in the IOR are referred to as the “Necklace of Diamond Strategy”³⁵.

Involvement of the Extra Regional Powers in the IOR

China’s growth as a global economic and political power, in spite of being a socialist country, is hard to accept for the US, both in terms of power and ideology. The Quad Initiative³⁶ could be a platform for mutual cooperation; however, it is to be kept in mind that Indo-Pacific is not a region that directly puts India before threats, and similarly, IOR is not an immediate priority for the US. US involvement in the island of Diego Garcia deserves a special mention, which is a British territory mostly populated by the US military, “the British colony that’s been colonised by the Americans”. It has proven to be strategically vital and a launchpad for Middle East military operations. India is also emerging as a ‘net security provider’³⁷ in the region, with the US as her

34. Narendra Modi - the first ever Prime Minister of India to visit Mongolia (16-18 May, 2015) (*India - Mongolia Relations - Ministry of External Affairs, 2016*)

35. The phrase ‘necklace of diamonds’ was first mentioned by India’s former Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh while speaking at a think tank in August 2011 on ‘India’s Regional Strategic Priorities’

36. The Quad, officially the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is a group of four countries: the United States, Australia, India, and Japan. As of 2021, leaders in all four countries have become more aligned in their shared concerns about China’s increasingly assertive behaviour in the region and are more willing to define a constructive agenda of cooperation. (*Smith S. A., 2021*)

37. “For the most part, the term net security provider is usually meant as enhancing mutual security of more than one country by addressing common security concerns, including dealing with transnational piracy, or responding to disasters, etc. Specifically, it encompasses four different activities: (i) capacity building; (ii) military diplomacy; (iii) military assistance; and (iv) direct deployment of military forces to aid or stabilise a situation” (*Mukherjee, 2014, #*).

supporter. In addition to this, the Indian Navy’s initiative of the Information Fusion Centre: Indian Ocean Region³⁸ might play a significant role in the Quad’s initiative to create a tracking system to vigil (IUUF) in the Indo-Pacific region and also to tackle maritime trade issues, like piracy, human and contraband trafficking, terrorism and so on. Over the last decade, the UK and France raised their ambitions to each play a role as credible external powers in the Indian Ocean. However, owing to specifically the growing power plays between India and China, both London and Paris struggle to create a significant hold in the region. France has a permanent naval presence on Reunion, an island in the Indian Ocean, while it has been engaged in joint military exercises with America and India in the same maritime area. The United Kingdom has Brunei as her only garrison in the region. (Hutt, 2017)



Fig: 5: IORA Member countries and the Great Power Competition in the IOR

SOURCE: <https://mrunal.org/2013/01/diplomacy-indian-ocean-rim-association-ior-arc-12th-summit-gurgaon-communique-highlights.html>

CONCLUSION

To complete the quote of Alfred Thayer, “... The ocean is the key to the seven seas in the 21st century, the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters” (Ashraf, Winter, 2017). The ambition of the ‘dragon’ to fly higher puts the ‘elephant’ before the challenges of keeping its integrity and sovereignty intact; the ‘eagle’ here is a dormant yet cautious observer. Thus, it can be said that the Indian Ocean is indeed one of the busiest maritime zones of the world, as it not only has to serve the economic interests of the countries but also has to provide a ground for the “defensive military stance!” With increased military

38. (IFC-IOR, December, 2018 at IMAC, Gurugram; part of the government’s SAGAR initiative.)

engagements, political-economic turmoil and several cases of human rights violation, normal flow of life has been disrupted as a contagious rat-race of power and domination takes over humanity.

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INTERNATIONAL FLASHPOINTS

- **SRI LANKAN CRISIS**
- **RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR**

Sri Lankan Cricket- A Fairy Tale Healing Balm Amidst the Country's Quandary

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"You don't play for the crowd; you play for the country" – MS Dhoni

ABSTRACT

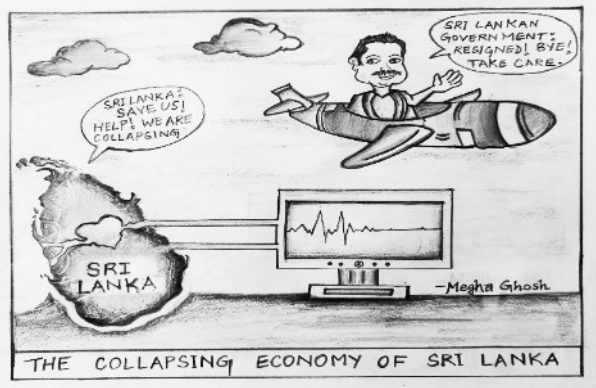
Since decades, sports have acted as a phosphorescent for a number of countries. From Italy's football triumph under the Fascist Mussolini which gave its people the notion of "all is well" to the factual evidence of cricket, uniting India in a way not even politics or 'Bollywood' can. This article fixates and analyzes two aspects. First, if Cricket as a sport has become 'manna from heaven' in Sri Lanka's state of emergency, where the country was undergoing a severe economic crisis. Second, how did an Asia Cup (2022) win release the emotions that the players, staff and the people of the country buried inside as they rushed out in waves, danced and ran in circles, pulsing with adrenaline- a glorious mayhem, a feeling that all this was a dream and not a slice of reality?

Key words: Cricket, Sri Lanka, economic crisis, Asia Cup

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COUNTRY RUNS OUT OF MONEY?

Amidst a dire economic crisis, Sri Lanka was an audience to the resignation of its top heads of state- President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. Appointments of newer heads of states however, did little to bring the nation out of its misery. As the supply of fuel for buses, trains, and medical vehicles ran short, the authorities claimed the government lacked the

foreign cash to acquire more. Gas and diesel prices skyrocketed as a result of the fuel shortage. Fuel sales for non-essential cars were halted by the government at the end of June 2022 for a period of two weeks. The government heavily regulated the sale of gasoline and ordered citizens to stay home from work and shut the schools in an effort to save resources.



The Collapsing Economy of Sri Lanka
Megha Ghosh, Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.-150

DEBTS AND GLOBAL AIDS

Colombo owes over \$51 billion to international lenders, with China being the largest creditor at \$6.5 billion. The new Sri Lankan government initiated the debt-restructuring talks with China in October 2022, as a crucial step towards finalizing the \$4.5 billion IMF rescue package for the island state in turmoil. Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which make up the Group of Seven, have committed their support to Sri Lanka's efforts to cut its debt obligations. Both the World Bank and India have offered Sri Lanka loans, with the former



The Island's Debt Enshrouded Economy !!
Adarsh Prasad, Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.-179

offering \$600 million and the latter at least \$1.9 billion (as of October 2022) {Perera, 2022}.

ASIA CUP, 2022- A CHIAROSCURO EFFECT IN THE SRI LANKAN DARKNESS?

Sports, or cricket in this context, has often acted as an indication of the state of the country. It is true that 1947 is when people had first begun using cricket as a metaphor for the state of the country. In 1947–48, India played against Australia in its first Test series after gaining independence, and the series served as a promotional opportunity for the new country. That the Indian squad was led by Lala Amarnath, a middle-class Punjabi who often irritated the colonial rulers, was a reflection of the times. Former Pakistani speedster Shoaib Akhtar, popularly referred to as *Rawalpindi Express*, emphasized in an interview that in the historic 2011 World Cup semi-final match, Pakistan needed the win more than India did in front of a sold-out Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali: “Hume zyada zaroorat thi” (We needed it more). A collapse in government, coping with the impacts of terrorism, corruption, and other reasons, he said, contributed to his bleak assessment of the situation at home.



Fans, supporting Sri Lanka at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium, as the Sri Lankan team beats Pakistan by 23 runs to win their 6th Asia Cup title.

Image Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/JukJtEQSQNAeG1qb7>

He believed that a win would have brought the country together at the time of unprecedented distress.

A common interest in a sporting event may unite individuals of different backgrounds, beliefs, and locations together. People still turn to sports as role models even in the darkest of times. The same applied for Sri Lanka. Many Sri Lanka fans will feel passionate that their team needed this victory more than anybody else. The following Sri Lankan natives' reactions to the win, as reported by Al Jazeera, speaks wonders of how much it acted as an elixir of life to the dying out nation. Hemalatha Tillakaratne (72), told the AFP News Agency, "Today they didn't impose the power cut because of the match, but they will start the blackouts again from tomorrow. They could also use this win to increase prices from tomorrow." Another fan, Krishani Athauda (42), exuding optimism said, "the victory was so much sweeter because of the \$200,000 prize money at a time when Sri Lanka is scrounging for foreign exchange to pay for essentials. We are happy that we won the (cricket) Asia Cup despite the economic crisis." ("Asia Cup Victory Lifts Spirits", 2022)

CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka as a nation has a long way to go, both as a country in recovery and as a cricketing side. However, the win as incorporated in this article acted as a pause. A pause in the dark times, a pause in contemplating the uncertain future, a pause in the desperation of times. Cricket acts as something that is very close to the hearts of all Sri Lankans and if this win gives them the medicine they need, then it is certainly well deserved. It is truly remarkable how a game goes on to become much more than just a game, saving lives and maybe could even save this nation. Just like the Sri Lankan cricket team hoped to win the Asia Cup, this brave win might also provide a ray of hope to the Sri Lankan populace which can in turn, assist in the country's rejuvenation.

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The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Black Sea and its Repercussions

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ABSTRACT

Black Sea has emerged as a conflagrant region studded with tensions with regard to who has control over it within the context of the ongoing Russia- Ukraine war. It has been a reason for constant feud between the two countries. Russia is very much skeptical about the increasing influence of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the region and Ukraine's engagement with the NATO forces. Due to the strategic significance of the Black Sea, Russia maintains a stronghold in the region. She has increased her military forces around the Black Sea region and also modernized the Black Sea fleet. Russia has very well identified that the Black Sea is the point through which Ukraine can be strangled economically. All the more, Russia has also captured a number of Ukrainian ports and it has no intention of halting its military engagements in the region. It is only a matter of time to see what exactly happens hereafter. Hence, this article delves into the major tussle that is prevailing in the Black Sea region pertaining to the Russo-Ukrainian warfare.

Key words: Russia-Ukraine, Black Sea, Crimea, NATO.

BACKGROUND

The ongoing devastating war between the two Eastern European countries of Russia and Ukraine in the 21st century is no big surprise given the history of these two states. Any retrospective analysis of East European history shall reveal the feud which the two nations have had since the very beginning. They are the two militarily most significant post-Soviet states. The break-up of the Soviet Union has had serious repercussions on Russia and the eagerness of Vladimir Putin to regain those territories which once were a part of the Union of

Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is seeming to be evident. In that backdrop, the Black Sea has been a reason for constant tussle between the two countries. No military topic has been more prominent in Russo-Ukrainian relations than the Black Sea Fleet and its bases in Ukraine, particularly in the Crimean port of Sevastopol which has been very immensely significant historically to Russian identity. The urge to control it, however, stems from the geo-political advantage it offers – its strategic location.

