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POLITIQUE



JOURNAL OF THE POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata

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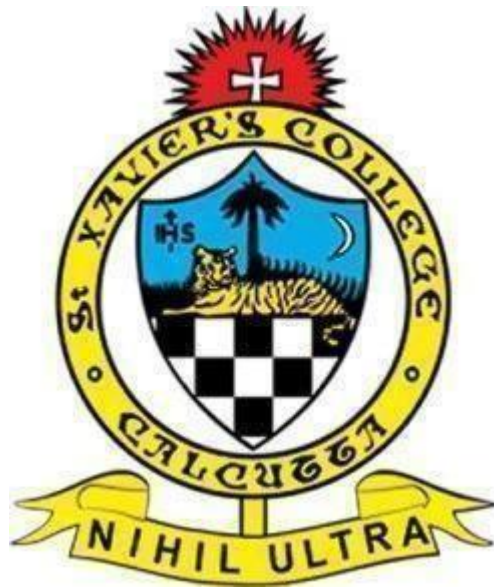
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POLITIQUE

**JOURNAL OF THE POSTGRADUATE
AND RESEARCH**

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata

2024–2025

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MESSAGES

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25/02/2025

MESSAGE FROM FR. PRINCIPAL

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

I take this opportunity to remind students that all the work related to the publication of such a journal provides ample opportunities to students for demonstrating skills and developing new ones. I am certain that this exercise has proved beneficial in encouraging students to analyse various political issues in greater depth and has provided a medium for them to present diverse socio-political perspectives relevant to the country and the world at large.

I congratulate the students and the faculty members of the Department for their efficient co-ordination and I am sure that this intellectual endeavour will continue in the years to come.

Nihil Ultra!


Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, SJ
Principal
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ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
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FROM THE VICE-PRINCIPAL'S DESK

I congratulate the Postgraduate Department of Political Science for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts in creating, *Politique 2024-2025*. I especially commend their enthusiasm for preserving the legacy of their annual departmental journal now in its 9th edition.

This volume is an aggregate of research articles from students, upholding the college standards of academic quality, integrity and excellence. It also bears the imprint of originality, creativity, imagination and individuality through caricatures and op-eds pertaining to significant political issues.

I am confident that this academic venture has been fruitful for students, particularly in developing their skills and abilities in research, critical thinking and writing.

Vice-Principal
Department of Arts & Science
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21 FEB 2025



MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN OF SCIENCE

The Postgraduate Department of Political Science releases of the **9th edition** of their journal, **Politique 2024-2025**, highlights a significant achievement in academic publishing. This edition showcases the collaborative efforts of both students and professors, emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches to diverse political discourses.

Such endeavours not only enrich the academic landscape but also foster critical thinking and innovative perspectives among students. The journal serves as a platform for unique insights from various social science disciplines, reflecting a commitment to broadening the understanding of political phenomena.

Congratulations to the Department on this accomplishment and best wishes for their ongoing mission to enlighten and inspire future generations of scholars and practitioners in the field of political science.

Dr. Indranath Chaudhuri
Dean of Science
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata-700016.

Dean of Science
Arts & Science Dept.
St. Xavier's College
Kolkata

21 FEB 2025



MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN OF ARTS

It is with great joy that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Postgraduate and Research Department of Political Science on the publication of the 9th edition of *Politique*, its annual departmental journal. This journal stands as a testament to the department's unwavering commitment to academic excellence and intellectual exploration. With each edition, *Politique* has played a vital role in inspiring young minds to think critically fostering scholarly inquiry, and shaping the next generation of political scientists. I am confident that this edition, like those before it, will continue to contribute to the ever-evolving landscape of political ruminations.

I congratulate the faculty and students for their dedication to research and scholarship. May this tradition of excellence continue to flourish, and may *Politique* serve as a beacon of knowledge and inspiration for years to come.

I wish the department continued success in all its future endeavors.

FarhatBano

Dr Farhat Bano
Dean of Arts
Dean of Arts
Arts & Science Dept.
St. Xavier's College
Kolkata



MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT

It gives me immense pleasure to announce the ninth edition of our annual 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

HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT,
POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE
(AUTONOMOUS), KOLKATA

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The Editorial Board of the 'Politique', an endeavour of the Postgraduate Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata is proud to unfurl the ninth edition of its annual departmental journal. This issue stands as a testament to collective intellectual engagement, and we hope it fosters further discussions and research in the field of political science. 'Politique' serves as a distinguished forum for innovative scholarship, presenting cutting-edge insights and diverse perspectives on political theory, comparative politics, international relations, public policy, and more.

The Editorial Board would like to extend its sincere gratitude to all authors, scholars, and researchers for their valuable contributions to this edition. Your insightful analyses and rigorous scholarship have significantly enriched the discourse on contemporary political issues, and we deeply appreciate your dedication to academic excellence.

We would also like to express our heartfelt appreciation to Mrs. Jhumpa Mukherjee, HOD, Department of Political Science and the entire faculty whose guidance and scholarly assistance have been instrumental in shaping this publication. Their expertise and unwavering support have ensured the journal maintains its high academic standards by maintaining strong emphasis on rigor, originality, and the relevance of research to both scholarly and practical applications

This issue stands as a testament to collective intellectual engagement, and we hope it fosters further discussions and research in the field of political science. We look forward to continued collaboration and contributions in future editions.

Warm regards,
Editorial Board
Politique, 2024-2025.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

The recent academic year witnessed a remarkable period of dynamism and significant accomplishments for the Postgraduate and Research Department of Political Science, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata.

The Department has taken the initiative to establish a forum designed to welcome distinguished research scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplinary areas. These esteemed academics will have the opportunity to engage with our student body by presenting their invaluable research experiences and illuminating a diverse array of avenues for scholarly exploration.

In due accordance with the initiative, extraordinary feats have been achieved. The 4th edition of the distinguished Research Scholars' Presentation Series was convened on the 19th of January, 2024. The esteemed guest speaker for this occasion was Dr. Pradipto Roy, a distinguished Postdoctoral Scholar currently affiliated with the esteemed University of Copenhagen in Denmark. He spoke on "Emerging Perspectives in Mental Health: Interdisciplinary concerns and methodological challenges." Dr. Roy delivered a captivating address on the contemporary and evolving perspectives within the multifaceted domain of mental health, with a particular emphasis on the crucial interdisciplinary considerations and the inherent methodological challenges associated with this critical area of inquiry.

On 16th and 17th of February 2024 the students of the department organized *Suffragium-Sansad '24*, the annual flagship event of the department. *Sansad 2024*, the annual youth symposium following the popular "Model United Nations in Institutions" convention, culminated in two simultaneous proceedings – the Youth Parliament (Lok-Sabha deliberation) and the Press Committee. This year's agenda was the "Digital Personal Data Protection Bill 2023". *Suffragium*, after a hiatus of three years, begun with Ballot Battalions Reflections, Knowledge Knockout Agenda'24 was all about presenting detailed policies on contemporary issues with the idea of a better tomorrow. *Dramatique*—a one-of-a-kind stage play event where every performance enthralled the audience with captivating stories, acting, and direction. The event, Final Bout was graced with the presence of Shri Harikrishna Pai, IPS, who along with an esteemed panel of senior professors, evaluated participating civil service aspirants, in a simulation of the third stage of the Civil Services Examination – the personality test, more generally known as the interview round. The department launched the 8th edition of its annual interdisciplinary journal, *Politique*.

The department also spearheaded the formation of *Electoral Literacy Club* to pioneer voter vigilance amongst youth. The Electoral Literacy Club of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata, since its inception in February 2024 within the institutional sphere has committed itself to the dissemination of electoral literacy thereby enlightening the new generation of Indian voters on the values of "Adarsh Matdaan" (ideal voting) based on the commitment of the Election Commission of India towards systematic voter education and electoral participation, a part of its vision and mission. Under the revered guidance of Father Principal Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio S.J, the foundation of this initiative is attributed to the visionary efforts of Dr. Jhumpa Mukherjee, the Head of the Department of the Post Graduate and Research Department of Political Science and her student mentees, Anurag Ghosh, Rituja De, Astha Gupta and Shaibal

Bhattacharya who have jointly worked in the establishment of the club thereby facilitating the lease of official permission for establishment from the Election

Commission of India. The club conducted an orientation for student coordinators from all departments to inform them on the aspects of ideal voting under the "Adarsh Matdaan" drive- a mission to spread electoral awareness to the first time voters of the college. Another awareness drive was hosted by the student coordinators in their respective departments. In collaboration with the Department of Social Work and National Service Scheme (NSS), ELC-SXC also observed Voter Awareness Week as per the directives of the Election Commission of India, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports by hosting competitive events like poster making, essay writing, discussions, and slogan writing.

At present, five doctoral candidates are actively engaged in research under the esteemed supervision of Dr. Indranil Bose, Dr. Panchali Sen, and Dr. Jhumpa Mukherjee. A significant achievement for the department is the recent conferral of the PhD degree upon Dr. Udayan Das, Assistant Professor, from the prestigious Jadavpur University. The faculty members of the department consistently contribute to the advancement of knowledge through the publication of their research findings in esteemed academic journals.

In alignment with the overarching objectives of the National Education Policy, the department proactively provides invaluable internship opportunities to its undergraduate students. Approximately forty students recently participated in a comprehensive month-long internship program, divided between two distinguished institutions: Asia in Global Affairs and the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies. The internship at Asia in Global Affairs significantly augmented the students' comprehension of pressing global socio-political issues.

The internship program at ISCS, Kolkata, offered students a valuable hands-on learning experience through a meticulously structured and well-planned schedule. At each session, students had the privilege of engaging in insightful discussions with eminent researchers and scholars. Furthermore, the program encompassed enriching field visits to significant locations such as the Shri Aurobindo Bhawan, the Museum of Art, Culture and History (MAKAIS), and the Passport Office, among others.

Beyond internships, the students of the department actively participated in a diverse array of academic conferences and debates, steadily establishing a strong presence and making their mark within the broader academic community. On the observance of International Youth Day, 2024 students attended a 2-day Youth Policy Conclave on "My Generation: Youth in a Changing World" organised by ORF Kolkata in collaboration with the School of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. On 21st October, 2024 students attended a panel discussion on "New Horizons: Understanding India-Thailand Ties" organised by ORF Kolkata. On 23rd November, 2024 a delegation of students from the department attended a discussion on "South Asian Diplomacy @Trump 2.0, organised by the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies at the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), Kolkata. Students had the opportunity to interact with experienced policy experts like Ambarish Dasgupta and Rajrishi Singhal over a round table to discuss the prospects of Indo-US Bilateralism under the Trump Presidency. All these conferences provided a prospective opening for experiential learning thereby facilitating a holistic academic leap. A student delegation from

the department also participated in the 6th edition of the Prajatantra National Youth Festival on the theme: 'Citizen Engagement: Building Block of Democracy'. Bhagyashree Sharma from PG 4 qualified as the grand finalist for the quiz competition and co-presented with Haram Feroz (PG 4) on: "Empowering Voices: Citizen Engagement in Kolkata", a detailed report on the functioning of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation altogether finishing 5th in all India ranking.

The Department of Political Science witnessed the second edition of its annual flagship-Sansad on November 12th and 13th, 2024 respectively. In the truest ethos of "remarks, rejoinders, and reforms," the foundational constants of a flourishing polity, SANSAD, the annual youth symposium was hosted at the inter-collegiate level and witnessed a Lok Sabha deliberation on the "Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill". The portrayal of Press Committee proceedings, the Fourth Pillar of democracy, was a success as well.

Being one of the oldest departments of the institution, the Post Graduate and Research Department of Political Science is a flourishing institutional legacy in itself. It is the serving testament to the intellectual engagement and vibrant spirit of the Xaverian intelligentsia, nurturing future leaders with critical thinking skills, informed opinions, experiential learning and a commitment to the modern values of plurality and intersectionality. The department takes immense pride in the accomplishments of its students for their exceptional feats in different walks of life.

Compiled by:

Anurag Ghosh,

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No. 165.

GLOBAL POLITICS: THE NEW WORLD ORDER

AI as a Catalyst in India's Cultural Diplomacy- Its Role in Preserving and Promoting Indian Culture in Diplomatic Efforts

Sreemedha Chatterjee

First Year (PLSA), Roll No. 117

ABSTRACT

Two of the fastest evolving facets of India at present, include Artificial Intelligence or AI and Diplomacy, as may be inferred from India's ranks in the Global Diplomacy Index (11th) and Stanford HAI's global AI vibrancy (14th). For a culturally rich country like India, the dynamic convergence of AI and Cultural Diplomacy would not only open unique opportunities for preserving the Indian heritage but also for experimenting with cultural exchanges and engagements.

This study explores how in recent times AI and online platforms have gained momentum in the spheres of cultural diplomacy, and taking advantage of this, how AI-driven platforms can be used in cultural diplomacy of India for initiating collaborations, monitoring cultural sensitivity, providing Virtual Reality (VR) experiences, bridging linguistic barriers, and assisting in creating digital tours of Indian culture and heritage, thus, allowing space for personalized experiences. Attempts at highlighting how AI can be used for evaluating and analysing media trends and influence, and case studies from different Indian initiatives, aimed at integrating AI into cultural preservation efforts, have also been accented upon in this study.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Sensitivity, Virtual Reality (VR) experience, Cultural Preservation.

SHIFT OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY TO VIRTUAL PLATFORMS POST-COVID 19, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND USE OF AI IN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The COVID-19 pandemic marked the emergence of various new trends and systems, the most significant of all being increased online engagement. Consequently, the surge in new and innovative ideas for organising virtual cultural events, webinars, online exhibitions, digital archiving, cross-cultural partnerships, and collaborations, workshops, and lectures, was also evident. Sustainability and cost-effectiveness were positive outcomes, with transition to virtual events as it reduced costs associated with physical venues and travel. Concentration on social media platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, and Facebook among others, also increased, because of their specific affordances, that is, what they allow users to do and their different ways of emotional engagement, which triggered variations in digital diplomacy methods.

These factors prompted consideration of more sustainable, long-term digital strategies in the cultural diplomacy efforts too. With AI gaining prominence in the post-pandemic era, certain countries started making use of AI in their cultural diplomacy too, which had subtle differences from that of Digital Diplomacy. Digital diplomacy entails the use of digital tools and platforms for diplomatic engagement and communication, encompasses a broad range of activities, including public diplomacy, crisis communication, and international relations, and engages a wide audience, including governments, NGOs, and the public in general. However, the use of AI in cultural diplomacy specifically refers to the application of artificial intelligence technologies to promote and share cultural heritage and narratives, focusing on cultural exchange, promotion, and the enhancement of cultural understanding, and mostly targets cultural consumers, artists, and institutions interested in cultural exchange.

While countries like the USA, UK, and Canada exhibit precedence in digital diplomacy, others like China, France, and Japan lead in the use of AI in their cultural diplomacy efforts, rigorously utilising AI to promote cultural heritage and enhance soft power through virtual experiences and language translation, enhancing visitor experiences and sharing their cultures globally by employing AI in museums and galleries to showcase traditional and modern cultures.

NECESSITY OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN INDIA.

The rise of cultural diplomacy and its usage in India is often questioned. To answer this, it can be noted that India is a country that boasts of enormous cultural, linguistic, and traditional diversity, and for such a nation, cultural diplomacy is more than just an exchange of art and traditions. Rather, cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool for India in the context of soft power. From music and dance to spices and cuisines, traditional crafts, to different art forms- cultural diplomacy serves as a bridge, connecting people across borders. It is significant as it can help build bridges between countries and cultures, and can help people narrow down cultural gaps and engage them through cultural initiatives which would help strengthen their ties to India and promote mutual cooperation in various fields. Introducing foreigners to Indian culture and letting them have a fresh, positive perspective of India's people, culture, and policies also helps shape interactions, priorities, and relations between nations. It must also be observed that cultural exchanges can enhance bilateral relations with other nations, hence, by sharing art, music, and literature, India can too, build trust and understanding, leading to stronger political and economic ties.

Promoting tourism is another purpose served by cultural diplomacy. It can boost tourism, attract international visitors to India's historical sites, festivals, and art forms, and not only generate revenue but also promote cultural exchange and appreciation. Engaging in cultural diplomacy, in fact, also promotes multiculturalism, global understanding, and tolerance, and through cultural programs, engages its youth with global cultures, fostering a sense of identity while encouraging open-mindedness and creativity. Economic benefits of cultural diplomacy include promoting Indian cinema, music, and art internationally, which opens avenues for revenue generation and, thus, fosters economic growth.

HOW WOULD AI'S INCLUSION BENEFIT INDIA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY?

AI's capabilities in data analysis, language translation, and immersive virtual experiences can be made use of to bridge cultural gaps, facilitate better engagement, enhance the effectiveness of diplomatic initiatives, preserve historical artifacts, optimize cultural exchanges to enable real-time translations and create virtual cultural experiences, thereby significantly amplifying India's cultural outreach in the world.

The most basic way of utilising AI in assisting cultural diplomacy can be done by creating interactive experiences, as in, Virtual Reality (VR) experiences, which can be made

personalised in nature as well. AI-driven Virtual Reality Tours of the magnificent, heritageladen palaces and forts of Rajasthan, the picturesque Taj Mahal, the sensational Ghats of the Ganges, the classic example of Indo-Saracenic architecture as reflected through the Mysuru Palace, the ancient caves of Ajanta and Ellora, can be used as sources of providing unique glimpses into the exclusivity of Indian Culture, and at the same time, use the rich cultural heritage as a tool for leveraging various means to promote understanding and co-operation. Creating Augmented Reality (AR) Enhancements, for example, allowing museums to use AR to overlay information on artifacts, create realistic simulations of traditional Indian festivals, enable experiencing the essence of Indian festivities and celebrations virtually, would also allow foreigners to get in touch with Indian culture from the comfort of their homes elsewhere, and at the same time uphold the essence of Indian music, dance, and art to the global audiences. A recent example of the VR tour developed by the Mysore Palace can be taken, which allows tourists to explore its Indo-Saracenic architecture and rich history from anywhere in the world. This not only served as a digital ambassador for Indian culture, allowing international visitors to experience the richness of India's heritage, but also promoted tourism of Mysore, and of India as a whole.

Further, the use of AI chatbots on tourism websites helps provide information about Indian cultural sites, festivals, and customs, thus enhancing visitor experiences. Using travel apps which AI drives, can be used to create personalised itineraries for visitors interested in Indian culture, history, and food, and help boost cultural tourism, which is an integral part of cultural diplomacy. For example, the Ministry of Tourism's initiative, "Incredible India" uses a chatbot that processes natural language to understand and respond to questions in multiple languages, thereby familiarising and assisting international tourists by answering queries related to cultural sites, travel itineraries, local customs, and more. The popularisation of "Yoga", which is an exclusively Indian heritage and has been widely adopted worldwide in recent times, can be aided by the use of AI as well. In celebrating Yoga Day on 21st June, every year, the message of the remarkable benefits of Yoga, like physical and mental well-being, improving strength, flexibility, and balance, as well as reducing stress and anxiety, thus, indicating the holistic approach combining the mind, body, and soul, is spread worldwide. Using AI tools to teach yoga postures and educate the masses about its positive outcomes and benefits would not only help Yoga serve as a component of the culture of India but also aid diplomacy.

The "Digital India" initiative, developed by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) in collaboration with various central ministries and state governments, was

launched in 2015, aimed at transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, among several other objectives, also focused on the extensive use of AI to share and promote Indian culture and diversity. AI's use to create immersive virtual tours of India's iconic sites like the Taj Mahal, Qutub Minar, etc, allowed users to experience the history and heritage of these landmark sites from any corner of the world. It also made use of 3D modeling and Augmented Reality, etc. Hence, besides promoting Indian culture and fostering tourism, this also made scope for international discussion about its history and culture.

Furthermore, AI played a vital role in making the program a success, as was the "India @75" program, launched by the Government of India, in 2021, to mark the celebration of the 75th year of independence of India. The government organized virtual exhibitions of popular Indian spots and various Indian cultures and traditions, adding 'Indian-ness' to the experiences. It also used AI to help create impactful digital storytelling campaigns showcasing the country's history, achievements, and variations, thereby connecting international audiences to India's journey, developing a sense of understanding, and strengthening diplomatic ties.

Amongst several uses of AI, one of its most noteworthy contributions lies in the fact that AI can be used widely for analysis and monitoring. In the sphere of cultural diplomacy too, this can be made use of in assisting cultural sensitivity monitoring, assessing media influences and trends. Cultural sensitivity monitoring, in cultural diplomacy, refers to the ability to understand, respect, and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. It involves recognising and valuing cultural differences in language, customs, beliefs, and traditions and is essential in cultural diplomacy. Monitoring cultural attitudes and practices by AI, such that they are better accepted by the target audiences so that negative reactions to the tactics employed are negligible to zero, can be recognised as another use of AI in the cultural diplomacy of India.

AI can study various social media posts and articles to measure public sentiment about India's cultural initiatives and evaluate the impact of Indian cultural programs on local communities abroad by analysing feedback and engagement levels. For example, AI-driven analysis tools were used by the Ministry of External Affairs of India, during the "Namaste Trump" event in the U.S.A., to analyse social media data and examine public sentiment and reactions in real time. This analysis helped diplomats better understand the event's reception and frame strategies accordingly. The insights clarified audience perspectives, allowing better communication strategies to be implemented in the near future.

AI can also be used to predict certain cultural diplomacy tactics, as it can analyse historical data and facts, and provide predictive analysis, which can further be used to refine strategies. It would also be of great help in tracking and evaluating any emerging new cultural trends worldwide, which would enable India to adapt its cultural offerings accordingly. Advanced AI-driven translation tools can facilitate communication in local languages possible during cultural exchanges, making programs more inclusive and the outreach higher, by identifying and engaging a greater number of cultural institutions, artists, and collaborators. AI monitoring of other countries' cultural diplomacy efforts would add impactful insights into successful strategies that India can adopt or adapt, and add more effective strategies for cultural promotion.

Online exhibitions of Indian art, powered by AI, would not only allow international audiences to engage with Indian art forms but also allow space for emerging artists to showcase their talents on a global level through virtual platforms. For instance, platforms like Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) use AI to deliver online courses on Indian culture, history, and arts. This way, they not only educate international audiences about India's rich heritage and diversity of culture but also help strengthen cultural ties and promote respect of foreign countries for India.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, with changing geopolitical dynamics, cultural diplomacy has become essential in aiding soft power. And in further aiding cultural diplomacy, AI has become crucial in recent times. Digital archiving, automated translation, content generation, data analysis, Virtual Reality (VR) experiences- AI assists in it all. It not only ensures the preservation of cultural heritage but also makes it possible to reach out to audiences beyond borders. In an age where digital interaction often shapes cultural perceptions and identities, this is very essential, as it also triggers emotional resonance with a country. Thus, by embracing modern technologies in a way that connects to our cultural roots, India can gain a pivotal position in the sphere of cultural diplomacy and enhance its connections with the rest of the world. By targeted campaigns and social media's data-driven analysis of the cultural aspects, and in creating networks and initiatives, the cultural aspects can be used in public diplomacy. For example, the Government organising a cultural festival in a foreign country, and using AI identify themes and programs that align with local cultural preferences, translating promotional materials into multiple languages with cultural sensitivity, use sentiment analysis

to gauge public reactions and adjust strategies in real-time, create virtual exhibits to engage audiences unable to attend physically. By integrating AI into cultural diplomacy efforts, governments and organizations can enhance their ability to connect, understand, and collaborate across cultural boundaries, fostering mutual respect, global unity, and meaningful exchanges between diverse cultures.

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Dilemma of the US Presidential Candidates- Striking a balance between the pro-Israel lobby and growing Antisemitism among the American citizens

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ABSTRACT

The growing volatility of the Middle East crisis has coincided with the US Presidential Elections in 2024. The leading Presidential candidates- Kamala Harris (Democrat) and Donald Trump (Republican) find themselves walking a tightrope, trying to balance between the strong proIsrael lobby- the AIPAC whilst maintaining its longstanding relationship with Israel and the growing antisemitic sentiment among the US citizens, especially the youth. This sentiment is a consequence of Israel's retaliation to Hamas's brutal attack on 7th October 2023 in the form of an alleged "genocide" over the citizens of Gaza. Though the assassination of the Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, opened up a possibility of an end to the war, the increasing tensions between Israel and Iran and Hezbollah requires strategic foreign policy on part of the USA while maintaining its domestic integrity and support. This article, therefore, tries to navigate the extent to which the candidates might be successful in securing their position without losing support from either side.

Keywords: *US Presidential Elections, AIPAC lobby, Antisemitism, Israel-Hamas war, Israel*

The significance of the US Presidential Elections is known worldwide. As the current global superpower, the individual leading the US shoulders immense responsibility. Hamas launched a brutal land, sea, and air attack on Israel on 7th October 2023 from the Gaza strip, resulting in more than 1200 deaths and several Israelis being taken hostage. Israel then retaliated with a fullblown air strike on the Gaza strip accompanied with ground force soon after. The situation escalated with each passing day as the death toll rose. With the recent killing of the Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar on 16th October 2024, nearly a year later, both the sides inch a step closer towards a ceasefire. Throughout the war (continuing), Israel has been at the

receiving end of extreme criticism and grave allegations of conducting a “genocide” on the Gaza citizens, especially on the city of Rafah, straining its reputation worldwide. The US has been a long-standing partner of Israel since 1948, and has extended support to it in the form of military aid, which has resulted in its criticism as well. The antisemitic sentiment worldwide, a consequence of the actions of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel has fuelled widespread protests augmented by the inability to reach a ceasefire agreement. The American citizens, the voters in the elections, hold a symmetrically opposing view to that of the AIPAC- American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a dominant pro-Israel lobby holding considerable influence making or breaking political career of the presidential candidates. Therefore, while the focus of the Presidential candidates should be to cater to the demands of its voters- limiting support to Israel in its actions, they also need to appease and work in accordance with the lobby in order to gain their much-needed funds and for the vote bank. This research is therefore, aimed towards analysing the pathways the candidates take by understanding the longstanding IsraelUS relationship, the influence of the AIPAC lobby, voter behaviour of the American citizens and lastly, the candidates’ reaction to this political dissonance.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE US-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, which suggested the establishment of a Jewish state, was supported by the then US President Woodrow Wilson, marking a beginning point for the US-Israel ‘special’ relationship. This was followed by the US supporting the UN resolutions two years after the Second World War as well as Harry Truman being the first President to recognise Israel as an independent nation. This ‘special’ relationship was confirmed by the US President, John F Kennedy in December 1962, and has been reaffirmed by the following Presidents ever since. This partnership is also based on the foundation of transfer of military and foreign aid, expansive bilateral trade, scientific and cultural exchange, dedication towards each other’s security etc. In fact, Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid since its founding, receiving about \$310 billion (adjusted for inflation) in total economic and military assistance.

Since the start of the most recent Israel-Hamas war on October 7, 2023, the United States has enacted legislation providing at least \$12.5 billion in military aid to Israel, which includes \$3.8 billion from a bill in March 2024 (in line with the current MOU) and \$8.7 billion from a supplemental appropriations act in April 2024 (Jonathan Masters & Will Merrow, 2024). They

also agreed to lease Israel two Iron Dome missile defence batteries that Washington had previously purchased from the country. It is this military aid that has come under scrutiny due to allegations of Israel using this aid to carry out indiscriminate bombing on the Gaza citizens instead of using it for their self-defence.

WHAT IS AIPAC AND HOW DOES IT INFLUENCE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS?

The AIPAC- American Israel public Affairs Committee, is the strongest pro-Israel lobby in the USA, aimed at ensuring pro-Israel policies in the US to strengthen their relationship and enhance their security. Its main objectives include - security assistance to Israel, preventing Iran from developing nuclear arsenals, supporting a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine as well as bringing normalcy in Israel's and other Arab states relations, a stable foreign aid budget, preventing efforts to isolate Israel and fostering civilian cooperation with Israel amongst others. Their strong influence is seen in congressional lobbying, contributions to policy formulations, influence over media and monetary backing for pro-Israel candidates, both Republican and Democrats. The AIPAC PAC- AIPAC Political Action Committee's moto is 'We stand with those who stand with Israel', therefore endorsing pro-Israel candidates while also undermining those who may seek to undermine this bipartisan relationship. For example, the shifts in public opinion recently, has caused AIPAC to increase its expenditure through the UDP- United Democracy Project- a political action committee formed in 2021 to directly intervene in election campaigns. The group pledged to spend \$100 million in 2024 elections, where approximately \$23 million was spent to unseat only two candidates, Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush, making their races the most expensive House primaries in history. These candidates faced the ire of AIPAC since they hailed from the progressive 'Squad' in the house who had embraced the calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and criticised Israel's offensive actions (Joan E Greve, Chris McGreal & Will Craft, 2024). Data from the 2024 US election campaign found that members of Congress who supported Israel at the start of the war received more than \$100,000 in donations from pro-Israel groups. These members often demanded US military aid and supported Israel's actions in the Gaza region, despite the increasing death toll in Gaza. Second only to the US Pensioner's Foundation in its lobbying ability, AIPAC poses Israel as a strategic partner for the US in advancing their 'national interest' like fighting terrorism and containing their common enemies such as Iran, Iraq, Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda etc., therefore, prioritising Israel in their foreign policy initiatives. Taking advantage of weak relations between the US and most

Middle-East countries, while advocating for closer ties between the US and Saudi Arabia, as the latter recognised Jerusalem and West bank as Israeli territories, the AIPAC aims at strengthening support for Israel's interests.

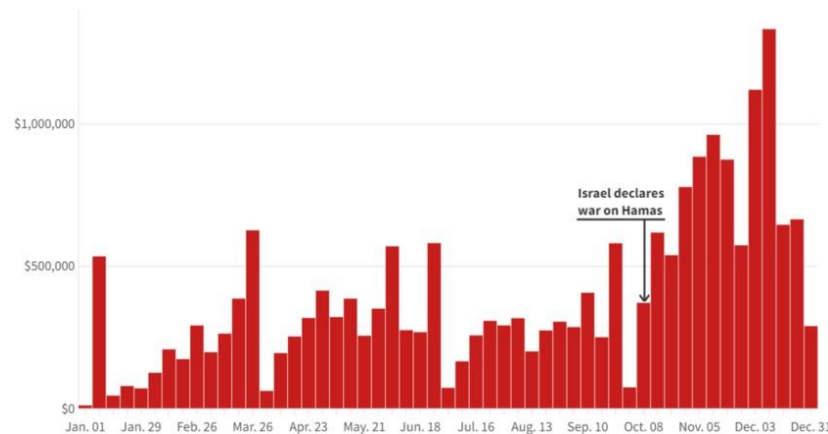


Fig.1 AIPAC Spending in the US Elections in 2023 Source:

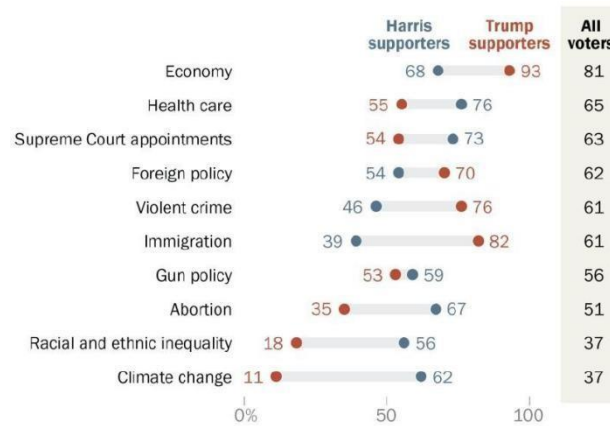
Federal Elections Commissions (2024)

VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF THE AMERICAN CITIZENS

The majority votes of the American citizens vote either for the Democratic Party or the Republican party. As the Presidential elections have been wrapped, it is integral to understand which parameters the voters consider while casting their vote. In times of the recent global crisis and shifting opinions, the candidates find themselves adapting to these changing perspectives as they campaign across the country. Several researches and surveys conducted by the Pew Research Centre, a non-partisan, non-advocacy think tank provides us an insight of the voter's minds. Following are some charts to understand voter behaviour in elections.

The economy is the top issue for voters in the 2024 election

% of registered voters who say each is **very important** to their vote in the 2024 presidential election



Note: Based on registered voters.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 26-Sept. 2, 2024.

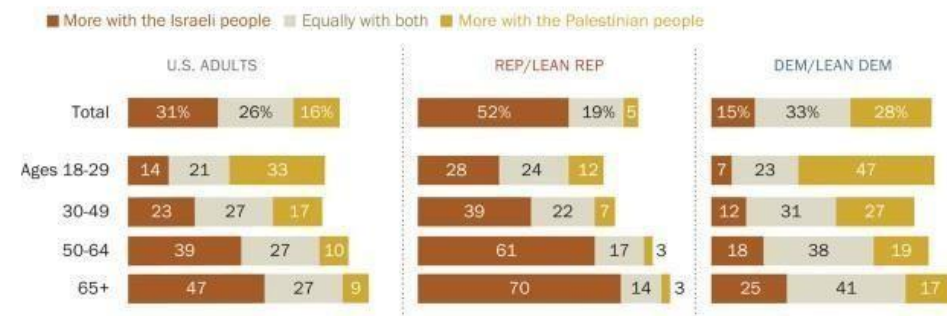
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fig. 2 Issues and the 2024 elections

While the economy is the top concern for the voters, foreign policy, violent crimes and racial inequality are also among the major issues identified by the voters. The extent to which these issues affect the voter's decision also depends on the demography of the population. Since the area of focus of this article is the spillover effect of the Israel-Hamas war, the following charts would reflect their opinion on the same.

Younger adults sympathize more with Palestinians than older Americans do

% who say their sympathies lie ...

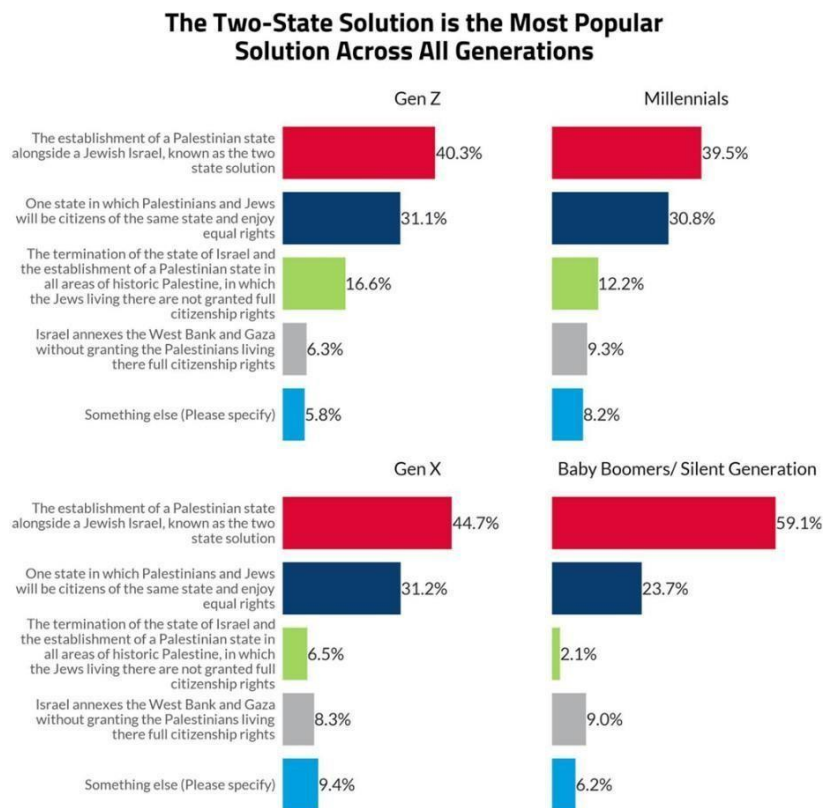


Note: Those who did not answer or answered "not sure" or "neither" are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 13-25, 2024.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

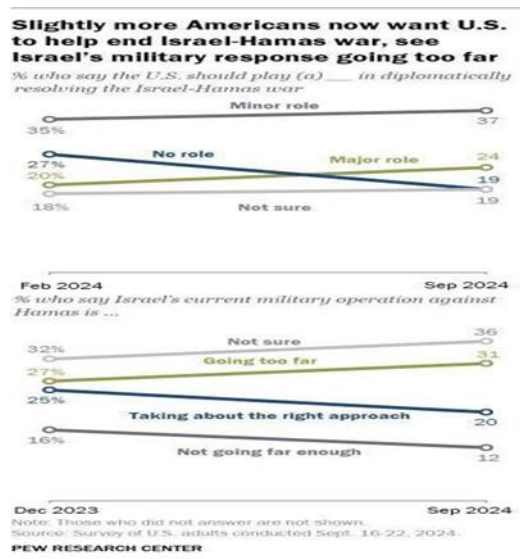
Fig.3 Younger Americans stand out on their views of the Israel-Hamas war

While older Americans sympathise more with Israel, the demography under 30 leans towards Palestine. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents under 30 sympathize more with the Israelis than the Palestinians (28% vs. 12%) while Democrats and Democratic leaners sympathize far more with the Palestinians than the Israelis (47% vs. 7%).



While the sentiment across all generations overwhelmingly remains positive towards an independent Jewish country already in existence along with supporting a two-state solution, the recent violence of Israel towards the Gaza citizens is strongly condemned. American citizens have constantly rallied for the war to end, often finding Israel's retaliation to exceed the needed response.

Fig. Fig 4. Perspectives on Israel-oriented policies



Widespread protests across universities along with people coming down in large numbers to the streets, vocalising their concern for the safety of the citizens in Gaza against Israel's offences have increased over the duration of the past year. The American citizens have also criticised the Biden government for not taking adequate actions to suppress Netanyahu's rampant disregard of civil rights and have demanded a change in the handling of the same. This pressure has forced Biden to criticise Israel's actions as well as restrict the shipment of military aid to them. They want US to play a more positive role in bringing about a ceasefire argument and returning the situation to normalcy.

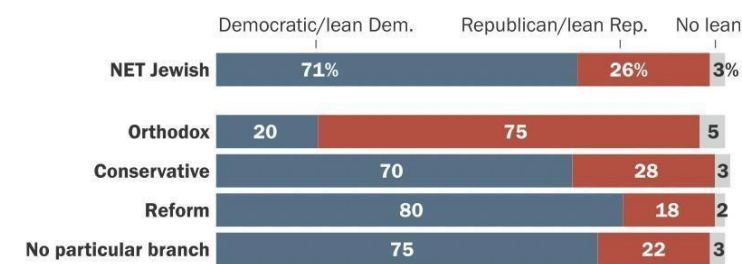
Fig 5. Voters Perspective

HOW HAVE THE LEADING CANDIDATES HANDLED THE SITUATION?

Kamala Harris, the current Vice President to Joe Biden, the US president, has been nominated as Democrat presidential candidate for the 2024 elections. She faces opposition from the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, trying to get elected President for a second term. Both the candidates have put up a formidable fight against each other, as the early polls reflect a very slim margin in terms of victory. They both find themselves in a complex political landscape, navigating between the different demands from the various sections of American society, as they campaign intensively to garner their votes. The AIPAC funds both the Republican as well as Democrat candidates, and thus both the candidates find themselves unable to take a strong stand against Israel's actions in the Middle East. While the American community of citizens is united in standing for Israel against Iran, the situation in Gaza has stripped support from Israel in that context. The candidates attempt to handle both sides of the coin- Jews, who feel insecure about their safety in the US as a result of the rising antisemitism and those criticising Israel, who feel that the US should withdraw support from the same. While it has been historically observed that the Jews prefer to vote for Democrat candidates and therefore back Harris, the opinion seems to be shifting as they feel abandoned due to the Biden administration's inability

to contain the largely antisemitic protests. The Republican party has tried to take advantage of this split in Jewish votes and has been quick to point out a faction within the Democratic Party rallying for a ceasefire agreement and holding Israel accountable for its actions instead of providing unwavering support to them. Meanwhile, Donald Trump has posed himself as the best friend Jewish Americans would want in the White House. He has painted himself as the ‘protector’ of Israel, and has repeatedly asserted that under Harris’s presidency, Israel would cease to exist and has therefore discouraged voters from voting for her. Both the candidates have shown support for Israel, but while Harris has been more vocal about the Palestinian suffering and therefore calling for an immediate ceasefire, Trump has advocated a ceasefire for different reasons which includes the loss of reputation of Israel in the ‘public-relations’ war. Therefore, key states like Pennsylvania, with large communities of Jewish population and states like Michigan, with a large Arab-American presence become important for both the parties.

Most U.S. Jews identify as Democrats, but most Orthodox are Republicans



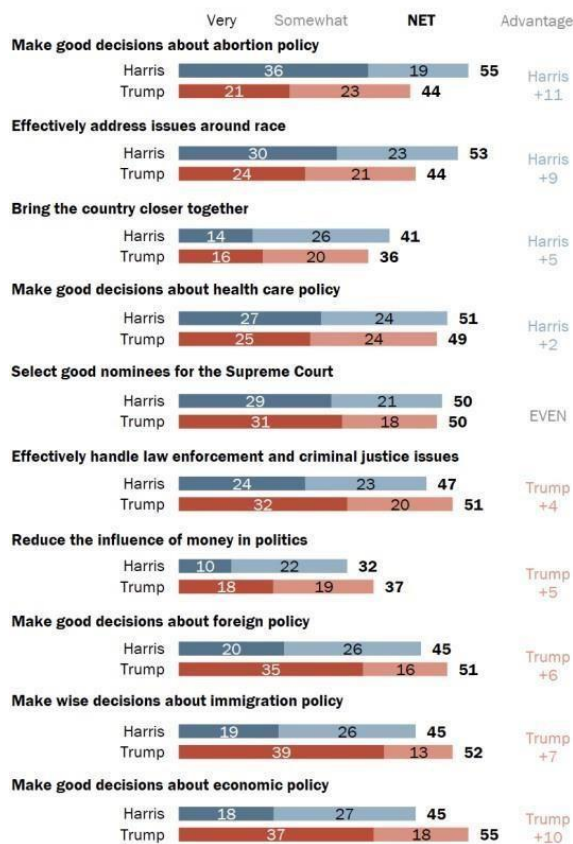
Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 19, 2019-June 3, 2020, among U.S. adults.
"Jewish Americans in 2020"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fig.6 Jewish Americans in 2020

Voters are more confident in Trump on economy, immigration; Harris leads on abortion, race

% of registered voters who say they are very/somewhat confident that ____ can do each of the following



Note: Based on registered voters.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 26-Sept. 2, 2024.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre analyses how the American public views and weighs both the candidates in terms of their solutions to the particular issues. While Harris leads on issues like healthcare, women's rights, racial inequality, Trump stands out regarding economic, immigration and foreign policies, reducing corruption and better law enforcement. This, therefore provides us an insight into how close and unpredictable the upcoming elections are going to prove to be, as both the candidates are relentlessly trying to show themselves as an agent of change, while undermining their opponent as an incumbent, incapable of the prestigious position.

Fig.7 Confidence in Harris and Trump on top issues

CONCLUSION

Therefore, in the age of misinformation, disinformation, cancel culture, growing insecurity for racial and ethnic identity and extreme polarisation, and with powerful lobbies like the AIPAC trying to control the media outlets with their unprecedented funding, pouring vast amounts of money to control the narrative, the world continues to move in a dangerous situation. The volatility in the Middle East, with Iran getting directly involved in the crisis and Israel not ready to back down at any cost, several tough decisions have to be made by the officials not only in the US, but also, nations worldwide. A US backed Israel has in its competition a Russia backed Iran, with chances of the NATO countries and China joining each side respectively - such a geo-political situation, therefore at the end of the day, lies in the hands of the leaders and their ability to make decisions for the greater good of their respective nations and by extension the

world as the world progresses in a dangerous age of interdependence and global supply chains getting disrupted by these discrepancies among countries threatening the future of the mankind.

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Examining the Complex Interplay of Factors in West Asian Refugee Protection

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the major challenges of refugee protection with a special focus on West Asia, identifying trends based on case studies of Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen. International frameworks, including the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, provide legal protection for refugees, but their implementation in West Asia has been complicated by sociopolitical, economic and security factors. The article discusses stigma and loss of national authorities and regional instability in shaping these experiences of refugees. By means of several case studies it also identifies the recurring themes of legal vulnerability, humanitarian challenges and failures of international burden-sharing. In the end, this paper makes a case for a holistic and systematic approach to refugee protection in the region.

Keywords: *Refugee, UNHCR, Afghan refugees, Yemen crisis, stigma*

A refugee is conventionally defined as a person who has lost the protection of their country of origin and cannot or is unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Historically, asylum was widely recognized and honoured, but the emergence of fixed borders in the late 19th century complicated the movement of displaced people. The formalization of international refugee laws in the 20th century aimed to address this challenge, but global conflicts continue to generate new refugee crises, particularly in West Asia.

FACTORS INFLUENCING REFUGEE PROTECTION STIGMA AND PERCEPTION

Public stigma refers to the attitudes and beliefs held by the broader community toward stigmatized groups. In the case of migrant workers, negative perceptions often prevail. Migrant women, in particular, face challenges related to their work abroad. Community members may associate labour migration with prostitution thereby perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Hundreds of women enter Lebanon each year, particularly from Eastern Europe and Morocco,

with an “artiste” visa, to work as dancers in clubs. “Artiste” is widely understood to be a euphemism for “prostitute”. One woman explained: “In [Nepalese] society, they may say that she earned money by going abroad and by having a bad relationship with a foreigner.” (International organisation for migration, research series no. 65, p7). These negative perceptions can lead to discrimination, exclusion, and even violence against migrant workers and their families.

COVID-19 exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among migrant workers particularly in West Asia. Measures like border closures and movement restrictions disproportionately affected them. **Loss of income** due to the pandemic led to insecurity, increased risks of violence, and mounting debts for migrant families. **Isolation and reduced mobility** heightened the risk of abuse, exploitation, and trafficking, especially for women migrant workers and their children. **School closures** disrupted child protection services, leaving migrant children with limited access to education and safety mechanisms.

Even before the pandemic, attitudes toward migrant workers were not generally positive. Reports indicate **increased verbal abuse** against certain nationalities and migrants presumed of bringing the virus to communities. Such stigmatization and discrimination are not only unacceptable but also dangerous. They can put women migrant workers, their children and their families at the risk of gender-based violence, harassment and trafficking. (UNICEF, East Asia and Pacific, 2020).

IMPACTS OF STIGMA ON THE HEALTH OF THE MIGRANTS

A WHO report illustrates the various stages of the migratory journey and the impact on a person's well-being: the journey traversed to the isolating temporary homes people are forced to live in when they reach safer countries, followed by the discrimination and bureaucratic struggle they face when dealing with health care systems in their new ‘homes’. In Europe, the prevalence of depressive disorders among refugees and migrants is 32%, significantly higher than the prevalence among the host population at 4%. Gender-based stigmas can also impact the mental health of male migrants in other aspects of their lives. For example, the report mentioned about "depleted masculinity" — a state that occurs when men feel they cannot live up to expectations or fulfil their duties. Refugee and migrant men reported feeling pressured to

fulfil their supposed masculine social roles like sending money back home and supporting their families as mentioned in the report. (Hindustan Times, 2022).

LOSS OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Statelessness is the condition where an individual lacks any recognized nationality or citizenship. They are essentially “citizens of nowhere”, which leaves them vulnerable and without access to basic rights and protections. Migrants who find themselves in a stateless situation face immense difficulties in terms of legal status, access to services, and protection.

The Impact on Migrants in West Asia:

Legal Vulnerability: Stateless migrants lack legal documentation, making them susceptible to detention, deportation, and exploitation. Without a recognized nationality, they struggle to access even basic services like education, healthcare, and employment.

Limited Rights: Stateless individuals often cannot vote, own property, or travel freely. This lack of rights exacerbates their vulnerability.

Discrimination: Statelessness disproportionately affects minority groups. Discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or other factors can lead to exclusion and denial of rights.

Invisibility: Stateless migrants often remain invisible in national statistical data, making it challenging to address their specific needs.

REGIONAL DYNAMICS

A STUDY OF THE IRAQI REFUGEES

The tragedy of the Iraqi people has spanned decades with little or no respite. The joy of many at seeing the end of Saddam’s cruel regime soon turned into misery for millions of people. The crisis of Iraq’s refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) was not a surprise. Humanitarian agencies and parts of the media had warned, months before the United States (US)-led invasion began about the major displacement of Iraq’s population; a humanitarian

crisis would erupt as a direct effect of the war or as a result of an ethnic conflict, and both could lead to widespread abuse of human rights.

As a result of the invasion, about 2.7 million people have been internally displaced and more than two million people have exited the country in search of refuge. The displaced Iraqis – 4.7 million people – are the largest displaced group worldwide, and the third largest refugee population in the world (after Afghans and Palestinians). That means that more than 15 percent of Iraq's population has been displaced, one out of every six. Before the fall of Saddam, the main obstacle facing international organizations in their efforts to help the displaced people within Iraq was the regime, which was responsible for violence and displacement.

After the 2003 invasion, humanitarian organizations entered Iraq in masses, and by July of that year, 200 international aid agencies were present. Simultaneously, there was an exponential growth in the number of local humanitarian actors (J. Sassoon, 2009).

Upon closely studying the Iraqi case we observe patterns like prolonged displacement due to political instability. Challenges in integrating refugees into host countries. The Iraqi case also shows heavy reliance on international aid with limited sustainable solutions.

A STUDY OF THE AFGHAN REFUGEES

After more than four decades of conflict and instability in Afghanistan, an estimated 28.3 million Afghans - two-thirds of the population, including women and girls, are still in need of humanitarian and protection assistance. More than 1.6 million Afghans have fled the country since 2021, bringing the total number of Afghans in neighbouring countries to 8.2 million - accounting for one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world.

Four decades of conflict and instability in Afghanistan have left millions of people on the brink of hunger and starvation. A record 28.3 million people need humanitarian and protection assistance in 2023 - a huge spike from 24.4 million people in need in 2022 and 18.4 million in early 2021. In 2023, 20 million people faced acute hunger, with 6 million people in 'emergency' levels (one step away from famine) - one of the world's highest figures (UNHCR, 2023).

Key patterns identified in the Afghan case is the persistent instability preventing voluntary repatriation. Too much dependence on host country with limited legal protections. Food insecurity and dependence on humanitarian aid.

A STUDY OF THE YEMEN CRISIS

After nine years of war, Yemen remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The national socioeconomic systems of Yemen remain on the edge of total collapse, while conflict, large-scale displacement and recurring climate shocks have left families vulnerable to communicable diseases outbreaks. An estimated 4.5 million people—14 percent of the population—are currently displaced, most of whom have been displaced multiple times over a number of years. Two-thirds of the population of Yemen—21.6 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection services. The risk of a large-scale famine in the country has never been more acute. Tens of thousands are already living in famine-like conditions, with a staggering six million more just one step away from it. Millions of children lack access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services, and the country continues to experience regular outbreaks of cholera, measles, diphtheria and other vaccine-preventable diseases. While the reduction in active conflict observed since April 2022 has led to a decrease in civilian casualties and distress across communities, the situation remains fragile without a sustainable political settlement (UNICEF, 2023).

Yemen's crisis highlights critical issues like mass displacement and repeated forced migration, severe food and medical shortages exacerbating vulnerabilities and limited international response and burden sharing.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE UNHCR

The expansion of UNHCR's responsibilities and activities and the adaptability of the 1951 Convention suggest that the international refugee protection regime has responded well to the growing demands placed upon it. But these developments do not tell the whole story. The effectiveness of the international protection regime must also be measured by the pattern of refugee movements, the number of refugees who remain at risk and/or without durable solutions, and the willingness of States to admit asylum seekers, recognize and accord rights to refugees within their communities, and share responsibility for refugee protection with

neighbouring or more distant States that shoulder a disproportionate burden. Using these indicators, the picture is far from a perfect one.

The total refugee population rose from a few million refugees in the 1970s to over 10 million by the mid-1980s, skyrocketing to more than 18 million over the next decade. Recent figures indicate that in 2003 the number of refugees and others of concern to UNHCR was 20.6 million, “roughly one out of every 300 persons on earth.

The rise in the number of the world’s refugees is one part of the troubled picture of international refugee protection. The other side of the picture is how much refugee populations have been received. Industrialized countries frequently claim that their historic generosity towards refugees, and confidence in the relevance of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, have been shaken by the enormous increase in the demands made upon their asylum system by migrants of mixed motivations.

Adding to these complaints are the high costs associated with supporting inefficient refugee status determination and appeals procedures, insufficient funds for the social services afforded to asylum seekers, and difficulty in meeting the expenses of enforcement mechanisms used for detention and removal purposes.

