RAMJAS POLITICAL REVIEW

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FACULTY EDITOR'S NOTE

Syed Areesh Ahmad

Hegel says that an idea becomes real only when it is simultaneously constituted both by its conception and a visible existence. Ramjas Political Review, the academic journal of the department of political science, is now 'real' in this Hegelian sense. It gives me immense pleasure to see the release of the first issue of RPR. However, it was a long and arduous journey from the drawing board many months ago to eventual fruition. I must commend the Editor in Chief Prathit Singh and his entire team which worked tirelessly to bring forth the first issue. Our hope is that RPR will become a valuable platform for our students to showcase their academic writing. Wishing the RPR team all the best for continuing this good work in future issues as well.

Regards
Syed Areesh Ahmad
Honorary Faculty Editor
RPR

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Editor In Chief's Note

It gives me immense pleasure to present, on behalf of the Editorial Board, the first issue of the Ramjas Political Review: the undergraduate peer-reviewed journal of the Department of Political Science, Ramjas College.

This journal was conceptualised as an initiative by students who felt the necessity of research and peer feedback at the undergraduate level. The Review affirms to be an accessible platform for all those interested in politics. As a vision set by our professors and seniors, this journal is a culmination of the spirit of academic debate and rigour promoted by the Department among students.

I am honoured to have served as the Editor in Chief of such a dynamic and brilliant Editorial Board which has worked relentlessly to maintain the high academic standards of this journal. I thank all the authors for their submissions and for cooperating with the board during the editorial process. A special thanks to Prof. Syed Areesh Ahmad for being our guiding light.

I believe, the foundational issue of this journal will set a benchmark for the issues ahead, setting the stage for the growth of an accessible and rigorous academic culture through the succeeding issues.

-Prathit Singh
Editor-in-Chief
Ramjas Political Review

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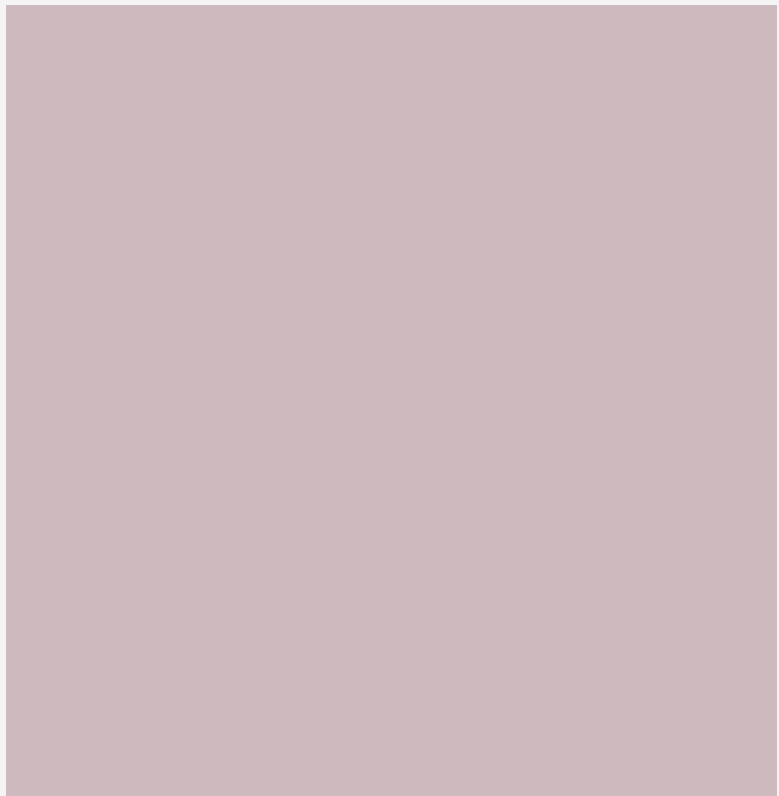
INDIAN WOMEN AND INHERITANCE:
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Throughout history, men have enjoyed the privilege of owning land and other assets of production while women were deemed naturally 'dependent' on their male counterparts. After independence, the Constitutional commitment to equal socio-political and economic rights

facilitated statutory and legal provisions, yet it took a decade of social churning for legal recognition of the right of a woman to acquire, sell or inherit property to materialize under the Hindu Succession Act 1956. This right was further extended through an amendment in 2005 that acknowledged the 'right of inheritance' to be by birth. Ironically, even with the legal framework in place, property rights remain a far-flung dream for women in India. The constant perplexity that surrounds women when it comes to the question of 'inheritance' often negates the laws established by the government after years of struggle that women had to put forth. And the dilemma still remains: Does passing a law ensure its implementation?

Introduction

While the idea of gender equality has always held the center stage in the history of Indian politics, its manifestation in society remains a subject of contention. This is true more so in the arena of inheritance rights wherein legislative efforts culminated in the substitution of a statutory regime for the traditional law of Hindus. The Indian experiment of augmenting an equitable law of inheritance has been a long-drawn process of conciliation between the Constitutional commitment to socio-economic and political equality and the principle of non-interference in personal laws. In addition to the sociocultural obstructions to the implementation of these laws, there are three important and overlapping issues: a) lack of awareness; b) legal loopholes disabling women's right to inheritance and; c) unintended consequences of the right perpetuating deeper inequalities and violence against women.

In a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court, a three-judge bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra ruled in Vineeta Sharma v Rakesh Sharma (2020) that 'a Hindu woman's right to be a joint heir to the ancestral property is by birth and does not depend on whether her father was alive or not when the law was enacted in 2005'. While the judgment, sure, is a progressive step towards gender equality, its implementation strategy remains chaotic. This was also reflected upon by leading legal practitioner Aggarwal (2020) who argued that "the lack of clarity on the practical implementation of the decision of SC can open a Pandora's Box

of litigation and property disputes". As such, the adjudication of equal inheritance for both men and women still has a long journey ahead. Therefore, this study aims to question and evaluate the effectiveness of laws in ensuring the exercise of women's inheritance rights and access to said property while offering insight into the historical, political, and cultural factors that hinder its implementation. Further, it sheds light on the social dilemma and lack of awareness that nullifies the impact of legal provisions in bringing about substantive changes in women's lives.

Methodology

The paper majorly constitutes a qualitative research study into the political, cultural, and socio-economic constraints on women's right to inheritance in India. Data has been collected primarily from secondary sources. In order to grasp the real-life hindrances women face in exercising their rights, an extensive literature search has been undertaken covering various journal articles, books, and newspapers covering women's inheritance rights since its inception.

Its aims are both descriptive and analytical. It is principally divided into three sections. The first section delves into the legal provisions of inheritance rights as embedded in the Hindu Succession Act 1956, while the second section seeks to interpret and assess the magnitude of its implementation. Finally, the last section addresses some of the inadvertent drawbacks and provides solutions for the same. The paper begins, however, with a brief historical background and the recent events that helped bring the issue back to significance.

Hypothesis

Despite the legal framework in place, property rights remain a far-flung dream for women in different parts of India.

Historical Background

Indian culture has traditionally been restrictive in providing women with any autonomy outside the purview of the patriarchal household. While ancient Hindu texts like the Manusmriti staunchly asserted that a woman is never fit for independence, it did not exclusively deny them ownership of property (Halder & Jaishankar, 2008, pp. 663-664). Ironically, the concept of 'stridhan' (women's property or fortune) was widely prevalent in Indian society at a time when women themselves were viewed as the property of their male counterparts. However, stridhan only included assets obtained during the wedding and not ancestral property (Halder & Jaishankar, 2008, p. 665). As such, the idea of inheritance and succession was deemed the 'exclusive preserve of men' within the Hindu community. In fact, some scholars believe the historical intention behind the sati system or sending widows to holy places like Varanasi was also to deprive them of their inheritance rights so that their share could be enjoyed by other members of the family (Khan, 2000, p. 142). In contrast, though unequal but inheritance rights found space within the customary laws of Muslims and Christians. Their exercise, however, was negligible within both communities in the pre-colonial period.

Their exercise, however, was negligible within both communities in the pre-colonial period. During the colonial period, the desire for an uninterrupted source of revenue motivated the British administration to devise a uniform law of inheritance known as the Indian Succession Act of 1925. This act was secular in nature and was further extended by the Part B States (Laws) Act of 1951 to cover the Christians of Travancore as well (Jacob, 1986, p. 243). The act was largely gender- equal, yet it excluded the mother and daughter- in law from inheritance if their spouses were alive. For instance, with regard to succession to the property of a Christian intestate who leaves no lineal descendants, the entire property goes to the father (after deducting the widow/er's share if present) thereby excluding the mother. As such, these laws hardly translated into the women's actual ownership of land or other assets.

Inheritance Laws in Independent India: The Hindu Succession Act 1956 & More

The Constitution-makers were quite firm in their commitment to ensuring equal socio-political and economic rights for both genders which culminated in Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution. Obligated by the burden of widening the ambit of the 'right to equality', the Indian government passed the Hindu Succession Act in 1956. Drawn from the Mitakshara school of Hindu law, this act recognized the right of a woman to sell, acquire or inherit property (Duncan & Derrett, 1959, p. 488).

It expanded on the idea of stridhan to include both movable and immovable assets including landed property. At the same time, it also attempted to bring matrilineal and patrilineal people, formerly governed by various customs, under what is virtually a single system (Aggarwal, 2020). Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and followers of Arya Samaj, etc. were also considered Hindus for the purposes of this law.

Conversely, Muslims were governed by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937, according to which the daughter gets half the share of the son and the widow also has the same share as that of the daughter (Khan, 2000, p. 142). Similarly, in the absence of a male heir, the daughter's son would be adopted by her parents and exercise the rights of a natural son. Unfortunately, multiple factors including the principle of non-interference in the personal laws of minorities have constrained the Indian government from reforming this policy to date.

However, the shortcomings of the Hindu Succession Act were brought to light over the next few decades. Silent on its point of application to agricultural tenancies, inheritance rights were left at the mercy of the laws of different state governments and the interpretations of High Courts. Certain sections of the act like Sections 6, 14(2), and 15 to name a few, constrained this right by not only limiting inheritance to unmarried daughters but also ignoring the essence of matriliny (Aggarwal, 2020). Further, the lack of scrutiny in its practical implementation supplemented by poor interpretation produced a rather dissatisfactory and shameful result for almost 5 decades.

Finally, the 174th Law Commission recommended certain amendments to the act. In 2005, the Hindu Succession Act was amended in a landmark decision to retain the concept of the joint family while recognizing 'women as coparceners', who have a right at birth to share the agricultural land and property equal to that of sons (Kelkar, 2014, p. 53). By and large, it sought to detach the major ambiguities in the original law to ensure an equal inheritance for women. It was naturally expected by the government that the amendment would improve the condition of women across the country but the ground reality is rather disheartening.

Legal Loopholes Disabling Women's Inheritance Rights

The amendment in the Hindu Succession Act in 2005 generated a sense of relief among legislators. It was anticipated that the amended act would be momentous in achieving gender equality by ensuring greater access to property for women. This was, however, naïve on the part of the government because the persistence of loopholes and ambiguities in the clauses continued to deprive women of their inheritance. The first and foremost amongst these loopholes is the enabling provision under Section 30 of the Act which spurs the Hindu fathers to disinherit their daughters by executing wills in relation to their coparcenary interests. Though it was removed by the amendment, a lot of grey areas still persist. Additionally, the definition of a 'joint Hindu family' remains ambiguous. Today, families are mostly nuclear or semi-nuclear and the traditional Hindu Mitakshara joint families are gradually eroding.

This changed scenario demands a clear definition of joint family in order to avoid conflicts during the allocation of inheritance. Similarly, when a female heir dies intestate leaving the property, her assets devolve upon her children and husband. If she does not have any of those, the property is inherited by the closest relatives of her husband (Khan, 2000, p. 142). This is a point of concern as the section does not specify the difference between inherited and self-acquired property nor does it include the natal family of women.

Amongst these, the most contended loophole in the Hindu Succession Act was whether the law would apply to daughters whose fathers died before the law was amended in 2005. The debate was aggravated after two High Courts passed contradictory judgments on the same issue. In Prakash v. Phulwati (2015), a 2-judge bench headed by Justice A. K. Goel held that the benefit of the amended act could be granted only to the "living daughters of living coparceners" as on September 9, 2005. This judgment was, however, contradicted in Danamma @ Suman Supur v. Amar (2018) which generated immense tension and controversy as leaving inheritance rights at the mercy of the interpretation of courts was undesirable. As such, multiple petitions and appeals were filed in the Supreme Court which climaxed in the momentous judgment delivered on August 11, 2020. Clearing the air, in Vineetha Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma, the 3-judge bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra declared that a Hindu woman's right to be a joint heir to the ancestral property is 'by birth' and does not depend on whether her father was alive or not when the law was enacted in 2005 (Aggarwal, 2020).

However, the court did not overrule its own decision in Uttam v. Saubhag Singh (2016), wherein it decided that every time a notional partition occurred in a Hindu Undivided Family (HUF), it came to an end, with every coparcener granted separate property. In this case, daughters cannot be coparceners to a non-existent HUF, since every HUF has had a death post-1956 and pre-2005. As such, both Uttam and Vineetha case judgments exist together, adding to the confusion. Moreover, the court has also maintained a studied silence about the practical implementation of the law, which together with the ambiguous law and conflicting judgments, has led to the persistence of litigation surrounding women as coparceners.

Major Constraints on Women's Inheritance Rights

While legal provisions facilitating inheritance rights for women have been in place for decades, property rights remain a fuzzy affair in India. Amongst all inheritable assets, land (a state subject) is the most crucial and debatable one. It is valued not just for material reasons or as a productive resource, but also for symbolic reasons in terms of identity, status, and hierarchy within a given social context (Rao, 2005, p. 4701). Thus, the success of any legal provision for property rights especially land dangles on the social and economic life of women. According to a study conducted by the United Nations Study Group in 2012, only 32% of women-owned plots in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar came from inheritance (Kelkar, 2014, pp. 54-58). The major reasons hampering women's exercise of inheritance rights have been analyzed below:

A. Lack of Awareness:

As discussed earlier, succession rights in India are mainly governed by various personal laws of people's religion. Additionally, there is little to no awareness among women about their legal rights pertaining to inheritance (Kelkar, 2014, p. 55). While people generally recognize the inheritance rights of women, the specificities of the law and its provisions are missing from their knowledge. This is connected to the larger problem of 'legal illiteracy' among women which enables people to escape their liability of providing an inheritance to their daughters who fail to question the discrimination due to their low educational background and lack of financial independence that would otherwise enable them to access avenues (like engaging lawyers) when it comes to inheritance, in comparison to men.

B. Social Stigma:

In communities where economic activities and social responsibilities are generally defined along the lines of gender, the idea of women owning or inheriting land is viewed with hostility. Scholars like Rao (2005) usually attribute this to the frustration of husbands about losing a part of their 'provider' role if women owned and cultivated land (p. 4703). Other reasons include insecurity about the fragmentation of land holding, protection of the economic and business interests of the father and sons in the household, and the basic instinct to pass on property to someone carrying the family name (Jacob, 1986, p. 245).

C. Pressure Within the Family:

There is a general reluctance among parents about passing on their property to their daughters as it would decrease the share of their brothers who are supposed to 'take care of the family' in the future. The longstanding traditional belief that the dowry paid during a daughter's marriage constitutes her part of the inheritance lowers their claim to the inheritance which is complemented by the misconception that a woman would enjoy the property of her husband after marriage leading to further resistance on part of family members. As such, the moral policing of girls is done from a very young age to gain their consensus about giving up their ancestral property rights. As for the few women who do acquire property, their access to the same is generally dependent on the dictates of their husbands and in-laws.

D. Lack of Formal Documentation:

There is barely any formal documentation wherever land inheritance is done within informal groups and women's names in deeds like white paper appear only in about 10% of the total documents (Kelkar, 2014, p. 56). The lack of communication between rural women and government issues of land management contributes majorly to this problem thereby making their land ownership vulnerable.
The societal notion of gender ideologies has also created some unintended and undesirable consequences of providing inheritance rights to women. Scholars like Rosenblum (2015) whose studies prove that even a small increase in inheritance rights or the perceived probability that a daughter will inherit can cause a decrease in investment in female child health (p. 224).

This is because inheritance increases the 'cost of daughters', leading to a decreased investment in daughters' health. Besides, these rights also have a retrospective effect in that women are 'forced to claim their share' of the inheritance by their husbands and in-laws who often resort to domestic violence to acquire ownership of the same. It is time that civil society and policymakers acknowledge the downside of the law and invest time and resources to eliminate these negative implications of the said Act to ensure the daughters of India freely enjoy their fundamental right to property.

Property Rights and Gender Equality: An Analysis

Throughout history, the gender gap in ownership of property has been among the crucial reasons for the oppression of women. Though the government recognized the direct relationship between inheritance laws and the economic empowerment of women as back as in the 6th and 8th Five-Year Plans, the implementation aspect remained largely ignored. For instance, while the Sixth Five Year Plan stated that the government would 'endeavor' to give joint titles to spouses in programs involving the distribution of land and homesites to the landless, the Eighth Five Year Plan officially recognized that changing inheritance laws was one of the basic requirements for improving the status of women (Agarwal, 1994, p. 1456). However, the necessary directives for implementation were not issued. Agarwal (1994) has argued that the major reason for this is the treatment of 'women as objects of study and exchange, and not as subjects' (p. 1457).

This implies that women do find symbolic representation in the laws devised by the government, but their perspectives and gender relations at the societal levels are often ignored, thereby leading to the failure of the law in bringing about substantive changes in women's lives. This is perhaps best evident in the assumption of the household as the unit of analysis, when issues such as poverty removal and economic development are considered, which completely ignores unequal gender relations at the intra-household level. Thus, an in-depth analysis of the link between property rights and gender ideologies must be undertaken to ensure that policy implementation actually bears fruitful results.