However, it is significant to note how the respective navies of these two countries claim the Black Sea Fleet as their own property. Ukraine claims the main proportion of the Black Sea fleet on the ground that they hold the responsibility for some 16.7 % of the external debt of the former Soviet Union so if they 'own' this share of Russian debts so do they own the assets (Eberle, 1992). The response of the Russian navy to this was a straight 'No' claiming that 'The Black Sea Fleet always has been, is, and always will be Russian.' (Eberle, 1992). Over time, this led to arguments about the Black Sea, its control and ownership becoming very acute. The Russians did acknowledge the need of Ukraine for access to some naval ships and thus they agreed to provide ships which they believe are appropriate to Ukrainian needs. The Ukrainians got offended and they sought acknowledgement from the Russians of their legitimate ownership of the fleet and their bases. While this was the immediate scenario post the disintegration of the USSR, let us look at how things have turned up in the present times and how this dispute has been one of the many reasons for the ongoing bloodshed between the two countries.

THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA AND THE POST 2014 SCENARIO

The political and security environment in the Black Sea shifted rapidly following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Moscow's historical claim to Crimea with vested interests in Sevastopol, Crimea's main port and largest city was manifested and Putin's popularity increased. The European Union and United States of America have imposed severe sanctions on Russia for its actions. As a result, regional cooperation in the Black Sea was severely hampered, if not totally broken down. The BLACKSEAFOR initiative (The Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group, formed as a regional security organization after the Cold War with the aim of creating a strong naval force for

the Black Sea littoral states - Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia) too got paralysed because of strenuous relationships between Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Georgia and tensions between Russia and Turkey. Russia even suspended its participation in this initiative in November 2015. The Russo-Ukrainian war notably started from this very phenomenon.

Ukraine, upset and absolutely offended with the loss of Crimea, started to increase its military spending and her main focus was land warfare. There is also an interesting point to note that the NATO countries, led by the USA started to increase their air, land and sea military deployments to the Black Sea region, since 2014. The military build-up by NATO and Russia around the Black Sea took place against the background of long-standing tensions and unresolved conflicts in the region that have accumulated over decades. The Black Sea has been experiencing far-reaching shifts in its international politics. After annexing Crimea, Russia's political and security stance did see a massive metamorphosis too and this was largely to counter NATO. In this rather offensive outlook, Crimea thus became the focal point of Russia's military force in the Black Sea region. It is the pivot for Russia's strategy of countering NATO in the immediate neighbourhood and has a leading role in the Middle East.

The Black Sea region is a volatile and unpredictable security environment. The military balance in the Black Sea region somehow got profoundly impacted by Russia's annexation of Crimea. Along with the Crimean Peninsula, Russia controlled the second most important geographical point in the Black Sea, after the Turkish Straits. Consequently, Russia could dominate, militarily, Ukraine's remaining Black Sea littoral. Russia has successfully achieved a major aim of creating a credible military deterrent to NATO forces entering the Black Sea. Ukraine on the other hand, has made it a foreign policy goal to join NATO under President Petro Poroshenko in 2014. The reciprocation from NATO in the form of strong political support and also the commitments of the USA, the United Kingdom and Canada to support the training of the Ukrainian armed forces so that they could provide their own security did serve as a relief for Ukraine.

Two things become pertinent with regard to the Black Sea region in context of NATO's involvement in the military enhancements of Ukraine. Not incidentally, both of these are related to Russia's position. First, given the deterioration of Russia's relationship with the West post-2014, Russia

reoriented its policy towards increasing its presence in other strategically significant places like the Middle East and North Africa, both of which have access via the Mediterranean Sea. The Black Sea provides a direct link with the Mediterranean Sea. Consequently, the Black Sea also becomes a strategically very significant point for Russia. Second, to preserve its strategic hold, ever since 2014 Russia has focused on strengthening its military forces around the Black Sea including modernizing the Black Sea Fleet. On one hand, this is an attempt to maintain its presence in the region. On the other hand, with the increasing influence of NATO in the region, it is also a step to protect Russia's Black Sea borders from NATO naval threats, if any appear.

THE CURRENT SCENARIO

It is in this backdrop of Ukraine's extended engagement with NATO and Russia's high security approach towards preserving its influence in and around its region that the impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian war in the Black Sea region can be looked at. Since the war is still in its active phase, much of the outlook is yet to be determined by the upcoming phases. As more holistic analyses are yet to develop with further events, much of the developments of the war are to be analyzed from the updates reported in newspapers and other legitimate sources.

Given the recent events, a first estimate which can be made is that Russia is looking to strangle Ukraine economically, and for this it has looked to cut Ukraine's commercial shipping channels in the Black Sea. Russia has done this by cutting two of Ukraine's main commercial ports located in the north-eastern part of the Black Sea – Berdyansk and Mariupol. In this context, the Black Sea indeed is the point through which Ukraine can be attacked economically. This has surfaced once again as Russia seeks to take over two more Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea – Odessa and Mykolaiv. The latter two account for most of Ukraine's pre-war grain exports. Although Russia has not yet been successful in taking up the latter two, it has initiated a blockade in order to ensure no grain leaves the country. Commercial shipping has been warned off, sea mines have been deployed in the waters leading to the port and the whole area of the Black Sea is constantly patrolled by Russian warships.

The Black Sea provides Ukraine immediate access to the Mediterranean and Suez Canal, and eventually larger markets. Blocking Ukraine off these markets only matches with the object of economic deprivation; on the other hand, it also is in line with the Russian priority of ensuring dominance in the Mediterranean region. Ukraine is much aware of the importance of these ports to surviving in the war. Accordingly, it has gone for sharp counterattacks on Russian forces in and around Mykolaiv. However, since the Black Sea never featured high on Ukraine's security list, it does not have a particularly strong naval fleet. Consequently, Ukraine has opted for a different naval strategy. For instance, Ukraine has attacked Russian oil-rigs in the Black Sea. By opting such strategies, Ukraine hopes to spread Russia's forces and defenses over a wide area, thinning them out and exhausting Russia's large reserves of military equipment.

There are no signs of Russia loosening the hold on the sea ports of Ukraine. As a result, the likelihood that Ukraine can export the amounts it needs to sustain its war with Russia is starting to fade. On the other hand, Ukraine too has been looking to target Russian war-ships and looking to drain out the Russian fleets in the Black Sea region. Both these perspectives make the Black Sea a very significant point of contention in the war. Hence, it shall not be wrong to expect the developments in this region to be reflected even more in the next phases of the war.

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Energy Crisis Conundrum

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ABSTRACT

With the onset of the forthcoming winter in the European continent, the threat of an energy crisis looms at large. The war in Ukraine has now posed a potential flashpoint of the energy conundrum. With Russia cutting off gas supplies to regions of Eastern Europe, the question arises – how well can the nations sustain themselves alternatively. To the dismay of consumers, the equilibrium between the three energy trilemma elements of security, affordability, and sustainability has deteriorated. If the crisis is not properly handled, it could jeopardize efforts to reach the broad net-zero emissions target and fuel the burgeoning anti-transition sentiment that could undermine support for the flagship European Green Deal (EGD) and the European Union’s leadership role in the global fight against climate change. Because of this, it is even more crucial to create and implement targeted and anticipatory procedures to deal with the volatility of the energy market. This article looks at the crisis that looms over Europe with respect to the energy supply and sustainability and makes an attempt to find possible solutions to this conundrum.

Key words: Winter, Russia, Ukraine, energy, European Union, Nord stream

BACKGROUND

The collapse of the Soviet Union had witnessed the downfall and crippling of the economy of the state. When the Russian Federation switched from a command economy to a free market economy, there was a serious economic crisis. Russian political elites continue to determine Russia’s national security strategy, and more especially Russian energy policy, which is the foundation of Russian economic and political power, despite the Russian economy having rebounded to a position of relative strength over the past ten years. About 40% of the natural gas imported by the European Union in 2018 originated from Russia (Foy, 2018). State-owned Russian gas monopoly Gazprom supplied

200.8 billion cubic metres of gas to European nations in the same year, with 81% of that amount going to Western Europe (Gazprom, 2018). Despite the fact that both parties are dependent on one another, the relationship is not at all successful. In addition to the obvious historical grudges, particularly between the eastern member states of the EU and Russia, current geopolitical developments, such as the Crimean crisis of 2014, have strained relations. Sanctions against Russia were put in place by the EU, the United States, and a number of other nations, focusing on the banking and energy industries (Spiegel, 2014). Due to the EU's reliance on Russian gas, they were nevertheless restricted to the oil industry. This detail illustrates an interesting dynamic between the two.

WAR AND WINTER

As a result of the current ongoing war in Ukraine, over the past few months, Russia has gradually stopped supplying gas to specific energy providers and entire nations. Finland, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Poland no longer receive any gas from Russia. Supply to certain parties was stopped because of their refusal to pay for gas in rubles, as Russia has demanded since April, while supply to other parties was reduced owing to alleged maintenance concerns at the crucial Nord Stream 1 pipeline (NS1, annual capacity of 55 bcm). But realistically, it is obvious that Russia is leveraging Europe's reliance on its gas supplies as a tool for economic warfare. Policymakers, experts, and markets initially exhaled a sigh of relief when the NS1 pipeline reopened in July following repairs. However, it soon became apparent that flows had only returned to 40% of their previous levels before decreasing to 20% just one week later. Russia claims they plan to uphold their contractual commitments, but the justifications keep coming. Russia claims it cannot increase gas supplies because it lacks an NS1 turbine that is stuck in Germany after being shipped to Canada for repairs. The turbine is reportedly prepared for delivery to Russia, but that country claims it is missing some documents.

Weather is an important factor to consider when analysing the energy crisis; if the winter of 2021/22 is as cold as the previous one was in Europe and other parts of the world, where markets it competes with for energy resources are located, this could exacerbate the current crisis (meteorological models seem to

indicate that this will be the case). An already terrible scenario would get worse if the security situation in Europe's eastern neighbours worsened. While Gazprom has appeared 'unable' or 'unwilling' to deliver more, Russia has maintained to fulfil its contractual responsibilities. According to Russia's official position, the wildfires of Covid-19 and outages have reduced its gas capacity and flexible supply quantities in 2021. After the fires at the Novy Urengoy facility, throughput from the Yamal pipeline at the Mallnow metering point on the German-Polish border fell sharply to 49 million cubic metres (mcm)/day (from 81 mcm/day) on August 11. Additionally, Gazprom is required by law to first replenish domestic gas reserves, which were drastically depleted following a harsh winter. While some contend that Russia is attempting to exert pressure on the EU about the Nord Stream 2 (NS2) project, the short- to medium-term importance of Russian gas exports to the EU appears to be unaffected by the method of delivery. However, even if Russia agrees to transfer extra volumes to Europe, gas storage facilities cannot instantly be refilled. As a result, in the case of a long and cold winter, demand will continue to exceed supply, thus escalating the dynamics of the existing market tightness. These circumstances will culminate in high consumer energy expenditures, both for businesses and for households - potentially causing social unrest, the closing of factories and enterprises, a rise in the cost of essential commodities, and a disadvantage for EU industry in comparison to rivals (especially, China) that are able to refill gas stocks more quickly. Finally, the EU's aggressive climate agenda and tightening of the Emissions Trading System (ETS) regulations caused a long-awaited increase in carbon prices, which reached an unheard-of peak of €88/tonne on December 8, 2021. High carbon prices result in a high premium for switching from gas to coal; scarcity and rising gas prices have compelled utility companies to switch to coal despite the significant carbon premium, driving both gas and coal prices higher and applying strong inflationary pressures on the cost of electricity, which in the EU is directly correlated to the price of gas under the marginal pricing model.

SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

Policies should be focused on developing mechanisms to first survive the unpredictable volatility in the energy market and second, thoroughly stress-test the transition process, which is probably not going to go as smoothly as

policy rhetoric would have you believe. Price swings have historically been reduced by strategic reserves, minimum inventory requirements, and subsidies for low-income consumers. Gas markets can also benefit from this strategy. Other tactics can include changing customer behaviour and enhancing energy efficiency, as well as increased demand aggregation and communal gas buying. The following suggestions may be worth taking into account as the EU continues to deal with the effects of the energy crisis and searches for long-term solutions to the supply-demand imbalances that the trend of decarbonization is expected to bring about:

Automatic collective solidarity measures: Going forward, sustaining market fundamentals is important – but when markets fail to balance supply-demand dynamics, to avoid self-reinforcing volatility and disruption, and the economic damage caused by price spikes, a collective response is necessary within the EU, automatically activating solidarity measures and demand aggregation, as an antidote to the current cacophony of measures

Demand-side management: Demand-side management is a crucial strategy that needs to be widely implemented to reduce non-essential consumption during times of high demand. Additionally, capacity markets have historically been widely employed to enable base load supply to be activated effortlessly without price externalities; hence, these methods should not be prematurely abandoned. To evaluate resource agility within the power system, effective load-carrying capabilities (the capacity to operate under maximum stress on the power grid) should be measured.

Gas imports – pipelines: For a successful medium-term solution to continued market volatility, either supply from Russia via current lines or the NS2 may be necessary. It is necessary to deescalate the situation since the present escalation of hostilities with Ukraine is alarming and could impair supplies to Eastern Europe, a development not without precedent. Although enhancing gas infrastructure could appear at odds with the goal of having net-zero emissions, the existing dynamics unmistakably show that gas will remain important, at least in the long term. Any new infrastructure development must ensure that sustainable energy carriers like hydrogen, synthetic gas, and biogas are supported in order to allay concerns that gas infrastructure may become a stranded asset.

Collective energy crisis fund: Given that this crisis will probably return and that the poorer, more fossil fuel dependent Member States are more susceptible to its effects, using the EU carbon permit income budget to reduce adverse cost pressures is a suggestion that warrants consideration as we move toward a net-zero trajectory.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For Europe, the outlook is not good. Without some significant reductions in gas demand, it is quite improbable that Germany will be able to avert a shortage. Certain of this demand decrease will be voluntary because some businesses will no longer be able to produce natural gas at profitable levels, but some of it may also be mandated. However, it is almost inevitable that the European economy will experience some difficulty this winter. European solidarity, either through the supply of natural gas or items, such as nitrogenous fertilisers, that take a lot of gas to produce, would undoubtedly help to lessen the impact.

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SECTION - III

**OPINIONS AND
CREATIVES**

Bioterrorism – An Ephialtes?

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Globalization, being a complex phenomenon, has transcended encompassing economic, cultural, political, technological and social bailiwicks. Thus, it has invoked several new-fangled arenas of study to work on. Centrally lies the conflicting claims about the forces and processes that structure security. Initially, security was defined within the ambit of military security. Presently with the shift to global environment and multi polar world wherein everything is interconnected in terms of trade and communication, the transition from secret diplomacy to open diplomacy, the risks of major armed conflict and interstate wars are now on decline. However, the global community is increasingly confronted with security challenges from local and transnational threats, which are primarily non-military in nature, and the emergence of non-state armed actors. The arena that deserves some exploration in this backdrop is the notion of bioterrorism. Terrorism has always been a very conflagrantly issue that still dominates world politics. The non-state actors involved in it formerly relied upon bombs and firearms but their reliance, however, has witnessed a transition in principally employing the effects of novel weapons that can be used against the targeted state/populace with an aim of mass expunging. Because of the increased threat of terrorism presently, the risk posed by several microorganisms, used as biological weapons, needs to be evaluated. Owing to the potential developments in biotechnology and biochemistry, manufacturing such weaponry has become facile as anyone ranging from governments to the terrorists can lay their hands upon them for the realization of their own interests, thus introducing a ground-breaking facet of security challenges.

Biological warfare denotes the silent release of catastrophic biological agents/pathogenic strains of microorganisms or their toxins to infuse life threatening diseases to devastate a population on a mass scale, culminating in the collapse of the governance in the targeted state. Microorganisms causing diseases like Anthrax, Smallpox and Botulism are categorized as Category A bioterrorism agents for their walloping transmission and pernicious impact on public health. Category B comprises Typhus, Brucellosis etc that can easily

dissipate, but possess low mortality rate. Category C includes pathogenic microbes doctored for large-scale dispersion and embodying a high mortality rate like multiple drug-resistant tuberculosis strains (Syal, 2008, pp. 1665). The evolution of biological weapons is not a new-fangled aspect in the history of warfare. Throughout history, there existed one metaphor: the transmission of any kind of pestilent infirmity was guided by a stranger as the spreader of the contagion. For instance, dissemination of Plague of Athens was attributed to the Ethiopians and the Tanzanians had attributed the high death rate from AIDS in their Kagera province to HIV infections to Idi Amin's Ugandan troops, who had crossed the borders. To speak about the terror attributed to bioterrorism, the mention of the Anthrax deserves foremost significance. The subway attacks of March 1995 reflected how the Japanese religious cult Aum Shinrikyo had released the nerve toxin 'Sarin' in the Tokyo subway system. As a serious repercussion, approximately twelve people were annihilated. It has to be borne in mind that Aum had utilized a gas, which did not require to be sprayed rather was diffused by itself. (Alcabes, 2004, pp. 36-39).

To highlight the distinctiveness of biological weapons, they are much easier to manufacture, although requiring sophistication. While the knottiness of making nuclear weapons possesses some safeguard against nuclear terrorism, depending on the technological hurdles of bioterrorism as protection is foolhardy. They are more easily transferable virtually across borders for the purchasing laboratory to easily escape detection. Once produced and weaponized, such agents can be disseminated beyond borders without any detection. In some cases, the agent can be 'suicidal' martyr who can infect himself, thus becoming a human weapon of mass destruction. Once detonated, the catastrophic consequences are virtually unstoppable (Kellman, 2002, p. 30).

While analysing the impact of biological weapons, it does not merely culminate in severe mass erasure of the population, rather it also welcomes uncountable economic and social disasters that a nation has to encounter. Any employment of biological weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the contemporary international and national landscapes, the social and economic fabric of a nation should be emphasized. Transmission of any risk-stricken disease breaks the backbone of the state, i.e., its economy. In recent scenarios wherein medical assistance has wholly bloomed, addressing such nuisances has become somewhat easier, if not the easiest. Although states are now equipped to combat what may be referred to as bioterror-ephialtes, in terms of vaccinations,

availability of combat commodities to restrain the further spread of such maladies and law enforcement in hand for the populace to adhere to, none can possess a contrivance to deal with the collateral impact of biological weapons on civilians around the combat zone or bioterrorist damage inflicted on an unsuspecting community. The role of the terrorist and the opposing militia groups also cannot be simply overruled. With the onset of globalization and the metamorphosis of information and communication technologies, no one is devoid of accessing data about anything they want to know. Recipes for producing botulinum and anthrax are posted on the internet, books describing biological-warfare assassination techniques are now readily available whereas some militia groups privately train themselves in biological weapons.

Law enforcement leaders often accrue the source of conducting biological terrorism to the religious cults and militant political groups because of the first significant bioterrorist attack staged in America by members of an Oregon-based religious cult led by Bagwan Shree Rajneesh. The cult members, aiming to disrupt an upcoming county election, contaminated local salad bars with salmonella, infecting numerous Oregonians. Even the impact of bioterrorism on the public health system (PHS) cannot be discounted. When an epidemic breaks out, the PHS often engages in procuring public health data while promising their confidentiality, and to keep a track on the spread of the infirmity for the larger interest of the population. Globally, the World Health Organization also keeps a count of nations' diseases while monitoring the emergence of new epidemics. Post the 1995 Ebola outbreak in Zaire, WHO created a more ramrod surveillance system, urging the countries to be transparent about the epidemics in their population. However, the advent of bioterrorism creates a dilemma i.e., the closer a PHS draws to the other systems, the more it will lose its credibility in the eyes of its public (Garrett, 2001, pp. 87-88).

In conclusion, the invocation of Covid-19 becomes imperative owing to the hypotheticals regarding its radiation, first case being reported in Wuhan (China) then, rapidly transmitting across the world resulting in extirpation of myriads of people. It is often compared to the Black Plague transmitted by the Mongols as a biological weapon in Ukraine culminating in a spread throughout Europe. The Biological Weapons Convention although calls for complete disarmament, repudiating and eradicate all kinds of WMDs including the development, production and stashing of chemical, bacteriological, toxin

weapons and on their destruction, it fails to consider the biological weapons employed by the terrorist organizations and is devoid of any agency to ensure compliance with its provisions. Thus, in the context of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, such a discrepancy becomes more glaring. It was speculated that China intended to make Covid-19 an economic weapon as the virus was assumed to have been released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Coronavirus has culminated in massacres of uncountable lives, nations encountering backlog in their economies and social order. However, it may catalyse the realization of implementing stringent measures to prevent the use of biological weapons, make the countries well equipped in terms of economic strength, awareness of the authorities, decentralization of authority among the local tiers alongside the adeptness of the international organizations to come up with more surveillance agencies to monitor the spread of transmissible diseases, stricter penalties for nations and terrorist organizations on manufacturing any chemical/biological weaponry for any forthcoming epidemic.

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“War” in Ukraine - A Heterodox Perspective

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Russia and Ukraine are in an unprecedented conflict, an unforeseen event that is making security analysts shudder considering the nuclear threat very much real due to Russian aggression. Of the various competing claims and counter-claims to threats and security concerns cited by both the nations, one of the most controversial arguments put forward by Russia has been the presence of the Ukrainian Nazis. As is known, the Nazis, the so-called national socialists, were born out of the economic destruction of Germany after World War I, exemplified by their hate-mongering, mercurial leader Adolf Hitler. The defeat at World War II somehow was not the end of Nazism. Despised all over the world and banned in most countries, the Nazis were slowly going extinct until the 21st century.

With the rise of populist parties challenging the mainstream political parties, the Nazis came out of the shadows into the sunlight of democratic politics. High doses of nationalism and anti-immigrant rhetoric allowed a reorganised form of Nazism to proliferate under the guise of nativism. A new movement was born out of this reawakening, the neo-Nazis emerged as democratic tolerance allowing offshoot groups to contest for political power. While neo-Nazis are getting stronger in European parliaments and streets, one country has taken their Nazi love to another level - the largest country in Europe, Ukraine. This issue gets heightened as an active body of Nazi militiamen called the Azov Brigade is inducted into the national guard of Ukraine by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy from the area of Azovstal near the Azov Sea which has become a prime area of conflict between the Russians and Ukrainians. This brigade has been accused by Russians of working to suppress Russian speaking population in the Donbas region by means which include torture, kidnappings, hate crimes, and so on.