While industrialized countries complain about the number of refugees crossing their borders annually, host countries in the developing world are increasingly disillusioned with the absence of effective burden-sharing. Serious concerns about national security have also accompanied many refugee flows in the developing world when the conflict that precipitated their flight crosses borders as well. This has significantly threatened the lives and safety of both refugees and local populations. (N. Kelley and J. F. Durieux, 2004)

CONCLUSION

In the fifty-three years of UNHCR’s existence, the world has experienced an exponential growth in displaced populations and UNHCR’s responsibilities accordingly have expanded to cover a wider range of people in need of protection. UNHCR has had to meet these challenges without a solid funding base and often without a firm commitment by States to uphold their international protection responsibilities of sharing burdens among each other more equitably. Recent years have been marked by additional challenges to the international protection regime as well, with

the UNHCR, states, and other interested actors facing difficulties. This has resulted in a reaffirmed commitment by States to uphold the principles embedded in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol and to build upon them by joining together to pursue durable solutions for more refugees in a genuine spirit of multilateral cooperation and responsibility or burden sharing.

Whether these efforts will bear fruit depends upon several factors, not the least of which is UNHCR remaining focused on nor are the states willing to give meaning to their commitment to implement them in a manner that does not exclusively advance their own interests.

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Exploring Carl Von Clausewitz's Trinity in the Syrian Civil War

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has witnessed a new era of conflict and violence, superseding traditional notions. Despite these substantial changes, war has remained a part of human history. Carl Von Clausewitz, an esteemed general and military analyst, threw light on the unpredictability of war and attempted to study its uncertainty. His theory is centred around three trinities, inextricably linked to each other. They were to determine war in the 18th and 19th centuries. His primary trinity of passion, chance, and reason, remain the key pillars according to which the nature, motive and cause of war can be assessed. This model was revolutionary at the time it was written as no other scholar had successfully discussed the intricacies of conflict before. However, Clausewitz's theory can be deemed as static as it does not take cognisance of the transformations of the state, the development of unknown threats, non-state actors like rebel militias, and international groups and the gross indignities inflicted on civilians in most wars. In this paper, we have studied Clausewitz's theory by observing the prevalence of civil wars. The literature on civil wars remains incomplete without mentioning the ongoing Syrian Civil War. The paper analyses the Syrian Civil War and concludes that Clausewitz's recommendations can even be utilised to understand a product of communal hatred, technological advances, and brutal suppression of the people, by the state.

Keywords: Clausewitz, trinities, state, civil war, Syria

The two world wars, the long drawn Cold War and the numerous conflicts that have emerged since the beginning of the 21st century have one thing in common– they were infamous for their inhumanity, and their destructive capabilities overshadowed discourse in most international forums. However, war was not always characterised by its present long-drawn nature or restricted to nation states. The evolutionary nature of the state and its avatar as the nation state has seen considerable transformations. The adjacent impact was the changing nature of war as well, with the inclusion of non-state actors, international organisations and other countries

supporting different armed groups for the sake of political control in an insidious game of checkers. Military theory has seen various attempts at understanding war, as an instrument of foreign policy or as a surprise tool utilised to seek revenge. Carl Von Clausewitz believed that war was an extension of policy and provided a comprehensive framework to study it. Although modern wars and the development of the “anti-modern war” models have challenged Clausewitzian theory, the Syrian Civil War (2012–) can be viewed through the lens of Clausewitz, even after centuries.

CLAUSEWITZ: ON WAR, POLICY AND THEIR CONTEXTS

Prussian general Carl Von Clausewitz is regarded as the premier military theorist of his times. Through his seminal work, “On War”, he tries to explain the complex and paradoxical nature of war. Clausewitz wrote “On War” at a time when wars were inter-state conflicts fought by clearly defined armies and countries. The characteristics of war have definitely changed, yet, its nature has not. *“On War” is not a theory predicting conditions of war, it is merely a tome designed to understand the nature of war.* The trinity can be used to analyse post 19th century wars. Ultimately, war is identified by a combination of the three tendencies of the trinity with varying influences dependent on conditions such as the state of weapons technology and the historical relationships between opponents. Since wars were confined to conflicts between states, there was no reference to wars arising out of colonial backlash, acts of terrorism, or civil wars.

For Clausewitz, “war was nothing but the continuation of policy with other means.” Therefore, war is a phenomenon to further political goals which is considered to be one of the dimensions. His description of war being a nonlinear system is partially due to the interaction of known and unknown social elements during war time. These social elements constitute the three elements of Clausewitz’s trinity — passion, chance, and reason. These elements interact with each other to create a pattern of behaviour that is understandable, yet very difficult to predict. Therefore, other theories of war that came out during that period were dethroned by Clausewitz’s, because the other theorists did not consider the element of uncertainty. Enemy intentions and reactions can never be gauged, and therefore no amount of theory could ever tell military leaders what to do in times of crisis. The other school of thought, which only dealt with practical elements like armament, supply, drill, and employment, were also incomplete in Clausewitz’s terms, since they bore the same relationship to leadership as “fencing did to swordsmanship.” War is a

phenomenon highlighted by its unpredictability, and its unquantifiable nature drastically limits the study of war as a science. The study of evidence by looking at wars that have already happened is possible, but a theory cannot be propounded since the next war might not follow a similar trajectory.

Despite the unpredictability of war, it is an extension of policy, owing to its paradoxical nature. Although it is propelled by rational tendencies of policy and reason, it is also at times propelled by primordial violence and hatred, and sometimes even by chance. Primordial violence is the blind natural force, whereas the subordinated nature of war as a political tool is what makes it subject to pure reason, and chance is always a factor under extremely violent and dangerous conditions. Each of these three elements are again “manifested in a corresponding subject within society.” The trinity, therefore, is a social system that is sensitive to initial conditions, but factors such as chance and luck can always alter the system’s behaviour in unpredictable ways.

Clausewitzian scholar Thomas Waldman further establishes a typology for the trinity’s elements. The typology is defined as the objective, subjective, and contextual levels of the trinity. Passion, chance, and reason constitute the primary or objective trinity. The primary trinity is manifested into the societal elements of the people, the commander and his army, and the government, respectively. Societal elements make up the secondary or subjective trinity, whereas context constitutes the third level. Context is not an element of the trinity, but it comprises conditions under which the other two levels of the trinity exist and interact. The third level i.e. context is the most influential because it provides the setting in which “the three primary tendencies—passion, chance, and politics—are manifested in reality through secondary level subjects.” According to Clausewitz, “War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case”, thus, context can be explained through how historically, societies have tended to conduct wars in their own particular ways, using different methods and pursuing different aims than their opponents. War therefore, must be viewed as a complex system that emerges from the multitude of small changes in its environment, something that can never be predicted. Initial conditions are too varied to apply a single methodology to approach a conflict. The context therefore, is too strong a catalyst to ignore.

The final characterisation of war done by Clausewitz was differentiating war into limited and total or absolute war. Very early on, Clausewitz had made the distinction, stating that wars can be of two kinds, those fought for the elimination of the opponent’s political independence, and

those fought to obtain favourable terms of peace. He went on to provide three independent explanations for such a distinction, one historical, or sociological; one metaphysical; and one empirical. Historically, Clausewitz pointed out, all wars were the products of the societies that fought them. Like all other institutions, war was shaped by the ideas, the emotions, and conditions prevailing at the time. This is when Clausewitz brought about the idea of absolute war, which he considered an ideal. In this context, Clausewitz defined the word ‘ideal’ not as something being good but something logical and natural. There was no logical confinement to an act of force as war can never be a single decisive act. The course of war is always shaped by considerations such as the international environment, the pre-war relationship of the belligerent powers, the characteristics of the armed forces, the terrain of the theatre of war, and perceptions of the new situation that it was hoped the war would produce. Total or absolute war therefore, occurs when a state or other political entity is fighting for its existence. A limited war on the other hand, is fought for a goal less than political existence, for example a war over a disputed territory or access to markets.

CIVIL WARS: MODERN PROBLEMS AND THEIR MODERN SOLUTIONS

The literature on civil wars is limited as thinkers often disagree on the parameters that ought to be fulfilled for a conflict to be characterised as a civil war. Civil wars erupted by the end of the Cold War owing to defrosted ethnic, communal tensions. Post the 1990s, it has been observed by the European Union Institute for Security Studies that there has been a relatively constant rise in civil wars with over two percent of the world’s countries plunged in civil wars at all points of time. The lethality of civil wars is owed to their length, disagreements within the parties and actors involved regarding solutions and the new trend of external intervention by international actors or other countries. The frequent causation of civil wars has largely deviated from Clausewitz’s conception of limited and total warfare.

A common definition given by the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC) states that civil wars entail government forces and one or more organised armed groups that arise on the territory of the state. Due to the phenomenon of globalisation, civil wars attract the attention of other armed groups who are not based in the territory of the sovereign state concerned, leading to long-drawn conflicts and negligible dispute resolution. The conditions of civil wars vary according to geographical territory, institutional set-up of the country, motives, and the demography of the country. Countries that are considered “anocracies” or states in the middle

of democracy and autocracy, tend to be victims of social fragmentation where the state is weak and finds it difficult to mobilise itself against threats. Civil wars take place when an opportunity presents itself for the organised armed groups— usually in the garb of newly available financial resources. Syria fulfils this criteria as the protracted civil war continues indefinitely, which has been made worse with international intervention and the mobilisation of external non-state actors like the Islamic State (IS).

The involvement of Turkey and Russia eventually led to minor escalations in 2018 and 2019 while government forces attempted to retake control of rebel areas, earlier controlled by the IS and Kurdish forces. The Syrian government continued to destabilise Kurdish forces in the North, who signed a deal with the Assad government to assuage the attack on themselves.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF CLAUSEWITZ, IN SYRIA

The Syrian Civil War has lasted ten times longer than international wars. It was expected to erupt for a considerable period of time aggravated by its mountainous terrain, low GDP and their economy being in dire straits. In accordance with Clausewitz's theory, it has developed into a total war, as there seems to be no logical explanation for the levels of brutality inflicted. Clausewitz's definition and characterisation of war is, simply put, one-dimensional. He fails to take into consideration the role played by multiple other actors like non-state actors or groups and international organisations. This fault cannot be entirely attributed to Clausewitz himself, for though the uncertainty of war is symmetric on both paradigms, these actors are products of what can be termed as modern states that did not exist during Clausewitz's times. For Clausewitz, wars are fought between clearly defined states, on the battlefields. For him, war occurs when states seek goals that clash with the goals of other states and choose to pursue them through violent means. At the outset itself, an analysis of the events taking place in the ongoing Syrian Civil war cannot be done in Clausewitzian terms, as the premise of the Syrian Civil war is so very different from what Clausewitz has written in "On War". However, the existence of the Clausewitzian trinity, and its manifestation into society in the corresponding subjects of the people, the commander and his army, and the government warrants an analysis of the Syrian Civil War.

Democratic uprisings by the people are something unforeseen in terms of Clausewitz's theory, since during Clausewitz's time, most states were monarchies, and uprisings against the state were seen as treason. Syria was not a democracy either. The Syrian state has often relapsed into

democratic authoritarianism with extreme forms of censorship, military control and a violent crackdown on reformists and politicians under the regimes of Hafiz-al-Assad and his son Bashar-al-Assad. The basic premise of war remains true however, democratic uprisings are antithetical to Clausewitz's characterisation of 'modern war', and can essentially be called 'anti-modern'. Herein lies another problem. Not all conflicts can be termed as "war", for as Clausewitz said, war requires the clash of "great interests". But this is where the paradoxical nature of war comes in once again. In the case of the Syrian Civil War, the "great interest" can be the fight for democracy, and against the authoritarian al-Assad regime. But then again, does the civil war have the scale and scope to warrant the tag of a "war" in the first place? The protest was peaceful in the beginning, but the ability of non-state actors to take up arms has grown enormously in recent times. There was constant engagement between organised rebel militias and government troops. The crackdown of the government, to quell the rebels can be seen as a part of a breakdown of Clausewitz's trinity's manifestation into society. By the end of 2012, the skirmishes were regular, therefore taking the shape of a war simply due to its scale, upsetting not only internal order but also international.

The civil war slowly took the shape of a proxy war. Support started to come in from other nations, for all sides taking part. The United States of America-led West, who consider themselves the harbingers of liberal democracy in a globalised world, naturally aided certain vetted rebel groups with arms and training. The rebels were also aided by countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Syrian state received a steady supply of arms from Iran and the militant group Hezbollah. Its long-time ally, Russia and new compatriot, China supported its crackdown in the United Nations (UN), using its veto power on multiple occasions to foil UN Security Council Resolutions to condemn the crackdown. The support of these countries is included in the chance factor of Clausewitz's trinity. The rebels could not have been aware of the armed support they were going to get from other nations, and the Syrian government could not have been aware of the rebels being capable of organised violence. This however, had a huge influence on the trajectory of the civil war as the availability of weapons determined the protracted nature of the war.

This brings us to the next factor of the trinity, passion. Passion here is the cry for democracy. The people of Syria, living under the authoritarian Assad regime for generations, had decided to stand up for themselves when most other nations in the Middle East were going through a similar change, with dictators falling during the Arab Spring of 2010. Assad was defiant and

believed Syria would not have a similar fate but was proved wrong by his own people. The peaceful protests for democracy took a violent turn. Thus, the exalted passion of the protests for democracy triggered a civil war. As analysed previously, unforeseen support for the rebels from other nations altered the course of the war in unpredictable ways. Clausewitz's trinity also manifests itself in Syrian society, in the form of the Syrian government, the Syrian military, and the Syrian people. The primary trinity and its manifestations are subject to context, which differs from war to war and conflict to conflict. Context itself provides the setting for the primary trinity to manifest itself in society. The strong catalyst of context, paired up with social elements in a war, alters the trajectory of war in ways that cannot be predicted by any theory.

THE DICEY GAME: THE NATION AND ITS INSTRUMENTS

A pioneer of his time, Carl von Clausewitz is still used as a starting point in understanding war as a science. His theory of trinities and the social systems that influence war— passion, chance and reason— still hold true in the 21st century. However, war as unpredictable as it was at the time when Clausewitz was writing, is not as restrictive any more. Limited and total wars often take place within the same sovereign borders of the nation concerned, with the intervention of foreign powers, non-state actors and international organisations. It has become increasingly impossible to negate the degree of intentional use of force and predictions in the acts of belligerents. Nations look out for power grabbing opportunities at every corner, rebel militias continue to secretly work with governments and civilians bear the brunt of this dangerous game. Thus, even as Clausewitz remains relevant, war becomes more cruel, intrusive and protracted in the 21st century.

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India's Hardcore Geo-Strategy (Vadodara), Tata-Airbus C-295 Aircraft, and India-Spain Strategic Bilateral Relations

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ABSTRACT

India's 'Make in India' initiative, spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aims to transform the country into a global manufacturing hub. This initiative is not only pivotal for domestic economic growth but also serves as a cornerstone for strengthening international partnerships. One such partnership is with Spain, which has seen significant growth in recent years, particularly in the aerospace and defense sectors. A major milestone in the history of India's Aerospace and Defense industry will be the manufacturing of India's C-295 transport military aircraft by Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) in Vadodara, Gujarat, in collaboration with Airbus Spain. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez recently inaugurated India's first private aircraft plant, fueling New Delhi's desire to boost local manufacturing in the defense and aerospace industries. This is considered not only a diplomatic step in India's defense but can also increase the country's import-export capacity and will make a significant contribution to the economy, leveraging the state's strategic location and industrial infrastructure. The collaboration not only strengthens bilateral ties but also aligns with India's 'Self-reliant India' initiative, reducing dependence on imported military equipment and positioning India as a potential exporter of advanced aviation technology. This integrated approach highlights how 'Make in India' and international partnerships like that with Spain are driving India's economic and strategic ambitions, enhancing its global influence.

Keywords: *India's Aerospace and Defence Industry, Make in India, India- Spain Relations, C295 Aircraft*

According to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 'Make in India' initiative will act as a game changer for India in many ways and will also boost India's ambitions for aviation exports. (Mukul, October 2024) The project is expected to create around 15,000 high-skilled jobs and

10,000 other indirect jobs over the future decade (TOI, October 2024). The debut of the C-295 aircraft in the Indian Air Force (IAF) marks a significant upgrade of the country's strategic airlift capability. The aircraft can perform a variety of missions involving multi-role capabilities, such as troop transport, cargo airlift, maritime patrol (Chopra, October 2024). Under the C-295 program, 16 aircrafts will be supplied directly by Airbus from Spain, and the remaining 40 aircrafts will be manufactured by TATA Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) of Vadodara, India (Sharma, October 2024). This step will act as a milestone for Gujarat's economy, which will help in the development of bilateral relations between the two countries. Gujarat has emerged as a trading hub between India and Spain due to its strategic location and well-established industrial infrastructure. The past years have seen the presence of many Spanish companies in Gujarat, such as Grupo Antolin for automobile production, Siemens Gamesa and Windar Renovables manufacturing established, and Gujarat's leadership in wind energy production. These various investments have made Gujarat a preferred destination for developing strategic and hard power diplomacy with India (ANINEWS, OCTOBER 24, 2024). Emphasizing efficiency and employment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said “The Airbus factory will produce 18,000 aircraft parts indigenously, providing opportunities for MSMEs across India. The newly inaugurated factory will pave the way for civil aircraft design and Make in India civil aircraft to meet the future needs of India and the world.”

INDIA- SPAIN STRATEGIC BILATERAL RELATIONS: AN EPITOME

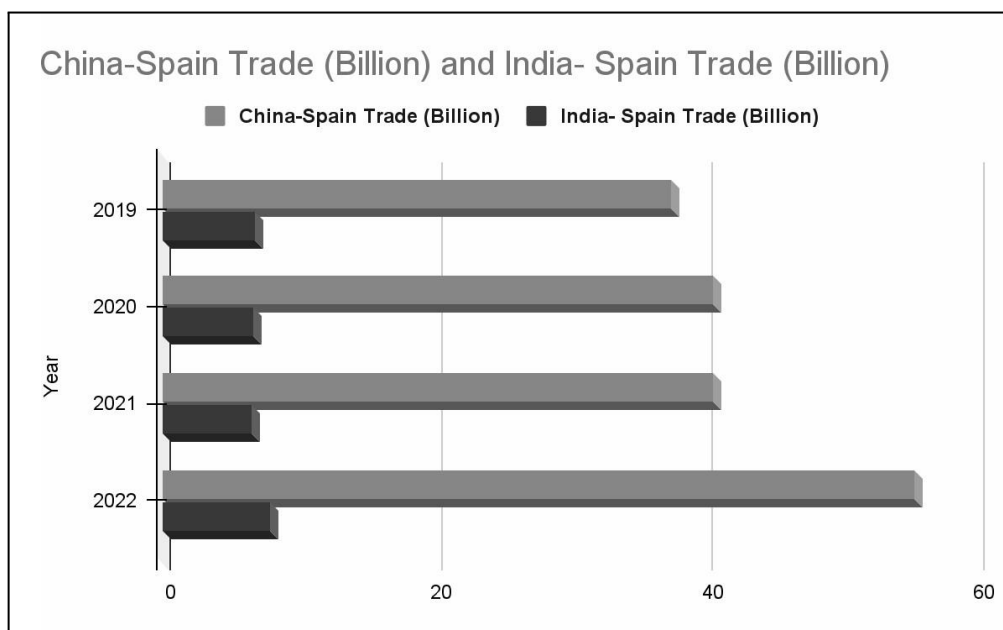
A strong nation should cultivate cordial relations with its internal stakeholders and external partners. It encourages economic exchange with foreign countries and enhances understanding at a global level. The European Union is a power block with socio-political and economic potential for India. Hence, India maintains cordial bilateral relations with the European Union countries as well and enjoys trade, tourism, educational, and cultural exchanges. Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, he has promised to make India a global hub. As part of efforts to modernize and reform military equipment, he focused on boosting the private manufacturing sector and eyed foreign direct investment to encourage exchanges with India. The current government has elevated India to the international stage, and other members of the cabinet have made strenuous efforts to consolidate cordial relations with foreign partners. Promising examples of bilateral trade potential are renewable energy, and smart cities, one example of which is the India-Spain relationship and mutual development cooperation. India's growing market and IT sectors have

explored opportunities between the two countries. Economic and commercial cooperation plays an important role in the relationship between India and Spain. India-Spain Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation (JCEC), which plays an important role in increasing bilateral trade by 2023. The India-Spain CE Forum, established in 2015, further strengthens the commercial relationship between the two countries (Sharma A, September 2024).

Since 1956, cordial and reciprocal relations between India and Spain have been formally established. Over the past 66 years, the relationship between these two countries has grown manifold through deepening diplomatic, commercial, cultural, and educational. Needless to say, more than half of Asia's population lives in India and China, with a combined GDP of more than 25%, a source of economic and commercial opportunity for any country (Kumar G & Ahmad A, November, 2023). In this context, the relationship between India and Spain started out on a shaky note but what has sustained the relationship between the two countries is the mutual interest between the two countries. A trade and economic agreement was signed between the two countries in 1972. Spain's imports have tripled compared to exports in recent years (Kumar G & Ahmad A, November, 2023). Major imports from India to Spain are biochemicals for the pharmaceutical industry, clothing, mechanical machinery, and iron. In 2015, the total bilateral trade between India and Spain was 3 billion dollars. Spain's imports from India have increased in recent years compared to its exports (Kumar G & Ahmad A, November, 2023). In terms of services, the value of exports of services provided by Spain to India in 2021 totalled 320 million euros, which is 53.8% higher than the previous year's figures. The services were mainly based on business services, trade, travel, telecommunication and computer services.

China plays an important geo-strategic role here, with China and Spain celebrating their 50th anniversary in 2023. Amid the many political tensions and uncertainties in the relationship between China and the EU, high-level diplomacy between China and Spain emphasizes pragmatic, cooperation and mutual benefit (Zhou Q, September 2024). Closer high-level exchanges between China and Spain have increased since Sánchez became Spain's Prime Minister. Both sides have mutual cooperation in areas such as trade, tourism, agriculture, culture and education. There is extensive and deep engagement between the two countries in the field of investment. In 2022, China exports 47 billion dollars to Spain, have grown by 12% over the past five years (oec.world, August, 2022). The main products exported to Spain are semiconductor devices, electronics and broadcasting equipment. In August 2024, China's

top exports to Spain were cars (\$397M), electric batteries (\$186M) and semiconductor devices (\$171M). China's exports from Spain in August 2024 were pig meat (\$142M), packaged medicines (\$33.5M), copper (\$98.6M), etc. (oec.world, August, 2024). Meanwhile, India exported \$5.31 billion to Spain there in 2022. The main products exported to Spain are nitrogen heterocyclic compounds (\$295M), molluscs (\$218M) and refined petroleum (\$192M). India's exports to Spain have grown at an annual rate of 5.04% over the last five years (oec.world, August, 2022). In 2022, Spain exported \$2.66B to India. Major exports to India are Crude Petroleum (\$680M), Refined Petroleum (\$108M) etc. (oec.world, August, 2022). In July 2024, India exported \$390M and imported \$186M from Spain, creating a positive trade balance (oec.world, July, 2024). India and Spain also have strong economic ties, with Spain being India's 13th largest investor. There are now over 280 Spanish companies in India, mainly in metallurgy, renewable energy, ceramics and infrastructure, mainly used in highways, transmission, metro systems, and some auto companies. (Embassy of India, October 28, 2024) Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu etc. are the main places of investment of Spain in India. Similarly, India's investment in Spain is USD 900 million. There are about 40 Indian companies in Spain, India is among the top 5 in terms of investment in Asia. Although Spain is China's fifth largest trading partner within the EU, the broader economic environment in recent years has created challenges in China-Spain relations, mainly in economic and trade relations. In 2023, China's exports to Spain in particular fell by 5.4 percent (Zhou Q, September 2024). However, in that case, it has become important for India to emerge as a key hub for bilateral relations with Spain in a region centered around big giant markets like Asia. The map below shows a disparate picture of imports and exports between China and Spain and between India and Spain between 2019 and 2022.

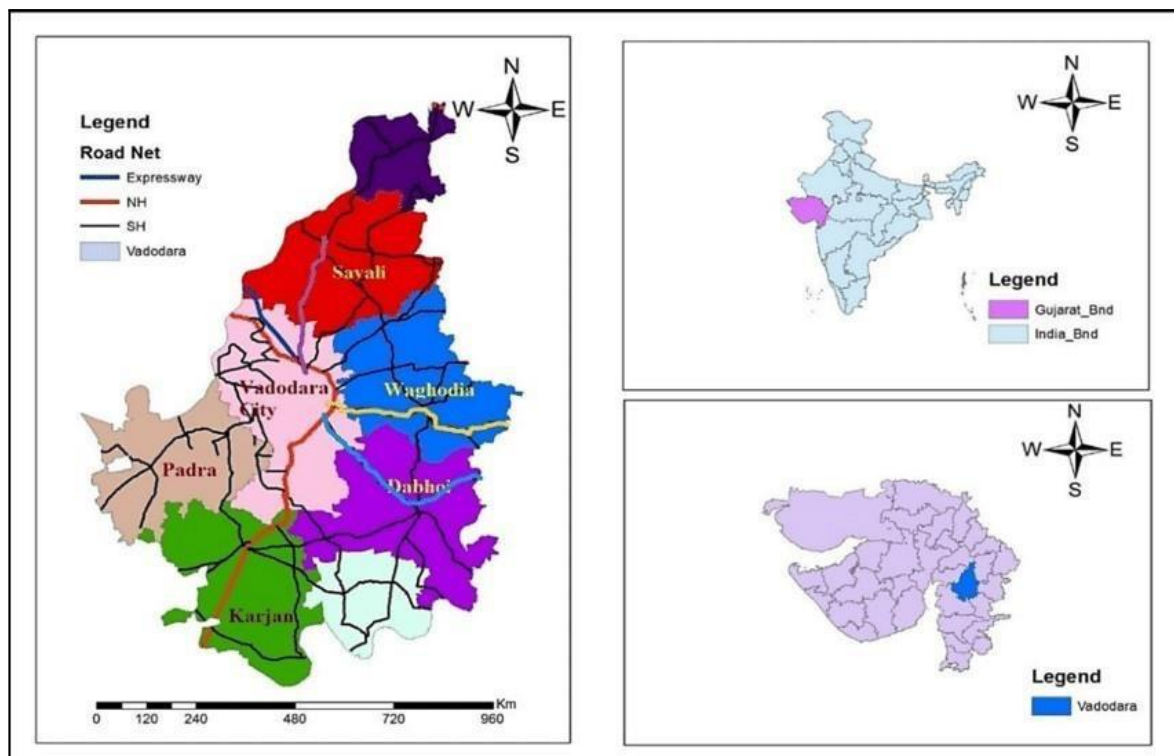


Source: <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateralcountry/chn/partner/esp?dynamicYearGeomapSelector=year2019&productSectionSelector=sectionID19&dynamicBilateralTradeSelector=year2022>

GUJARAT (VADODARA): THE HARDCORE GEO-STRATEGY

Gujarat has witnessed a healthy growth in international and domestic passenger traffic in the last few years. Located on the west coast of India, Gujarat can be said to be an ideal gateway for air travel from western countries. Gujarat has more than 40 ports, Kandla is one of the largest ports in India. Gujarat is one of the Dhoni states in India, with microlight flights and other aviation facilities. Vadodara is a major city in the state of Gujarat. It serves as the administrative headquarters of Vadodara district and is located 141 km from the state capital Gandhinagar. Railways and National Highway 8, which connects Delhi to Mumbai, pass through Vadodara. Various large industries such as Indian Oil Corporation, Gujarat State Fertilizers and Chemicals, Reliance Industries Limited, Parikh Industries, Linde Engineering India and various Chemicals Limited have developed in Vadodara. Vadodara is a manufacturing hub for power equipment, railcars and defence aircraft and several companies in the IT sector are growing rapidly here. It is a hub of the pharmaceutical industry in Gujarat. Bombardier Transportation, a Canadian company has set up a rail coach manufacturing plant in Sabli. The city's location and its development have made Spain a lucrative location to invest money in the region. The C-295

project is a huge achievement for the Indian private industry as it is the first project of its kind in India that a fully military aircraft will be built in India by a private sector (EconomicTimes.online, October, 2024). Vadodara is not only tasked with assembling the aircraft, but is expected to be responsible for everything from component manufacturing to assembly, testing to delivery. An official statement from PM Modi's office referred to the entire set sub as 'a complete ecosystem of delivery from manufacturing to assembly, testing and qualification, the entire life cycle of the aircraft' (EconomicTimes.online, October,2024).



Source:https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Location-Map-of-Vadodara-District-showingMajor-Road-Networks_fig1_340652802

The Vadodara plant, a joint venture between Airbus and Tata Advanced Systems, will integrate domestic manufacturing. Airbus has already identified 37 local suppliers, of which 33 are MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). About 13,000 of the 14,000 C-295 aircraft components are expected to be manufactured in India (EconomicTimes.online, October 2024). The Tata-Airbus project in Vadodara further highlights the growing strategic cooperation between Gujarat and Spain. Gujarat's exports to Spain also increased, reaching

\$0.94 billion in 2023-2024. Major exports include bio-chemicals, machinery, minerals, etc., which highlight the diverse industrial base of the state. (Times of India, October 2024) Strategically Gujarat and Vadodara are an important region if seen that way.

IMAGINING AHEAD: TATA-AIRBUS & C295 AIRCRAFT

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who was present on the occasion of the inauguration program of C-295 Aircraft in Vadodara, called the project a special and important initiative for the Indian space sector (Economicstimes.online, October 2024). India's decision to locally manufacture the C 295 could facilitate reducing India's dependence on imported military equipment. India is heavily dependent on defense imports, particularly arms imports from Russia. Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned that the Tata-Airbus collaboration will create an integrated defense ecosystem (Economicstimes.online, October 2024). The Prime Minister mentioned the iDEX (Innovation for Defence Excellence) scheme which has increased over 1000 startups in the last 5-6 years (Mygov.in, October, 2024). PM Modi envisages that the C-295's facility has played an important role not only in military aviation but also in civil aviation. The Vadodara complex is ready to cater to both national and global aviation needs, which could make India an aviation hub (Mygov.in, October, 2024). Future variants of the C-295 will also be adapted for other services such as the Navy and Coast Guard. It is already in the advanced stage of discussion (ETV Bharat, October 2024). The C-295 is widely used for military and civilian missions, including disaster relief, search and rescue, and humanitarian missions such as drug smuggling, piracy, and illegal immigration.

The C295 project has become the cornerstone of India's 'Self-reliant India' initiative, which aims to reduce imports and focus on domestic production. The Tata-Airbus C295 project is expected to have a profound impact on employment and the local economy. Its production facilities are said to trigger a trickle-down effect on commercial and financial benefits (India Today. in, October, 2024). The C295 project is not only significant for India's domestic needs but also holds the potential and promise for India's future exports.

IN SUMMARY

The 'Make in India' initiative and the strategic partnership between India and Spain are mutually reinforcing. The inauguration of the C295 aircraft manufacturing plant at Vadodara marks India's milestone towards self-reliance and aerospace excellence. Although the C-295 is believed to have brought benefits to the Indian aerospace industry, the deal remains elusive in terms of revenue engines, and radars. Eminent economist and columnist Swaminathan Iyer commented on it as 'Self-sufficiency' and 'self-reliance' (indiandefencereview.com, December 2023). As India continues to modernize its defense capabilities and expand its manufacturing base, the synergy between 'Make in India' and international partnerships like that with Spain will be crucial in achieving these goals. However, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh felt, 'The C295 project is a huge achievement for India in terms of demilitarization and for private industry, with some of the first such initiatives being undertaken in the private sector in India.'

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Radical Environmentalism: A Marxist-Feminist Critique of the Liberal Internationalist Order to Climate Justice

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ABSTRACT

The last decade of the 20th century saw a surge in climate consciousness. Since the Brundtland Report (1987) and Rio Summit (1992), there has been extensive international cooperation and policy framing to mitigate the effects of climate change coterminous with the neo-liberal and New Right movements. As a result, the libertarian capitalist world deliberately ignored the root causes of climate change and has adopted inefficient methods like ‘green capitalism,’ ‘carbon trading’ etc., and has made the Global South the scapegoat of Global North’s “green” capitalistic aspirations, leaving the women and working class of the Global South the worst affected. This research article argues how the international climate change forums within the liberal internationalist order have failed to adequately highlight the causal factors of the climate crisis by offering a feminist and Marxist lens of critique, thereby, concluding with a solution towards climate justice.

Keywords: *Radical Environmentalism, Neo-liberalism, Greta Thunberg, Climate Justice, Global South*

“GRETA EFFECT”: EMERGENCE OF RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

When Greta Thunberg was asked about Jacinda Arden, the then-former Prime Minister of New Zealand, who regarded the climate crisis as a matter of life and death, Greta replied, “It’s funny that people believe Jacinda Arden and people like that are climate leaders. That just tells you how little you people know about the climate crisis,” pointing that these leaders just say these without taking any action as the emissions of greenhouse gas in New Zealand had increased by 2% in 2019. (Hattenstone & Fischer, 2021)

Through this strong reply, Greta brings forth the incompetency of the political leaders in the current geo-political situation regarding real climate justice. Indirectly attacking neo-liberal

capitalism, Greta also said that climate change will severely affect young people as the current generation's "future was sold so that few people could make unimaginable amounts of money." (Thunberg, 2021) She also highlighted that Global South will suffer the most even though they contributed the least to climate crisis. (Jake-Johnson, 2024) Thus, it is no doubt that Greta, being the face of new radical environmentalism (*The Guardian*, 2019), has shown the world a new perspective towards climate justice- a perspective which has delved much deeper into the causal factors of climate crisis. Rather than just techno-scientific methods of climate justice, Greta has aspired for a total revolution of the current liberal internationalist system, engineered through massive public pressure to achieve climate justice. This has included anti-war agitations, speaking against ignorant international political leaders, highlighting inefficiency of international climate change forums and has rightfully integrated gender liberation movements with climate justice. (Advocate, 2021)

Greta Thunberg's radical climate activism, starting from her lonewolf movement of "School Strike for Climate Change", encouraging school students to skip schools on Friday to agitate against climate change policies when she was merely 15 years of age, has made her receive honours and awards, being the youngest *Time* "Person of the Year" in 2019, with hundreds and thousands of supporters across the globe, describing it as the "Greta Effect" (Watts, 2021). Greta's speech, famously known as "*How dare you*" speech in 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) remains iconic till date. She, criticizing the world leaders, said, "I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean...How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words...People are dying, entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!" (Thunberg, 2021)

IGNORANCE AND INEFFICIENCY LIBERAL INTERNATIONALIST CLIMATE CHANGE FORUMS

Before the 2021 Conference of Parties (COP) at Glasgow, Greta said that the leaders make suggestions but take no action. On October 30th 2021, she described COP26 as a failure, regarding it as "greenwashing", the practice of making misleading claims about a company's environmental impact to attract customers. (Welle, 2021) Greta has never been wrong while pointing out the inefficiency and ignorance of international political leaders in these climate change forums as they have almost never provided any justice to climate change. These forums

have generally advocated for technological and scientific solutions to climate change, by vehemently ignoring the fact that climate change has been the result of uncontrolled capitalism. The concept of "metabolic rift" forwarded by John Bellamy Foster explains how capitalist production depletes resources without their replenishment and externalizes ecological costs. Industrial agriculture, for instance, uses practices that degrade the soil and speed up greenhouse gas emissions to gain profit based on the short-term outcome rather than ecological sustainability. (*Foster, n.d.*) Marxist ecology presents the argument that capitalism's expansive system is fundamentally incompatible with the finite bounds of the earth, and thereby is a leading cause of climatic crises like climate change. While a shift to renewable sources of energy is an important step towards climate change mitigation, what remains untouched is the ideological positioning which perpetrates climate crisis, leaving an incomplete analysis of climate change solutions. (*Klein, 2014*)

The inefficiency has been exacerbated by the leaders like US president Donald Trump, who in his previous tenure had denounced climate change as a myth (*Worland, 2019*) and has advocated an extremist right-wing "Project 2025": an anti-LGBTQ, anti-feminist, and antienvironmentalist project in the current tenure which he has promised to implement after taking the office on January 2025. jeopardizing the entire global climate action. (*Milman, 2024*) Upon getting re-elected, Trump can withdraw US from Paris Climate Agreement (2016) and global climate change agreements yet again, can reduce investments in green energy, slowing down the transition to renewable sources of energy. Trump's promise to "dig coal" during the 2024 Election campaign was also to support the fossil-fuel run industries, undermining long-term environmental goals for short-term economic gains. (*Khair, 2019*)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in its Emissions Gap Report, published in October 2022, warned the world of heading towards catastrophe, (*McGrath, 2022*) as the reduction of carbon emissions has been "woefully insufficient" to meet the standards of the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement (*Emissions Gap Report, 2022, pg 26*). And yet, world leaders have turned a blind eye to the October report in COP27 held on November 6th by not voicing their ambitions on cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. (*Stallard, 2022*) This is why Greta Thunberg, when asked about the New Zealand Prime Minister back in 2019 rightfully denounced political leaders to be climate leaders. The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2024 report, having a standardized framework to compare the climate change performance of 67 countries along with the European Union (EU), which amounted to 90% of

world's GHG emissions, found that none of the countries were “strong enough to achieve an overall high ranking”, making the top 3 places vacant (*Germanwatch e.V*, 2024). Out of 67 countries, 34 received ‘low’ to ‘very low’ ratings. The top five performers were Denmark, Estonia, Philippines, India, and Netherlands, while the three worst included the Arab nations of UAE, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Saudi Arabia. In 2022, Denmark, ranking 1st, set more ambitious climate goals, aiming for net zero by 2045 instead of 2050 and achieving negative CO2 emissions by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. As part of this effort, Denmark became the first country to introduce a tax on livestock emissions through its “Agreement on a Green Denmark.” From 2030, farmers will pay DKK 120 (about USD 17) per tonne of CO2-equivalent emissions, increasing to DKK 300 (about USD 43) by 2035. Climate-efficient farms will receive a 60% tax deduction, and the tax revenue will be reinvested in green initiatives, climate technology, and supporting agricultural sectors during the transition. (*ibid.*) Iran ranks last of the 67 countries in the CCPI; it scores low on GHG Emissions, Renewable Energy, Climate Policy, and Energy Use. It still hasn't ratified the Paris Agreement, linking this commitment to a lifting of its sanctions, has no net-zero target, has some of the highest per-capita GHG emissions globally and renewable energy forms less than 1%, notwithstanding its large reserves of gas; the country endures severe heat waves and several other worsening impacts of climate. Thus, the CCPI can also be considered a figment of the liberal internationalist order. (*ibid.*)

WOMEN OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH: THE SCAPEGOAT OF CLIMATE CRISIS

It is no doubt that as the concerns of climate change emerged in the 1990s, policies were framed to reduce GHG emissions, which ushered in Corporate-Social Responsibility (CSR) and a switch to renewable sources of energy for climate change mitigation. But, the fundamentals of the climate crisis, i.e. capitalism and consumerism remained totally untouched. In fact, when the 1987 report from the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, led by Brundtland established the need for ‘sustainable development’, it completely omitted the discussions of the Global North’s over-development and high level of consumption and had produced techno-scientific solutions like “green capitalism”, a continuance of the neoliberal agenda of privatization and exploitation, failing to dwell upon the causal factors of the climate crisis. (*Pskowski, 2013*)

Two-thirds of the world, the Global South, has accounted for merely 20% of global GHG emissions, while one-third of the world- the Global North accounts for the remaining 80%.

(Hartmann, 2009) Despite such clarity of the real image, Global North representatives in the 2009 Copenhagen COP targeted the Global South regarding “cost-effective” method of reducing GHG emissions and family planning. A paradox indeed. (Egeró, 2013)

The intrinsic self-destructive nature of capitalism and its antagonistic relations with environmentalism was well highlighted by Karl Marx back in 1867. In Part IV: “Production of Relative Surplus Value” of Volume I of “*Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*,” Marx remarks, “Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the sources of all wealth-the soil and the laborer.” (Marx, 1867, pg. 329) Marx meant that capitalism tends to destroy its two sources of wealth-the worker and the environment and this destruction will be to such an extent that capitalism would eventually turn to destroy itself. Thus, on Marxist lines, the advocacy of “green capitalism” provides no real solution to the problems of climate crisis.

Such impotent analysis of climate change has made the women of Global South, the immediate victims of climate change and natural disasters. Their vulnerability is directly linked to gendered social roles, discrimination, and poverty. Gendered roles restrict the mobility of women across the world and have subsequently obstructed women from participating in climate change policies. In the Global South, the consequences faced by the women are far more than the Global North as they have to bear the burden of fetching more water or collecting more fuel and fodder-an activity traditionally assigned to the women. If there is a situation of food shortage, it is the women who sacrifice their food for the men and children to eat. When the men are compelled to migrate to the urban areas, following desertification and reduced agriculture, the women have to bear the entire burden of cultivation along with the traditional duties of caretaking and household work. These women are then left with very few opportunities to cope with natural disasters or unpleasant weather conditions. (Guard, 2015) This means that gender inequality makes women and children 14 times more vulnerable than men. (Aguilar, 2007)

Given that these international forums are predominated by men and “man” is supposed to represent everyone, such gender-blind analysis has resulted in ignorance of the gendered effects of climate change, marginalized by mere techno-scientific solutions to climate change. (Guard, 2015) Even though the United Nations Framework on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) website “Gender and Climate Change” has asserted that women are at the center stage of climate change challenges, the lack of gender parity in climate change discussions and policymaking has been

widely criticized by eco-feminists. When mothers get killed, following a natural disaster, it automatically increases infant mortality, child marriages, increases neglect of girl's education, frequent sexual assaults, rape cases, and trafficking of women and prostitutes. These raped, assaulted, or trafficked women remain as helpless victims. (*Aguilar, 2007*) Climate justice to be effective must be alligned with gender justice (*Olson, 2002*).

An eco-feminist accounting system is capable of tracking and promoting climate justice throughout the globe. Replacing economic globalization with economic justice will provide the much-needed climate change. (*Guard, 2015*) A transition from capitalist profits to ethically driven conscious enterprise shall bring about substantive climate change.

“GREEN CAPITALISM”: A CORPORATE VENEER TO SANITIZE THEIR IMAGE

Since both increased international environmental concerns and the neo-liberal movement saw its inception in the 1990s, the decade led to the ironic and unusual fusion of environmentalism and neo-liberal capitalism, named “green capitalism”- a veneer by corporations to sanitize their image. This subsequently gave rise to various other techno-scientific concepts like ‘carbon exchange’, ‘carbon footprint’ etc., highlighted in the Kyoto Protocol (1997).

While ‘green capitalism’ has advocated these techno-scientific methods for climate change mitigation, they have deliberately removed the burden of climate crisis from them and placed it over the Global South, especially women and the working class. By allowing the Global South to practice ‘carbon trading’, the basic idea of cutting down carbon emissions is cleverly ignored by the corporates of the Global North, thereby, evading their responsibilities. At an individual level, they encourage the reduction of ‘carbon footprint’, while the industrialists bypass all environmental laws and release unfiltered polluted matter to the environment. Therefore, capitalism has successfully commodified environmental concerns and has ushered vague and inefficient methods of ‘carbon trading’, and ‘carbon footprint’ to carry on with their exploitative expansionism over the ecology of the resource-rich Global South. (*Sovacool, 2011*)

Despite our scientific understanding that the relationship between climate change and emissions is non-linear and complex, the Kyoto Protocol has been ardent in forwarding the idea of carbon trading. A country can still emit a unit (comprising one ton) of GHGs as long as it offsets the ton by purchasing a ‘carbon credit’. This means that the Global North can still emit 100 tons of

GHG gases as long as it offsets its emissions by planting trees in the Global South to sink the same 100 tons, (*Sovacool, 2011*) which is practically impossible.

Thus, the Global North has indulged in exerting capitalistic domination and economic imperialism over the Global South, exploiting them to such an extent that it becomes detrimental to the people living in the Global South, with the working class and women being the immediate victims of it. In today's world, as climate change concerns have engulfed the concerns of the public- the clever tactics of 'green capitalism' by corporations have nothing to do with environmentalism but a cloak to carry on their motives of capitalistic exploitation and oppression. This is essentially an idea where the Global North will develop electronic vehicles at the expense of thousands of hectares of forest land cleared in the Global South for mining or in the name of infrastructure- not only harming the ecology but also displacing the tribes dependent upon the forests.

A PRAGMATIC SOLUTION TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

Even though the techno-scientific methods of climate change mitigation are desirable and can provide limited success, the fundamentals of climate crisis remain largely untouched by the current climate policies. In such a case, radical political environmentalism needs to take responsibility to ensure the establishment of climate justice order. Following the gendered effects of climate crisis, immediate importance should be to give women ensuring them greater opportunities in climate change discussions. Although it is by no means enough, this would satisfy the initial demands of the eco-feminists. Gender justice remains a pre-requisite to climate justice.

Another pragmatic step is to advocate 'alter-globalization'- developed during the New Left Movement of 1960s, i.e. to maintain international cooperation without the neo-liberal exploitative tendencies of the capitalist world. (*Reitan & Gibson, 2012*) This will free the world from the negative effects of globalization. Alter-globalization will work towards betterment of the developing world, protect human rights and their values, ensure climate and economic justice and protection of tribes and indigenous population.

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Sovereignty or Humanity?

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to examine the dichotomy that exists between national sovereignty and international human rights. Any embodiment of interference based on international humanitarian law has been perceived as a threat to national sovereignty on several occasions. Sovereignty is considered to be a cardinal norm in the international sphere, any perceived threats to it may alarm nations. With rising levels of war crimes witnessed in the 21st century, international humanitarian law acts as an imperative tool for the guarantee of basic rights of human existence and living. However, national interests often rise above the humane intentions of interventions. The article traces various instances of foreign interventions along with special focus on contemporary trends.

Keywords: *sovereignty, international humanitarian law, human rights*

The seamlessness of globalisation has been a boon to humanity in more ways than one. With burgeoning levels of interconnectivity, the human race is at the zenith of its technological existence. However, being at the zenith tends to minimise the humane character of humanity. Globalisation has led to the erosion of the territoriality of the state and often its sovereignty with the increasing permeability of borders. In the realm of international standards of human rights, nations are mandated to pertain to certain fundamental rights of the citizens. In the trajectory of global history, humanitarian laws have been necessitated to combat evil practices such as slavery. The modern world has developed many such gruesome crimes against humanity that are opposed to the adoption of an international standard of living, and states need to be the central driver in such an adoption. Therefore, the dichotomy should be redirected towards *national sovereignty and international human rights and not national sovereignty versus international human rights*.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the UN General

Assembly in 1948 was one of the first steps in the creation of a comprehensive code for international human rights law. The member-states were therefore compelled to formulate policies of protection based on all aspects of human rights, especially in the aftermath of the Second World War. Be it the 1940s or the 2020s, the state as an entity has always been responsible for the conditions of its domestic population. International law holds them accountable for their conduct in the cases of wars and regional conflicts. Human rights in global politics indeed transcend national borders because human rights are nothing less than a demand of all humanity on all of humanity (Luban 1985).

In a tragic scheme of things, when an influential state undertakes acts of barbarism, national sovereignty often triumphs over human rights. The Cold War decades were ridden with several instances of proxy wars instrumentalized by the power blocs. The deadly aftermath of the Cold War in terms of war crimes went far beyond the Western and Soviet blocs. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979, and Russia's ruthless suppression of the Chechen uprising in the 1990s received severe condemnation by human rights activists. The rise of China's economic power has led to the disregard of inhumane Chinese treatment of the Uyghur population and other Muslim ethnic groups in the northwestern region of Xinjiang. It has also been accused of the mistreatment of citizens in the invasion of Tibet and the systematic subjugation of Tibetan culture, religion, and national identity has been rampant.

The existing division of votes in the United Nations Security Council due to the veto power of the five permanent members acts as a major hurdle in upholding human rights by the United Nations. The United States of America has vetoed a resolution at the UN Security Council demanding an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The US has vetoed a ceasefire on four different occasions since October 2023.

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

National sovereignty has been upheld as the cardinal rule of international politics and intervention has been rejected by states. However, intervention on humanitarian grounds is considered essential to prevent the maltreatment by a state of its citizens. The Indian Army intervened in the civil war between East Pakistan and West Pakistan which eventually led to the liberation and creation of Bangladesh in 1971. However, none of these interventions can be

adequately justified solely based on humanitarian grounds, but rather as a means of fulfilling the national interests of states.

The post-Cold War world witnessed several instances of ethnic rivalries and conflicts around the world especially in the emerging newly independent countries. This resulted in a rise in humanitarian interventions in the new world order. Interventions were brought about by the United Nations and the US to create a protected environment for conducting humanitarian operations in Southern Somalia. US-led NATO forces, forced the Serbs to withdraw their armies from Kosovo in the fears of ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population by airstrikes. When Indonesia stepped up a campaign of intimidation and suppression in East Timor, a UN authorised peacekeeping force led by Australia took control of the island from Indonesia. However, these instances of humanitarian intervention are always guided by a deep desire to fulfill the national interests of nations.

Intervention by the international community can often save lives of innocent citizens and prevent damages to property and environment. The establishment of a 'no-fly zone' in northern Iraq in 1991, prevented possible reprisal attacks and massacres after the Kurdish uprising and also allowed Kurdish areas to develop a significant degree of autonomy. The intervention in Kosovo in 1999 succeeded in its goal of expelling Serbian police and military from the area and helped to end a massive displacement of the population and prevent possible further attacks. However, humanitarian interventions often do more harm than good. Replacing old dictators with foreign occupying powers may increase tensions and create a greater risk of civil war and ethnic conflicts, subjecting civilians to a constant state of warfare like the US invasion of Afghanistan to combat Al-Qaeda and their subsequent abrupt and unplanned withdrawal of forces in August 2021 has led to a state of tyranny in Afghanistan.

CIVILIAN IMMUNITY

Civilians are offered immunity under the Fourth Geneva Convention in terms of protection from murder, torture, or brutality in armed conflict and occupied territories. The prohibition of killing civilians is to be maintained as a moral code. However, what is to be maintained is far removed from what occurs in reality. The major world powers have intentionally persecuted civilians at some point in history. The United States of America has committed killings in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, and the Soviet Union in several of its expansionist purges in Europe and Afghanistan. Countries such as France and Britain have done so through their colonial uprooting

of communities and populations, not only through offensive measures but also through the creation of several famine-like situations. Mass killings have often been perceived as a mechanism to eliminate projected enemies and as a viable strategy to defeat certain insurgencies (Bellamy 2012).

Noam Chomsky has categorised the usage of human rights by the United States of America as a moral cloak for its hegemonic ambitions. The American ‘War on Terror’ in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks resulted in several violations of human rights which resulted in significant loss of innocent civilian lives in the Middle East.

CONTEMPORARY STATE OF AFFAIRS

The International Criminal Court (ICC) at Hague issued arrest warrants in October 2024 for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for allegedly committing war crimes in the Gaza Strip. The court had found evidence that suggested that Netanyahu and Gallant were intentionally depriving Gaza civilians of resources of sustenance. In the early weeks of 2024, South Africa put forth a case against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the grounds of accusations of committing ‘genocidal acts’ in its military offensives in Gaza.

Palestine has witnessed improbable levels of death, destruction, and displacement since the heightened Israeli attacks in October 2023. The situation in Gaza is yet to be curtailed, however, interventions by countries and international actors based on legal codifications have given way for the perpetrators to be held accountable in the international forum. Israel has falsified all allegations and has branded all forms of international resistance as ‘anti-Semitic’.

It is a rather grim affair that despite increased efforts to prevent mass atrocities that have been undertaken in recent years, contemporary cases of mass killing and genocidal acts remain as likely to end with victory for the perpetrators. Of the several ways in which instances of mass atrocities might be ended, intervention or punishment by foreign powers is still a rare occurrence.

Humanitarian intervention is accompanied by a set of moral challenges in global politics. It essentially poses a threat to national sovereignty and the idea of the inviolability of borders. The conventional notion of state sovereignty and its superior power over the treatment of its population is challenged by the adoption of international human rights. In the modern world,

states need to work in tandem with international human rights to build and maintain a just and peaceful world order. Although such a scenario may still be a hypothesis, nations must come together for the cordial maintenance and implementation of international humanitarian law.

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The Game of Scrabble

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the dynamics of global governance and resource utilization through a metaphorical comparison with the game of Scrabble. It examines how states, like players in the game, are provided with resources at birth, and must navigate the demands of their populations while pursuing their agendas. Drawing on Immanuel Wallerstein's Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory, the article discusses how rich nations maintain their power by exploiting poorer nations. It also explores three models of state behaviour: one focused on fulfilling citizens' needs, one prioritizing the desires of the government, and one where states fulfil their responsibilities while advancing hidden agendas. Using real-world examples such as Denmark, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Russia, and North Korea, the article highlights how political leaders often prioritize power consolidation over the welfare of their citizens, leading to resource mismanagement, corruption, and socio-political instability. The article ultimately critiques the tension between global moral order, power accumulation, and the needs of the people, underscoring the complex and often exploitative nature of global politics.