The increasing 'feminization of agriculture' in recent years has given an impetus to this process of female property entitlement. (Vasudeva, 2018) The gradual realisation that rural women play a decisive role in food security and local agro-biodiversity has dawned upon the people that their role in economic activities as cultivators and entrepreneurs are of national importance (Shiva, 2009, p. 19).

The Economic Survey of 2017–18 also brought to light that only 12.8% of the operational holdings of agricultural land were actually held by women. Since productivity is most likely to increase in self-owned lands, the government is now trying to transform agricultural policies as well (Vasudeva, 2018). For instance, it has increased its focus on women's self-help groups (SHG) to connect them to micro-credit through capacity-building activities and providing information.

It has also initiated programmes like the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development which focuses exclusively on women farmers with the primary objective of enabling them to gain effective control over production resources and manage support systems ("Central scheme for empowering women involved in farming." 2012). Therefore, sustained efforts in this direction can culminate into an amalgamation of inheritance rights and economic independence leading to greater equality and empowerment of women in India.

The Road Ahead

The development of gender as a central category of development analysis in the 21st century has necessitated an examination of the dialectical relationship between female oppression and property deprivation. In such a situation, the examination of the gender dynamics at the societal level especially in rural India is important to determine the inability of formulated policies in ensuring inheritance rights for women. This can be done by promoting ground-level research that focuses on the intra- household constraints binding women and subsequently developing policy methods that counter these restrictions. Further, the lack of awareness about inheritance rights must be tackled with the help of NGOs and other non–profit organizations through regular awareness campaigns for not only women but also men. Since the benefit of female property ownership accrues to the family as a whole, appropriate education will be instrumental in generating greater awareness and support from the male members.

This must involve the modification of the school curriculum to include basic guidelines about their property laws and rights as well. Such an initiative will help shape young minds in a manner that they are empowered by the weapon of knowledge and can contribute to nation-building. A strict differentiation between ownership of property and access to the property, as proposed by Agarwal (1994), must be taken into account as well. It is also advisable for the government to develop village-level mechanisms to promote not only female ownership and access but also 'effective control and decision-making capability' over the inherited land. This will serve as a major defense of women against that patriarchal family structure and lead to their economic empowerment Consequently, adequate policy implementation of inheritance laws is intrinsic in the achievement of the larger social project of 'gender equality'. This will reduce women's vulnerability to domestic violence and equip them with increased bargaining power within the family. Strengthened by their property ownership, women would enjoy greater autonomy in the public sphere and denounce the risk of poverty in case of separation and divorce.

Conclusion

The findings of this research prove that property rights have certainly evolved for the better in Indian politics. Over the last two decades, trends like the 'feminization of agriculture' have highlighted the potential benefits of female ownership of property prompting the government, academicians, and legal professionals to undertake research into the realization of female inheritance rights.

Still, the issue of inheritance is so dynamic in nature that both the government and the Supreme Court seem to have adopted a 'trial and error' method in their approach to deal with the problem. There is a gradual recognition that equal opportunity to inherit ancestral property and equality in accessing said property will not only empower women but also boost economic growth. As such, the 2005 amendment did bear significant results but its implementation continues to be plagued by a multitude of legal loopholes and societal constraints that deprive women of exercising their right to inherit ancestral property. Therefore, the government should undertake a rigorous policy evaluation to detect and fix any and all factors presently hindering women from exercising their rights and spread greater awareness to normalize the practice of daughters inheriting property.

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POPULAR CULTURE AND THE DISCOURSES OF FEAR: LEGITIMISING THE US WAR ON TERROR

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Abstract

In this essay, I'll reinterpret American popular culture as a site of anxiety and fear post-9/11. I'll examine how popular culture helped forge a collective national identity revolving around the discourses of fear by systematically studying how mass media, news reports, advertisements, TV series/ shows, Hollywood movies, video games, consumer markets, etc., promoted fear since "the US discovered international terrorism". I'll investigate how the popular culture legitimised the War on Terror and used the Hobbesian passion of fear as a means to the end of achieving the political ends of mustering domestic support for PNAC (Project for the New American Century), a grand plan for aggrandisement and crystalising US preponderance– or, euphemistically, hegemony. Finally, I'll examine how popular culture embraced 9/11, enabled the making of the war and bestowed it with much-needed legitimacy.

Keywords

9/11, fear, Hollywood, mass media, popular culture, The US, TV, War on Terror, video games.

"Being certain that they and I

But lived where motley is worn:

All changed, changed utterly:

A terrible beauty is born."

Easter, 1916; William Butler Yeats

Let me open this essay with the words of my professor– when the *virtu* of the founding fathers is all but spent, and *ordini*, that hitherto bound the nation together faithfully, develops cracks, the nation will look for an effective mucilage, an effective adhesive that could bind the civilisation together and stabilise the society [1] [2]. And for the hegemonic US that suffered from an imperialistic nostalgia of the Cold War times, which was just stepping towards the dawn of the twenty-first century with a plummeting economy with extremely disenchanting growth rates, a magical thread was the need of the hour to bind the disillusioned society together [3].

A favourable stroke of serendipity– the 9/11 attack– conferred the US elite coterie with that magic wand that wove the necromantic thread which recreated a new national identity for the crestfallen US with a chagrined economy– a national identity revolving around the discourses of fear– the fear cultivated by the popular culture, which was made a quintessential part of everyday life (Altheide, 2016). And this fear, as I'd argue, was used to further, in the words of David Armstrong (2002), the US ambitions to "rule the world", to neither be "more powerful" nor "most powerful", but "absolutely powerful" [4]. The ineptitude of the Bush administration to promise candied economic growth, therefore, made it ground its legitimacy in the bastions of a new national culture– the new *ordini*– based on fear.

Though wars begin in the minds of *men*, their legitimacy flows from popular culture. The same holds for the US War on Terror– though it began in the minds of *men*, Bush and his associates to be more precise, its legitimacy poured from popular culture [5]. Although Kant's perpetual peace theory denies the possibility of democracies breaking into a state of war, especially because public opinion guides democratic decision-making, which will always be inimical to the prospect of war, Americans actually endorsed the US War on Terror [6]. For instance, a 2002 *CNN survey* reveals that 53% of Americans favoured US ground troops marching into the sovereign territory of Iraq with the intention of a regime change. Moreover, a *Gallup poll* suggests that 87% of Americans were satisfied with how Bush handled the War on Terror. In addition to that, a December 2001 *Gallup survey* reveals that 92% of Americans were satisfied with the progress of the US military in Afghanistan [7].

So, why did the Americans support the war? The answer is quite simple– popular culture became a site of anxiety and narratives of glorification of war post-9/11, where fear became the foundation of dominant narratives (Glassner, 1999). In this essay, I propose four such areas– or domains– where popular culture became a war legitimising force that cultivated supportive and patriotic but disillusioned citizenry. They are– one, the mass media promoting fear; two, the Hollywood and the TV series attempting a cultural depiction of what Nilges (2010) calls the "aesthetics of destruction"; three, video games which became "sites where post-9/11 dreams of victory and nightmares of fear are embodied" (Annandale, 2011); and four, the civil-military consumer interface, which militarised the very modes of being (Milburn, 2005).

I

For Hobbes, fear was the greatest of all human passions, and for Machiavelli, this passion can be channelled, albeit shrewdly, to meet certain political ends [8] [9]. The US government, as I mentioned elsewhere, capitalised on this fear constructed by the popular culture post-9/11 to seek legitimacy for a decade-old US project to be the world hegemon, which already had regime change in Iraq as one of its prime agendas almost ten years before the US invented international terrorism. The Hobbesian passion of self-preservation based on the cultivated discourses of fear of the 'axis of evil' and the immutable possibility of another 9/11 was, yet again employed by the US government, for a shameless *ex post facto* justification of its PNAC, or the Project for New American Century– a document which delineates the course of action that ought to be adopted by the US government to be a world hegemon– a Leviathan– in the truest sense through a series of measures, including overseas military expansion, ballooning the defence budget, withdrawing from major treaties, engaging in pre-emptive strikes, inter alia.

Altheide and Grimes (2005) claim that Vice President Dick Cheney, who was part of the caucus that framed the PNAC blueprint, knew that the regime change in Iraq was the *motif principal* of the project. And 9/11 became the pretext for seeking legitimacy for this grand project, which masqueraded as the US War on Terror. The post-9/11 mainstream media rhetoric supporting the War on Terror, grounded on the politics of fear, patriotism, consumption, and victimisation, helped forge a national identity (the new *ordini*) by integrating fear into the everyday lives of people (Kellner, 2004), and muster public support for the war (and therefore, the PNAC).

II

Since the US discovered international terrorism in 2001, mass media has been ferociously promoting fear through multiple means, attempting to seek legitimacy for the PNAC agendas of an unprecedented global US military expansion, a groundless growth of unparalleled expanse in the US military budget, regime change in Iraq, invasion of Afghanistan, etc. One of the common methodologies employed for the same was spreading misinformation through Public Relations firms, for instance, Hill and Knowlton, which was involved in deliberate disinformation activities to muster public support for outmanoeuvring Saddam Hussein, for example, by claiming that Saddam's troops killed babies in Kuwait (Stauber and Rampton, 1997) during the first Gulf War. Nevertheless, post-9/11 media became more aggressive in propagating the narrative of 9/11 as an attack on all Americans, the American culture, and the US civilisation itself (Altheide, 2006). Since all Americans were victimised by the attacks, all were expected to contribute to the cause of toppling the source of fear– the 'axis of evil' (Garland, 2012). Media now began to act as the action arm– or the propaganda puppet– of the government, where newscasts were draped in flag colours. Patriotic sloganeering became a ritual in news podcasts and the reporters started employing the politics of linguistic collectivism– they started using words like 'us' and 'we' while reporting, reinforcing the narrative they wished to propagate– 9/11 as an attack on the US civilisation itself. The advertisement industry also played a *major munus* in mustering legitimacy for the War on Terror. For instance, in an all-advertisers' industry meeting chaired by the Advertisement Research Foundation on

18th September 2001, a resolution was passed in consensus, which transmuted as an overarching framework for commercial advertisements– "To inform, involve, and inspire the Americans to participate in activities… [that could] help win the war on terrorism" [10]. For instance, businesses like General Motors started employing patriotic slogans, for instance, 'keep America rolling', and baseball fans started singing 'God bless America'.

Moreover, the images of destruction propagated by the mass media further helped cultivate legitimacy for the War on Terror in the hearts of the Americans. For instance, the destructive depictions of 9/11 victims fuelled financial aid worth $2 billion in the form of charity at the interpersonal level. Children jumped into this exercise by raising money for the starving children in Afghanistan, victimised and relegated to impoverishment by the evil regimes. The images further stirred patriotic spirit in the hearts and minds of the Americans, which can be corroborated by the fact that the flags were out-of-stock in most of the US stores for at least a year following 9/11. Moreover, everyday lives started assimilating this fear narrative in the day-to-day language, for instance, phrases like 'since 9/11', 'how the world has changed', etc., started propping up in wonted conversations.

III

This popular imagery promulgated in the mass media took the form of what Yeats (1989) called "terrible beauty" in the cultural depictions of destruction in the visual arena. Hollywood movies and TV series became the sites of constructivism, where dominant discourses– the perpetual threat modelled based on the politics of fear, a celebration of patriotism

and the demands of "silence and unquestioning fealty in the name of fear and patriotism", and the mythology of the American captivity narrative– were aesthetically engineered and projected onto the visual medium (Birkenstein, Froula, and Randell, 2011).

Mathias Nilges (2010) calls such depictions of perpetual threat the "aesthetics of destruction". The post-9/11 TV series industry was plagued by the general crisis and impotency of the white, male hero to successfully terminate the threats to the nation, making the threat of terrorism perennial, enduring, and permanent. These series confer a stamp of permanency to the discourses of fear, which, further, helps muster public support for toppling the source of such fears through proactive military intervention by the US. For instance, consider the series *24* (2001) starring Kiefer Sutherland as Jack Bauer. Though he successfully manages to counter the terrorist threat in every episode, it reappears at the end, often in fiercer manifestations, where the whole gamut of the terror is projected as the new normal, which is now part of one's daily life. What is interesting to observe is that, unlike his predecessors of the 80s, Bauer terribly fails to arrest the threat to the nation and the civilisation itself, as how much ever he tries to do that, all episodes end with the resurgence of terrorism.

Similarly, in *Live Free or Die Hard* (2007) starring Bruce Wills as John McClane, the protagonist finds himself trapped in an ugly middle position– a stinking limbo– where he not only fails to safeguard the US economy from cyberterrorism but also requires the help of a young hacker to get the hang of the things. Here, the white, male hero, who was previously an authority figure with a commanding agency as a defender,

is relegated to the whereabouts of a comical sidekick– alluding to a rather pessimistic present plagued with uncertainties where only one thing is certain– another 9/11 may knock on the doors of civilisation anytime Nevertheless, in addition to grounding the populace with an impermeable cloud of fear, Hollywood had twin objectives– one, complementing the rise of the rabble-rouser authoritarian tendencies of the Bush administration, which included legitimising the operation of secret prisons, increasing surveillance of computer communication and the telephone, state-sponsored abductions, overaggressive police actions, etc.; and two, creating favourable conditions for inspiring the citizens to participate in the War on Terror, either directly, for instance, by enrolling themselves as soldiers or indirectly, for example, by the public display of patriotism. As Jack Valenti famously remarked on 27th September 2007, "We in Hollywood have to get on with doing our creative work … the country needs what we create" [11].

To substantiate the arguments I just made, I would like to consider the case of the 2003 film *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*, a war story along the lines of the classical Anglo-French rivalry, which celebrates the triumph of an outnumbered English crew led by Commander 'Lucky Jack', fighting for the God and the country [12]. The film, in the words of Birkenstein, Froula, and Randell (2011), is a "desirable narrative" that bestowed a serene stroke of legitimacy to the authoritarian tendencies of Bush– which may be read together with Bush's own remarks while addressing a rally in 2000– "If the US were a dictatorship, it'd have been a heck of a lot easier, just so long as I'm the dictator" [13]. In addition to lending support for the centralising

tendencies of Bush, the film parallelly glorifies "patriotism, military valour, and masculine solidarity" – the basket of quintessential patriotic virtues– something which fuelled the spirit of patriotism among the Americans, clamouring for their support for the War on Terror [14].

Masugi (2003) calls Commander Jack in the movie *en consideration* a "benevolent dictator", the God of the ship of England (as in the movie, he calls his ship, HMS Surprise, England; in his words, "… And though we be on the far side of the world, this ship is our home. This ship is England), someone beyond any question, beyond any reproach, flying like a mighty British eagle beyond all censure, transcending all reproof, yet cherished, idolised, and loved by his crew. His crew reposes unparalleled trust in him, yet he can even condemn them to death. This figure of an idealised commander, benevolent yet fierce, fighting for the country and God, for the sake of his people and his crew, anticipates Bush, who, like Jack, fights for the country, the American civilisation, and the people of America (Scott, 2003). And therefore, all citizens have to lend their support to Masugi's benevolent dictator, raise him to a pedestal beyond reprove, and endorse the War on Terror, as "after all, the world has changed after 9/11" (Altheide, 2006).

Moreover, television series became a site of constructivism– an arena where, says Faludi (2007), the "wild west fantasy of captivity and rescue" is aesthetically and cunningly constructed to attempt a Machiavellian paradiastolic reversal of the positions of the aggressor and the aggrieved. For instance, the NBC TV Movie *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003) portrays the US invasion of Iraq as a defensive struggle to liberate the American civilisation from the barbaric savagery of the 'axis of evil'. It narrates the capture (by the Iraqi forces) and the

subsequent rescue of Pfc. Jessica Lynch, limned in the movie as a hapless damsel-in-distress, waiting to be rescued by the American forces from the captivity of the Iraqi brutes [15]. The US military, therefore, became the group which is besieged, and the Iraqi forces became savage, irrational, and brutish aggressors– logically necessitating the continued use of force.

This civilisation vs savagery war, built upon the fertile foundations of the Western captivity narrative, masqueraded the invasion as a humanitarian intervention– a rescue mission to save Jessica Lynch. The civilisation vs savagery rhetoric is fiercely reinforced in the film through the use of 'contrasts', as Kamla Das employs in her poem 'My Mother at Sixty-Six', where she contrasts the dismal and gloomy environs in the car with the alacrity of the sprinting trees and merry children outside [16]. The film is interspersed with multiple flashbacks, which, similar to Kamla Das's poem, contrast the gloomy war environs with the alacrity of Lynch's home and family life. And the ample assistance provided by the US Department of Defence to the filmmakers might explain why the film vociferously propagates the American cock-a-doodle-doo of being an innocent civilisation besieged by wild savages, which further necessitates redemptive actions through righteous violence– which Stacy Takacs (2017) calls the "righteous ecstasy".

IV

When mass media and visual entertainment complexes emerged as sites of cultivation of fear and the virtues of patriotism emanating from it, video games embodied in them the dreams of success and the nightmares of the destruction of the War on Terror. Though real-

life military technology is often compared to the beautifully engineered gears in any immersive video game, Boyer, Lee, and Pfister (2007) claims that video games capture the realities of life to the hilt. McKenzie Wark goes a step ahead to claim that the world outside the gamespace is an imperfect copy of the computer game, just as the Platonic world of senses, which is an imperfect copy of the world of thought/ forms [17]. this complex relationship between the simulated game space and the real world– or video games and actual warfare– opens new avenues of possibilities for engaging the participants in the actual war, for instance, the US military using video games to train and recruit soldiers. An online military recruitment ad read– "If you're ready to stop playing games, we're ready for you" – here, the military is acting as a conduit, which transforms the in-game experience of the player into a real-life war spree– the same enemies, the same values, and the same weapons– the military just magnified the scope [18].