In 2014 under the guise of protecting the sovereignty of the country, the Ukrainian government has added a new battalion to its national guard, in a

way, validating the Nazis in a national force, the first of its kind since the disbanding of the vicious Schutzstaffel (SS) after the fall of Hitler. The brigade was not part of a state force but rather a militia called the Azov brigade. Named after the area of Azov and formerly known as defenders of Azov, this militia is unique in Europe, at least till 2014. The Azov brigade uses all the known tactics used by the German forefathers of Nazism, ironically the same ones who invaded the Ukrainians in the 1940s and committed heinous crimes on Ukrainian soil. These tactics include blaming minorities for the economic problems of Ukraine, and white supremacist ideas cojoined with Aryan myths about protecting the white culture of the west against other Abrahamic religions (Islam and Judaism). They have openly supported the use of violence to support their cause and have indulged in various criminal activities in the east of the country against Russian-speaking areas of Donetsk and Luhansk. Both of these are now areas of contention between the Russians and the Ukrainians.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has reiterated the stance that his special operations in Ukraine are an effort towards denazification of the country and controlling the far-right forces that are harming the Russian-speaking minority in the eastern parts of Ukraine, especially near the Azov Sea, from which the militia derived its name. The battalion has seen action in the areas of Mariupol, where it surrendered to the Russian forces after intense fighting. The commander leading the charge there, Denys Prokopenko surrendered after his forces were cornered in the Azovstal steel plant by the Russian forces in the early days of the Russian assault. The war rages on and the western powerhouses are trying their best to keep Ukraine afloat while the Russian siege continues. These are the facts, but the story behind this war continues in myriad ways.

Comedian turned President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky has been trying his best to turn the narrative of the war in favour of his country from the beginning. He has gone to the Emmy awards; the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTAs) and other western entertainment award shows to ramp up support. Western powers such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, European Union, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries have been arming the Ukrainians to the tooth and have promised

more armaments. This has only escalated tensions as Vladimir Putin has vowed to keep the borders of NATO from expanding to the western borders of Russia.

The repercussions have been dire not only on the humanitarian front but economic as well. Ukrainian wheat exports have been affected badly which are of much importance to the world as Ukraine produces the bulk of global wheat. Russia in retaliation has stopped supplying natural gas to European countries via its Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines which provide almost 60% of European gas. This has led to inflation and a rise in energy costs for western European countries. The situation will become worse as winters arrive and the demand for gas increases. The quaint observation is that Mr. Zelensky has asked European powers to tolerate this increase in prices and above that provide him with expensive weapon systems with no standard payback policy in the name of safeguarding sovereignty. Russian interventions that led to the earlier Euromaidan protests were constantly used as evidence for what would happen if the European powers did not heed his call. In simple economic terms, I posit it as if Mr. Zelensky is asking the following-

Please give us weapons which are expensive for which we may or may not pay you back, in the meantime ask your populace to pay 20-30% more in energy costs amidst an economic slowdown to hinder Russia which has provided gas to Europe even after sanctions were imposed upon it, while neo-Nazis such as the Azov brigade is funded by the state and its members made functionaries in the government.

Political realism as well as economic realism cannot be synchronized with such a stand. Geopolitical balance rests upon stable relations which are enforceable and binding instead of idealistic rhetoric and economic mismanagement based on armaments. Though NATO allies have stood by Ukraine, Germany, Hungary, and Turkey are now contemplating reigning in the rants of Ukrainian officials against Russia and brokering a peace deal.

Despite the recent demonization of Mr. Putin by the western world as an autocrat, warmonger and global threat due to his special military operation in Ukraine certain facts have been overlooked by the west. First, the Azov brigade has been terrorizing Russian speaking population in the Donbas region since the early 2010s. Second, the Azov brigade only stopped neo-Nazi rhetoric after the global media focussed on its role in the Ukrainian defence. Third, post-1991,

NATO had assured (verbally) that it would not push its boundaries toward Russia and ensure the security of Russian borders. These assurances were broken within a decade as Russian neighbours and even the former Soviet republics were incorporated into NATO. Fourth, the Minsk agreement of 2014 was openly flouted by Zelensky when he applied for NATO membership in 2020, which stated that as a former soviet republic Ukrainian security would be looked after by cooperative alignments between Russia and Ukraine. Fifth, the continued arming of Ukraine by western forces has only aggravated the situation for Russia which has maintained that the Ukrainian government is being used by the western powers to fight their proxy war. Finally, the banning of trade unions, arrests of pacifists, students, and inclusion of rightist neo-Nazi elements in the government and the army have been censored by the major media houses creating a pro-western narrative.

Russian special operations in Ukraine have led to the death and destruction of lives and property in the country, creating global panic due to heightened tensions. But the Ukrainians are not the sheep to the Russian wolf as portrayed. The war in Ukraine is more complicated than what most television commentators are making of it. It is a geopolitical convergence between a country that has neglected its own signed memorandums in favour of getting western military help and becoming a part of a military alliance that at best can be said as a relic of the past, admitted by none other than the former President of NATO's largest contributor - Donald Trump. On the other hand, there stands Russia under Putin, a country trying to reclaim its former glory and get assurances about its geopolitical security which has been under threat by continued violations of old assurances. As a responsible superpower, Russia must cease its operations in Ukraine for establishing a long-term peaceful reconciliation along with providing the Russian-speaking regions with an opportunity to join Russia based on the ideals of self-determination, without Ukrainian intervention. In that same manner, Ukraine must cease its efforts to challenge Russian regional security with the help of western armaments and rather focus on providing welfare to its population which is more important for the Ukrainian population. The 21st century should not be the century of wars but peace, cooperation, and development. With that being said, Nazis are a relic of the past and they should be kept there, not in the national armed forces of

countries claiming to be democratic. As once said by Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov, a war hero of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) -

“A democratic state with even one Nazi isn’t a democracy”

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Another Brick in the Wall

Bipsan Chatterjee

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No. – 114

Since the dawn of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been marked discontinuities in education at all levels, all across the world – however, to varying extents. Developed countries, with better digital connectivity, coped with it better. In developing countries like India, however, the situation remained grim and hopeless for close to two years – especially, with a great digital divide and resource restraint. Primary education in rural India depends heavily on the Government-run schools. Sporadic individual initiatives aside, administrative response to preserve continuity in the rural primary education has been negligible. As a social policy and development studies enthusiast, I have been observant of the multi-sectoral divides that the global pandemic has exposed. From media screens to *adda* sessions, the urban-rural and the rich-poor divides have been heavily discussed and deliberated upon. However, to my surprise, the focus has predominantly fixated on questions of employment and finance while completely neglecting the crucial case of rural primary education. Primary schools in West Bengal had reopened as late as the Spring of 2022 – after almost two years of no academic activity whatsoever. While in the more urban localities the students had adequate will and access to avail online private tuition to maintain continuity in some form, the children in the villages were not fortunate enough and had no such opportunities.

This article is an account of what I witnessed as a young research-intern with PRADAN (a Delhi-based NGO working on developmental action in predominantly tribal rural settings) during August-September, 2021 at the ‘*Ranibandh*’ block in *Khatra*, Bankura district, West Bengal – in the heart of the tribal belt of the state. While my research aimed at the perusal of the adaptations in developmental program and action during the pandemic by the NGO at its Ranibandh division, my engagement with the community led me to multiple villages in the block, such as ‘*Komo*’, ‘*Rudra*’ and ‘*Ambikanagar*’ gram panchayats. It was during my interaction with different members of the community and observing the primal infrastructure present there, that I

understood the kind of impact the stagnancy in primary education has had on the children as well as the families in rural India. This article, therefore, is an on-ground, first person report highlighting key aspects of the same.

A special acknowledgement is due to be addressed to Mr. Tarak Das, a teacher at a State Government-run primary school in *Lakshmisagar*, Khatra. His patient and in-depth interaction with me during the community engagement has immensely helped me in gathering all the necessary information. In this article, I have drawn from our *tete-a-tete*, with due approval from Mr. Das.

DREAMS BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Cobweb on the windows, dusty doors and benches, streaks of the sunlight entering the classrooms through the rain-damaged asbestos roofing and blackboards with not one draw of chalk. This is how a primary school at a village in West Bengal looked like in August, 2021 – one and a half years into the pandemic. The primary schools are at the heart of the social interaction and a crucial agent of socialization amongst the children in rural India. The school grounds are thronged with children running around, playing and growing up in close contact with nature. For almost two years, the primary schools in West Bengal had their doors closed. They operated for about a couple of hours every day around noon to prepare the midday meals, which would be collected by the guardians. The tired and disappointed eyes of the children peeped through the windows to take a look at their classrooms from outside, hoping and praying for the misery to end. During the interview, Mr. Das teared up as he said, “(It is) an unbearable pain, having to tell the little kids that they are not welcome at their own school,



**Mr. Tarak Das with a student
on 15th August, 2022.**

their second home. The worst part is not knowing when all of this (*the pandemic*) is going to end.” (Translated from Bengali.)

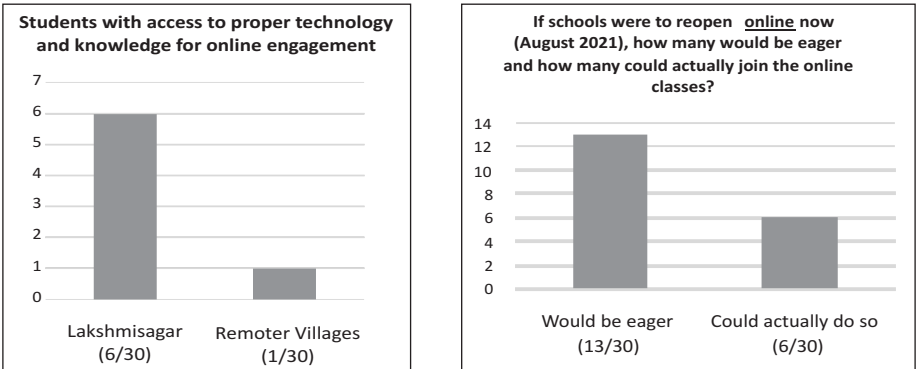
DIVERSION, DISTRACTION AND DESPAIR

Mr. Das familiarized me with the harsh realities that have lashed upon the children in the wake of the pandemic. There seemed to have been an overall diversion of attention amongst the children, which eventually led to a diversion of interest. Some out of financial compulsion and some out of simple vocation and recreation, had gotten engaged in their parent’s work front as ‘*helping hands*’. The habits of being a ‘*student*’ seemed to be dying out amongst the children. Most importantly, the lack of continuity led to the children increasingly growing introvert and losing the ability to express themselves skilfully.

Besides the obvious financial, technological and internet divide, in most cases, the lack of intent, interest and knowledge amongst the parents have kept these rural children from formal education in any and every form during the pandemic.

LET’S TALK NUMBERS

To build a statistical approximation, I had set a class of 30 (for each case) before Mr. Das and sought his opinion on certain important questions. I have highlighted them briefly in the following charts.



Mr. Das also mentioned that male children have shown deeper tendencies of dropping out, with that being highest amongst the SCs and the STs who are trapped in their generational constructs of early marriage and desire of the male child. The OBC families, according to Das, were better placed financially and in literacy rates.

INITIATIVE, INTENTION AND INDIVIDUAL ACTION

It is indeed extremely unfortunate that there has not been sufficient deliberation on necessary policy action that could prevent the two-year long learning gap amongst the youngest minds in their most dynamic age of cognition. Initiatives such as alternate class days, provision of games and sports in school, adapting the curriculum to more activity-oriented learning – could all possibly be beneficial. Since distribution of mid-day meals was the only daily connection between the children, their parents and the school - continuity in learning could also be regulated with home tasks and activities exchanged for scrutiny on a regular basis through the parents while collecting the mid-day meals.