Keywords: scrabble, Immanuel Wallerstein, world systems theory, development

THE GAME OF GLOBAL POLITICS

Often researchers say that the conflict zones existing around the world, are present for the maintenance of the 1st world orders. Immanuel Wallerstein spoke of it, through his work and declaration of the Dependency Theory, followed up by an interpretive framework of the World Systems theory – first, firmly analysing the exploitative relationship that exists between the rich and poor countries, with the driving force of capitalism behind it, and second, understanding the deeper connection among multiple levels of the framework, respectively. Nonetheless, the story is simple – maintain the poor to maintain the rich.

However, this author has a different perspective.

Take the example of the game of Scrabble. Each of the players are handed a set of letters at random and they make of it what they can – words which may hold genuine meaning or simply

enable them to gain the maximum points through ‘triple word scores’ or lastly, make words which will help them be done and dusted with the game, satisfy the group they are playing with and move on to more important notions of life – such as, filling their own stomach.

Now apply this understanding to the world we live in.

Every state has a certain set of resources handed to them at birth – land, river systems, mountain ranges, mines filled with precious and non-renewable reserves, the list is endless. Now with these set of resources (the set of letters), each state and their machinery must fulfill the everincreasing desires of a thirst-filled population, focus upon the growth of the economy, and overall development, to list a few of their responsibilities. (this is representative of the words they must make to advance in the game) In accordance to this, ahead of the players lie three options – One, consider the demands and needs of the people, efficiently utilize the resources at hand and focus upon the vegetation cum sprouting of the newly born state. Here, there is the presence of a certain willingness on part of the machinery to tackle their responsibilities, head on.

Two, utilize the set of resources to fulfill the machinery’s own desires primarily, followed by the fulfillment of desires of the multitude on a need-based notion. Here, the level of willingness might have been reduced to a certain extent, as slowly, personal desires and human tendencies creep in.

The last option at hand, is where, simply due to the existence of a ‘global moral order’ and certain principles that guide the international community, a state fulfills their responsibilities, indeed as a ‘machine’ in its truest sense, and then continue the process of the attainment of their own hidden agendas.

THE THREE APPROACHES: GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCE UTILISATION

Let’s take a look at examples of the above types.

Does a nation solely ever exist for the purpose of looking after its citizens? Well, if we are to go into the nuances, not really. However, on the surface, there does exist a certain variety of it. One such would be Denmark. Relatively focused on a kempt atmosphere, it has consistently ranked as one of the highest on the World Happiness Report. There are certain reasons for this – With the provision of universal healthcare to all its citizens, Denmark ensures that everyone has access to medical services without financial barriers. This contributes to a high standard of health and longevity. Policies of Unemployment Insurance, Paid Paternal Leave, and Pensions,

offers comprehensive welfare benefits, which in turn, helps creating a strong social safety net. We also note that the country provides free and high-quality education to all citizens, regardless of background, providing to each person the opportunity to succeed and contribute to society.

Now, with the second type of player at the game, we could sight the example of Venezuela. Under the leadership of Hugo Chavez and later Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela became highly dependent on oil revenues, which were used to support the government's political agenda and military power. Chavez, for example, directed significant resources toward social programmes that supported his political base but also focused on consolidating personal and political power. Now, despite the country's oil wealth, Venezuela has faced severe economic collapse in recent years. Mismanagement, corruption, and the government's prioritization of retaining power led to hyperinflation, food and medicine shortages, and mass emigration. The desires of the government, especially in maintaining control, were prioritized over the economic welfare of the people.

Zimbabwe, under Robert Mugabe's rule, experienced significant mismanagement of its resources. His regime focused on consolidating power through land redistribution programmes and support for the military, while corruption was rampant at all levels of government. The country's economy collapsed, leading to hyperinflation, unemployment, and severe poverty. While the government directed resources towards the ruling party's survival, Zimbabwe's people faced widespread suffering. Much of the country's wealth was directed to the elite and political allies rather than improving public infrastructure or services.

Hobbes might be criticized for having a negative viewpoint of human nature, but one cannot deny the fact that these examples provide testimony to his description of human nature as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

The third and most important type of them all is the reality of today's world. Nietzsche argued that once individuals or groups gain power, this initial acquisition does not satisfy them; rather, it fuels a deeper desire to acquire more power. For Nietzsche, power was not just about domination over others but the ability to shape and transform oneself, overcome limitations, and assert one's will. This desire for more power becomes self-perpetuating: power is never fully satiated, and those who attain it are often driven by an insatiable need for further dominance and expansion, whether in personal life, social influence, or material wealth.

In the contemporary world, we do not lack examples of the above understanding. To start with the obvious, Vladimir Putin's rise to power in Russia was marked by consolidating control over key political, military, and economic institutions. Over time, he has created a situation where he now possesses the ability to remain president for life. This is tied to a combination of political maneuvering, constitutional changes, control over key institutions, and nationalism. The inevitability of him holding power indefinitely now looms over the present Russian Federation. In 2020, Putin's government passed constitutional amendments that reset his presidential term limits. Before this, the Russian Constitution restricted presidents to two consecutive terms, but the amendments allowed Putin to run for additional terms, effectively enabling him to remain in power until at least 2036. This change was seen as a strategic move to ensure that Putin could stay in power for the foreseeable future, possibly until his death. Here, if we question what the function of the apparent operative opposition is, it is safe to say that the Kremlin controls or influences most of the major media outlets, shaping public perception and suppressing dissenting voices. This allows Putin to maintain a stronghold on public opinion and minimize challenges to his leadership.

Putin's government has always cracked down on opposition leaders, political parties, and civil society organizations.

Russia's newest open ploy as a testament to this is the curious case of Alexei Navalny. As much as the Kremlin denies any involvement in his death and proclaims it to be "non-criminal," the situation at hand is obvious. The former leader of the opposition, Navalny actively published material about corruption in Russia, organized demonstrations, and described the ruling party – United Russia – as a "party of crooks and thieves." When he ran for the 2013 Moscow mayoral election and came in second with 27.2% of the vote, he was later barred from running for the 2018 presidential elections. In August 2020, he was hospitalized after being severely poisoned by a nerve agent, for which he accused Putin of being responsible. After a difficult political trajectory, on 16th February 2024, the Federal Penitentiary Service announced that Navalny had died in prison in Western Siberia after taking a walk and feeling unwell that morning. The statement from the prison stated that all necessary resuscitation measures were carried out but did not yield positive results.

A situation that was so surreal, that if one would take the story out and place it, as it is, in the mind of a director, the next Bollywood action movie would have a readymade script. Not to joke about the situation, it is pretty ironic that Russia feels the public of the global order would

believe such a story when the past attempts at Navalny's life are a clear indication of what must have happened in reality. Permanent solitary confinement, abuse, isolated punishment, and even more so, denial of the basic human right to life by not allowing his lawyers to supply medication for when he fell ill – the reality screamed deception where his death was concerned. However, in the game of Scrabble, there is always that one player, who ends up with only consonants and not a single vowel, resulting in them becoming incapable of making a word and throwing away their obedience to the rules, leading to them whatever they wished to – here, we get Kim Jongun. North Korea under him, represents a state that not only forgets the established rules of international conduct but also disregards the basic needs of its people in favour of consolidating power.

DIFFERENT NAME, SIMILAR GAME

At the end of the day, this is merely one blind example of the numerous encounters of such situations we can see around us. The dynamics of global power, governance, and resource utilization reflect a complex and multifaceted interplay between the desires of states and the needs of their populations. While some nations, like Denmark, genuinely prioritize the welfare of their citizens, others demonstrate the dangers of resource mismanagement and the prioritization of political agendas over public welfare. The cases of these nations reveal a clear tension between leadership driven by the desires of the few and the broader needs of the many. Leaders such as Putin exemplify the dangerous self-perpetuating cycle of power accumulation. As power becomes more concentrated, the desires of leaders evolve from governance toward domination, shaping their policies and actions in ways that serve not only the state but also their ambitions.

Ultimately, the ever-increasing demands of a global moral order, the complexities of international politics, and the internal desires for personal and national power intertwine in a game much like Scrabble – where states, with their unique sets of resources, must navigate the board and play according to the rules of the global order, but with the added layers of hidden agendas and power plays that shape the course of history. As such, the narrative that emerges is not just about the survival and flourishing of nations, but the ongoing struggle for dominance, control, and influence. The balance between serving the collective good and advancing individual or national desires continues to drive the global political landscape, with

the powerful often exploiting the vulnerable in pursuit of ever-greater power. The cycle is relentless and, in many ways, inevitable.

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The Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Global Energy Crisis:

Economic Implications and Long-term Geopolitical Shifts

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ABSTRACT

*Russia's sudden invasion of Ukraine on 24th February, 2022 has been instrumental in invoking adverse impact globally. The conflict has been responsible for impacting international trade, developed as well as developing economies, energy security, food security, prices of commodities, financial markets, and global supply chains. The Russia-Ukraine Conflict has also brought about long-term shifts in geopolitical strategies as well. However, the conflict has struck a massive blow on the global energy markets, heavily impacting the demand for energy resources that have reduced leading to the surge in energy prices, followed by strategic decisions like sanctions taken by nations against Russia and vice versa. This article will take a close look at the crisis faced by the global energy markets owing to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. **In particular**, we shall **explore** and **simultaneously discuss** the impacts on energy dependency and vulnerabilities exposed by the conflict, the impact of Western Sanctions on the Russian as well as global energy sector, long-term geopolitical shifts, and measures adopted to mitigate the energy crisis and ensure energy security. The article will aim to address these issues and try to recommend ways for recovery from the crisis.*

Keywords: *Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Energy Markets, Energy Crisis, Global Economy, Geopolitics*

Globally, the intensification of the Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to changes in energy policies, trade relations, and sanctions. The global energy landscape is changing as a result of the ensuing volatility in energy prices, shifts in demand and supply, and the hunt for new energy sources. The economic and geopolitical effects of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on energy markets are examined in this article, along with how countries are adjusting to the new situation and the wider ramifications for global energy security.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFLICT ON GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

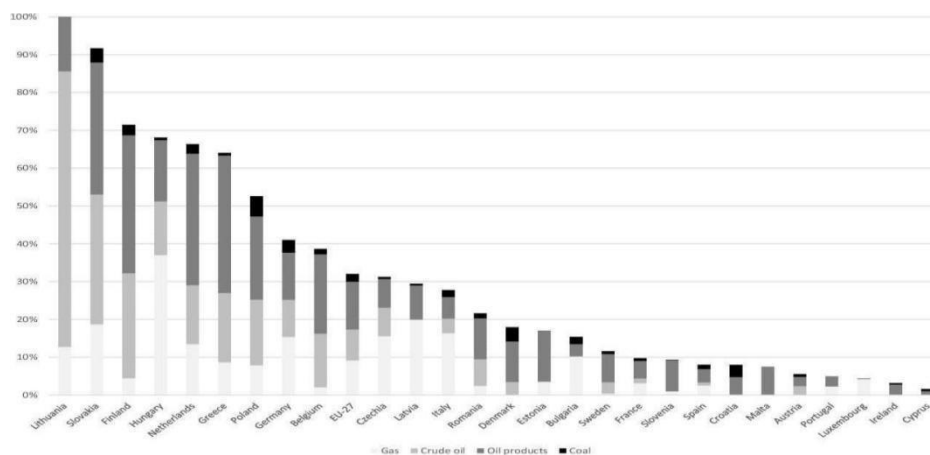
The conflict has fundamentally altered the global energy landscape, speeding up transitions in energy policies.

- The Russia-Ukraine conflict has disrupted Russian energy exports. It was one of the largest energy exporters in the world before the conflict. In 2020, its natural gas exports accounted for 16.07% of the world, oil exports 11.08%, and coal exports 17.08% (Ruan, W., 2023). Ruan, W. (2023) also states that fuel and energy product exports accounted for 54.3% of Russia's total exports, and contributed 40%-50% of the government fiscal revenues. However, sanctions and price caps imposed on Russian crude oil exports limits Russia's ability to fund the war. Gas exports have also been severely curtailed. The Nord Stream Pipelines, which supplied much of this gas, was damaged in September 2022. This further diminished Russian gas flows to Europe, threatening energy security.
- The conflict has been responsible for an increase in energy prices, particularly in Europe. Fluctuations in prices have been the outcomes of markets trying to assess the potential implications for global energy supplies. In the first two weeks after the invasion, the prices of oil, coal and gas went up by around 40%, 130% and 180% respectively. Gas prices also drove up wholesale electricity prices in the Euro area. In fact, an increase in prices of crude oil had led to an overall increase in domestic prices (Sun, M. *et al.*, 2024)
- Shifts in energy and trade have also been observed due to the conflict. Diversification of energy supplies became a common feature as Europe reduced their reliance on Russian energy and shifted to the U.S., Qatar, Norway with respect to Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports. Norway and the U.S. became the European Union's main gas suppliers in 2023, representing 30% and 19% of the EU's total gas imports respectively.
- Many emerging economies faced a surge in energy import costs which contributed to them facing inflation and economic challenges. Countries which are dependent on energy imports, like Africa and South Asia, had to struggle in managing the increased financial burden. Conversely, energy-exporting economies saw an increase in revenues, but this also highlighted the need for economic diversifications amid global shifts towards renewable resources.

- There have been significant geopolitical realignments. For instance, Russia has strengthened its transatlantic ties and cooperation on energy security. This is because the U.S. has become a key LNG supplier to Europe, as we discussed above. Also, Russia has increased its energy exports to China and India, thereby fostering closer ties with these nations. China and India have largely increased their imports of Russian oil by 22 % and 111%, respectively.

EUROPE'S ENERGY DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA – VULNERABILITIES EXPOSED BY THE CONFLICT

Europe's reliance on Russian energy, particularly, on natural gas, has been a critical aspect of its energy landscape for long. The war in Ukraine and subsequent conflicts between Russia and the West exposed Europe's vulnerabilities in terms of energy security, volatility of prices and political leverages (Enescu, A., & Szeles, M. R., 2023). Before the crisis in 2022, the EU received 30% of its energy from Russia, of which gas accounted one-third, while oil and some coal historically accounted for two thirds (Becker, T., Åslund, A., 2024). Fig. 5 summarizes the Russian component in EU's energy balance, that is, sources of the dependence on Russian energy for EU countries.



Sources of dependence on Russian energy for EU countries

Source: Eurostat

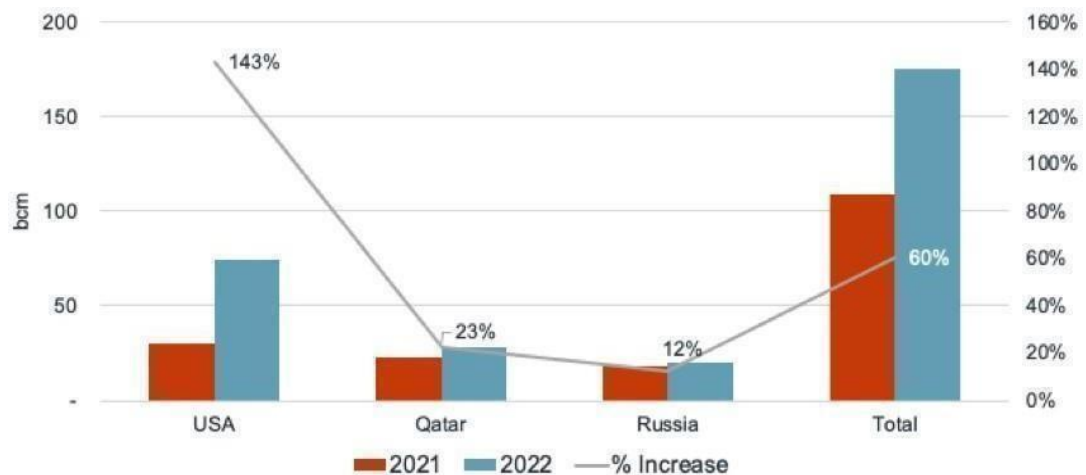
European economies like Germany, Austria and Italy were highly dependent on Russian gas fuels to heat their industries, heat homes and generate electricity. Beyond gas Russia was also

a significant supplier of oil and coal. In 2021, the EU imported about 25% of its crude oil and around 45% of its coal from Russia (Huang, H. et al., 2024). However, the conflict heckled the energy dependence of EU on Russia and exposed vulnerabilities of energy dependence:

- Gas supply cuts highlighted Europe's vulnerability with the gradual escalation of the conflict. As sanctions were imposed, Russia's reduction of natural gas exports to Europe, cutting off supplies to countries supporting Ukraine, left Europe scrambling for alternatives. The sabotage of the main pipelines, particularly the Nord Stream pipelines, further exposed the fragility of Europe's energy infrastructure. This incident highlighted the risks associated with over-reliance on a single supplier and infrastructure concentrated in specific geopolitical regions.
- The sudden reduction in Russian gas supplies led to skyrocketing energy prices across Europe. Natural gas prices increased several times over driving electricity prices higher as well. High energy costs fueled up the cost of living and production across Europe (Guan, Y. *et al.*, 2023). This put immense pressure on households, industries, and government budgets. In some countries, this sparked political unrest as citizens protested against rising energy costs.
- The conflict exposed how Russia had effectively used energy as a geopolitical weapon. By reducing or threatening to reduce gas supplies, Russia was able to exert pressure on Europe, knowing that some countries, particularly Germany, were deeply reliant on Russian gas for both industrial and residential needs.
- The energy crisis tested the political unity of the EU. Countries with different levels of dependency on Russian energy had varied responses to sanctions and embargoes. Some, like Germany, were reluctant to take immediate drastic steps, while others, like Poland and Baltic states, urged stronger actions against Russia.
- Lack of immediate alternatives have been relevant. Europe's ability to replace Russian gas with other resources, such as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from the U.S., Qatar or Norway, was constrained by infrastructural limitations. Many European countries lacked sufficient LNG terminals, and gas storage facilities were insufficient to buffer against sudden supply disruptions. Rapid changes to alternative energy resources like wind, solar power etc. was not sufficient to compensate for the shortcomings from reduced Russian supply of gas. The crisis revealed that Europe's energy transition wasn't yet advanced to shield it from the impact of fossil fuel supply disruptions.

Europe's Total LNG Imports

2022 vs 2021



Source: Institute of Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), IHS Markit

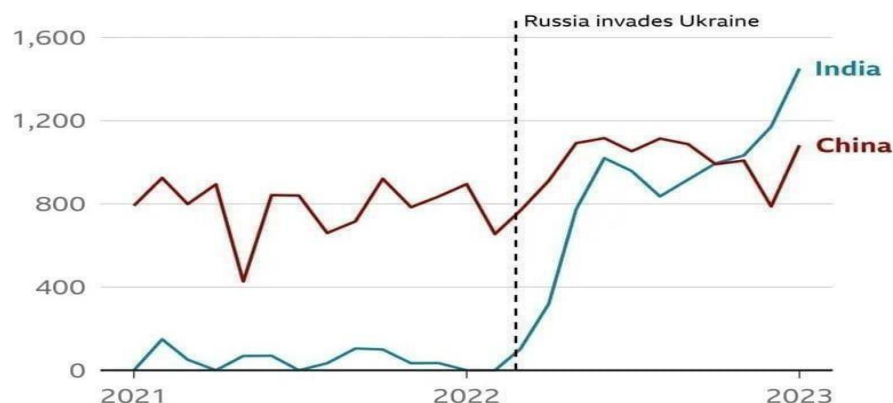
ECONOMIC IMPACT OF WESTERN SANCTIONS ON RUSSIAN AND GLOBAL ENERGY SECTOR

- Impact on Revenue:** Price caps and embargoes were imposed on Russian oil exports by EU and G7 countries to limit Moscow's revenue without completely removing Russian oil from global markets (Russia's war on Ukraine – Topics – IEA). Additionally, the EU banned seaborne imports of Russian oil and petroleum products. However, the oil price-cap imposed by G7 is not working and Russia has continued selling oil exported via the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean. Rather EIU oil embargo proved more effective in tightening the Russian oil revenues which faced contractions owing to Russia being forced to sell its oil at discounted rates to India, China and Turkey (Hartvig, Á. D. *et al.*, 2024).
- Economic and Domestic Impacts:** Since energy exports form a significant portion of Russia's federal budget (Ateed, E. H., 2023). Falling oil and gas revenues have created high inflation, forcing Russia to turn to its own domestic budget and cut spending elsewhere. Domestic issues add further stress (Guan, Y., Yan, J., Shan, Y. *et al.*). With less Russian oil

and gas flowing into traditional markets, supply and demand imbalances are driving up energy prices, especially in Europe. Lower revenues and reduced foreign exchange inflows from energy have contributed to fluctuations in the value of Russian ruble, pressurizing the domestic economy further.

- **Shift in Trade Flows:** Russia has pivoted its energy exports to Asian countries, especially China and India. While these nations have increased purchases, the logistical challenges (such as longer transportation distances and the need for new infrastructure) have increased costs, thereby, complicated the trade. Russia's energy infrastructure, particularly pipelines, has been oriented towards Europe for decades. The redirected flows of Asia have revealed the limitations of existing pipeline routes and highlighted the need for new investments, which is challenging under sanctions.

Russia's oil exports to India and China before and after the invasion of Ukraine



Source: Kpler, BBC

- **Inflation and Economic Restructuring:** Rojas-Romagosa, H. (2024, March 1) states that increasing energy prices during the crisis has contributed to inflation worldwide, affecting transportation costs and food production. Inflationary shocks have prompted Central banks to tighten monetary policy which leads to slower growth and potential recessions in some regions. High energy prices have forced European industries to reconsider their production strategies. Long-term deindustrialization in parts of Europe is expected, unless energy costs are mitigated.

LONG TERM GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS AS A RESULT OF ENERGY CRISIS CAUSED BY THE CONFLICT:

- ***Reduced Energy Influence:*** Russia's use of energy as a geopolitical weapon failed as Europe has reduced its reliance on Russian oil and gas. This has weakened Russia's economic influence over Europe, a region that was previously one of its largest energy customers. Thus, Russia has become increasingly dependent on China and India to buy discounted oil and gas, implying Russia's increased dependency on Asian powers economically now. This also hints at shifting the balance of powers in these relationships. For instance, China and India can come to terms in lowering prices, reducing Russia's bargaining power.
- ***New Global Alliances and Partnerships:*** Transatlantic alliances have strengthened, with the U.S. stepping in as a major LNG supplier to Europe (Skalamera, M. 2023). This alliance is likely to continue in the long term, improving U.S influence in European energy markets. Countries like Qatar, Australia, and Algeria have gained prominent footing as key energy suppliers to Europe. Diversification of supply sources has increased their geopolitical importance, giving them greater influence in global energy politics.
- ***Impact on the Global South:*** Developing countries like Africa and South Asia has experienced increased inflation and economic hardships as a result of the disproportionate effects owing to the energy crisis during the conflict. It has become more challenging for them to secure affordable energy as they compete with Europe and other developed economies for LNG supplies. Countries in the Global South that did not align with Western sanctions have benefitted from discounted Russian oil. A realignment is followed by balancing ties with the West and Moscow.
- ***European Geopolitical Strategy and Independence:*** The European Union's 'REPowerEU' Plan aims to eliminate reliance on Russian fossil fuels by 2030, with a focus on diversifying energy imports, building renewable energy capacity, and improving energy efficiency. This hints at a long-term strategic autonomy of energy independence. The crisis has also highlighted the need for a stronger European military and security framework to ensure stable energy supply.
- ***Russia's Strategic Decline:*** Russia's economy is likely to weaken due to the long-term economic isolation imposed by Western sanctions. Russia's ability to maintain its oil and gas infrastructure will be challenging without access to Western technology and investment.

This will lead to decline in energy production over time. Russia is likely to deepen its involvement in Eurasian institutions like the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and strengthen ties with China through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, this implies an expansion in China's economic and political influence as Moscow shifts to a subordinate role in the Sino Russian partnership.

STEPS TAKEN TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS – STRENGTHENING ENERGY SECURITY

The energy crisis which stemmed during the Russia-Ukraine conflict has threatened global energy security to a great extent. With more focus on securing reliable access to energy resources, this could lead to higher competition for acquiring suitable sources for energy. We thus explore options that countries or regions may resort to or consider for stable and reliable access to energy resources.

- ***Diverging energy resources:*** Diversification of suppliers such as reducing dependency on Russian energy (particularly natural gas) by sourcing from alternative suppliers (the U.S., Qatar, Norway and Algeria), expanding infrastructure for increasing LNG imports, accelerating investment in renewable energy resources to decrease reliance on fossil fuels over time may serve impactful in securing energy stability (Rizaldi, B. A. et al., 2023).
- ***Strategic Energy Reserves:*** Increasing stockpiles of oil, coal and gas can provide a buffer for supply chain disruptions. Strengthening coordination within groups like the International Energy Agency (IEA) or the European Union (EU) can collectively help to manage energy stocks and mitigate shortages.
- ***Infrastructure and connectivity:*** Investing in alternative pipeline routes that bypass Russia or Ukraine, such as the Southern Gas Corridor or pipelines from Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean, expanding LNG regasification facilities to increase capacity for importing LNG from global suppliers, enhancing electricity grid connections between countries for more efficient energy supply may be effective options.
- ***Energy efficiency measures:*** Encouraging energy-saving initiatives for households, industries, and transportation to reduce overall demand, implementing stricter regulations on energy efficiency in buildings, appliances, and industries to cut

energyconsumption – some effective measures that can be considered to tackle energy security crisis (Sadowska, E., 2022).

- **International Cooperation:** Regional energy partnerships (like the EU Energy Union) can help ensure the sharing of energy resources and to manage disruptions efficiently. Supporting the peaceful use of nuclear power in countries that safely develop and operate the same can help reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- **Regulatory and Financial Support:** Liberalizing energy markets to allow for more competition and investment, can help countries pivot to alternative suppliers more easily. Providing subsidies or tax cuts for renewable energy projects and energy efficiency upgrades, can help accelerate transition away from dependency on imported fossil fuels.
- **Protection of Critical Energy Infrastructure:** To prevent cyberattacks on pipelines, grids and storage facilities, cybersecurity for energy infrastructure must be strengthened. Pipelines, storage facilities, and power plants must also be guarded from potential sabotages or damages related to military conflicts (Webster, J., 2023).
- **Diplomatic Efforts:** Alternative energy suppliers must be kept under the diplomatic lens to secure long-term energy partnerships. Efforts must be put in to de-escalate the RussiaUkraine conflict itself, thereby, stabilize global energy markets.

CONCLUSION

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has profoundly reshaped the global energy landscape, exposing the interconnectedness of geopolitics and energy markets. **To combat the energy crisis across the globe, strategies such as diverging energy resources and handling energy reserves strategically might serve as measures of mitigation. Protection of critical energy infrastructure and apt energy efficiency measures can also be adopted in this light. From a geopolitical standpoint, diplomatic efforts in enhancing international co-operation and providing financial support may serve the purpose to combat the global energy crisis.** In sum, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the resulting energy crisis has highlighted the urgent need for a balanced approach to energy security, economic stability, and environmental sustainability. Moving forward, the lessons from this conflict should guide policymakers in building resilient energy systems and fostering international cooperation to mitigate similar

crises in the future. The conflict serves as a stark reminder of the inextricable links between energy, economics, and global stability.

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AREA STUDIES:
EXPLORING REGIONS

CARICOM and the Promise of Regional Integration: Opportunities and Challenges for Small States

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ABSTRACT

The world is witnessing rapid changes, and with change comes challenges. Similarly, CARICOM, or the Caribbean Community is grappling with the complexities of globalization, economic integration, and sustainable development. Thus, the aim of this article is to figure out a simple question: Can CARICOM navigate through these rough waters or will it capsize under pressure? Are CARICOM's current policies effective in promoting economic integration within the region? What role does the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) play in this context? And what kind of challenges does it still face despite making significant progress in trade, security, and sustainability? This article tries to provide an overview of CARICOM's economic integration efforts, the balance between economic growth and social equity in labour policies, and explore the strategies that are required to navigate future challenges which will ensure sustainable development in the Caribbean region.

Keywords: CARICOM, Economy, Integration, Trade, Development



Map of CARICOM Member States

The Caribbean Community and Commons Market was established in 1973 by the Treaty of Chaguaramas and comprises 15 small states. It falls under the category of Regional Trade Agreement which serves as an essential tool for economic growth, regional integration, political cooperation and pooling of resources among smaller states that are striving to enhance their collective influence domestically and internationally. CARICOM adheres to a model of regional cooperation that aims at addressing the challenges that small economies face in an ever-growing competitive and diverse global landscape. Its main objectives are to promote economic integration, coordinate foreign policies and cooperation among its members, and also to ensure that the benefits of integration are shared equitably among the member states. However, the impact of its goals of liberalization of trade and economic collaboration under frameworks like the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), has been mixed. While some progress has been made, the benefits it ultimately offers seem to be unevenly distributed among member states, exhibiting the complexities of fostering integration among its member states with vastly different capacities and resources. Thus, exhibiting the need to explore the underlying reason for these mixed results.

OVERVIEW OF CARICOM'S ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND OBJECTIVES

CARICOM or The Caribbean Community provides a platform for small Caribbean states to unite and successfully integrate their economic policies. Thus, it becomes imperative to analyse the profound impact globalisation has had in advancing its economic integration efforts. Globalisation has significantly reshaped the economic terrain for CARICOM member states serving as a catalyst for both growth and new challenges. Integration of the global markets, for instance, has enabled these small economies to pursue liberalised trade policies, attract foreign investment, and expand their access to international markets. However, it has also resulted in increased global competition that has exposed structural vulnerabilities in its member states such as limited product diversification, high transportation costs, and regulatory mismatches that ultimately hinders deeper intra-regional integration. This evolving global landscape lays emphasis on the need for CARICOM to develop economic strategies so that the benefits of globalisation are more equitably distributed across its diverse member states. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the evolution of CARICOM's efforts regarding economic integration and its impacts on member states.

CARICOM put forward policies of liberalization of trade that harmonized foreign policies and ensured that collective efforts were being made in the development of its economies. Thus, trade forms the core of CARICOM's mission as it recognizes the economic benefits that small states can derive from enhanced access to regional and international markets. CARICOM member states, therefore exhibit higher trade-to-GDP ratios in comparison to other Latin American countries, reflecting their dependence

on international trade. However, intra-regional trade trails behind as it accounts for only 6.6% of total trade, a decline from previous years. This can be attributed to reasons like low product diversification, high transportation costs, and the continued dependence on historical trade relations with foreign nations like the United States and Europe. Additionally, high intra-regional tariffs and regulatory misalignment also discourage trade, preventing the realisation of economic integration. CARICOM also lags behind in effectively implementing its policies like Single Market and Economy (CSME) which are designed to allow the free movement of goods, labour and capital, further constricting the free movement of goods, capital, and labour. Over the years, CARICOM's average tariff rates have remained higher than their Latin American and OECD counterparts which further discourages involvement in trade. Efficiency in trade facilitation, through customs procedures and document automation also continues to face hindrances in the region. While Trinidad and Tobago perform significantly well in trade facilitation indices, the majority of its member states still lag by considerable margins. CARICOM's participation in Global Value Chains (GVC) is limited as most of the member states play the role of users of foreign inputs rather than exporters of finished goods and intermediaries. However, there are some exceptions, including countries like Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, which are primarily energy-producing countries and contribute to GVCs through oil and gas exports. Therefore, policies that promote industrial diversification and attract foreign investment will be essential for expanding participation in GVCs.

The trade landscape of CARICOM economies is dominated by services. Tourism is the most significant contributor as it accounts for over 50% of service trade in countries such as Barbados, Jamaica, and St. Lucia. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the vulnerability of the sector as a whole. Firstly, the gaps in transportation infrastructure when international and intra-regional travel was reduced. Secondly, it also resulted in limited air connectivity and high travel costs, especially following the closure of regional airline LIAT (which resumed again recently in 2024), therefore reflecting the need for investment in affordable and reliable transportation systems.

Energy integration is also an important sector within CARICOM's economic plan but the paradox lies in the region's heavy dependence on fossil fuels with its imports currently constituting 13% of the region's GDP. Despite its potential for supplying renewable energy. Initiatives like the Eastern Caribbean Gas Pipeline and projects on the regional electricity grid interconnection are pursued to address these challenges but the progress has been slow. This is due to factors such as high costs, regulatory fragmentation, and financing constraints. (Allub, L., & Schliesser, R., 2021).

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND LABOUR POLICIES: BALANCING GROWTH AND SOCIAL EQUITY

With the economic impacts discussed before, some challenges and opportunities for CARICOM could be identified in the sphere of labour management. The CARICOM has to address both the economic,

social, and political realities which require a more proactive and integrative approach toward labour management which is a necessity for building regional growth and development.

Globalization has had a significant impact on the Caribbean labour market. Traditionally, the region relied on preferential trade agreements for its traditional exports, such as sugar and bananas. However, global trade liberalization has eroded such arrangements. For instance, The WTO's Uruguay round forced CARICOM states to compete in the global market based on reciprocal agreements (Leslie, 2002). In response, CARICOM has taken on the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) as a strategy for economic integration. The CSME allows the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people and creates opportunities for intra-regional collaboration. *"There was a novel notion of creating growth triangles within the CSME introduced by Denis Benn modelled after the India-Malaysia-Singapore (IMS) triangle"* (Edward Greene, 2014). Denis Benn suggested such growth triangles considering the petroleum/natural gas resources of Trinidad and Tobago and the potential of its financial surpluses as a "pivot" or "growth zone catalyst" for elaborating a strategy of integrated development in the Caribbean. In this context, two triangles have been identified with Trinidad as the axis. Firstly, the more natural resource-endowed countries, namely, Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica, and secondly, the service-oriented countries of Barbados and the OECS and also to establish market niches in emerging economic powers such as China and India. These policies are significant for production integration and regionally shared economic goals. Labour policies in CARICOM, therefore, need to be both pro-growth and pro-social equity, as the key priorities are employment creation, enterprise development, and appropriate skills training. Special attention is given to promoting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and harmonizing labour laws amongst the member states. Thus, the need for social dialogue among governments, employers, and workers' organizations is emphasized as a critical tool for effective policymaking. Other pressing issues include youth and gender disparities. High levels of unemployment among the youth and women (Admin, 2015). This demanded targeted interventions to which initiatives such as the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors' Programme and the proposed Commission on Youth Development were responses. Such steps were taken in the direction of empowering the abovementioned persons and reducing barriers to employment.

"Human capital development is at the heart of CARICOM's strategy for global competitiveness. The Tertiary enrollment rates in the region which are relatively low, at 15%, compared to 25% in Latin America and 60% in East Asia, are indicative of the need for greater access to education. Therefore, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) emerges as a significant component in equipping the workforce with skills in line with the modern economy" (CARICOM HRD 2030 Strategy – CARICOM, n.d.). Standardization of qualifications through regional agreements and frameworks has further enhanced labour mobility and competitiveness. Migration is both a challenge

and an opportunity for CARICOM. This is a challenge because the "brain drain" of educated professionals, whether teachers or doctors, threatens to drain the brains out of a region. Initiatives such as the UNDP TOKTEN programme were taken to encourage more skilled nationals to contribute to the development of regions (Downes S Andrew 2008). *"Remittances from the diaspora are also an important source of income for many Caribbean households."* CARICOM is also committed to peoplecentered development that focuses on decent work, which encompasses employment rights, social protection, and social dialogue. Gender equality, youth employment, and health issues such as HIV/AIDS and stigma prevalent in workplaces are also taken into account. Thus, The Charter of Civil Society and other such initiatives were a conscious step taken towards involving diverse groups, including youth and women, in governance and decision-making processes. (Edward Greene 2014)

Labour organizations play a role in advancing these goals. Trade unions serve as focal points for worker advocacy and are instrumental in promoting awareness of the CSME's benefits.

Opportunities for labour in CARICOM, like the difficulties it faces, are closely integrated with the region's other economic and social goals. This requires innovative responses to globalization that should tap into the regional integration momentum and human development potential. In short, CARICOM can take advantage of its skilled, mobile, and inclusive workforce to thrive amidst the complexity of the global economy while ensuring that its people reap sustainable and equitable development. (Downes S Andrew 2008).

NAVIGATING CARICOM'S FUTURE

In a policy meeting in 2024, Ambassador Wayne McCook provided an outline of the progress, priorities, and strategies that CARICOM must remember to navigate the next 50 years in the region. (*CARICOM Senior Official Provides Overview of Future Policy Challenges*, 2024)

Firstly, his address highlighted CARICOM's ongoing efforts in trade, security, financial reform, and sustainability, emphasizing the need for self-defined, actionable solutions. At the heart of CARICOM's agenda is regional integration. Thus, the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (RTC) allowed for achievements such as the abolition of establishment rights and service provision restrictions by 2006. Still, full free movement for all citizens, an ultimate goal, has not been realized mainly due to persisting policy adjustment and implementation differences between member states. The need to further strengthen Intra-regional trade thus arises which is accomplished by promoting agricultural competitiveness and food security through the "25 by 25" programme and updates to the Common External Tariff (CET). However, CARICOM remains cautious about free trade agreements to ensure that they reflect the priorities and concerns of member states and support its own interests. At the

multilateral level, CARICOM is very proactive in forums such as the WTO, advocating for a dedicated Small Island Developing States (SIDS) programme.

Secondly, mechanisms like the Council on Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE) and the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) address regional stability thus making crime and security a focus of its integration architecture in the area of peace and security.

Thirdly, sustainable development is another critical area for CARICOM. SIDS suffer disproportionate impacts from climate change, so CARICOM has amplified its advocacy for climate action in international forums. Through regional initiatives, it re-emphasizes renewable energy, green and blue economies, and sustainable practices. Ambassador McCook also advocated for leveraging the creative industries to develop a strong orange economy in the region by emphasizing the region's cultural richness and potential for innovation.

Fourthly, he identified health and social development as the main areas of regional cooperation. While CARICOM played an essential role during the COVID-19 pandemic, further investment in health systems and regional coordination will be needed to address the emerging threats that are likely to arise.

Lastly, CARICOM is also pushing for digital transformation as a priority for economic growth. It believes in developing a regional digital strategy to integrate e-commerce, ICT and innovation, which will help bridge technology gaps and enhance competitiveness. In balancing regional and national interests, it aims to foster stakeholder engagement while ensuring that policies reflect the needs of Caribbean people as mentioned by Dr. Carla N. Barnett, in her speech in 2024.

Looking forward, CARICOM needs to have policies that are for its people. By being inclusive, sustainable, and innovative the region will have a prosperous future. As Ambassador McCook stressed, "Navigate we must," which means that CARICOM has to study, strategize, and act to face challenges while also building on the successes over the past five decades. (CARICOM Senior Official Provides Overview of Future Policy Challenges, 2024)

CONCLUSION

CARICOM represents an important framework for promoting economic integration, political collaboration, and sustainable development for the member states. The bloc has made strides in promoting cooperation and shared growth. However, there are challenges to be faced, such as uneven benefit distribution, limited trade diversification, infrastructural gaps, and hurdles in policy implementation. Moreover, the effect of climate change also threatens the existence of the region, as the rising sea level, extreme weather events, and ecosystem disruption have the potential to destroy livelihoods and economies. To address these challenges CARICOM has undertaken these policies

themselves while urging other economic powers to follow sustainable development goals to deal with climate change. Therefore, strategies that include intra-regional collaboration among its member states and the continuation of leveraging of collective resources become essential in strengthening its economic and social frameworks and adapting to a rapidly changing global landscape while remaining committed to equity, sustainability, and innovation. (Remarks by Dr. Carla N. Barnett, CARICOM Secretary-General, 2024, November).

As CARICOM faces pressures of globalization and climate vulnerability, it needs to put at the core of its policies the empowerment of its people, the enhancement of regional competitiveness, and the fight for climate justice in the international arena. CARICOM only after embracing these imperatives can turn its challenges into opportunities and ensure a unified and resilient community that can thrive in the decades ahead.

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The Dragon's Ambitions: Assessing China's Strategic Goals in the Indo-Pacific Region

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades the Indo-Pacific region has gained significant traction, contributing to the imminent future of global geopolitics. China has substantially increased its military expenditure, funding a wide range of military projects and weapons, paired with anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities. This expansion seeks to strengthen China's regional influence and counter-balance the presence of the United States and other regional powers in the region. These endeavours intend to prohibit countries from operating in China's self-acclaimed maritime and air domains. The Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) of the United States is directly competing with the One Belt One Road policy, to counter China's position and affiliations in the region. China has also developed into one of the world's largest single creditor nations, which has significantly aided its attempts to undermine the sovereignty and autonomy of countries within and beyond the Indo-Pacific region. China's expansionist policies have resulted in territorial disputes with sixteen nations, of which ten concern maritime boundaries, primarily in the South China Sea. This paper aims to explore the vast geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region and assess the strategic role of China in shaping the regional power structures and security frameworks.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Indo-Pacific Strategy, Regional hegemony, South China Sea.

The Indo-Pacific area is a configuration of 36 countries, 25,000 islands, seven of the world's eight fastest-growing markets, and seven of the world's ten largest armies. By 2030, four of the world's top economies—Japan, India, China, and Indonesia—will reside in the region. This region's strategic importance in the 21st century stems from the growing association between the Western Pacific littoral states and the Indian Ocean region. Over the years, the region has undergone major environmental, demographic, civil, military, and political changes. This area represents a new reality concerning global maritime security and forging new alliances to counter the expanding threats of regional hegemony (Babcock-Lumish, et al., 2020)

Several stakeholders across continents show a growing interest in this region owing to its dynamic economic and security paradigm. The Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) seeks to expand its hegemony over the region by the virtue of infrastructural development and its escalating military presence. Beijing has been accused of unilaterally dominating offshore resources across South China Sea while undermining the territorial sovereignty of the neighbouring states. China's Nine-Dash Line claim has been widely criticised for having no coherent legal basis and has been rejected by the United Nations Law of Sea Tribunal in 2012. However, rejecting all opposition China published its New Standard Map in 2023, a week before the G-20 Summit renewing its legal claims to most of South China Sea in an attempt to legitimise its presence over the territorial and maritime zones of Philippines, Malaysia and India (Jochheim & Lobo, 2023).

The United States has consistently prioritised the Indo-Pacific area as a key part of its development and diplomatic strategy. America's concern regarding the Chinese influence in the area has been manifested in the form of the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), the National Security Strategy, the Pacific Deterrence Initiative along with several bilateral agreements such as the Indo-US Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific region. In order to deter the Dragon's influence, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), an informal forum gained traction to foster a collective vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. This partnership translated its common values through their joint naval exercises and a virtual QUAD meeting in 2020. The future of QUAD entails launching a new regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) and the first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025. The US-China rivalry has substantial implications for the economic and security architecture of the region. In response to perceived provocations from the United States, the People's Republic of China has strategically employed economic and security measures, including extending credit lines to various nations, advancing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and developing its Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capabilities (The White House, 2022).

CHINA'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION:

OBJECTIVES, APPROACHES AND IMPLICATIONS

China's primary goal in the Indo-Pacific sector is to create a vast spread regional hegemony by consolidating its position as the world's largest creditor nation, modernizing its military artillery, and, finally, by pursuing a plan of constructing a maritime empire in the South China Sea (SCS).

The Indo-Pacific region exhibits strong economic resilience and continues to drive global economic growth through export-oriented development strategies, which it has furthered by making strategic investments in several countries. An Official Development Assistance (ODA) of \$17 billion in Sri Lanka in 2015 and \$46 billion in Pakistan in 2020 justifies China's vigour to construct and complete the OBOR

and String of Pearls. What sets China apart in the region is its strong political will to foster a holistic economic restructuring. China's economic transition towards an inclusive and sustainable growth path dispenses many opportunities for the Indo-Pacific region, primarily through expanding trade and investment in areas of rising value.

China's rebalancing from external to domestic demand implies that China while remaining a hub for regional production networks, is increasingly an important source of final demand which is closely linked to the internationalisation of the Chinese Renminbi (RMB). China is also projected to be the world's largest energy importer and a secure and sustained supply of energy is key to its national security. Therefore, free and safe maritime routes in the Pacific and Indian Oceans are lifelines for China's energy trade.

Economic advances like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) lead to regional economic development and interconnectivity, which could exclude the U.S. from the region. Thus, a more confrontational strategy has been adopted first on the notion of 'Rebalancing to Asia' and then on 'enhancing quadrilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' to balance China's rapid rise in the region and monopolizing power (Chawla, 2024).

CHINA'S MILITARY MODERNISATIONS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

China's military modernisation is advancing rapidly, supported by a significantly increased defence budget (USD 232 Billion in 2024). This surge in spending reflects the country's ambition to enhance its military capabilities and extend its influence throughout the Indo-Pacific region. The modernization effort includes the development of advanced weaponry, diversifying its ICBM fleet to include multiple missile types, such as the DF-5, DF-31, and the DF-41, an expansion of its nuclear stockpile, and improvements in areas such as cyber warfare, space operations, and electronic warfare. Beijing is also focused on strengthening its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategies to prevent adversaries from operating freely within its region. To further bolster its military reach, China is exploring the establishment of overseas military bases. This initiative is closely linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to expand the operational range of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and enhance its power projection capabilities (Reuters Staff, 2024).

At the same time, China has been aggressively asserting its territorial claims in the South China Sea, using coercive tactics to undermine the sovereignty of neighbouring countries and seize control of vital offshore resources. By challenging the existing maritime order, China aims to dominate key shipping lanes and limit access to fishing zones. Moreover, China's growing military actions toward Taiwan, including frequent military drills and diplomatic pressure, have escalated tensions in the

Taiwan Strait. Its assertiveness in the East China Sea and along the India-China border has also contributed to increased instability in the region (Mastro, 2024).

Thus, one can say, China's swift military modernization and expansionist policies are reshaping the regional security landscape. Its rising assertiveness, combined with its pursuit of A2/AD capabilities, poses a challenge to the current regional order and raises concerns among neighbouring nations and global stakeholders.

CHALLENGING THE MARITIME ORDER: CHINA'S ACTIONS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

China's territorial claim to most of the South China Sea is a "core interest" issue of China's territorial integrity. China claims sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly scatterings of artificial islands and the associated exclusive economic zones, and indeed most of the South China Sea under the questionable "nine dash line." This brings China into maritime and territorial disputes with the ASEAN countries namely, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam (Congressional Research Service, 2021).

Chinese strategy in the South China Sea has been to establish clear physical military control of these waters, and avoid sovereignty talks at the regional or international level. Beijing remains keen to localize the issue and avoid the 'interference' of outside nations. As the international maritime legal regime evolved, China began to codify its claims to maritime rights through the passage of domestic legislation. These laws harmonized China's legal system with the requirements of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Economically, jurisdiction over these waters would give China access to the maritime resources of the South China Sea, especially hydrocarbons and marine life. China's commitment to its claims in the South China Sea is long-standing and unlikely to change. A delaying strategy that seeks to consolidate China's claims and deter other states from strengthening their own claims only raises further obstacles to future compromise (Salleh et al., 2021).

A NEW COLD WAR IN THE INDO-PACIFIC?

China's strategic ambition is to evolve into the dominant force in the Indo-Pacific area. To attain this goal, it is deploying its military, economic, and diplomatic resources. Given its current trajectory, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is likely to maintain its current economic and military policies while attempting to prolong the resolution of the South China Sea issue. However, if the United States takes a more active attitude in the region, it risks sparking an arms race and undermining the sovereignty of nations within China's economic sphere of influence.

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The Nation with Two Nationalisms: Answers to the Bangladesh Crisis '24 Lies in Underlying Shifts in National Identity

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 Bangladesh movement has marked a re(?) -definition of the idea of 'Bangladesh', breaking away from decades of partisan and ideological conflict between Bengali nationalism and Bangladeshi nationalism. While Sheikh Hasina's ousting has incapacitated proponents of Bengali nationalism, Mujibur's legacy of the secular imagination of the Bangladeshi nation has been eroding overtime (Zaheer, 2024) parallel to increasing Islamization of Bangladesh and in response of unique identity challenges in South Asia. The article utilizes qualitative analysis using secondary data to track the historic makings and trajectory of Bangladeshi nationalism and the underlying tensions that explain the 2024 crisis and the unfolding challenges to Bangladesh's secularism and democracy, as well as locating the root causes for rising Indo-Bangladesh tensions.

Keywords: *Bengali nationalism, Bangladeshi nationalism, Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Islamization.*

August 2024, the 'Banglabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statue was toppled in Dhaka (PTI, 2024). The destruction of Mujibur iconography during the 2024 Bangladesh movement is symptomatic of the underlying shift in identity discourses from Bengali nationalism to Bangladeshi nationalism.

Mujibur iconography bore the ire of this churn, not only to protest against the failings of his daughter, but also the rejection of his legacy of Bengali nationalism. While until recently the Hasina hegemony felt consolidated, the deepening legitimacy crisis, especially following the violence marred 2024 elections, mass resistance became proof of bottom-up democratization, beyond institutional means (ACLED, 2024).

Even as the Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus, leads the nation following Hasina's resignation and flight, Bangladesh's interim government has moved to lift the ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami party (Al Jazeera, 2024) that had been imposed under antiterrorism laws. A free hand to religious forces is a symptom of how Bangladesh's public discourse has outgrown the conflict of nationalism.

Increasing intolerance towards minorities and flaring ethnic tensions, have come to characterize postHasina Bangladesh. Three Hindu temples set on fire (Times of India, 2024), with 24 people burnt alive

(Business Standard, 2024), Chinmoy Das: an ISKON Hindu priest arrested resulting in protests by Bengali Hindus (The Hindu, 2024), and exclusion of tribal populations as ‘*alibashi*’ (separatists) as outsiders (Zahid & Srivastava, 2024). Further, the bizarre commemoration of Mohammad Ali Jinnah by the National Press Club in Dhaka, marked with Urdu poetry and songs, a nod to more Islamic interpretations of nationhood (Mukul, 2024). The nation with two nationalisms has responded to both domestic politics as well as regional strains, and now appears to have picked its favoured.

WHO IS A BANGLADESHI?

The Bangladeshi national identity is an outgrowth of its independence movement and post-independence domestic and international responses.

The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was a fallout of the expropriation of East Pakistan into an agrarian colony under the postcolonial Pakistani state. Pakistan’s geographic anomaly, being divided into two by the vast Indian territory, was cause of insecurities for the Jinnah government (Muslim League leader and founding father of Pakistan) who emphasized centralized administration, with Urdu as the uniting (homogenizing) language for the diverse ethnicities that composed East & West Pakistan. The early death of Jinnah left a power vacuum, which the Pakistani military filled. These tendencies of centralization and militarization was reflected in the pre-eminence of the Punjabi-Pathaans in both the government and the military. Despite East Pakistan being more populous, West Pakistan got the lion’s share in terms of economic capital, political dominance, and cultural disposition.

Resistance against marginalization of the Bengali-Muslims of East Pakistan came to forefront through the *Bangla Bhasha* Movement (Bengali language movement) of 1950s-60s against Urdu imposition. The homogenization efforts exploded under an anti-climactic political miscalculation. The denial of premiership to the populist Sheikh Mujibur Rahman despite Awami Leagues’ landslide victory in the 1970 Pakistan general election gave fire to the East Pakistanis who were on edge after the 1970 cyclone, famine and the ethnic genocide conducted by the Pakistani military. (The National Archives, n.d.) The 1971 war, that would separate East from West Pakistan, creating Bangladesh, also left open the question of: ‘Who is a Bangladeshi?’

Are they Bengalis?

Or are they Muslims?

If they are Bengalis, then what was the need for the 1947 partition?

And, if they are Muslims, then what is the need for a 1971?

