

ISSN: 2583-004X
E-ISSN: 2582-7154

INDIAN STUDIES REVIEW

(A UGC-Care Listed and Peer-Reviewed Journal)
Vol. 4 No. 1 (January-July 2023)

**A JOURNAL OF CENTRE FOR STUDY OF
POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE, DELHI**

INDIAN STUDIES REVIEW

Journal of Centre for Study of Politics and Governance

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INDIAN STUDIES REVIEW

Journal of Centre for Study of Politics and Governance

Volume 4 Number 1

January – July 2023

ISSN: 2583-004X

Contents

	Page No.
Rajesh Dev	1-16
The Bhartiya Janata Party in the States of Northeast India	
Atanu Mohapatra & Chandan K. Panda	17-34
Kashmir Pandits: Migration, Homelessness and Resettlement	
Angira Sen	35-52
COVID 19 Pandemic: Reinforcing the Need for Gender Sensitive Policy Framework	
Raghvendra Kumar	53-78
China's Engagement with the Island States of East Africa in the Western Indian Ocean: A Geo-economic Perspective	
Deepa Kamra, Samir & Neeraj Gupta	79-94
New Age Banking and Its Socio-Economic Implications	
Manan Dwivedi & Gayatri Dixit	95-110
The Tight Rope Walk between the geo Economic Implications of Trans Pacific Partnership and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership: India Responds	
Pushpa Singh	111-124
A Critical Re-engagement with Traditions: Women, Agriculture and Agroecology in India	
BOOK REVIEWS	125-141

Indian Studies Review is a Multidisciplinary, UGC-listed, Peer-reviewed, academic journal published twice a year (January and July) both online and in print from Delhi. It welcomes original research articles from authors doing research in social sciences and its sub-disciplines. The objective of the journal is to provide platform to the researchers, academicians, policy makers and policy practitioners to engage with issues of contemporary relevance in polity, economy or society and initiate a scholarly intellectual debate through their research monographs. Articles must have a theoretical structure and methodological insight employed in the critical and objective enquiry. Review articles and book reviews are also welcome.

The Bhartiya Janata Party in the States of Northeast India

Rajesh Dev*

Abstract

Northeast, is customarily distinguished from the Indian mainland on a perceived sense of historical marginality and ethnocultural and religious differences. The formation of regional political parties can also be attributed to this cultural specificity and political identity of the region. The emergence of the BJP in the region is not alarming, unanticipated or even extensive. And if viewed in the context of certain factors this development would also seem unsurprising, such as-the dynamics of complex inter-ethnic relation in the region and most importantly the inability of the Indian national Congress (INC) to keep pace with the emergence and incorporation of local elites into the party. BJP also focusses on the factors of development of the region to become an active “economic gateway” under the Act East Policy.

Keywords: *Northeast, BJP, inter-ethnic relations, regional parties, development.*

As one drives uphill from Guwahati, considered the gateway to southeast Asia, towards another sister state, Meghalaya, one comes across numerous statues and large painting of Christ along the highway. At one point one could also see a mural of Christ with the words, “(W)elcome to Christian state”. Though the mural remains, the ‘designation’ of the state of Meghalaya as Christian state however has been removed. I began with this description to press home the point that in popular imaginaries and layman impressions, Assam is seen as a frontier to “Hindu mainland” and the “Christian Northeast”. So, the apparent growth of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the region not only complicates the popular imaginary but from the perspective of the BJP is considered a huge success.

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The region comprising the seven states, collectively termed as the Northeast, is customarily distinguished from the Indian mainland on a perceived sense of historical marginality and ethnocultural and religious differences. The politicisation of this perception has produced competing ethnopolitical demands, the complexity and variety of which led the region being considered an ‘outlier’. In many cases, beginning with the “Nagaland for Christ” movement, it also led to the privileging of specific religious and cultural selves (Thomas, 2016). This relationship between region, ethnicity and religion led observers to conclude that a civilizational faultline exists between this periphery and the mainland and that subsequently became the foundational template for representing the region (Mankekar, 1967). Communities and ethnic identity movements have adopted this story to sometimes interrogate their cultural incorporation and political affiliation with the Indian state (Dev, 2011) and sometimes to also imagine a shared regional self-identity as “northeasterners”.

The formation of regional political parties can also be attributed to this cultural specificity and political identity of the region. All most all the regional parties are the result of regional aspirations and movements seeking autonomy and preservation of cultural identity. The All-Peoples Hill Leaders’ Conference (APHLC) (Chaube, 2017); the Mizo National Front (MNF) (2018); the Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura (IPFT) (Ali, 2013) , the Asom Gana Parishd (AGP) (Bahn, 2020) and even a national party with a largely regional presence, the National People’s Party (NPP) (2013), to name a few, avowedly identify with the interests and identity projects of specific ethnic groups.

This representation of the region as not only an ethnocultural but also a religious outlier continues to dominate elementary portrayal of this region. Popular descriptions of the region and the constituting states are also shaped by the degree of religious diversity and proportion of religious groups (Ramachandran, 2017) in the region. There is little surprise that such ethnocultural and religious representation of the region acquires fresh political salience in the backdrop of the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the region.

This is not to suggest that the diffusion effects of this collective self-identification unambiguously influence an uniform regional political culture or even constitutes a single political field. Because a cross-state analysis of the region will reveal immense variation in the dynamics and materiality of social identity, politics and electoral competition in each of them (Dev, 2011). Moreover, ethnic identity affiliations in each of these states, undergo change with their level of aggregation (Laitin, 1998). For instance, within the state of Nagaland Aos and the Angamis, fiercely identify with their respective tribe categories; within India, they identify themselves with the Naga nation and collectively both Nagas and Mizos identify themselves as “northeasterner” within India. These choices at their level of aggregation produce their own dynamics of identity and difference that has implications for electoral competition and political outcomes. Yet, in spite of these internal variations it is still possible to argue that a broader politics is deeply informed by a collectively imagined region based on the idea of difference. Even as it is internalised, it is also contested.

How do we then, given this cultural, and political context, explain the growth of a party like the BJP which argues for “one India, one law” in a region where ‘difference’ has been accorded institutional recognition. How do we explain the political relationships between a party that embodies a majoritarian ethic and a region where the history of state-formation manifests the role of innovative constitutional provisions and politico-administrative policies (Dasgupta, 1997) that prohibits the imposition of such an ethic?