Furthermore, the in-game values of obedience, loyalty, and discipline witnesses a cultivated spill-over, inspired by which a significant number of youngsters volunteer to join the armed forces to 'defend the bastion of the American civilisation', as the character Jessica Lynch claimed in the aforementioned made-for-TV movie, *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003). For instance, consider *America's Army*, a game developed in collaboration with the military, in which the soldiers (participants/ players) are trained in military tactics, handling and using Avant-garde military gear and sophisticated weaponry, and the virtues of discipline, loyalty, integrity, and obedience. The enemy is portrayed as brutal and mysterious and is to be dealt with by cold-blooded application of brute force, according to the orders of the commander.

Moreover, such games, by referencing the real world, often blur the distinction between fantasy and reality– and thus, the "aesthetics of destruction" portrayed in the games spills over to real life. For instance, consider *Full Spectrum Warrior*, a 2004 war game unfolding in the fictional country of Zekistan, located somewhere between modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China– and unsurprisingly, this fictional space is strikingly similar to the actual target location of War on Terror (consider the US invasion of Afghanistan, for instance). The game also accentuates the social fears of terrorism by depicting horrific scenarios– the "aesthetics of destruction". Similarly, *Rainbow Six: Vegas*, a 2006 video game, also portrays the images of destruction caused by monstrous terrorist attacks and deals with righteous and necessary retaliation through the use of legitimate force.

V

What is more effective than militarising the popular culture to secure the political ends of mustering legitimate support for the War on Terror? Jean Louis DeGay was right when he commented that "nothing speeds up the development of technology like war" [19]. However, when this war technology penetrates the popular culture or the civilian mode of life, it turns into what Eisenhower once called the 'military-industrial complex'– an unholy nexus between the industry and the military (Derian, 2009) [20]. For instance, the consumer application of GPS, a military intelligence tool, is an example of the militarisation of civilian life (Kaplan, 2006). Also, after the Iraqi war, the US Army's Humvee assault vehicle– the one in which Jessica Lynch was travelling– was transformed into the civilian Hummer. Similarly, Graham (2004) says that the names of civilian

combat vehicles or SUVs, for instance, Stealth, Challenger, Warrior, etc., alludes to a militarised view of everyday life.

By militarising the daily life of the civilians, a confluence of the military, consumer, and civilian identities is woven, leading to the assimilation of military values– or aggressive virtues– like bravery, courage, strength, fighting, hatred towards the enemies (as Justine Toh (2013) interprets other cars on the road as potential enemies and the neighbourhood as a suburban combat zone vis-à-vis Hummer), etc., into the fabric of the society– which translates into the civil society's unfaltering commitment and inexorable support to the US War on Terror.

VI

The Westphalian state system links the institution of the state with the territory. Similarly, article 1 of the *Montevideo Convention* defines a state as possessing a defined territory, *inter alia* [21]. However, tying down the institution of the state into a territory, or attaching the burden of territoriality to the institution of the state is problematic, as no state has ever limited its activity within the confines of its territory. Such contradictions in the Western International Relations theories make me look at Indian strategic thought with great awe. Kautilya, in his *magnum opus* Arthasastra, associated state with expansion, and not territoriality. His theory of *rajamandala* deals with the expansionist policies of the *vijigishu* to secure *yogakshema* [22]. And the US is no exception. The expansionist tendencies of the US through overseas military expansion coupled with a stratospheric defence budget align beautifully with Colin Powell's statement in the House

Armed Services Committee that "there's no future in trying to challenge the armed forces of the US" [23]. Moreover, it is *de rigueur* for the states to muster popular support for such aggrandisement (the PNAC), especially because the US is not a dictatorship as Bush lamented in a 2000 speech I quoted elsewhere, and Bush was simply not Lucky Jack of the movie *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003), where unilateral actions of war and peace would have been justified by the stature of Jack, who was beyond any question, beyond any censure, and beyond any respite. And popular support for the War on Terror masqueraded as the practical unfolding of the objectives of the PNAC was manufactured through deliberate attempts to weave the elements of fear and patriotic virtues into the fabric of popular culture.

In this essay, I investigated four such areas in the popular culture paradigm– mass media, virtual entertainment complex, video games, and militarisation of civil life– where fear and patriotism were consciously integrated into the daily life of the US citizens, with an attempt to muster support and legitimacy for the War on Terror. In the first part of this essay, I explained how popular culture and mass media depictions of an omnipresent terrorist threat, patriotism, and victimisation helped forge a national identity built around the discourses of fear. In the second part, I expounded how the visual entertainment complex, including TV shows, series, and Hollywood movies attempted to capitalise on the "aesthetics of destruction" to propagate cultural images portraying moral and material superiority of the US, national mythology of the American captivity narrative and the civilisation vs savagery rhetoric, and of course, fear, to muster

support for the authoritative and expansionist proclivity of the Bush administration.

Moreover, In the third part of the essay, I demonstrated how video games, especially because of their immersive qualities, became sites of post-9/11 dreams of victory and horrors of destruction. I attempted to explain how the military-entertainment linkages attempted an intersection of video games and actual warfare– fantasy and reality. Finally, in the fourth part, I spelt out how civilian life became increasingly militarised through a confluence of the military, consumer, and civilian identities, and how the civilians, by baptising into a militarised mode of being, rendered their support to the War on Terror.

Endnotes

[1] Prof. Syed Areesh Ahmed (January 9, 2022), India Needs Honesty, in Facebook. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.facebook.com/areesh.syed.1/posts/pfbid02rurDVpKQeuS CToTUHPyXtN7RKu3oRJg3LBCH7yti9jTye5kq3EgfDARegQRCSxuhl
[2] Machiavelli in the Prince and the Discourses suggested that the founder of a principality/ republic possesses extraordinary virtu, which binds the society together till it dissipates. Moreover, here, I used Machiavelli's ordini as order or institutional structure that cultivate civic virtu in the people of a republic.
[3] 1.45% by March 2000, 0.53% by September 2000, -1.4% by March 2001, and -1.66 by September 2001. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/USA/united-states/economic-growth-rate

[4] Refer to David Armstrong's 2002 essay in Harper's [Dick Cheney's Song of America]. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from

https://harpers.org/archive/2002/10/dick-cheneys-song-of-america/

[5] The preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO reads, "since wars begin in the minds of *men*, it is in the minds of *men* that the defences of peace must be constructed." *Men* (emphasis added) as some feminist theories claim that "men make wars ... because war makes them men", [Barbara Ehrenreich, Blood Rites (1997)] – making masculinity and war complementary and mutually reinforcing social constructs– and I would agree with the assertion. Fukuyama (1998) argued that aggression, violence, and war mentality are "hard-wired in men", and the global order presided over by women– who possess what Wollstonecraft called sexual virtues of domesticity, which, for Fukuyama translates as peace, cooperation, love, and coexistence– would be more peaceful.

[6] Refer to Adwaith, P.B., *et. al.* (2022), p. 1934

[7] Refer Gallup. (2002, October 8). Top Ten Findings About Public Opinion and Iraq. Gallup. https://news.gallup.com/poll/6964/top-ten-findings-about-public-opinion-iraq.aspx

[8] Hobbes argued for an artificial community bound by the fear of the Leviathan

[9] Machiavelli demonstrated, in his *magnum opus* The Discourses on Livy, how religion can be 'used' by the Republic as a tool for cultivating fear to meet political ends. He also cites an example of General Scipio making his commanders take a blood oath [as when a blood oath (to

fight till the last breath) is broken, entry to heaven is barred] while his troops were being buffeted by the magnificence of Hannibal.

[10] Refer to Elliott, S. (2001, October 30). THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING; The Ad Council, Criticised for its Response to Sept. 11, Moves Ahead With Plans to Remake Itself. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/30/business/media-business-advertising-ad-council-criticized-for-its-response-sept-11-moves.html

[11] Valenti quoted in Birkenstein (2018)

[12] As Yuri Bezmenov would argue, faith and God, something non-material, helps move society forward, and inspire its members to sacrifice for the common good [Bezmenov in Sengupta, A. (2020). *Understanding the Political Scenario of INDIA, CANADA, JAPAN, CHINA, the USA, FRANCE, etc.* [Video]. On YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9TviIuXPSE, 1:00:42-1:00:35. This may be read with General Boykin's narration of his meeting with a Somalian warlord post 9/11– "I knew that my God was bigger than his" – conferring a moral tilt to the dominant metanarrative that established 9/11 as an attack on the US civilisation itself [Refer BBC NEWS. (n.d.). The US Is "battling Satan" Says General. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3199212.stm]

[13] Refer to CNN transcript - *Newsday: Transition of Power: President-Elect Bush Meets With Congressional Leaders on Capitol Hill*. (n.d.). December 18, 2000. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0012/18/nd.01.html

[14] Ross Douthat quoted by Birkenstein (2018)

[15] Private First Class (Pfc.) is an entry-level rank in the US Army.

[16] Refer to *My Mother at Sixty-Six, English Poems, Poem by Kamala Das*. (n.d.). English for Students. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from http://www.english-for-students.com/my-mother-at-sixty-six.html

[17] In the allegory of the divided line, Plato [*Republic*, book 6, sec. 509d-509e] says that the physical objects or the objects of senses, inhabiting the third fraction of the line from the top, are just imperfect copies of the forms inhabiting the first part of the line. Refer to Plato, *Republic*, Book 6, section 509d. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=plat.+rep.+6.509d and Plato, *Republic*, Book 6, section 509e. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D6%3Asection%3D509e

[18] Cited by Halter (2006), *Introduction: America's Army Goes to War*, p. xvi.

[19] DeGay quoted by Matthew Hickley in *U.S. Military Develops Robocop Armour for Soldiers*. Daily Mail. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-447631/U-S-military-develops-Robocop-armour-soldiers.html

[20] Taken from Eisenhower's *Farewell Radio and Television Address to the American People, on January 17, 1961*. Refer to the 'Speeches' section at Eisenhower Presidential Library. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/eisenhowers/speeches

[21] Refer to Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention at Malouin, P. (n.d.). *Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States* (1933). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from: http://www.hudok.info/files/1114/3526/0588/Evi-Doc_12_Montevideo.pdf

[22] Refer Misra (2015), p. 12

[23] Powell quoted by David Armstrong in his essay in Harper's [Dick Cheney's Song of America]. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://harpers.org/archive/2002/10/dick-cheneys-song-of-america/

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THEORETICALLY POSITING THE DOCTRINE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (R2P) IN LIGHT OF THE SITUATION IN INDIAN-ADMINISTERED KASHMIR

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Introduction

The situation in Kashmir is not only complex but also majorly ignored in the usual academic circles that study self-determination, sovereignty, territorial integrity and interventionism, in light of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). While critical stances on human rights in the region are definitely supported by an adequate bank of literature (Malik, Zhilong, & Mubeen, 2020; Goldston & Gossman, 1991), the manner in which academia deals with mitigation is unidimensional i.e. through either balancing regional powers or debating constitutional legality (Behera, 2016; Indurthy & Haque, 2010; Hussain, 2010). Of late, there has been a steady rise in the discussion on whether R2P can be applied in this situation (Naveed, 2020; Chowhan, 2020; Raashed, 2020; Hussain & Mehmood, 2021; Qadri, 2021), as a method of granting emancipation to a population that has been trapped amidst territorial rivalries of three nuclear states – Pakistan, India and China. The region has been jarred with propaganda and crackdowns on

civil society, leading to an infantilization of local voices (Zargar, 2021). Thus, in light of such a situation, which is deteriorating on a regular basis and without any oversight by the international community, the question arises: can R2P be invoked in Kashmir?

This paper aims to answer this question by analyzing if the options under R2P can be tweaked in a tailor-made fashion for effective dissemination. Note must be taken of the fact that this paper will also scratch the legal surface but only critically. The theoretical, political and operational dimensions of the R2P lie at the core of this study. This paper will open with a brief dissection of the territorial factor involved in the conflict and go on to reflect upon the grounds for the application of R2P and finally discuss how it can be applied and the outcomes that are to be expected. The objective here is to shed further light on feasibility of sustainable solutions in terms of administering R2P in one of the most politically complex situations, and thereby set a precedent for an elaboration of the theoretical framework of R2P, pondering upon its possible revival as a dominant tool for the civilian protection and prevention of atrocity crimes. An additional objective would also be to outline the boundaries of discourse that exist under this domain and put things into perspective in terms of how trajectories can fan out.

Characterization of the Situation

One of the reasons why the situation in Kashmir can be rightfully termed as 'complex' is that the region is truncated across three States, as into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), India Held Kashmir (IHK) and China Occupied Kashmir (COK). Hence, the three states, all of whom bear nuclear weapons, are in a state of perpetual tension with regard to the ownership of the region (Snedden, 2013). However,

this paper will primarily deal with IHK owing to the genocide alert issued by Genocide Watch in 2019 after the revocation of Kashmir's special status by India (Stanton, 2019). Stanton argued that the situation in Kashmir not only fulfilled his own Ten Stages model but also Harff's (2012) risk factors thereby making the possibility of genocide inevitable. The blatant abuse of human rights in Kashmir is a phenomenon that has been ongoing for decades, especially after the Indian military had been granted the use of overreaching measures in 1990 via the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Egyesült, 2007), commonly referred to by its acronym – AFSPA. Ever since, there have been reports of forced disappearances, extra-judicial killings, the use of torture and sexual violence, all of which had been perpetrated by the Indian armed forces in order to terrorize Kashmiris, thereby subduing them into authority and enforcing a North Indian religious and ethnic domination over the local population (Chatterji, et al., 2009). The widespread use of rape as a weapon of war has also been documented along-with bureaucratic efforts to downplay any amount of coverage of the same (Kazi, 2014). The discovery of mass graves in 2011 caused a temporary stir in the international media without resulting in any concrete action. The present, post-special status scenario has seen consistent internet blackouts, the use of civilians as human shields, the use of lethal force to deter social movements and break up communal gatherings and the continued use of sexual violence as a tool to break the popular morale (Ellis-Petersen, 2020). Chowhan (2020) and Hussain & Mehmood (2021) argue that these conditions are suitable for the invocation of R2P as a temporary remedy that can be faced with multiple obstacles but must be considered nevertheless owing to the exhaustion of available options.

An Explainer on R2P

R2P is a doctrine of global political commitment adopted by the UN in 2005, with the aim of preventing and responding to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. It is a framework that places the primary responsibility for the protection of populations from mass atrocities on the state, but also acknowledges the responsibility of the international community to take timely and decisive action when the state is unable or unwilling to protect its population. R2P is based on the principle that sovereignty is not an absolute right, but rather a responsibility . This responsibility includes the protection of the population from mass atrocities, and the state has a duty to exercise this responsibility. If a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population, then the international community has a responsibility to intervene to protect the population (Bellamy, 2008).

R2P has three pillars. The first pillar emphasizes that the state has the primary responsibility to protect its population from mass atrocities. It encourages states to develop effective domestic institutions and policies to prevent and respond to such atrocities. The second pillar focuses on the international community's responsibility to assist the state in fulfilling its responsibility to protect. This can include providing technical assistance, capacity building, and diplomatic support. The third pillar emphasizes that if a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population from mass atrocities, then the international community has a responsibility to take timely and decisive action, in accordance with the UN Charter (Evans, Thakur, & Pape, 2014).

R2P has been a subject of intense debate and controversy since its adoption. Critics argue that R2P is an infringement on state sovereignty and could be used to justify intervention for political or economic interests (Bellamy, 2008). Proponents, on the other hand, argue that R2P is an important step towards preventing mass atrocities and ensuring that the international community takes action to protect populations when necessary (Evans, Thakur, & Pape, 2014). Since this paper deals with the modalities with the ongoing R2P discourse with regard to Kashmir, any discussion with regard to the concept in itself is beyond the scope – unless it plays directly into the debate regarding Kashmir, as stated in the sections to follow.

Legal Obstacles

 The primary legal obstacle with regard to the applicability of R2P is an equivalent of what Schmidt (2014) outlines in her work on the interplay of R2P and International Humanitarian Law in the case of Gaza. Schmidt's analysis on the applicability of R2P in Gaza allows one to draw similarities with the situation in Kashmir, both resembling occupied territories. While no clear legal precedence exists in terms of operational matters of R2P in such a scenario, Adams (2014) argues that in the case of Gaza, both Israel and Hamas have sovereign responsibilities and the parameter of this said responsibility ought to be defined by each actor's effective control. Thus, if we employ the same logic with regard to the case of IHK, it can be argued that India does exercise effective control over its respective Kashmir territory and is responsible for the protection of civilians.

 A caveat exists herein: unlike in Gaza, where the ontology of Israeli occupation is backed by international law, Kashmir's occupation is still, up to this point, an affective claim. The Instrument of Accession signed in 1947 between Maharaja Hari Singh and the Indian Government disrupts legal positivism towards the branding of India as an occupying power. The Instrument of Accession in 1947 granted India the grounds to legally extend jurisdiction to the valley. Kashmir acceded to India with the Maharaja signing the document as a mark of consent granted to the Indian Union, on behalf of the population of the erstwhile Princely State (Bose, 1999). A substantial portion of the acceded territories had receded to Pakistan in the immediate post-Independence period by means of conflict (Stein, 2010).

 This circles back to the question of demarcating political obligation on part of the Indian Administration to protect life through responsible State Action in the regions it enjoys territorial control. Although India enjoys de-facto territorial control over IHK, its control should extend to the entire valley as per the Instrument of Accession prior to any established mechanisms of a Plebiscite, advocated for by the UN Security Council, that may alter the legal status-quo.
In the present day, a rather obvious democratic question persists: is the *vox populi* of the Valley represented through the Maharaja's signature dated 1947? Seven decades serve as a substantial period for discourses to be rebranded and thus revisiting discursive spaces between the State and the people is of paramount importance. Current attempts by the Constitutional machinery of India to delimit political boundaries post the territorial alteration in 2019 needs to encompass the broader objective of looking into popular aspirations

centered around developmental goals, disarmament and political expression.