TWO CONTESTING NATIONALISMS

Mujibur became *Deshobondhu* (friend of the country), the personification of post-1947 injustices, the denial of representation and the linguistic autonomy of the state. He defined the newborn nation in terms

of Bengali nationalism, a secular construct premised on the Bengali ethnic identity and language conscience. Mujibur definition was consciously light on novelty, indistinguishable from Indian subnationalism of *Bengaleeana* (in reference to Bengalees inhabiting West Bengal, India). The *Mukti Bahini* (pre-independence Bangladeshi liberation militia) having fought the Pakistani Army with the sentiments of “*Joy Bangla*” (hail Bengal), “*Tomar desh, amar desh, Bangladesh*” (your country, my country, Bangladesh) and “*Jago, jago, Bangalee jago*” (awaken, awaken, Bengalees, awaken) gave precedence to ethno-linguistic and territorial affiliations over religious ones (which they had in common with their West Pakistani opponents), responding also to the need for India’s aid in securing Bangladeshi independence and rehabilitation of its citizens. ‘Mujibism’ rested on the four pillars of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism, firm to his need to parallelly delegitimize the “two-nation theory” or political Islam of 1947, and legitimize the 1971 independence movement against Islamabad’s autocratic rule. Secularism was a centrepiece, and became enshrined in the constitution of 1972, with Islamic parties propagating theocratic rules-based order were banned as they were perceived to have pro-Pakistan leanings. (Khan, 1974)

It is post-war domestic politics that sprang an antithetical counterpart in form of Bangladeshi nationalism, by General Zia-ur Rahman, who took power following the assassination of Mujibur in 1975. Zia-ur found himself in a complacent position, lacking Mujibur’s popular support, and having an urgency to rehabilitate the East Bengal divisions of the Pakistan Army and disengage the Awami League’s *Rakha Bahini* (Bangladeshi para-military) in order to secure his position. At the same time, he needed to step out of Mujibur’s shadow and India’s looming influence over the newly independent country. (Sheik & Ahmed, 2020)

Zia-ur addressed these by re-interpreting ‘Bengali’ nationalism into ‘Bangladeshi’ nationalism, making a clear-cut distinction between “our” (Bangladeshi-) Bengali and “theirs” (Bengali -Indians in West Bengal). Bangladeshis were Bengalis plus Muslim – an ethno-religious identity. In line of to this though, in 1977, secularism was removed from the constitution, and in 1988, Islam was made the state religion. However, Bangladesh as the country of Bengali-Muslims leaves out the considerable number of minority groups. This includes the Buddhist hill tribes of Chittagong (Chakmas, Hojongs, etc.), and even the nonBengali Muslims from post-partition Assam and Bihar, who having aligned themselves with the Pakistani regime during the Liberation War were retributively marginalized from Bangladeshi society (World Bank, 2008).

The conflict between these two distinct strands of nationalisms (Hossain, 2015) has been a durable feature of Bangladeshi national identity, and has been reflected in the decades long biparty system. These competing values overtime became personified by the two major parties: Awami League (AL), led by Sheik Hasina, Mujibur’s daughter, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Begam Khaleda

Zia, Zia-ur's widow. Since 1991 till 2008, Bangladeshi politics had been defined by the intense biparty competition between AL and BNP, with the country's mostly homogenous ethnic composition (Minority Rights Group International, n.d.) and economic growth (Mahmood, 2021) enabling democracy's survival.

“EK HASINA, ZERO DIVAANE”

While for the past five decades, Bangladeshi national identity was beset by two contesting conceptions of nationalism, the 2024 popular uprisings (Nagpal, 2024) and consequent removal of the Sheikh Hasina government has marked a paradigmatic shift. The initial protests by university students (Uddin, 2024) were against the reservation for the descendants of the freedom fighters during the 1971 war. These protests soon became an all-out mass uprising as attention expanded to anti-democratic practices of the Hasina government due to the heavy-handed military responses to peaceful civilian protests and the participation of religious forces. Bangladeshi society mobilized against election malpractice, judicial harassment, extrajudicial killings, intimidation of media and civil society organizations, punitive practices against opposition voices, null cases against Khaleda Zia and activist Muhammad Yunus, packing courts with loyalists and corruption that had become the staples of the Hasina regime. (Hasan, 2024) (Maître & Jackman, 2023)

It is ironic how autocratic exclusion had resulted in the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, and now political marginalization and democratic backsliding again has rebirthed a more defined sense of Bangladeshi identity.

SECULARISM IN A CONSTITUTIONAL PARADOX

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy has lost out on its argument of inclusivity and a secular republic. The father's legacy has been hampered by the daughter's blunders. While secularism had long been a contested attribute of the Bangladeshi nation (Ahmad, 2020), founding ideals held fast against a seamless Islamic interpretation of the national identity. While Zia-ur had removed secularism from the Constitution in 1977 and replaced it with “Absolute Trust and Faith in the Almighty Allah,” and revoked the ban on Islamic parties, the AL had restored the secularism provision in 2011, though Islam continued to remain the state religion of Bangladesh (Habib, 2011).

In contestations, secularism lies on a constitutional paradox (Ahmed, 2024). While Article 2A of the Constitution of Bangladesh reads that “Islam is the state religion, but the state must ensure equal rights and status to other religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity”, Article 12 of the same Constitution establishes Bangladesh as a ‘secular’ nation, imposing an obligation upon the State to ensure that religious authorities of no particular religion can dominate over the State itself.

‘RADICAL’ UNDERCURRENTS

An erstwhile general in the Pakistan military during the 1965 war, Zia-ur had adopted the Pakistani handbook, entering a *mullah*-military nexus (Chakravarty, 2017). This had led to a parallel Islamization

of Bangladesh through the conservative *ulama* (Islamic clergy), who in turn served as a regime institution (Hossain, 2012). This has subsequently eroded the heterodox, pluralist and more tolerant variants of Islam that had historically existed in the Indian subcontinent, substituting them, overtime, with more hardliner religious narratives (Mostofa, 2021). This has been reinforced with the recent import of the *Farazi* and *Wahabi* movements by Bangladeshi migrant labourers returning home from the Middle-East (Choudhury, 2020), as well as by the active presence of radical actors like Hefazate-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) in politics (Mahjabin, 2024). These fundamentalist forces have been further emboldened by narratives and upheaval in post-Hasina Bangladesh (Upadhyay, 2024) (Mostofa, 2021).

The Zia-ur definition of Bangladeshi nationalism has not just become the domestic consensus, but also one that will result in restructuring of relations vis-à-vis India. While Sheikh Hasina's ousting has incapacitated proponents of Bengali nationalism, Mujibur's legacy of the secular imagination of the Bangladeshi nation has been eroding overtime (Sharma, 2024) parallel to increasing Islamization of Bangladesh and in response of unique identity challenges in South Asia. Having a national destiny exclusive of India has been a uniquely South Asian aspiration, where "big brother" India has been seen to loom large in the backyard and intervene much into affairs of other South Asian states. For the caretaker government, India has become a scapegoat to abstain from deeper introspection of Bangladesh's political faults, easy to do because of India's uncritical support of the Hasina government (Bhushan, 2024). Taslima Nasrin, an author-activist, expressed deep concern over the seeping Islamic radicalism that threatens to brainwash and indoctrinate the Bangladeshi youths to make them "anti-India, anti-Hindu, and pro-Pakistan," turning Bangladeshi the Afghanistan way. (Nasrin, 2024)

SOUTH ASIAN SECURITIES

Bangladesh, one of world's most densely populated states lies at the crucial geostrategic juncture between the Indian subcontinent and South-east Asia, being vital to security in the Bay of Bengal. While there was an undeniable trajectory of democratic backsliding under the Hasina regime, Bangladesh achieved impressive economic growth, especially from its booming textile industry. Restoring political stability is a regional necessity.

In the obverse, the turnaround in Bangladesh has been a cause for intensifying friction with India. Where domestic politics had already created a strong rhetoric against 'Bangladeshi' migration and infiltrators – a shorthand for electoral fearmongering by the ruling BJP dispensation. And, there was already an ever-growing fear that Bangladeshi migrants encroach on physical and political spaces, jobs, land, corner welfare resources meted out by the state and place undue pressures on infrastructure. The fear has turned to outright hostility following violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh and irredentist rhetorics by Bangladeshi politicians (Singh, 2024), with Indian doctors going as far as to refuse medical attention

to Bangladeshi patients (Deb & Mittal, 2024). Protest marches in Kolkata surrounded the Bangladesh consulate (Bhattacharya, 2024), showing counter mobilization of Indians against Bangladesh, with mass hysteria often threatening retributive actions, even as migrants remain a universally vulnerable category in host countries. As radical Islamist groups gain more visible space, fringe hostilities have become mainstreamed. This turn towards religious nationalism (Mehta, 2024), minorities, especially Hindus, have found themselves increasingly under siege. Moreover, Bangladeshi elites, instead of acknowledging and addressing the genuine concern for the safety and security of minorities, has been denying these challenges as mere Indian disinformation and Indian media's propaganda to discredit the authenticity of the student-led protests and the newly formed interim government, which has been critical towards the country (Sen, 2024).

RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY(?)

The 2024 Bangladesh movement has marked a re-definition of the idea of 'Bangladesh', breaking away from decades of bipartisanship and ideological conflict between Bengali nationalism and Bangladeshi nationalism. While the return of the AL is extremely unlikely, the party suffering from the unpopularity of Hasina. Concerns have been raised over the 'neutrality' and 'intents' of the Yunus non-partisan caretaker government and its commitment for multi-party electoral competition due to the delay in holding elections. As elections get slotted for the late 2025 or early 2026 a strong appetite for democracy amongst Bangladeshis must prevail. There is a need for a constant civil society and government dialogue, with genuine bids to deepen mutual trust on democracy and democratic means of dissent. The end a fifteen-year regime (Mahmud, 2024) has destabilized the very fabric of society and deepen the social and economic crisis. There lies a great deal of anxiety over the possibilities of a deep-seated polarization in the upcoming election (Gupta, 2024). While Hasina has fled, her party, the AL is to contest the polls. Whether it will be a head on contest between the AL and the BNP with Jamaat-e-Islami (a time-tested electoral alliance) or a military blessed "King's Party" (Das, 2024) is yet to be know. Uncertain times push people to seek sanctity and shelter in established spaces. Religion is the most notable such space. With 91 percent (U.S. Department of State, 2022) of the country identifying as Sunni Muslim, and a sustained Islamization of the Bangladeshi society, the place of religion in society, nation – and identity will be strengthened.

Moreover, with the BNP-JI duo well poised to win an upcoming election, having a capable organization and its long status as the country's largest opposition party. Coupled with anti-India tensions, majoritarian fervour and dampening of minority security may consolidate Bangladeshi society upon a more fundamentalist version of Islamic identity. Fringe forces, like the JI, are fringe no more. There has been a clamour over the future of democracy in Bangladesh, the underlying shift in identity motivating the transition, with the BNP and JI positioned to gain the most. These leaves open questions over whether the reconstituted democracy will be democratic for all or not? Even for the minority Hindus and tribals?

While it has been civil society activism that brought the fall of the Hasina-led AW government for their excesses, there is cause to reason that the civil society too would not be untouched from the shift in national identity, tossing a challenge to democratic reforms going ahead. Leaving open questions on: 'Whose democracy? And, at whose cost?'

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INDIA NOW: CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

Bhakti & Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Bhakti, a profound and deeply rooted spiritual tradition in India, has long inspired millions of devotees to embark on pilgrimages to sacred sites. However, the environmental cost of these journeys has emerged as a pressing issue in recent decades. This paper examines the paradox of devotional activities contributing to ecological degradation through its focus on key pilgrimage centres across India. From deforestation and habitat disruption in forested sacred sites to glacial melting in Himalayan shrines, the environmental toll is evident. Water pollution in rivers like the Ganges, waste management challenges in pilgrimage towns, and disturbances to protected ecosystems further exacerbate the issue. While the spiritual aspirations of pilgrims remain paramount, the unsustainable practices tied to mass gatherings, inadequate infrastructure, and poor waste disposal systems underscore the need for urgent intervention. This study advocates for the integration of eco-consciousness into religious practices, promoting green pilgrimages and sustainable tourism models that balance spiritual fulfilment with environmental stewardship. By addressing these challenges, India can honour its spiritual heritage while safeguarding its ecological future.

Keywords: *pilgrimage, cost, degradation, multi-pronged*

THE COST OF AMARNATH YATRA

The influx of pilgrims into forested regions for spiritual pursuits often results in significant deforestation and habitat disruption. A prominent example of this is the Amarnath Yatra, a revered pilgrimage in the Kashmir Valley, which attracts hundreds of thousands of devotees annually. While the journey holds immense spiritual significance, its environmental impact is profound. (Note: cost herein refers to the negative impact of the Yatra)

The route to the Amarnath Cave traverses ecologically sensitive zones, including lush forests that serve as critical habitats for diverse flora and fauna. Temporary campsites, food stalls, and accommodations for pilgrims require clearing vegetation, which leads to deforestation. Trees are felled to make way for infrastructure, and the increased footfall compresses the soil, hindering natural regeneration. Additionally, the collection of firewood by pilgrims and support staff further depletes forest resources, exacerbating habitat degradation. In 2010, Jammu and Kashmir had 660 kha (One

katha is equal to 126.46 square meters) of natural forest, extending over 8.3% of its land area. In 2023, it lost 51 ha of natural forest, equivalent to 57.7 kt of CO₂ emissions.

Moreover, waste generated by pilgrims, including plastic and non-biodegradable materials, accumulates in the forested regions. The improper disposal of this waste not only pollutes the soil and water sources but also poses a threat to the local ecosystem. As of July 2024, the cumulative figure of waste generated remained at 200 tonnes. The total quantity of waste processed in tonnes was 162.40 tonnes, and the total inert waste generated in tonnes was 34.30 tonnes. (Dhakad & Dhar, 2020)

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach like stricter regulations on the number of pilgrims allowed, promoting eco-friendly practices such as biodegradable waste disposal, and involving local communities in conservation efforts that shall ensure the spiritual sanctity of the Amarnath Yatra is preserved without compromising the ecological integrity of the regions they traverse.

THE COST OF DEV DEEPAWALI AND KUMBH MELA

Varanasi attracts millions of pilgrims annually, who flock to its ghats along the sacred Ganges River for spiritual rituals. While these practices are deeply rooted in faith, they also contribute significantly to water pollution, threatening the river's ecological health. Pilgrims visiting Varanasi often perform rituals such as bathing in the Ganges offering flowers, food, and other materials, and immersing idols made of non-biodegradable substances. These activities introduce organic and inorganic waste directly into the river, affecting its water quality. The large-scale immersion of offerings wrapped in plastic and the use of chemical-laden dyes further exacerbate the pollution levels. (Dhakad & Dhar, 2020)

Moreover, the city's aging sewage infrastructure struggles to handle the growing population and influx of visitors. A significant portion of untreated or partially treated sewage flows directly into the Ganges, adding to the contamination. Pilgrimage activities, particularly during festivals like Dev Deepawali and Kumbh Mela, see a dramatic rise in the volume of waste entering the river.

The consequences of water pollution in Varanasi are severe. The high levels of biological oxygen demand (BOD) and the presence of harmful pathogens pose risks to public health, with pilgrims and locals at risk of waterborne diseases. Aquatic ecosystems in the Ganges are also severely impacted, with reduced biodiversity and the decline of species such as the Gangetic dolphin. Efforts to mitigate this issue include government initiatives like the Namami Gange program, which focuses on reducing pollution and restoring the river's ecological balance. However, the success of such efforts requires combining spiritual practices with eco-consciousness is essential to preserve the sanctity and health of the Ganges. (Note: cost herein refers to the negative impact of the Yatra)

THE REASON BEHIND THIS HEAVY COST

The environmental degradation observed at numerous pilgrimage sites in India reflects a profound lack of care and responsibility toward ecological systems and the communities residing in these areas. Pilgrimage activities, driven by faith and devotion, often prioritize spiritual fulfilment over environmental consciousness, leading to significant ecological harm.

Pilgrimage sites typically attract massive crowds, particularly during festivals, creating a strain on local resources and infrastructure. However, the lack of awareness among pilgrims about sustainable practices exacerbates the problem. Waste generated from food packaging, plastic offerings, and other nonbiodegradable materials is often discarded indiscriminately, polluting both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. This lack of accountability not only damages the environment but also disrupts the livelihoods of local communities that depend on these ecosystems. A critical factor contributing to this degradation is the absence of empathy for residents evident through the *‘yeh hamaara ghar nahi hain attitude, toh kyu saaf rakhna’* exacerbates the brunt of these environmental challenges for the residents. The lack of personal connection with the pilgrimage site, viewing it with a utilitarian view of spiritual fulfilment attainment rather than viewing it as a home for many, a sacred place supposed to be kept clean for fellow pilgrims. For instance, pollution in rivers like the Ganges impacts fishing communities, while deforestation for temporary accommodations deprives locals of forest resources.

The lack of empathy is further evident in the disregard for noise and air pollution. The use of loudspeakers, excessive lighting, and unregulated vehicular emissions during religious events affects both the local environment and the well-being of residents. Additionally, inadequate planning by authorities to manage waste and regulate crowds highlights a systemic neglect of responsibility toward sustainable development.

Addressing these issues requires fostering a sense of collective responsibility among all stakeholders. Educational initiatives emphasizing the environmental impact of pilgrimage, stricter enforcement of eco-friendly practices, local communities’ involvement, and local administration in conservation efforts are critical. By integrating environmental stewardship with spiritual practices, pilgrimage sites can transform into sustainable and harmonious coexistence models, benefiting both the devotees and the residents who call these sacred landscapes their home.

THE OTHER FACE OF BHAKTI

There is a flip side to this gloomy picture, and to ensure a holistic approach, this article also explores this positive aspect. Such positive initiatives include the Green Pilgrimage Network – Indian Chapter, launched in 2012, enabling pilgrims to contribute positively to the environment as part of their spiritual journey by promoting sustainable solutions such as greening waste management, improving sanitation, and adopting eco-friendly transportation in pilgrim cities.

Similarly, the Punyam Poonkavanam Project at Sabarimala Temple focuses on reducing pollution and waste during the Sabarimala pilgrimage. Key aspects include discouraging the use of soap and oil in the Pamba River, avoiding plastic materials in offerings, and encouraging devotees to participate in cleanliness activities at the temple premises. Such measures have been instrumental in preserving the local environment.

Furthermore, religious practices in India have led to the preservation of an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 sacred groves across the country (Yarlagadda, 2022). These biodiverse habitats have been conserved due to their religious significance, showcasing how faith can also play a pivotal role in environmental preservation.

This highlights the possibility that with conscious efforts and sustainable practices, pilgrimage activities in India can be aligned with environmental conservation, ensuring the coexistence of spiritual and ecological values that support each other.

PILGRIMAGE-DRIVEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT V/S ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Pilgrimage in India has undeniably facilitated significant development in and around sacred sites, spurred by the need to accommodate the influx of millions of devotees annually. These sites have witnessed the construction of roads, improved transportation networks, enhanced hospitality services, and upgraded civic infrastructure, including sanitation and waste management systems. Such developments have boosted local economies and increased employment opportunities for local communities in sectors such as tourism, retail, and transportation. For instance, cities like Varanasi, Haridwar, and Tirupati have seen substantial urbanization due to their status as prominent pilgrimage destinations, with benefits extending to broader regional economic growth.

However, the scale of environmental degradation caused by pilgrimage activities often outweighs these developmental gains, posing long-term challenges to both the environment and the sustainability of these sites. Infrastructure construction frequently leads to deforestation and habitat loss, disrupting local ecosystems. For example, creating roads and facilities for the Kedarnath Yatra in the fragile Himalayan region has increased landslide risks and harmed biodiversity. (Byerly, 2012)

Sacred rivers, such as the Indrayani River in Alandi, bear the brunt of water pollution caused by ritual offerings, idol immersion, and untreated effluents. This pollution threatens aquatic life and jeopardizes public health and local livelihoods. As aforementioned, air and water pollution during festivals further degrade the environment, diminishing the quality of life for residents.

While pilgrimage-driven development brings short-term economic benefits, the long-term environmental costs are far-reaching and often irreversible. Sustainable development strategies are essential to balance spiritual practices with ecological preservation. This includes limiting tourist numbers, enforcing eco-friendly rituals, and involving local communities in environmental stewardship. Without such measures, the harm caused by pilgrimage will continue to undermine the very sanctity and sustainability of these sacred sites, rendering the developmental gains insignificant in the face of ecological destruction. A more conscious and responsible approach is necessary to ensure that pilgrimage sites remain both spiritually and environmentally viable for future generations. Unchecked development is lethal and will destroy the very development it paved the way for - the destruction of social and environmental development by economic development. The consequences of environmental degradation should not be undermined and should be given equal if not more attention than development.

SOLUTION: A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PILGRIMAGES

A multi-pronged approach involving local communities, administration, and pilgrims themselves is essential. The current situation, marked by rising environmental concerns at sacred sites, highlights the urgent need for a collaborative and integrated strategy that balances spiritual practices with ecological sustainability.

Local communities play a pivotal role in the preservation of pilgrimage sites. Their deep connection to the land and resources provides invaluable insight into sustainable practices. Engaging residents in conservation ensures they become active stakeholders in protecting their environment. Additionally, local communities can aid in waste management, and promote environmentally conscious behaviour among pilgrims, all of which contribute to the long-term preservation of these sacred spaces.

The administration must create and enforce policies that encourage eco-friendly pilgrimage practices. This includes regulating infrastructure construction, minimizing deforestation, and implementing waste disposal systems capable of handling the large volumes of waste generated. Effective monitoring and the imposition of fines for violating environmental norms can serve as deterrents against harmful practices. Furthermore, authorities should promote the development of green pilgrimages by providing incentives for eco-conscious facilities and creating awareness campaigns focused on the environmental impact of pilgrimages.

As the primary agents of environmental strain, pilgrims must also take responsibility for their actions. Indians also have an aversion towards regulations which when imposed on pilgrimage might generate a negative response that shall get politicised, thereby, the political benefits that pilgrimage has will no longer be there. Therefore, regulations about limiting the number of pilgrims will require the development of an attitude amongst the pilgrims who understand the need to be ecologically conscious. This can be achieved through educational programs that raise awareness about the environmental impact of their rituals, including the importance of reducing plastic waste, using biodegradable offerings, and avoiding polluting rivers and water bodies. Pilgrims can also be encouraged to embrace sustainable modes of transport and adopt practices that minimize ecological harm, such as preventing the destruction of local flora for religious purposes.

In conclusion, the environmental degradation resulting from pilgrimage in India is a complex challenge that requires the combined efforts of local communities, administrative bodies, and pilgrims. By fostering a culture of environmental responsibility through education, regulation, and community involvement, it is possible to safeguard the ecological integrity of pilgrimage sites while preserving their spiritual significance for future generations. It is about honouring India's spiritual heritage while preserving its ecological future - connecting the past with the present issues to ensure a sustainable and safe future for all. This article attempts to highlight a fact known by many yet ignored by many more.

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Counter-hegemonic Voices in Literatures of Resistance: A Case Study of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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ABSTRACT

*The pen is not mightier than the sword, the Pen is the sword. The realm of resistance transcends conventionally mainstream forms of protest marches, riots, sit-ins etc., into literary and other artistic expressions. Resistance is engraved on pages of a book, lyrics of a song, strokes of a painting, big screens of a theatre and so on. These constitute the literatures of resistance, emphasising the role of cultural rebellion as a part of a larger struggle for emancipation. The theory of resistance literature thus lies in its politics and its power to change the world. This paper, therefore, aims to provide an analysis of the literatures of resistance in light of a qualitative content analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* as it seeks to establish the research purpose- the literatures of resistance as articulations of alternative imaginaries of contemporary India while exploring how they provide a vent to the counter-hegemonic voices of the oppressed and the impact of anti-establishment writings on society.*

Keywords: *literatures of resistance, anti-establishment writings, oppression, subversion, revolt*

LITERATURE AS AN ARENA OF STRUGGLE

Aspects like the social, political, administrative, economic, religious, historical, educational, among others are reflected in literature, making it a mirror of societal life. Subsequently, resistance is an inherent feature of literature. While the degree or nature of resistance, implicit or explicit, may vary among literature and its various genres, there is often intentional or unintentional expression of some dissent. Authors and artists have been known for echoing the misery of the masses while voicing their disapproval and opposition either by composing indirect attacks in the form of satires or more of an upfront condemnation of society or the government.

Literatures of resistance are essentially politicised, anti-establishment writings that actively criticise and interrogate oppressive, hegemonic institutions or ideologies. Thus, a non-violent expression of dissent

and subversion in various forms and types. Literature is, therefore, presented as an “*arena of struggle*” (Harlow, 1987) while it enacts a crucial role in constructive social and political change.

Further, it is noteworthy that the creative impulsivity of literature bearing voices of the rebellious oppressed manifests in as many ways and forms as there exists a prevalence of subjugation. This validates not only the significance of literatures of resistance as an artistic platform for echoing the cries of the exploited but also the broad scope and flexibility of the means of expression it offers. Multiple shades of resistance are exhibited in several types of resistance literature through resistance poetry, narratives of resistance, novels, theatre or cinema, music, and even the prison memoirs of political detainees. Additionally, there has been an array of upcoming contemporary forms of literatures of resistance manifested through puppet theatre, graffiti, paintings and photographs, political cartoons or caricatures et cetera.

The emergence of resistance as a theme can be traced back to nineteenth-century literature, which gradually became a focal point of several areas of study. The term ‘resistance’ was first applied in literature by Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian writer and critic, in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*. Barbara Harlow’s pioneering work, *Resistance Literature* (1987), a discussion of different types of resistance, further exposed the potentials of literary criticism. Moreover, theories like the reader-response theory that recognises the role of readers in making sense of the text through their ideology, social background, aspirations and expectations, and other interpretative strategies; and the semiotic analysis- acknowledging the significance of language that enables perceiving the world, one characterised by apprehensions of time and place and juxtapositions that breed nuances and insights, reinforced and contributed to the supportive popularity of resistance literature. Thus, over time, there has been marked growth in the protesting expressions of oppression and exploitation through this literary medium that has been expanding in addressing and echoing these subversive sentiments in newer and creatively impactful ways.

NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE: STORIES OF OPPRESSION AND REVOLT

Up until the very recent past and present, one witnesses persistent resistance, in various forms, for various causes. Author and political activist Arundhati Roy’s *The Pandemic is a Portal* (2020) being one of her many such works wherein literature was employed as a weapon to attack the failures of the system and the government to cope with the devastatingly deadly Covid-19 pandemic. Previously, resistance literature against 2019 CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act)-NRC (National Register of Citizens) manifested a surge of protests in the form of not only prose, but also poetry, street art, graffiti, performance art, music, and theatre. The Farmers’ Protest (2020-2021) is another instance which witnessed the surge of anti-establishment poetry and literature. The paper thus goes on to provide a closer look and in-depth analysis of one such resistance piece in the following section.

SUBVERSIVE TEXTS AND THE REGIME: CASE STUDY OF THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS- ARUNDHATI ROY, 2017

A product of her 20 years' fiction hiatus, Arundhati Roy's second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a beautifully heart-breaking story of stories, a dark narrative revisiting the scars of modern Indian history's most violently calamitous events. A classical specimen of resistance literature, one where the art has readers dragged into politics and not politics being dragged into art; the inevitability of intertwining the personal and political is echoed on every page.

Roy's "*Fascinating Mess*" (Sehgal, 2017) navigates through a range of issues- sufferings and rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, discrimination and oppression along gender, caste, class and religious lines, atrocities of a coercive state apparatus, casualties of capitalism, corruption and malpractice, environmental erosion, most importantly, resistance and protest. All of this stems from her own experiences as a political activist, during the twenty years she spent campaigning for Kashmiri independence, protesting against Hindu nationalism and ecological despoliation, and simultaneously defeating the sedition charges levelled at her. This is reflected in her second work, marking a substantial departure from her first, the 1997 Booker winner, *The God of Small Things*. Indeed, "*being an activist and an artist is trickier than it sounds*" (Sehgal, 2017).

This novel, as polemical as its author, follows an achronological timeline, overpopulated with broken tales of broken people, their miseries and resistances, woven together as a patchwork of narratives. One of the two main storylines revolves around Anjum, an intersex, transgender woman, a *Hijra*, a breaker of stereotypes. Roy addresses numerous issues through Anjum's life sketch. The denial of rights to the trans community, state and society's dehumanization, discrimination and contempt against the Hijras are expressed through instances like when during the taut situation of the Emergency, Anjum and her colleagues, for whom, "*it was only a routine bit of humiliation for the Hijras*" were randomly beaten up along with other citizens by the police on a flyover; or when at Delhi's Jantar Mantar's protest site, a public space, she was challenged, "*Who gave these Hijras permission to sit here? Which of the Struggles do they belong to?*". Likewise, Roy draws upon bloody instances of history- like the horrors of Partition, the Emergency, Kashmiri insurgency, anti-Sikh riots, the Bhopal Gas tragedy, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Gujarat riots, the rise of Hindutva and gau rakshaks to pitch forth her resistance through characters like Anjum and many others. Anjum's own traumatising experience during the ghastly Godhra riots has been described in gruesome details- how she, a Muslim, had to resort to a Hindu disguise and the chanting of Gayatri Mantra for survival, was abused by the "*saffron parakeets*" who loomed over her and made her chant their slogans, not killing her only because "*killing Hijras brings bad luck*". The trauma response relegated her to reside in a graveyard, except, "*she wasn't living in the graveyard, she was dying in it*".

Casual cruelties of caste are exposed through Anjum's friend and one of the tenants at her graveyard's *Jannat Guest House*, Saddam Hussain (originally Dayachand, yes, a disguise, again) a Chamar, who had suffered his share of abuse and discrimination owing to his lower caste background. He was not only fired from his job at the mortuary (as a cadaver handler, to remedy upper caste doctors' fear of pollution upon touching dead bodies) because he, an Untouchable, ran into one of the doctors, but also witnessed his father and fellow Chamar men suffer false incrimination and arrest for cow-slaughter (while they were disposing of the carcass for the upper caste farmers) and be publicly beaten to death outside the police station while "*Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them.*"

Resistance itself has been explicitly highlighted in this piece of literature, where numerous parties of protestors are described camping at the Jantar Mantar; a melting pot of anti-corruption movement, farmers and tribes people's protest, linguistic rights movement, representatives of the maimed in the 1984 Union Carbide gas leak, sewage workers protest and the Kashmiri Association of Mothers of the Disappeared. Roy has not failed to pinpoint the parasitic tendencies of the media and the cunning of fake humanist politicians who selectively support or neglect the most sensitive and critical concerns as per their self-interest. Another character of Dr Azad Bhartiya, a dedicatedly fierce protestor is introduced here. It is also in this scene that Roy introduces Anjum to an abandoned baby, a link to the text's other protagonist, S. Tilottama or Tilo.

Tilo, an activist, ex-architecture student and a child of interfaith marriage, echoes the author herself. She 'kidnaps' the abandoned baby of yet another exploited and abused activist, Comrade Revathy Maase and later moves in to reside at Anjum's guest house as they raise the baby together. Tilo gets involved in the Kashmiri insurgency through Musa Yeswi, her friend and lover, who was an active and much sought-after member of the Kashmiri resistance (he later dies as a martyr) after his wife and three-yearold daughter died (by the same bullet) in a massacre while they stood in their balcony watching a peaceful funeral of a martyr. Roy provides a bloody, vivid account of the plight of Kashmir, the terror and atrocities inflicted on the Kashmiri citizens by the insensitive Indian government and a brutal military through the tales of Musa and Tilo. Therefore, painting a callous yet realistic picture of Kashmir, where "*the dead will live forever; and the living are only dead people, pretending.*"

Roy's explicit and poetically scathing critique is an archipelago of resistances. Through historical anecdotes and her characters, she has successfully tapped and expanded upon extensive issues and their protests plaguing the country since its infancy. Her defiance is manifested through the hearty celebration of divergent characters in the text, so much so that not only humans but also animals are given their share of resistance; everyone is given their battles and their little victories.

Roy's polemic has received both commendation and condemnation- for exposing the glaring though ignored realities of political, social, and economic life. Despite critiques, the influence and impact of her work are not lost. She has garnered national and international acclamation for the novel, which went on to be shortlisted for the 2017 The Hindu Literary Prize and longlisted for the 2017 Man Booker Prize.

"To me, there is nothing higher than fiction. Nothing. It is fundamentally who I am. I am a teller of stories. For me, that's the only way I can make sense of the world, with all the dance that it involves."

- Arundhati Roy

THE LEGACY OF RESISTANCE OUTSIDE TEXTS: IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

While resistance literature, as the name suggests, is resistance through literature (inclusive of its various forms and types as discussed in earlier), there lies a significant point of contestation- are these literatures merely confined within the covers of a text? Or do they transcend their literary bindings and travel into the real exploitative, oppressive world to fight their battles and make a difference?

This can be further substantiated by an analysis of post-colonial literature, one relevant to our own country, wherein there is a marked recurrence of mainly two ideas- resistance and representation. Ultimately, a critique of any resistance piece is based on how appropriately it reacts to oppression and its real-life impact, how successfully it represents the minority or oppressed, or both, as the case may be. It is interesting how resistance literature in post-colonial countries majorly employs the language of the empire to refute and rebut the colonisers, writing back to call out their hegemony, exploitation and racism towards the natives- among whom, there is a realisation of deprivation and an urge to fight back not just the colonisers but also other hegemonic authorities residing alongside them in their own country. Resistance literature provides protest movements with a framework for unity and solidarity building among the participants that is further contagious, an element inherent in constituting and gearing a resistance movement forward, successfully invokes feelings of the people to rebel against injustice and subjugation. Thus, the impact and influence of this legacy of resistance, even outside texts, is not lost.

MORAL OF THE STORY

"Would songs be sung even during darkness and bleakness? Yes, then songs would be sung, about darkness and bleakness." (Sharma, 2021)

In conclusion, literatures of resistance weld together as an artistically literary shield against various forms of persecution, a shield on which each attack ricochets louder and stronger as it reverberates

throughout society, galvanising the oppressed towards waging a war of subversion against every repressive entity.

However, this does not guarantee such writings' freedom from challenges and vices. While antiestablishment writings, given their positive impact on the masses can be constructively employed to consolidate the oppressed towards a moral and virtuous cause, they could also be used as an instrument of propaganda to steer the public in a direction that serves as the propagandists' self-interest. Further, selective penetrating literary explorations sometimes provide clichéd solutions threatening to obscure some complex problems by binary oppositions. However, this does not imply that these limitations outweigh the merits of resistance literature, which, discussed throughout this paper, induces support and strength into works with deep meanings, stimulating insights, and expressing strong human emotions- transforming itself into an *art* of resistance.

It is thus evident that the literatures of resistance have a long history, humankind's history of resistance, which will further go on to artistically create, impact, and influence future histories through creative, revolutionary redemptions as, unfortunately, there almost always will be reasons for resistance.

I acknowledge that this paper borrows from my undergraduate dissertation, "*Counter-hegemonic Voices in Literatures of Resistance: Contemporary India and Anti-establishment Writings*", done at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous) Kolkata in 2022-2023 under the supervision of Dr. Jhumpa Mukherjee.

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Digital India: An Analysis of the Implications of the Scheme and its Impact on the Technological, Economic and Political Lives of Citizens

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First Year (PLSA), Roll Nos. 136, 177 & 181

ABSTRACT

21st-century governance in India has taken to a digital, or rather, technological structure and framework—by which a broad range of demands and needs of the Indian citizens are met. These policies range from bureaucratic and administrative services to those concerning the health sector and internet connectivity. In this very context, this study seeks to analyse the course of India's digitalization, while throwing light onto the several initiatives, policies, schemes and programmes—drawing out their implications, aspects, as well as visions, and long-term goals. With a brief history of digitalization in the state, significant context is provided as ministerial activities are holistically examined and scrutinized. Thus, this paper elaborates on citizen-sovereign relations, conversations, discourse and dialogue, discussing reforms and efforts on the part of the Union Government to enhance the quality of public life, welfare and development, through the lens of technological modernization and popular engagement.

Keywords: *Technological modernization, MyGov, National Health Policy, e-hospital, economic development*

“Power to Empower”— with the hopes of comprehensively strengthening India — economically, socially as well as politically, the nation headed towards becoming a digitally empowered society with bold long-term aspirations of improving governance, e-literacy, internet connectivity, promoting inclusive growth through economic gains in electronic services, product manufacturing, and job opportunities. One of the main reasons the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took to the issue of digitalization during its election campaign in the year 2014, was to reduce the monotonous and cumbersome process of going through governmental paperwork— digitizing bureaucratic platforms would hasten various formal processes and add strict obstacles to corrupt practices. From the Indian e-commerce being on an ‘upward growth trajectory’ to a prominent boom in telecommunication industries across the nation, this scheme is most certainly worthy of an analytical deep dive.

E-GOVERNANCE — EXPANSION AND POPULAR ENGAGEMENT

Digital India was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the first of July 2015 to connect rural areas with high-speed internet network and improve digital literacy. Having been introduced by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and Ministry of Finance, it encapsulates a broad range of services, plans and benefits of diverse nature that have undoubtedly changed the country's social, political and economic landscape. Such services include the National e-governance plan, the launching of the website MyGov.in, the Swachh Bharat Mission mobile application, e-hospital applications, taking digital attendance of government employees, and so on. These initiatives have transformed the landscape of India through technological modernization and simplified daily political and economic processes and undertakings to a great extent.

To get into depth, the National e-governance plan (NeGP) is an initiative of the Government of India to make all government services available to citizens of India via electronic media. This very plan consists of 27 Mission Mode Projects (MPPs) and 31 components. It was formulated on 18th May 2006 by the Department of Electronics and Information Technology as well as the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances; “Metadata and data standards” is the official document describing the standards for common metadata as a part of India's National e-governance Plan. The plan worked towards the development of new applications to allow Indian masses to access government services through Common Service Centres—that aim to provide essential governmental and non-governmental services to citizens, especially those residing in rural India. The 11th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, titled ‘Promoting e-Governance- The Smart Way Forward’, established the government's position that an expansion in e-Government was necessary in India. The submitted report cited several prior initiatives as sources of inspiration, such as the Singapore ONE programme, known for disbursing financial and in-kind assistance to low-income families who are in dire need of such resources. This plan has shown us results — it is in this context that the NeGP 2.0, christened as “eKranti”, has been structured and planned out. To elaborate, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, on its official website, has itself acknowledged how the approach has the potential of enabling huge savings in costs through development and sharing of core and support infrastructure through several policy initiatives. The major core infrastructure components are State Data Centres (SDCs), State Wide Area Networks (S.W.A.N), Common Services Centres (CSCs) and middleware gateways—National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG), State e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (SSDG), and Mobile e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (MSDG). The important support components include defined policies and guidelines on security, HR, citizen engagement, social media as well as standards and guidelines related to metadata, interoperability, enterprise architecture and information security. The vision of the NeGP stands bold—

“Make all Public Services accessible to the common man in his locality, through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency and reliability of such services at affordable costs to realize the basic needs of the common man.”

Out of several such services, MyGov.in qualifies as one that is yielding in terms of encouraging active participation of Indian citizens in their country’s governance, social development, brewing popular discussion, national conversation, and so much more. Essentially, it is classified as a citizenship engagement platform, with its headquarters located in New Delhi. It was founded by Ravi Kumar on the 26th of July 2014 and is recorded to have over 482.97 lakh registered users. The platform has undoubtedly gained a tremendous amount of success coupled with popular legitimacy—evidence in support of which would be how in merely the 1st week of August, MyGov received over 100,000 lakh registered users, this was hardly two weeks after its initiation! Moreover, as per official reports, just within 45 days of its launch, as many as 215,000 users were enrolled at MyGov and more than 28,000 submitted their ideas on a broad range of issues. The format of the Prime Minister’s online Independence Day message in the year 2014 was extracted from the suggestions submitted to MyGov. To add to this, MyGov has observed an even greater deal of popularity; owing to the launching of its mobile app—the MyGov app, developed by the National Informatics Centre—under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. Additionally, there are various pre-defined groups to which users can at their discretion subscribe to. The objective of each group is to bring positive changes to the relevant areas with the participation of citizens. In each group, users are provided with two domains— ‘Do’ and ‘Discuss’. The ‘Do’ section includes both online and offline tasks to which contributors may assign themselves. The ‘discuss’ section may be used for discussing and deliberating over relevant issues affecting the nation. It may also be used for providing crucial information regarding the topic and also to propose new ideas. The users are rewarded activity points based on their contributions. Users may also volunteer and submit their entries. These are reviewed by other members, analysed by experts and approved subsequently.

The motto of this thoughtful scheme goes, “#PuttingIndiaFirst”. It has indeed proven to be an excellent platform that fosters citizen-sovereign conversation and input, adding to, and more importantly, strengthening India’s democratic backbone.

PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, AND DIGITALIZED ADMINISTRATION

The digital India scheme incorporates several other services to catalyse and enhance public welfare in the country. The National Health Policy envisages attaining the highest possible levels of health and universal well-being for all age groups through preventive healthcare orientation in all developmental policies and universal access to good-quality healthcare services without financial hardship.

The digital transformation of healthcare is driving efficiency and innovation in the sector, paving the way for more efficient, economical, personalised, and patient-centric care. By adopting advanced tech

solutions, medical institutions can significantly improve staff experience, enhance patient care, reduce cost, optimize operational processes, and enable faster diagnosis.

Digital transformation in the healthcare sector redefines the future of medicine and patient care. India, with this motive, adopted the e-hospital to transform the healthcare landscape in India. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) has developed the e-Hospital suite with a vision to improve the delivery of healthcare services to citizens across the country under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission. It is a one-stop solution which helps in connecting patients, hospitals and doctors on a single digital platform. Built on decentralized multi-instance architecture, it is a cloud-based open-source Hospital Management Information System that has digitized the internal workflows and processes of over 630 hospitals across various states and union territories. Since September 2015, it boasts over 245 million OPD transactions, ensuring and easing public healthcare services to the citizens.

This e-hospital carries certain features like the Online Registration Service (ORS) that facilitates online appointment scheduling using Aadhaar authentication. It has very much simplified the appointment process by allowing people to select hospitals and departments of their own choice. The e-hospital framework is linked with other digital healthcare services like ‘e-sanjeevani’ and ‘e-blood bank’. This integration with other services enhances patient care by providing comprehensive health information and telemedicine services. The platform is designed to be intuitive, requiring minimal effort from users to navigate through its services. Patients can easily access consultations via video, audio, or chat through platforms like ‘SeHAT’ for remote healthcare.

E-hospital has increased accessibility as a result of which even patients in remote areas can now access healthcare services without the need for travel, thereby reducing waiting times and improving service deliveries, this is one incredible advantage of having an e-hospital application. It also allows better resource management, minimising administrative burden on healthcare providers and also promotes a more transparent interaction between patients and healthcare providers, through online services, reducing opportunities for corruption and inefficiency.

However, the e-hospital system has drawbacks that impact its effectiveness. Key issues include the need for interoperability, with different hospital systems creating inefficiencies; inadequate staff training, resulting in improper use; and concerns over data security and privacy. Technical problems like system downtimes can disrupt services, while the digital divide limits access for those with limited technology skills or unreliable internet, worsening healthcare inequalities.

The Government of India employs several thousand officials working across Ministries, Departments and various organizations. The management of attendance for employees is a complex but necessary task since the presence of officials in offices directly impacts productivity and efficiency. Traditionally,

attendance was managed through registers where officials marked their attendance upon arrival in the office. However, supervision of this system was difficult and liable to incorrect information being entered into the system. Late arrival and early departure of employees was a common occurrence across organizations and created a situation where sincere and punctual employees felt discouraged and disincentivized. Thus, the Biometric Attendance System (BAS) became a part of the “Digital India” program of the Government of India that was implemented in the Central and State Government Offices. The system enables the employees to register attendance by simply presenting their biometrics in the installed biometric devices, that are authenticated online from the biometrics (Aadhaar) stored in the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). In conclusion, biometric technology has revolutionized time and attendance management in India. The use of fingerprint or facial recognition technology has ensured accuracy, efficiency, security, and compliance with labour laws. Biometric technology has become an essential tool for modern organizations. The Indian government is making a commendable move in this direction, as organizations across the country must enhance productivity, minimize errors, and elevate efficiency.

The progress of a nation greatly depends on its citizens. Every citizen has to abide by the law and order of the nation, as well as perform their duties as responsible citizens to maintain a harmonious environment, and the government has to take the initiative to connect with the citizens to enhance connectivity and communication. With this motive, the Government of India initiated the ‘e-sampark’, which is a mechanism to connect the government directly with citizens across India by running mailers, outbound calling and SMS campaigns. The platform is used for sharing information and public service messages. The concept of e-Sampark has been introduced to establish proactive communication. The multi-faceted platform facilitates not only seamless communication between the government and citizens but also maintains a database of contacts of the nodal officers, representatives and citizens. In addition, users can also view the previous campaigns conducted. E-sampark is operational in various states across India including Chandigarh, where it has established multiple service centres that provide a range of services like payment of utility bills, Aadhar-related services and information dissemination regarding government programs. The implementation of e-sampark has significantly improved citizen engagement and awareness regarding governmental initiatives. By digitalising communication, it reduces the need for physical interaction with government officials, saving time and energy and making it easy and accessible to both the officials and the people. Overall, e-sampark exemplifies the government’s commitment to leveraging for better governance and enhanced public service delivery across the nation.

THE ECONOMIC SIDE — SCHEMES AND SIGNIFICANT LEGISLATIONS

The Digital India scheme comprises several initiatives that aim to enhance and strengthen the nation's economy as well like the Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) that aims to induce job growth, the launching of Digi-lockers, and several measures to eradicate the circulation and overall use of black money.

Business process outsourcing (BPO) is the delegation of one or more IT-intensive business processes to an external provider that, in turn, owns, administers and manages the selected processes based on defined and measurable performance metrics. BPO offerings are categorized into two major categories: horizontal offerings (those that can be leveraged across specific industries) and vertical-specific offerings (those that demand specific industry vertical process knowledge). As the digital era manifests its full potential, the BPO sector is set to benefit from robust technologies. Due to technological advancements, call centre services are becoming more insightful and transparent, enabling businesses to get all the benefits of outsourcing. The BPO sector in India is expected to grow at a CAGR of 9.3% from 2022 to 2030. The Government had launched the India BPO Promotion Scheme (IBPS) and the North East BPO Promotion Scheme (NEBPS) under the Digital India programme, to create employment opportunities and dispersal of the Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) industry in small cities and towns by incentivizing the setting up of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and ITES operations by providing financial support of up to ₹ 1 lakh per seat in the form of viability gap funding towards capital and operational expenditures. Under IBPS and NEBPS, 246 BPO/ITES units have started operations covering 27 States/UTs and are providing direct employment to over 51,584 persons. Digital transformation with BPO services is necessary, as cloud computing lets businesses get services whenever they need them. This lets BPOs offer solutions that can be scaled up or down as needed. The cost of the tools goes down, and information is safer and easier to get to. Indian business process outsourcing (BPO) firms are increasingly using the cloud to provide their customers with convenient and rapid services. Plus BPOs can connect with customers more quickly and personally with the help of AI-powered robots, prediction analytics, and personalized service choices.

The government has also enacted a number of legislation to formalize the economy and make business transactions essential. The Central Goods and Services Tax Act, other GST Acts at the state level, the Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, and the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act are a few examples. To add on, the government launched a four-month-long scheme urging income taxpayers to declare their black money. The ones who did declare their black money had to pay a penalty of 25 percent of the tax, surcharge and penalty twice – by November 30, 2016, and March 31, 2017.

Efforts were also taken to link the Aadhaar card to PAN for income tax returns, and to banks. The Aadhaar Card is now a necessity in various fields – to register for a SIM card, open bank accounts and file income tax returns. The recent step taken by the government to link Aadhaar to PAN for filing

income tax returns is mandatory as it would help the authorities to keep track of tax evasion. The Government has kept in mind the interests of businessmen and investors as well, as they are significant contributors to economic growth and development —Double Tax Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) is aimed to keep businesses and investors from being taxed twice if they are investing overseas — abroad and in their home countries— this aims to strengthen trans-national diasporic relations as well. Recently, the government tweaked DTAA agreements with countries such as Singapore, Mauritius and Panama to close tax loopholes. The digitalization of currency has also proved to be a stepping stone with its own economic promises. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently launched the country’s first pilot project for the digital currency known as the digital rupee or e-Rupee (₹). The launch of the digital rupee represents a significant advancement in the “Digital India” revolution. It will be a fantastic opportunity for India since it might make conducting business easier while enhancing the security and resilience of the overall payments system. Digital currency attempts to rapidly progress monetary policy to disrupt physical money, lower the cost of financial transactions, and reshape how the money will circulate.

The leading and topmost programme of the Government of India was initiated with the vision to change India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the programme on July 1, 2015. The three vision areas of Digital India are digital Infrastructure, governance and services and digital empowerment of citizens. Digital Locker is a dedicated personal storage space, which is linked to each resident’s Aadhaar number. The main use of DigiLocker is to store e-documents and Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) link of e-documents which is issued by various issuer departments. DigiLocker system provides the e-Sign facility which can be used to digitally sign e-documents. DigiLocker is a digital locker for issuing and verifying the documents and certificates, eliminating the need for carrying physical documents. Along with the storage facility, it also provides easy accessibility. Various documents are uploaded in DigiLocker like Voter Id card, PAN card, BPL card, Driving license, education certificates etc. It can be treated as authorised documents as these documents are linked to the Aadhaar number.

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Indian Taxation System: A Dystopian Misery for its Citizenry

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ABSTRACT

Framing an ideal taxation system for every section of the citizenry is itself a utopia for a heterogeneous country like India. Whereby the challenges for administration lie in dealing with reducing the differences between haves and have-nots amongst the citizenry. The Indian middle class has been one of the most prominent groups that contribute towards the nation's revenue through 'income tax' and other innumerable taxes. This research article attempts a comprehensive analysis of various reports, journals, and case studies, that how the meagre changes brought about in reducing this taxation parity have remained toothless and are failing to live up to its intended expectations even under the Goods & Services Tax (GST) Regime.

Keywords: *ideal taxation, citizenry, nation's revenue, system inability, unequal income groups*

The dystopian taxation measures were not new for the nation, their brunt has been spreading over the years with rising inflation. A comprehensive revamp was the need of the hour, it also meant people were falling under the income tax regime even with lower incomes. This had become an issue with a serious cause of concern for the economic trajectory upwards. The Union budgets since 2014 have been projecting how an income tax rate of 20% became applicable to income above Rs 5 lakh and 30% on income above Rs 10 lakh (Union Budget, 2014). The average inflation presently is around 6% in 2024, the real value of Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh in 2014 was found to be Rs 2.8 lakh and Rs 5.6 lakh, respectively.

The current taxation system was found to be quite pressurizing on the Indian middle classes, especially for the lower middle class. The Union budget of 2005-06, was famous for the notion of being

‘middleclass’ friendly and is still touted as ‘a dream budget’. In the Union Budget 2007, the finance ministry significantly raised the tax slabs - 10% tax on income above Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh, 20% tax on income above Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh and 30% tax on income above Rs 2.5 lakh (Chidambaram, 2007).

	Year 2005-06 ▲	2005-06 - Equivalent Gold Weight Purchased
Basic Exemption Limit	Rs 1 lakh	144.9 g
Ceiling for lowest tax slab	Rs 1.5 lakh	217.4 g
Floor of highest tax slab	Rs 2.5 lakh	362.3 g
Price of 1g Gold (999)	Rs 690*	1 g

The tax slabs for the year 2005-06 in terms of gold weight and its valuation in 2024.

Source- Economic Times Online, RBI Report 2005-06

According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, the price for 1 gram of gold in 2005-06 was around Rs 690. It had the purchasing capacity of about 145 grams of gold for Rs 1 lakh since that section did not fall under the ‘tax-slabs’, hence no income tax was incurred. One could even sell that gold at the current price of Rs 7,275 per gram (India Bullion and Jewellers Association Ltd. rates as of July 2024), an individual could easily get today Rs 10.54 lakhs (approx.) in return. If it had been the gold standard, then the lowest income tax slab of 10% should have been levied on those with income above Rs 10 lakh for making it ‘inflation-proof’, if compared with the tax slab of 2005-06. Similarly, the 20% slab should have begun from Rs 15 lakh and the 30% tax slab from Rs 25 lakh if this budget had to be another dream budget.

THE INDIRECT TAXATION REGIME: FROM VAT TO GST

The transition from Value Added Taxes to Goods & Services Taxes in July 2017 under the 101st amendment with article 279A was expected and promised to be the smoothest transition. It would have helped in making the taxation especially indirect ones simpler and the fuzziness of the earlier VAT would have been reduced considerably, similarly, the VAT regime also promised simpler Service Taxes, Central Excise Duty, and even simplifying compliances. To enhance the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) across the country, the most noteworthy objective of GST has been its role in simplifying and expediting company compliance. Before its implementation, businesses had been contended with a complicated

network of indirect taxes levied by both central and state governments, which created difficulties and raised compliance costs. This transition to an automated and digitized tax system enhanced compliance efficiency, facilitating tasks such as submitting returns, matching invoices, and making tax payments online. Despite this positive stance made under the GST regime, various sectors continued to face multiple taxation challenges alike VAT that hindered their growth and operational efficiency. Many Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and the manufacturing sectors have been grappling with the issues related to Input Tax Credit (ITC) and compliance burdens. Instead of simplifying these processes, MSMEs struggled with compliance control measures involving various intricacies. The Information & Technology (IT) Sector also faced significant challenges, particularly with the increase in the cost of software services which is levied at an 18 % GST rate. These increased costs strained resources, and made the sustenance of smaller IT firms and various start-ups' continuance difficult, quite contrary as promised under 'Skill India'. The other most affected sector has been the e-commerce sector where a substantial section of the citizenry contributes towards economic growth and is part of the taxation indirectly. The e-commerce platforms in return encountered significant challenges concerning Tax Collected at Source (TCS) and Tax Deducted at Source (TDS).