This author is of the view that the emergence of the BJP in the region is not alarming, unanticipated or even extensive. And if viewed in the context of certain factors this development would also seem unsurprising. Such factors would to an extent include the BJP’s affiliation with and the activities of other affiliates of the ‘parivar’ the broadening of the party’s electoral appeal through regionalisation; the dynamics of complex inter-ethnic relation in the region and most importantly the inability of the Indian national Congress (INC) to keep pace with the emergence and incorporation of local elites into the party.

The electoral arrival of the BJP in the region began in 1996 in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, thereafter spreading to other states of the region consolidating its social bases primarily in ‘select pockets’ in each of the states. Its electoral presence in states beyond Assam began to take more consolidated shape once it learnt to “induce defections” (Chaube, 1985) and effectuate regional alliances by outbidding the Congress. The slow ascendancy of the BJP in the region therefore, corresponds with the growing decline of the Congress which had been a major political force in the region. The in-fighting, factional pressures, resistance to dynasty-based intra-party upward mobility intensified this decline of the Congress and the relative rise of the BJP. Interestingly, in most of the hill-states like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and even Arunachal Pradesh the rise of the BJP not only in terms of seats but also vote-share has not been phenomenal. It has formed governments, largely by aligning with regional fronts that have historically sought “strategic alliance” with the party in power at the Centre.

The political salience of claims to difference and autonomy, that still is the central pivot of politics in the region, became apparent to the ‘parivar’ “decades back” (Gupta, 2018) when members from the RSS “saw an opportunity to fix the battered limb of a wounded Bharat Mata” (Shubhrastha, 2017) and plant the seeds of a “alternative ideology” (Shubhrastha, 2017) during the ‘anti-migrants’ Assam Movement. In 2003, the BJP government at the centre acknowledged the true weight of this politics when A.B. Vajpayee, as Prime Minister candidly recognised the “unique history of the Nagas” (Karmakar, 2018). As the party made national breakthroughs and commenced its expansion in ‘northeast’, it began to gradually calibrate its elemental ideological postulates with regional cultural and political sensibilities.

Thus symbols and issues central to the party’s political agenda, such as ban on cow slaughter or banning the consumption of beef, Hindutva, Uniform Civil Code, religious conversion or the Ram Temple are never the privileged idioms of political mobilisation in most states beyond Assam. The party rather focusses on a developmentalist narrative (2019) arguing that for social and political progress and its integration with the

mainland, the region should become an active “economic gateway” under the Act East Policy (Ziipao, 2018). Such emphasis on eclectic developmentalism finds specific empirical illustration in the creation of a separate ministry for the “development” of the region as also enhanced grants to each of the states for efficiently managing these activities. This is also manifested in the activities of the RSS, and other frontal organisations of the ‘Sangh Parivar’, like the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Sewa Bharati, Rashtra Sevika Samiti and Ekal Vidhyalayas (Siddiqui, 2014). These affiliates of the “parivar” active in the region, and expanding progressively throughout, are engaged in “social welfare and developmental tasks” aimed at mainstreaming this “peripheral and backward” region.

Though a developmental paradigm provides crucial mobilisational and political foil to dissimulate an abiding ideological sub-text, it does not in any ways constrain the party or the affiliates of the “parivar” from utilising “local symbolic inventories” to surmount perceptions about its hindutva bias (Jenkins, 2001) and majoritarian image. According to some estimates there are around 1088 (Awungashi, 2019) Shakhhas (branches) of the RSS in the entire region. These Shakhhas along with “innumerable varieties of affiliates” (Appaiah, 2003) are engaged in discovering, interpreting, and appropriating, local cultural idioms and symbols within the broader ideas, practices and iconographies of a hindutva-centric inference of Hinduism.

The process is cogently summed up in an insider’s view of the working of the ‘parivar’ in the region. It says, “the challenge for the RSS...was to define, promote and entrench the term Hindu in the consciousness...in such a way that the local histories, myths, idioms, and fables become a part of the sangh’s conception of Hindu nationhood” (Shubhrastha, 2017). The challenge was managed with such missionary assiduity (Jaffrelot, 2010) that in a few decades it has come to impact the social and political life in many states of the region. As Jenkins shows in the case of Rajasthan, in these states too, the activities of the ‘parivar’ are now accompanied by “broad ideological adjustments” (Jenkins, 2001) by the party in ways that suit regional specificities. These adjustments, or

what we term as “strategic moderation”, allows the affiliates and the party to access social and political spaces inimical to the core ideology of the party and the broader “parivar”.

In Arunachal Pradesh for instance, the emergence of revivalist movements among the Adi tribes ‘discovering’ the concept of “*Donyi-Poloism*” slowly spread among other tribes like the *Galo* and produced variants forms among the *Apatani* and *Nyishi* tribes (Chaudhari S. K., 2013). In spite of its long history in the state, Christianity had received little social and political salience until recent years when missionary activity among the dominant tribes of the state like the *Adi*, *Galo*, *Nyishi*, *Apatani* and *Tagin* Tribes (Chaudhari S. K., 2013) produced collective resistance and construction of identity projects for the revival of authentic cultural and religious selves. Thus Indigenous religious practices like *Donyi-Polo*, *Rangfraism* or *Intyaism* acquired new institutional forms (Chaudhari S. K., 2013) with reformed rituals, practices and iconography encouraged by affiliates associated with the ‘*Parivar*’ (Awungashi, 2019).

According to some observers in the parliamentary elections of 2019, this was noticeable in the West Arunachal constituency where Kiren Rijiju, a Buddhist from the *Monpa* community, stood as a BJP candidate against Nabam Tuki from the *Nyishi* community, a Christian and Congress candidate. Mr. Rijiju claimed that the Arunachal Pradesh Catholic Association (APCA) appealed to members of the Christian faith to vote for Tuki, whom they considered as “the pillar of catholic churches in the state” (2019). This alleged appeal and its politicisation polarised the electorate and some say, aided Rijiju. Tapir Gao, a member of the *Adi* tribe and the BJP candidate and winner from the East Arunachal Constituency was more categorical about the influence and role of religion when he attributed the conversion of tribes to the “catalytic work of the Congress” (Katiyar, 2017) identifying, thereby, the Congress as pro-Christian and anti-indigenous faith.