Political Obstacles

The political obstacles that arise echo the five structural problems put forth by Paris (2014). The legitimacy of R2P suffers from a 'mixed motives problem,' characterized by vague notions of altruism with inherent motives of self-interest which will in no way be non-existent in Kashmir. Neither is its success divorced from the 'counterfactual problem' nor will it be able to establish the conspicuous harms of non-intervention if it is actually applied and naturally lead to unwanted consequences. Libya shows the non-restrictive nature of mandates as a common trend in R2P operations, highlighting the 'end-state problem'.

Rana (2011) elaborates upon the doubtful position of India on R2P and his conclusion points towards the notion that political will is lacking in terms of supporting the doctrine. Any form of support towards an interventionist policy concerning the protection of human rights has the potential to raise fresh questions on Indian actions in Kashmir, which India is bound to avoid as she maintains that Kashmir is a 'domestic issue' (Noorani, 2019). Additionally, Rana (2011) mentions that India is particularly wary of the Third Pillar of the doctrine owing to geopolitical tensions with Pakistan and China. With frequent cross border skirmishes occurring on a near-regular basis, any form of military action will not only face heavy retaliation but also may lead to an absolute collapse of the humanitarian machinery that R2P would want to establish for the people of

Kashmir. India has the propensity to engage in further policing of the Kashmiri population if the hint of such initiatives is noticed amongst members of the international community.

India's skepticism towards a military intervention based on the Third Pillar, as highlighted by Rana (2011) is rational for varied reasons and must also resonate internationally. Firstly, R2P implementation does not hint at a bright record. Post its application in Libya, India's erstwhile Ambassador to the United Nations, Hardeep Singh Puri, stated how it gave R2P a bad reputation and that the only motive was the political destabilization of Libya. Puri also alleged that civilians had been armed and that the no-fly zone had been implemented only selectively (Virk, 2017). Thus, a military solution would do little to prevent the situation from being further turned into a power negotiation amongst regional Great Powers, implying a plethora of new security dilemmas encompassed in a realist narrative.

Overcoming the Odds

The question thus arises: keeping the above-mentioned dilemmas in mind, what can be done in terms of emancipation for the Kashmiri population, under the garb of the R2P? A part of the answer lies in revisiting several of the coercive and non-coercive methods that are enshrined under the doctrine, and the need for R2P to be a tailor-made process in terms of kickstarting a discourse on Kashmir. Firstly, further academic research must be conducted on India's effective control in Kashmir, such that no legal loopholes can be exploited by India in order to push-back against the evidence presented. Once a

growing body of literature is able to characterize this subject matter, India's settler colonial project can be exposed giving way to the amassing of evidence of Indian actions in the region, most of which has been heavily censored and suppressed (Qadri, 2021).

Secondly, two perspectives must be outlined when engaging with the process of initiating R2P. The first perspective is that the discourse should focus on the voices of the Kashmiri people and their needs for self-determination, which has largely been ignored (International Crisis Group, 2010). The optics on the crisis ought to shift in terms of how the conflict is viewed, which means that the region ought to be characterized as one which is occupied and not as a strategic zone that is sought after by Great Powers (Shah, 2021)—a narrative that leads to the dehumanization of the people, thereby making them expendable (Naveed, 2020). The situation must be internationalized such that greater checks and balances can be enforced by the international community on the actions of India (Raashed, 2020).

The second perspective is that there ought to be an overwhelming effort in operationalizing Pillars I and II of the doctrine. Chowhan (2020) explores various diplomatic methods that make themselves available including the extensive usage of the United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) Universal Periodic Review mechanisms along-with national human rights instruments which can function in tandem by making use of inter-state diplomacy and the strategic use of persuasion and pressure. In case these prove to be ineffective, Pillar

III can be operationalized by implementing economic sanctions and reducing Indian opportunities for business on a global basis. Livingston (2017) outlines this strategy in his example of Canada refusing to engage in business with Oil and Natural Gas Corporation of India (ONGC), a move which he refers to as 'investor activism' (Rock, et al., 2017).

 The function of these measures stated above must achieve three outcomes. The first outcome should be the reinstatement of Kashmir's special status under Article 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution. This would put political power back in the hands of the Kashmiri people, allowing them the sovereign right to determine their political and administrative future (Deshmane, 2019). The second outcome should be the repealing of the AFSPA, thereby reducing troop presence which would lead to a drastic reduction in draconian law enforcement practices (Kazi, 2014). The third outcome should be the eventual realization of a plebiscite to actualize Kashmiri self-determination as stated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 47 of 1948 (Raghavan, 2010). For this purpose, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) should be strengthened and given a broader mandate (Khan, 2014). Of late, the UNMOGIP has been subject to severe budget cuts which has hampered their operations (Press Trust of India, 2017). The UNMOGIP is of prime importance in the case of a plebiscite as it serves as the eyes and ears of the international community during a period of transition. It is also the body that ought to be tasked with the situation not relapsing into a Great Power rivalry, thus maintaining the moral sanctity of an R2P application.

Additional considerations

 Pressing political questions arise in terms of applying R2P to persuade India – why would she accept any form of intervention in the first place and consequently undermine her legal-sovereign claims further by upholding the principles of the intervention in a constricted sense? If moral persuasion is the way out in pressurizing India into action, how would the international community react when India counter-responds with the claim that if R2P has to be applied, it has to be applied uphold her responsibility as a state in her legally demarcated areas of sovereign presence, which includes IHK and well as POK. Thus, application of R2P, already perceived as a sleight of hand to underestimate state sovereignty, cannot further derail itself by manifesting in a politically incongruent manner if it has to maintain its legitimacy.

 Furthermore, R2P is based on respect for norms, principles of International Law, peace and human rights. With legal precedents favoring India's calls for status-quo-bilateralism, it is difficult to ascertain a degree of political compulsion to make India dilute the issue internationally, let alone garner support for the same in the UN Security Council. R2P focuses on the four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing – codified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which India isn't a party to. Thus, politically going ahead with R2P premised on the aforementioned provides India with a rallying factor to diplomatically oppose the move as it is in the sovereign right of any country to differ from assumed normativity of treaties. Thus the 'morality argument' involving pressurizing India to abide by the Rome Statute is non-existent.

It would be difficult to convince the world of a better alternative than an internalized process of bringing peace, preventing atrocities and actualizing the aspirations of the people. The strongest precedent that R2P can have in Kashmir is that of one which it adopted in Kenya in 2007-08, premised primarily on facilitating mediation. It is imperative to steer as far as possible from adopting coercion, pressure or international condemnation which will not only malign R2P as a principle detached from the realities of Kashmir, but will further invoke a legitimacy crisis.

Conclusion

It can thus be observed from the paper that moral, political and situational grounds can be argued to exist for the application of R2P in Kashmir and it is touted by many to be the only tool remaining which promises an ounce of salvation for the Kashmiri population. It goes without saying that the strategy outlined in the aforementioned sections will not be easy to achieve owing to existing geopolitical tensions, legal complexities, lack of explicit, actionable political grounds, on top of the perpetual relative ignorance of the situation in the United Nations Security Council (Hussain & Mehmood, 2021). This further puts an added responsibility on the academic as well as policy practitioners to initiate further literature on the issue such that more attention can be drawn to the situation which continues to put policy-makers in a conundrum.

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BREAKING BARRIERS: STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY BY ENSURING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.

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Abstract

Political participation is the cornerstone of any democracy. However, many democracies worldwide are struggling with a lack of women's participation in politics, largely due to patriarchal social norms. This issue has serious implications for a country's development and political culture. Without women legislators and administrators in decision-making bodies, policies may not be analyzed from a female perspective, leading to non-inclusive legislation. In order to achieve the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, India must prioritize the political participation of women. By doing so, India can truly achieve the essence of democracy, which is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Therefore, this paper highlights the urgent need to address the issue of women's political participation in India.

Keywords

Political participation, democracy, social norms, patriarchy.

Introduction

"YATRA NAARYASTHU PUJYANTHE RAMANTHU THATHRA DEVATHA"

"Pithah Rakshathi kaumaare, Bharthr Rakshathi Youvane, Puthro Rakshathi Vaardhakye Na Sthree Swathanthryam Arhathi"

-MANUSMRITI (CHAPTER 9(3))

These are two paradoxical verses from Manusmriti, an ancient legal code that existed in India. The first verse states that gods exist, where women are worshipped, but the second verse states that women do not deserve freedom and must constantly be protected by their fathers, husbands, and sons. These verses summarize the existence of women in India, wherein, on one hand, they are respected, but on the other hand, they are denied their basic rights. The same applies in the realm of political participation. It is a well-established fact that political participation is one of the foundations upon which democracy rests. It can be defined as the voluntary activities undertaken by the mass public to influence public policy, either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make policies (Uhlaner, C. J. ,2015).Since its Independence, India has made efforts to achieve better inclusivity of women in multiple spheres. Through its fundamental rights, the constitution has safeguarded women's honor and rights through articles 14-18. However, on closer analysis, we can find that India has been practising a form of aversion towards female participation in politics. Politics is always perceived as a male domain that has restricted women from participating in various aspects of the political process like elections, legislature, etc. Around the nation, we can find news about women candidates being denied seats to .

participate in elections. The last in the row was the case of Lathika Subhash, an ex-Mahila congress chief from Kerala, who shaved her head as a protest against not granting a ticket to the Kerala Legislative assembly. The fact that India was ranked 160th for representation of women in ministerial positions (IPU and UN Women, 2021) and other executive bodies reveals the extent of the low political participation of women. There are psychological, socio-cultural, and economic reasons for the same. The Indian social system has always associated femininity with qualities like calmness, care, motherhood, and submissiveness, which are perceived as negative attributes of politics. However, India has also witnessed dynamic movements like Chipko and the Anti-arrack movement, which had a serious social impact. These incidents reveal that women are competitive and socially oriented, and can efficiently take part in politics and shape and share power.

Even in the 21st century, when women occupy 50% of the population, there are only 102 M.P.s in Lok Sabha, which has 545 members, is not at all representative. Efforts like 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha were not passed and continue to be a dream. When India, as a nation, is at a juncture towards becoming a world power, it cannot deny women's voices. And we must remember that politics ceases to be politics if it fails to inculcate the voices of the voiceless. Overall, it can be stated that women's Political participation must be understood at the confluence of social, economic, and political reality to gain a better understanding of the problem and the factors that contribute to this issue. This article tries to understand the reasons that hinder women's active political participation and its effect on democracy and suggests measures to strengthen the level of participation and democracy in general.

Understanding the Barriers

India and the low level of women's political participation must be understood from different dimensions. There are socio-cultural, political, and economic realities that need to be addressed while understanding the problem of the lack of women's political participation. However, these factors are interconnected and predominantly influenced by the patriarchal nature of Indian society.

1.1 Socio-Cultural Factors

Most of the South Asian countries are patriarchal in nature and this has an influence on the social and political participation of women. India is not an exception to this. The strong cultural norms and gendered restrictions prevent women from actively engaging in the political sphere. India's social reality is rooted in the belief that women are incapable of holding political power because their natural traits are not oriented towards the traits of a strong leader. Ameen Nisha & Vezhaventhan (2018) analyzed the level of political participation of women in India and other nations to understand the reasons for the low level of their political participation. The study found that India lags behind other nations in political participation due to its socio-cultural, religious, and political causes. India was ranked 148 for representation of women in government and other executive bodies. Despite the increase in the number of female M.P.s, the number is still below the global average of 24.5% (as per 2019 data)[1]. Similar studies on the theme of women's political participation have found other reasons that prove, how gendered norms prevent women's political participation. A recent study conducted by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW) found that less than a tenth of more

than 50,000 contesting in national and state elections are women[2]. Singh, A and Choudhary, S. (2021) in their study titled 'Women Participation in Indian Politics: Struggle for Visibility' focused on the various barriers in the path of women's political participation. The research states multiple reasons that hinder women's participation in politics like male preponderance, lack of financial resources, abusive treatment faced by female party members, and constricted social perceptions about female leadership. The social expectations about women and their roles have become serious barriers that prevent women from actively participating in politics. The political environment is not that favorable for women as they face gendered biases, sexism, and social media attacks during their political course. A shocking aspect of socio-cultural norms is that both men and women subscribe to the gendered norms and believe that politics shouldn't be a domain for females. (Vissandjée et al., 2006) in their study 'Women's Political Participation in Rural India states that both males and females had similar perceptions about women's political participation and considered politics to be a sphere inappropriate for women. Both genders believed that women lacked certain faculties required for politics. These included communication skills, leadership skills, and basic reading and writing skills. Even when older women are elected as sarpanch, their age is the deciding factor. Permission was always a necessity for women to engage in any activity. Even after having employment, women found it difficult to participate in other activities as the whole responsibility of the house rested upon them. Some scholars attribute psychological barriers like fear to participate in elections and lack of public speaking skills, as reasons for women's political participation (Shvedova, 2002). However, this

must be read together with the social conditioning and gendered socialization that women in India have been receiving over the centuries. Hence, we can say that Indian women are constrained by the age-old patriarchal norms that are strongly intertwined with culture and religion.

1.2 Lack of Inclusivity at decision-making bodies-Political constraints

Since its Independence, India has tried to ensure women's political participation in decision-making bodies. The 73rd amendment of the Indian constitution led to the legalization of the Panchayati Raj system to ensure democratization from the grass-root level. Article 243D of the constitution mandates that 1/3rd of the total seats in Panchayat must be reserved for women. The policy aimed at increasing women's political participation at the local level. Studies have shown that the legislation was proved to be successful in increasing women's political participation at the local level. (O'Connell, S.D, 2020) found that this mandate for reservation significantly contributed to the increase in the number of female candidates who contested in national and state elections since the mid-1990s. However, women's representation in important offices remains low. . Female representation in state governments lags significantly behind and thus excluding them from seats of institutional power (Gulati, N., & Spencer, E. 2021). Currently, West Bengal is the only state with a woman Chief Minister. As per the data collected by IGC about state government leadership, Six Indian states don't have female ministers. None of the states even have 1/3rd of female ministers in their governments. The highest proportion is for Tamil Nadu having 13% (Gulati, N., & Spencer, E. 2021). 68% of states

have less than 10% of women representation in leadership roles. Since Independence, the level of women being elected to Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are very low. The average number of female Rajya Sabha members is 9.5%[3]. Multiple reasons can be attributed to the same. (Khanna, 2009) in her article 'Political Participation of Women' in India states that women remain at the periphery of political power due to cultural constraints and due to lack of political consciousness. Gate Keepers within political parties are reluctant to give seats to women candidates, and those independent candidates seem to be in a weak position regarding their chance of victory. Hence, it can be stated that women face political barriers in competing in elections and these barriers are rooted in the gendered perceptions of their male counterparts.

Figure 1. Proportion of female ministers in state governments

(Source:https://www.theigc.org/blog/leaders-and-citizens-womens-political-participation-in-india/)
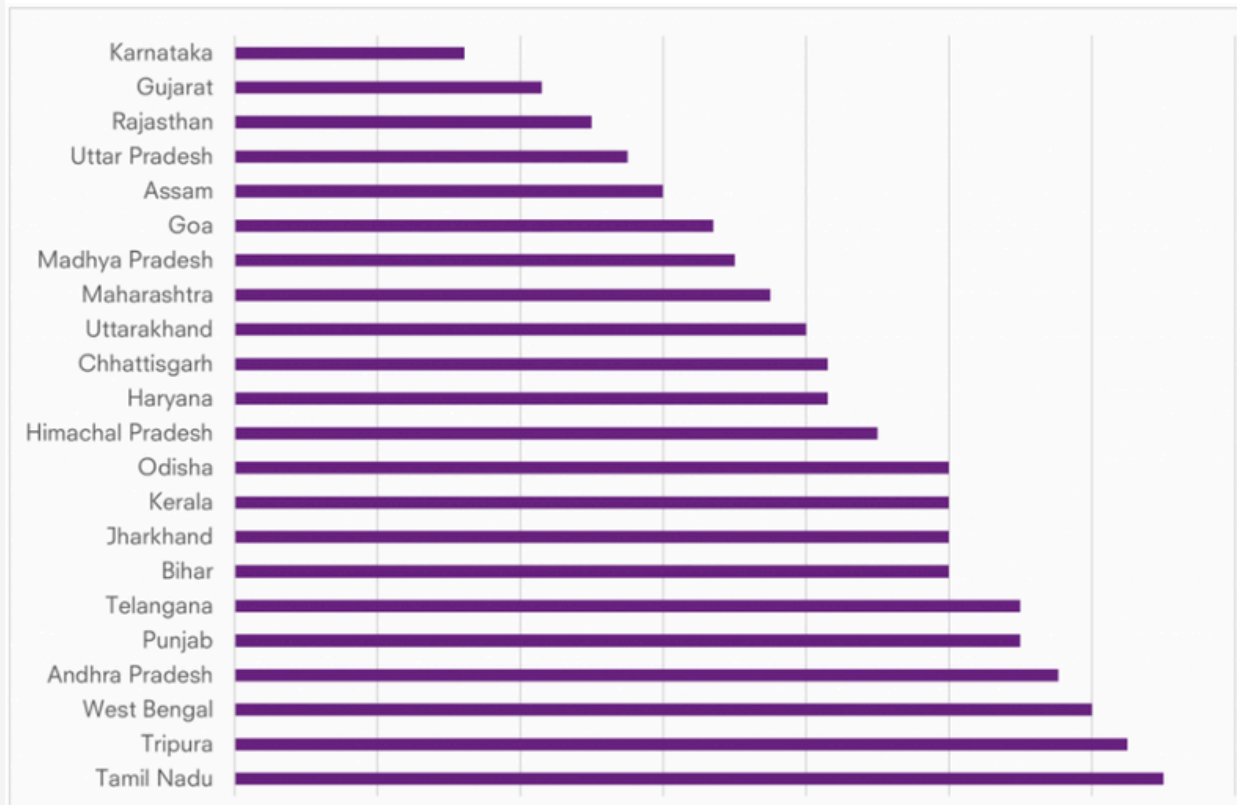
1.3 Violence Against Women

Violence against women is a general and specific issue with varying implications. is a pervasive issue with severe implications for both individuals and society as a whole. In India, this issue is particularly prevalent, with women experiencing various forms of violence at alarming rates. This violence takes many forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, honor killings, and female infanticide. Additionally, violence against women is also found in the political sphere, where women are often subjected to physical and verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and other forms of discrimination. This not only creates a hostile work environment for women in politics but also discourages women from entering the political arena altogether. (Nussbaum, 2011) (cited in Opoku, 2020) states that 24% of men in India committed sexual violence against women at some point in their life. Sexual crimes against women have increased by 70% within two decades. In 2018, India was ranked as the most dangerous country for women to live[4].