While it may be argued that there was a general lack in initiative and adequate interest on part of the administration as well the faculties, several inspiring educators such as *'Rasta-r Master'* ('Master/ Teacher of the road') Dwipnarayan Nayek of Paschim Burdwan, have shown that all that is needed is the will/intention. (Press Trust of India, 2021.)

The immense impact of the two-year learning gap will show itself gradually with time and then, perhaps, it will be too late for action. Though the West Bengal government's education ministry had announced adaptations in the curriculum to cope with the gap, Mr. Das and other educators feel that a strictly academic approach to bridge the gap shall not prove to be wholesome in terms of an all-round cognitive growth of the young minds. It is about time that the Boards realise the importance of accommodating co-curriculars and *audio-visual* interactive curriculums – *especially* in rural primary education.



Students at Mr. Das' school on 'World Environment Day'.

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Statues, Sunflowers & the Ironies of the Modern Left

Sushen Mitra

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.-151

Would it be very far-fetched to liken the politics of the modern left, with its confused theatrics and pretension, to a Victorian burlesque? It is a tormenting reality to reckon with — to watch the right blaze fastidiously on from Serbia and Sweden to Italy, France and beyond while the left does its best impression of Arnold's ignorant armies clashing by night. It seems that the problems of the left lie in its trying to do too much and therefore, for all its pains, achieving little; in a boisterous radical minority appropriating its broader discourse; in its muddled focus on the superficial and, worst of all, its misguided contentment with performative activism instead of any real change.

In early October, when two glowering climate activists poured tomato soup on one of Vincent Van Gogh's sunflowers in London's National Gallery (Feldman, 2022), it seemed to lay bare every bit of how self-defeating leftist activism seems to have become. "What is worth more, art or life?" one of them asked, gluing herself to the wall behind her. "Millions of cold, hungry families can't even afford to heat a tin of soup," she said, brandishing the Heinz cannister she had just emptied. The irony was, expectedly, lost on them. If their intention was to enrage their audience into caring about the planet, they succeeded commendably in doing the first — the overwhelming public response was negative. How does the eco-friendly linseed oil used for painting have anything to do with the fossil fuel industry? Why vandalise the work of an impoverished social outcast who died cold and hungry himself? Why take frustrations with oil executives out on dead Impressionist painters and non-profit museums? If anything, all they accomplished was trivialising a very real, worrying environmental crisis into an act of juvenile delinquency and damaging public support for what is a very reasonable agenda.

This imperceptive misreading of issues is fatal but it is by no means the only way the left undercuts its own programme. In the wake of the Black Lives

Matter protests in 2020, ‘performative’ came to be the most widely suffixed pejorative for activism. The phrase connoted attempts to get the self-righteous glory associated with activism, to pose and pout smugly on the Right Side of the narrative and talk the talk without walking the walk. Protesting seems to have become an end in itself, granting some peculiar self-fulfilling psychological victory and making one feel better about oneself, and not the means to occasion change. It seems unbelievably simple to claim allyship; one only has to post black squares online or retweet platitudinous hashtags or sign empty Change.org petitions or add rainbows to social media handles during Pride Month but do no constructive legwork to ensure that Black lives actually matter or support LGBTQ communities in tangibly meaningful ways. At the same time, it has become ridiculously easy for institutions and organisations with histories of structural discrimination to virtue signal and claim moral victories. American police officers kneeling with protestors (O’Kane, 2020) or English Premier League footballers wearing rainbow armbands (Lake, 2020) do nothing to break cycles of systemic racial profiling by law-enforcement and homophobia in sport.

In a riveting parallel with the world of feminist academia, Martha Nussbaum’s eloquent critique of Judith Butler addresses this (in)action. Butler’s rather defeatist contention is that power structures are inherently self-perpetuating and, as a result, slender hope for lasting change remains for the feminist movement. The wounded feminist, resigned to a fate of ineluctable oppression, can only find some sad, Freudian redress in a parodic performance of politics; to make fun of oppressive power structures is to subversively attack them while also, bizarrely, eroticising them; to find purpose in such individual agency is also to discover sexual gratification in such a performance. Stripped clean off Freud, I find something dishearteningly similar between Butler’s moral passivity, satisfied with theory and hollow theatrics, and the sort of supine gesturing that the left is so guilty of. Neither does anything to actually better the cause they represent. On the contrary, such symbolic theorising and activism, reeks of a distant sense of privilege. Nussbaum forcefully argues that while it might be simple for a tenured professor at a liberal university to do so, “for women who are hungry, illiterate, disenfranchised, beaten, raped, it is not sexy or liberating to reenact, however parodically, the conditions of hunger, illiteracy, disenfranchisement, beating, and rape. Such women prefer food,

schools, votes, and the integrity of their bodies [and] I see no reason to believe that they long sadomasochistically for a return to the bad state.” In the same way, as morally supportive as it might seem, it is not enough to engage in symbolic online performances for members of the LGBTQ community or people of colour to have a better life in reality.

Even when there are actual protests, they seem to reveal a convenient lack of nuance. When, in May and June of 2020, BLM became a call to iconoclasm and statues regarded as symbolic reminders of oppression were torn down, it betrayed such a simplistic view of history. It is not a new phenomenon by any means: empires (and their statues) have risen and fallen and a visceral instinct towards iconoclasm seems to be timeless. Nevertheless, erasing the physical reminders of an uncomfortable past does not undo history or make the underlying principle go away. One can pat oneself on the back and bask in meaningless victory, perhaps, but dismantling statues of the slave-owning Ulysses Grant and the imperialist Cecil Rhodes do little to lead to any tangible ‘decolonisation,’ as the movement’s perpetrators claim. (In fact, one can reasonably argue that the Rhodes Scholarship, with its many distinguished recipients from Asia and Africa, has done far more to that very end.) Grant’s brilliance as a military strategist and Rhodes’ success as a business magnate can in no way be nullified by their crimes. History does not proceed in cosy binaries of black and white, as the radical left would have one believe, but in shades of very awkward grey. Instead of regarding statues as celebratory monuments, it would be far wiser to see them as valuable historical documents. Rhodes must not fall but ought, instead, to present all sides of history: *‘here lies Cecil John Rhodes, astute politician, mining magnate and obnoxious white supremacist.’*

The way for the left to respond to growing anxieties about a dogmatic, populist right is not by fighting fire with fire. In other words, the Overton Window moving to the right cannot be countered by a shift towards the radical left. If the left as a whole assumes an air of intolerance within its ranks – as the incessant ideological battles of the most useless kind on Twitter and Reddit demonstrate – what remains to separate left from right? A fraught, alienated centre does it no favours, keeping it eternally divided into warring factions. Instead, the illusion of change ought to be replaced by actual attempts to precipitate it. There is no point in sharing rainbows or climate change posts

online if one finds pleasure in malicious, homophobic jokes or refuses to use public transport in person. To turn up for protests, engage in public campaigns or donate to allied organisations does far more than a lone hashtag every two weeks. If the left is to refashion and remobilise itself, let it not resemble the right it tries so very hard to separate itself from. Justice is not a parodic Butlerian performance for social brownie-points. The voiceless deserve better.

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Digital Education and Economy: Pillars of New India

Arka Palit

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.-140

India's digital move began in the 1950s, which aimed at rapid industrialization following the centrally aligned five-year plans. Over the years, enterprises realized that mere industrialization was insufficient. The gradual move by the enterprises was from human intervention and inaccuracy to zero human interference and accuracy, more precisely towards "smart industrialization" (Business Standards)

In the 1980s, the Indian Information Technology Market (IT Market) was all about hardware products and the software industry was completely unknown and non-existent. The significant changes in the Indian economy, including trade liberalization and relaxation of entry barriers; software came into existence in the country after the 1990s. India has traversed a long way in its digital journey starting with smart industries, online payment solutions, complaint redressal, E-commerce, and telemedicine and now with virtual courts and a paperless budget from 2019 onwards shows that India is now moving progressively towards establishing "smart cities" leveraging technologies like Automation, IoT (Internet of Things) based technology and artificial intelligence. These figures were quite encouraging. A survey conducted under the aegis Deloitte India found that 67% of Indians were getting services as expected by the government and were at par with those offered by the private sector. More than 86% of the population in India was on the same page that the government needs to invest more in technology to be prepared better for the future. The study also found that the use of in-person government services halved across Asia Pacific (APAC) nations in the last two years, and 77% of citizens primarily use a digital platform to access government services.

The gap starts to widen from here, with more than 41% of the population still struggling to access digital services for their individual use, mostly, due to a lack of basic digital skills and a shortfall in digital infrastructure. Governments' readiness to embrace digitization and progress ahead still varies widely

between emerging and developing economies. Indians also believe that online services will improve their trust in the government and 89% are willing to learn new digital skills or use a new platform. (Team Computers)

The urge for the replacement of manpower with smart power gave a new direction to this transformation. The majority of the Indian workforce was only involved with receptive tasks that required no human judgment or critical thinking, reducing their levels of productivity and quality of decisions. Soon, it was realized that the Indian industry now requires transformation from manual skilled laborer/worker to smart machines, robots, and other forms of automation for carrying out routine, receptive back-office tasks. This was indeed the first trend for moving ahead with digital, automation solutions.

IS THE CASHLESS ECONOMY WORRISOME?

The Cashless transaction has enhanced more manageable payment across the nation. The technology remains absolutely simple, a smartphone with a bank account linked to it, for its usage and availability - the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of India introduced UPI (United Payments Interface), as a pilot project with 21 banks. Now, it is one of the most successful cashless transaction methods, though there still lies the question about network connectivity in various parts of the country. Chances are high that transactions are often not successful; developing such an infrastructure should also be backed up with proper connectivity and better telecommunication networks. Lack of awareness looms large; where the citizens often feel that this digital way of transacting is problematic and worrisome, it is better to carry heavy bundles of notes. Also, more than half a million of the population have found that transacting with the use of cash is easy and can be liquidated easily. However, money in electronic form gives us the freedom from having a separate physical wallet and a weightless mobile wallet instead, which is secure and trustworthy. The paperless economy can help in the easy tracking of funds transfers. This in a way will contribute positively towards curbing corruption, cyber terrorism, drug peddling, etc. The paper-based economy often made cash movement tracking difficult. Many illegal activists made use of this perfect opportunity by siphoning crores of cash for activities like illegal border infiltration, funding of terrorist organizations across borders, and the gap between affluent and impoverished keeps on increasing.

The contemporary way of transacting through UPI often fails to pass the validation of it being useful and effective. The government should introduce and project them at various gatherings like advertisements in various newspapers and television, and also in between the screening of movies in the form of documentaries and presentations. The initiative is now to work toward securing and improving digital identity, this will also help citizens feel digitally empowered and be more confident to move ahead for a cashless future which would bring a boom in fin-tech start-ups in the country which is also the need of the hour.

EDUCATING VIRTUALLY

Digital India here projects a mixed picture. At one end there is seamless connectivity in major towns and cities, allowing for working, attending classes, and conducting sessions from the comfort of homes to villages and interior parts where there is zero connectivity, not even phone calls possible, and thinking of implementing virtual classrooms is indeed a dream. The digital divide has been felt largely during this pandemic where the urbanites were accessing and working on their devices comfortably, but these children were unable to get access to mobile phones and the internet. Sadly, India had to lose many of its future citizens as these students ended their life and they could not cope with this humiliation. The most important challenge lies ahead of connecting our villages with superior internet and telecom connectivity and how to turn this dream of millions of children and youth living in remote corners into reality lies the effort and contribution of the youth. The need of the hour is to find out why these areas are remaining backward and to educate these students about its correct usage and how helpful it is for understanding and comprehending concepts. All round connectivity will enhance virtual education and this digital divide can be removed to a large extent. This move will help India to be a developed country within ten years or so. Now the focus lies on how we adapt, invent and improve our homemade technological innovations, and be an example for the world and also an inspiration for others.