However, this revival and rediscovery of indigenous traditions and practices that creates the socio-cultural base for political expansion often

subsists in tension with the need to broaden the electoral appeal among the growing number of Christians. Two instances visibly reflect this tension between a purist ideological position pursued by other affiliates of the 'parivar' and the position of strategic moderation pursued by the Party. In 2017 the BJP-led government in the state had to rename the "Department of Indigenous faith and Cultural Affairs" more neutrally as the "Department of Indigenous Affairs" after being pressured by the Arunachal Christian Forum who viewed the former nomenclature as too anti-Christian (Majumdar, 2017).

On the other hand during a recent rally for parliamentary elections, the Chief Minister, Pema Khandu, a Buddhist expressed his intention to repeal the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act. This announcement was strongly condemned by representatives from indigenous communities and forums who appealed to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to intervene (Saikia, 2018). The Chief Minister did not act on his announcement and the RSS declined to publicly comment either in favour or against these actions obliquely acquiescing to the need for such ideological compromises.

Similarly in Nagaland, followers of the indigenous religion, Heraka primarily from the Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei tribes (also collectively referred to as the Zeliangrong tribe) have been revived with support from the party and the affiliates of the 'parivar'. Heraka, an indigenous faith among these tribes was founded by Jadonang and promoted further by his protegee Rani Gaidinliu (Longkumer, 2010).

Various affiliates of the 'parivar' have been active in Nagaland since the 1970s but only after the formation of the BJP Government at the centre and election of state legislators from the party did their association with members of the Heraka faith become visible and politically contentious. During the recent elections to the state assembly and thereafter to the parliament, the discord between the followers of the Heraka faith and the Christians acquired political significance. The sitting Chief Minister, Z.R.Zeliang, was accused of being an RSS sympathiser and a Heraka supporter because he belonged to the Zeliang community. So much so

that he had to publicly state he was “baptised” in 1973 and is still a devout Christian (Majumdar, 2017).

An observer, who also happens to be a Christian Naga, believes that Christianised tribes who are in a majority apprehend that being too close to the RSS, may allow followers of the Heraka exert new dominance in the politics of the state they have traditionally controlled. This distrust and suspicion therefore, has inter-tribal connotations for control of state power as traditionally the Ao and Angami were perceived as dominant groups controlling the levers of power.

Another observer this author spoke to attributes this inter-community contestation over state power to the political competition between Neiphiu Rio, an Angami who wanted to return to state politics and T.R.Zeilang, a Zeliang who was the Chief Minister at the time. This ultimately resulted in a split in the Naga People’s Front (NPF) with Rio forming a new party, the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP). The BJP during the last state elections in 2017 had an alliance with the NPF but tacitly supported and ultimately formed the government in the state in alliance with the NDPP.

The electoral implications of this contestation between the two communities had become so critical for the BJP in a Christian dominated state that Ram Madhav, the then National General Secretary of the party had to publicly acknowledge that it was due to the sacrifices of the missionaries that the people of this region stand tall today (Dey, 2018). It is little wonder that party workers in the region have come to term the party as “Bharatiya Jesus Party” (Shubhrastha, 2017). However, the fact that the BJP despite being perceived as anti-Christian was able to electorally expand in Nagaland where powerful church associations influence social and political narratives is a clear indication of the complex mix of cross-cutting and interrelated processes. The tenuous inter-tribal relations and competition for state power by tribal groups and anxieties about Naga political identity produces the political openings that the BJP exploits and which the Congress did in its heydays.

In contrast, this expansion has been very limited in the case of Mizoram, often described as the “lone sentinel of Christianity” (Chhakchhuak, 2018) in the region. Except in some Chakma and *Reang-Bru* dominated constituencies, the BJP or the affiliates of the Sangh have been unable to penetrate the powerful and fiercely christianised {and homogeneous} civil society and culturo-religious bodies that dominate organised politics and everyday life in Mizoram (Gogoi, 2018). Yet the relentless pursuit for political expansion led the party to apply “a balm of love” (Ghani, 2019) through its “Christian Missionary cell” (2019) in the state. In Meghalaya too, Sangh affiliates have developed close relationship with indigenous faiths like the *Seng Khasi* and the *Niamtre* of the non-Christian *Khasi* and *Jaintia* tribes who consider themselves minorities in a state dominated by their Christian brethren.

This conjunctive process of supporting non-Christian indigenous communities and appearing pro-Christian does produce a contradiction. The BJP creatively manages this by politically positioning itself as “centrist” and making political tradeoffs as in the case of Arunachal Pradesh. Another strategy to convey a “centrist” message is to support or nominate Christian candidates as in Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland. Both these political strategies are counter-balanced by enabling the non-political affiliates of the ‘parivar’ to foreground threats to the cultural identity of non-Christian indigenous communities. This division of political and cultural labour not only insulates the BJP from any direct accusation of being partisan but also enables it to strategically utilise it for political purposes.

These instances from the region underscores not only a deeper tension that the party encounters between “ideological purity and political pragmatism” (Jaffrelot, 2001) as it expands in the region but also provides an insight into the political compulsions of the ‘parivar’ for accommodating such ideological compromises. For the ‘parivar’ capturing state power even at the cost of short-term ideological compromises is important for deepening its growing social acceptability as also institutionalising political consolidation. An insider account rather boastfully summarises this regionalisation of the party by explaining how “(I)n spite of being branded

as a polarising political force, it (BJP) has a secret recipe that allows it to bond well with strong regionalist, and in some cases, subnational satraps...This secret sauce (is) of unification and subsuming of strong regional sentiments within the accommodative, national politics of the BJP” (Shubhrastha, 2017).

Some explanations for the rise of the BJP agree with the foregoing cultural account. They insist that empirical data reinforce popular assumptions that support for the BJP from sections of the population who do not believe in its core ideology or programmes is due to the activities of its “non-electoral affiliates” (Thachil, 2014). According to this theory there is an “electoral division of labour” between the party and other affiliates of the ‘parivar’ like the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Sewa Bharati, who engage in “social welfare services” amongst those who are unlikely to support the BJP. The “goodwill” they generate through outreach activities like schools, primary clinics etc. create the base for political recruitment. And It is inferred that it holds true for the ‘northeast’ as well. But this is not so. In much of the states in Northeast India, available data in terms of the number of seats, vote share etc. does not show this translation of social goodwill into votes.