GOODS & SERVICES TAX: A BOON OR BURDEN?

GST's introduction had indeed been a boon for the citizenry in the initial years of introduction, though challenges started incurring over the following years for every section of citizenry from middle-class citizenry at the most to business ventures. It has been useful only for the corporates, as GST made payment of 'Corporate Taxes' with a varied range of relaxations and tax-free benefits for 'Special Economic Zones' (SEZs), no tax cuts as promised initially by the GST council remained only under mere wordings. Under this banner a wide range of indirect local taxes 'octroi' (a French term for local taxes), excise tax, service tax, and custom duty taxes were created for a nationally integrated economy that was a single tax, a single market for strengthening the notion of 'One Nation, One Tax' a reality, along with fostering the policy of 'Make in India'.

The Government and the GST Council had been vehement towards commendable and proactive measures. The recent amendments introduced during the Union Budget and the 53rd GST Council meeting have reflected a strong commitment towards enhancing the ease of doing business. The notable amendments are the reduction of TDS for e-commerce operators from 1% to 0.1%. Lowering the TDS rates would enable the e-commerce platforms to retain more capital for reinvestment fostering innovation and growth within the sector. Additionally, the reduction of TDS from 1% to 0.5% for other sectors is expected to ease financial pressures across various industries, including hospitality industries (Annapoorna, 2024). Subsequently, these amendments have reflected the government's responsiveness to the evolving needs of the digital economy and its commitment to fostering a supportive regulatory

environment that enhances the ease of doing business in India. For MSMEs and manufacturers, the extension of the time limit for claiming ITC is a significant relief. It allows businesses more flexibility in managing their tax credits, thereby reducing the immediate financial strain associated with compliance, and SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) have to face a higher tax burden. In earlier taxation systems the registration limit¹ was Rs. 1.5 crores that is SMEs with a lower turnover of Rs. 1.5 crore could get the benefit of SME subsidies but through GST the registration limit was brought down to Rs. 40 lakh the SMEs have to register for GST and follow rules and regulations. Section 11A of the Central GST Act also promised to address the ongoing challenges faced by various industries that had reached alarming levels, emphasizing the need for common trade practices and a bona fide understanding of the law (Doshi,2019). It also provided for much-needed relief by allowing these industries to seek exemptions from retrospective tax demands when they have complied with the prevailing rates and empowers the GST Council to provide relief to industries from tax demands.

Various goods like tobacco products, aerated water, areca nuts, slaked lime, catechu, and other flavouring agents attract additional compensation CESS apart from GST therefore the final prices of such specified products have increased under the GST system.

Even the taxation charges for hotel accommodation, earlier below 15% now it has been shifted from 18% to 20%. Thereby the cost of the services became costlier to the final consumer. A fascinating scenario where complexity sharpens more is about excluding taxation on certain food items like milk, sugar, salt, and tea leaves on one hand and the other hand, commodities like pasteurized milk or condensed milk, refined sugar, iodized salt, Darjeeling tea or even purchasing a mineral water bottle which all are considered as packaged products and are levied 12% - 18%, depending upon the quality and branding. At one end the government is entrusted to give free elementary education to all children irrespective of economic status as a fundamental right entrusted in the constitution under Article 21A. On the other hand, the educational cost, at private universities and schools are kept out of the GST system, they are hoped for to levy 18% of tax as against the 14% in the earlier system. Thereby an assumption is made that the educational cost of private institutions is expected to increase by 3% to 5%, while GST on training or coaching institutions will also increase thereby students who were paying Rs. 2 lakh and GST as Rs. 30,000 will now have to pay additional Rs. 6000 over increased tax slab rates. The recent 55th GST Meeting had made quite an ambiguous measure, bringing much controversy regarding 18% GST upon selling used cars. If an individual plans to sell their car which was bought at Rs 30 lakh in 2021 and if sold in 2024 for Rs 15 lakhs, 18% tax would be levied on the selling price amounting to Rs. 27,000. A quintessential component of everyday lives, mobile phones are being levied 18% GST. Thereby, reducing the profit margin of mobile phone companies. Entertainment is also becoming a part of a 'mere luxury' if a movie ticket is bought at Rs.100 then

GST of 18 % is charged. If the ticket is higher than Rs 100 then the tax slab changes from 18% to 28%, thereby increasing the entertainment taxes heavily in every minute component.

A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUAL TAXES: INDIA VS. SAUDI ARABIA & UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE):

India shares, a substantial cordiality with the Middle Eastern States both economically and politically. So, an assessment of the taxes for individual citizenry is needed for greater comprehension at large.

India's personal income taxation system a pressurising impact on citizenry. In the financial year 202324, for annual income up to Rs. 2.5 lakh no income taxes were levied, for income above Rs. 2.5 lakhs being levied at 5%, above Rs. 5 lakhs at 20% and for income above Rs.10 lakhs at 30%. Additional surcharges apply for income above Rs. 50 lakh, and there is a Health & Education Central Excise and Service Tax of 4% on the total tax payable. The E-filing² system by the Income Tax Department is also relatively modernized even with dealing all complexities like the existence of multiple tax slabs, frequent amendments, and various types of taxes at the central and state levels (e.g., GST, Income Tax, Corporate Tax). Compliance and documentation also becomes cumbersome, especially for businesses operating in multiple states. Saudi Arabia, does not levy personal income tax on individual income. The most attractive aspects of Saudi Arabia's tax system, especially for expatriates. Saudi nationals are required to contribute to social security, which is generally around 9% of their salary, but this is not classified as a personal income tax. E-filing System, implemented in tax administration, and the General Authority of Zakat and Tax (GAZT) is highly digitalized, allowing for efficient tax filings. being relatively simple, with clear rules and minimal bureaucratic hurdles also offers a simpler and more streamlined tax administration measure. In contrast, India's tax compliance is more complex, particularly for businesses that deal with multiple states and tax slabs.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) VS. INDIA

UAE levies no personal income tax on salaries or wages, hence no tax on income. Nothing levied as a wealth tax, capital gains tax³, or inheritance tax. Social security contributions promised to its nationals (employed in the private and public sectors) but not for expatriates. The tax system is designed to be highly competitive and attractive for foreign trade and businesses friendly environment. This comparative analysis shows, how India follows a progressive tax structure with tax rates ranging from 0% to 30%, depending on income levels. Taxpayers benefit are limited only to certain exemptions, such as investments in pension funds or insurance premiums. India no longer has a wealth tax, but

capital gains taxes applies for investments in assets such as stocks, real estate, etc. acting as a social security scheme. This includes the 'Employees Provident Fund' (EPF) and Employees' State Insurance (ESI) for employees in formal sector jobs. Even after paying such a wide range of taxes, the selfemployed are compelled to contribute to the National Pension Scheme (NPS), only for a minimum income security after their retirement with their hard-earned income during the service years.

CONCLUSION

After several rounds of reforms and adoptions, the dystopian misery is still on for the noble citizenry. Regardless of the advantages that GST provides there are still certain criticisms that have hindered the government as well as the citizens in diverse ways. Revenue collection has been prevailing since earlier times but in the present scenario, taxes have been infiltrating every business of SMEs, and also for the savings of common citizens. The everyday paucity being identified by economists and critics from various disciplines has pointed out that it is more of a production-based tax rather than a consumer-based tax. Not at all fitting with the 'One India, One Tax Model' instead the burden has been more for the citizenry. The taxation differences between States and Centres are not at all mentioned clearly. The boundary between various 'tax slabs' under the price range of a single product purchased under the categorization by the GST council under major slabs for different goods and services are quite ambiguous. There is a need for clearer guidelines on how individual taxes would be levied rather than changing patterns between various governments and states for its benefit. Additionally, the government's proactive steps are needed in addressing sector-specific challenges, and enhancing the overall business environment would help in improving global investor confidence, leading to increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows. With this commitment, the future looks promising and questionable for Indian enterprises even also in comparison with other allies and partners, also navigating the complexities of the GST landscape is needed with greater cause of attention and need for better planning measures.

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Women's Rights And The Uniform Civil Code Of India Debate

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical analysis of how feminist perspectives align or clash with the ongoing debates over implementing a uniform civil code in India. Since the first proposal of a UCC, debates have arisen about it- whether it truly works towards the betterment of women and implementing women's rights or that it's a code which disguises the motto of a totalitarian society with a Hindu-centric approach. In this research paper we delve into the various discourse and opinions of both the sides- for and against, of a UCC and compare their arguments to the needs of contemporary society and attempt at finding and / or suggesting necessary outcomes and suggestions. This paper also sheds light on past cases of oppression of women as well as contemporary issues regarding women and their rights, along with current challenges regarding gender equality, religious autonomy and the complexity of India's pluralistic society.

Keywords: *women's rights, Uniform Civil Code, feminism, gender justice*

The controversy surrounding the establishment of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India is often situated in the spheres of law, religion and women's rights. The goal of the discussion is to unify the matrimonial, parental, and custodial laws of different religious communities into a single, national code. A lot of feminists hail this as an initiative to uproot a patriarchal order enshrined in personal laws that they contend are detrimental towards women. Yet many other people see the UCC as an invasion of religious values as well as diversity within culture. So, there arises a debate between feminist or "liberal" views against people with conservative views, wanting to uphold the traditional ways of functioning of a society. There is also a debate between the feminist themselves, having contrasting views about some aspects of the UCC.

This article attempts to look at the ways feminist views both support and oppose the current UCC debates in the context of Indian politics by presenting some of the most important UCC issues arising from the two sides of the debate.

THE ORIGINS OF THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE DEBATE

The Uniform Civil Code was mooted for the first time while drafting the Indian Constitution during the period 1947-49. One of the provisions in Article 44 explicitly directs the State to 'endeavour to

secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India'. The purpose of this article is to further national integration by ensuring that all the citizens, including those who belong to different religions or communities, are subjected to the same laws. However, implementing UCC was postponed on the grounds that there was a need not to offend religious minorities particularly Muslims who were apprehensive of losing their personal laws following the Partition.

Over the years, however, a number of legal and political events have reignited the debate over the UCC. The Shah Bano case (1985)¹ and Triple Talaq judgment (2017)² are some of the prominent cases that emerged in the struggle for women's rights against religious personal laws. In those cases, legal cases were won in favour of women's rights, but political groups have frequently shied away from addressing the topic since it might upset religious communities.

FEMINIST SUPPORT FOR THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

Feminists depict a United Code of Conduct as a prime factor towards attainment of gender equity in India which currently the country breeds issues of. Personal laws concerning marriage dissolution and succession, among other things, are especially the centre point that undermines women. For example, under Muslim law, polygamy and triple talaq have for ages undermined women's rights, but this is improving owing to legal amendments. Also, during the puranic and medieval period, succession laws were made which favoured men, however steps have been taken to bring legislation such as Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 to amend this.

Feminists argue that a Uniform Civil Code is crucial for an equitable society and women should not be subjected to any kind of personal laws – Hindu laws, Muslim laws, Christian laws, etc. – that are regressive towards them. They claim this would equally allow women legal redress and protection regardless of their religion. In this regard, the UCC is not just a legal amendment but a requirement that contributes to the demolition of the patriarchal system that confines women within specific terrains within the public as well as private domains.

For the feminists that are in favour of the UCC, the code serves as a means of relocating the battleground over women's rights from religious factors to the citizenship and constitutional equality arena. A uniform civil code would ensure that all women, irrespective of whatever religion one follows, would enjoy legal rights equally as men before the law. This, they contend, is important in a secular democracy where the rights of citizens are not to be subjected to religious sacrosanct.

THE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM ARGUMENT AGAINST THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

Though UCC gets the endorsement from a number of feminists, others, especially from minority sections of the society have raised eyebrows on UCC believing that it will interfere with the scope of religious freedom. These critics hold that a uniform code, especially one legislated by the authorities,

will erode cultural plurality and autonomy of religious institutions. They observe that in this country religion is not just personal but a societal issue, and any initiatives aimed at reforming personal laws need to be cognizant of this issue.

Some members of the Legislative Assembly who see the imposition of UCC from this perspective argue that UCC is aimed at paganizing the minority groups including imposing Hindu norms on the others. Naziruddin Ahmad, MLA argued that few civil laws in all communities were “inseparably connected with religious beliefs and practices” (Constituent Assembly Debates On 23 November, 1948). To illustrate, Muslim groups, for instance, the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA), have maintained that there is indeed a need for some reforms in the Muslim law, but a UCC would endanger the community’s cultural freedoms and religious diversity. In doing so, these groups argue that such changes can be made without compromising freedom and stressing on reforms for internal rather than external imposition of oneness.

Other feminists who have been against the UCC on the same preposition have also noted the circumstances in which this debate is held. They say that the demand for a UCC is more often political, for it has little bearing on justice issues but aims to galvanize the groups which retort to aggression. In that scenario, the way UCC is introduced is a sort of security that cuts diversity from the Indian identity and a top-down method of assimilating the minorities. This angle was seen in the raising of the Shah Bano case where Muslim conservatives claimed that the decision was nothing but an infringement of their religious rights when in fact it was favourable to other Muslim women.

In India, UCC has always been an emotive issue and the parties have always tried to exploit it to gain support from their respective communities. Out of all the parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been quite clear and persistent for UCC and has made it a feature in most of its election agendas. The UCC lead initiatives taken by the BJP appear part of the broader secularism cum national cohesion initiative of the party. It is argued that the initiatives are also aimed at consolidating the Hindu votes, aiming to impose a Hindu-centric vision and further alienating the Muslim community segments.

For feminist groups, the UCC’s political dimension becomes a bit more complicated. Sexual equality and modification of existing laws are okay with them but the search for women’s empowerment is not central to their politics. For these feminists, there is the risk that the UCC debates are actually more likely to be used to advance majoritarian goals rather than to promote equality. It has led them to take a more moderate position seeking changes within personal law – not the implementation of a UCC.

This aspect of struggle makes the responses directed at UCC by feminists, to say the least, puzzling. On one hand, the UCC offers an opportunity for the legal advancement of women, while on the other, it can be invoked to encroach upon the rights of the religious minorities. Feminists then have to look into these opposing requirements which involve the struggle for gender justice and the objective of upholding the pluralistic character of the society.

INTERNAL REFORM VS. UNIFORMITY: A DIVIDE WITHIN FEMINISM

How to go about the internal reforms in personal laws or call for UCC has created a rift in the feminist movement in India. Secular feminists are critical about the effectiveness of internal reforms in tackling the broad-level discrimination entrenched in the personal laws. They argue that till the personal laws are in existence, the women will always be discriminated against because of their religion and it is only a UCC which can ensure true gender equality.

However, internal reform feminists have a different position. They do not believe that a UCC is necessary for achieving gender justice because it can be attained through reforms within the personal law systems. They argue that personal laws are not rigid and fundamental and social changes can be achieved from within the religions. Muslim women's rights were, for instance, advanced with the Supreme Court's 2017 ruling against the practice of Teen talâq or instant divorce. Likewise, reforms in the Hindu Succession Act passed in 2005, giving equal inheritance rights to women, confirmed that changes were feasible without a uniform code being imposed.

So, these feminists push for the necessity of religious communities in the course of legal reforms. They contend that changes that are imposed from above, such as the UCC, will be met with resistance and backlash, but changes that are negotiated within communities will be embraced and sustained. They consider this approach more suited to and respectful of India's multiculturalism and more likely to bring about gender justice in the long run.

THE FUTURE OF THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE DEBATE

The debate on UCC is still an ongoing and heated discourse. The chasm between the feminists who are in favour of UCC and those who want internal reforms further cuts into the fracture lines present in Indian society with respect to religion, law and the state. The secular feminists regard the UCC as a measure of legal equality which is above religious considerations. The situation however is quite the opposite for other individuals, who consider the UCC as an attack on the plurality of the culture and religious beliefs.

One suggestion towards achieving this is that a finer National repository of different cultures is that the approach of UCC should be more nuanced, taking into personalized considerations of different religions and communities instead of a generalized code- which by default moves towards being a majoritypleasing conduct. This national repository of different cultures UCC could permit some degree of uniformity of the laws on marriage and inheritance with allowances for the particular

religious and cultural characteristics of various communities. However, such an approach would involve considerable negotiation and discussion amongst the state, religious authorities and women's rights activists, but such an approach does offer a way of combining the objectives of equality and diversity.

CONCLUSION: STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN GENDER JUSTICE AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

It is true that the debate over the UCC is definitely one of the most heated debates in the current view of Indian politics and society. Feminists too are faced with this seeming paradox - pursuing the goals of gender justice while being sensitive to plurality of religious and cultural contexts. Though UCC is conceived to provide equal legal rights to all women, it also includes the fear of religious minority domination and majoritarian oppression.

With many of them actively participating in the debates surrounding the UCC, it becomes very important to remember what the end goal is: the security and the enhancement of a woman's rights. It does not matter if it is through a UCC or through internal changes in personal laws that the end goal is to ensure equality of women and their rights, regardless of their culture and religion, within the framework of law.

NOTES

1. Shah Bano Case (1985): This landmark case highlighted the conflict between women's rights and personal laws, where the Supreme Court upheld the right to maintenance for a divorced Muslim woman. It sparked intense debate around the UCC, secularism, and minority rights. See Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum, 1985 SCR (3) 844.
2. Triple Talaq Judgment (2017): In Shayara Bano v. Union of India, the Supreme Court declared instant triple talaq unconstitutional, signaling a shift towards uniformity in marriage and divorce laws to protect women's rights. See Shayara Bano v. Union of India, Writ Petition (C) No. 118 of 2016.
3. Hindu Succession Act Amendment (2005): The amendment granted equal inheritance rights to daughters, marking a significant step toward gender equality within Hindu personal law. See Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, No. 39 of 2005, Acts of Parliament, 2005.
4. Article 25 and Religious Freedom: Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, providing an essential counterpoint in debates over the UCC, as it limits the state's ability to impose uniform laws that may infringe upon religious practices. See Constitution of India, Article 25.

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Young India in a State of Ferment: Contemporary Youth Activism

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ABSTRACT

Addressing the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the skill of India's young population will be catalytic for the country's progress towards becoming developed. In other words, the government has utmost faith in the upcoming generation to lead India to a promising future. However, can the same be said the other way? This article strives to trace the diminishing trust of the young generation in modern governance by exploring certain youth movements that have necessitated significant social and political changes. Their increasing propensity to informal means of political participation has reformed the definition of modern 'youth politics'. Protests, demonstrations, digital activism and other diverse innovative strategies have come to play a crucial role in the expression of youth unrest. Thus, the proliferation of youth agitations in recent years, pertaining to dynamic issues, is reflective of the growing pessimism among Indian youths.

Keywords: young population, youth movements, youth politics, protests, digital activism, agitations, Indian youth

Headlines such as – ‘Students cry out: No reservation please’ (Times of India, 2006), ‘Protests Spread in Wake of Sedition Charges Against Students’ (Benar News, 2016) and ‘JNU Students’ Union hold protests against fee hike’ (Zee News, 2019), have seemed to become a common sight in presentday newspapers. Further, according to the 2018 data released by the National Crime Record Bureau, student-led protests have nearly doubled between 2014 and 2018 (Pandey, 2020). Such surge in youth activism, on one hand, reveals the spurt of challenges that counter their aspirations, on the other, they simultaneously contribute to democratization and demand greater transparency and better governance. ‘Youth’ who possess abounding psychic energy, who are neither entirely progressive nor conservative, and are ‘unattached to’ and ‘unsettled’ in society (Ghosh, n.d.), play a paramount and nonnegligible role in shaping contemporary politics. A distinctive feature of this category of population lies in their zeal for a new start. As harbingers of radical social change, their active contribution, historically, has led to the overturning of several authoritarian practices and the realization of democratic values in life

(Ghosh, n.d.). ‘Youth unrest’ amongst the young population, has become a frequent occurrence owing to their increasing discontentment with the government.

This dissatisfaction is also a symptomatic reflection of the underlying fundamental societal and economic problems that have driven the younger generation to act collectively and by their own convenient means.

An emerging trend in ‘youth politics’ is their proclivity to unconstitutional measures of political participation. Movements and protests have thus, not only been frequented over the years but also manifested digitally, specifically in the post-internet revolution age. This brings us to an interesting bifurcation in the discourse of political engagement, built around the traditional vs contemporary forms of participation. Research conducted in Europe by Laden Yurttagüler in 2018 for his paper ‘Citizenship Education in Changing Times’, demonstrates the growing interest amongst young people to join loose interest groups rather than traditional forms of political participation. Alongside this, social media and its unbridled and unfiltered usage has emerged as a new tool of revolution echoing the discontented voices of the youths (Şerban, n.d.). As Thomas Zeitoff outlined in his 2017 Journal, this new information and communication technology has enabled citizens to access new data without restrictions. Its capacity to spread information remains unparalleled which has aided actors in functioning in a dynamic environment. The younger generation has therefore replaced conventional media that only permitted a one-way movement of information (elites to general masses), with social media which largely remains outside the clutches of government censorship. Platforms like X (formally known as Twitter), YouTube, Facebook and Instagram have garnered attention over the years due to their strategic utilization by both incumbents and protestors. Hence, social media has often become instrumental in the hands of youth rebels to disarray the existing political norms (Ghosh Roy, 2024).

PROTEST POLITICS OF YOUTH: A GLANCE THROUGH INDIAN ARCHIVES

India has always been familiar with incidents where students took to the streets and expressed their opposition. Indeed, the whole episode of the freedom struggle itself marks a rough inception of student solidarity in India. However, the idealistic objective of achieving national independence was replaced with concerns of countering “socio-economic ills and maladies” visible in the form of sporadic unorganized agitations often based on “campus-politics” (Hazary, 1988). This dramatic transformation of protest politics can be observed, highlighting a few movements spearheaded by the Indian youths in post 1970s.

AXOM ANDOLAN (1979 - 85)

The lifeless body of Khargeswar Talukdar, 22, was found and reported in late 1979, in Assam. His killing which was meant to silence the students’ uprising, however, marked him as the first martyr of the Assam Agitation (Assam's fight for survival, 2024).

The Assam Agitation or Axom Andolan, spearheaded by the indigenous population of Assam, was a movement triggered by the decease of the then Lok Sabha MP, Hiralal Patwari. In the urgent need for

by-elections, the subsequent preparation of electoral rolls exposed the sudden surge in the electorates due to years of influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

The agreement to address this large-scale immigrant penetration was initiated with a campaign by the All-Assam Student's Union (AASU), in 1979. Their initial structured resistance, a twelve-hour general strike (Assam bandh) had quickly gained massive mass support. The reputation of this campaign eventually grew to inspire various political and cultural groups to unite and establish All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which together served as the linchpin of the Agitation. Mass dharnas, wall writings, night-time blackouts, extensive petitioning and refusal to participate in general elections, were some of the notable means adhered to by the students (Polity and Governance, n.d.).

This initial course of peaceful resistance however took a turn as emotions began to run high. Further, Talukdar's martyrdom injected the scope of rampant use of violence which necessitated the imposition of President's Rule in Assam. It also culminated to 'one of the darkest chapters in Assam's history' – the attack on the Neillie village by the Lalung tribe and the Assamese in 1983. This massacre resulted in the deaths of over 2000 Bengali Muslim immigrants, mainly women and children (Assam's fight for survival, 2024). Nonetheless, the efforts of AASU and AAGSP, six years-long unrest, reached its zenith with the historic agreement of the Assam Accord in 1985, resolving the deep concern of securing the Assamese identity.

THE BLANK NOISE PROJECT (2003)

Section 509 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, criminalises any gesture or act that intends to disparage the modesty of a woman. However, contradictorily, eve-teasing and sexual harassment of women in public spaces, including workplaces and educational institutions, have become increasingly normalized. Aspirations of women, particularly pursuing education and job opportunities, have been constantly hindered by their daily encounters with catcalls, vulgar commentaries and indecorous sexual touches. In such light, the Blank Noise Project was pioneered by Jasmeen Patheja in 2003, culminating into a movement that spanned over fifteen years. This project appealed to several individuals, including students, to become 'Action Heroes' and procure the initiative to address street harassment. An exceptional feature of Blank Noise was the variety of strategies the participants employed to raise awareness. For instance, under its campaign 'I Never Ask For It', it crowdsourced and both publicly and digitally displayed clothing donned by women during incidents of harassment. Movements and campaigns encouraging women to claim their freedom and space like, 'Akeli Awaara Azaad' (On Her Own, Bold, Independent) and 'Meet to Sleep', were launched under this project. Community volunteers, artists and creative online collaborators, academic institutions and students, survivors, allies and public spectators, were incorporated under the broader umbrella of Blank Noise rendering it to emerge as an inclusive project (Phadke, 2020).

One of the notable contributions of Blank Noise remains its launch of the Safe City Pledge in 2012, in the wake of the Nirbhaya Case (Blank Noise, 2023). Thus, the dream of the then student (Patheja)

envisioning the confrontation of street harassment and gender inequality through innovative initiatives, transformed into a reality.

COLOURS OF CONSENT: PRIDE MARCHES

"When 17-year-old Manoj - who was recorded female sex at birth - told his family that he felt like a man and loved a woman, he almost got killed", read a BBC article, documenting the contemporary conditions of Indian LGBTQ couples (Arya, 2023).

The roots of 'tabooization' of homosexuality or same-sex attraction in India, can be traced to the enforcement of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 1861, by the British. This very imported law, mirroring the religious standards of Europe left a long anti-LGBTQ legacy in India (Mehrotra, 2021). In July 1999, 138 years after the legal ban on 'homosexual conduct', India witnessed its first but innocuous form of Pride march known as 'Friendship Walk' in Kolkata. The plan of this walk was uniquely arranged by a handful of Queer Indians who found each other using mailing lists and Yahoo groups (LGBTQ+, 2023). It was from 2007 onwards that Pride marches gained considerable support owing to the participation of myriads of people, the majority being the youth. Events like, the Queer Azaadi march and the subsequent Queer Film Festival in 2007, Mumbai; the remarkable rally of the Queer Pride Parade in Delhi; the mega-city of Bangalore which hosted the first-ever Lesbian Dykes on Bikes march; the Kolkata Rainbow Pride Walk (KRPW) also known for its workshops, art creations and awareness drives, and, the Reel Desires or The Chennai International Queer Film Festival, are exemplary contributions of youths (OT Staff, 2022).

The Victorian relic in the IPC – Section 377, was finally stricken down by the Supreme Court on September 6, 2018. Thus, the consistent efforts of the youths yielded a monumental political outcome, honouring diverse sexual orientations and identities and unintentionally serving justice to the values of Ancient India, that in the pre-colonial times revered the Hijra community (Mehrotra, 2021). However, despite the decriminalization of homosexuality, India has a long journey ahead to eliminate social stigma and negative attitudes toward queer identity, as acceptance of homosexual relationships still remains limited even in large metropolitan areas.

INDIA'S DAUGHTER: NIRBHAYA (2012)

"Her internal organs had collapsed and her body was not even accepting water That is when we decided that no matter how long this fight takes, I have to be strong for her" said Asha Devi, the mother of the 23-year-old victim of the horrific Delhi gangrape (Bhardwaj, 2020).

On the cold night of 16th December 2012, Jyoti Singh (under the pseudonym Nirbhaya), a young intern in physiotherapy, was not just subjected to sexual assault but her body was also unimaginably mutilated. The sheer barbarity and viciousness of this case compelled the legal system to treat it as the 'rarest of the rare' in the Indian 'crimescape' (Rana, 2020).

Within hours of the news telecast, thousands of people poured onto the streets, including students, to demand justice and raise concerns for women's safety. Nirbhaya's death on December 29th further aggravated the ongoing protest marches in Delhi, which soon spread across other cities of the nation.

Munmi Dutta, President of the North East Girl Students' Association termed this as the 'beginning of a new struggle'. Campuses of Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University became sites for demonstrations and their walls echoed the chanted slogans. Soon this spiralled into massive violent outrages where students were met with police hecklings yet they fearlessly stood, facing water cannons, tear gas and holding posters (Kapoor, 2023).

The structuring of various spontaneous gatherings into proper mass struggles, to a large extent, can be credited to such relentless student initiatives. It managed to spark global indignation and the incident was denounced by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, who urged the Government of India and that of Delhi to employ all their resources in serving justice. The persistent clamour of public resentment was finally heard, when the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 was introduced as a part of the anti-rape laws. Among other things, this new law expanded the definition of rape and made it a non-bailable offense. Additionally, it also increased the terms of imprisonment for most types of sexual violence and added death penalty for cases where the raped victim was either killed or left in a vegetative state. Further, this Act ensures the imprisonment of those police officers who refuse to file an FIR in such cases (Deka, 2024). The strength of public solidarity hence enabled Asha Devi, who had never visited a police station before, to force India to reform rape laws (Bhardwaj, 2020).

INFERENCE

To sum up, a glance through the aforementioned cases is sufficient to realize the abiding anxiety of modern India. As 'embryonic citizens', the younger generation ought to exercise their political freedom to attain as well as sustain the 'future quality of civic culture' (Coleman, 2007). Their participation remains critical in sculpting the political terrain of the nation and in aiding the endurance of the democratic bedrock. However, when this voluntary engagement takes recourse to nontraditional means, it ruptures the notions of Foucauldian 'governmentality'¹ by threatening the authority of the state. The reason for this divorce from formal political engagement often stems from the diminishing faith of the people in the state, in countering the underlying social, economic, environmental and political issues. Likewise, to understand the condition of recent youth unrest in India, one has to unravel the implications of postmodernism - an age of polycrisis. Despite the liberalization of the Indian economy and the subsequent globalization of Indian culture, there exists a high disparity in development across the nation. India displays a specific bipolarity, where metropolitan cities, at the receiving end of the competitive global market, co-exist with subaltern regions, which have carried the baggage of poverty and backwardness from the colonial period. This paradoxical uncertain society is awarded to the contemporary Indian youths who are abandoned with the responsibility to untangle as well as resolve the overlapping crises. Thus, concerns of unemployment, injustice, inequality, underdevelopment, the precariousness of privacy, population explosion, health anxiety (a COVID repercussion), corruption and lawlessness, outline the parameters of modern apprehension that the youths have to grapple with.

ENDNOTE

1. Concept of 'Governmentality', originally described as "the code of conduct" by Michael Foucault, includes a wide range of control techniques by the government that makes the subject governable.

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POLITICAL ECONOMY: THE MARK OF THE MARKET

Ideology and Economic Diplomacy: The Case of Iran

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ABSTRACT

With growing economic interdependence, economic isolation becomes a tool to ensure compliance - primarily in the arsenal of the U.S. The effects of this tool, however, are not always favourable. Economically isolated powers have tended to pursue riskier strategies, often launching attacks that expand the conflict at hand. Existing scholarship argues if tensions between Iran and the U.S. were to escalate, economic isolation would be one of the primary techniques in the strategy of the U.S., something that can be readily observed recently. While its effects on the strategy of Iran remain to be seen, existing scenarios suggest that Tehran is not willing to escalate the ongoing conflict. This article seeks to highlight the reasons why; despite facing sanctions and antagonistic public opinion, escalation might be a move that the Islamic Republic of Iran may choose to undertake. This argument will be constructed based on the previous failures of sanctions, presence of external allies, domestic conditions as well as existing political elite ideology. The article first highlights the reasons behind why economic isolation has failed to de-escalate conflicts. It then goes on to show how an ideological factor could overcome isolationary pressures, if the ideology is strong enough.

Keywords: *Iran, the U.S., economic sanctions, economic isolation, elite ideology.*

Since 1979, to counter the ascension of Ayatollah Khomeini and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the country has been one of the most heavily sanctioned ones in the world. In this context, economic development and international integration become difficult. This results in public dissatisfaction with the government in case of failure to take concrete steps to work towards the removal of sanctions. Recent public dissatisfaction can be estimated from a November 2023 National Survey of Iranian Values and Attitudes, that reflects key social, political and economic concerns, which revealed that a startling 92% of the population is unhappy with the current state of the country. Key issues to emerge from the findings were inflation, cited by 81% and unemployment, cited by 47.9%, alongside corruption, housing shortages and safety. Significant to note here is the unenthusiasm of Iranians towards their leadership - as of February 2024, a slim majority of 52% express disapproval towards the current government. Iranians under the age of 30 who make up 60% of the population are particularly disapproving of the government, with 61% expressing dissatisfaction. 80% of Iranians are of the opinion that it is a bad time for them to find a job within the country, with 26% (as of 2023) wanting to move abroad permanently. Another survey, published in March 2024, shows that 66% of the population has an unfavourable opinion of the current leader

Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, with 62.1% expressing their views as very unfavourable. According to sociologist Simin Kazemi, the abstention of 60% of the population in the first round of voting in 2024 presidential elections clearly reflects public dissatisfaction and hopelessness with the leadership. Within this context, it is important to note that the Iranian public does not seem to prioritise the same issues as its leadership, one of these being the Palestinian-Israeli issue. This difference in priority can be observed in the use of the slogan, “*No to Lebanon, no to Palestine, my life only for Iran*” which rose to prominence in the 2009 Green Movement, and has since resurfaced over the years (Afshari, 2024; Azizi, 2024). This is in stark contrast to the state’s support of the Palestinian cause, which organised support protests on October 13 2023, in the wake of the October 7 attacks. Since then, the situation has escalated further with Iran having actively engaged itself in the conflict - first in April of this year and most recently, in October, since when there has been an ongoing exchange of fire. The public asserts that the government should be seeking to use funds to combat the deepening economic crises of inflation and unemployment, rather than pursue its foreign policy agendas. This foreign policy, according to Iranian photojournalist and author Arash Azizi, has brought the Iranian public nothing but misery, international isolation and economic difficulty (Azizi, 2024). The fundamental question that stands before us is why, despite increasing economic sanctions and antagonistic public opinion, is the government choosing to engage itself in a conflict which could have negative consequences for it?

WAR AND ECONOMIC ISOLATION

In the current economically integrated world order, when states do go to war, economic isolation emerges as one of the first tactics used to stop conflicts from escalating. Erik Sand (Sand, 2020) highlights isolation as a tactic to have been used as a strategic measure in both the World Wars against Germany, taking on the form of blockades - a much resorted-to tactic by the U.S. These blockades are imposed with the aim of coercing states into surrender. However, existing scholarship shows that blockades have been largely ineffective at achieving their desired result. John Mearsheimer, who conducted an extremely thorough study of blockades and their effectiveness (Mearsheimer, 2014) finds that, with the exception of Japan’s surrender in 1945, there have been no instances of winning wars via blockades. He attributes reasons such as the difficulties faced in implementation and the blockade becoming porous over time, along with other practises such as stockpiling, substitution and conquest, to the ineffectiveness of blockades. A second form that isolationary tactics have assumed, particularly post-World War II, is in the form of sanctions, a measure that has historically failed more times than it has succeeded (Schott, 1998). The reasons for their repeated failures, with focus on how they have failed in Iran and how they can continue to do so, have been highlighted below.

STRUCTURAL FAILINGS

In order to actually implement and reap the successes of sanctions, the sanctioned country must be integrated into the economic world order (Sand, 2020). However, this has in reality contributed to its failings. Increasing globalisation has made it easier for target countries to find alternatives in the global

market. If the U.S. chooses to sanction Iran, it can easily implement them - the effect will however be negative for the U.S. because Iran has access to alternative buyers of its goods, primarily crude oil, in China (Becker & Kohlmann, 2024). Virtually every Iranian good that has been embargoed by the U.S. finds a way to be obtained by foreign governments via Dubai - a case that columnists such as Javier Blas opine can be observed in China importing oil from Iran by rebranding it as “Malaysian” (Blas, 2024). In this regard, it is necessary to highlight that one of the failures of sanctions also rests on the inability of the U.S. to be able to lift them after compliance of the sanctioned state - such as in the case of Venezuela. This pushes governments to not just develop their infrastructure in such a way that they adapt to life under sanctions but also gives them no reason to change their existing regime and ideology, thereby ensuring the strengthening of both.

HUMAN COST

Sanctions have had deteriorating effects for the Iranian polity and economy. Since 1979, the literacy and life expectancy rates have been escalating in Iran but so has the unemployment rate. While recent data reveals a notable decrease in poverty, these gains remain fragile. From 2020-2022, the poverty rate, as defined by the \$6.85 daily poverty line for upper middle-income countries (World Bank, 2024), dropped by 7.4%, from 29.3% to 21.9%. This helped raise about 6.1 million Iranians out of poverty. However, an estimated 40% of the population is vulnerable to falling into poverty in the event of a climate shock or economic downturn. Poverty is projected to decrease only slightly, from 21.9% in 2022-23 to 20% in 2023-24 and 19% in 2024-25. Inflation has consistently been in the ranges of 20% per year (World Bank, 2024).

In such a scenario of rising prices, high unemployment rates and, above all, the ever-present sanctions, individuals can opt for one of two scenarios: they can either topple their government by means of a revolt or join forces with state institutions and turn against the sanctioner (Bajoghli, Nasr, SalehiIsfahani & Vaez, 2024). In the case of Iran, it has been found that, excepting 2012, sanctions have not had either of these desired effects. Agathe Demarais (Demarais, 2023) points out how the Obama administration managed to convince the Swift financial transaction system to cease doing business with Iran leading to the crashing of the economy. A year later, Hassan Rouhani was elected President who was quick to accept a U.S. deal to limit Iran’s nuclear program. However, this case seems to be an outlier. While it remains to be seen if the second scenario will occur in Iran, it has been

found to have taken place in Russia in 2023 - where, even after a year of the Russia-Ukraine war, citizens, in part angry at the U.S. sanctions, are queueing up to join the army (Demarais, 2023). Nasr and Bajoghli go on to argue that, in the case of Iran, sanctions have had the opposite of their intended effect. Rather than damaging the regime, sanctions have strengthened the Iranian state, increased state repression and impoverished the population. Instead of offering an ‘alternative to war’, sanctions have become a cause. The second scenario could thus, be viewed as a more likely possibility.

EXTERNAL ALLIES

Non-compliance may also be facilitated by the presence of an external ally. This is not limited to countries that provide military assistance but also extends to countries with whom the state is engaged in trade of arms, establishing joint R&D centres for advancing technological research and so on. Iran has close military ties with the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, which is a part of the Axis of Resistance alongside several Iranian proxies and militant allies such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthi movement, Al-Ashtar Brigades and Iraqi militia. Additionally, Iran also maintains strategic alliances with Russia as well as China, both of which have legacies of defying the West. While Russia may not directly participate in the conflict, it could seek to help out Iran's proxies by supplying them with weapons. Iran itself is in line to receive two Su-35 fighter jet squadrons from Russia, while also holding interest in acquiring Russian radars and air defence systems (Smagin, 2024). While the successful implementation of such systems by Tehran could take several months, the fact that there exists a country with advanced martial technology willing to help could provide reason enough to defy sanctions. A more likely possibility is that Moscow may choose to help Tehran by supplying it with intelligence reports, requests for which have already apparently been made by Iran (Smagin, 2024).

It is important to acknowledge here that Russia may in fact choose to not come to Iran's assistance, not just because of its own war but also because the conflict may enable Russia to expand its oil exports. Smagin goes on to opine that in a worst-case scenario, if Iran closes the Strait of Hormuz the entirety of the Middle East will be cut off, making Russia indispensable. Still, it may prove to be somewhat helpful.

It is therefore, discernible that tools of economic diplomacy more often than not, do not have their desired effect. Though an important aspect of inter-state relations at a time when the politics of economics and the economics of politics are indispensable to one another, the failures of economic diplomacy raise significant doubts over its successes. In the case of Iran, each possible juncture at which such tools might fail has been explained. The next section seeks to explain the second part of the research question as to why state foreign policy does shift along lines similar to expressions of public opinion.

THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS

It has been highlighted at the beginning of this article that the current Iranian regime is more unpopular than ever. It is therefore important to consider why, despite this growing unpopularity, did the state choose to engage itself in a conflict, part of a foreign policy agenda not favoured by the public, and not focus on the domestic issues at hand? Firstly, the attack by Iran could be viewed as a response to Israeli

strikes assassinating key leaders who are part of the Axis - which indeed it was. However, there may also exist other reasons for this decision.

It is significant to note here the foreign ideology adopted by Ayatollah Khomeini at the time of the establishment of the present Iranian state in 1979 - pro Palestinian, promoting pan Islamic unity and above all, anti-Israeli (Abbas, 2024). In 1980, this enabled the regime to entrench itself - the new military proved its loyalty by waging war against Iraq, claiming it as a proxy of the U.S., having good relations with Israel and thereby seeking to isolate Israel by destroying its allies, while at the same time establishing the Quds Force to enable the state's march towards Jerusalem. By the time it exited the war, the force was well established which was further institutionalised with the ascension of the incumbent Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989.

The perception of the Israeli threat is not unjustified given the number of Iranian leaders that have allegedly been assassinated by Mossad. The presence of this external threat enables the state to undermine any sort of protests at home, giving it the necessary reason to continue the current regime and its resistance towards the Israeli state. The vitality of the resistance against Israel is something that the regime continues to reiterate, with regular publications on Khomeini's official website about Israeli colonialism. It is also what contributes to Iran's continued support to its regional proxies, the Axis. This Axis however, is not just unpopular internationally but domestically as well. The Axis has a history of engaging in regional civil wars that have claimed thousands of Sunni lives (most of the Axis is of a Shiite population), adding to its unpopularity (Abbas, 2024). Despite this, the Axis remains the primary organ through which the Iranian regime carries out its anti-Israel activities in the ongoing conflict.

The regime also seeks to build support for itself internationally on grounds of a pan-Islamic unity. Just days after the October 7 attacks, Khomeini's website published the following quote by Alireza Komeili, Secretary of the Iranian Islamic NGO International Union of Unified Ummah - *“‘Ummahism’ is like a macro-strategy of the current era, which should be transformed from dialogue and conference into operational ideas. The Zionist enemy... proposes ideas like the ‘IMEC’ (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor), which has the function of creating a unified identity.... So, it should be easier for us and the countries of the region, who have many real and realisable needs and commonalities. This ‘shared destiny’ is so real and intertwined that even the sand storms of our deserts create a common crisis for us, paving the ground for mutual cooperation.”* Both the ideological bases of promotion of pan Islamic unity and anti-Israeli stance become apparent in this statement. To that end, Tehran's decision to engage itself in the conflict becomes a case of elite ideology superseding public opinion and inadequate foreign pressures.

While it is probable that engagement in this conflict will have negative consequences for Iran, as conflict for any state does, the Khomeini regime has been unpopular for years no even more so since the antiestablishment women protests of 2022. War has frequently had impacts on regime - they could change, as happened in Iran in 2012-13, or they could consolidate, as in India in the aftermath of the Pulwama attacks in 2019. The question that stands before us now is when does public opinion have an impact on foreign policymaking, if it even does. Is there a saturation point for when focus on fulfilment of foreign policy agendas, at domestic costs, pushes people to rise against the state? The foreign policy stances adopted in 1979 may have had support then but times have since changed and demands shifted. A difference between public opinion and foreign policy making is something that could prove to be fatal to Iran.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Axis of Resistance refers to Iranian-backed regional militia and political organizations that seek to counter US influence in the region.
2. Iran continues to remain one of the most heavily sanctioned countries, only surpassed by Russia in 2022 in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war.

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Navigating India's Evolving Tax Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Taxation is at the core of revenue generation and economic management of a country. A tax is a financial charge imposed by governments on persons and/or organizations to raise funds for government expenditure. Taxes are levied in India, both by the Central and State Governments. On a very small scale, some minor taxes are also levied by the municipality and local governments. Over the last few decades, the Indian taxation system has undergone transformational changes in its need to be more efficient, transparent, and inclusive. The article reviews the intricacies of India's tax system and tax reforms, introduction of the GST, which made a paradigm shift to unify India's fragmented indirect tax system, and digital transformation in taxation that is awaited by the future of India's entire taxation system. Along with this, it explores the future of taxation in India more closely, such consideration being essential.

Keywords: *Tax, Goods and Services Tax (GST), Income, Expenditure, Aadhaar, Direct and Indirect Taxes*

Taxation is the substratum of governance and nation- building. It helps the government to procure capital for supporting several of its projects and ensuring effective operations. The word 'tax' first appeared in the English language only in the 14th century and is derived from the Latin 'taxare' which means 'to censure, charge, compute'. India's tax system dates back hundreds of years to the 14th century, when Chanakya describes in 'Arthashastra', a system in which merchants, farmers, and artisans paid the monarch with gold, silver, and agricultural products as a kind of surcharge. It helped the king maintain its treasury so that it should be large enough to enable the country to withstand a calamity, even of long duration during which there is no income (L.N. RANGARAJAN, 1992). The basis for the Indian tax system was established using this information and a few more adjustments. Later, Sir James Wilson, a British civil servant, established the modern tax system in 1860 with the introduction of the Income Tax. This tax structure was implemented after independence in an effort to eliminate income inequality between the rich and the poor and to improve the nation's economic standing.

Taxation is government revenue from individuals, enterprises, organizations, goods, and services. Hence, the funds allow the government to run various programs considered necessary for national development, society betterment, and upliftment of the less-privileged sections of society. The power to levy taxes has been conferred upon the Central and State governments by the Constitution of India. Article 265 of the Constitution of India states, "No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority

of law” (Constitution of India). This provision secures Indian citizens against arbitrary and illegal taxation, as it ensures that the imposition and collection of taxes are regulated by duly enacted law through Parliament or state legislature. This ensures taxes operate on democratic processes and public service.

UNDERSTANDING THE TAX SYSTEM IN INDIA

The Central Board of Revenue was established in 1964 to manage the taxation structure for different countries. There are: one-S direct taxes, two- indirect taxes paid by each national citizen. Direct Tax, as suggested by the definition, is the one that is paid straight by the people to the government. These include income tax, capital gains tax, perquisite tax, corporate tax, and securities transaction tax. Article 270 of the Constitution states that “Taxes on income other than agricultural income shall be levied and collected by the Government of India...” (Constitution of India). While on the other side, Indirect taxes are the ones that have to be paid to the government but are not directly by consumers, mostly levied within the framework of other organizations. These include service tax, sales tax, octroi, customs duty, value-added tax, and excise duty which was later replaced by Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Income tax is the tax that might be paid by the citizens on the income earned by them in a financial year. For the financial year 2024-25, income tax slabs are designed under two regimes: Old Tax Regimes and New Tax Regime. Under the Old Tax Regime, flexibility in tax filing is provided through investment-based deductions and exemptions while compliance is simplified but no flexibility in respect of deductions is provided under the New Tax Regime. Taxpayers must analyse their income, eligible deductions, and preferences for financial deduction investments such as savings or tax exemption. If considerable investments are being made under tax-saving instruments, the Old Tax Regime can be a good option. For simplicity and liquidity, the New Tax Regime can be better for anyone.

Net Income Range	Rate of Income-tax	
	Assessment Year 2023-24 [#]	Assessment Year 2024-25 ^{##}
Up to Rs. 2,50,000	-	-
Rs. 2,50,001 to Rs. 3,00,000	5%	-
Rs. 3,00,001 to Rs. 5,00,000	5%	5%
Rs. 5,00,001 to Rs. 6,00,000	10%	5%
Rs. 6,00,001 to Rs. 7,50,000	10%	10%
Rs. 7,50,001 to Rs. 9,00,000	15%	10%
Rs. 9,00,001 to Rs. 10,00,000	15%	15%
Rs. 10,00,001 to Rs. 12,00,000	20%	15%
Rs. 12,00,001 to Rs. 12,50,000	20%	20%
Rs. 12, 50,001 to Rs.15,00,000	25%	20%
Above Rs. 15,00,000	30%	30%

Figure 1.1. The Income Tax Slab for FY 2024-25.

(https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nandinipunjabi_our-finance-minister-mrs-nirmala-sitharamanactivity-7221474329761316864-WBlZ)

The table (Figure 1.1) compares income tax rates for two assessment years, 2023–24 and 2024–25, based on income slabs.



Figure 1.2. GST Tax Slab. (<https://sonasis.in/what-are-the-gst-tax-rate-in-india/>)

The image (Figure 1.2) provides a summary of Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates in India, differentiated into five slabs, namely, 0%-external and domestic goods and services such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and staple food grains like rice and wheat are exempted from GST, 5%- items of basic necessity such as packaged food products, edible oils, and train travel in economy class fall under this slab, 12%-products like processed food, dairy items like butter, and hotel accommodations with tariffs between ₹1,001 to ₹7,500 are taxed at this rate, 18%-most standard goods and services, such as restaurant dining, telecom services, and electronic appliances like refrigerators, are under this slab, and finally, 28%-Luxury goods and services, including high-end cars, cigarettes, and air conditioners, are taxed at the highest rate.

THE GST REVOLUTION

GST, short for Goods and Services Tax, is a multi-stage tax facing goods and services in the country. It was first implemented in France in 1954, whereafter several countries, such as Australia, Canada, Monaco, United Kingdom, Spain, and others, introduced it. The brainchild of laying GST in India was then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2000, when he set up a committee for the introduction of GST with his finance ministry advisor Vijay L. Kelkar as its head. According to him, GST would ameliorate the tax composition of India. Amendments to the bill were started in April 2010 and eventually were introduced in 2011. Four additional GST bills were brought forward in Lok Sabha and became part of the Cabinet passage. GST was finally in operation on 1 July 2017.

The GST brought subsumption of all the indirect taxes. It thrived on the motto of ‘One Nation, One Tax, One Market’. It aimed at increasing the efficiency and overall productivity by removing constraints from logistics and the lengthy processes of input-tax credit. It increased pellucidity in the tax structure, decrease corruption and unnecessary tax evasion.

Central Tax	State Tax
Service Tax	Entry Tax
Duties of Excise	Purchase Tax
Central Excise Duties	Luxury Tax
Cess and Surcharge	State VAT
Additional duties of excise	Central sales Tax
Additional Duties of Customs	Entertainment Tax
Additional Duty of Customs	Taxes on advertisements

Figure 2.1. The Table represents the indirect taxes GST subsumed.

As M. Govind Rao writes, the most important reason for low productivity of the Indian Tax Structure is its narrow base. A very less percentage of the Population pays direct taxes like the income tax which creates an imbalance in the revenue structure. This obliges the government to heavily rely on the indirect taxes for maximum of its revenue. There is a tax burden on the middle-class population and the low income groups suffer from the regressive effects of indirect taxes. This is because direct taxes are based on an individual’s ability to earn and pay whereas indirect taxes are uniformly levied on all the goods and services. Citizens with lower income has to pay direct taxes along with the compulsory indirect taxes across products which results in disposable savings. There is a need to revamp this imbalance and ensure an equitable and fair tax system.

The Suboptimal Yield of property taxes is also a shortcoming of the Indian Tax Structure. Property Taxes are very important as they provide the financial base for the local services. The function of the local government to provide sanitation, water supply, education etc are carried out with the help of this

Tax. Properties are immobile and their tax bases are stable therefore they are often exempted from the risk of market fluctuations. Property taxes are benefiting tax and therefore should evoke greater compliance (Rao, 2015). The main problem arises because there is poor collection and coverage because there is an absence of up-to-date information, data on the registrations of land and properties. Because of corruption, many unlicensed buildings and properties are not recorded in the registers, and hence are always exempted from paying taxes. Aside from those, places of worship, cremation and burial grounds, government and charitable institutions are relieved of the burden of paying taxes. The Administrative Reforms Commission has noted that only about 60–70 percent of properties in urban areas are actually assessed (Rao, 2015). Local government to leverage political considerations does not revise the property tax rates. They prioritize short term popularity over long term financial stability by offering subsidies, outdated tax rates etc.

Another problem in the Indian Tax System is caused by the multi-national companies (MNCs). They use various strategies like the Base erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) to shift profits from high- tax jurisdictions to less or no-tax jurisdiction. MNCs also avoid tax by creating mechanisms like inflated payments for intellectual property use, excessive interest on loans, or management fees. They also avoid tax by exploiting tax treaties like taking advantage of double taxation avoidance agreements (DTAAs) which lets the companies plan deals to take advantage of lower withholding taxes or other beneficial terms.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The ‘One Nation, One Tax, One Market’ GST system has been India’s most efficient reform in the Tax Structure till date. The introduction of e- bills in 2018 to track the movement of the flow of goods across nations is also a commendable feature of the system which was put in place to prevent tax cheating.

The biggest digitalization of India in 2020 has led to the foundation of e- invoicing system which helps the tax payers to generate their electricity, income and property tax bills at any given place and at any given time. This digitalization has also made paying taxes hassle-free for individuals.