The issue is equally prevalent in the political realm of India. Women politicians in India have been subjected to physical, mental, and emotional abuse. A study by the Centre for Social Research titled Violence Against Women in Politics revealed that the incidence of physical and verbal abuse is higher in India than in Pakistan. In the survey conducted across India, Nepal, and Pakistan, 45% of respondents (women politicians) from India reported having faced physical abuse. (Henderson, 2018)(cited in Opoku, 2020) states that women political leaders face psychological and physical violence, which forces them to abandon politics and withdraw their candidatures. (Godin. M, 2021) As per the report by Amnesty

International, women politicians, on average, receive 113 problematic tweets of verbal violence. The report analyzed 1,14,716 tweets to 95 female Indian politicians and found that 1 out of 7 tweets were abusive in nature[5]. This abuse is severe in the case of Muslim women politicians as 55% of the online abuses were directed against Muslim women politicians. This reveals the extent of violence that women politicians have to face.

Overall, it can be stated that women in India face multiple barriers with regard to political participation and there must be efficient policies to ensure that female participation and representation is ensured at all levels. Such factors have raised questions about the values of equality and justice and also about the idea of democracy upheld by the constitution. This is a serious issue that can hamper the democratic values of the nation and could also lead to its erosion.

Making way for Women

Studies point out that women face psychological barriers with regard to political participation. This has roots in the social conditioning that they have received. So, the first step towards achieving higher participation would be to equip the present generation of women with confidence and skills which are considered to be necessary for politics. Similar policies were adopted by nations like Rwanda where women candidates were given leadership training and such initiatives helped Rwanda achieve more than 50% of women's representation in their government ("Revisiting Rwanda Five Years After Record-breaking Parliamentary Elections," 2018).Government can provide similar training at village levels through self-help groups that ensure the psychological empowerment of women. Training can be provided for public speaking, team building, and building self-confidence. As per the Global Gender Gap Index 2022, India ranks 107th out of 153

countries in terms of Educational attainment, which shows that education can play an important role in determining political participation. Government must continue and strengthen its existing policies and must devise new measures to increase the enrolment of girl children in schools. Government must promote equivalency schools wherein women who couldn't complete their education, can attain education at any point in their lives.

After implementing such policies, there must be a political consensus in passing The Women's Reservation Bill or The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill to better represent women in Parliament, as this would ensure that women have a voice in influencing the legislative process. Such a reform would also motivate millions of women in India to be actively involved in politics and create their space. It can be clearly understood that low level of political participation has its root in the patriarchal norms and social norms that consider politics as a male domain. Here, schools have a better role in creating awareness that politics is a level playing field. Such efforts in creating a social discourse about the need for increased political participation of women can reap benefits in the long run. Inaccessibility within political party is another major issue. In India, political parties are the primary means through which parliamentary and state legislative elections are contested and triumphed, making them the fundamental political apparatus (Ghosh, 2022). Despite political parties in India making promises in their constitutions to ensure adequate representation for women, records from elections reveal that they offer very few party tickets to female candidates in reality (Rai & Spary, 2019). Hence, the idea of an open space for participation in election remains bleak for women. However, studies suggest how women legislators can perform better in terms of economic indicators in their constituencies compared to their male counterparts (Ghosh, 2022), which shows why there must a be legal

interventions to make reservations for women necessary for the parliamentary elections as this can open wider opportunities for women to contest in elections.

India and its young generation of women are not free from social narratives based on patriarchal norms. Thus, the priority would be to promote positive leadership cultures in schools across India as schools have a more significant psychological impact on children. This can be facilitated by mandating student councils across all schools and promoting girl children in influential leadership positions, as this would provide an avenue for them to overcome their inhibitions and fears. The government must focus on making schools the centre for creating future leaders and for rewriting the social narratives about women. Such informed and focused policies would ensure that India is able to achieve higher levels of women's participation and representation in the future.

Conclusion

The future of any nation depends on how its female population is treated. India, when embarking on its journey as a superpower, needs to ensure that women also get equal representation in spearheading our nation and its future. Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Any initiatives towards correcting democracy must start from the issue of women's political participation as this would be the stepping stone towards other changes as well. Significant studies show that increased women's participation can ensure better development (Dang, 2022) and would ensure that policies legislated and implemented are designed in such a way that it takes in the concerns of women.

Changing times requires changing perspectives. India must reconsider its priorities and give increased importance to the issue of women's participation. More discourses about women's participation must be encouraged in India. Such moves can surely aid India's economic and social goals in a transitionary phase. This would also ensure that India is a democracy of all and not a few.

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INTEGRATING (?) A FRACTURED REGION: INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SOUTH ASIAN INTEGRATION

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Abstract

South Asia is the world's most populous region and has a burgeoning population of young, talented individuals. Unfortunately, in 2022, it attracted concern because of a polycrisis of climate, economic, and political shocks upending the febrile regional stability. This essay, taking an Indian perspective, derives motivation from the tumultuous year to advocate renewed efforts at regional integration. It relies on a review of literature on this vexed question, discussing the ontological contours of regional integration in International Relations and South Asia's identity, tracing the impact of bilateral ties of India with its neighbours in the region on this politically disjointed but geographically and historically united unit. The essay discusses two kinds of challenges: first, those that attend nearly all regions, viz. riparian and boundary disputes; and second, challenges like ethno-religious polarisation and the acrimonious legacy of the Partition, which are unique to the region. It tries to conclude on an optimistic note, underscoring the few successful efforts from India at peaceful cooperation to face shared challenges, adopting them as templates for integration.

Keywords: South Asia, Regional Integration, Indian Foreign Policy, SAARC, Bilateral Relations.

Introduction

In 2022, South Asia, even with conservative and understated statements that punctuate diplomatic communication, was in the eye of the storm. Whereas the region has bled in the polarisation affected by religious extremism and terrorism, the previous year saw the fallout of more urgent, novel, yet no less structural devils plaguing the region. 1/3rd of Pakistan was effaced during the cataclysmic floods, costing the exchequer over $30 billion (The World Bank Group, 2022). The Sri Lankan economy collapsed, convulsing it into popular mobilisation against political and military elites. The heretofore rock-solid Awami League dispensation was shaken by public discontentment over its crackdown on the opposition and attempts at skulduggery in the scheduled general election this year (Molla, 2022).

If instability and unpredictability were the most oft-employed terms referencing South Asia, the absence of a unified front was a common worriment. Emerging from the embers of British imperialism, sharing a heritage stretching to the Indus Valley civilisation, encompassing common customs and challenges, South Asia is slated to be consequential: the world's most populous sub-region, hosting 1.8 billion people (World Population Review, 2023); a pivot to Central, Southeast, and West Asia; and promising an economic miracle with a growth of 7.4% (Asian Development Bank, 2022). It is poised to conjoin best practices across the region to ensure human security, except that intractable territorial, riparian, ideological, and economic disputes among the States have clouded their vision.

This essay will seek to analyse the world's least integrated region by first studying the contours of Indian foreign policy, the largest State and aspirational great power in the region, thereby proceeding to a brief overview of India's bilateral relations with its neighbours in the region, linking them to the causes of the fraught project of integration/cooperation in South Asia, and prospects against this norm.

Regional Integration: Contours

A brief detour to the concept of regional integration is unavoidable, which thrives in interdependence liberalism. Haas defines integration as the process whereby 'political actors are persuaded to shift their loyalties . . . toward a new centre whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states' (Obydenkova, 2008). David Mitrany's functionalist theory of integration is based on enduring peace in transnational technical and economic collaboration. Ernest Haas propounded the neofunctionalist theory of integration of the inevitable "spill-over" of functionalism into political integration. Keohane and Nye Jr. conceptualised the evolving nature of complex interdependence, wherein conditions of "low politics" of welfare outstrip realpolitik, military power is left redundant, and the State's power disperses to transnational and non-state actors.

Regionalism is a union of neoliberal and realist ideas—securing material interests and a balance of power through cooperation. While neoliberals underscore the declining transaction costs, peace, and information exchange, realists posit that integrated regions are the culmination of the egotistical State's quest for stability in an anarchic

world system. Though approached from distinct vantage points, regionalism, stretching from the Hellenic League to the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has secured citizens, supported common defence and foreign policy, erasure of mutual suspicion, and impelled closer economic and trade convergences, often coalescing into a customs union (e.g.: Gulf Cooperation Council or the GCC) or common market (e.g.: European Union or the EU).

Drivers of Indian Foreign Policy towards South Asia

A presumption of hegemony owing to its geographical, demographic, and economic vastness vis-à-vis its neighbours informs India's[1] response to South Asian integration. Throughout the political spectrum, prescriptions to obtain this historical promise of preponderance are at variance; but if the telos of India's grand strategy is geopolitical revisionism—restoring India's lost primacy as a global power—a peaceful, integrated, and economically vibrant neighbourhood under India's leadership figures prominently.

Indian foreign policy toward the neighbourhood, in particular, is a dependent variable of national interests: for India, they range from the protection of sovereignty, which is immutably significant, owing to India's colonial past; promotion of economic opportunities through openings for trade and commerce; and, of late, projection of soft power[2].

More dated frames of reference can be recovered from the *Shantiparva*, where Bhishma opines on the impermanence of friends and enemies pitted against interests. Indic strategic thought concretises with Kautilyan *Rajamandala* in his *Arthashastra* (circa 3rd century BC), considering inevitable politics of hedging, suspicion, and offensive defence against the neighbour (*ari*), the first of the many concentric circles that surround the *vijigsu*. Based on power equations, the nature of the ideal policy, motivations of actors, and chance factors, they may pursue a policy of *sandhi*, *vigraha*, *asana*, *yana*, *samshraya*, or *dwaidhibhava*[3].

Policies have also been shaped by tangibles: common land frontiers with all South Asian neighbours and sea frontiers with Sri Lanka and the Maldives, both of which have provided the region insularity to develop a distinctive identity and sea lanes of communication for the exchange of goods and ideas; India inherited not only the largest military and ammunition from the colonial regime but also its outlook toward the small Himalayan states like Nepal and Bhutan as buffers against China. Jawaharlal Nehru inspired India's (foreign and) neighbourhood policy by concocting a mix of his idealism, opposition to racism, and socio-economic transformation on "socialistic" lines, with realism, compelling him to see South Asia as the exclusive sphere of influence for India[4]. Envisaged in the crucible of the Cold War, it privileged non-alignment and Panchsheel[5].

With Indira Gandhi, South Asia became an area of dominance, and India's outlook, jaded by the wars in the 60s, became hyper-realist. Though Indira exercised a soft hand with Nepal and Sri Lanka, the

domestic environment impelled her to launch a successful campaign for the independence of East Pakistan in 1971, decisively swinging the power equation with Pakistan in India's favour. However, with the Gujral Doctrine and Modi's Neighbourhood First policy in the neoliberal era, India is both militarily and economically capable to be the provider of the region, envisioning a relationship of mutual benefit for trade and connectivity. It is more conciliatory, to conserve trust and regional integrity[6].

India's Bilateral Relations with South Asian Countries

The transfiguration of these principles into policy will be briefly analysed by looking into India's bilateral ties. India and Bhutan are well integrated, their ties governed by the Treaty of Friendship (1949), based on Panchsheel but that had, till 2007, accommodated India's predominance in Bhutan's diplomatic engagements. They've synergised security cooperation: Bhutan expelled ULFA militants in 2004; India neutralised a Chinese incursion in Doklam in 2017. The Jaldakha Agreement epitomises techno-financial assistance from India in hydropower, though, Bhutan owes 68% (Ministry of Finance, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2021) debt to India and is at the wrong end of a trade deficit.

Since Solih's Presidency, India and the Maldives have rediscovered warmth, with Solih following an India-first policy. He has undone the the ghosts of the Yameen Presidency, when the Maldives had tilted

into China's zone, endorsed the docking of China's Navy at Maldivian ports, and bandwagoned atop the BRI. India was responsive to Abdullah Gayoom's plea to neutralise an attempted coup in 1988; even today, it coordinates with Malé in the IORA and pledged credit lines worth over 100 million dollars to build climate-resilient infrastructure (Moorthy, 2022). It has integrated its oceanographic radar systems. However, the archipelago is gripped by a debt trap, apart from an Islamist insurgency, behind the fringe India Out Campaign.

India's ties with Sri Lanka have been hostage to their domestic politics: India had to walk the tightrope between Tamil sentiments and bilateral ties with Lankans during the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgency. The Indira-Sirima Pact evinced India's accommodativeness, accepting 600,000 Tamils, rendered stateless by the Sinhala-Only Act. India also ceded Kuchhaitivu to Sri Lanka. Rajiv Gandhi dispatched the infamous Indian Peace-keeping Force to Sri Lanka to disarm the LTTE under the Gandhi-Jayawardene Pact. India had partnered with the US and Japan to provide relief after the Boxing Day tsunami. During the economic meltdown, it extended $4.5 billion (Gupta, 2022) in direct assistance, currency swaps, and credit line transfers. However, China looms large on the Lankan horizon, with Sri Lanka in a debt trap of the BRI, losing the Hambantota Port to the Chinese. It cancelled the Eastern terminal project of India and Japan on China's bidding and has accused India of intervening in the 2015 elections.

China looms larger at Kathmandu, with which New Delhi had inked an archaic Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950, envisioning a relationship interpreted by Baburam Bhattarai as one of imperialism (Jha, 2014). After the ascension of King Mahendra, Nepal cosied with Beijing, signing a secret intelligence- and arms-sharing pact in the 1980s; it has pledged multi-billion dollar projects in Nepalese services and infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative. India's imposition of economic blockade in 1989 and 2015 jeopardised the "roti-beti ka rishta," plunging the Nepalese economy into China's orbit. Besides the Kurtha-Jayanagar and Janakpur railway links, India has contributed little in connectivity and has used access to Kolkata Port as a trump card to coerce Nepalese leaders to do its bidding. China has, meanwhile, become the largest ODA partner to Nepal.

India also kindles nationalist responses in Bangladesh, where Mukherji (2007) cautions the "gratitude" for the military and material succour in the liberation war has worn off. Allchin (2018) goes a step further to elucidate the insecurity of Bangladeshi forces and politicians in India taking a protagonist's position in the story of their nationhood. Therefore, they desire a degree of autonomy from India, never concretely or empirically defined, which surrounds it on three sides and is the upper riparian State for rivers like Brahmaputra and Teesta.

Due to a string of Islamist military autocracies till 1991, it has become a feasting ground for extremist Islamism. No permanent arrangement on river-water-sharing has been inked, and India has allegedly diverted waters from the Ganges by the Farakka barrage.

The onset of the Hasina era has arrested the decline in Indo-Bangladesh ties: her Awami League has revived Bangladesh's secular character, and Indian and Bangladeshi intelligence has collaborated against Islamist outfits. During summit-level talks in Dhaka in 2015, the landmark land boundary agreement assuaged Bangladesh. During Hasina's visit, a Memorandum of Understanding on using Kushiyara's water was inked; rail-road connectivity has been facilitated between Dhaka and Shillong, and Dhaka and Kolkata; and Bangladesh has opened Chittagong and Mongla for sea trade.

On the other hand, Myanmar and Afghanistan desire closer integration with India. Bilateral ties with Naypyitaw and Kabul have ebbed and waned owing to domestic circumstances; moreover, historically, both have been at the periphery of India's preoccupation. With the onset of mujahideen and Taliban in the '80s, it lost the plot to Zia's Pakistan. Between 2001 and 2020, India, handing over $3 billion in aid (Chandra, 2020), was the largest regional donor to Kabul, and has built dams, the Parliament, hospitals, and rehabilitation centres. In 2011, the relations were upgraded to a Strategic Partnership. India and the Taliban regime are also making overtures, as India has re-opened its embassy in Kabul. Though Naypyitaw and Delhi have an agreement to promote investment as well as a border trade agreement, they suffer from the lack of infrastructure; bilateral trade is a mere $12.8 million (Pant, 2016). Relations declined as Myanmar went closer to China under Ne Win, as India remained reticent on democratisation.

India's most adversarial relations are with Pakistan, bred in post-Partition riots, and four wars over J&K and East Pakistan. Islamabad's sponsorship of terrorism and separatism since the 1980s has been acknowledged by the United Nations Security Council. Pakistan is in a fruitless quest for parity with India because of which anti-India nationalism has been stoked across party lines. Pakistan suspended bilateral trade over the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A; India has lately threatened to rethink the Indus Water Treaty, a rare partnership between the two enemies. All transport between the countries has been annulled, including the Samjhauta and Thar Expresses, and the Lahore-Delhi and Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus links. The India-Pakistan border was described as the most dangerous place by Bush.

Challenges to Regional Integration

Since South Asia lacks a regional identity, this sweeping overview was geared toward spreading in relief the imperious factors clipping potential convergences in South Asia, which will now be analysed broadly, from a regional perspective. Prima facie, India is hounded by what Shyam Saran refers to as a challenge of proximity: each country shares legacies with India and is at pains to craft an idiosyncratic identity; those, like Bangladesh, who have succeeded at imagining a national myth settle securely with New Delhi, while others, like Pakistan and Nepal, are on tenterhooks. India's development assistance, secondly, cannot portend a level playing field owing to the irreconcilable political economy and demography across the region. India's economy, at $3.18 trillion, is the region's largest, followed by Bangladesh, at $418 billion. India has managed to

diversify and digitise its economy; the same hasn't been replicated across the region.