I argue that a more substantive and alternative line of reasoning must build upon but move beyond facile cultural accounts. And this can be derived from scholarship on political parties, their organisational structures and the ways in which parties recruit and incorporate elite sections of the society. Drawing on Kanchan Chandra, I posit that the BJP engaged in a creative process of “elite incorporation” (“Elite Incorporation in Multi-ethnic Societies”, 2000) through which they gave political life to the cultural symbology and “goodwill” generated by the other affiliates of the ‘parivar’. An elementary form of the theory’s argument is that elites (social and political) would join (or confederate) those parties that provides them with better opportunities and flexibility for upward political mobility. Voter choices would depend on their comparative perception of a party’s (in the context of the region it is the individual candidate) high or low probability of winning. The caveat however, is that the incorporation of new elites would be possible when incumbent elites do not fear their own survival.

And this would be possible, according to Chandra, in a party that is growing and has a widening resource base to share.

The BJP, under a charismatic and secure leader like Modi has been able to incorporate new elites from a cross-section of the region's communities. This largely has to do with the disillusion of regional elites with the Congress because of its inability to ensure upward mobility of existing elites within the party and accommodate newly emerging elites as an entrenched elite monopolised hierarchies of power and office for political and dynastic interests. The in-fighting, factional rebellion, resistance to dynastic incorporation and centralisation of decision-making in a "high-command" diluted the relative authority of powerful regional leaders and resulted in the decline of the party. This provided the BJP with its much-needed political opening especially in Assam and later beyond that state.

The prominent case of Himanta Biswa Sarma, described as "one of the towering Congress leaders of Assam" significantly demonstrates how an entrenched hierarchy had institutionalised within the Congress party. Sarma deserted the Congress along with a significant number of sitting legislators from the Congress to become a powerful member of the BJP hierarchy. In spite of its centralised structure the BJP conceded local authority and power by giving voice and political opening to this disenchanted elite. It also attracted new elites from the rapidly expanding and mobile middle class that emerged amongst a large number of historically marginal communities in the region during the last decade due to increased developmental activities in the region. The party permitted articulation of their multiple and often cross-cutting interests to protect culture and identity as also fulfil political ambitions and access to expanding state resources.

This strategic concurrence to multiple claims and interests produces, at least at the moment, a durable arrangement where claims for the creation of a *Twipraland* can be accommodated without losing the support of electorally dominant communities in Tripura; concur to protect indigenous religious faiths without disrupting the claim for more religious freedom of Christians

in Arunachal Pradesh or privilege the interests of non-dominant tribes like *Konyaks*, *Zeliangs* together with the promotion of leaders from dominant tribal communities like the *Aos* and the *Angamis* to political office in Nagaland. None of the leaders newly incorporated into the party owe ideological allegiance to the RSS other than a selective deference that ensures their political survival. This institutional incorporation is a significant factor shaping the electoral expansion and success of the BJP and has no bearing on the ideological anchoring of the party in the region. Therefore, the accepted argument that 'saffron rise' owes its origin to the RSS is disputable because beyond Assam, there are no indications of a "societal or cultural transformation" (Jaffrelot, 2019) from below in most of the states of the region. On the contrary, 'strategic moderation' and/or "ideological adjustments" marks the electoral rise of the BJP in the region.

This article argued that the rise of the BJP must be seen in the backdrop of the decline of the Congress in the region and in that context its ability to incorporate and enable regional elites to find fresh political openings. The party in the process aggregated disparate interests and politicised and mainstreamed claims that only had peripheral salience. This assemblage of disparate groups and interests often works at cross-purposes and creates conditions that can be difficult to reconcile politically. As the collective regional resentment against the Citizenship Bill (2019), or the continuing political tussle between the BJP and the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) (Deb, 2019) demonstrates this aggregation could only be provisional as the cross-cutting and complex coalition of communities and interests can, at any moment, subvert this newfound stability. For it must be remembered that unlike other states in mainland India where the BJP depends largely on the activities of a committed cadre (Jaffrelot, 2001), in this region the party depends largely on the authority, leadership and social networks of regional elites. Therefore, if the strength of the BJP and its rapid expansion in the region lies in elite incorporation herein also lie its weakness.

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Kashmir Pandits: Migration, Homelessness and Resettlement

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Abstract

It was in January 1990, that the Kashmir Pandits were forced to leave the valley. Militancy in Kashmir had acquired a visceral form, and the valley was completely under its grip. The sickening frenzy over exclusivity and the doctrine of isolationism took the valley in the direction of a complete collapse. There were many stakeholders who acted as cohorts to intensify the wave of militancy. The militants directed their untamed energy against the Pandits, who belonged to a contrary socio-cultural axis, to establish a cultural monolith, characterized by exclusivity and oneness. The ethos of Kashmiriyat regressed into an empty signifier. The Kashmir Pandits became homeless in their home country and were subjected to unspeakable pain, trauma, and dislocation. This displacement embodied serious consequences which dislodged their right to live a normal life with security, rootedness and dignity. This paper, therefore, discusses the forced migration of Kashmir Pandits and their identity as refugees, their homelessness and the scope of return to their home in Kashmir.

Keywords: Kashmir Pandits; Militancy; Migration; Homelessness; Resettlement

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, Kashmir Pandits have been living in India as a fragmented and dislocated community. They are living as refugees in their own country, which is secular, democratic and multicultural. Even after thirty years, they are still uncertain of their return to their actual home, where their ancestry and cultural root is located. Since Article 370 and 35A of the Constitution, antique from the Nehruvian period and legal documents that granted exclusivity status to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), have been abrogated by the BJP government, there seems some hope of resettlement giving the Pandits immunity of optimism for the return to their home. It was towards the fag end of 1989 and in the very early part of 1990, the Kashmir Pandits came under the grip of militants in the

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valley (Jagmohan, 2019). Kashmir has nevertheless been one of the most contentious regions in South Asia. India and Pakistan have been at loggerheads over Kashmir since the Partition in 1947.

History at a Glance

Going back into history, Kashmir started moving in the direction of becoming a Muslim majority state as Shah Mir (1339-42) ascended the throne of Kashmir through cunning and conspiracy after the death of the last Hindu King Udyanadeva in 1338 (Jagmohan, 2019; Khan, 1953). After Shah Mir, the Mughals, the Afghans, etc., occupied the throne of Kashmir and made Kashmir a significant centre for propagating Islam and conversion (Madan, 2008). The Hindu and Buddhist legacy that existed for centuries was bottlenecked (Jagmohan, 2019). The iconic Kashmir narrative of inclusivity was replaced by a narrative of exclusivity and oneness. This socio-cultural tendency restructured the existing ethos of collectivism and a shared future. To ensure a complete Islamic takeover of the valley, forceful conversion was adopted as a methodology for achieving the goal of cultural unilateralism (Jagmohan, 2019). The unchallenged consistency of such practices led to the decrease in the demography of the Pandits in the valley. The exodus began. The Sultans (1339-1555), Chaks (1555-1586), the Moguls (1586-1752) and the Afghans (1752-1819) ruled Kashmir before the Sikh rule started there, and could change the cultural topography of Kashmir (Razdan, 2016). Barring a few exceptions, the likes of Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470), though very few in number, the Islamic rulers largely contemplated proselytising the valley.