Chanakya dreamt of an India that had a self- sufficient economy and had minimal taxes which were collected in the least painful way. For Chanakya, as Shri Nanik Rupani notes, "A King must collect taxes like a honeybee," enough to sustain the state, but not too much to destroy. This is what is of utmost relevance to the Indian taxation environment today. The taxation structure has risen to the point that it is now exploiting middle-class individuals. This has been evident by the GST Council’s decision on a small matter like the different tax levied on popcorn based on its sugar or spice content. It was announced that salted and spiced popcorn would have 5% GST but pre-packaged, caramel popcorn would be categorised as sugar confectionery and therefore will have 18% GST. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that any item with sugar content will be taxed differently and thus, those said items will be categorized as “Mithai”. This announcement has let to severed criticism of the

government and also putting forward the concern for the Indian middle class being trapped in an unfair tax bracket. Recent reports suggests that Indian middle class is shrinking rapidly. There is an increase in affluent houses in the urban areas whereas there is a decline in lower middle-class houses compared to the last five years. This ‘shrinking’ of the middle class is also affecting the sales growth in the economy. There is a widening of income, consumption and socio- economic gap in the country for the same reason. Since this middle class is a significant demographic segment, it is hampering the economic growth.

There is also an ongoing concern regarding the price of petrol and GST. Currently petrol and diesel do not have GST on them. In the 53rd GST council meeting press conference, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the center has the intention of bringing petrol and diesel under GST, but it is only possible when the state governments decide to move. The regulation of the price of the petrol falls under the state governments, and bringing it under the central’s control is still being debated. It is forecasted that a maximum rate of 28% GST will be levied, which will bring the payers in a better position than they are currently. Presently at least 40%-50% of their petrol price is tax, which will change once it is under GST regulation. There will be a considerable price drop, and consumers will have to pay less than they are paying now.

CONCLUSION

The GST reform is still under progress. It is quite early to evaluate the impact of the reform and also to calculate the impact it will have on Indian Economy (Singh. A, 2024). The government is digitalizing all its sector in an unparalleled rate. The process of Refund and registrations being completed online has led to the formation of a traceable system and left no room for frauds. It is very important to understand that the implementation of GST is an ongoing process. The main goat over the past few years was to reduce the misuse and evasion of the government’s financial stability. Further, GST's advancements in payment systems and e-bills have paved the way for a bright future.

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Redistributive Policies in India: A Political Economy Perspective on Equity and Welfare

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the politics of redistribution in India, highlighting how governments use economic policies to address inequality and promote public welfare. It explores the link between redistribution policies and political agendas, focusing on social justice through resource allocation to marginalized groups, including women. By analyzing constitutional principles and the contrasting views of Amartya Sen and Abhijit Banerjee, this study uncovers the interplay between political mandates and economic strategies. It further demonstrates how welfare schemes serve not only to reduce poverty but also to mobilize voter bases, particularly women, revealing the balance between economic ideals and political incentives with implications for governance and social equity.

Keywords: *Redistribution, Political Economy, Inequality, Women, Electoral Politics*

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REDISTRIBUTION IN INDIA

In India, redistribution is vital to the functioning of its democratic system, addressing the fundamental question of how resources are allocated across various sections of society. Unlike purely market-driven economies, India emphasizes not only economic growth but also equity through state intervention. Redistribution policies, like employment programs, subsidies, food security, and direct benefit transfers aim to reduce socio-economic disparities while simultaneously establishing political legitimacy (Bhalla, 2017). Governments leverage these policies to demonstrate responsiveness to public needs, thereby blending electoral interests with developmental goals.

Redistributive policies in India are not just economic tools but reflect political priorities. Shaped by electoral considerations and socio-political ideologies, they act as intermediaries between the state and citizens (Chatterjee, 2008). In a country where economic needs intertwine with political motivations, these policies address poverty while serving as instruments of influence and control. Redistribution, therefore, is both an economic necessity and a political tool, balancing long-term growth with short-

term political imperatives. The constitutional framework guides this, mandating a commitment to social equity.

CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE FOR REDISTRIBUTION

The legacies of colonial economic structures play a critical role in understanding the roots of poverty and inequality in India (Thorat & Newman, 2010). British colonial policies prioritized economic extraction, deepening disparities that persisted after independence. The post-independence era saw leaders adopting a socialist-inspired welfare model aimed at poverty alleviation and equitable development (Subramanian, 2012). These efforts were enshrined in the Constitution through the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), especially Articles 38, 39, and 41, which emphasize social justice, equitable wealth distribution, and social security. Although non-justiciable, these articles serve as moral imperatives, guiding successive governments in shaping policies toward redistribution.

Welfare schemes like MGNREGA, the National Food Security Act (NFSA), and PM-KISAN demonstrate the government's commitment to these principles (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Redistributive policies remain essential for social cohesion and political stability, as a government's success is often measured based on its ability to initiate and implement redistribution policies effectively to tackle inequality, an absence of which can provoke public discontent and result in political unrest.

Table 1: Alignment of Key Redistributive Policies with DPSPs

<u><i>Policy</i></u>	<u><i>Objective</i></u>	<u><i>Alignment with DPSPs</i></u>
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)	Provides guaranteed employment to rural households to enhance livelihood security	Upholds Article 41 (Right to Work) and Article 38 (Social Justice) by creating job opportunities and reducing poverty
National Food Security Act (NFSA)	Ensures food and nutritional security by providing subsidized food grains to eligible households	Aligns with Article 39 (Adequate Means of Livelihood) and Article 38 (Social Welfare) by addressing hunger and malnutrition

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM- KISAN)	Provides income support to farmers to help them manage agricultural expenses	Supports Article 39 (Equitable Distribution of Resources) by promoting rural economic stability and reducing income disparity
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SEN VS. BANERJEE: IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON REDISTRIBUTIVE STRATEGIES

Two influential schools of thought, represented by Amartya Sen and Abhijit Banerjee, highlight contrasting approaches to redistribution. While Sen emphasizes in-kind transfers to build capabilities and foster human development, Banerjee advocates for cash transfers as direct interventions to improve economic conditions. Sen's perspective is rooted in his seminal works, such as *Development as Freedom* (1999) and *The Idea of Justice* (2009), which argue that poverty is a deprivation of capabilities necessary for a dignified human life and his model aligns with political ideologies that prioritize social equity and comprehensive state welfare. Banerjee's approach, articulated in *Poor Economics* (2011), co-authored with Esther Duflo, reflects a pragmatic, evidence-based preference for targeted cash transfers and the use of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) to design and assess welfare policies, valuing immediate impact over long-term capability-building.

The ideological debate between Amartya Sen's capability-building model and Abhijit Banerjee's preference for direct cash transfers encapsulates broader discussions in political economy, each with distinct implications for state intervention, governance, and social equity:

- ***Amartya Sen's Capability Approach:*** Amartya Sen argues that poverty is not merely a lack of income but a deprivation of fundamental capabilities necessary for a dignified life. His seminal work, *Development as Freedom* (1999), underscores how poverty restricts individual choices and freedoms, advocating for robust public investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure as the pillars of long-term sustainable development. In *The Idea of Justice* (2009), Sen further emphasizes the role of institutions in fostering equitable access to public goods, positioning the state as a central actor in addressing structural inequalities.

Sen's ideas have directly influenced policies like the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which aim to provide in-kind support to empower marginalized communities. While these initiatives have yielded significant social benefits—reducing malnutrition, enhancing education, and supporting rural incomes—they are not without challenges. Corruption, inefficiencies, and leakages have often hindered their effectiveness. For instance, the PDS, designed to ensure food security, faces issues such as food grain diversion and the provision of poor-quality rations, which limit its intended impact.

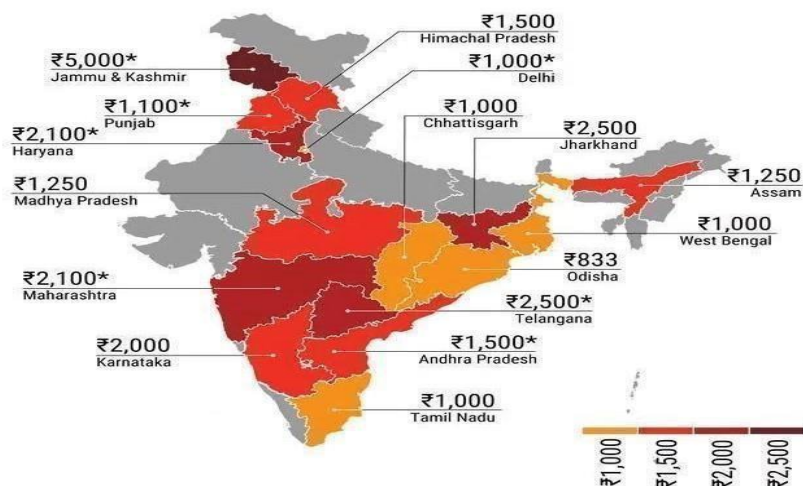
- ***Abhijit Banerjee's Experimental Economics and Direct Cash Transfers:*** Abhijit Banerjee, through his book *Poor Economics* (2011), advocates for direct cash transfers as a cost-effective and scalable way to alleviate poverty. His work emphasizes the importance of RCTs in identifying what works in poverty alleviation programs, offering an evidence-based lens for policy design. RCTs, a cornerstone of Banerjee's methodology, involve rigorously testing interventions in controlled environments to assess their impact and scalability. His perspective resonates with neoliberal values of market efficiency and individual autonomy, offering a politically attractive model. Banerjee argues that cash transfers not only provide immediate economic relief but also empower individuals to make choices tailored to their needs, reducing the inefficiencies often associated with in-kind support. These transfers are typically more transparent, reducing administrative overhead and minimizing leakages.

In *Good Economics for Hard Times* (2019), co-authored with Esther Duflo, Banerjee also discusses the potential of Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a redistributive tool. He suggests that UBI can serve as a safety net for vulnerable populations while reducing administrative complexities in welfare distribution. While UBI's financial feasibility remains a challenge, Banerjee emphasizes its transformative potential in reducing inequality and providing dignity to the marginalized.

Policies like the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) exemplify Banerjee's approach to redistribution. These programs align with his emphasis on efficiency, transparency, and individual autonomy. While these policies are praised for reducing leakages and administrative burdens, critics argue they often fail to address deeper structural issues such as affordable healthcare and quality education. Moreover, cash transfers risk being politicized, especially during election cycles, as tools to secure voter support.

This ideological divergence illustrates the spectrum of political values shaping redistributive policies, each with distinct implications for state intervention, governance, and social equity. It also highlights the broader implications of redistributive policies, especially as they intersect with electoral dynamics and political strategy.

Direct Cash Transfers to Women Across States (Monthly Allowance)



**Still to be implemented; Eligibility criteria vary by state Source:*

Outlook Business

REDISTRIBUTION AS A TOOL IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

Redistribution policies play a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes, particularly during election cycles. Indian political parties strategically introduce or expand welfare schemes before elections to gain public support and build loyal voter bases. Notable examples include:

1. **PM-KISAN (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi)** - Launched in December 2018, just months before the 2019 General Elections, this scheme provided ₹6,000 annually to small and marginal farmers, offering economic relief while consolidating BJP support in rural areas.
2. **Ladli Behna Yojana** - Introduced by BJP in March 2023 ahead of the Madhya Pradesh elections, offering ₹1,500 monthly cash transfers to women from low-income households, it aimed to attract female voters and strengthen BJP's campaign.
3. **Lakshmir Bhandar Scheme** - Launched by TMC in February 2021 ahead of the West Bengal Assembly Elections, this cash transfer scheme provided ₹500 per month to general category women and ₹1,000 to SC/ST women. Notably, ahead of the 2024 General Elections, the TMC increased the allowances, raising the support for general category women to ₹1,000 and for SC/ST women to ₹1,200 (Mp et al., 2024). This adjustment was part of the party's strategy to attract female voters and secure electoral support.

These schemes, driven by short-term political goals, highlight that redistribution in India is not just about economic justice but also political strategy. However, the timing and targeting of these policies raise concerns about fiscal sustainability, as balancing immediate electoral gains with long-term economic stability remains a challenge. Redistribution, therefore, serves both as a tool for addressing inequality and securing electoral success.

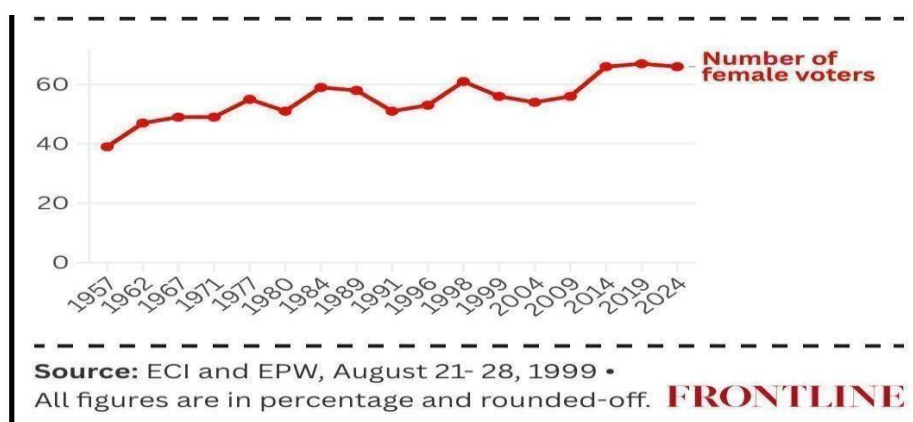
WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF INDIAN REDISTRIBUTION POLICIES: ELECTORAL STRATEGY OR EFFECTIVE EMPOWERMENT?

In recent Indian elections, women have emerged as a central focus of redistribution policies, with political parties introducing targeted welfare schemes and cash transfers to capture their votes. Early initiatives like the BJP's *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (promoting girl child education) and *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* (free LPG connections) to West Bengal's *Lakshmir Bhandar* scheme (monthly financial aid) set the stage for this trend. More recently, the NDA's *Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin* scheme in Maharashtra and JMM's *Maiya Samman Yojana* in Jharkhand played pivotal roles in their respective 2024 Assembly election outcomes. Looking ahead, the Aam Aadmi Party has announced the *Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana* for the 2025 elections, signaling an intensifying focus on women voters. These initiatives, often introduced close to elections, highlight women's growing importance in shaping electoral outcomes while reflecting the competitive populism of Indian politics.

WHY WOMEN?

- From an electoral perspective, women-centric policies have emerged as powerful tools for garnering votes, particularly as women's voter turnout has surged in recent elections. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, women's turnout reached 65.7%, just 0.1% less than men's, highlighting a steady narrowing of the gender gap. The national elector gender ratio also improved significantly, rising from 928 women per 1,000 men in 2019 to 948 in 2024. Between 2019 and 2024, women's enrollment on electoral rolls grew faster than men's, with 1.41 crore women among the 2.63 crore new voters added (Chattopadhyay, 2024). Political parties increasingly tailor their manifestos and rhetoric to appeal to female voters, recognizing their growing influence in shaping electoral outcomes. For instance, women voters were pivotal in recent state elections, leading to heightened competition among parties to promise direct cash transfers, subsidies, and other benefits.

Women's Turnout Since the 1957 Lok Sabha Election

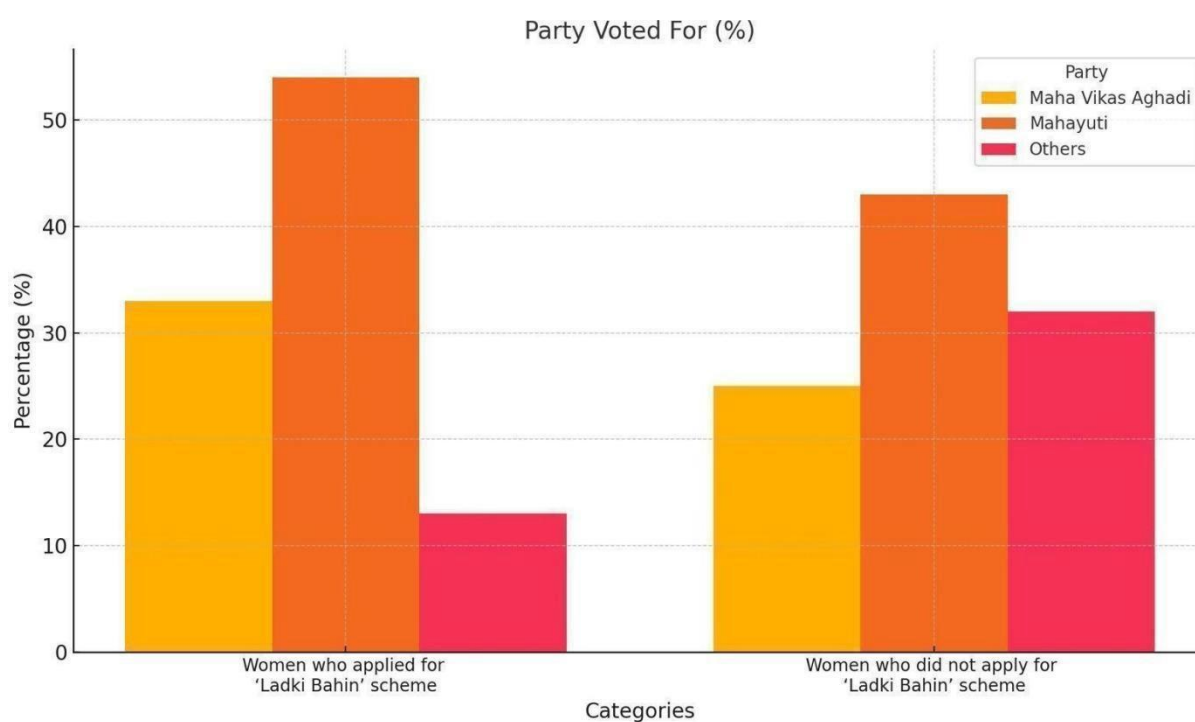


Source: Frontline

Electoral Impact of Women-Centric Welfare Schemes: The Complex Reality

Exit polls conducted by Axis My India underscore the strategic role of women-centric welfare schemes in shaping electoral outcomes. In Maharashtra, the Ladki Bahin Yojana played a significant role for the NDA, with 16% of its voters attributing their choice to the scheme, reflecting its effectiveness in attracting female voters. Similarly, in Jharkhand, the Maiya Samman Yojana was a key factor for the INDIA Alliance, influencing 24% of its voter base. These insights demonstrate how targeted welfare programs are increasingly used to secure support from key demographics, particularly women, in competitive electoral landscapes. However, the effectiveness of these programs in achieving genuine empowerment remains contested, raising questions about their long-term transformative potential versus their immediate political utility.

Voting Patterns Among Women in Maharashtra Based on Ladki Bahin Scheme Participation



Source: Lokniti-CSDS Survey

However, the surge in women's turnout has fueled the notion of a "women's vote bank." Empirical evidence challenges this idea. Studies by Lokniti-CSDS show that women's voting behavior is shaped by a range of factors—caste, class, and regional dynamics—rather than a single gender identity. Women voters do not act as a monolithic bloc; their decisions are influenced by intersecting social and economic realities. While welfare schemes may sway segments of the female electorate, they do not create a uniform political allegiance among women.

LOOKING BEYOND THE RHETORIC

While women-centric welfare schemes offer immediate economic relief, they often fail to address the deeper structural issues limiting women's participation in politics and the workforce. Despite the passage of the Nari Vandan Adhiniyam Bill, which aims to ensure 33% reservation for women in Parliament, the underrepresentation of women in politics remains prevalent. Political parties continue to field women candidates with familial ties to male politicians, highlighting a disconnect between the rhetoric of empowerment and the reality of marginalization (Mishra, 2024).

The true measure of these policies lies in their ability to foster long-lasting empowerment by addressing systemic barriers and enabling women to achieve economic independence and social equity. While certain schemes have improved access to resources and enhanced women's visibility in public spaces, the broader outcomes often remain limited by poor implementation, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural resistance. For India to genuinely empower women through redistribution, policies must transcend tokenism and prioritize sustained investments in education, employment, and safety. Women must be viewed as active agents of change, not just as vote banks. The rise of women-centric policies reflects both opportunities and challenges, signaling the need for a more holistic approach to women's empowerment in India.

CONCLUSION

Redistributive policies in India lie at the crossroads of economic strategies and political agendas, shaping the country's approach to reducing inequality and promoting social justice. Achieving genuine equitable development requires not just effective policy implementation, but also a delicate balance between electoral motivations and long-term welfare goals. As India navigates the challenges of combining populist welfare schemes with market-driven reforms, the alignment of political objectives with broader economic justice will continue to be pivotal. Furthermore, ensuring that redistributive measures not only deliver immediate relief but also address deeper systemic issues, particularly those affecting marginalized groups, including women, will be crucial. Moving forward, fostering greater transparency, minimizing inefficiencies, and prioritizing inclusive policies that genuinely empower underserved communities will be vital for achieving sustainable development and fostering a more just and inclusive society.

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The Politics behind Developing States

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the politics behind the developing states which is a complex integrity of governance, economic policies, international relations, and power dynamics that shapes a nation's trajectory toward development. This research explores how political ideologies, institutions, and leadership impact the economic and social growth of developing nations. The study emphasizes the role of state policies in influencing the distribution of resources, addressing inequality, and fostering sustainable development. Political stability, or the lack therefore, often dictates the success or failure of development initiatives, with the quality of governance being a pivotal factor in attracting investment, ensuring social cohesion, and implementing reforms. Furthermore, the research delves into the influence of global actor-such as international organizations, foreign aid, and multinational corporations-and their interaction with domestic political structures. These external factors often shape national policies, at times aligning with or undermining the aspirations of local government. The paper also examines the ways in which political elites, social movements, and civil society groups interact to either promote or hinder developmental efforts. Through case studies and comparative analysis, the research highlights the essential role of politics in the developmental process, illustrating how political decisions and power relations influence the path of development in state-building.

Keywords: Politics, Developing states, Governance, Economic policies and international relations

THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT: POWER DYNAMICS AND POLICY IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

The political landscape of developing sates plays a critical role in shaping economic growth, social progress, and governance outcomes. This article explores how domestic political institutions, power structures, and international influences intersect to drive or hinder development efforts. By analyzing case studies across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the paper highlights the role of political elites, interest groups, and external actors in shaping policy decisions. It also examines the impact of corruption, populism, and state capacity on development trajectories. The findings reveal that successful development is often contingent upon political stability, inclusive governance, and strategic policymaking that balances economic reforms with social equity. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how political factors shape the developmental paths of emerging economies, offering insights for policymakers, international organizations, and scholars focused on sustainable development.

THE INTERSECTION OF POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The developmental trajectories of emerging states are deeply intertwined with their political environments. Political institutions, governance structures, and leadership choices play a decisive role in determining economic growth, social progress, and state stability. In many developing countries, the path to development is shaped not only by economic policies but also by the distribution of power, political competition, and the influence of external actors. Weak institutions, corruption, and political instability often hinder development, while effective governance and inclusive political systems can accelerate progress. This article explores how the political landscape influences development, highlighting key factors that drive or obstruct growth in emerging economies.

Scholars have long emphasized that political instability undermines economic growth by reducing productivity and discouraging investments. Alesina et al. (1996) argue that frequent government turnovers and political uncertainty lead to lower levels of economic growth, as businesses delay investment decisions in unpredictable environments. Their cross-country analysis highlights that nations experiencing consistent political instability suffer from volatile economic performance and slower long-term development.

The role of governance and institutional strength is equally pivotal. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) assert that inclusive political institutions are fundamental for fostering long-term growth, as they enable broad participation and prevent elite capture of economic resources. Their seminal work *Why Nations Fail* draws from historical case studies, demonstrating how countries with extractive institutions often experience stagnant growth and inequality, while those with inclusive governance structures foster innovation and equitable prosperity. Similarly, Rodrik (2007) contends that institutional quality, rather than geographical or cultural factors, is the primary determinant of economic divergence between nations, emphasizing that successful development is contingent on strong, transparent, and accountable governance.

Corruption, another major impediment to development, has been extensively analyzed by Mauro (1995), who found that corruption lowers economic growth by reducing public investment efficiency and distorting policy priorities. Mauro's research demonstrates that corruption misallocates resources, limiting infrastructural development and eroding trust in public institutions. Furthermore, Reinikka and Svensson (2004) provide empirical evidence from Uganda, showing that corruption siphoned off large portions of public funds allocated for education, ultimately contributing to poor development outcomes. Political regimes also shape development trajectories in significant ways. Przeworski et al. (2000) analyze the economic performance of democracies and autocracies, concluding that while democracies grow at slower rates initially, their growth is more sustainable over the long term. They argue that democracies, by promoting accountability and protecting property rights, create conditions for stable economic progress. In contrast, authoritarian regimes like China often achieve rapid economic gains,

but their long-term stability depends on the continuity of leadership and the absence of internal dissent (Li & Xu, 2007).

Colonial Legacies and the Political Architecture of Development

The historical legacies of colonialism, state formation, and early political structures continue to shape the development trajectories of emerging economies. Scholars such as Englebert (2000) argue that the colonial experience fundamentally disrupted indigenous political institutions, creating fragile states with weak legitimacy. His research highlights how arbitrary colonial borders and imposed governance structures have led to persistent political instability and conflict in post-colonial Africa. Similarly, Herbst (2000) contends that the inability of African states to consolidate power and establish strong institutions in the post-independence period has hindered their developmental progress.

In Latin America, the legacy of extractive colonial institutions, as discussed by Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001), created a foundation of inequality and elite dominance that continues to obstruct inclusive growth. Their analysis shows that countries with high levels of extractive economic institutions during colonial times often transitioned into modern states characterized by political exclusion and economic underperformance. By contrast, settler colonies like those in North America established more inclusive institutions, which laid the groundwork for sustained economic development.

Mahoney (2010) further elaborates on the divergence in development between Latin America and other regions, emphasizing the role of early colonial governance models. He argues that patterns of Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule entrenched centralized power structures, limiting opportunities for broadbased political participation and fostering economic dependency on commodity exports. This colonial legacy, Mahoney notes, contributed to the emergence of authoritarian regimes and economic volatility in the 20th century.

In Asia, Kohli (2004) highlights the case of South Korea and India, illustrating how historical statebuilding processes led to divergent development paths. Kohli attributes South Korea's rapid industrialization to the early establishment of a strong, cohesive state capable of steering economic policy, while India's fragmented colonial legacy resulted in slower, more uneven growth. The developmental state model in East Asia, he argues, benefited from a historical capacity to mobilize resources and implement long-term economic strategies, unlike many post-colonial states in Africa and Latin America.

The intersection of colonial legacies and post-independence nation-building remains a critical determinant of development outcomes. As Englebert (2000) and Acemoglu et al. (2001) demonstrate, the political foundations laid during the colonial period continue to influence state capacity, governance quality, and economic performance in the developing world. Addressing these historical inequalities

and fostering stronger institutions are essential steps toward achieving sustained and inclusive development.

INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT: THE GOVERNANCE IMPERATIVE

The strength and structure of political institutions are crucial in shaping the development outcomes of emerging economies. Institutions determine how power is distributed, how policies are implemented, and how resources are allocated. North (1990) argues that the quality of institutions—defined by the rules of the game that govern economic and political interactions—directly influences long-term development. Inclusive institutions that promote political participation, protect property rights, and ensure accountability are essential for fostering economic growth. Conversely, extractive institutions, which concentrate power and limit opportunities, tend to hinder development by restricting innovation and perpetuating inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

In examining the role of political institutions, Rodrik (2007) emphasizes the need for "good governance," which includes both effective state capacity and the ability to enforce the rule of law. States with strong institutions can create stable environments conducive to investment and entrepreneurship, while those with weak institutions are prone to corruption, rent-seeking behavior, and policy inefficiency.

Przeworski et al. (2000) highlight the impact of regime type on development, suggesting that democracies, despite initially slower growth, provide greater long-term stability and adaptability, which contribute to sustained economic development. In contrast, authoritarian regimes may achieve rapid economic gains in the short term but often struggle with issues like corruption and governance failures in the long run (Li & Xu, 2007).

In sum, the architecture of political institutions plays a pivotal role in determining development outcomes. Institutions that promote inclusive participation, rule of law, and transparency are vital for fostering sustainable growth, while extractive or poorly designed institutions hinder progress by concentrating power and limiting access to opportunities.

ELITE CAPTURE AND POLICY DYNAMICS IN DEVELOPMENT

Political elites and interest groups wield significant influence over development policy and outcomes. According to Rainer (2001), elite control over state resources and policy decisions can lead to "elite capture," where the benefits of development are disproportionately distributed to the powerful, exacerbating inequality and hindering broad-based growth. This is particularly evident in countries with weak institutions, where elites manipulate political and economic systems to maintain their privileged status (Khan, 2010).

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that extractive political systems—where elites monopolize power—create an environment where economic policies are shaped to benefit a small group, leading to underdevelopment for the majority. Such systems stifle innovation, restrict competition, and divert resources away from public goods. Conversely, inclusive political systems that allow for broader participation and challenge elite dominance tend to foster more equitable and sustainable development.

In countries with fragmented political power, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, elite bargaining often leads to policy paralysis, as competing factions vie for control of state resources (Englebert, 2000). This is in contrast to developmental states like South Korea, where a more cohesive elite class, aligned with state goals, facilitated rapid industrialization (Kohli, 2004).

In essence, elite power dynamics are integral to the political economy of development. When elites capture the political and economic system, development is often stunted. However, when elites align with broader societal interests, they can drive inclusive, growth-oriented policies.

POPULIST POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

Populist political movements often arise in developing states as a response to widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo, particularly inequality and unmet economic promises. As Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) note, populism centers on the idea of a "pure people" pitted against a "corrupt elite." While populist leaders may initially gain traction by promoting inclusive policies and redistributive reforms, these approaches often come with unintended long-term economic consequences.

Rodrik (2018) argues that populist governments can prioritize short-term growth through protectionist measures or expansive social programs. However, such policies often lead to economic instability and decreased investor confidence, as they may disregard the necessary structural reforms for long-term sustainable growth. Case studies from Latin America, such as Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, illustrate how populist economic strategies, including nationalization and price controls, led to hyperinflation and economic collapse (Corrales & Penfold, 2015).

On the other hand, some populist regimes, such as those in Southeast Asia, have successfully harnessed populist rhetoric to advance development goals, particularly by focusing on infrastructure projects and pro-poor growth strategies. Kohli (2004) argues that, in some cases, populist policies can stimulate rapid economic growth when they are strategically combined with state-led development models, though their success depends on the broader political and economic context.

In conclusion, while populism can offer immediate economic relief to disenfranchised populations, its long-term impact on development is often mixed, depending on how policies are implemented and the underlying political institutions.

GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS AND THEIR ROLE IN DEVELOPING STRATEGIES

External influences, including international organizations, foreign aid, and geopolitical considerations, significantly shape the development paths of emerging states. According to a study by Burnside and Dollar (2000), foreign aid can enhance development outcomes when it is targeted effectively, particularly in countries with sound policies and institutions. However, aid dependency can also undermine local governance if it encourages rent-seeking behavior or fosters a culture of reliance on external support rather than domestic innovation.

In addition to aid, global trade policies and international relations play a key role in shaping economic outcomes. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, trade imbalances and unfair global trade practices have often hindered the region's economic potential (Rodrik, 2011). Meanwhile, emerging economies like China and India have leveraged their position in the global market to secure growth, benefiting from international partnerships and foreign direct investment.

Geopolitical power dynamics also influence the development strategies of countries. As suggested by Moyo (2009), countries often face external pressure to conform to the economic prescriptions of organizations like the IMF and World Bank. While these prescriptions, including structural adjustment programs, aim to improve economic stability, they can sometimes lead to austerity measures that slow down development or create social unrest, as seen in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s.

The external environment thus plays a dual role in shaping developmental outcomes: it can both facilitate growth through international cooperation and foreign investment, or obstruct progress through unfair economic practices, dependency on aid, or coercive policy measures. Emerging states must navigate these global forces carefully to align external relations with domestic development goals.

CONFLICT, FRAGILITY, AND THEIR IMPACT ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Political instability and conflict remain significant barriers to development in many emerging states. Collier (2007) argues that violent conflict not only directly destroys infrastructure and disrupts economic activities but also creates long-lasting economic and social consequences, including decreased investment, brain drain, and shattered social trust. Countries embroiled in civil wars or political crises often face slower recovery rates, as the rebuilding of institutions and infrastructure is both costly and time-consuming.

The relationship between conflict and development is complex. Fearon and Laitin (2003) contend that fragile states, characterized by weak governance, poor institutional capacity, and widespread poverty, are more prone to conflict. These states struggle to enforce the rule of law and maintain control over their territories, leading to violent disputes over resources, ethnic tensions, and insurgencies. In cases like Sierra Leone and Liberia, prolonged conflicts have left deep scars on their economies, hampering post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

However, post-conflict reconstruction offers an opportunity for rebuilding more resilient and inclusive institutions. As Krasner (2004) points out, the international community can play a role in facilitating peacebuilding efforts and providing technical assistance to re-establish governance structures. Countries like Rwanda and Bosnia have demonstrated that with strong international support and effective leadership, post-conflict societies can undergo substantial economic recovery and political stabilization.

Ultimately, while conflict and instability have devastating effects on development, the process of recovery and state-building—if supported by inclusive policies and international collaboration—can lead to resilient development pathways. Political stability, therefore, is not just the result of successful economic policies, but a fundamental prerequisite for sustained growth and peace.

GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Social movements and grassroots political engagement play a critical role in shaping development outcomes, particularly in countries with fragile political systems or where traditional governance structures are ineffective. According to Tarrow (2011), social movements are not only a response to economic grievances but also act as a catalyst for political change, pushing for policies that address inequality, corruption, and human rights abuses. These movements can shift the political agenda and pressure governments to prioritize inclusive economic growth and social justice.

In many developing states, civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots movements have been at the forefront of advocating for better governance and sustainable development. As de Sousa Santos (2006) argues, these movements often challenge state policies that favor elites or multinational corporations, pushing for redistributive policies that ensure more equitable development. A key example is the role of grassroots movements in Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which successfully pressured the government for land reforms that benefitted the rural poor (Santos, 2006).

Furthermore, the rise of digital platforms and social media has amplified the influence of grassroots movements. Castells (2012) explores how the use of social media has empowered civil society in many developing states, enabling collective action and transnational solidarity. Movements like the Arab Spring illustrate how grassroots mobilization can challenge authoritarian regimes and bring political change, although the outcomes of such movements are often uncertain and context-dependent.

In conclusion, grassroots movements serve as a vital mechanism for pushing governments to adopt more inclusive and responsive development policies. Their capacity to mobilize citizens, challenge entrenched power structures, and demand accountability makes them a critical factor in shaping the political and economic landscapes of developing nations.

TECHNOLOGY AS A DRIVER OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Technological innovation has become a central element in shaping the development strategies of emerging states. As Sachs (2015) points out, technological advancement can serve as a catalyst for

economic transformation, boosting productivity, fostering industrialization, and creating new markets. In many developing countries, embracing technology has the potential to leapfrog traditional stages of development, enabling rapid growth in sectors such as agriculture, education, and healthcare.

The role of technology in development is also tied to governance, with digital tools facilitating transparency and accountability in government practices. According to Nye (2010), the rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has revolutionized the relationship between citizens and the state, empowering people to demand better services and greater political participation. Mobile technology, for instance, has significantly improved financial inclusion in Africa, with mobile banking systems like M-Pesa offering millions of previously unbanked individuals access to financial services (Jack & Suri, 2011).

However, technological innovation can also exacerbate existing inequalities if access is not evenly distributed. As Gerschenkron (1962) argued in his theory of economic backwardness, emerging economies may face challenges in adopting advanced technologies without substantial investment in human capital and infrastructure. Moreover, technological adoption can be hampered by political resistance from elites who may view it as a threat to their power. In such cases, innovation may be limited or fail to reach the broader population, resulting in uneven development outcomes.

In sum, technological innovation is a critical enabler of development, but its success depends on the ability of states to integrate it effectively into their political and economic frameworks. Governments must ensure equitable access to new technologies, invest in education and infrastructure, and create policies that allow technology to drive inclusive growth and enhance governance.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENT GOVERNANCE

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly important factor in the development policies of emerging states, as economic growth often comes at the cost of environmental degradation.

According to Stern (2007), the challenge for developing countries lies in balancing the need for economic development with the imperative to protect natural resources and ensure long-term ecological sustainability. Unsustainable practices, such as deforestation, overfishing, and fossil fuel dependency, not only jeopardize environmental health but also hinder future development prospects by depleting critical resources.

The role of governance in environmental sustainability is critical. Ostrom (1990) highlights that effective governance structures are necessary to manage common-pool resources and implement policies that prevent environmental harm. In many developing states, however, weak institutions and political instability make it difficult to enforce environmental regulations, leading to the exploitation of

natural resources by both domestic elites and multinational corporations (Pomeroy & Rivera-Guieb, 2006).

Moreover, the global political economy influences the environmental strategies of developing countries. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, have pushed many nations to adopt greener policies, but the ability to implement such commitments often depends on the political will and economic capacity of the state. As Fankhauser (2013) argues, while international financial assistance and technology transfer can help developing nations transition to green economies, these efforts must be aligned with domestic policies that prioritize sustainable growth.

Ultimately, environmental sustainability must be integrated into development policy through strong institutions, international cooperation, and political will. The challenge for developing states is to adopt policies that not only foster economic growth but also safeguard the environment, ensuring that development remains viable for future generations.

CONCLUSION

This research underscores the crucial role of political structures in shaping the development outcomes of emerging states. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) suggest, inclusive institutions are at the heart of sustainable development, fostering both economic growth and political stability. Conversely, the persistence of extractive institutions in many developing countries hinders progress, often leading to social inequality, political unrest, and economic stagnation. The evidence presented in this research aligns with the broader scholarly consensus that political instability and conflict pose significant barriers to development, as they disrupt institutional frameworks and displace resources that could otherwise contribute to long-term growth (Collier, 2007).

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that elite power structures, as identified by Khan (2010), are instrumental in shaping development trajectories. When political elites capture state resources for their own benefit, the resulting policies often fail to address the needs of the broader population, exacerbating inequality and stifling economic potential. Yet, as demonstrated by the cases of South Korea and Rwanda, strong leadership and effective governance can overcome these challenges, leading to transformative development outcomes.

The study also highlights the dual role of external influences on developing states. While international aid and foreign investment can provide much-needed resources for growth, they also pose risks, particularly when they reinforce existing power imbalances or undermine domestic policy autonomy (Moyo, 2009). As Rodrik (2007) points out, the ability of developing countries to craft their own development strategies is often constrained by global economic pressures and external political dynamics.

In light of these findings, it is evident that political stability, strong institutions, and inclusive governance are essential for fostering sustainable development in emerging economies. Addressing the root causes of instability, strengthening democratic processes, and promoting greater participation in political decision-making will be critical steps for achieving long-term growth and stability. Ultimately, the political environment in developing states is not just a backdrop to economic development—it is a central determinant of their success or failure on the global stage. The research suggests that in order to achieve sustainable and inclusive development, policymakers must focus on creating political structures that are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

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POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY:

SOCIETY AND THE STATE

Breaking the Diploma of Domination: Reimagining Education for Equity

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ABSTRACT

Education systems around the globe have historically been celebrated as the great equalizer. Education has been regarded as the key driver of personal and societal growth. They have enabled social mobility within and across generations and helped individuals develop their capabilities, thereby generating individual and collective development. A rigorous analysis, however, presents evidence that access to quality education remains unequal, fortifying existing social inequalities based on class, caste, gender, and racial divides while working as an 'ideological state apparatus'. While exploring the ubiquitous challenges of social inequality and ideological dominance in education, this paper asserts itself within an Indian context. This brings one to an inquiry into how education systems can unconsciously work to maintain the societal divisions that often accompany social change. Concluding with policy recommendations that call for a more egalitarian and emancipatory education system, the paper emphasizes government, teachers, and policy makers working together for effective change.

Keywords: education, social inequality, critical pedagogy, ideology

THE PERPETUATION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Education is viewed as a means to personal and social development. It equips people with information and the skills needed to survive in the increasingly complex world. It would help create critical thinking while opening roads for economic opportunity. But beneath this optimistic veneer is a paradoxical reality: education systems often serve to reproduce and reinforce existing social inequalities, mechanisms for the transmission of dominant ideologies (Apple, 1979).

According to Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of cultural reproduction, education systems favor students hailing from privileged sections because they possess the valued cultural capital of these institutions. The cycle becomes a phenomenon where social class creates

educational success, leading to forceful stratification of society. Bourdieu believed that rather than being a neutral institution of meritocratic opportunities, the education system functions as a major agency for the reproduction of social hierarchies which is accomplished through the transmission of cultural capital.

This suggests that the theory of 'cultural capital' refers to the non-economic assets—like language, skills, knowledge, and attitudes of people acquired from their respective families and social backgrounds. In his lens, educational institutions are seen as being predisposed to favor the cultural capital, particularly the dominant social classes, namely, 'habitus'. The 'habitus' is an unconscious pattern of dispositions, ways of acting, and expectations developed through one's background (*Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J. C., & Nice, R. 1977*).

In his work on the "social character of learning," Krishna Kumar demonstrates how in India teachers turn students into estranged objects when cultural capital is not valued in a school setting, as in the case of oral traditions and vernacular knowledge which is pertinent when students belonging from marginalized background fails to adapt English proficiency or upperclass attitude (*Kumar, 1989*).

In explaining 'symbolic violence', Bourdieu claims that dominant culture imposed by the education system is uncontested and therefore accepted as legitimate in a way that masks the reproduction of social inequalities. As an arbiter of achievement, the school legitimizes whatever social order has already existed, incorporating the achievement gap as a natural result rather than a difference caused by structural inequalities. (*Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J. C., & Nice, R. 1977*)

This identifies another form in which Bourdieu's assertion that schools "consecrate" the dominant culture applies: the neglect of indigenous knowledge systems in India that strengthen urban elite cultural capital while pathologizing rural and tribal identities in their textbooks (*Patil, 2020*).

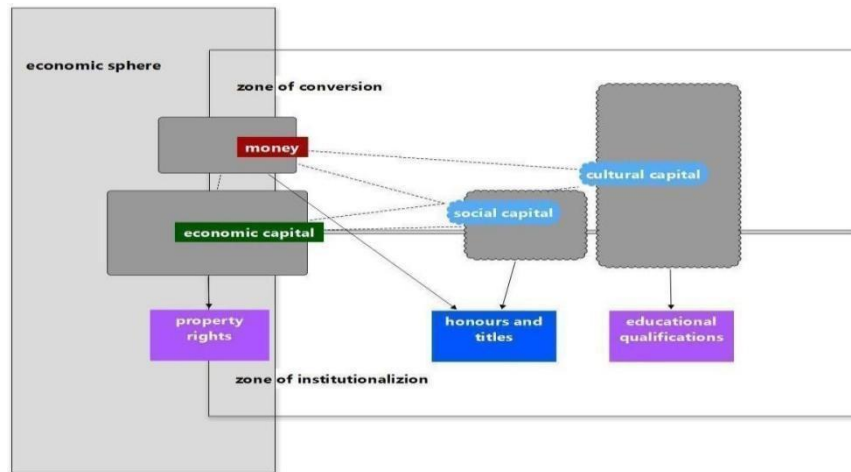


Figure 1. *Reproduction in The Practice of Education*

Source: *Infed.org*

Given the deep history of the caste system, including economic inequalities, the education system's role in perpetuating social inequality is extremely significant and apparent in India. The theoretical representation of caste in school environments impacts not only their performance inside class but also helps them develop their self-identity outside class for the rest of their lives, even determining their future goals. (Chand, D. 2024). According to Deshpande, upper caste members are in a position to slip into modern professional identities such as "casteless" citizens and hence, enter the institutional space with confidence and privilege. The marginalized students, mostly Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs, on the contrary, have to foreground their caste identities in the face of systemic exclusion, leading to self-censorship and alienation from academic life (Deshpande, 2013).

Moreover, the three-dimensional array of caste, class, and gender produces a host of interconnected impediments. Study shows that even though the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in schools are improving, boys are more likely to be enrolled in private schools; again, an inequality where quality education is concerned.

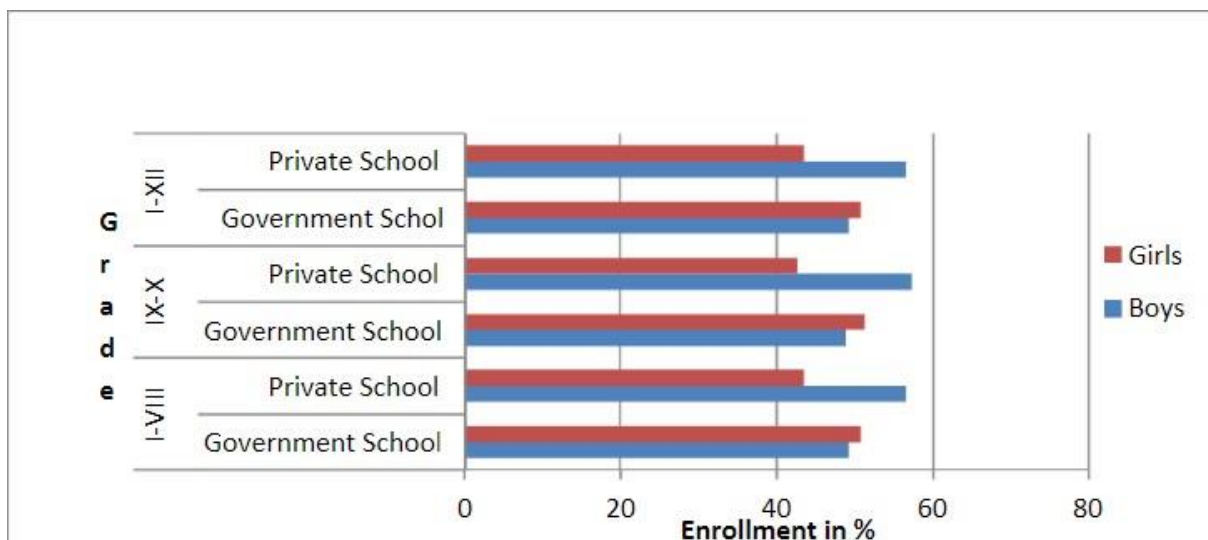


Figure 2. *Enrolment of boys and Girls at various stages by School Management, 2016-17*

Source: *U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2018, NIEPA, New Delhi*

In the government school, it is evident that more girls were enrolled than boys, with the gender gap in the enrollment figures remaining stable throughout the different levels of education in 2016-17. On the other hand, gender gaps in private schools are greater than in government ones. For instance, in the year 2016-17, the gender gap for elementary, secondary and higher secondary was 13.1%, 13.12%, and 14.63%, respectively (*U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2018, NIEPA, New Delhi*).

Societal norms often present an investment in the education of boys with more beneficial "returns on investment" in terms of producing future breadwinners. Whereas girls' education is disregarded as a long-term investment, due to their short careers resulting from early marriage. Thus, families with financial constraints would tend to put boys in private schools (*Kushwaha, 2020*). This loop of economic and gender disparity in educational access and quality continues inter-generational inequality leading to a vicious cycle whereby disadvantaged groups suffer through generations on the basis of this mechanism.

EDUCATION AS AN 'IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUS'

Louis Althusser, a French Marxist philosopher, conceived the notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970). According to Althusser, ISAs are institutions used by the ruling classes to ensure their dominance by subverting the ideology through non-coercive means. These differ from the

Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), wherein order is maintained through the mechanisms of state property such as the police and the military, whereas ISAs function within civil society, thus shaping beliefs, values, and norms, basic conditions to sustain the existing social and economic orders. One of his core arguments was that schools, through ISAs, teach students the dominant ideology in order to rejuvenate labor power and social relationships, which are effectively revived to support the capitalist system. Schools reproduce unequal access to opportunity and education, which, in turn, reproduces stratification within labor in respect of class, race, and gender.

Thus, even though education is regarded as a meritocratic pathway towards development, its structural inequalities underscore ineffectiveness to achieve social equity. (*Althusser, L. 1971*)

In the Indian context, the ideological state apparatus often reinforces particular political or religious ideologies, which can be addressed as ‘communalisation of education’ (*Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2001*). In India, research shows that the “New Indian Curriculum” focuses on how the Indian education curriculum is used to reinforce the concept of “*Hindu Rashtra*” in shaping the “national ideology” (*Singh, A. 2023; Froerer, P. 2007*). The Ministry of Education approached the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to review textbooks annually to instill ‘ideological influences’ through Political Science, Sociology, and History textbooks, leading to some illuminating debates.

Special focus was given to history and political science, in order to “saffronise” the syllabus and parallel the Hindutva ideology (*Education, T. 2024*). From the Class 11 NCERT History book, the chapter ‘Central Islamic Land’ was removed, which talked about the history of Islam and the early Arabian caliphates. Class 12 books witnessed the removal of the chapter ‘Kings and Chronicles’ which dealt with the Mughal Empire. Strangely, the chapter on Partition was removed as well, perhaps in order to support the popular Hindutva narrative of Hindus being central targets of partition violence. Topics of Citizenship was removed from the Class 11 Political Theory book in 2021, perhaps due to the rising resentment against CAA-NRC bills (*Staff, S. 2020*)

Extensive changes were made in the Class 12 Political Science books. Chapters of Cold War and US Hegemony were removed, which criticized the US during the Cold War. Topics of the Gulf War, ‘War Against Terror’ was introduced with a positive perspective of the US. In Indian politics, incidents of the 1990s such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid or the 2002 Gujarat Riots were heavily revised in order to bolster a Hindutva version of reasoning. For

example, in the Class 11 Political Science textbook, any mention of Muslims as the primary victims of the Gujarat Riots was erased in the chapter on Secularism (*Iftikhar, F. 2024*).

HIDDEN CURRICULUM

The ineffectiveness of schools to eliminate inequalities can be reverberated with Philip W. Jackson's concept of 'hidden curriculum', which refers to “unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students acquire in schools” (*Sabbott, 2015*). This hidden curriculum often aids in creating or even perpetuating social hierarchies as it prepares children for their roles in society (*Jackson, 1968*). It silently passes social norms, values, and expected behavior in conformity with the interests of the ruling class.

Schools may unwittingly educate children about the desire to conform to authority, submit to power, and accept social hierarchies through discipline and high school organizational structures, among others (*Little & Little, 2014*).

According to a case study by the Times of India in 2021, it is uncovered that the curriculum teaches girls lessons of equality between genders, however, the unofficial curriculum in schools plays the contradictory role of crushing the dreams and ambitions of girls through the perpetuation of old and stereotypical gender roles (*Tulsyan, A. 2021*). It is the silent killer that has been causing significant damage in the Indian society in terms of gender inequality.

MEASURES FOR MITIGATING SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND IDEOLOGICAL DOMINANCE IN EDUCATION

The government of India undertakes various measures to reduce social inequality in education:

1. The Indian government brought about the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, now PM Poshan, to improve nutritional support and boost school enrollment of disadvantaged children. It has been extremely instrumental in reducing withdrawal rates and improving academic outcomes, which would certainly help reduce some forms of disparities within the education delivery system.
2. The Right to Education Act (2009) tries to achieve equity among marginalized communities through compulsory free education for children between 6 to 14 years of age. However, socio-cultural barriers and infrastructural inadequacies in the implementation still restrict this initiative's power to restore individual competence (*THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT, 2009 Clarification on Provisions Chapter 1: Preliminary Section 2, 2009*)

3. The National Education Policy (2020) derives its strength from core commitments to the equitable distribution of good-quality education opportunities intending to eradicate evils like caste and gender inequalities (*National Education Policy-2020, 2020 July*). The implementation of the policy hasn't been examined so far, despite its claims. Moreover, several allegations with regard to NEP being framed to bolster the 'Hindutvanization of Education' have also been raised (*Rajalakshmi, 2022*); ideally, making it an 'ISA'
4. Inclusive measures, such as scholarship schemes for students coming from less privileged backgrounds, are desired to redress the wrongs of societal inequalities. However, on closer scrutiny and analysis, it is discovered that there has been no considerable progress toward this ideal; policy intent is unlikely to be achieved in practice.

These measures are insufficient in dealing with the ideological aspects involved in educational practices and materials. There is a need for direct intervention to deal with the embedded perpetuation of ideologies found in traditional curricula and the trend is projected to surge in the future.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: A WAY FORWARD

Critical pedagogy emerges as one promising route to overthrow ideological control over education. At the heart of this school of thought lay educators, Paulo Freire being the most emblematic, who aimed at equipping students with critical vision and consciousness so that they could transcend existing narratives and realize oppressive structures (*Freire, P. 1970*). A more straightforward definition of critical pedagogy is "a radical approach to education that seeks to transform oppressive structures in society using democratic and activist approaches to teaching and learning" (*Braa & Callero, 2006, pg. 357*).