MILES TO GO!

Indian entrepreneurs have learned a good lesson from global competitors, how important it is to sell an experience and not just a mere product or service in

order to survive and succeed altogether in the competitive market. There is a need for enterprises to look for solutions that provide quality customer experience, before and after availing of a service or buying a product; this would open doors for all kinds of application solutions.

India's digital journey till now has been sweet and sour, along with ever-changing needs and the relentless thirst for exploring the unexplored reigns in the mind of most Indian entrepreneurs. The constant effort for both public and private after almost seven decades to consider India as a "Digital India" is also somewhat becoming a reality. India has been ranked third among the most attractive destinations for technology investments in the world. Starting from Pharmaceuticals to manufacturing to automobiles, every sector has been working aggressively toward establishing the country as a leader in industrialization and technological development.

E-governance in every city, town, and village will allow for the faster and more efficient administration of various areas. Monitoring allows for the prevention of mismanagement and alerts the necessary authorities at the earliest, to take necessary steps. We as citizens of the country should take steps to prevent technology from being taken for granted. Once citizens start contributing diligently to India then only the vision and mission of Atmanirbhar Bharat will become successful and it can become an example for every country in the world to become self-reliant in every sphere.

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India – A Nation Scripting her Own Destiny

Aditya Mukherjee

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 113

Being able to dictate one's own terms in international podiums is one of the most valuable virtues, something not all countries had, half a century ago. Having to undergo some of the worst years of colonialism-driven economic and resource exploitation, countries of the so-called 'third world' were left vulnerable, reeling under the pressures of appalling socio-economic conditions. The ability to put its stance forward was seen as a luxury as these nations were virtually written off and were deemed irrelevant actors in the world order.

India has come a long way from where it was 75 years ago since independence and it continues to break new barriers in various technological and innovative fields. But the domain where it seems to have particularly stood out is its approach towards International Relations.

The foreign affairs calendar for the ministries is chock-a-block with numerous appointments with foreign heads of states as well as representatives. The rhetoric shift in India's foreign policy decisions from traditional to a more proactive one by initiating various strategic alliances is mainly for improving economic, security and trade relations. The main objectives are promotion of commerce & trade; maintaining security; expansion of logistics facilities, infrastructure and enabling connectivity among member states. From regional alliances such as SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) and ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) to inter-regional groupings such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), India is seen to participate by taking a leading role.

The overarching and organic approach to foreign policy as well as a clear identification of India's competencies and challenges has emerged due to the power transformation that is taking place in Asia, brought about by the growing influence of China in the global arena and the relative decline of

Western influence. India has sought a way to deal with this new status quo in a balanced and rational manner keeping in mind her own interests at the foremost. India's metamorphosis of its foreign policy alignment on a regional as well as at an international level and its key partnerships with Russia, Japan and other South Eastern countries have to be seen in the larger context of a rising India with a unique voice and perspective in a world troubled with geopolitical conflicts. Global Inclusivity, i.e., A nation with a strong voice and actions, with an inclusive vision for the planet has resonated positively worldwide. The concept of World as one family or "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbaka*" borrowed from the Maha Upanishad, which has been rooted in the Indian foreign policy lexicon in recent times, has managed to inspire confidence across the globe through its humanitarian assistances, medical and vaccine supplies, food and economic aid worldwide. (Srivastava, The Kathmandu Post, 2022) India's incredibly proactive involvement in taking its stance clear might also be inferred from its recent actions to counter China in its expansionist policies by taking a lead in forming an inter-regional alliance known as QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. (Smith, CFR, 2021). The group aims to keep China at bay for its activities in the South China Sea. The current government's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, amid the unprecedented diplomatic outreach towards the SAARC and the Central Asian countries has been received positively barring Pakistan sticking out like a sore thumb (Das, Jindal Journal of International Affairs Vol 1, 2018). In an ambitious initiative, India has moved itself from 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy' wherein the ambit for a cooperative and meaningful relationship was not only restricted to its immediate South Asian neighbours but it has also expanded to the fast developing East Asian states like Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, taking its assertive foreign image forward, India has used its influence on the South Asian region to create BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation). Taking stock of the possibilities that the Bay of Bengal region could provide, India, by means of this alliance aims to strengthen its relations among the member countries, through intra regional trade and multilateral strategic talks. To this end, a few joint initiatives have been taken, most notable being the Kaladan Multimodal Project (linking India and Myanmar), Asian Trilateral Highway (linking India and Thailand via Myanmar), Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA)

(between India, Bangladesh and Bhutan) to bring the member countries closer. The independent policy stance that India has taken would have definitely rattled the West. Gone are the days where countries were expected to follow the dictates of the so-called major power centres. In the contemporary era of a multi-polar world order, where the decision-making prowess has become a more dynamic process, India's authority perhaps would be understood by its stern policy stance of not looking to appease others. The perception that India was siding with the aggressor i.e. Russia during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, brought about condemnation from all quarters. However, India's firm decision of not aligning with any particular country, reflects its interests in keeping a long-standing, time-tested friendly relationship with Russia, but at the same time keeping a diplomatic relationship with the West intact. I believe, India, as a post colonial state, has to look after its own strategic, self serving interests by maintaining the delicate geopolitical balancing act successfully.

The aforesaid instances assert how a country which was virtually written off more than half a century ago, is now able to dictate its own terms. A country who was left in tatters, I believe, now stands shoulder to shoulder with all the major powers, more assertive than ever, a country which is more than capable of writing her own destiny.

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Envisioning the Queer Future: A Resolve Inspired over a Credence Imposed

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A voice disrupting, a will soaring, and a fight gruelling.

The journey of the Queer Community from marginalized and unacknowledged to the belligerent but unaccepted can hardly be considered a positive progression. Queers are now recognized, but not received – rejected as a subversive community of gender and sexuality non-conformists. This vehement disownment hints towards detachment. The vice of dire apathy is carried over irrespective of legal status of queer relations; for social acceptance is little encouraged by laws handed down – proposing previously alien alternate lifestyles in society. The prismatic Indian Society of lingering parochial norms and primordial foundations makes this struggle an up-hill battle to push boulders to a summit. Thus, the dejection of these marginalized groups is perpetuated, overcome only through inspired mass embrace of the differences. The tale of this subaltern sect is yet ideal, and far from conclusion. An unabideable reality, but a story of decisive role in the future of humankind and our freedoms.

Time and again, the constraints of societal order and confines of established ethos have been overcome by the silenced. Those who were exiled to the peripheries of the community, forced to hide their being, and take refuge by conforming to the entrenched values and structures have fought back to earn their right to distinct life. It is the humane right of individuals to live out a dignified life in their image. Yet, it is the ancient, inherent tendency of society to assimilate all into uniformity. This continuous conflict of balance and counterbalance between the forces of conformity and diversity is a constant dynamic of opinion and discourses among selves inhabiting society. The desirable and undesirable are eternally intertwined in the contest of human conscience. Movements have successfully liberated perspectives, and

overturned narratives to make them more inclusive of minority struggle and redemption. These movements live onwards in shared memory and values transmitted from generation after generation, serving as a live parable against corrected injustices that marred society.

The Queer movement has been a long and continuous effort directed towards recognition and acceptance of the non-normative community, and political activism to achieve parity of treatment and protection against discrimination. The movement has expanded the limits of acceptability in society. While LGBTQIA identities are by no means a modern innovation, but are an ancient constituent of Human society. In spite of historic presence, non-heterosexuality and non-binary genders have remained a tabooed subject in public dialogue, evermore so in a prismatic society like that of India.

While there lies a great deal of evidence that non-normative genders and sexuality were accommodated in Hindu culture, centuries of Abrahamic regimes left Indian society uprooted of its tolerant attitudes towards the divergent sexual and gender cohabitants. British imperialism imposed biased laws that assumed non-conformity as acts "against the order of nature" [Section 377 of IPC, 1861: Unnatural Offenses] [4] [5], that has held into the post-colonial reality. Thus, it has been the Queer struggle to overturn injustice and fight for recognition, legal protection, and equal rights, chiefly through battling for the freedom of non-heterosexual intercourse and marriage. Though a unified cause against injustices, the two ethical claims must be understood in context of the distinct domains they hope to change.

Sexual intercourse is a matter of concern for individuals engaged, behind closed doors. Privacy of individuals does not stand trial before the state or society. Sexual interaction between two individuals above the age of consent, harming or hindering no other, is the sole prerogative of the individuals. Neither society, and least of all the state must police, through sanction or coercion, the private realm. For both, the society of normative authority and the state of legal authority, are concerned with aspects of collective life. Thus, the formal withdrawal of the state from its undue and violent suppression of gender and sexual freedom vis-a-vis formal regulation and laws and minimal social intervention is a welcomed correction of their ways. The final striking down of most provisions under Section 377 of IPC by the Indian Supreme Court

(2018 Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India) [6] gave just constitutional relief to the privacy of Queer relations against the arbitrary manifestations of state overreach.

However, this win must not be wrongly propelled to represent the victory of Queers identity and liberty. It merely upholds individuality in choice and expression. It is no collective sanction and embrace of the Queer truth. The acceptance of the choice of sexual interaction between individuals in privacy may redeem persecution by the state, but has not, and will not withhold prosecution of the Queer, so long as its 'illegitimacy' remains ingrained in society.

Thus, the Queer fight lies elsewhere. The realization of the Queer Agency lies in acknowledgement, approval, and legitimization of the 'misfit' into mainstream life. It is so victorious when the community receives the mandate from the society-at-large. The greater goal of the legalization of non-heterosexual marriages in society is a means to achieve social ratification to overcome centuries of stigma in society. It is delinking the association of 'perverted' and 'profound' from queer practices. Whilst one can rebut the necessity of mass compassion to secure the Queer future; freedoms brought upon by legality may often not translate into reality unless the vigilance of society dawns upon it a necessary entitlement of its inhabitants. Social change is thus the only route to ensure that the Indian society irrespective of its dispensation is able to provide collective might, empathy, and security to its Queer members as full and indispensable cohabitants of the society.

Here, this article differs with the principal approach of the Queer community to seize the last vestige of legal inequality as against heterosexual couples: towards an exercise of social change rather than a lobbying effort to claim desired verdicts, in understanding that humans are not beings of isolation, but other-interdependent living in society. It is a plea for a deviant course for the Queer cause.

Moreover, marriage is no subject of the private sphere. It is a sexual union of a couple, acknowledged, accepted, and legitimized by the society. The crux of social intake on matters of a blessed union is scarcely formal-legal, but rather social. Marriage is a validating apparatus and cannot be reduced to a mere

contract between two individuals, or a religious exercise among two families, but is a greater act of instilling the couple and their family sanctity in society – as bonds by consent of all, sanctioned by all, held fast by all. Marriage is sacred because it is public. It is this undeniable nature of marriage as a social institution, rather than one of civil grant or personal regulation, that makes any and all statutory efforts towards changing its orientation a misplaced one. Thus, the route towards legalization of non-heterosexual marriage must be a long, rigorous, and percolating campaign towards socializing to sensitize and educate people on the matters of the Queer community.