The Islamic missionary drives, under the auspices of the reigning Sultans and the imperatives of cultural exclusivity, suffocated the non-Muslims. The Pandits of the valley who were the custodians of the *Sanatana* tradition were categorically targeted as they strived for erecting cultural embankment against the perfidy and promotion of proselytization. Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413) was particularly instrumental in the early years of Islamic rule to institute systematic iconoclasm. He pioneered the policy of Islamic superiority and one identity. Subsequently, other sultans began to follow in his footsteps to impose monotheism upon a people who cultivated pluralism from the time unknown. Looking at the gravity of

atrocities unleashed upon the Pandits by Aurangzeb's governor for Kashmir affairs Iftikar Khan (1671-75), the Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur was requested to extend his help to the Kashmir Pandits. Guru Teg Bahadur's challenge to Aurangzeb and his death in the latter's hand owing to his obstinate defiance against Aurangzeb's determinacy to convert led Ranjit Singh to occupy Kashmir (Jagmohan, 2019; Kohli, 1992; Singh, 1967, Fenech, 1997). The Sikh rule lasted only 27 years (1819-46) in Kashmir and it was followed by the Hindu Dogras (Mangrio, 2012).

The Dogra rule in Kashmir was primarily an Anglo-Dogra collaboration (Rai, 2012). The British sold Kashmir to the Dogra king Gulab Singh in 1846 through the treaty of Amritsar with the payment of Rs. 75 lakhs (Bose S. , 2003). The Quit Kashmir movement against the Dogra rule under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah (National Conference) on May 10, 1946, complicated the matter when India was struggling harder to obtain its freedom from British rule. Anand (Anand, 2001) writes: "The Quit India Movement in British India had its echo in Kashmir where the National Conference had launched 'Quit India Movement' with renewed vigour from 28.6.1938 demanding that Maharaja Hari Singh should quit the State bag and baggage and leave the people of the State to decide their own future by having a responsible government. It gained more momentum in 1944".

Therefore, the Quit Kashmir programme was not just a 1946 political decision. It developed in consonance with the emergence of the National Conference as a political organisation in 1932. Abdullah's Quit Kashmir experiment was not merely his reaction against Dogra's administrative incompetency, it was in sync with the Muslim League's demand for the Partition as Kashmir was a predominantly Muslim majority state. On the question of Dogra misrule, the Dogras had toothless sovereignty in Kashmir. They acted according to the British tutelage. They just occupied the decorated office of being the king like the kings in colonial India. To accuse the Dogras singularly as despots were presumably to peddle the manufactured narrative of Sheikh Abdullah. The Dogra rule in Kashmir came to an end with Raja Hari Singh signing the Instrument of Accession to join the Union of India in October 1947.

Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir immediately after the Partition in 1947 made the situation extremely dire by engaging the tribesmen comprising Afridis, Mahsuds and the Pakistan regulars to go on a rampage in Kashmir (Chandrashekhar, 2018; Jagmohan, 2019; Anand, 2001). Hari Singh's indecision made Kashmir bleed in the savage unleashing of violence, barbarity, and loot. His procrastination made Pakistan acquire half of Kashmir which is now called Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Even after the Instrument of Accession was signed by Hari Singh, the matter was taken to the United Nations (UN) by Jawaharlal Nehru on January 01, 1948. Contrary to his expectation, Nehru had nothing to gain by taking the case to the UN. Of this act of misadventure, India had to lose much of its autonomy in Kashmir.

The new Kashmir was born on 26 October 1947 although a part of it remained under Pakistan even after the Instrument of Accession was signed by Hari Singh to merge into the union of India under the intervention of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP). Towards its self-determination and autonomy, legal arrangements and special provisions were made. But the dignity and human rights of the Kashmir Pandits never secured a place in the Kashmir discourse. Pakistan through the Kashmiri leaders and by playing the card of religion and Islamic brotherhood constantly kept the atmosphere tense in the valley. The Abdullahs, Muftis, Geelanis, Hurriyat, etc., under the tutelage of Pakistan, complicated the matter. Militancy, terrorism and separatism, therefore, got intensified in Kashmir. The resurgence of cultural homogeneity under the impact of a consortium combining Pakistan, militants and local leadership made life miserable for the Pandits in Kashmir.

Migration

The tragic episode of the Pandit migration from the valley occurred in 1990. The atmosphere in Kashmir was very tense. Messages from the mosque came blaring to vacate the valley at once. The selective killing of the Pandits was introductory to a big happening if the warning of vacating the valley was not adhered to. The valley came completely under the grip of the militants who received training in Pakistan. The local leadership went absolutely mum and offered enough indication of

possible collusion. Benazir Bhutto did the necessary messaging through her televised speech to keep the temperature high in the valley (Jagmohan, 2019).

The kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the prominent Kashmiri leader and the then Indian Union Minister of Home Affairs in the V P Singh government Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, by the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) on 8 December 1989 and the subsequent release of five jailed militants in India emboldened the militant grit in the valley to cause further instability (Ganguly, 1998). Those released militants were Abdul Hamid Sheikh, Sher Khan (a Pakistani), Javed Ahmed Jargar, Altaf Ahmed and Moor Mohammad Kalwal (Bhattacharjee, 2019). In addition to that, Farooq Abdullah released 70 militants from J&K jail between July and December 1989 (The List of terrorists released by Farooq Abdullah govt, 1990). This gave the militants and the separatists the necessary impetus to wreak havoc in the valley. Pakistan did the rest with rhetoric, ideology and hard and soft resources for intensifying the tension. Moreover, the unrest around Mandal Commission and Shah Banu case in 1986, effete central leadership and the poor economy in 1988 put India in a shaky condition. Pakistan utilised these hard times in India to push its infiltrators and unleashed violence in the valley. The success of getting its operatives released by kidnapping Rubaiya Sayeed increased Pakistan's appetite to intensify terrorism.