Resultantly, intra-regional trade[7], an indicator of regional integration, is among the lowest, at 6.5%; well-integrated regions like East Asia peak at ~35%. South Asians, due to absent trade networks, are trigger-happy, not having raised the opportunity cost of conflict. The share has varied from 5.1% of India to over 50% of Nepal, owing to differential access to global markets. The South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA), inked in Colombo, prepared the ground for the South Asian Free Trade Area, enforced in 2006; but neither addressed the needs of Least Developed Countries nor did away with sensitive lists for thorough trade liberalisation. Instead, members competed against each other for greater market share: India's notion of a customs union by 2020 /'30 was thus stillborn.

Economic integration is far-fetched because South Asia, churned in acrimony in 1947-8, is composed of sovereignty hawks who despise forgoing a fragment of state power for regional good. South Asia has hard borders, belying a millennium of shared culture; frontiers (e.g.: Northeast India and Rakhine) are hyper-militarised and seen not as bridges but barbed wires against external threats. Karim (2014) argues in light of the Hegemony Stability Theory—that since South Asia is contested by India and Pakistan, smaller States like Bangladesh and Nepal have been rendered insecure, and thus the idea of SAARC was also mooted by President Zia-ur Rehman in 1985, the first meeting materialising at Dhaka, headquartered at Kathmandu.

Regional integration presupposes a benevolent hegemon, but in South Asia, India, notwithstanding its interventions in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Doklam, has been unwilling to shoulder that responsibility. Its geopolitics has been Sino- and Pakistan-centric; even in soft politics, Indian promises have met with bureaucratic delays. Despite an Eminent Persons' Group, India hasn't reworked the Treaty of Friendship with Nepal to make it equitable; India's touted hydropower cooperation with Bhutan over Pnatsangchu & Kholongchu has run into financially unfeasible delays; and India has been the least accommodative in lifting NTBs to comply with SAFTA (Nayak, 2022).

Unsurprisingly, India is cast as a power-hungry "big brother" to fan nationalist vote banks in domestic politics of neighbouring States, e.g.: BNP's Islamism in Bangladesh, Pakistan People's Party in Pakistan, Maoists in Nepal, or Abdullah Yameen in the Maldives[9]. In India, too, federal relations have impinged on the Centre's dealing with these countries: for instance, Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been unwilling to compromise on Teesta (Shankar, 2017). This is not to deny the emerging reality of increasing salience of sub-national units, including states and cities, in directing a country's foreign affairs to extract something beneficial for themselves in the bargain. It is futile, for instance, to envision connectivity between India and Bhutan and keep Assam and Sikkim out of the picture (ibid). China, a Communist autocracy, meanwhile, outscores India in efficiency: it has separated trade and ODA from politics, has blanketed the region with BRI, and its trade with South Asia is double of India ($59 billion vs $30 billion).

Bright Spots

But there are silver linings in this dismal picture. The SAARC failed due to bilateral disputes and the non-compliance with Article X, but the littoral States of the Bay of Bengal have formed the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC); with most democracies and emerging economies, interdependencies on trade and investment have been readily identified. Unlike the SAARC, primarily based on strategic interests, BIMSTEC locates 14 sectors critical for human security, like climate change and fisheries, with actionable objectives and leads countries to utilise their sectional expertise. Headquartered in Dhaka, it also encompasses the BIMSTEC Business and Transport Working Group. Similarly, after the Kathmandu Summit of the SAARC, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) went ahead with operationalising the passenger and cargo protocol, harmonising customs clearance and transit procedures, and facilitating multiple entry/exit points under the SAARC Motor Vehicles Agreement to incentivise trade and tourism.

The SAARC had cultivated enduring consensus on issues of human security and trade by signing the Convention on Prevention of Terrorism (1987) and Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002). The ceasefire at LoC in 2021 excited a ray of hope. Notwithstanding their mutual rivalry, India and Pakistan partner in international forums, recently at COP-28[9] and the WTO Ministerial[10] (Mishra, 2022). The potential for cultural and Track-III diplomacy is immense: Indian and Pakistani public intellectuals

interact despite harshness in hard politics; Bollywood, cricket, and common festivals bind the region together. The Buddhist circuit spread around Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal (BBIN) and the Kartarpur Corridor are examples of connectivity fostered through religion.

Conclusion

To conclude, South Asia, with a fledgling transport connectivity, under-developed intra-regional trade, and geopolitical tempers, is the least integrated region of the world. India is in a peculiar situation—raring to take the mantle of a great power but shaky in its neighbourhood. Karim (2014) says the ethical imperative to foster connectivity needs to be matched with economic pragmatism, and transport links will function as feeders for supply chains and amity. While riparian and border disputes occur in all regions, Partition legacies and religious extremism are idiosyncratic to South Asia. As long as interdependencies in the economy (e.g.: the South Asian Free Trade Agreement), healthcare (e.g.: SAARC satellite), and healthcare (e.g.: supply chains for vaccines) are not created from a regional platform like SAARC, South Asia won't find common solutions and veer its way towards crisis. India cannot shrug responsibility from playing a key role in such efforts. However, it needs to check the discordant notes from its policy circles, media, and the public at large, all of which emit a pernicious air to its otherwise benevolent ventures.

India, in a critical analysis, stands guilty of wielding imperious instruments like economic blockades to influence policies.

The diversification of international relations of its neighbours should be seen as an opportunity for propping extra-regional cooperative frameworks, rather than, despite the efforts of history, preying on its region of influence by extra-regional powers. India inherited the colonial legacy of hegemonizing South Asian affairs, but if it is any serious about leading the Global South, the sooner it sheds this skin, the better. should deploy its successes in running a federal democracy in the neighbourhood, ached with vicissitudes of identity and representation. Any project of regional integration should be decoupled from core geopolitical issues and instead concentrated around human security because if the world's most populous sub-region fails, the world will fail.

Endnotes

[1] To respond to the demands of the question, this essay shall restrict itself to India's foreign policy and geostrategy vis-à-vis South Asia, without sauntering in the otherwise bustling corridors of the foreign policies of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal et al, which occasionally coincide but are often sharply at odds with India's.

[2] Joseph S Nye Jr.'s terminology, whereas EH Carr referred to it as power over opinion. See Sikri (2020) for this incisive problematisation

[3] Peace, war, neutrality, coercion, alliance, and duplicity respectively

[4] Despite being a practical idealist, Nehruvian stance toward the region was realist and occasionally hegemonic, notwithstanding, as

Dr. Raja Mohan has argued, the paucity of resources to find solutions for the region.

[5] Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence.

[6] Terms like Gujral Doctrine, Neighbourhood First, and Panchsheel, when applied to South Asia—and elsewhere—are ideal types; the praxis of foreign policy is a negotiation of prevailing circumstances, domestic pressures, and principles. As the following sections will hint, Indian policy has been rather ad hoc with bare fundamentals intact.

[7] See Appendix

[8] Pragmatism supplants anti-India rhetoric once these parties assume power: Prachanda approached the Indian Ambassador when embattled by cracks in his coalition in his first term; PPP, when in power between 2008 and 2013, had vociferously advocated for trade with India.

[9] Chaired by Pakistan, the G77, also crucially represented by India acting as a bridge between the Global North and South, attained the right to loss and damages in an otherwise disappointing Conference of Parties at Sharm-el-Sheikh.

[10] India and Pakistan, along with countries like South Africa and Uruguay, have demanded flexibility in IPRs, especially in the pharmaceutical sector.

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Appendix
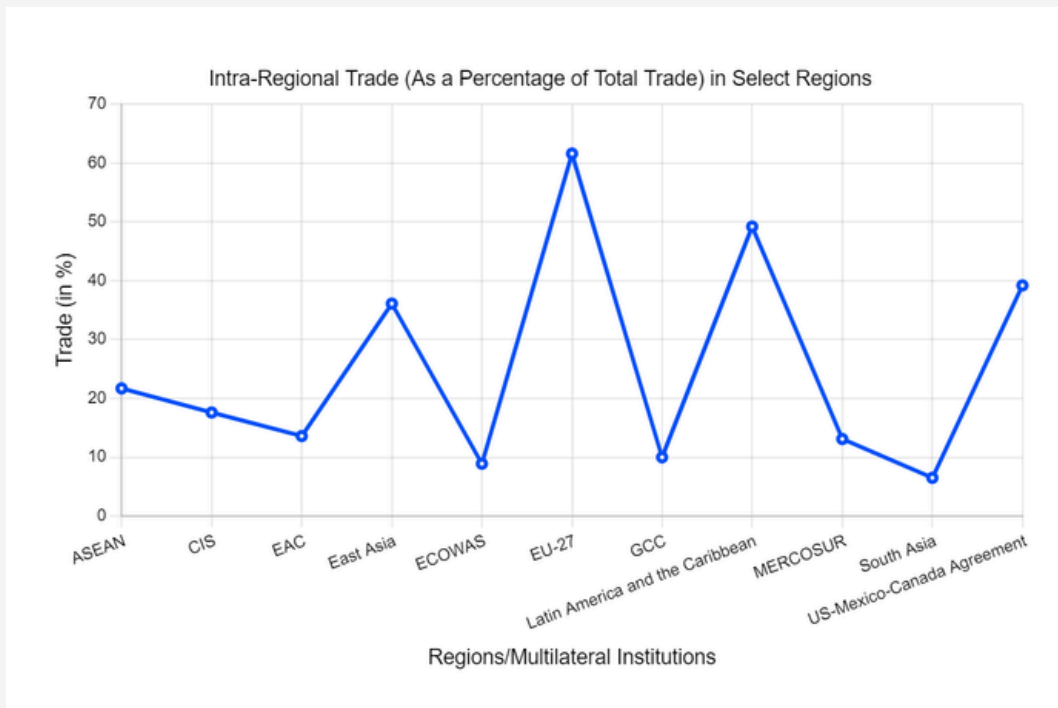
Data sourced from the 2021 International Trade Statistics Yearbook, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations; line graph designed by self.

THE INDIAN NATION: IDEATION THROUGH CONFLICTS

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The recent victory of Simranjit Singh Mann of the separatist political party Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) hints at the resurfacing of a subdued secessionist ideology in Punjab (The Hindu, 2022). Typically, a secessionist ideology suggests a fracture in the idea of a nation. Here, I use the word nation with ample caution and am aware of the different debates it espouses (Gupta & Mantri, 2020).

These fractures, with their roots in discontentment that communities may have with the state, are in no way novel. They represent historic demands which predate the very foundation of the Indian nation-state. Therefore, to attempt to understand these present-day fractures, one must revisit the processes that developed this idea.

The construction of the idea of the Indian Nation has been heavily debated among scholars (Subrahmanyam, 2015). These debates are especially conflicted when it comes to the impact of colonialism on the subcontinent as well as the contribution of the colonial experience to the idea of the Indian Nation. To summarize this conflict a potent question that needs to be asked is: Did the colonial experience fracture the core patterns of Indian society or were the colonial masters compelled to adapt to native styles and merely preside in a glorified manner over the more subterranean movements of Indian history.

This article attempts to present this debate and their relevance to the Indian state in the twenty first century.

Benedict Anderson has presented nationalism as socially-constructed community wherein people consider themselves to be part of a group through a belief in collective myths about the past (O'G, 2016). However, this past may vary depending on the school of thought one prescribes too. In India, we can divide the conflicting strands of Indian nationalism and its origins into two schools.

The first is the constructivist school that firmly believes in the idea that India as a nation-state was a colonial invention. They cite the British's historically unprecedented imperial control over the entire subcontinent to justify their claims. In this version the argument goes that it was only the British who managed to extend control over the entire subcontinent, thus bringing the entire region for the first time under a single political entity, therefore it is only the British who should be credited for germinating the idea of an Indian nation. Furthermore, they also cite Britain's specific and colonialism's general use of systems of knowledge to subjugate, divide, classify, and control indigenous populations thus uniting in India's case, its various castes (jatis) (Khilnani, 2017) into a unilinear national identity. This unification involves the introduction of a common language of the state in a land of multilinguality as well as the construction of a justice system that applies a uniform code of legal conduct on the entire populace (Singha, 2000). While one could argue that these attempts were made to not 'unify a community into a nation'

but to create a community of loyal subjects for the Empire, there is some merit to the justifications provided by the constructivist school (Samaddar, 2010).

However, the school overlooks some unique characteristics of the British Raj in India, such as the relationship between several independent princely states and the British government. The pricely states, comprised of semi-autonomous regions with local rulers who were often quite outspoken. The rulers adhered to norms signifying notional subservience to the paramount British power such as making appearance at Imperial Darbars of 1877, 1903 and 1911. But they also organized resources against the continuance of the Raj by donating to political parties and providing safe haven to their functionaries.It is important to note that these regions comprised over forty percent of the subcontinent. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, many of these states such as Baroda and Mysore initiated reforms centered around universities, which can be understood as 'strikes against specific sites of British dominance'.

Yet, these princely states were accommodated into the British hierarchy of rule, arguably, to keep alive these regional aspirations of sovereignty and fracture any nascent development of strands of subcontinent-wide national identity. While the success of such a strategy is debatable, it is certain that the British were not the only political machine operating in the subcontinent (Bhagavan, 2003). Therefore it is a bit unseemly to attribute to the British with the unison of national identity in India especially in light of the existence of other sovereign spheres(Bhagavan, 2003) in the form of the princely state.

On the other side we have the 'civilisation school'. In this author's opinion it is the more colonial view of Indian nationalism. It posits that India as a nation has existed since time immemorial, or more specifically, since the first vestiges of classical Indian civilization established itself along the banks of the River Indus. This conception divides the history of India into three rather simplistic phases : 'a formative one ending at the close of the first millennium of the Christian era, a second phase of confusion and decline, roughly coterminous with Islamic rule and a third - which may still be continuing - of resurgence and a return to roots. Versions of this school of thought, in recent years, have become more and more prominent in light of the political ascendancy of Hindutva-based parties in India.

This view of Indian history, positing India as a civilisational state with the majority religion as its basis is quite facile. It transplants 'word-for-word' Britain's justification for its empire in India. Colonial scholars identified Indian history with a similar tripartite division which presents Indian civilisation as homeostatic and unchanging (Mill, 1997). They argued that India as a civilization is only able 'to export culture' while being unmoved by foreign ideologies except in an overwhelming negative and self-defeatist sense.

This perceived lack of 'modernity' as well as 'individual rights' became the core of the civilizing process of Britain and under the aegis of introducing these systems to India, Britain justified its abhorrent imperialism in India.

By presenting the colonial encounter as interaction between a force of modernity (read the British) with a timeless and static India, we ridicule India and its multi-cultural past. This is demonstranted in the studies undertaken by several generations of historians of India. In the author's humble opinion, it is more sensible to view India as a crossroads open to external influences as well as assimilation of the same rather than as a crude and simple 'exporter of culture'. By placing Indian nationalism in a tradition of assimilation we may become more equipped to accommodate the many fractures that the Indian state faces in the twenty-first century.

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THE UNFORESEEN END TO FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION.

The History, Politics and Future.

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Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to the practices that operate, alter, or remove the external genital organs in young girls and women. The procedure is performed using a blade or shard of glass by a religious figurehead, town elder, or a medical professional with limited training (WHO, 2023).

The practice of FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against girls and women. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity; the right to be free from torture and cruelty and the right to life, in instances when the procedure results in death (Mohammed et al., 2018). FGM which has been a prevalent practice in Africa, Middle East and Asia, is not territorial in nature and extends beyond borders, some immigrants in the United States and Western Europe still practice it, by sending their daughters back to their homeland to undergo this procedure. FGM, in India has been modelled in Bohra Muslim community, as "khatna" or "khafz" (Tripathi, 2020).

The aim of the present research is to analyze the political environment, geographical landscape and the gap in approaches to curb Female Genital Mutilation by comparing literature and several sources regarding FGM as well as to explore the phenomena perpetuating the custom. This research also attempts to explain the concept of this practice by analyzing different beliefs that support its continuation.

Historical Background

The origin of female genital mutilation is widely debated. Early evidence suggests that the practice was probably used in ancient Egypt as a sign of separation from the aristocracy. Another group of scholars believe that the practice began during the slave trade, when black female slaves entered ancient Arab societies. Some even believe that FGM became prominent with the arrival of Islam in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. While there are other historians who propose that it originated among certain ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa as part of puberty rituals. It was generally believed throughout history that female genital mutilation ensured female virginity and reduced female desires (FGM National Clinical Group, n.d.).

The practice of FMG is supported by traditional beliefs, values, and attitudes across societies. In some communities it is valued as a rite of passage into womanhood, in others as a means of preserving a girl's virginity until marriage. In many countries, female genital mutilation is a prerequisite for marriage, and marriage is essential for a woman's social and economic survival.

Some African women also believe that if their daughters are not circumcised, they will not get a husband.. This harmful tradition was driven by taboos from generation to generation.

FGM is deeply rooted in some cultures while some believe it is done for religious reasons, however, it is not limited to a specific culture or religion (Kerubo, 2010). Female genital mutilation has also been practiced by gynecologists in the UK and the US to 'cure' women of masturbation and insanity. Female genital mutilation continues in some communities in various forms, and even into today, it is a harmful tradition for girls and women.

Political Landscape

Due to a perceived lack of meaningful choice regarding decisions of their own bodies, women who are subjected to this practice are considered in Western development discourse to be disempowered. Thus, the prevalence of these practices can thus be understood as a key mechanism for challenging such power relations in favour of women's rights, and gaining greater control over the sources of power. There is evidence of FGM in 28 African countries, and figures suggest a prevalence of more than 70% in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Mauretania, Northern Sudan, and Somalia (Knox, 2021). Many African governments, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Senegal and Togo, have taken steps to prevent FGM by criminalizing it by law. However, extensive development history has shown that the universalist stance adopted in legislation alone is ineffective at best and fundamentally ineffective at worst.