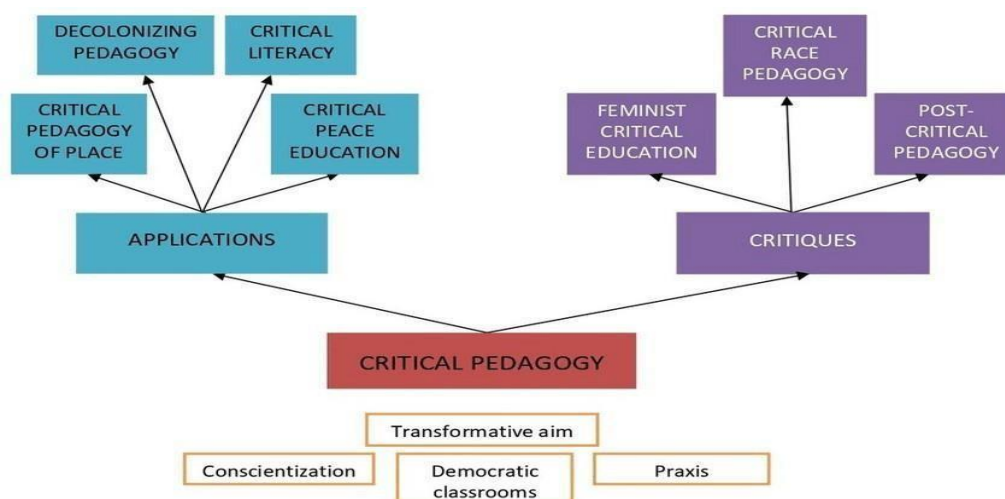


Figure 3. *Two major groups of Critical Pedagogy: application and critique*

Source: *(Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2019)*

To counter the "hidden curriculum", radicalization of education is important. This consists of the education system conferring to the fact that the educational syllabus is framed to support the ruling political agenda. The educational process should be about identifying and dealing with the resistance and agency of the learners. Apart from these, it includes non-conformity to given standards, and framing of critical lenses of everything to challenge inequality and domination. Therefore, according to Ira Shor a student can become critically conscious only when they learn to go beneath the surface meaning. *(Shor, 1992)*

A critical pedagogic approach, in short, is based on the belief that learners are not empty accounts which are to be filled in by the teacher, but individuals with potential to think, reason, understand and critique in a rational manner. *(Snehalatha, 2017)*

For example, a case study of Kerala in India elucidates the active possibility of critical pedagogy. Research conducted in the Indian sub-continent revealed that critical pedagogies implemented in classrooms resulted in student engagement, skillful critical thinking, and responsiveness to social issues (Kareepadath, V. P. 2018). It is thus, evident that there is the potential for critical pedagogy to be visualised in India, creating routes to engage social inequality as well as ideological dominance in education.

RECOMMENDED POLICIES

To address both social inequity and ideological hegemony in education, we have the following recommendations as a policy:

1. Active reshuffling of textbooks and curricula in such a manner that they present different perspectives and experiences. The latest venture in Kerala towards gender-neutral textbooks is a very good example of this kind of approach (Kaur, A. 2024).
2. Giving teachers full training to develop the ability to identify and fight covert biases, encourage inclusiveness, and adopt critical pedagogical practices.
3. Government programs geared towards education equality should be ensured to reach the target population through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of current initiatives for effective roll-out.

4. Independent and apolitical expert committees should be instituted to undertake the development and revision of education materials to avoid biasing them with ideological perspectives.
5. Introduce scientifically accurate, age-appropriate sex education from primary to secondary levels to defeat gender prejudices by leveling both genders.
6. Leverage a host of critical pedagogy approaches to tilt the entire curriculum, encourage students to critically question dominant narratives, and keep them engaged with critical thinking skills (Kareepadath, V. P. 2018).

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

Constant collective effort is needed by all pertinent stakeholders, policymakers, teachers, parents, and students, to transform education from an inequity-perpetuating system into one that empowers and emancipates people.

The future should hold into perspective such an education system which assures equal access and simultaneously transmits critical consciousness in students by challenging societal inequalities. In short, the recommendations put forward in this paper will be a valid basis to start dismantling the vicious cycle of educational reproduction of inequality and domination of ideology.

The future is one of both peril and promise. Educators and policymakers, both have the potential and the responsibility to reshape education into a truly transformative tool. Together, the stakeholders need to tackle this with hope and determination, ushering education towards a transformed learning landscape that offers opportunities for every student to tap into their potential, and return value to a more just and fair society.

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Juliet and Romeo

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ABSTRACT

Luring officers sexually has always been shameful and a taboo concept for the common people. This research article focuses on honey trapping as a genuine art of spycraft and espionage. The idea of honey trapping, a clandestine espionage tactic, has long captivated the public imagination through films. Rooted in historical realities, honey traps employ charm and seduction to exploit vulnerabilities, often compromising sensitive information. In modern times, the advent of technology and social media has amplified the sophistication and reach of such operations. Instances of cyber honeypots and military investigations highlight its prevalence in contemporary intelligence warfare.

Keywords: honeytrap, honeypot, spycraft, espionage, sexpionage, sparrow, romeo

Honey trapping—the use of seduction as an espionage tool—has shaped intelligence warfare for centuries, from ancient courts to modern cyberspace. Using seduction as a tool in espionage has long been controversial, yet it remains a key strategy in intelligence warfare. Yet do we realize how this, known yet unknown to the common people, the idea of honey trapping surrounds us in real life?

Recently, Jhanvi Kapoor captured Page 3 with her movie 'Ulajh'¹ released on Netflix this year. The protagonist, IFS Officer Ms. Suhana Bhatia, fights to sustain her career against being blackmailed to leak sensitive classified information to the enemy country. Such movies are not hot off the fire to the audience. In the 60s, the classic James Bond movie 'From Russia, With Love'² was a commercial success and a worldwide box office hit. Such espionage movies have always captured the cinephiles with their portrayal of spy craft and mystery. But such instances do not only exist in film and reels; they are based on real-life events. But do we know that this is a certified art amongst spies? A spycraft? Only a few can pull off and are trained by grooming them and teaching them the art of seducing with their beauty and gait.

ANCIENT ESPIONAGE

Such an art is often referred to as 'honeytrap' or 'honeypot' in the spy universe. In essence, it involves setting a trap using temptation to exploit the emotions or vulnerabilities of the target, often resulting in them unwittingly compromising their security or divulging confidential information. During the Mahabharata³, Shalya accidentally supported and even led the Kaurav armies. Had he been vigilant, he could have avoided the honey trap of being flattered to join the 'wrong side.' (Waghmare, 2024)

"The honeytrap is a reminder that in the game of espionage, the most potent weapon is often not a gun or a bomb, but human frailty."- Alex Berensen, American Author. (Waghmare, 2024)

Sex, or the promise of it, has always been an enigmatic subject. For millennia, spies across the world have used sex to encircle people and get access to valuable information. Some years ago, MI5 released a memo warning British banks and businesses against the threat of Chinese 'sexpionage' (Dalmia, 2019).

The practice of honey trapping has been a cornerstone of espionage for centuries. One of the earliest documented instances dates back to 1498 in Venice, involving a low-ranking official and his mistress. The Council of Ten, a secretive and influential governing body responsible for security, sought to penalize individuals from the Senate, universities, or secret councils who disclosed confidential information to foreign entities. Those found guilty faced execution.

WORLD WARS

Among the most infamous figures linked to honey trapping is Mata Hari, who even inspired elements in a James Bond film. History's most infamous honey-trap spies, used seduction to infiltrate political and military circles before being executed for espionage in 1917. Mata Hari had gained fame across European capitals, mesmerizing high-ranking officials and military officers with her multilingual skills, captivating dances, and undeniable charisma. However, her interactions with influential figures during World War I raised suspicions among French and British intelligence agencies, leading to her surveillance. As a Dutch national, she had the freedom to travel between warring nations, which further heightened concerns about her

activities. In 1916, Mata Hari began a relationship with Vladimir de Masloff, a young Russian pilot serving France who was severely injured in combat. Determined to support him

financially, she agreed to work as a spy for the French against Germany. Her espionage career led her to Madrid, where she seduced Major Arnold Kalle, a German military attaché. What transpired next remains ambiguous. French military files declassified years later suggest Mata Hari attempted to convince Kalle that she was a German agent. Historians differ in their interpretations: some believe Kalle believed her claim, while others argue he did not. What is certain is that Kalle sent a message to his superiors naming Mata Hari as a German spy. This communication was intercepted by French intelligence, who used it as evidence to accuse her. Whether Kalle intentionally implicated Mata Hari or was genuinely misled is still debated. Some historians argue that Kalle exaggerated her involvement, knowing the French would intercept the message and arrest her, while others believe he was duped. Regardless, Mata Hari was arrested by French authorities, subjected to a secret trial, and convicted based primarily on the intercepted message. In 1917, she was executed by firing squad, solidifying her reputation as one of the most enigmatic and tragic figures in the history of espionage (Fratus, 2023).

Most of us are also familiar with the film 'Red Sparrow' released in 2018 to make us aware of the Red Sparrows of Russia. In this movie, Dominika Egorova, a Prima ballerina, turns into a dangerous Sparrow, is a young Russian intelligence officer, assigned to seduce a first-tour CIA agent who handles the CIA's most sensitive penetration of Russian intelligence (IMDb, n.d.). "The Russians have for many, many years, used women to try and sexually entrap [high-ranking foreign officials] for blackmail purposes, to try and tell their secrets," Matthews⁴ told CNBC in 2018. "If the conditions are right, in Moscow, someone with access to secrets is having one too many drinks in a Moscow bar, and a young lady for sure will sidle up to them and see how far it goes." (Fratus, 2023).

MODERN CYBER WARFARE

But as they say, everything has become more complicated with the advent of the 'modern age' and the spy universe is no different. The fusion of technology and social media has enhanced the accessibility and effectiveness of honey trapping in espionage and intelligence activities. With the advancement in communication technology, dating apps⁵ like Tinder, Truly Madly, and Ok Cupid have come to be used as weapons to lure officers. In December last year, the Indian army identified 150 profiles being used by Pakistan to lure honey-trap Indian Army

officers. This is when someone posing as an attractive person entices another into revealing confidential information or doing something unwise (Gill, 2020).

When most people think of “honeypots,” they picture a plump Winnie-the-Pooh adorably getting stuck while trying to get honey out of a jug—a honeypot. In recent years, the term “honeypot” has migrated to the lexicon of cyberspace and operations.

In the rapidly evolving realities of computer security, the term “honeypot” has come to mean: [a] deception technique in which a person seeking to defend computer systems against malicious cyber operations uses a physical or virtual environment designed to lure the attention of intruders with the aim of: deceiving the intruders about the nature of the environment, having the intruders waste resources on the decoy environment, gathering counter-intelligence about the intruders’ intent, identity, and means and methods of cyber operations. Typically, the honeypot is co-resident of the actual systems the intruder wishes to target. Honeypots can be multiple resources such as servers, laptops, web-facing applications, or other technological ploys established to monitor and record the actions of cyber intruders. Honeypots are deployed in various ways to make them attractive to hackers. In some cases, they appear to be the “crown jewels” of an organization such as intellectual property, operational plans, or financial reports. Intuitively, to be effective, the honeypot must appear realistic. If it looks or feels fake in any way, intruders’ suspicions will be raised, and the honeypot will not be effective. In essence, it is a virtual sting operation. Honeypots can also be weaponized. That is, a weaponized honeypot includes files that contain malware that, once exfiltrated by intruders, will cause significant damage and disruption to the intruders’ computer networks (Wallace & Visger, 2018).

So, what is India doing about this? In February this year, in a written response to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Defence, Subhash Bhamre said the Army reported two cases of honey-trapping in 2015 and another two in 2017. The Indian Air Force reported one case in 2015, while the Navy did not report any. As a result, advisories were issued. The military intelligence is carrying out selective checks on phones, laptops, and desktops of officers and soldiers in sensitive areas, sources say. The Army has described honey-trap cases as a weapon of hybrid warfare being waged by the enemy across the borders. Army Chief General Bipin Rawat has cracked the whip on social media usage. A list of dos and don’ts has been prepared. An information warfare team is being set up at the Army headquarters. Suspected Twitter handles and Facebook accounts have also been identified. Operation Dolphin Nose is an ongoing investigation by the Indian Navy to track down personnel being

honey-trapped. In December, seven Indian Navy sailors were arrested under Operation Dolphin Nose for leaking sensitive information regarding the Navy to Pakistan. In January this year, three more Navy personnel were arrested for spying (Dalmia, 2019).

FEMINIST AND GENDER POLITICS IN SPYCRAFT

Now from the feminist perspective, honey traps aren't exclusively about femme fatales in alluring outfits (though they certainly make for captivating movie moments). Men can just as effectively take on the role of a "honey pot," demonstrating that gender equality extends even to the clandestine realm of espionage. During World War II, the German intelligence agency utilized Salon Kitty, a brothel in Berlin, as a center for gathering intelligence. In the years preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall, East Germany deployed male agents to charm and manipulate women holding significant positions in West Germany. These operatives, famously known as "Stasi Romeos," are vividly chronicled in Marianne Quoirin's book, *Agentinnen aus Liebe (The Spies Who Did It For Love)*. Additionally, some reports suggest that the Soviet Union operated a training facility called State School 4 in Kazan, located southeast of Moscow, where officers were meticulously trained in the intricate techniques of honey trapping. (Dalmia, 2019) The concept reached new heights under the leadership of East German Stasi spymaster, Markus Wolf, often referred to by the CIA as "the man without a face." Wolf's male operatives became so infamous that they were dubbed "Romeo spies." These agents were highly educated, typically aged between 25 and 35, and well-versed in Western customs and post-war ideologies. Only the top 1% of applicants qualified to become Romeo spies, receiving fabricated identities based on immigrants or deceased individuals. After undergoing extensive training in espionage techniques, they were deployed to West Germany. Once deployed, these spies skillfully engaged in manipulative relationships with their "Juliets," often sustaining long-term affairs. Over time, many disclosed their true roles, successfully recruiting their targets to join the espionage network as full-fledged spies (Fratus, 2023).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the concept of honey trapping shows us that the people involved in the spy universe cannot be as mechanical as they should be or are supposed to be and, in the end, demonstrates the complex interplay between human psychology, vulnerability, and intelligence tactics. As technology continues to blur the lines between personal and professional life, honey trapping remains a timeless espionage tool. Whether through seductive spies or cyber honeypots, the battle for information persists, proving that the most powerful

weapon in intelligence isn't firepower—but human psychology. Media and cultural narratives often glamorize and prioritize sexual attraction, reinforcing its importance and allure in human interactions. Also, psychological reactance, the tendency to desire what is prohibited can make sexual temptations more appealing, especially when societal norms or circumstances label them as forbidden. The emotional states like loneliness or low self-esteem in which the officers are forced to work to maintain privacy and security of their lives and also their nations', can heighten susceptibility to sexual advances as individuals seek validation and connection. At its heart, honey trapping underscores an essential truth about espionage: the most potent vulnerabilities often lie within the human mind.

ENDNOTES

1. Ulajh is a movie about a young IFS officer who gets embroiled in a dangerous personal conspiracy while far from her home turf, at a career-defining post. The film deals with spies and conspirators who want to scuttle peace efforts between two neighboring nations, but it also focuses on personal ideals and family.
2. From Russia with Love is a 1963 spy film and the second in the James Bond series where James Bond willingly falls into an assassination plot involving a naive Russian beauty in order to retrieve a Soviet encryption device that was stolen by the organization Spectre.
3. The Mahabharata is an ancient Indian epic poem that revolves around two branches of a family, the Pandavas and Kauravas, who battle for the throne of Hastinapura in the Kurukshetra War. It is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of India and is valued for its literary merit and religious inspiration. The Mahabharata is the longest epic poem known, consisting of over 100,000 shloka or over 200,000 individual verse lines.
4. Jason Matthews, C.I.A. Officer Turned Novelist. After 33 years at the agency, he turned out three well-received novels that included realistic details of espionage — and appearances by Vladimir Putin.
5. Online dating has become the most common way to meet new partners in the digital age, and dating apps are the core of the industry. These mobile applications travel with us everywhere and provide an opportunity to swipe, match, and chat on the go.

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One Hundred Years of South Asia's Solitude

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to meticulously draw parallels between the progression of literature of the Global South, particularly that of South Asia and the nature and approach to political research situated in the newly established post-colonial nation-states of the twentieth century. The article analyzes why the reliable sciences and techniques of the West failed to cure the colonial hangover of South Asia, and further investigates how the literary genre of magical realism challenges and improves the realist and universalist generalizations made by scholars to understand the politics of the subcontinent.

Keywords- South Asia, magical realism, decolonization

When Gabriel García Márquez discards the realist's black and white lens which tempers Western literary imagination to instead give lurid and peculiar descriptions of his fictional Macondo's political landscape, he gifts new voice, language, and prose style to the literary craftsmen of the post-colonial order and background. Fredric Jameson rightly labels this shift in perspective as a "literary earthquake" which unleashes a Latin-American cultural boom, whose tremors sway even the sturdy pillars of scientific sophistication that underpinned the discipline of political science in the post second world war global order (Jameson, 2019). No longer are theorists of the South restrained by the empiricism and cold logic realism that the academic spaces of the West demands, there is a hesitant yet gradual and inevitable acceptance of research studies on political systems which describe their institutions and functioning in a fantastical, often mystical, and certainly autonomous manner. They play the risk of being labeled as literature that is written gossip with no scientific basis. But the verifiability in the real-world context remains intact, whether they qualify as "facts" or not often ceases to matter.

The overemphasis on pre-packaged facts, data and findings is motivated by the morbid desire to keep afloat settler perspectives that rationalize and maintain neo-colonial domination of the oppressed's psyche (Tuck and Yang, 2012). But this bland and rigid dependency on empirical theoretical station which Western scholarly achievements are marked by is precisely what incapacitates them from penetrating and understanding areas which require spice, story, and nuance. The requirement for generalizations remains unfulfilled in such research work, there

is a deeper play of individualistic whims and aspirations which theorists acknowledge. There is minimized scope for a rational justification of political actions and mechanisms, the audience, and in our case the academic space, simply learns to stop sifting for causes and instead embrace the events. No formerly legitimated theory can take the centre stage in such research, only the paradoxical individual does- much similar to what Marquez orchestrates in his literary masterpiece.

THE LATIN-AMERICAN INFLUENCE

The discipline of world literature is perennially fascinated and intrigued by *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and subsequently grateful to its author, Gabriel García Márquez for dreaming the magic of Macondo into literary existence once he eliminates the “traditional narrative paradigm” altogether to dismiss logical burdens of linear progression (Spindler). His blatant and trailblazing audacity is simultaneously mirrored in the disciplinary evolution of political science in the second half of the Twentieth Century when the behaviouralist and developmentalist approaches were similarly scrutinized and their reliance on value-free knowledge and sophisticated methods of scientism with claims of modernization and democratization were provocatively questioned. Heralding this counter-movement were the Latin American neo-Marxists, most notable being Andre Gunder Frank, who were patronized by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) and put forth the dependency theory to highlight the historically exploitative interstate relations that acted as post-colonial obstacles to development in the “third world” nation-states.

Although he arguably did it with the highest finesse, Márquez was not the first to employ the genre of magical realism in his novel, he was preceded by the likes of Jorge Luis Borges and Nikolai Gogol, with Borges even being regaled as the pioneer of magical realism. There is noticeable parodic political flavour intrinsic to their ventures with the literary genre. What is indeed interesting to take note of is that Gogol imaginatively weaponizes the genre to describe and satirize the tedious complications of the 19th Century imperial Russian government and its bureaucracy’s high-handed culture, thereby successfully delineating a finely insinuated critique of the structures of politics and power through fantastical short stories. This political fervor is later more visibly manifest in Mikhail Bulgakov’s “*The Master and the Margarita*”, an allegorical indictment of the Soviet Union that explores the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance and the corruption at the heart of Soviet society while resisting the aesthetic tenets of Socialist Realism (Dent, 2024). This Latin-American courage

to articulate a blend of mythology, philosophy and tragic realities was soon reflected in the literature of South Asian origins, the most famed name among the legions of contemporary authors and poets being that of Salman Rushdie.

MAGICAL SENSIBILITIES OF THE SOUTH ASIAN DISSONANCE

South Asia's political scene is this intriguing and yet infuriating mix of political apathy, neighborly nosiness and adumance. None of the aforementioned combinations I use in writing to describe South Asia would pass off as acceptable terminology in our present academic space but this is what most vividly communicates the political essence of the subcontinent. Rushdie reiterates the words of V.S. Naipaul- these are "half-made" societies which do not possess the unfairly gained powers and wealth of the West to bury their political and economic anguishes, their miseries when documented in fiction, possess the ability to make the seemingly impossible unsurprisingly possible. A lone illiterate peasant could manage to acquire political power and usher in an era of dynastic politics where he or she wields unquestioning, somewhat dictatorial authority. The state military would clash with the civilian government and force interventions as self-proclaimed "guardians" of the religious majority of the nation. In another case, a neighbour would militarily interfere in the unstable political scenario of a state to massacre the shared minority between the two nation-states in order to put an end to the raging ethnic conflict and restore peaceful conditions. Democracy will be instated by external democratic territories through undemocratic methods. This undemocratic solution of the Western powers to install an educated elite as decision makers could lead to further democratic backsliding. Nationwide drives of decolonization are sanctioned by the state and civil society that partake in the replacement and revision of tangible historical truths, only to re-impose the intangible yet suffocatingly omnipotent colonial narratives of the agonizing past.

All of these turbulent historical episodes within the subcontinent are diligently recorded and analysed by both domestic and international political scientists, specifically scholars of postmodernism, but these abnormal yet socially transformative and definitive time periods are also to be parallelly perceived and understood by the larger society that is either subjected to direct experiences or inherits generational trauma. The absurd and the post-modern then finds expression through fables which invoke the supernatural to come to terms with and navigate the brutal socio-political aftermath that characterise postcolonial realities in South Asia. Like the dialectical nature of reality itself, the stories produced in the subcontinent are also immersive literary experiences in an infinite loop of political conflicts and reconciliations

as repetitions of the same fatalistic choices in the South Asian nation-state's historic political trajectory become normalized. Situated in the context of the Partition of 1947, Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel *Midnight's Children* is one such literary specimen that places its alienated and obfuscated protagonist in a post-independence mystical matrix where his telepathic powers enable him to find solace in strangers whose fates are identically intertwined with that of their newly free yet wounded nation. While *Midnight's Children* is centred in India, Rushdie's third novel, *Shame* voices out the anguish and losses of Pakistan in the wake of partition as throngs of refugees generated from vicious religious conflict before the dawn of an independence long yearned for, are coerced to reject their native cultures and embrace as well as stake claim to a homeland that is strange and often hostile to them. Colonized history and cross-cutting identities have far-reaching implications on the reshaping of the dynamics of politics than even the freedom leaders in charge could have comprehended as nostalgia for the non-existent and bitterness borne of existent identities model imagined communities. In the fictional area studies that Rushdie undertakes, he relies on usage of the hallucinatory devices of magic realism to try to capture, metaphorically, the sweep and chaos of contemporary reality, its resemblance to a dream or nightmare, thereby establishing a literary form and historical narrativization unique to the contemporary fiction manufactured in the South Asian context (Singh et al, 2017).

An internationally acclaimed and awarded practitioner of the South Asian tradition of magical realism, and to a certain extent a successor of Salman Rushdie's literary magnetism is Shehan Karunatilaka, winner of the 2022 Booker prize for his novel, *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*. Set in the times of the prolonged Sri Lankan civil war during the 1980s, Karunatilaka's characters, still reeling from the consequences of the Black July riots of 1983, are not separated or liberated from the burdens of their identity and its associated politics even in the afterlife as their troubled souls intervene in matters of the earthly realm to stage political assassinations and continue the cycle of vengeance, attempt to protect their loved, and dearly pay for their intrigue, experiences and involvement in the resultant violence of the ethnic conflict. Like Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children*," and Bulgakov's "*The Master and Margarita*," Karunatilaka's reimagination is supremely confident in its literary heterodoxy, and likewise in embedding pivotal moments of politics, power, and history in the idiosyncratic particularities of ordinary Sri Lankan life.

The political history of the subcontinent, unlike that of the West, is not unilinear and progressive. With colonial trauma of more than two centuries being the only common thread

running through the diverse nationalist narratives proliferated in the modern nation-states of South Asia, a momentary sense of solidarity and shared solace is rare to emerge. As they gradually advance towards a century of independence from their colonizers, the unnamed yet persistent and strangulating frustrations, fears, and fury prevalent in post-colonial societies that trigger a cyclical pattern of historical wrongs have yet to be adequately redressed and soothed. Márquez eloquently expressed sagely and optimistic meditations on the reversal of the tragic fate of Latin America in his Nobel lecture of 1982- “Faced with this awesome reality that must have seemed a mere utopia through all of human time, we, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.” His sentiment is exemplified in the post-independence trajectory of an aspiring South Asia that eagerly awaits the dawn of a prosperity that can guarantee liberation and secure their dignity once and for all.

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Secrets of the Männerbund

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ABSTRACT

The world has always been characterised by a lot of secrets. There have been secret organisations that have kept a lot of actions alive behind closed doors. Freemasonry has been one such fraternal organisation of the mannerbund. It has been accused of conspiracies, owing to its evolution as well as its practice. Controversy has been its dominant feature and identities have remained secrets. However, history has revealed to us a lot of its abstruse without bringing to light the actual secret of freemasonry. Do they rule the world or does the history of the world rule them? The article aims to study the secrets of the origin, evolution, and sustenance of freemasonry. It also focuses freemasonry in India and reveals facts related to the same.

Keywords: *Freemasonry, Freemasons, stonecutters, brotherhood, conspiracies*

‘Who controls the British crown? Who keeps the metric system down? We do, we do!’ (The Stonecutters song). Delivered and popularised through the cartoon show ‘The Simpsons’ entrails the audience down and draws attention to the culture of ‘Freemasonry’. The world has always witnessed secrets, conspiracies and game of power throughout. This endless string of secrets and conspiracies have persisted through centuries by the efforts of the world’s largest secret society, the Freemasons, a group that includes men of intellect. The inception of freemasonry dates back to the 18th century - Age of Enlightenment. The age being one of innovation, newness and re-revelation in philosophy, life and religion needed educated Englishman of intellect, who would indulge among themselves to commune on matters of the state. Freemasonry draws its base from fraternal organisations that existed for centuries. Though freemasonry revealed itself during the period of enlightenment, yet involved, elaborate ceremonies and secret rituals and customs organised through a strict hierarchy. The ceremonies consist of passwords, songs, secret knocks and prayers. There are even rules pertaining to which direction should the masons face while they sit or stand during the ceremony, how they sit and even what they wear. This conservative attitude is engraved in the

organisation, probably due to its evolutionary history - having its roots in the medieval guilds of stonemasons (Blakemore, 2023). The denial of religion, coupled with such strict observances increases the scope of conspiracy theories about them. However, most members post enlightenment were vast majority of members who were not masters of stonework. “In the original guild there were three stages: Apprentices, Fellowcraft and Master masons” (Blakemore,2023). Today these divisions have evolved to be based on philosophy. The black book, with words misspelled and blurred contains their truly guarded ritualistic secrets and their significance. A purposive action owing to their clandestine character.

The membership of Freemason groups is limited to men only. Freemasonry believes that they make good men better- better fathers, better husbands, better brothers, and better sons. It focused on making men useful and important for the society by upgrading their spiritual, mental and physical being. Though different groups have their own unique rules yet one factor remains universal where membership is recommended by other members of the society. With their Moto of being perfect individuals, they believe their members to be “Supreme Beings”- who possess a good moral character and who pledge and conform to the rules and customs of freemasonry. Their three supreme motos are of: brotherly love, truth, and relief. The association stands on the pillars of brotherhood. The members are set to be bonded by brotherhood and compassion for each other. They are also known to secretly assist each other in business and workplace. The essence of secrecy is so high amongst the freemasons is due to the fact that when they take their oath brotherhood, they promise to keep whatever happens behind the close doors, a secret. Failing so, they shall be debarred from masonry. The members of the fraternity often met in pubs and referred to these associations as a “Grand Lodge”. History later confirms to the fact that these pubs have been later converted to spaces exclusively for the freemasons and have been called to be a “Grand Lodge” with the name of the location often attached as a prefix or suffix. The one in Kolkata that housed the Freemasons still stands at 19 Park Street- Freemasons Hall, Kolkata. The masonic brotherhood is still believed to be burning with a low flame as the members still convene once a month at the Freemasons Hall (Sengupta, 2022). The Masons had philanthropic ventures too. They are said to have had 22 children’s hospitals in old England where patients were treated for free.

FREEMASONRY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

However, the Catholic Church did not and still does not encourage masonry membership rather, disregards it. In 1738 Pope Clement XII issued the Catholic Church’s first decree against freemasonry (Mo Rocca, 2013). In 1983, the Catholic Church also declared masonic

Association to be a grave sin and were forbidden to receive the holy communion- this was published in an edition of the Catholic Herald (Blakemore,2023). Yet many historians are of the belief that the inception of stonemasonry that leads to the organisation of freemasonry began in king Solomon's Temple, the existence of which is very much only in the 'Bible'. Therefore, much of their customs and rituals are found to be similar to the practices of Solomon's Temple.

ALLEGORY OF THE FREEMASONS

The symbolism of freemasonry includes a square and a compass which is understood to be exclusively drawn from the tools of stonemasons. However, the more intricate meaning of the symbolism is revealed to the members through rituals and lectures. The letter G at the centre of the symbol is also said to hold the meaning. Some believe it stands for God while others believe it stands for geometry while some others also believe that it stands for 'gnostic': the study of spiritual mysteries. Another very important symbol of the freemasons is the 'All seeing eye' which is believed by them to be the eye of Providence that oversees all their actions and hence they should be truthful to the brotherhood. They have often been called to be 'devil worshipers' and have been accused of taking over the world through their conspiracies. However, the freemasons have always claimed themselves to be harmless. The world is believed to have had over 3 million Freemasons even until the 19th century. Many civil leaders and powerful men were believed to be members like Winston Churchill, Voltaire and Henry Ford. Nine signers of the American Declaration of Independence including George Washington, and 13 other American presidents have been freemasons (Bullock,1996). This explains the fact why freemasonry has been associated with conspiracy that is because it contained men of civic importance and they always met secretly. The conspiracies about freemasons, where mostly of the fact that the secretly overpowered the governments and industries of the world.

FREEMASONRY IN INDIA

Though contemporary freemasonry in India began in 1961, the inception of freemasonry in India is as old as the times of the East India company and began officially in the 1720s with the appointment of a provincial Grand Master to supervise masonic activities. Freemasonry in India initially was limited to the areas of greater British influence. Hence, the first 'Grand Lodge' in India began in due form at Fort William Calcutta. John Napier, Warren Hastings, Lord Dalhousie, Wellington were all said to be freemasons. History also indicates that Tipu

Sultan, the son of Hyder Ali was also a member of the fraternity. The number of lodges were said to be around 400. Which reduced to 290 post-independence in 1947.

Eminent Indians like Narendra Nath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda), Motilal Nehru (the father of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) and C. Rajagopal Acharya (Governor General of India), Ashok Kumar, The nawab of Pataudi Mansur Ali Khan, J.R.D Tata were members of the various Indian grand lodges. The active lodge— The Grand Lodge of India was officially constituted on 24th November 1961 at Ashoka Hotel, New Delhi. There were delegations from Scotland, Ireland and England attended the ceremony. India is believed to have buildings that bare the square and compass. The plan according to which New Delhi, the capital of India is laid out is also believed to have principles of masonry embedded in it. The Freemasons in India are believed to be more charitable than freemasons all around the world. They have contributed hugely to the society by doing works of charity, such as organising classrooms for prison children, lifted up the lifestyle of people in villages and have built houses for tsunami affected villages.

FREEMASONRY IN ATTENDANCE

Freemasonry in the 19th and 20th century in India as well as all over the world, faced several challenges for being secretive of the decisions and actions and were often largely accused of conspiracy. Owing to this, a number of lodges were bound to disintegrate as a result of which the membership declined to large extent. Freemasonry in the 21st century faces a different kind of challenge. The identities of Freemasons are no more secrets; however, their secrets are still well preserved. Freemasons are now allowed to disclose their identities as freemasons, but are still bound by the oath of secrecy to not bring out to the world. The secrets discussed behind closed doors in the grand lodges. However, with security systems being so advanced, the Freemasons are now bound to make a lot of compromises in their organisation. The world order of the 21st century has made a difficult for freemasons to carry on with their ventures. It has also become difficult for the organisation to sustain freemasonry. They are trying hard to sustain their old members, but are unable to attract new membership due to the lack of integrity and secrecy in men.

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Sub-classification in the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories- A Step Towards the Dismantling of the System of Reservations

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ABSTRACT

The system of reservations was introduced in 1933 in British India. Almost a century later, this temporary provision has gone through multiple changes aimed at the objective of social justice. However, such changes have more often than not increased the ambit of reservations, which has incurred opposition from the general category as well as those who rightfully deserve but do not benefit from it. Reservations have also become a political instrument used to gain an electoral win by political parties. Nonetheless, a revolutionary change has been brought forth by the Supreme Court's judgement in State of Punjab v Davinder Singh, on 1st August, 2024, wherein it upheld the constitutional validity of sub-classification within the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories. This article aims to examine the trajectory, rationale, efficiency and repercussions of this monumental judgement.

Keywords: reservation, sub-classification, caste census

THE JOURNEY OF SUB-CLASSIFICATION IN RESERVATION

The issue of sub- classification of classes for the purpose of reservation first arose in Mr Balaji vs State of Mysore case (1962) where the Constitution Bench held the sub-classification of the backward class to be unconstitutional because it: (a) was solely based on caste; and (b) devised measures for the benefit of “all” classes of citizens who are less advanced when compared to the most advanced class in the State which is not the scope of Article 15(4). Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy critiqued this view in K.C. Vasanth Kumar and Another vs State of Karnataka (1985), observing that as a matter of principle, sub-classification within a reserved class is valid provided that both the classes are far behind the advanced class and that one of the classes is ahead of the most backward class. He also observed that the validity of the classification of the Backward Class into Backward and More Backward Classes may be open to adjudication on the facts of each case. In State of

Kerala and Another vs. N.M. Thomas and Others (1975), the Supreme Court held that both Articles 14 and 16(1) permit reasonable classification having a nexus with the objects to be achieved.

The observations in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1999) elucidated three principles regarding sub-classification: (a) sub-categorization within a class is a constitutional requirement to secure substantive equality in the event that there is a distinction between two sections of a class; (b) sub-classification must not lead to the exclusion of one of the categories in the class. A model that provides sufficient opportunities to all categories of the class must be adopted; and (c) sub-classification among a class must be on a reasonable basis. Justice Sawant held that the distinction between the categories must be substantial, while Justice Jeevan Reddy held that the subcategorization must be reasonable.

However, in the case of *E.V. Chinnaiah v. State of Andhra Pradesh* (2004), the Supreme Court observed that the principles in *Indra Sawhney* on sub-classification of the Other Backward Class will not apply to the Scheduled Castes because the judgment specifically observed that it is only ruling on the sub-classification of the Other Backward Class and not the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

In *M. Nagaraj and others vs. Union of India* (2006) and others, the Court applied the test of creamy layer and the requirement for collection of quantifiable data showing backwardness of the class and inadequacy of representation of that class; even insofar as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are concerned. The correctness of the decision in *M. Nagaraj* was further referred to the Constitution Bench in the case of *Jarnail Singh and Others vs. Lachhmi Narain Gupta and Others* (2022).

STATE OF PUNJAB vs DAVINDER SINGH

On 1 August 2024, in *State of Punjab vs Davinder Singh*, a seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud upheld the constitutional validity of sub-classification within the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories in a 6:1 majority, overruling the five-judge bench decision in *E.V. Chinnaiah v. State of Andhra Pradesh* (2004).

The judgement authored by Chief Justice Chandrachud on behalf of himself and Justice Misra, concurred by Justices Gavai, Mithal, Nath and Sharma, observes that Article 14 of the Constitution permits sub-classification of a class which is not similarly situated for the

purpose of the law and that the operation of Article 341 (1) does not create an integrated homogenous class.

Historical and empirical evidence demonstrates that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are a socially heterogeneous class. Thus, the State in exercise of the power under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) can further classify the Scheduled Castes if (a) there is a rational principle for differentiation; and (b) the rational principle has a nexus with the purpose of sub-classification. The State must establish that the inadequacy of representation of a caste or group is because of its backwardness and must collect data on the inadequacy of representation in the “services of the State” because it is used as an indicator of backwardness.

Simply put, the “creamy layer” principle is applicable to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories and the criteria for exclusion of the creamy layer from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of affirmative action could be different from the criteria as applicable to the Other Backward Classes.

RATIONALE AND EFFICIENCY OF SUB-CLASSIFICATION

The main purpose of the system of reservation is to uplift the disadvantaged sections of the society and alleviate them to the level of the majority population. This can be illustrated by means of a race which places participants at unequal points, the ones farther away from the starting line are at a disadvantage. The system of reservations, therefore, tries to place all participants at the same starting line.

The disadvantage or backwardness of these groups is not exclusively in terms of social status, poverty, access to resources, or political invisibility; it is rather a holistic amalgamation of deprivation in socio-economic-political avenues. However, the most important factor perhaps is the social stigma attached to certain caste identities, for example in the form of “untouchability”. Although Article 17 abolishes this practice in any form and makes it ‘a punishable offence’, nonetheless, the menace of untouchability persists.

It is noteworthy that a person’s identity is situated within the intersectionality of multiple identities. An identity cannot exist exclusively in vacuum, instead it inter-plays with multiple other identities to give rise to a person’s social standing. A person is therefore, created by the inter-mingling of an array of identities like gender, caste, class, race, religion, region, language, education, income, etc. The intersectionality of such identities gives people a relative advantage or disadvantage in different contexts.

For example, a high caste woman is better situated (socially) than a Dalit man. Yet the same high caste woman is at a disadvantage in comparison to a high caste man and is oppressed by the pervasive system of patriarchy. A poor Dalit woman is perhaps at the bottom-most echelon of society. Her identity is found in the intersectionality of gender, caste and class- all three of which put her at a disadvantage. The evil practice of ‘caste rape’ implies that her sexual and bodily dignity can be violated at any time by a ‘high’ caste man.

One might argue that the system of reservation and the call for a caste census is anti-thetical to the purpose of removing the caste system altogether. Nani A. Palkiwala, in his book, *‘We, The Nation, The Lost Decades’* notes, “The basic structure of the Constitution envisages a cohesive, unified, casteless society. By breathing new life into casteism, the judgment fractures the nation and disregards the basic structure of the Constitution” (Palkiwala, 1995, pg. 179). This argument undoubtedly holds weight in the sense that often, in the urban setting at least, a person’s caste identity takes a backseat as their social standing is determined by parameters like education and income; and their caste identity comes under the spotlight only when questions about caste reservation and caste census are asked. In such cases, fictional schisms are newly created within the community.

Despite such valid arguments, it is noteworthy that until a new methodology of affirmative action is evolved or adopted, the system of reservation shall prevail and continue to occupy the field. The dismantling of an existing system cannot be suggested without the creation of an equally or more effective new system. Society is dynamic in nature and laws must evolve based on the needs and demands of its inhabitants. Sub-classification thus, becomes an important evolution in the system of reservation.

Consider this: when a member of a backward class becomes an IAS/IPS officer or a doctor, engineer, lawyer, professor, etc., it can be rightfully assumed that their socio-economic status along with their degree of access to resources and the political process incurs an upgrade. It is assumed that they hold a higher position than the rest of their class. The children of such families can also be assumed to have access to better educational institutions and facilities than those from a backward class. The question that therefore arises is whether the children of uplifted families coming from backward classes be eligible for reservation.

Justice Krishna Iyer in *State of Kerala and another vs. N.M. Thomas and others* (1976) repeatedly observed that the State is entitled to take steps for weeding out socially, economically and educationally advanced sections of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from the ambit of reservation.

No doubt, one swallow does not make a summer. If a few members of a particular caste or class advances in the society, the entirety of that group would not cease to be backward. Nonetheless if any member of designated backward class acquires a higher status and attains equality with the forward class, it is difficult to comprehend if their children would be treated as depressed, downtrodden or backward in terms of social, economic or educational conditions. Therefore, the caste to which this person belongs may not be excluded as a whole from the benefit of reservation but certainly the family which has obtained the benefit once shall not be allowed to take advantage of reservation in the next generation. The reservation to such families has to be confined to one generation only (Mithal, 2024).

At the group level, horizontal discrimination that is, the practice by which certain Dalit castes practiced untouchability against other Dalit castes was observed through an extensive study on caste discrimination in 1589 villages in Gujarat undertaken by The Robert F. Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights in collaboration with Navsarjan (an organization that promotes the rights of Dalits). Through the census conducted, the study identified that the practice of food, water and religion related untouchability is emulated within the Dalits as well. For instance, Dalits of lower sub-caste were prevented from sitting with the rest of the Dalit community during meals. They were not given tea when they visited the house of a higher subcaste. It was also found that a Dalit belonging to a lower sub-caste could receive water in the house of a Dalit of a higher sub-caste only in 12 percent of the villages. The study also found that in 92.4 percent of the villages studied, all the Dalits did not have access to all-Dalit burial grounds and that the lower sub-castes were denied entry into to Dalit Temples in 79 percent of the villages.

The rationale and efficiency of sub-classification lies in its capacity to identify those within the disadvantaged classes who are most in need of advancement- identify the backwards among the backwards. It is necessary to exclude the affluent individuals or families from the benefits of reservation and make room for the actually underprivileged within these classes.

The States are certainly not mandated to sub-classify SC/ST categories for the purpose of reservation; nevertheless, should the State identify such a need, they are legally permitted to create sub-categories to that effect. Periodical exercise has to be undertaken to exclude individuals who have acquired a degree of social mobility, thus sharing the attributes of the general category after reaping the benefits of reservation (Mithal, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS FOR CASTE CENSUS AND POLITICS

There are arguments both in proposition and opposition to caste census. On one hand, a caste census can help promote social justice, ensure equitable distribution of resources and monitor the effectiveness of affirmative action policies. Some scholars even argue that a caste census is necessary to abolish caste-derived privileges and the caste system itself. On the other hand, a caste census would reinforce the caste system, leading to further social divisions and could marginalize small castes by incorporating them into a larger group.

Yet, the proper operation of the system of reservation to achieve the objective of social and economic alleviation requires a sub-classification of categories, which necessitates the identification of such ‘backwards within the backwards’ classes of citizens through a caste census. While the caste census lobby and the anti-caste census lobby may debate the merits and demerits of a caste census, the rule of law favours the former.

The issue of sub-classification has not been limited to the halls of the apex court. The Indian National Congress in its 2024 Election Manifesto promised to conduct a nation-wide SocioEconomic and Caste Census to enumerate the castes and sub-castes and their socio-economic conditions. Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) chief, Chirag Paswan on the 20th of July, 2024 remarked that caste census should be part of the next census as specific data is often needed for adequate allocation of money for community-based development schemes, adding that Courts also at times seek population data of different castes. However, Paswan does not voice support of making such data public owing to its potentially disruptive repercussions.

Although the Supreme Court’s order was met with dissension from Bahujan Samaj Party which extended support to the day-long Bharat Bandh called by some Dalit and Adivasi groups to protest against the Court’s verdict on 21st August, 2024, there are sections of the population that have expressed their support for the judgement. The district unit of Madiga Samaj Sanghatane Okkuta, for example, staged a half-naked protest on 16th October, 2024, demanding the implementation of sub-classification of Scheduled Castes as per the Supreme Court judgement given Karnataka’s Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah’s failure to show any interest in implementing internal reservation.

The Supreme Court’s judgement that States have a right to sub-classify Scheduled Castes notified in the Presidential List with an objective to provide them “more” preferential treatment in public employment and education is monumental. It is certainly a positive step towards the proper implementation and abolition of the system of reservations, which is a temporary

provision. The failure of abolishing this temporary provision is the failure of the government as well as the people in their crusade against social inequality and injustice.

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The Subaltern as an Agent of Change in Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine how the subaltern characters, marginalised and excluded groups act as agents of change in society. The implications are critically analysed through Mohammed Hanif's "Our Lady of Alice Bhatti" that sheds light on the issue of minority representation and gender in Pakistan, and Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" that takes us into the disintegrated Igbo society due to colonial rule. Through the characters of Alice Bhatti and Okonkwo we understand the larger struggle of the subaltern in terms of gender, identity and colonial legacies. This synthesis explores various theories centred around subaltern agency through the lens of prominent postcolonial theorists. The subaltern consciousness and methods of resistance have been explored to demonstrate how these groups are dismantling systemic oppression. Through the acts of defiance, these subaltern characters in the respective narratives navigate the harsh system and reshape their identities.

Keywords - Subaltern Studies, Subaltern Consciousness, Subaltern Agency

"When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty" - Thomas Jefferson

The notion of the subaltern has always been central to postcolonial theory, encompassing marginalised groups in a profound power structure. The term was coined by Antonio Gramsci, offering three alternative terms "irrepressible subaltern," "hegemonic subaltern," and "citizensubaltern," with reference to the politics that excludes certain social groups (Thomas, 2018). The term was previously used to address a junior officer in the British military. In postcolonial studies, the subaltern refers to the native groups that have been socially, politically and geographically excluded from the imperial colony. The subaltern is muted, devoid of any rights and forced to co-exist in an unyielding and suppressive society.

THE DYNAMICS OF SUBALTERN STUDIES

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' dives into the complexities and voices of the people that have been silenced. By addressing the deadly

equation of the patriarchal society and colonial empire, she advocates that the women are doubly marginalized. Spivak writes, “the subaltern has no history and cannot speak”, however their efforts in subverting the status quo cannot be ignored. Homi Kharshedji Bhabha a pioneer of “hybridisation” and “mimicry” has contributed significantly to the subaltern studies, exploring the bitter relationship between the colonizer and colonized. On the other hand, Edward Said in his book, “Orientalism”, published in 1978 dwells into the portrayal of the subaltern by the West, justifying their unjust deeds in the foreign lands. This concept has found its way in various cultural studies, revealing how the subaltern characters and their nations are depicted as “backward, exotic and not capable of ruling themselves.”

THE ESSENCE OF SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Subalternity has transcended beyond the Subaltern Studies group and emerged as a powerful concept in various disciplines. While some critics believe that the subaltern is forced to be mute and stripped of their identity, others believe they can voice themselves due to the colonizer's ambivalence. (Windriani 2021). A core focus of the Subaltern Studies group was the struggles of the Dalits, “untouchables” or the “banished caste” and the rural labourers who had been overshadowed by colonial discourse. Having evolved in recent years, these insights now span across various disciplines and perspectives. Subaltern literature reflects themes such as oppression, marginalization, gender discrimination, and subjugation of lower and working classes.

The role of Marxist theories enriches the understanding of subalternity as it shares the same concern for the marginalized. By focusing on the differences of the haves and have nots, proletariat and bourgeoisie, it critiques the dominant power structure. Nonetheless, Marxism focuses on the class issue rather than a broader oppression, however, the intersection of class and the passive identity of the proletariat is to be noted. P.K Awasthi in his work *Politics of Subaltern Consciousness*, examines Arundhati Roy’s novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and Jawaharlal Nehru’s autobiography *Toward Freedom* and illustrates how the subalterns employ their consciousness to dismantle injustices. He uses Dipesh Chakrabarty’s definition of the concept by calling it “peasant consciousness”. By discussing the continuous resistance, he puts forth the positions of *hijras*, Dalits and women in India, the ones in a continual quest for an autonomous identity. Dr. M. Elangovan in his work, *The Formation of the Subaltern Consciousness: A Bisexual Foetus* writes that “subaltern consciousness seeks its

own vision of a ‘paradise lost’ in the sense of community”. This consciousness stems from a sense of alienation as a response to the oppression endured.

GENDERED MARGINALITY IN MOHAMMED HANIF’S *OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI*

Mohammed Hanif’s *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* explores the themes of love, prejudice, corruption amidst the intersections of gender and faith. While she does not find herself under a colonizer’s rule, she is certainly expected to conform to the ideals of a Muslim majority Pakistan. Her father, Joseph Bhatti is a *chuhra*, a term used to denote the Dalit caste. Hanif has demonstrated the hardships of the Christian community through Joseph. Alice, who works as a nurse at a hospital in Karachi, uses mimicry to challenge these norms. The tension between the cultural identities is prevalent and Hanif depicts the struggles of Alice in the patriarchal society. In an attempt to assimilate, Alice uses subversive mimicry to navigate the challenges posed by religion and gender. The novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* rejects idealization of both subaltern life and death, emphasizing the ambiguity of struggle for living subalterns. (Mirza, 2015)

By imitating those behaviours, conduct and speech, Alice resists them and gradually reshapes her identity. Indigenous women, especially those marginalized, economically impoverished, and experiencing sexual harassment, struggle against colonial oppression through mimicry. (Bahardur, 2017). What may seem as a meek attempt of rebellion, as an act of submission on the surface, is actually the method that the subalterns use to disrupt the social hierarchies. The narrative ends violently, yet Hanif gives the subaltern a voice through the protagonist, who effectively conveys a positive message by treating patients at the hospital. On 11th August, 1947, Jinnah in his constituent assembly speech promised “equal rights, privileges, and obligations” for every community. This promise did not age well and according to the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), around 193 cases of violence against minorities in Punjab were reported in 2023. Additionally, there are around 1,855 people who have been charged with blasphemy in Pakistan in 2023 including 65 Ahmadis, 11 Christians and a Hindu.

Jinnah also said that, “You are free to go to your temples and your place of worship in this State of Pakistan. Religion or caste or creed have nothing to do with the business of the State.” (The Scotsman, 12 August 1947, p.4). The novel reflects Pakistan’s contemporary situation, illustrating how Alice and her family were unsuccessful in getting rid of their *chuhra* status. Despite her efforts to assimilate and integrate, she was exploited and mocked multiple times during her duties at the hospital.

Simone de Beauvoir's theory of "the other" is a feminist theory that advocates for how women are reduced to a subordinate position. She argues that men held the position of the subject while women were reduced to that of an object. In the case of Alice, this is prevalent on many levels, as Teddy Butt, the man she is eventually drawn to, is the stereotype of the macho male that assumes the role of the subject. She stands as an agent of change that exposes the shallowness and violence that are hidden under these power dynamics, refusing to stoop down to a position of an 'inferior'. Women of minority status in postcolonial states like Pakistan are mostly oppressed and seldom included in the regular stream of life. (Ahmed et al, 2022).

THE CULTURAL FRACTURES IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

Chinua Achebe's language in his novel, *Things Fall Apart* is indeed political because he wanted to rewrite literature from the perspective of the black man. The novel is a counter narrative tracing the age-old Igbo people that trace their origin back to the time of King Eri during 3000 BC. The spread of Christianity in West Africa led to the decline of paganism when the European colonizers and missionaries had entered their territory in 1857. The British colonial rule also made strong attempts to loot the Igbo community of their identity and rich culture. Knowledge among the Igbos was acquired through collective experience and wisdom, with elders and oral tradition playing important roles in the knowledge acquisition process. (Ihejirika, 2023). Achebe showcases the character of Mr. Brown in the novel who hails "Chukwu", considered to be the supreme being of Igbo spirituality. Brown believes that, "Chukwu is the only God and all others are false", referring to the almighty Father in heaven.

We are introduced to Okonkwo who is a respected warrior and the leader of the Umuofia Igbo clan. He leads the charge against the colonizers and is afraid of change, mourning the loss of the old ways. When his people start leaning towards the colonizers, Okonkwo struggles with an identity crisis, his personal insecurity overflowing to the brim in the face of the colonial authority. When he kills a British district officer, he is perceived as a monster and loses all his peers, realising that he cannot save his people. He becomes a symbol of resistance, his subaltern voice is exemplified even in this last moments when he decides to commit suicide. Okonkwo's claims are not absurd, he identified the common trick from the British playbook and laments - "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart"

The novel shows the "subalterns" attaining a voice and refuting a discourse imposed by the "other" through essential ideologies, rituals, and practices. (Katbi et al. 2016). A new class of the Igbo community emerges as hybrids, such as the character of Nwoye in the novel who adopts Christianity. The hybrids have adopted an English taste and have left behind their roots, blending into the imperial empire and accepting their culture as inferior. While increased tax rates and eradication of local culture were major issues, the woman's question is also articulated by Zhang Hai who writes, "African women in Igbo communities experienced double colonization and subalternity due to colonialism and patriarchal society". The death of Okonkwo should not be considered shameful nor should the silent resilience by his close friend Obierika and the elders of the village who pass down their folklore and language without direct confrontation. The small acts of resistance in the novel and gradual rebellion by the subaltern historically echoes the outburst against the British in Africa, such as the Aro Expedition of 1901-1902, Igbo Women's War of 1929 and the Aba Women's Riot of 1929 where several Nigerian tribes strived to protect their heritage.