The former Union Minister in V P Singh's cabinet, Arif Mohammad Khan, shares his experience with *The Sunday Guardian* on August 31, 2019, that 'the manner in which the Rubaiya Sayeed matter was handled, gave a fillip to terrorism' (Basu & Kumar, 2019). The central government under V P Singh could do nothing remarkable to stop the exodus of the Pandits but to send Jagmohan as governor to restore normalcy in the valley. On his arrival in Srinagar, he found shockingly that the situation had gone completely out of control. The Pandits were in panic and paranoia seeing the violence unleashed by the militants. The state machinery and the chief minister Farooq Abdullah had retired metaphorically to a coma against the neurotic frenzy of militants hellbent

on flushing the Pandits out of Kashmir. The timing of such action was well-chosen. It was not just an accident in history. There was no suddenness involved in it. It was an occurrence indicating collusion, conspiracy and calculation. Leaving home was painful for the Pandits. Leaving home was to give up one's ancestry, property, job, investment and cultural roots. The militants spread the shockwaves of terror not just by messaging but also by killing. The Pandits had a difficult journey to make. It was a journey to uncertainty. They migrated to Jammu with the idea that things would settle down and they would come back. The remains of their houses in the valley are now reduced to mere skeletons and left to the elements for final disintegration. But it's been three decades now and with the BJP government in power at the centre and directly coordinating the J&K affairs, there seems some space for hope to readdress the much-awaited Pandit plight. It seems that definitive attention has been extended to bring the valley to normalcy and to develop a socio-cultural scope for the return of the Pandits.

Homelessness

The Pandit's journey to Jammu was not easy. Jammu was not welcoming enough towards them. The pain of leaving home was coupled with the indifference of the Jammuites (Pandita, 2013). They were sheltered in tents as refugees for quite a long time. The camps built to accommodate the displaced Pandits in and around Jammu and in the towns of Kathua and Udhampur were named Jhiri, Gajan Sumud, GSI Transport Nagar, Railway Camp, Labour Sarai, Muthi, Purkhu, Misriwala, Nagrota Camps etc (Datta, 2017). The heat and humidity, lack of hygiene and severe irregularities in water and electricity supply, epidemics, etc., intensified their agony. Gradually, the government of India made arrangements in terms of providing One Room Tenements (ORTs) (one of brick and cement type and other of fabricated materials with tin roofs), financial support (Rs. 1200 per soul and with a cap of Rs. 5000 per family, only for the 'Relief Category' not for all, in 2010) and benefits in govt service sectors, etc., to make their life a little better (Datta, 2017). Ironically, the materials used for constructing ORTs could hardly resist the boiling summer in Jammu:

“They were also built with a ‘shelf life’ expected to last only for ten years until 2004, and yet they are still inhabited. While the camps are provided electricity and water by the state, the supply is erratic, which exacerbates conditions in the summer. One informant complained bitterly about having to raise children, live, sleep and entertain visitors like me in a single room, which he regarded as ‘slow poisoning’. The camps are thus regarded by its residents themselves as a place which does not allow for a life of dignity and respect” (Datta, 2017). This is what is bragged about as the lucrative gifts of the government. The pathetic condition of these ORTs explains the lack of administrative seriousness towards the plight of the Kashmir Pandits. However, no quantum of compensation can substitute the Pandit right over a home in Kashmir.

Nothing can assuage the pain of being homeless. Only home can. A home away from home is not a home. Any semblance of home in the ORTs is a synthetic home. It is a stopover arrangement. Their real home is in Kashmir. They are waiting to return to their home. Jammu is a kind of waiting room (Datta, 2017). The Pandits' demand for returning to their home is the most legitimate demand and nothing can refute this demand because they exercise the autochthonous right over the land in Kashmir being the oldest inhabitants.

Resettlement

Though three decades have already passed since their forced migration from the Kashmir valley, the issue of resettlement is still a burning question. The issue remains valid as long as the Pandits have not been asked to reclaim their ancestral land. But the Kashmir question is quite complex: ‘The Kashmir dispute has become increasingly layered and fragmented with territorial, legal, and political dimensions’ (Markey, Wahid, Jha, & Mian, 2010). The geopolitics embedded with it is equally complicated. There has been a religiously and ideologically determined perception that has been built that the Pandits belong to a different religious and cultural axis and therefore should not be given the required

accommodative environment to them to stay alongside as neighbours. This social attitude was fed to the people, and militants and other religious and political organisations operating in the valley ensured its sedimentation in the collective psyche of the people. Therefore, every lukewarm attempt made to settle the Pandits after the 1990 episode did not succeed. On the contrary, the intensity of targeted attacks on the residual Pandit community by the terrorists was further deepened.

The Pandit residue that still clung to their land in some remote parts of the valley even after that tragic episode in 1990 exercising their grit and exceptional strength to combat violence and negationism fell prey to the subsequent massacres post-1990 (Timeline of Terror, 2022). Seven Pandits were killed by the militants in Sangrampora village, Budgam district, J&K on 21 March 1997 (Baweja, 1997). The extremely thin Pandit minority was selectively targeted and lined up and shot dead. In 1998 on 25 January, the Wandhama Ganderbal massacre took place and in which 23 Kashmiri Pandits were gunned down (Singh, 2021). The deceased also included four children and nine women. On 17 April 1998, the Prankote massacre occurred and in which 29 Hindus including women and children were beheaded by the militants in the villages of Prankote and Dakikote, Udhampur district, J&K (Gupta, 2021). It was the most brutal and barbaric act which forced 1000 Hindus to migrate. The story of Hindu migration was not just one of or isolated incident in Kashmir. It was chronic and consistent. The Chapnari massacre on 19 June 1998 witnessed the killing of 25 Hindus by the militants at Chapnari, Doda District, J&K (Pillai, 2022) The Kishtwar massacre on 03 August 2001 by the militants at Kishtwar, Doda District, J&K claimed 17 Hindu lives (Kak, 2001). Kashmiri militants killed 32 Hindus at Qasim Nagar in J&K on 13 July 2002 (LeT Ultras involved in Planning, 2002). In the Nadimarg massacre, 24 Kashmir Pandits were killed at Nadimarg village, Pulwama district on 23 March 2003 (24 Hindus are shot dead in, 2003). In the 2006 Doda massacre (April 30), 22 Hindus were murdered in Doda, J&K (Sharma, 2006).