In the case of FGM, the gap between what Western feminists see as sexual violence and what Africans see as ritual ultimately hindered the effectiveness of top-down approaches in changing community opinion. who practice genital mutilation. The discourse of the Western "anti-mutilation" campaign sometimes reinforced the determination of communities to continue cutting, resisting culturally imperialist narratives. To be clear, this is a culturally imperialist narrative in which female genital mutilation is presented as indisputable proof of African women as voiceless and passive victims: whose sexual and reproductive capacities are controlled by "barbarism".

As a result of state-level failures in redressing the gendered power relations at the heart of cultures, notions of 'empowering women' have gained a foothold in key statements from the WHO and United Nations regarding FGM. However, in keeping with the dominance of the neo-liberal ideology and its consumerist core, the version of empowerment that has historically been popularised by these organisations places emphasis on the self-optimising individual.

The neoliberal and awareness-raising models of empowerment outlined so far share several problematic Western assumptions that emerge when analyzing FGM practices and call for dismantling. Initially, both see empowerment as a one-way progression towards a pre-defined goal, in which development targets become 'conscious' actors, then manifesting as economic dependence or attempting to undermine existing hierarchies. Actual experiences of pain, pleasure, tension, sexuality and health are rarely discussed in development accounts,

often forgotten in educational medical descriptions, but the embodied experiences of girls and women should probably be central to understanding the process. about empowerment and what it does to them. Analysis of the status of women must therefore be based on their real lives, not on the general assumption that they lack scientific knowledge about health and well-being, both because of science and because of the deeply culturally specific resonances of female genital mutilation.

Second, challenging patriarchal power relations and empowering women as a result of FGC can simplify a complex situation caused by multiple factors at multiple levels. The issue is not so much how men oppress women, but how both, through their active participation, internalize a system of asymmetrical values and gender restrictions. Research has shown that in many societies, self-cut older women become practical gatekeepers and beneficiaries of the social order, single-handedly authorizing, and performing operations and ensuring that their daughter's "benefit" from the same social label and culture.

Conclusion

Only 51 countries around the world have a legal framework to combat female genital mutilation. Lack of political mobility and awareness of FGM around the world affects the availability of protective measures for women and girls at risk. Of the 92 countries with data on FGM, only 51 specifically addressed FGM (Equality Now, n.d.). The nature of combating FGM requires not only a global but also a nuanced response adapted to the specific regional complexities of FGM as practiced in different countries and communities. The United Nations global goal of ending FGM by 2023 is only possible with better information about FGM and its prevalence, more investment to end FGM, effective enforcement of laws against FGM and tailored and comprehensive policies and services for survivors in all countries. where female genital mutilation is common, which can only be achieved through interstate cooperation and oversight and support from supranational organizations.

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THE PERSISTENCE OF PREJUDICE:
REVIEW OF 'A HISTORY OF PREJUDICE'

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"*Nevertheless, Dalit deprivation has had several dimensions historically. It was once located, and is still to be seen, in the Untouchables'(or ex-Untouchables') extremely low ritual status, frequently wretched economic conditions, and (until quite recently) denial of access to common cultural and political resources. It was also to be seen in the sexual exploitation of their women, which the Dalits' alleged impurity anduntouchability did nothing to prevent.*" (Gyanendra Pandey, 2013)

The author of *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States,* Gyanendra Pandey, tries to bring forth the prejudices that are prevalent in India and America based on caste and race, respectively, and talks about the dimensions of Dalit deprivation. (Pandey, 2013)

The condition of Dalits in India has been distressing. The basic rights of Dalits have been ignored and denied by the governments—and this is not a new phenomenon in India (Kumbhar, 2016) The author, in many instances, tries to uncover these incidents and provide some examples to substantiate his claims. The text also focuses on how the segregation of villages and population exists in India, and how the concept of purity is prevalent in upper-caste households.

The text also highlights how the notion of purity, paradoxically, finds no place when a Dalit woman is sexually abused. (Pandey, 2013)

This response paper aims to summarise the text and build upon arguments based on the text. It also aims to unravel some of the caste based incidents that have happened in India in recent times and link them to the author's text.

Synopsis of the Text

The author, in the introductory chapter, begins with a question regarding the explanation of the term 'Prejudice.' He bifurcates prejudice into two kinds, i.e., vernacular prejudice and universal prejudice. He considers the vernacular prejudice as a form of prejudice which is visible and local in nature. (Pandey, 2013) On the contrary, the universal prejudice is a form of prejudice which is largely invisible because it is ubiquitous in nature; and thus, this form of prejudice is considered to be 'natural'. The author, further, quotes Raymond Williams to describe the notion of 'Modernness' as something which is 'satisfactory or unquestionably desirable.' (Pandey, 2013)

The author tries to relate the miseries of the Dalits and the African-Americans and find a connection between their struggles. He names some white Abolitionists who challenged the policy of apartheid using the idiom of caste, derived from India. He also illustrates how Dalit intellectuals used the terms derived from Anglo-African abolitionists idiom (Pandey, 2013).

Further, the author emphasises on the formation of 'Dalit Panthers', a group of some radical Dalit activists, and relates them to the 'Black Panthers' of America. This claim can be substantiated by the fact that the founders of the Dalit Panthers, including Namdeo Dhasal, categorically state the Black Panthers and Ambedkar as their inspiration.

The author further claims that the Dalit question and their history is of little concern to the students of Indian origin studying in the USA. For this presumption, the author relies on an incident at Johns Hopkins University. The students, generally from upper-caste background, have a conception that caste is a thing of the past and that it is not a part of our history. (Pandey, 2013)

The author tries to convey the resistance that the Dalits have shown against the existing social and political order in their quest for egalitarian and democratic society. The author, by mentioning the population of Dalits, conveys the power that they hold to transform the polity of the nation.

The author, while contrasting the Dalits with the African-Americans, points out that a bourgeois class within the latter has existed since long but no equivalent existed in the former's case. He further states that if there had been any bourgeois class among Dalits, they would not have remained Dalit. The author regards poverty as a factor that has heightened the marginalisation of Dalits, and according to him, the continued use of economic power by the dominant castes has further led to the deprivation of Dalits.

The author mentions that the dominant castes perpetually use violence in order to maintain the status quo in the society (Pandey, 2013).

The author talks about the violence encountered not only in sexual and physical abuses or police brutalities against Dalits but also in how the upper-caste people desert their neighbourhood(s) when a Dalit comes to reside there. This desertion is also found in the protests against affirmative action. Subsequently, the author refers to the time when India attained independence from colonial rule and describes the condition of India at the dawn of independence. He quotes Gunner Myrdal, a Swedish economist, to rely on the assumption that the early India's polity focused on planned development and adherence to the principles of Egalitarian state (Pandey, 2013).

Talking about the caste system in India, the author considers it an apparent obstacle and regards it a factor responsible for fortification of contempt against the manual workers. The author further states that this contempt is not only limited to the persons performing the act of manual scavenging but also to the other members of his/her caste. This feeling of disgust against a particular section of people hampers the feeling of fraternity among the citizens. Considering this situation of suspicion and disgust against a community, the author mentions a statement by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the notable Dalit rights activist, who while replying to Gandhiji said that, "Gandhiji, I have no homeland" to emphasise on the fact that the dominant castes would never accept Dalits as the fellow citizens of India. (Pandey, 2013)

The author concludes the introductory chapter, from where the excerpt has been taken, by explaining the significance that the law holds in a life of a marginalised person and he uses an example of Mangoo, a cab driver, to subsist his claims.

To conclude, the author quotes Walter Benjamin, who argues that the environment in which we live, the state of caste discrimination, is a rule and not an exception. (Pandey, 2013)

Response to the Text

The author of the text, while being empathetic to the struggles of the Dalits in India, aims to convey his analysis of the practice of casteism in India. He talks about various dimensions of Dalit deprivation and his text includes various reports and examples, which he used in order to subsist his claims. (Pandey, 2013) To a large extent, I am in consonance with what the author has conveyed in his text.

To commence with, the author has tried to link the struggles and social movements of Dalits with those of the African-Americans. I argue in favour of this assumption as we have various instances to show that the struggles and movements of the above mentioned groups overlap. The Dalits, in the case of India, and African-Americans, in the case of the USA, have both been marginalized and stigmatized for a long period of time (Pandey, 2013). These groups have been segregated from the mainland and had to live in ghettos or at the outskirts of the villages. These areas have largely been neglected and were placed on the peripheries of power structures (Yengde, 2019).

In a report by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1996, the organisation notes that "Although various constitutional and legal provisions exist in order to protect Dalits, yet the impunity of the dominant castes leads to the limited effect of these provisions." (HRW, 1999) Also, the social movements led by various social reformers of India were influenced by the white abolitionists of the USA and likewise, various white abolitionists were too influenced by the works of caste-defiers in India (Pandey, 2013).

This practice of use of violence has led to the society not getting transformed and the status quo is maintained (Pandey, 2013). Again, various incidents have happened that depict the application of violence to maintain the status quo in the society. In every eighteen to twenty minutes, a case of caste-based violence is reported; many such cases remain unreported (Winter, 2016). Vikas Jatav, a 17-year-old Dalit boy, wasn't allowed to enter a temple in Bijnor and on insisting to enter the premises of the temple, he was shot dead by the upper-caste men. The practice of witch-hunting, helps not only to establish power over other citizens but also helps in gaining control over the use of resources by the upper-castes and thus, maintaining the status quo in the society (Gurung&Arya, 2020).

In the concluding chapter, 'The persistence of Prejudice', the author emphasises on the fact that prejudice based on caste still persists in India (Pandey, 2013). Dalits are often reminded of their status in society as outlined in many holy scriptures. The ruling caste groups torment, rape, and murder them as a means to assert their superiority over them.

The survival of these social problems in our society is due to our continued adherence to the conservative principles espoused in many religious scriptures. We regard the sanctity of some beliefs as more vital than an individual's life.

In the same chapter, the author claims that income is not the only determinant to be a middle-class in India. One of the most widely known incidents is of an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, a native of Rajasthan, who was not allowed to sit on a mare and pass through the upper-caste village during his wedding. The reason behind illustrating this example is to convey the fact that income or the class of the individual holds a secondary place in describing a person's position in society, the primary factor being the caste background (Pandey, 2013).

In the concluding chapter, the author asserts that conversion out of the demeaning Hindu community is one of the paths for Dalits to merge themselves into mainstream society. He substantiated his claims using the examples of Babasaheb's conversion, along with more than 3.5 lakh followers, to Buddhism in 1956. The author also quoted what Periyar said during his struggle against the caste Hindus. In Periyar's opinion, the disease of being Shudras is like cancer. He insisted on adopting Islam considering it the only way to cure this disease and walk as worthy individuals in the society (Pandey, 2013). This is the point, conversion as a means to attain social mobility, where I would like to express my dissatisfaction with the author. In my opinion, just converting from a religion that preaches untouchability and other caste-based discrimination to one that is comparatively more liberal and offers extended equality to the Dalits

is a fallacious act. Converting from one's religion does not ensure an equal and higher position in society which is still caste based. In order to substantiate my argument, I would like to take the example of the Dalits, who converted to Christianity in Tamil Nadu. A wall has been erected across the Catholic cemetery, separating various areas for the burial of Dalit Christians. In response to this act of the Catholic Church, Father Vincent Chinnadurai, the chairman of the Tamil Nadu state Commission for Minorities, said, "The burial ground is owned by private individuals, so we are not able to do anything about this. Even the local bishop is not going to the cemetery to perform rituals" (Natarajan, 2010).

Now, in order to further justify my argument, I would show how the Dalit Sikhs are discriminated against in Sikhism, which is believed to be based on the principles of equality and fraternity (Singh, 2021). The caste hierarchy in Sikhism is complex. Jat Sikhs, who are believed to be of Shudra origin in Hindu society, are at the apex of the social structure in Sikhism. They are followed by the Khatri Sikhs. Then come the Ramgarhia and Ahluwalia Sikhs. At the bottom of the ladder come the Dalit Sikhs, who are further divided along different caste lines (Mcleod, 2000). There is another dimension to the social hierarchy in Sikh society, and this makes it even more complex. In addition to caste distinctions, a unique distinction exists between the *Sahajdari* and *Keshdhari* Sikhs. The *Keshdhari* Sikhs are considered superior to the Sahajdhari Sikhs. But when it comes to Keshdhari Dalit Sikh and Sahajdhari Jat Sikh, the former, even though he is Keshdhari but a Dalit, holds a lower place in the hierarchy (Ram, 2007). In Punjab, Dalit Sikhs experience societal boycotts.

This problem is certainly not recent to Sikh society; it has existed since the dawn of the twentieth century (Ram, 2004). This disparity in social status is further exacerbated by the landlessness of Dalit Sikhs, who hold merely 2.3% of Punjab's agricultural land (Singh, 2021).

Considering the two cases of converted Dalits mentioned above, I assert that conversion from one religion to another does not do much to make the caste identity of Dalits irrelevant in a widely caste-based society. By converting their religion, their gods might change but their social status still remains the same.

Conclusion

The way the author has written this text, while illustrating the various struggles the Dalits of India face. The text outlines various issues and challenges that remain as they were at the dawn of independence (Pandey, 2013).

By mentioning various dimensions of Dalit deprivation, the author has successfully acknowledged the discrimination that those belonging to an oppressed caste face. The Dalits even today have to face endless atrocities. A total of 50,291 cases of caste-based atrocities, against Scheduled Castes, were registered in 2020, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (Dhrubo, 2021). As the author, in Chapter 7, has stated, prejudice still persists in India. The author has also depicted how students of Indian origin seem disinterested in studying the concept of caste.

They regard it as a thing of the past and thus, feel disconnected to it (Pandey, 2013). This ignorance of caste is in itself a way to show solidarity with the oppressors.

Thus, we, as the citizens of the world's largest democracy, should identify the caste-based discrimination and work against it and aim to make India a true egalitarian state.

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CASTE, GENDER AND RACE: IS RAM RAJYA AN IDEAL STATE?

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Ram Rajya is not unheard of to anyone in the Indian context as it is used so much in the realm of politics since independence, even though its connotation has changed from one of an ideal secular state to a Hindu state (and not Hindu nation, as I'd like to draw a distinction between Hindu rashtra and Hindu rajya here, where the former refers to a Hindu nation and the latter, a Hindu state) based on the perverted ideology of Hindutva (classic/ pure/ non-perverted Hindutva, as Savarkar alluded to, was concerned only with the revival of the Hindu nation, which India already is, and aspired for a secular state) (Sharma, 2011).

In simple terms, Ram Rajya is the governance based on ideals and principles of mythical and epical king Lord Rama. Lord Rama is the protagonist of the epic Ramayana which is standardly referred to be first written by Maharishi Valmiki and made popular by Tulsidas through Ramacharitmanas: the Ocean of the Deeds of Ram. Nevertheless, the concept of Ram Rajya is highly contested. Whether the Ram Rajya promotes the caste system, gender inequality, racial discrimination or not, remains an enigma. This article aims to analyze Ram Rajya based on parameters of caste, gender, and race.

Caste in Ram Rajya

Those who opine that Ram Rajya was free from the caste system draw inferences from Nishadraj who belonged to the lower caste and was a good friend of Lord Rama. Nishadraj was the monarch of the Nishad community (fishing community) who aided Lord Rama, Sita, and Lakshman in crossing the Ganga River during their 14-year vanvas (exile). Lord Rama stayed at Nishadraj's house for the first night after the Vanvas ended. He gave Nishadraj the same respect that he gave to his other royal friends. In this way, Ram Rajya is claimed to be free from caste discrimination.

However, in the sixth book of the Valmiki Ramayana, Lankakanda, Ram Rajya is described as, "All [i.e., Brahmins (the priest class), Kshatriyas (the warrior class), Vaishyas (merchants and agriculturalists) and Sudras (the servant class)] were performing their own duties, satisfied with their own work, and bereft of greed". This points toward the rigid caste-specific duties and hence, prevalence of the caste system. Though Savarkar's Hindutva proposed the revival of the Hindu nation, which, acting as a universal solvent, dissolves caste in it, leaving behind a land-based (artha of Kautilya) identity of being a Hindu, the Ram Rajya (which is presently interpreted as the Hindu state of Lord Rama), seems to be riddled with caste considerations, antithetical to the Savarkar's obsession with unity- unity created by the Hindu nation (not state), acting as a universal solvent (Raghuramraju, 2007).

This point is corroborated by scholars like Dr. BR Ambedkar, Periyar Lalayee Singh (Shambook Vadh), and Swami Achhutanand (The Justice of Ram Rajya) through the Shambuka incident given in Uttarakanda of Valmiki's Ramayana. Shambuka was a lower caste man who was beheaded by Lord Rama because of practicing tapas (asceticism) which is a caste-specific duty of Brahmans only under the caste system. Some opine that Rama did not kill Shambuka in his own will, instead of on the will of Brahmins who considered it to be the duty of the king to check transgressions in the practice of the caste system. "Not to blame Rama for killing Shambuka is to misunderstand the whole situation" (Ambedkar, 2014).

Gender Dynamics in Ram Rajya

Proponents of Ram Rajya praise Sita as an ideal daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law. Even though she lived in a palace and had many sevaks (servants) she used to do her chores by herself and took care of her mother-in-law. She always stood by her husband and was his strength.

Ram Rajya has been called patriarchal by many scholars. Ambedkar is critical about how Ram treated Sita in 'Riddles in Hinduism'. From Valmiki's Ramayana, he quotes Ram's words following his triumph over Ravana where Ram refers to Sita "as a prize" and subject of his "honour". In Ram Rajya, Sita is asked twice to prove her purity and chastity. After being free from the captivity of Ravana, she is subjected to Agnipariksha (test of fire) in which she passes though. Nevertheless, this does not satisfy the public, and she faces expulsion based on rumors "in a somewhat advanced state of pregnancy in a jungle, without friends, without provision,

without even notice- in a most treacherous manner" (Ambedkar, 2014). Ambedkar criticized Rama as a "weak and cowardly monarch" who "yielded to the public gossip". Feminists condemn him for violating basic rights of women like the right to dignity, health, safety, and life (Article 21 of Indian constitution). Lord Rama again demands a test of chastity from Sita when he finds her in the forest through his two twin sons Lava and Kush. "Sita preferred to die rather than return to Rama who had behaved no better than a brute" (Ambedkar, 2014). Rama has been charged with 'Abetting Suicide' by feminists.