Any top-down, artificial imposition of a verdict so divergent from the social reality would be neither a perfect nor a permanent solution against existing stigma and discrimination against the Queer. Without substantive change of hearts and minds legal sanction will do little to mitigate the social wrong. It will be ignorant to forgo the role of values, morality, public education, acceptance, and conscience as the true enforcers of justice and the potent way to realize the revolution to overcome the generational lapses in relating the Queer with the mainstream lies in a long-drawn but certain change of collective conscience, against subconscious imprints of prejudice and bias as products of society. The present movement of pride is confined to urban pockets in education and action, while the overwhelming majority of India is rural and far from an understanding alliance. The Indian Queer movement acts more like an echo chamber for the community, for a self-assured future. An overnight overhaul of eon long dogma, by the stroke of a gavel or statutory bill will resolve little. Seismic change brought about by a few allies will yield no certain, dignified Queer futurity. Laws remain hollow so long as people don't register it as the rightful course of justice. The Queer is distinct from the 'staple', one entrenched and absolute. Change in its nature must be both incremental, bottom-up and gradual, lest the majority in its anxiety find the traditional fabric of society changed, breeding violence – a backlash. Such matters vital to humanity must neither be decided behind closed doors by representatives nor verdict upon the gavel of a bench of judges. Only an organic movement can produce truly substantive change. Here the entire society must stand jury to the change of magnanimous proportions, that must penetrate all sections and layers of society, reaching the peripheral communities, all of modernity. [Kumar, Rahul & Patgiri, 2022]

This necessarily would mean to forgo the fulfilment of legislative sanction till there appears, in better human conscience, a consensus of respect within the society. To accept and yet consider this proposal for mighty – everlasting change is the Queer choice. With an outgroup author, this article does so to express the better route to a community that must in certain terms decide its own collective destiny. It is a gambit that the community must be willing to spare. One that may not provide immediate dividends but is a surer path to a more honored and dignified future in the long-term. This proposal suggests differently, the trajectory of human civilization holds greater moral priority for the present. It is towards perpetuation of the outcome borne by the struggle for all generations to come that we must leap.

We must not walk on the same lines long drawn. This is a call for an inclusive future, as against the unfair reality, one not stained by brackets: and towards this not an imposition but conviction that leads.

In all we do, proud may we march ahead...

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Zan! Zendegi! Azadi!

Asmita Shit

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“You can kill me as soon as you like but you cannot stop the emancipation of women”

- Tahirih Qurrat Al-Ayn

The Islamic Republic of Iran is an anomaly in the Middle East. It is home to a proud and ancient culture whose ideals of freedom and democracy under Cyrus the Great formed some of the foundations of the U.S. Constitution, while Iran itself has struggled to achieve democracy. The Iranian people are largely pro-Western but are brutally subjugated by an anti-Western religious theocracy. The custodial death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman has shaken the Islamic regime in Iran. The ‘moral police’ arrested Amini for wearing her hijab in an ‘improper way’. A wave of protests has swept Iran against the long-standing forced hijab laws.

HISTORY OF IRAN

Although it may startle you, Iran has not always been this conservative. Tracing Iran's history will reveal a completely different picture. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the scenario was very different. Under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran who ruled from 1941 to 1979, Iran witnessed a brief period of liberalisation. Iranian women had the freedom to dress however they wanted. While the hijab was still widely worn, western clothing like mini-skirts and tight-fitting jeans were not unusual. It was not uncommon to see women wearing swimsuits in public. However, the Mullahs were displeased with this westernisation of Iran. Reza's ideologies and vision did not align with the Islamic hardliners. This led to the overthrow of the Shah under Ayatollah Khomeini and marked the beginning of a fundamentalist regime and suppression of women. Iranians may not have wanted monarchy, but it is certain they did not want a clerical regime to replace it. After the Islamic Revolution, political agendas in Iran have always focused on women's bodies. The regime's policy towards women is characterized by mandatory dress

codes. Women's sexuality and bodies are regulated by them as part of a policing apparatus. To put it simply, Iran is successfully ageing backwards.

MORALITY POLICE

The recent incident with Mahsa Amini has raised some questions 'Who are the moral police?', 'What are they trying to enforce?' After the Islamic Revolution, to control the behaviour of women in public places, several laws were introduced - including mandatory dress codes. It was illegal for women to work in certain fields, to seek a divorce, and to travel without their father's or husband's permission. A division of Iran's police forces known as "Gasht-e-Ershad," which translates as "guidance patrols" (Welle Deutsche, 2022) and is popularly known as the "morality police," is responsible for enforcing the rules of the Islamic dress code in public. The law states that all women must cover their heads and wear hijab in public after reaching adolescence, though the specific age is not specified. The state's interpretation of Islamic Sharia law, which mandates modest clothing for both men and women, forms the basis of a significant portion of Iran's social laws. The "morality police," however, focus mainly on women. The definition of unsuitable clothes is vague, leaving a lot of opportunity for individual interpretation and giving rise to claims that "morality" enforcers unfairly arrest women. Those detained by the "morality police" are given notice, or in some cases, they are transported to a police station or a purported education. Inside the facilities, detainees are given classes about Islam and the importance of the hijab and then forced to sign a pledge to abide by the state's clothing regulations before they are released. The morality police are so active that it would be difficult to identify a typical Iranian woman or family that has not experienced some sort of engagement with them.

GEN-Z VS OLD IRANIAN LEADERS

Protests in Iran are not new. On international women's day, 8th March 1979 (CBC,2022), millions of women took to the streets to protest against the mandatory veil laws. It is safe to say that this is not the first time Iran has seen women protest but the death of Amini has resulted in massive demonstrations by women. Women have always participated in Iranian protest movements. For instance, the Girls of Revolution Street protest gained momentum which began when Vida Movahed removed her headscarf and waved it in the air on

Revolution Street in central Tehran in 2017. Several other women followed her footsteps, removing their headscarves in nonviolent protest despite threats of arrest and harassment. However, this wave of protests stands out from previous ones due to the participation of younger generation. Young girls in schools and universities are risking their lives to oppose influential Iranian leaders. Numerous student protesters were detained, and several were forced to flee the nation. In defiance of the nation's modesty standards, students gathered at the Islamic Azad University in Tehran, many of them were dressed in black. A similar scene unfolded on October 2, riot police used force against a large number of students protesting at Tehran's Sharif University of Technology (AIR NEWS, 2022). The Iranian media which is controlled by the Iranian state shows a distorted image of reality. According to state tv, all the Iranians are supporting the Supreme Leader. This is where the Gen-Z comes in. They issued the boldest challenge to the theocracy in more than a decade. The pluralistic nature of Gen Z makes it harder to govern than previous generations due to their exposure to the Internet and social media since birth Gen-Z using social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Facebook present the reality in front of the world. Videos of women cutting their hair and burning their hijabs have gone viral. They have a greater understanding of the freedom enjoyed by their counterparts elsewhere. Young girls believe that they can make their own choices about how they look, who they want to be in life, and how they want to live, unlike their previous generations. As a result, this generation questions authority doesn't believe in the existing red lines drawn by society or the regime and refuses to submit to these hardliners. The Islamic hardliners tried to subjugate Gen-Z in various ways. One of the ways in which the Islamic Republic has attempted to control its youth is through the zero-tolerance policy toward anything considered antithetical to the identity of the Islamic revolution, implementing the Internet "Protection Bill," and creating symbolic initiatives, such as the "Hello Commander" pop song (Bizaer Maysam, 2022). These efforts have not been successful. These young protestors are unfazed by anyone. They are struggling to make a change since their future is at stake. As a result of Gen-Z's enthusiasm for protest, the taboos have been broken and it will be difficult to return to the status quo.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The international community must show solidarity with the women in Iran risking their lives to protest and defend their rights. The Iranian protests are not about wearing hijab or maintaining dress codes, it is about the coercion faced by women. The liberty of women is in question. No woman should be murdered for having the will to live freely. Iran needs to be saved from old, senile men. It is high time Iran gulps down a tablespoon of ‘modernisation’.

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The Need for Intersectionality in Indian Feminism

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The Mainstream Feminism in India, with Upper-Class Savarna women at the forefront, revolving around “Smashing the Patriarchy”, proclaiming “All men are trash”, and fighting for equality has somehow managed to turn a blind eye to its most marginalized and oppressed segments — Dalit, Muslim, and Trans women (Sharma and Geetha, 2021). Feminism in India is in dire need of reassessing its goals and making space for intersectionality.

Savarna cis-het women who take up the most vocal, active political spaces in India fail to recognize and acknowledge the ‘caste factor’ in most issues. Performative activism is often done by Upper-Caste feminists on social media platforms such as Instagram where they post selfies with their lower-caste house helpers to show their solidarity. However, they fail to recognise how these Upper-Caste people are often the same ones who continue to uphold the system of untouchability by refusing to use the same utensils as their domestic workers, or letting these workers use the same spaces as them since they are considered ‘impure’ (Narain, 2022). Dalit voices have been systematically erased, and their political spaces have been taken away. There has been a lack of recognition of Dalit women as a social category in the mainstream political system in India. Bahujan women’s political participation has also been mostly restricted, and their caste identity has made them extremely vulnerable and marginalized. Dalit women’s political capacity has been disparaged through caste discrimination, harassment, threats or physical assaults (Kalyani, 2021). The #MeToo movement, one of India’s major revolutionary feminist movements - initiated by a Bahujan student Raya Sarkar, eventually shifted the focus away from marginalized communities and only managed to give high-profile, upper-class, victims justice. Since the entire #MeToo movement was digitized and available exclusively to the privileged sections; the working-class women who did not have any access to social media were systematically

excluded from it. 'Khabar Lahariya', India's only rural, women-run digital press started the 'MeToo rural' series for documenting cases of sexual harassment faced by rural women and showing support to these underprivileged women who face sexual violence on a regular basis (Pande, 2019).

Selective activism by mainstream feminists has caused harm not just to lower-caste women but also to trans-women. It is important to acknowledge that the lived experiences of cis-gender women are largely different from that of trans women in this hetero-patriarchal society. Indian feminists while fighting for the right to make choices have often forgotten that the marginalized do not get to make choices. There is no feminism unless the voices of trans women are actively heard and addressed. Trans women continue to face discrimination, they are not allowed to hold jobs or get an education, get abandoned by their families (Chauhan, 2018), and are harassed not only on a corporeal level but also on an emotional level (Sengupta, 2022). Feminists in India, while talking about equal pay within the workplace often forget to make space for trans women who are excluded from the labor market and are forced into sex work which has high health related risks and makes them more susceptible to becoming victims of violence (Dabas, 2016). It impedes them from getting employment in societally considered respectable jobs owing to the taboo and notion of impurity surrounding trans folks as well as sex work. Trans women begging on the streets is one of the most common sights in India. If Indian feminists really believe in the upliftment and empowerment of women, then why are trans women not considered a part of this plan and why would they not make a safe space for them? Feminism is not just about breaking the stereotypes and patriarchy; it goes beyond that. Urban feminism involves a lot of conversations about the normalization of menstruation but forgets to include trans people in it. Usage of cis-centric pop culture quotes such as 'no uterus no opinion' (Facci, 2022) is yet another example of how these 'girl boss' feminists fail to be inclusive even when they're trying hard to be available for all women.