Table 01: Violence against the leftover Pandits post 1990 in Kashmir

Year	Date	Place	Casualties
1997	21 March	Sangrampora village, Budgam district, J&K	7 Pandits
1998	25 January	Wandhama Ganderbal	23 Pandits
1998	17 April	Villages of Prankote and Dakikote, Udhampur district, J&K	29 Hindus (1000 Hindus migrated from the place)
1998	19 June	Chapnari, Doda District, J&K	25 Hindus
2001	03 August	Kishtwar, Doda District, J&K	17 Hindus
2002	13 July	Qasim Nagar in J&K	32 Hindus
2003	23 March	Nadimarg village, Pulwama district	24 Pandits
2006	30 April	Doda, J&K	22 Hindus

Violence inflicted upon the Pandits in Kashmir was too consistent and concentrated that it generated too much fear and paranoia among them. The first thing that is urgently required is to address that fear that has taken its seat in the Pandit mind. Removal of the temporary provisions in the Indian Constitution such as Articles 370 and 35A on 5 August 2019 by the BJP government at the centre ensured the suspension of special status given to J&K. The removal of this legal barrier is a significant achievement. There is no contestation about it whatsoever because the preceding governments did not consider it urgent and never understood its anachronism. Article 370 has always been a political tool to achieve certain electoral and ideological dividends. Against all the pressures both internal and external that the central government could repeal this oppressive legal construct is in itself a remarkable accomplishment. It is expected that the removal of the legal barrier would facilitate the integration process. It was followed by Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act on 09 August 2019 which carved two union territories out of one J&K. The amendment undertaken in October 2020 revised the existing law concerning land and ownership and a host of other things (Sinha, 2020). Such phenomena, however, offer some positive indication that something exceptionally different is yet to take place. Settling Pandits along with a host of other people in Kashmir will

occasion a demographic balance. As a result, the Pandits will feel safe in a space that is plural, not culturally claustrophobic. The sense of cultural alienation will not motivate a community to settle and thrive. A diversity of cultures and people and ideas makes a place truly eclectic and forges an environment of harmony. This initiative would restore true *kashmiriyat*, which the valley was quintessentially known for. It would perhaps defeat the game plan of the militants and some stakeholders who intend to fossilize Kashmir into a medieval monolith.

This optimism stands in complete disagreement with the ongoing ground reality in Kashmir. There is no doubt that in recent years the number of killings by militants has gone significantly down because of the strict policies taken up by the central government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. The culture of development, business, tourism, infrastructure, employment and communication has been effectively promoted in Kashmir. The security concerns have been most expertly addressed. Intelligence mechanisms have tightened up their grips to restrict terrorist activities. These developments that include economy, security, employment and infrastructure present the impression of a different Kashmir. The positive derivations that emanate from these impressions indicate the development of a scope of inter-community co-existence. The issue of Pandit resettlement seems an achievable goal. This explains how much focus the current government in coordination with the security apparatus has given to building a different Kashmir.

Given this developing background, the reality of targeted killings happening intermittently, on the contrary, inflicts fear. In 2022 alone between 1 May and 2 June, nine Hindus have been killed in Kashmir causing serious anger among the religious minorities in the Muslim-majority valley (Aswani, 2022). These and a host of other killings have generated a sense of fear leading to a possible evacuation of the remaining Hindus from the valley. The Kashmir Pandits and the non-Kashmiri Hindus living in Kashmir feel unnerved about these tragic developments (Chowdhary, 2022) Ensuring the prevention of this form of terrorism, which seems more intelligent than obvious, has been difficult as the terror module emerges from within. They are more embedded and obscure than distinctly identifiable. In such a scenario, the

idea of a return of the Pandits to the valley to restore the eclecticism of Kashmir sounds unrealistic. This new variant of terrorism requires modification of methods to handle the perpetrators effectively. The conventional techniques will not act appropriately to stop them. Therefore, it may take some time to respond to the hybrid terrorism. This does not in any sense explain the incompetence or failure of the security and intelligence apparatuses to check these challenges.

The impact of these killings, may it be Makhan Lal Bindroo, the prominent Kashmir Pandit pharmacist (Ashiq, 2021), Arvind Kumar Sah, a street vendor from Bihar, (Masood, 2021), Rajni Bala, a Hindu teacher from Jammu posted in Kulgam (Ashiq, 2022), Supinder Kour, a Sikh woman teacher, and her colleague Deepak Chand (Ellis-Petersen & Hassan, 2021), Rahul Bhat, a revenue employee in 2022 (Sabarwal, 2022), Vijay Kumar, Bank Manager, Ellaquai Dehati Bank, Kulgam district (Hindu man killed, 2022), and a host of other people including some of the Muslims complicate the atmosphere in the valley appearing antithetical to the possible return of the Pandits (Chowdhary, 2022). Therefore, around 4000 Kashmir Pandit employees, who were placed in Kashmir under the Prime Minister Rehabilitation and Return Scheme over a period of a decade, and the Dalit employees numbering 3000 'employed under the 8% reservation of Scheduled Caste quota in each district of Kashmir' (Chowdhary, 2022), feel insecure in the event of these gruesome killings taking place intermittently, and demand for the relocation and safety. Fearing threats to their life, they contemplate on mass migration complicating the central government's efforts to secure peace, friendship and reciprocity. The growing impatience among the religious minorities including Hindus and Sikhs in the valley where Muslims are a majority obscures the optimism of return.

Hybrid terrorism is reported to have got backing from cross-border actors interested in vitiating peace in Kashmir. The recent spike in targeted killings is seen as the handiwork of the hybrid terrorists. These modules that operate so precisely on their targets are surprisingly not figured on any terror list but are sufficiently radicalised to deliver the given task (Sandhu, 2022). They emerge from the crowd and mingle quietly in the crowd making it all the more difficult to trace them. This level of

sophistication has gone into the making of terror in the valley. The anonymity factor attached to it spreads fear among the residual Pandit, Hindu, Dalit and Sikh communities forcing them to run out of Kashmir. This is a part of the sleek strategy adopted by the terrorists and other stakeholders of separatism, exclusivity and cultural homogeneity to unsettle the Indian government's determination to introduce peace in the region. This may frustrate the imagination of Pandit homecoming and the aspired logic of reciprocity and productive cultural dialogue. The groundswell of terror has increased security concerns among civilians, minorities and security forces. These worrisome developments, which were apparently nil in 2020 generating hope of difference, have disturbed the proposed course of events to normalise the security imaginations of the valley. The sub-currents of radicalisation, plotting, weapon delivery and target determination and final execution, co-option of radicalised locals, and Pakistan's alleged role in remote-controlling these events along with the local cohorts are some of the developments which disturb the valley. But the resolve of the current central government to exercise zero tolerance for terrorism explains the preparedness to quick-fix the problem in a short while. The manifestation of this preparedness comes in the form of India's successful organisation of the three-day G20 Summit in Kashmir from 22 to 24 May 2023. This sends a very definitive signal to the world about India's commitment to restoring peace in the valley. This also develops the optimism of Pandit's resettlement in the valley.