Proponents of Ram Rajya claim that Rama considered his duty to listen and protect the views of every person who comes seeking justice. Feminists counteract that he did not investigate and give a chance of fair hearing to Sita. He defended a woman's enslavement as just. The deontological considerations of being a king bound by the dharmashastras and the nitishastras forced the sovereign of Ayodhya to turn a blind eye towards teleological considerations of being a husband.

Another female character in Ramayana is Surpanakha (a widow). Her nose was sliced off by Lakshman because she expressed lust for a man (Lord Rama). She did not know that Rama was married. She met this fate by breaking a patriarchal code that views women as passive receivers of male desire. Feminists argue, in Ram Rajya, Sita is revered because she behaved 'ideally' by bearing all atrocities of a man (Rama) according to the patriarchal norms. Whereas, Surpanakha defied the code of conduct, hence, not revered.

Ram Rajya and Race

Proponents of Ram Rajya claim it to be free from racial discrimination. An example of Mata Sabri is provided in this context. She was a tribal woman who ardently worshipped Lord Rama. When he came to meet her because of her dedication, he graciously accepted the semi-eaten plums offered by the tribal woman. She semi-ate the plums to discard the sour ones.

On the contrary, the example of the killing of Vali can be given. He is referred to as a monkey in Valmiki's Ramayana whom Rama killed from behind while hiding in a tree without hearing his stance. One of the justifications he gave was that while hunting, no consent is needed of an animal and it can be killed from behind. Rama gave him the status of an animal, i.e., monkey. Rationally, he must be of a different race with somewhat different physical features. Ambedkar writes, "this murder of vali" who was "unarmed" was a "planned and premeditated murder".

Conclusion

The concept is not free from critiques and hence, there exists more than one interpretation and image of Ram Rajya. Learning from mythology has no harm unless we don't carry the elements which prove to be non-coherent to the present scenario. "As knowledge grows, our theology develops" (Radhakrishnan, 1927). Valmiki's Ramayana was written (around 5th century BCE) according to the sociology of that time.

An illustration of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman returning from Sri Lanka is drawn at the beginning of Part III of the Indian constitution (fundamental rights). Does this make Ram Rajya coherent with the values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity of the Indian constitution? Other illustrations in the constitution include Rani Lakshmi Bai, Akbar's court, Indus valley seal, conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, etc. However, all these illustrations are not part of any written article and represent India's culture and history only.

The Indian constitution is not confined to the limits of a 'person-centric' raj. It establishes a 'people-centric' republic state even though it may reflect Lord Ram's ideals as claimed by proponents of Ram Rajya. A utopian Ram Rajya with a secular connotation is coherent to the values of the Indian constitution which Mahatma Gandhi had sought to achieve. However, it does not mean to completely wipe out casteist, patriarchal and racist interpretations of Ram Rajya or the idea of utopia from other epics or religious books. Because, Ultimately, the Indian constitution stands supreme.

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Exploring Vivekananda's Denial of Widow Remarriage Through a Modified Orientalist and *Advaitic* Framework

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"Do you think that a nation is saved by the number of husbands its widows get"? [1]

Vivekananda, the hallowed face of modern Hinduism and neo-Vendanta, has been critiqued by an army of scholars– often feminist and subaltern critics including Amiya Sen– for being a hapless conservative along the ranks of Aristotle when it comes to women. Along with his exotic version of ideal womanhood (which I'll discuss later in this article), his stance on widow remarriage [Vivekananda rejects the prospect of widow remarriage] has always been a subject of intense scholarly debates, which has been interpreted and reinterpreted by scholars like Sen (2003), Rüstau (1998), Raghuramaraju (2007), Sharma (2011), Dalton (1982), etc, along various lines. While the coterie represented in this article by Sen understands it in the framework of 'conservative euphoria', the group represented by Raghuramaraju uses an Orientalist framework to understand Vivekananda's prima facie conservative convictions [2]. Though I'm not denying the undisguised stint of conservatism plaguing his ideas, I would prefer to look at his ideas from two other perspectives (in addition to Amiya Sen's conservative euphoria interpretation) – modified Orientalism (exoticism) and advaita.

A. Raghuramaraju interprets Vivekananda as an Orientalist thinker [3]. However, since Orientalism brings with it the ignominy of Material-Spiritual rhetoric (the East as spiritually advanced and the West as materially developed) that Vivekananda modifies into an erotic-exotic dichotomy, I would prefer to consider his philosophic disposition as a reshaped/ modified form of Orientalism [4]. Moreover, in the context of the missionary campaign that reclined Hinduism– which Vivekananda understood as nativism– into a malodorous state of shame, he negates this civilisation vs savagery/ superstition narrative by attaching a premium to the Eastern value systems, raising it to a higher pedestal, which is quintessential to defend his position of what Yuri Bezmenov would say– "no thanks, we have our junk" – or we have our value systems which, as Raghuramraju interpreted, "reins supreme" in the "hierarchy" where "Western materialism figures at the bottom" [5] [6] . Such a stance requires a rather fierce defence of what the West branded as savagery (Indian value systems) – and it would explain Vivekananda's position on widow remarriage.

By attaching a premium to the Indian value systems, Vivekananda would've said something like– the practices which are ordained by your text come naturally to us. And since what is natural is good (and the best) – the classical Aristotelian or Rousseauvian rhetoric– it beautifully aligns with the greater framework of Vivekananda's modified Orientalism (which I'd also call exoticism). And when I apply the same logic to his stance on widow remarriage, it turns out to be something like– in contrast to the text-based order of nuns you (the West) have, we (the East) have a natural order of nuns (the widows).

Therefore, for Vivekananda, widows constitute a natural order of nuns– something not ordained by a text but the very ancient natural practice of the place of being/ dwelling– which is to be read along with the 'natural is good' narrative and the "hierarchy" that A Raghuramraju talked about. By attaching a natural premium to the Eastern practices, Vivekananda, therefore, justifies his hierarchy of placing Eastern value systems at the apex, and it would also explain his "limited fascination for Western materialism", or his denial of the substance of modernity (which Gandhi embraces), to be more precise [7].

Interestingly, pre-Marx socialist thought emanated from the Bible. The lofty socialist ideals of Saint Simon, Cabet and Blanc– all devout Christians– had their socialist-leaning inspired by the Bible. For instance, the socialist motto of "to each according to needs … and from each according to ability" comes from the Book of Acts that documented early Christian practices [8]. And if I go with Sen's interpretation, Vivekananda would've said something like– the socialism emanating from your text comes naturally to us– as Sen interprets Vivekananda's stance of dismissing the prospect of widow remarriage as the silhouetting example of ingrained "socialism in Hindu [Eastern] society" [9]. Nevertheless, I'd like to use the term 'social equity' here instead of 'socialism', which is a bit misleading, as Vivekananda rejected the substance of modernity, and socialism is a "distinctly modern theory" (alongside liberalism), whose roots can be traced back to the age of Enlightenment [10]. However, in addition to the overbearing Orientalist framework, this position has to be read along with Vivekananda's conservative conviction.

For him, marriage was not an individual privilege to be exercised at will, but a sacred duty every woman must perform. Natheless, due to the lopsided sex ratio characterised by the general "scarcity of men" in the higher classes of Hindu society, the remarriage of each widow transmutes as the loss of opportunity for virgins to fulfil their sacred duty [11]. And since "they have had their chance", widows shall not remarry– so the principles of 'social equity' say– which alludes to the natural (and not text-based) commitment of the Hindu society to 'equity' (not equality, for the reason I mentioned elsewhere), and Amiya Sen interprets it as an instance showcasing "socialism [social equity] in Hindu societies" [12].

Furthermore, I propose to employ the aforementioned erotic-exotic dichotomy to explain Vivekananda's dismissal of the idea of widow remarriage. I would like to quote Vivekananda here– "women in the West do not appear to be women at all" [13] – which can be interpreted in the erotic-exotic framework of attaching an exotic value to the Indian womenfolk possessing what Wollstonecraft called "sexual virtues" [14] – that of wifely chastity, integrity, devotion, sentiments, and motherly love– which can be juxtaposed by Vivekananda's earlier erotic stance of comparing Indian women with "black owls" vis-à-vis American women [15]. By attaching a premium to exotic womanhood, Vivekananda reinforces the spiritual superiority of the East and thus justifies the "hierarchy". For him, Indian wives possess the virtue of satitwa– the wifely chastity and sexual virtues of Sita and Savitri (he cites the example of Rajput queen Padmini's self-sacrifice emanating from her wifely chastity).

He, further, compares the love of the wife towards her husband to the selfless love of the gopis for Krishna, as illustrated in the Bhagavat Purana.

However, this stance shall also be interpreted in the light of advaita. Though Vivekananda appears to be joining forces with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who suggested that a chaste and devout widow could hardly remarry, the former grounds his assertions on a firm philosophical fabric of advaita. For Vivekananda, the love and faithfulness of the widows were the bastions of Indian civilisation– as he sees a euphoric stint of permanence in the widow's love for her deceased husband, and since the immutable God or the bhraman is the only permanent entity in the advaita paradigm, the logical conclusion is the covert divinity in the love and unwavering devotion of the widows– which is the universal soul or the bhraman itself. Moreover, an unmarried widow, steadfast to her wifely chastity and unfettered love for her beloved, is symbolic of an ecstatic order in the cosmic chaos– a "semblance of permanence in an ever-changing world" [16] – something angelic, seraphic, and celestial, a divine rupture in what Baudelaire calls the "fleeting, contingent, and ephemeral" [17]. In toto, Vivekananda was critical of widow remarriage. However, an interpretation of Vivekananda's dismissal of the prospect of widow remarriage solely on the lines of his conservative viewpoint desperately fails to present the entire picture. In this essay,

I tried to read his conservative standpoint along with the modified Orientalist framework of the erotic-exotic dichotomy and the advaita philosophy to appreciate Vivekananda's philosophical disposition and the unbridled consistency running through the essence of his thought like a beatific string of pearls.

Endnotes

[1] Vivekananda (1894, January 24), Friends (letters to his disciples in Madras), para 7, line 4, in the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (5.1.7).

[2] Sen, A. (2003), 'Swami Vivekananda on History and Society', in Swami Vivekananda, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 65.

[3] Raghuramaraju, A, (2007), 'Swami and Mahatma Paradigms: State and Civil Society', in Debates in Indian Philosophy: Classical, Colonial, and Contemporary, Oxford University Press, pp. 40.

[4] Vivekananda suggests that the West was also philosophically advanced in the past (Greek philosophy) and the East was also materially advanced in the past (zero, geometry, algebra, astronomy, etc., in ancient India) to counter the material-spiritual stereotype of Orientalist thinkers, and modifies it into an erotic-exotic dichotomy. Exoticism was associated with the East. For instance, though the East had blueprints and the concept of making airplanes (Vimana purana), we don't have enough physical evidence to prove that material manifestations of such ideas existed. And the West was associated with eroticism– a desire to make something consumable, attach material value or give material manifestations to ideas, i.e., some sort of a Faustian bargain (consider pornography, for example, which makes beauty a thing to consume).

[5] Sengupta, A, (2020), Understanding the Political Scenario of INDIA, CANADA, JAPAN, CHINA, USA, FRANCE, etc., [Video]., In YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9TviIuXPSE

[6] Raghuramaraju (2007), pp. 46.

[7] Raghuramaraju (2007), pp. 32.

[8] Bovens, L, (2020, September 4), "From Each According to Ability; to Each According to Need" – Tracing the Biblical Roots of Socialism's Enduring Slogan. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/from-each-according-to-ability-to-each-according-to-need-tracing-the-biblical-roots-of-socialisms-enduring-slogan-138365

[9]   Sen (2003), pp. 71.

[10] Smaldone, W, (2019), European Socialism: A Concise History with Documents, p. 3-4.

[11] Vivekananda (1895, February 27), India's Gift to the World (speech), Brooklyn Ethical Association, in the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (2.7.16).

[12] Sen (2003), pp. 71.

[13] Vivekananda quoted by Sen (2003), pp. 69.

[14] Jones, C, (2002), Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindications and Their Political Tradition, in The Cambridge Companion to Mary

[15] Wollstonecraft, pp. 48.

[16] Vivekananda quoted by Sen (2003), pp. 69.

[17] Sen (2003), pp. 71.

[18] Baudelaire, C, (1964), The Painter of Modern Life, trans. Jonathan Mayne, pp. 13.

[19]   Vivekananda quoted by Sen (2003), pp. 69.

Sen (2003), pp. 71.

[20]   Baudelaire, C, (1964), The Painter of Modern Life, trans. Jonathan Mayne, pp. 13.

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Meet the Board

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A student of the political science department, takes keen interest in Indian politics and public policy. Having covered politics of the heartland closely, he has a deep insight into rural development, electoral strategy and governance.

ARUSHI GUPTA

Arushi Gupta is a second year student pursuing BA Programme in Economics and Political Science at Ramjas College, University of Delhi. Arushi is interested in International Relations and has a keen interest in current affairs. She likes reading books and listening to music and often tends to write on social issues. She aspires to be a diplomat.

ADWAITH PB

Adwaith PB is a fantasist. Dwelling merrily in his world of Oriental myths, of giants, nymphs, and anthropomorphic dragons, his absent-mindedness always lands him in unforeseen hardships. As a deviation, he writes his heart out in the moonlight. And in the sun, he's a student of the epics and perils of the political, contemplating its wayward laboratory– the society.

Meet the Board

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An aspiring data analyst and political researcher. She is interested in fields like geopolitics and International Relations. She has worked at the Ministry of Education and Research for Policy Making.

DEEPTISH THAPA

Deeptish is a first-year student at Ramjas College, University of Delhi, pursuing an undergraduate degree in political science and history. As an aspiring writer, he seeks to address socio-political issues in general and caste and religious issues in specific.
He is also a legal enthusiast who takes to engaging in study on Indian legal matters, especially those that pertain to constitutional or criminal law.

KRISHNA CHAUHAN

Krishna Chauhan is currently serving as a final year student in the Political Science Department of Ramjas College, University of Delhi Previously as a youth leader in Special Olympics Bharat ,he left some deep imprints in the domain of the education of Special Children, he strives to make some enduring changes and leave an everlasting impact on the editorial board.
He is an ardent nature lover and a gifted artist.

Meet the Board

NIKHIL

Nikhil is the second year student of B.A program in the disciplines of political science and an avid follower of anything random on google and anything which can help him think about his life, he is a believer of nihilism and believes that world is an illusion and everything is a myth. When not studying you can find him imagining and wondering how life could have been if he had made the different decisions.

PARTH SETH

Parth Seth is a final-year undergraduate student of Political Science at the Ramjas College, University of Delhi. Parth is interested in International Relations and Area Studies, wherein the themes he likes to engage with include multilateralism, geopolitics, migration, human security, and great power competition; he primarily studies the regional affairs of South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.

PRATHIT SINGH

A researcher, and a child rights activist, Prathit Singh is a third year student of Political Science at Ramjas College. He has published his works with academics from across the UK and India and has been vocally advocating for the rights of children and young people across the world.

Meet the Board

PREM ANSH SINHA

Prem Ansh Sinha is a first-year undergraduate student, trying to pursue the study of Political Science Honors at Ramjas College, University of Delhi.
He likes to ravel in the mysteries of the self while reading of the past and making sense of the society. While he is done with his daily quota of daydreaming, he likes to crush his peers at competitive quizzing across the country to fuel his egoistic fires.

PRERNA DEWAN

Prerna Dewan is a final-year undergraduate student at Ramjas College majoring in Political Science. She takes keen interest in International Relations as well as Gender Studies. She has previously authored a research article on Global Solidarity Vs. Increasing Nationalism, which has been published by UNESCO and Takhte. She aspires to be a diplomat.

SHUBH JAISWAL

A Lifelong Learner and A Political and Legal Enthusiast, Shubh is currently pursuing B.A Honors in Political Science from the prestigious Ramjas Institution of University of Delhi. With the aim to practice law in future, he eyes the legal intricacies with their political contexts and seeks to establish a broader overview by linking the siamese - Politics and Law.

Meet the Board
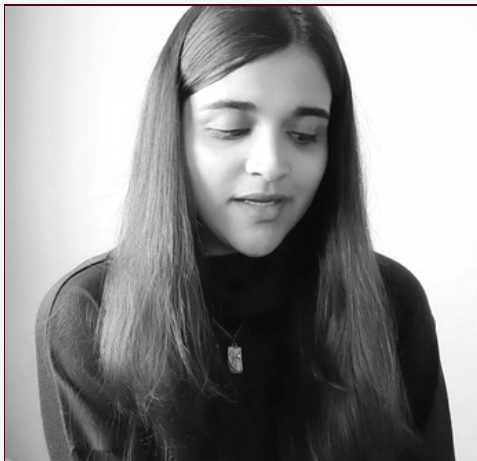
SIMRAN ANAND

*Simran is currently pursuing B.A Honors in Political Science from Ramjas College, University of Delhi.
She is a budding researcher and data analyst. She is actively working in the domain of Human Rights and Public Policy and has worked with institutions such as University of Saskatchewan, UNDP India and UNESCO.*

SOFIYA ANSARI

Sofiya is a final year undergraduate student, pursuing BA (Hons) Political Science at Ramjas college, University of Delhi. She yearns to explore new things and had swapped multiple hats in the field of content writing, journalism, paper presentation, and debating. With a keen interest in reading, analyzing and research, she constantly strives to hone her skills in writing.

Education.... like democracy, is always in the making, forever incomplete and founded in possibilities.

-Maxine Greene