Western feminism has indeed influenced Indian urban feminism to a large extent which has made Savarna women speak up for the Anti-abortion laws passed in America, but not for their Muslim sisters facing discrimination for wearing the Hijab. Savarna women protesting against Hijab and calling it

regressive, religious, and patriarchal forget that they are the same ones who advocate for women's right to wear what they want. Why are Muslim spaces being taken up? Why are the opinions of Muslim women stifled with regard to their choice to wear the hijab, and how it is a symbol of Power and Resistance? Why is there no solidarity shown by these popular feminists? Is hijab not considered progressive because the privileged section of India considers it to be not progressive?

Post the 2012 Nirbhaya case, India had witnessed the large-scale outrage, and the convicts were put to death sentences by the court. India also witnessed a large-scale change in crime laws after 2012 (Sharma, 2022). Indian feminists spoke at great lengths about women's bodily autonomy and their choices. However, today we hear nothing, not even a whisper, from these elite feminists now that the convicts of Bilkis Bano walk free on remission. (Lawrence, 2022). Dr B.R Ambedkar once said, "Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path." It is imperative to look inwards and realize how much the caste-factor shapes the legal justice system in India and how it cannot be separated from any arena of life, whether personal or political. Exclusionary Feminism is dangerous. People with privilege need to fight the Brahmanical system that has been built on the oppression and blood of marginalized communities (Rao, 2003). Savarna feminists need to realize that they have dominated the feminist movement for too long and it is now high time to move away and pass the mic to the ostracized section of Indian society that has been fighting for ages for their rights. They need to realize now, more than ever, that it is not a Feminist movement unless it's intersectional.

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Eros and Ananke - Understanding Civilization through a Freudian Lens

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Civilization, as political theorists like to stress, is a product of the 'Social Contract' or the common will of the society. However, one needs to understand that such social contracts were just cosmetic manifestations of the emerging liberal world order which needed the dictums of Law, the right to property, parliamentary democracy, and non-interference to further the cause of laissez-faire individualism and reduce the manipulation of socio-economic affairs by religious-institutions.

While the social contract theorists had a liberal agenda to address via their thesis, it is the prominent Neurologist, Sigismund Schlomo Freud who was in proximity to address the notion of a social contract, the growth of civilization and its discontents by using the tools of psychoanalysis. Freud's primary focus is on the psyche of 'man' or the individual cause of civilization, culture, or for that matter, any contract that emanates from him. Freud's seminal work "Civilization and Its Discontents" is a Pandora's box to the broad question of man's place in the world. It seeks to answer questions fundamental to human society and its organization.

Freud has leached on to a pessimistic outlook towards humanity owing much to the horrors of the First World War. He advocated that human beings like all other carnal beings are pleasure-maximizing animals and it is the natural tendency of man to curb pain or the sensation of it at any cost. He transfers the intrapsychic conflict between ego (personality component dealing with reality) and id (represents our animal instincts); pleasure principle and reality principle; consciousness and subconscious mind which he had analyzed in his psychoanalytic writings over to the domain of human civilization. He categorizes three sources of human suffering or fear which manipulated mankind to establish a civilization, namely- i) the superior forces of nature ii) the deposition to decay of our bodies, and iii) the inadequacy of our methods of

regulating human relations in the family, the community and the state. While the first two sources are inevitable as we cannot subdue nature, however, to the third which is the social source of our fear, we tend to disregard it as the very civilization and culture which were created to ensure protection and well-being for all of us, has become a great part of our misery. Freud stressed on returning to primitive conditions as civilization threatens to undermine the modicum of happiness to man in the name of privation.

According to Freud, Eros (love) and Ananke (fears) are the parents of civilization. The primitive family as the primary unit of society comes together to satisfy the immediate urge for libidinal gratification. Next, Freud tried to economize love through 'Caritas' or generalized love for humanity, to avoid the downside of exclusive love. Note once again Freud's economic thinking, even in love we hedge our bets and protect ourselves from sensual bankruptcy by, as it were, diversifying our emotional portfolio. Civilization also tends to have its roots in the totemic culture (a western viewpoint), wherein in a patriarchal setup, the sons come together keeping aside their mutual hostilities against the power and authority of the father. The bonding together of the sons, the subordination of their mutual hostilities for a strategic alliance against the father, is one of the first acts of civilization. Civilization here emerges from a negative, aggressive impulse; the war of all against all, that constitutes the state of nature, is suspended solely to dethrone a mutual and more powerful 'enemy'. Freud conceptualizes civilization as an eternal struggle between 'Eros' (love/ drive for integration) and 'Thanatos' (death, aggression, and fragmentation of bonds)

The harsh reality that Freud finds out through his psychoanalysis, which one will eagerly deny is that men are not gentle, humanitarian, and love seeking animal who merely defends themselves against external aggression, but there exists a strong inclination among men towards aggression, domination, and control over their weak peers or subject. This part which constitutes the 'ego' tends to be contained and repressed under the laws and ethics of civilization (the super-ego) while emulating passively in the power structure of the society, which leads to, what I would like to call a phenomenon of 'ethical corruption' within ourselves. Homo Homini Lupus (Man is to man a wolf); who dares to dispute it in his own life and history.

Conflict and aggression have played a pivotal role in shaping the boundaries of modern civilization. Religion is the most important wheel of civilization and it was the main channel through which aggression was channelized into our civic society. The Abrahamic religion owing to its close geographical vicinity and influence has influenced its people into their respective threshold and waged war against each other. The Karmic faith having its root in South-East Asia did not find a medium to channelize the inherent aggression thereby creating rifts and divisions within its socio-religious framework itself in the name of caste, purity, bloodline, and so on and so forth. The most contemporary event changing the course of civilization was the use of 'Thanatos' in Communism. The Communists believe that they have found a way to relieve humanity from its evil. Man is inherently good but is corrupted through the capitalist ecosystem which supports private property and egoistic individualism. If private property was abolished through revolution and capitalism was overthrown only then could an egalitarian order be established. The civilization which was expected to prevent the worst atrocities of brutal violence is itself perpetrating aggression in discreet ways. Communism is itself using the tool of aggression to change the course of history by dividing society into haves and have-nots. Psychologically speaking, it is founded on an untenable illusion. By abolishing private property, one denies the human love for power, individualism, and control. These instincts did not rise as a result of property; they reigned almost supreme in primitive times when possessions were almost scanty.

The main argument turns on a paradox. And the paradox is this: the civilization, which we have created to ensure our happiness, turns out to be the same civilization that is the source of our greatest misery. So, we are our own worst enemies. So for Freud, civilization is a system of laws, orders, and norms that make society hold together, and this is always in danger of unravelling because of our mutual hostility to one another, thus, leading to 'cultural neuroses'.

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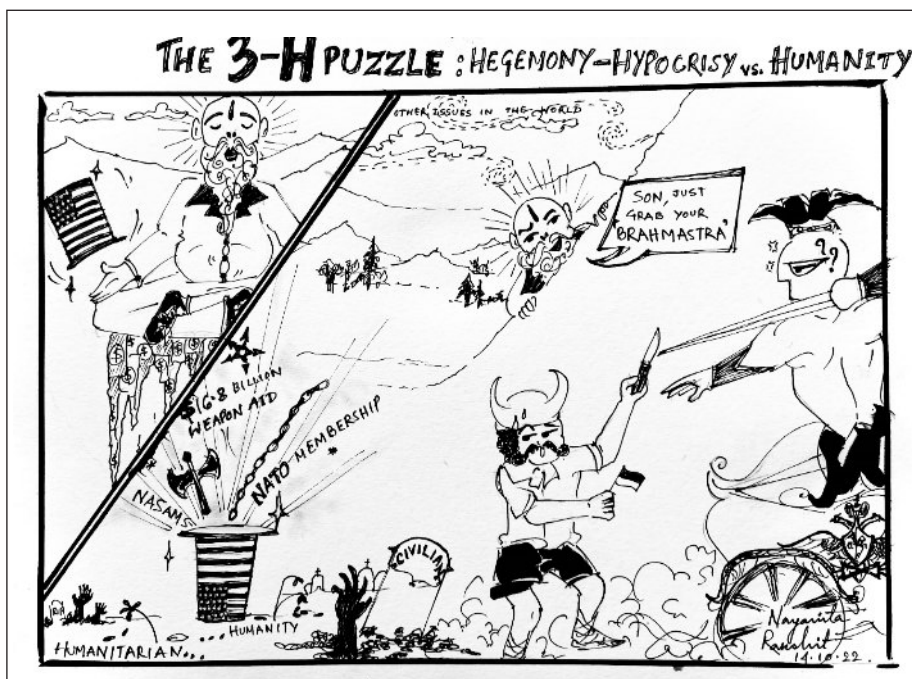
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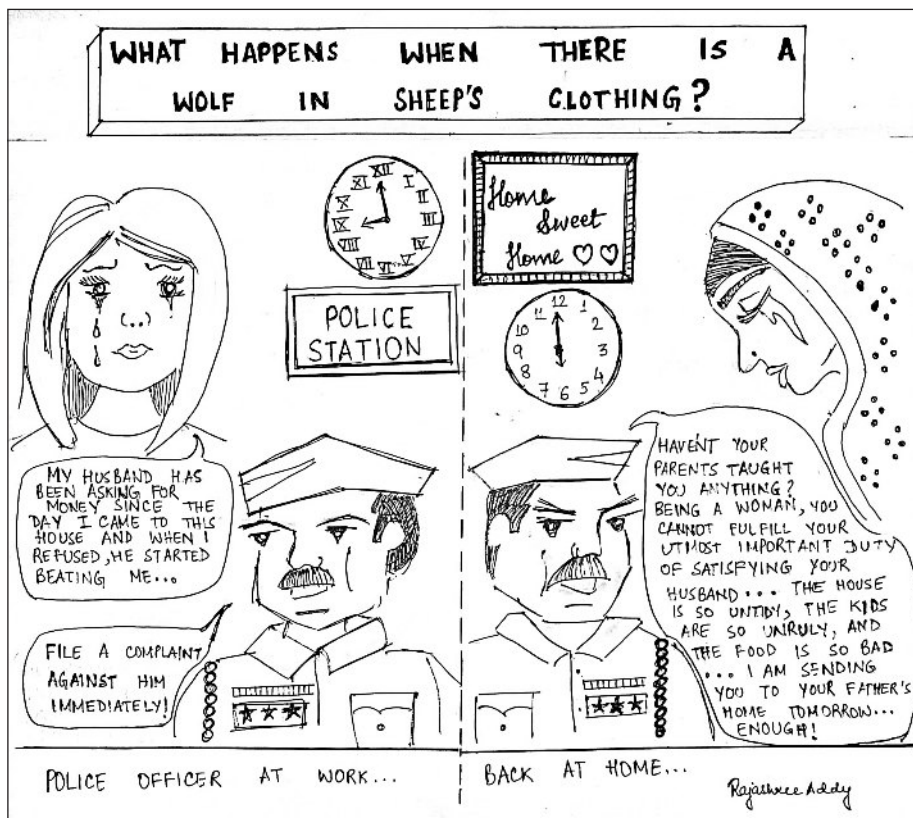
Is free fair?

Neha Pandey, Second Year (MPLS), Roll No.- 140



The 3-H Puzzle: Hegemony-hypocrisy vs. Humanity

Nayanita Rakshit, Second Year (PLSA), Roll No.-185



What happens when there is a wolf in sheep's clothing?

Rajashree Addy, Second Year (PLSA), Roll No.- 109