THE VOICES OF RESISTANCE AND CONFORMITY

The subaltern's voice of resistance has a dual characteristic entailing a balance for survival. On one hand they need to accept the imperial order to exist and on the other, resist it by preserving their values and culture. Their approach may be violent or nonviolent as they navigate the power structure to find new methods of resistance. Resistance can be reconceptualised as the negotiation rather than negation of social power in subaltern resistance contexts. (Chandra, 2015). The subaltern groups may not always have the required resources for combat; thus, they negotiate and conform for the timing. Frantz Fanon in his work, *Black Skin, White Masks* introduces the concept of the "zone of non-being". This is centred around the dominance of the white society that undermines the identity and dehumanizes the other counterparts. By using this theory with reference to the subaltern groups, a resistance is always brewing beneath the surface that may appear to conform.

In Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the resistance is subtle but the impact is felt throughout the narrative. The protagonists in both of these narratives emerge as agents of change despite meeting an unfortunate fate. The resistance in its initial phases is never full-fledged rather a gradual escalation before the marginalized put themselves out there to fight for justice. Such is the case of the Dalits and Adivasis in the Indian landscape who use small acts of resistance in the form of grassroots activism. By this framework, Partha Chatterjee's distinction between a 'civil society' and 'political society' is

thereby valid. When these groups drift away from the inherent political structure, they indulge in informal political participation by forming their own political communities.

CONCLUSION

In both, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif, the authors have portrayed the harsh reality of the marginalized groups. By addressing various issues from gender and minority rights to the encroachment on cultural identity, the narratives echo the voice of the subaltern. Their resistance goes beyond an act of rebellion and highlights the importance of active participation of all communities in society. In an act of reclaiming their identities, the subaltern consciousness is evoked that fuels their desire for an equal representation.

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OPINION EDITORIALS

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 165

The Indian political milieu has shaped and modified itself over the course of 77 years, walking in tandem with trends. Given the shifting demography from rural to urban in an era of increasing connectivity via internet, social media has emerged as an essential leverage in the political arena. This has mandated the presence of political parties on the internet to have significantly larger outreach. Manifestos and greater campaigning have shifted swiftly from Doordarshan to party twitter and Instagram handles, and recently, WhatsApp broadcast channels.

The Election Commission of India (ECI), a non-partisan body has not berefted itself from the world of social media. Instead, the PR team of ECI has grabbed onto the most relatable content on the internet right now, Memes. ECI has used popular Bollywood movie dialogues to create greater electoral awareness and encourage more voter registrations. One such post was uploaded on 19-07-2024 with the caption “Me convincing my younger siblings to enroll by filling out Form 6”, starring a still from ‘Jab We Met’, where the character Geet is asking the ticket master “Bhaisahab, aap convince ho gaye ya main aur bolun?” (@ecisveep, 2024). Similarly, such memes have been shared over X, Instagram and Whatsapp Broadcast Channels engaging more electors and creating awareness. The handle has also shared various informative content, including its in-house edition of “ECI Explains”, posting a series of short form content, catering to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) related to elections. (@ECIVoterEducation, 2024)

Among Political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has probably the most notable social media presence and influence. Most of their content are in the form of animated videos with an AI generated voiceover of Modi, creating a fun, entertaining, and attention-grabbing content. Creating such engaging 30 seconds of content is probably the most subtle way of campaigning, where self-marketing is not blatant. In the era where most of the voters are in the form of Floating voters, having no particular party allegiance, it is important and beneficial to capture the attention of these individuals. With a greater social media presence, the algorithm does its work of pushing the posts to netizens’ For You Page, grabbing the attention of even the apathy laden voters, making them aware of what the party offers. However, we cannot dismiss the age-old contention of “Social Media is harmful”. In this case, social media is not necessarily harmful, but can rather be used in a derogatory manner. The social media posts by various parties or affiliates of parties often go unsupervised by the Model Code of Conduct. A content or meme which was initially made in a lighthearted manner can be deemed as a mockery of the targeted individual. One such example can be the series of posts by BJP where it refers to Rahul Gandhi, as

“Balak Buddhi” and Man Child (@bjp4india, 2024) While it might be taken as a small remark on the previous actions of Rahul Gandhi, it can also be deemed as hateful propaganda against his image.

Social media is a game of balance between the reel and real life, and the same applies to political parties too. While creating awareness regarding what the political party offers, PR tactics like these can often mould individual choices by swaying them to entrust the nation on people only based on contents they pump out. As responsible voters of India, it is definitely our responsibility to make informed choices. Now how an individual decides to polish their choice is on themselves, and their rational mind.

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A Global Surge of Far-Right Politics: What It Means for Democracy

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Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 122

Far-right political movements are changing the political landscape: from Brazil to the United States and from Hungary to New Zealand. The surprising results of the European Union elections revealed far-right parties' successes confirming the rising appeal of populist and right-wing agendas in states such as the Netherlands.

Development toward the far-right influence is not consistent throughout, as center-left governments are still dominant in major democracies like the U.S., Germany, and Brazil. However, any overt traction for the far right in well-established democracies is an unequivocal signal. Recent Dutch victories for Geert Wilders, an anti-immigrant party, showed that nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments mostly resonate with certain constituencies who feel disenfranchised by mainstream parties.

Traditionally, far-right parties were associated with extreme features such as racism and anti-Semitism. Far-right organizations nowadays, however, are prone to self-proclaim radical-right, clouding the platform in somewhat nuanced messaging predicated on nationalist pride rather than overt xenophobia (*Mondon & Winter, 2020*) Political personalities like Marine Le Pen of France have taken their platforms further away from traditional far-right ideals; their parties have become defenders of national integrity rather than purveyors of racial superiority. However, such recalibration has made far-right political persons like Italy's Georgia Meloni, herself raised in fascist revivalist circles, respectable for presenting her party, Brothers of Italy, as a conservative force upholding global alliances that denounce anti-Semitism.

Various factors drive the rise of the far right. Economic grievances with neoliberal policies are simultaneously juxtaposed with the perceived marginalization of the working class, fuelling anger and the longing for change. These discontent and yearnings are dealt with by populist leaders who undertake to surround themselves with a cult of personality intuitively appealing to these voters who feel left behind—like a “Strongmen Saviour” (*Mohan & Padmanabhan, 2023*)

Social media has also amplified these messages, allowing far-right groups to further the narrative of "us vs. them" and disseminate polarizing rhetoric across borders. Coupled with the growing "surveillance capitalism"¹—the collaboration between private capital and state surveillance—populist leaders can now leverage digital tools to sway public perception in sustaining their control over power.

On top of that, privatization, hyper-globalization (*Rodrik, 2021*), and cultural-racial attitudes played the most pivotal roles in the recurrence of far-right ideology.

These changing trajectories, especially in Europe, pose a catastrophe for progress in their efforts aimed at issues such as climate change. The influence of the right-wing representatives of pro-business climate skepticism threatens to derail the Green Deal and the net zero by 2050 targets of the EU. At the same time, rifts opened up by far-right elements, from Russia to NATO, would severely undermine EU unity over security and industrial policies, as well as support for Ukraine's defense and other critical initiatives.

Not that they don't have common themes, but far-right parties generally struggle to produce a united front. Leaders like Le Pen and Viktor Orban get into a profound dispute over where it depends on Russia, NATO, and, respectively, the economy. This fragmentation hampers their ability to push through far-reaching change but doesn't diminish their influence on policy and discourse.

In this climate, it is crucial to keep an eye on the long-term implications of these shifting allegiances and think about how democracies can adapt to such new political realities. The far-right sentiment is not wavering anytime soon, provoking thoughts around what values and what sorts of strategies will pull these democratic societies further.

ENDNOTE

1. A political economic concept describing widespread collection and monetization of personal data through monitoring people's movement by huge profitable corporations. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Profile Books.

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An Outlook on the Naxal Movement

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The Indian Maoist Revolution often termed the longest-running internal conflict in the country, is currently in a phase the Maoists call a "strategic retreat." While the movement has declined in some regions, it persists in others. Recently, 31 Maoist revolutionaries died in a firefight with Indian troops near Abujmadh in South Chhattisgarh. The Indian government's counter-intelligence budget has seen significant increases, with the National Intelligence Grid's allocation rising by 108% to ₹200.53 crore in the 2023-24 Union Budget (Chauhan, 2023), and the Intelligence Bureau's budget increasing by 13% to ₹3,418 crore (Economic Times, 2023). Despite these efforts, the Maoist movement remains resilient, rooted in systemic failures of the Indian administration and deep-seated societal inequalities. Emerging from Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, the movement addresses the grievances of marginalized communities, particularly Adivasis and Dalits, who feel left behind by India's rapid economic growth. The revolution promises justice, representation, and land reforms that the state has often failed to deliver.

Historically, Dalits and Adivasis have revolted against oppression, as seen in movements like the Santhal revolution and the Tebhaga uprising (1946-51). However, the Maoist movement gained significant momentum following the Naxalbari uprising. Though that movement was quickly crushed within 72 days (Dubey, n.d.), it garnered sympathy and support, particularly among Adivasis, Dalits, and radical communists. Over time, the movement spread across one-third of India (Dubey, n.d.), from the India-Nepal border to the jungles of Central India and into Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The Maoist revolution has sustained itself through decentralization. After capturing areas, they designate them as "liberated zones," emphasizing community-based decision-making, resource sharing, and self-reliance. They established Jan Adalats, or "people's courts," to deliver justice to the oppressed while levying taxes on harvests in exchange for protection and support. Strategically, they have organized into regional units, such as the Andhra-Odisha border zone. Financially, they engage in looting, tax collection, abductions, and extortion; for example, they abducted Sukma district's District Magistrate Alex Paul Menon, in 2012 (Dubey, n.d.).

Despite a series of government-led anti-Maoist operations like Operation Green Hunt, the movement has not been entirely eradicated because the administration relies heavily on military action rather than addressing the underlying issues of land reform and development, which are often marred by corruption. Policies favouring corporations have forced local tribal groups off their ancestral lands. Moreover, the Indian media frequently portrays Maoists as outlaws, which the rebels exploit for their revolutionary narrative.

Military actions often result in civilian casualties, further adding fuel to the fire which results in continuation of the cycle of violence. The government must address these fundamental issues by granting more autonomy to local groups and cooperating with civil society organizations and NGOs, which can mediate and help implement ceasefires. Otherwise, the revolution is unlikely to cease as killing Maoists only creates a vacuum that will be filled by others, leading to wasted taxpayer money and continued suffering for civilians caught in the crossfire.

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Bangladeshi Crisis: India's Increasingly Volatile Neighbourhood

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The downfall of Sheikh Hasina and her ouster from office as Prime Minister is a watershed event in Bangladeshi politics, with significant consequences for the entire subcontinent. The violent protests in Dhaka, which culminated in Hasina's resignation and subsequent exile, were fuelled by widespread public frustration over government corruption, particularly regarding an unjust job quota system. The developments thereafter, leading to the establishment of an interim government backed by the military, have [been] met with highly polarized reactions. While some have lauded this 'people's revolution,' there is a strong conviction that it will only aggravate the dwindling political stability in the region. The political landscape of India's immediate neighbour, Pakistan, serves as a glaring example of a fragile parliamentary setup that has frequently fallen into the hands of autocratic military regimes. The recent unrest in Bangladesh has even triggered debates as to whether it is on the way to becoming like its historical rival. Both the nations are quite literally on the edge economically as well. The new party in power in Bangladesh—the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—has had a troubled relationship with the Indian government due to its alleged links with the ISI. Extremist groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir appear to be receiving support from the state now. Analysts have expressed concern regarding the possible strengthening of a terror network operating along the porous borders on both sides of Indian territory. In light of the situation, there remains a fear that the state machinery could descend into complete dysfunction in the absence of a legitimate government. Navigating the ideal steps to take in such a volatile environment becomes a tricky task for Indian diplomacy. "Neighbourhood first"—which has been the cornerstone of India's foreign policy—has shown only partial effects so far in terms of building cooperation and trust. With Pakistan and China already posing significant challenges, the growing antiIndia sentiment in Bangladesh has only added another layer of complexity. India now has to delicately balance its stance in such a way that it appears equidistant from both camps—the exiled leader and the military-led government. Overall, the Bangladesh crisis underscores the fact that India's neighbourhood is becoming increasingly hostile, and there are very few nations that can be considered India's partners. Whether it's the Maldives' closeness with China, the fundamentalist Taliban in Afghanistan, or Sri Lanka's struggling economy—challenges to India's regional interests are many. Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar's in-person engagement with the current Bangladeshi Foreign Advisor, Md. Touhid Hossain, at the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly highlights India's willingness to continue constructive ties between the two countries amidst brewing antagonism (Chaudhury, 2024).

India might be unable to trust Bangladesh as it previously could under Hasina, but a workable relationship is essential given the interdependence of the two neighbours in various sectors. India needs to exercise strategic patience and adaptability in its diplomatic approach in order to comprehend how the situation in Dhaka further unravels over time.

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BRICS 2024: A Conduit to Multipolarity?

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In a fracas-hit world, the conduct of the BRICS Summit 2024 under Russia's presidency in Kazan is a development which merits attention. BRICS, a major political force, originally comprising of Brazil, Russia, India and China, witnessed its first expansion with the inclusion of South Africa in 2010. Since then, its motto 'Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security' and emphasis on establishing a multipolar world order has become quite conspicuous. BRICS 24 observes a notable increase in membership as countries like Egypt, UAE, Ethiopia and Iran officially form a part of the enterprise. With such impressive representation, BRICS, an economic and political organisation, now accounts for 25% of the global GDP and a brobdingnagian 45% of the global population. But what happens to be a whammy for the West is Turkey's official request to join the BRICS which is unseemly as Turkey is a NATO member and its attempt to establish comfortable relations with the adversary bloc certainly is not a matter of comfort for the West. UNSG Antonio Guterres's presence at this Summit has drawn considerable criticism, particularly given his refusal to accept an invitation to a Ukrainebacked peace summit in Switzerland, a decision that appears to undermine the interests of West-backed Ukraine.

Apart from growing membership and increasing economic weight, BRICS 24 envelops much more content to upset the hegemony of the West. Firstly, the rationale behind Russia's optimism with BRICS 24 under Putin is as plain as a pikestaff. A nation facing Western sanctions under a leader indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court, post its aggression in Ukraine, looks at this Summit as an opportunity to resume its global stature as a leader from being a 'pariah State'. With this October Summit, Putin appears to undermine the 'confinement' that the West had planned against him. Apart from Russia, the entire membership has been quite vociferous on the issue of 'De-Dollarisation' and the promotion of local currencies for a more holistic and inclusive global economy along with a 'united action to tackle terrorism'. The ambitious 'Petro-yuan' stands as a major irritant for the US and its intimate allies. The growing discontent regarding the unfair *modus operandi* of international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank is also quite limpid as BRICS nations plan to strengthen the New Development Bank to help it stand as an alternative against the previously mentioned institutions which happen to be mere 'cat's-paws' of the West. The inclusion of other major oil-yielding states like Iran and the UAE apart from Russia and China, facilitates the development of alternatives as far as energy transactions are concerned which apparently will invalidate the reliance on the US on both matters of energy and its payment.

India has been maintaining its diplomatic stand as it reiterates its belief of BRICS being a ‘non-western’ organisation instead of straitjacketing it to an ‘anti-western’ consortium. PM Modi had his first bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping in the last five years. Both the leaders agreed to work towards a “peaceful and stable” relationship connoting eagerness for cooperation. Also, India was keen to further UPI’s usage for cross-border payments. The Summit has proven itself crucial enough as India tries to assume the leadership of the ‘Global South’.

By and large BRICS Summit 2024, appears to be quite successful as an embryonic step of the members towards their mission of establishing a multipolar world order.

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Democracy Disrupted: The Dark Side of Social Media's Grip on Politics

Tatsama Deb

First Year (PLSA), Roll No. 159

Social media, while acting as a stage of discourse for a politically underrepresented individual, is a tool of manipulation and malpractice, amplifying disruptive voices. Initially designed as a tool for political engagement and transparency, social media has evolved into a platform that deepens polarization and weakens the democratic process. Although it offers some benefits, the negative impact on politics has become increasingly hard to overlook.

It is evident that these networking platforms act as a promotional stage of ideologies for political parties particularly their election campaigns, which can be seen as a positive instance, however, there have been incidents where they also try to attract younger audiences by catering to the recent micro-trends, often masking their ideology under the cloak of being representative and democratic, preaching something completely against their ideals. These parties frequently act as a proselytizing stage, by putting the right amount of effort and dragging a middle-ground thinker to their sides, promising things that are practically not possible.

Moreover, the youth and young adults, who learn about the current affairs as well as the political process of the country only through the mode of social media, perceive themselves as intellectually preeminent and superior to actual governance specialists. The present-day phenomenon of “WhatsApp university” is a colloquial term used to describe the spread of misinformation, fake news, and unverified knowledge through messaging platforms like WhatsApp. This term satirically critiques the rapid, unregulated dissemination of spurious content, which users frequently regard as factual, often culminating in pervasive misinformation, particularly concerning political, health, or societal issues. Findings by various researchers suggest that the older generations of people are more susceptible to the spread of deceptive narratives than the younger demographic.

Studies conducted on this matter suggest that it is completely undeniable that these platforms influence international relations to a certain extent. Tiziano Peccia, in his 2014 article “The Theory of the Globe Scrambled by Social Networks: A New Sphere of Influence 2.0” mentions the stark contrast in the usage of social media platforms in different spheres of the world. While the West usually prefers to use American platforms like X (formerly called Twitter) and Instagram, the Eastern sphere opts for digital networks like Weibo, establishing separate ideological and cultural domains online.

Media platforms also provide a ground for anonymity, which may increase hostility towards certain communities without the fear of persecution. These individuals also attract new followers and expand the cycle of engagement, further fueling a toxic atmosphere of oppression, all while concealing themselves behind the guise of their ideologies.

Although it is undisputable that decades of technological development led to the birth of social media, which is, unquestionably, an exquisite advantage, it's wiser to stick to conventional approaches instead of tearing democracy apart for "freedom of speech". As the quote goes, "Everything in moderation including moderation".

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Eclectic Synergy: Durgotsab as a Spectacular Celebration of India's Cultural Brilliance

Adarsh Prasad

Second Year (MPLS), Roll No. 138

Durga Puja is more than just a festival; it is a heartfelt celebration that bursts forth as an extraordinary linen of cultural richness in greater eastern India (West Bengal) and cherished unparalleled fervour among the global Bengali diaspora. This festival celebrates the divine victory of the Hindu goddess *Durga* over the demon king *Mahishasura*. Over time, it has become a symbol of India's soft power strategy, transcending its religious origins to form a vibrant tapestry that reflects pluralistic ethos and cultural diplomacy. UNESCO's recognition of Durga Puja as an "intangible cultural heritage" emphasises its role in fostering global connections and "winning hearts" worldwide. Grand international celebrations, especially in cosmopolitan centres like *Times Square* significantly enhance India's cultural footprint (Desk, 2024).

At the heart of this celebration lies the exaltation of '*Nari shakti*' (womanhood), rendering female empowerment interlaced with spiritual significance. Drawing from ancient Vedic traditions and revered texts like the *Markandeya Purana*, the festival has strengthened brilliantly, especially through the transformative times of the colonial era. Visionaries like *Raja Nabakrishna Deb* ingeniously turned Durga Puja into a potent vehicle for cultural resilience during British colonial rule, crafting an enduring legacy that continues to resonate with people today.

The festival's commencement is heralded by Mahalaya 'Matri Aradhana', a day imbued with profound cultural significance. The soul-stirring and iconic recitation of *Birendra Krishna Bhadra*, who evokes the timeless struggle between *good* and *evil*, artfully intertwines mythological heritage with communal identity. This invocation strengthens the bonds among Bengalis worldwide, uniting diverse voices under a shared cultural banner. In a vibrant urban metropolis such as Kolkata, Durga Puja transforms into a dynamic *secular space*, inviting participation from all ethnic cultures, regardless of religious affiliations.

This has been further enhanced by films like *Durgeshgorer Guptodhon*, which continue to carry on the cinematic representation of Durga Puja and intricately weave the high-spirited festivities into narratives celebrating adventure and heritage while enhancing visibility and contributing to an expansive dialogue about cultural identity through cinematic portrayals or celebrations in cities like London, Melbourne,

and New York, Durga Puja serves as a poignant reminder of how culture can bridge divides in an increasingly complex world.

Moreover, Durga Puja is a big economic event for Kolkata and has been able to generate a staggering ₹32,377 crore (approximately \$4.5 billion) in 2019 (Vaishya, 2024). This is a clear manifestation of its economic strength that cannot be overlooked and this makes it not only a cultural and economic power but also a significant attraction for international tourists, artists, and even the media. The Irish theatre group Kevin Kelly's 'Macnas' from Galway set up a pandal in Kolkata which was widely showcased during St. Patrick's Day in Ireland (Pratap, 2024). The inclusion of foreign artists in these celebrations adds to the already existing intercultural dialogue, enhancing India's soft power and creating a larger story of global interconnectedness.

However, the increase in commercialism brings about the change from the small scale 'barowari durgotsab' to the growth of thematic pandals. This enthusiastic adoption of globalism raises some fundamental issues regarding the conservation of the traditional essence of the festival. The incorporation of corporate funding and western food in the pandal hopping may diminish the realness of the Durga Puja. The traditional *dhakis* (drummers) are the heart and soul of the festival, they may be sidelined, affecting their earnings, showing a delicate balance between culture and commerce.

Ultimately, Durga Puja epitomises India's soft power, representing not merely a religious observance but a vibrant cultural phenomenon that strategically intersects tradition with contemporary diplomacy. As a vivacious platform for inclusivity, the festival's global recognition must be balanced with a commitment to preserving its authentic roots amidst rising commercialisation in an increasingly convoluted world. It serves as a living testament to the transformative power of culture, showcasing India's rich heritage while reinforcing shared values and mutual respect on the global stage.

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Half Freedoms: The Inadequacies in Women's Reproductive Rights in India

Abhipriya Ghosh

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 160

The landmark judgements of *Suchita Srivastava* (2009) and *Puttaswamy* (2017) recognized a woman's right to bodily autonomy and to make reproductive choices under her constitutional right to personal liberty. The ambit of women's reproductive rights extends beyond the choice to procreate or not- it also encompasses the right to use contraceptives, access to family planning, the right to terminate a pregnancy (including access to safe abortion methods), and the right to information on reproductive health. However, over the years, the Indian Government has increasingly infringed upon these rights, making it an area of state control. The potential ban on the over the counter (OTC) sale of emergency contraceptive pills (ECP), expected to be recommended by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, will become yet another tool of control if actualized. A ban will make these pills prescription-only, based on claims of "irrational use," although there has been no clarification regarding what constitutes this irrationality (Frontline, 2024). Deemed safe to use by the World Health Organisation, the pill has remained inaccessible since its introduction as an OTC medicine, primarily due to prevalent fears of it encouraging promiscuous behaviour amongst women and misconceptions regarding its side effects (Dixit et al., 2015). Imposing a ban will complicate acquiring ECPs and likely increase unsafe abortions and unwanted pregnancies, leading to serious social, economic, physical, and psychological consequences for women. Instead, the focus should be on ensuring access to all forms of contraceptives, disseminating information on their usage and promoting sex education.

Priorities of the Indian State in curtailing a woman's bodily autonomy are also evidenced by criminalizing abortion under Section 88 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, for "causing miscarriage." The sole exception to this provision is the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, which permits abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy under defined conditions and requires the approval of a Registered Medical Practitioner (RMP). The criminalization of abortion, coupled with inadequate knowledge, leads several RMPs to perceive abortion as iniquitous, with numerous women facing shame and coercion into continuing their pregnancy (Chandra et al., 2021). Third-party interventions and the inaccessibility of safe and affordable abortion services underscore the structural inadequacies in female reproductive rights in India (Bhate-Deosthali & Rege, 2019). Additionally, the 2015 ban on Commercial Surrogacy is defended by associating surrogacy with immorality and the commodification of a woman's body (Pande, 2017). The ban not only presumes the incapability of

women to make informed choices about their bodies, but it also restricts the reproductive rights of single women, homosexual couples, and women with infertility who wish to pursue parenthood through surrogacy. Although there are legitimate concerns regarding the exploitation of commercial surrogates (Hibino, 2023), a ban is counterproductive since it neither addresses the underlying concerns of exploitation nor ensures that women are empowered adequately so that income from surrogacy is not their only chance for a better life. Instead, it pushes the market underground, leading to increased unsafe and exploitative practices.

The status quo is an insufficient response to the need for reproductive rights, impacting marginalized communities the most (Jain, 2024). If these rights are not restored and flaws amended, the pre-existing rates of maternal mortalities and unsafe abortion could rocket further (Yokoe et al., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a woman-centric approach, letting them be in control of the choices they make.

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“H-Pop”: Normalisation of Islamophobia through Popular Culture

Supratim Halder

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 174

Far away from the mainstream politics and media, ‘Hindutva Pop’ popularly called H-Pop has captured India's mofussil towns to stadiums of the 2023 Cricket World Cup. The thrusting of Hindutva into the popular culture, H-Pop has increasingly normalized bigotry, has vilified minorities, presented a ‘saffronized’ version of history, and demonized its critics every day as being “anti-Hindu,” or to the extreme, “anti-national,” juxtaposing Indian nationalism with religious majoritarian fundamentalism. Immersed inside catchy dance beats, violent lyrics, and “poorly synced” music (*Baishya, 2022*), H-Pop has easily trapped a large population of India into a dream of “Hindu Rashtra”, wherein the religious minorities and secular Hindus are framed as primary enemies of them.

While the dreams of the majoritarian supremacist state were once limited to some elite circle related to the Sangh Parivar, H-Pop artists engineered its popular demand. This has been systematically achieved by not only the deliberate sensationalization of secular national leaders- like M.K Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru but also through reimagination of the controversial historical Hindutva figures like Nathuram Godse. One such H-pop artist, Kamal Agney, back in 2017 presented a Hindi song for his audience that commended Nathuram Godse’s act of Gandhi’s assassination who favoured the “crescent born” i.e. the Muslims. Such songs when made famous through popular culture, not only present the minorities as enemies of Hindus, thereby presenting a distorted version of history. Another popular song by Pooja Golhani whereby she encourages the chanting of songs in the name of Lord Ram openly in public spaces poses an open threat to Muslims, on their non-conformity to Hindutva. (*Purohit, 2023*) Apart from that, the intrinsic role of H-pop has been to establish conspiracies by fearmongering into the psyche of their audience. While any factual data cannot back the favourite demographic threat of minorities v/s majoritarians, H-pop has worked to spread this false message to their audiences. In 2019, Kavi Singh, another famous H-pop artist prepared a song that tried to spread a similar message of the famous pan-India conspiracy to overthrow the population of Hindus in India and then “make us (Hindus) dance in their tunes”. (*ibid. pg. 45*) After the Pulwama Attacks, Singh recorded a song “The Sacrifices by Our Martyrs of Pulwama” which blamed the minorities for the attack and called to “finish off that traitor”. (*ibid. pg. 4*) Such polarized rhetoric, normalized and repeatedly injected into the veins of credulous audiences has resulted in grim circumstances, as there has been a growing link between consuming hate music and tendencies towards violence and aggression, as historically evident from Nazi propaganda songs and Radio Rwanda. (*Rehbar, 2022*)

Therefore, it becomes necessary to look out for such instances where the propagation of hate has been exacerbated by the integration of right-wing politics with popular culture. Despite being popular among

the Hindutva circle, H-pop has a feeble appearance in news headlines- silently, yet loudly serving the Hindutva agenda from the very grassroots level- establishing a trinity of fear, resentment, and revenge to popularize the goal of a majoritarian state.

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If Not Mamata, then Who?: Understanding Bengal's Dynamics

Suryanko Banerjee,

First Year (PLSA), Roll No. 180

The assembly elections in West Bengal are due in spring 2026; with a year to go, debates have already started given the recent Abhaya movement. Anti-incumbency sentiments have been fuelled, and accusations of corruption, incompetence, and insensitivity against the current administration have come to the forefront. This raises questions about the probable outcome of the upcoming election. To assess the future, however, we must first examine the past.

Bengal's history reveals a peculiar power structure that is deeply entrenched and resistant to change. This structure was shaped by a history of instability, communist ideologies, political violence, and corruption. It is highly averse to reform, tending instead toward continuity and stability. The rise of Mamata Banerjee can be attributed to her opposition to the reformist attitudes of the then CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. Whenever a communication gap has arisen between the ruling party and the people, protests have been registered through electoral verdicts. Therefore, direct and personal leadership was necessary to bridge such gaps (Mukhopadhyay, 1994). This resistance has also been described as an "isolationist tendency" of Bengal (Hazra, 2021).

Now the question arises: Will this system persist indefinitely, with no hope for '*paribartan*'(change)? Two possibilities exist: one, that the entire structure is challenged, or two, that change occurs within the structure.

The only apparent opposition—the BJP—seems to favour the former, attempting to alter the structure with the introduction of Hindutva politics. While this strategy posed a significant challenge to the established order, the system has adjusted in ways that have been less favourable for the BJP. This can be observed through two instances Firstly, minorities appear to have consolidated their support behind TMC's banner. Secondly, BJP's impressive rise in 2019 eroded significantly in 2021, as evidenced by decreased vote shares in SC/ST seats within just two years (Jyoti, 2021).

This reflects the BJP's limited insight to tackle an adversary like TMC in Bengal. In contrast, TMC derives power in three main ways. First, through its influence over media, intellectual and cultural circles, and Tollywood in Kolkata, which helps shape its public perception. Second, minorities—including Muslims, women, and marginalized communities—support TMC for their

welfare schemes and secular image. Finally, TMC's grassroots machinery is unmatched in Bengal, where its cadres interfere with people's daily lives, acting as intermediaries in delivering government benefits.

Thus, genuine public dissatisfaction toward the government should not be underestimated. No matter how powerful any government seems, politics can change within a very limited time. More cautiously, as in 2021, the combined opposition vote share was nearly equal to that of TMC. Hence, there is always a possibility of consolidation of the entire anti-Mamata vote. Thus, alternative players can emerge in 2026 provided channelisation of the dissatisfaction into electoral votes.

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Index of two I's: Ishq and Identity, can they co-exist?

Sreemita Mukherjee,

First Year (PLSA), Roll No. 119

In every Indian street, there exists a Romeo-Juliet. India, that is, Bharat, is a country of marriage. The biggest event of our lives wherein everything comes to a standstill is marriage. However, on the other hand, marriage and love aren't necessarily synonymous. Love is scandalous, while marriage is a simple and unfiltered reality. We have seen this play out on screen, in our literature, and in our daily lives umpteen times. Two people fall in love despite their differences and are then eventually and inevitably forced to split because of the same. In our land, this story is commonly woven because there exist so many parameters of division. Class, caste, gotra, religion, and ethnicity are just a few broader terms to encapsulate the sheer thirst for division that runs through our societal structures. Centuries of co-existing haven't led to the rise of peace; it has only led to more pronounced hatred. Our identities are political, and by turn, so is our love—our choice to love someone of a different identity politicised. Our social structure is political, and we continue embroiled in a cycle of politics, identity, and condemning love.

Heer-Ranjha, Laila-Majnu, and Romeo-Juliet, though not known by the same names, exist in every nook and cranny of this great country. Our people have reached out to grab onto the garb of love and have lost themselves in love, and yet, the crude reality of identity is what has time and time again brought their worship of humanity down to a whimper. It is in death that we find ourselves free to love because we are only then free of identity and free of politics.

So here lie the three conclusions: in a country where politics has somehow become synonymous with social identity and inadvertently fundamentally fractured human relationships, love, and harmony can never coexist because our mere existence, our tragic tendency to be human and unique, is considered a threat.

There can only exist the institution of marriage, a marker of social status that furthers and cements our identity, not as something that defines who we are to love but instead defines who we are to oppose. These rigid structures have rendered us incapable of fully extracting the true essence of our greatest feat—love.

Inspiration: <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/tabloid/hyderabad-chronicle/why-tragic-love-stories-are-successful -897355>

Indigeneity in India: A Question of Culture or Origin?

Dronacharya Saha,

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The word *Adivasi* is used to describe people belonging to the tribal communities in India. The word when translated would mean ‘earliest settlers or from beginning’ and therefore indigenous (Minority Rights Group, 2023). Modern archaeology traces the earliest humans to have evolved and migrated from Africa, and since human history is of migration, if we are indigenous to any place, it is to Africa alone in that sense.

This poses the question: who then is indigenous? The answer lies in culture. People are not necessarily indigenous; rather, the culture they follow makes them so. Indigeneity arises through the intersection of geography and culture and the people who follow this particular culture become indigenous. For instance, the Ahom who ruled the Brahmaputra valley and had their origins in the present-day Yunnan region of China and Myanmar have become integral to Assamese society. They adopted the region’s lingua franca, Assamese while preserving their language, Tai, and worshipping their gods alongside Hindu deities. The same cannot be said about the British, not just because they colonized our country, but they never adopted our culture. They undermined it. Even the Mughals who were not keen about Indian culture, started adapting and adopting it for political reasons and therefore, it helped them to rule longer. The cultural classification of indigenous may seem to be a right-wing thought, however, even the founders of the Indian Constitution were aware of the normative problem of recognizing the word *Adivasi* and instead used Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Scheduled Caste (SC).

The British promoted the Aryan Invasion Theory and tried to show anyone other than the ‘tribal community’ and people of the so-called ‘Dravidian race’ as indigenous. The word *Adivasi* is itself of colonial origin and must not be used to denote and downplay the value of others who have an equal presence. It was intended to describe people of the wilderness (Alles, 2017, pp. 248-249) and soon it became the singular social stratification and then a whole new identity of its own for the British when in practice it is a spectrum of social stratification.

This, however, is by no means to downplay the practices of these groups but to preserve them. It can only be done by letting them follow their ancestral culture and not deceiving them to follow others. Steps have been taken in this regard by people across the political spectrum, like the Sarna Code Bill, and schools started under the Saraswati Shishu Vidya Mandir. The former intends to exemplify an old identity called Sarna and the latter intends to teach their historical legacies. But the surge of this ‘new identity’ of the tribals particularly in Jharkhand under the Bill is a modern invention (Bhattacharya & Khan, 2024). So much so that in defending their demands they have staged movements that have called

for an 'independent zone' which has led to secessionist tendencies, The Pathalgadi movement is a case in point.

So, what is the solution? It is not religion, ideology, or some concocted identity but culture alone. Indigeneity rooted in culture is the one aspect that remains common in geography irrespective of the aforementioned identities. Thus, people who migrate to a new land need not forget their culture but must also learn to adapt and adopt the culture of the land. History, especially in India, has shown this to be a viable solution.

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Like, Share and Repeat: The Era of Citizen Journalism

Rituja De

Third Year (PLSA), Roll No. 164

The better half of the world has been riddled with disastrous political crises in the first decades of the 21st century. Traditional and mainstream media apparatus and organizations are often prone to biased reporting due to structures of ownership usually tend to be related to the high levels of the law-making bodies. For instance, in India, burgeoning corporate conglomerates have been acquiring media corporations as an aid to their overall business growth and to increase leverage in the market, the most recent example being the rather aggressive Adani Enterprise takeover of NDTV in 2022. Such rising levels of political ownership of media corporations is rather alarming in terms of the independence and impartiality of reportage. As a consequence, viewers and readers are turning to channels of citizen journalism in order to get a broader picture of regional and international events in place of traditional streams of news.

In a grim trajectory of events, the situation at the Gaza Strip has catapulted into becoming the world's first social media documented genocide. Several Palestinian journalists came to the forefront to document the collateral damage of the attacks in terms of the tremendous loss of lives, mass displacement, destruction of houses and hospitals and the blockage of necessary resources. Over the past year, Palestinian photojournalist Motaz Azaiza has shared several instances online of being directly targeted by Israeli drone attacks due to his extensive coverage of Palestine on social media through his photographs. Azaiza left the Gaza Strip earlier this year and has been traveling the globe to raise awareness and amplify the Palestinian cause.

In September 2024, Bisan Owda, a Palestinian journalist along with Al Jazeera received an Emmy award for their documentary, *Its Bisan from Gaza-and I'm Still Alive*, which documents her family's forced displacement from their home. Bisan still continues to be in Gaza reporting on the happenings of the war through her phone and social media handles each day. More than a 100 journalists have been killed in Palestine over the past year, often in deliberate and targeted attacks alleged to have been conducted by Israel.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India have been deemed by few as the "first ever social media election in India". Social media creators such as Dhruv Rathee and former NDTV journalist Ravish Kumar emerged as daring voices which helped the public differentiate hard facts from the TRP (target rating point) motivated, provocative and inflated news coverage of traditional media.

Citizen journalism is essentially humanizing the ignored lives and stories beyond the advertisement revenue backed sensationalization of mainstream media. Traditional media houses garner the leverage of a somewhat credible and dedicated team of reporters and fact-checkers along with several resources which are inaccessible to several rising independent journalists on the internet. Community guidelines on Youtube as well as X (formerly Twitter) allow users to report problematic and inaccurate information, however, these methods have not always been instrumental in tackling false news and misinformation. Social media has played a significant role in bolstering national attention on the Manipur ethnic riots, however, although there have been several alleged reports of heightened violence amongst ethnic groups due to the spread of online misinformation.

The independent functioning of the press beyond the shackles of political and corporate involvement is imperative for the healthy existence of a democratic nation especially in public judgment of candidates and political parties in the electoral process.

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One Nation One Election: A Recommendation at Odds with Indian Federalism

Shreya Datta

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 105

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been endorsing the “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) theory ever since they came to power. It falls within their political design of upholding cultural homogeneity, now seen in the clubbing of elections to the Central Legislatures, the State Assemblies and Panchayat elections. India’s federal principles are key to the “basic structure” of the Constitution and its multilayered governance institutions ensure transparency, political participation and essential democratic checks and balances. The Ramnath Kovind led High-Level Committee claimed in their 281-page report that ONOE would resolve newly invented issues of “voter fatigue”, cause stringent implementation of the Moral Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission and guarantee administrative efficiency through cost cutting measures. However, this opaque fantasy ends up perpetuating the BJP’s insistence on by-passing democratic accountability. Their notion of elections being an inconvenience is highlighted as this endeavour would lead to the premature demise of most State Assemblies. It asserts that elections should be aligned from the year 2029 onwards, which would mean many State Assemblies would have an incomplete tenure. The ONOE policy cannot simply be considered an administrative change within the election calendar, it militates against the notion of federalism. The first article of the Constitution declares India to be a “Union of States” where the powers of the Union and the States are separated. This allows citizens to elect their representatives at the Central and state level for five years with each representative catering to a specific role. Our multi-party system flourishes as various regional parties put up a fight against national parties. With the ONOE scheme, this remains in flux as voters would swing towards national parties over regional parties in an election for all representative institutions. This would benefit the political elite and limit the characteristic clutter of democratic politics and the role of state legislatures.

The high-level committee and supporters of this recommendation believed that this would be a significant cost cutting measure, emerging as a solution to rising election budgets as citizens would be voting for national, state and local legislatures in one go. However, this claim remains unsupported by evidence and paints election expenditure as unnecessary. Being a ‘Tughlaq-like’ recommendation, ONOE states that elections would take place for the remaining tenure of a government, even if their term ends in a year. This is impractical as the natural inclination of all Members of Parliament, including

opposition members, would be that the government should not fall owing to the expenditure incurred for a truncated term. For the fear of risking a re-election, the opposition would become yes-men as the opposition is not designed to protect the government. It would be difficult for the Lok Sabha or state legislatures to function effectively as most of its policies would not see fruition. This idea is unworkable unless the premature dissolution of all assemblies is prevented, which would lead to overly centralised practices, and if a term is not fixed for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. It is essential to not get lost in the lust for power and essential to protect our constitutional provisions, implementation of which begins through timely, and rightful voting for elected, popular government.

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Trump's Second Act: The Strategy Behind the Win

Ramaditya Ganguly

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 155

The 2024 US presidential elections was nothing short of a political earthquake which saw former President Donald Trump back into the Oval Office and the complete decimation of the Democrats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. It was the first time since George W. Bush in 2004 that a Republican presidential candidate was able to win the popular vote. A close look into the results reveals several facets that ultimately determined this result.

A key factor that significantly benefited the Republican Party was the clarity of its leadership; from the outset, there was no ambiguity about who represented the party's face. In stark contrast, the Democrats grappled with uncertainty, initially projecting President Joe Biden as their candidate for re-election. However, facing persistently low approval ratings, Biden ultimately stepped aside, passing the baton to Vice-president Kamala Harris a mere three months before the election. Many, including former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have pointed out Biden's late withdrawal as a critical misstep, arguing that it left Harris with insufficient time to effectively mount her campaign and engage with voters.

Amidst geopolitical tensions and economic turmoil, Trump's populist rhetoric—emphasising “America First” economics, anti-immigration policies, and reduced foreign entanglements—resonated with voters burdened by post-pandemic hardships, which they blamed on the Biden administration. Meanwhile, Kamala Harris struggled to distance herself from Biden's image and failed to offer a compelling alternative economic plan. Additionally, Biden's extensive support for Ukraine, which Trump criticised and promised to resolve swiftly, did not appeal to an electorate facing a cost-of-living crisis. The administration's muted response to Israel's actions in Gaza further undermined its stance on standing up to aggression, a point Trump capitalised on by highlighting the relative calm during his presidency. Kamala Harris could neither uphold nor distance herself from the legacy of the Biden years which proved to be electorally fatal.

Trump's decisive advantage in the 2024 election lay in the Republicans' ability to consolidate their voter base, while the Democrats struggled. Trump's core supporters, especially men across demographics, rallied behind him, whereas Kamala Harris saw declining support from key groups, including African Americans, Hispanic and Latino-Americans, women, and Muslim voters. The decreased share of women voting Democrat was notable despite higher turnout. Additionally, backlash over the Biden administration's handling of the Gaza conflict led many Muslim and immigrant voters to back minor party candidates like the Greens, significantly impacting swing states.

As the U.S. transitions to a new administration, Republicans are intensifying preparations to consolidate power, while Democrats face a critical period of strategic reassessment to address coalitional fractures and redefine their electoral appeal. Donald Trump’s unprecedented political resurgence—marking a historic comeback in American politics—signals potential upheavals in domestic governance and global geopolitics. Observers worldwide are closely monitoring how a prospective second Trump term might reshape international alliances, trade dynamics, and diplomatic frameworks, particularly under the banner of renewed “America First” rhetoric. Academics and policymakers alike underscore that the trajectory of U.S. leadership under Trump will reverberate across multilateral institutions, conflict zones, and economic systems, testing the resilience of the international order. Whether this chapter heralds disruption or recalibration remains a pivotal question for contemporary political scholarship.

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Why Indians Lack Care for the Environment

Udipta Saha

Second Year (PLSA), Roll No. 142

India, labeled as a third world country, is expected to lack consciousness towards an issue that seems mostly invisible- the degradation of the environment. Oftentimes, for the government, issues which require immediate action take precedence over environmental issues; which seem distant to them because of its inconspicuous nature. An “I don't care” attitude towards one's surroundings has been deep rooted in Indians since childhood, despite various efforts by the education system to change that. In reality it is less about their care, or lack thereof, for the environment and more about an individual's ability to make a change. Most, if not all, follow the thought of “what difference will I make?” It is the best example of “do as you see”; littered streets become a validation for littering. An outer perspective, from other nations especially, makes this unfortunate state of affairs look bizarre- interconnectedness with nature is ingrained in India's culture- far different from its current reality. Today's India has lost significant and vital cultural elements; culture today has been restricted to celebrations and nationalist pride exclusively.

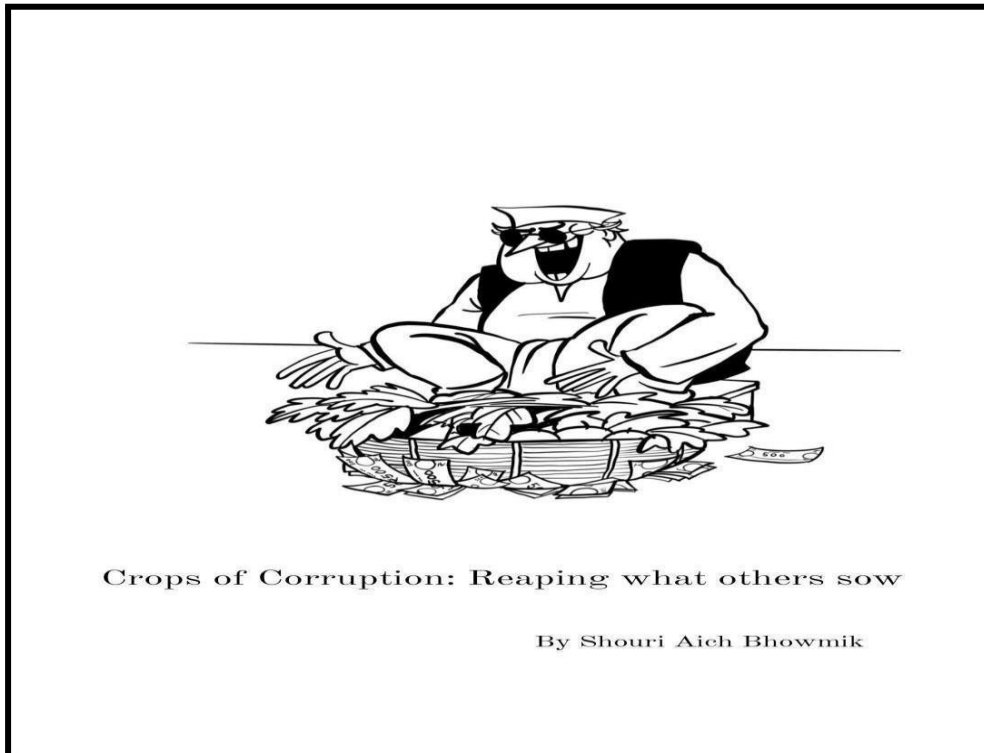
Most Indians view themselves as cogs in a machine with no significant power. Throughout their lives, Indians aim to reach a position of monetary stability and power- political and otherwise. Their social worth is dependent on these two elements. This way of life fails to account for climate change, environmental degradation or intense pollution as significant factors; since acquisition of both money and political power comes at the cost of exploitation of resources- natural and human. Therefore, blame cannot be put on the masses for lacking care. When the country's richest 1% owns more than 40% of the national wealth while the bottom 50% owns just 3%, making ends meet for most Indians becomes a challenge; when food and healthcare are often luxuries, the well-being of their families, often just survival, becomes the top priority for them. With significant political figures promising changes to be brought about while being least bothered about environmental issues, the masses are bound to follow. This pattern is deep seated in the political sphere. India's few attempts at being environmentally conscious have been haphazard and even futile- only trying to fulfill international commitments rather than creating a systematic network for this specific purpose. The deaths of critically endangered Great Indian Bustards due to collision with high tension wires for solar energy in Rajasthan and the government proceeding with the Char Dham project without an Environmental Impact Assessment are examples of this. The need for sincerity and understanding of the gravity of the environmental situation by people in power is superseded by other, often malicious interests; while the ones who are to be affected the most, especially the marginalised, are trying to scrape by in life. Climate change cannot matter to them if there is no guarantee that they may be able to live long

enough to face its adversities. Their lack of voice means the real danger of it is not heard by others. All this considered, failure to understand how one is affected by environmental degradation creates a spiraling path; a slippery slope. It creates generations of people who are equally cynical and lack the care for it, which stems from both economic injustice and not being able to feel the danger at a personal level. The sole solution to this is to bridge the income gap while building a comprehensive awareness framework to mitigate the slow death of India's environment.

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CARICATURES



Crops of Corruption

Shouri Aichbhowmik, First Year (PLSA), Roll No. 189

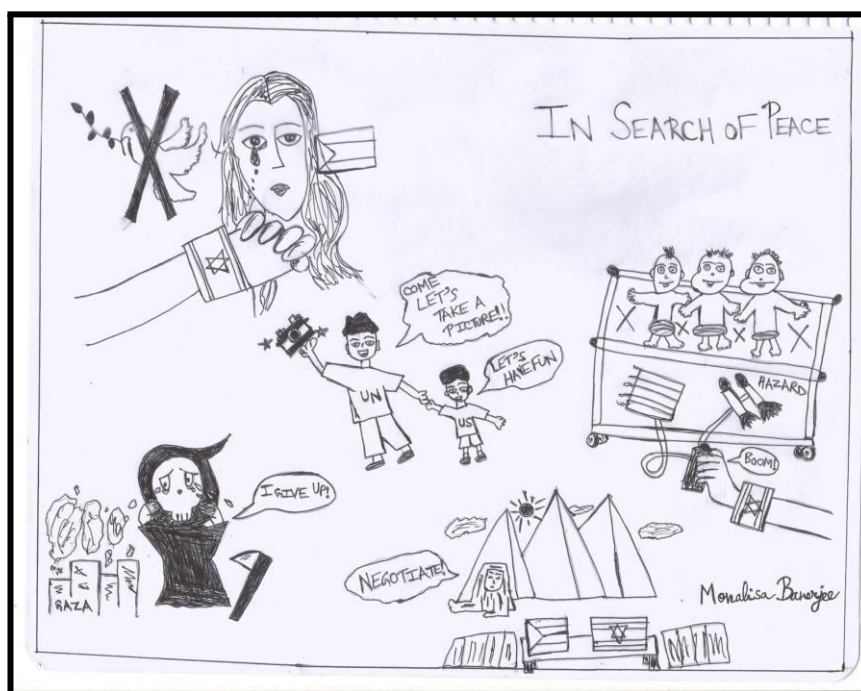


Equal Pay for Equal Work - Still a Distant Reality?

Rajashree Addy, First Year (MPLS), Roll No. 124

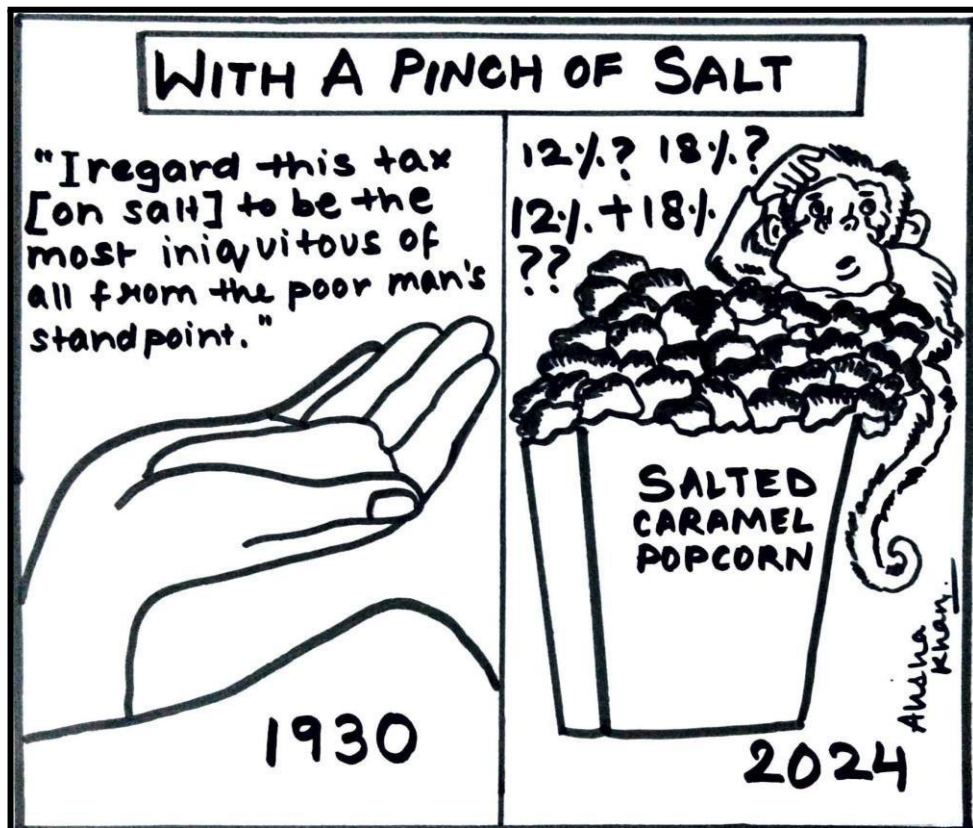


Adarsh Prasad, Second Year (MPLS), Roll No. 138



In Search of Peace

Monalisa Banerjee, Second Year (MPLS), Roll No. 109



With a Pinch of Salt

Alisha Khan, First Year (MPLS), Roll No. 121