Moreover, Kashmir has gone through a very difficult time owing to restrictions and curfews imposed after the abrogation of Article 370 to avoid tensions in the valley. The fact of militant and terrorist grip over the valley and the Gupkar elite and their vehement opposition to the removal of the said article has forced the central govt to resort to such restrictive measures. But, to add to its difficulties, the Covid 19 extended the period of shutdown. Therefore, the valley had to go through a slightly longer period of stasis. It may contribute to slowing down the processes of negotiation for an amicable settlement in an atmosphere of friendship and harmony as the Gupkar confederacy may apply all methods in their ideological arsenal to postpone the processes of the Pandit settlement. Pakistan is always there to add and profit from the tension that captures

the valley. Despite the existing and probable bottlenecks, there should not be any hesitation on the matter of resettlement of the Pandits. The postponement method would further complicate the matter. But now the situation seems much better. The BJP government has done enough to restore peace through development and minimisation of militancy. Tourism, business, economy, development, employment and communication have substantively improved in the valley. The grievances over poverty and lack of facilities are no more the itineraries in their protest list. Therefore, the time now seems more conducive to bringing the Pandit communities back to their home and settling the historical injustice inflicted on them.

The Pandit community have, however, reorganised themselves over the last three decades after their forceful eviction from the valley as they found no reason to stagnate expecting the central government's intervention to resettle them going against the arithmetic of electoral dividend by appeasing certain communities. The collective amnesia around the suffering of the Pandits and their right to land, from which they have been driven out, disappointed the Pandit community and engendered in them the courage to recover. They could overcome their suffering by exercising their unique existential grit, the 'courage to be'. But, they did not leave the valley voluntarily. It was not an act of choice. It was a deliberate attempt to cleanse them from the valley if the call to vacate was not adhered to. This thin minority may not feel encouraged to come to the valley unless a secure environment is developed. A secure environment cannot just be developed by increasing troop deployment, but by promoting inter-community interaction and cooperation. This is inarguably a tough proposition knowing the communal temperature of the valley. But, that seems to be the only way out to bind people having contrary cultural affiliations and ideological moorings. The current government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done exceptionally good work in terms of instilling development in the valley. There is a noticeable difference in the valley in terms of tourism, development and security and a significant reduction in terrorist activities. This gives the impression that the long-pending issue of the resettlement of Pandits in the valley is going to be addressed soon. All that has been done in this connection is to earn *sab ka vishvaas*

(everyone's trust) to make Kashmir a multicultural space where difference is its strength. The efforts that have been given in this direction, if find resonance with the existing community in the valley at large, will make the resettlement process effortless and effective.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the forced migration of Kashmir Pandits from the valley owing to the resurgence of militancy demanding exclusivity and disconnect. The Pandit displacement led to their homelessness and terrible difficulties in the face of complete uncertainty. Even after 30 years, they are still refugees and unsure of their safe return. The removal of Articles 370 and 35A has been a necessary way forward towards settling the Pandits in the valley. The will of the nation seems to be at the right place on the matter of giving the pandits the homecoming, but there seems delay at the level of execution and procedural nitty-gritty. More importantly, the mood of the valley needs to be gauged prior to the resettlement of the Pandits. The central government is extending the best of its efforts to build an environment of cooperation and intercultural dialogue. Development has been the methodology through which cooperation-building exercise is believed to yield desired results. The political and ideological mess that Kashmir was reduced to since Independence and even prior to that needs uncoiling to set things right. The efforts taken in the last few years by the current government are significant enough to make some attitudinal changes in the people of the region. There is high optimism for a change in the sociocultural mood of the place given the developmental motif that has gone into Kashmir. Such expected behavioural and perceptual changes against the status quo of a very specific religious and ideological attitude, if becomes visible on the ground, can make a difference. If the aspirations translate to actuality, it will facilitate the ease of the Pandit resettlement.

The return of the Pandits to the valley is their right. It should not be conflated with choice because it is their place, 'The Kashmir Pandits trace their ancestry to the story of Kashyap Rishi. It explains the geographical and cultural rootedness of the Pandits in Kashmir. The depth and the strength of their root determine their claim upon the land' (Panda, 2022). The sooner they return is better for Indian democracy and

its democratic institutions. Justice would be served to the Pandits who were not only humiliatingly driven out from their ancestral land in a democratic country but also had to wait for 30 years to go back to the land rightfully theirs. However, the option of dialogue with the communities in the valley must be adhered to. This would initiate an ecosystem of peace and cooperation, and would make the resettlement of the Pandits in the valley more lasting and rooted:

“Knowing the complexity of the Kashmir issue, it requires the govt at the centre and the leadership in the state and the people of Kashmir and the Pandits to come together in order to express cooperation. All stakeholders need to discuss and amicably resolve the issues through proper dialogue. Efforts need to be made from both sides. Willingness needs to be extended from both ends. Such acts of a unique display of human character will defeat the cause of militancy and ease out gradually the intense military presence in the valley. It will inaugurate a new ecosystem of intercultural communication and cohesion (Panda, 2022)”.

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COVID 19 PANDEMIC: REINFORCING THE NEED FOR GENDER SENSITIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK³

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Abstract

The uncertainties the world is facing since the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic is a test for humankind. The impact of the pandemic is definitely universal; however studies and statistics have revealed its disproportionate impact on women and girls. The paper examines the gender dimension of the pandemic and argues for a more gender responsive policy framework to address the challenges women are facing due to the pandemic. The threat to peace and security due to COVID 19 pandemic has further highlighted the centrality of the UN WPS Agenda. Inclusion of women voices will be critical to address future pandemics.

Key Words: Pandemic, human security, gender sensitive policies, WPS Agenda, sustainable development

Introduction

The world witnessed unprecedented uncertainties with the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020. The pandemic once again highlighted that non-traditional security issues like health can have serious ramifications on governance, economy and politics, the impact of these challenges cut across borders. COVID 19 pandemic changed the world scenario in a way none had ever expected.

The security challenges posed by the pandemic are multidimensional. Today, security is not just limited to traditional military issues. It has moved from “an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people’s security, from security through armaments to security through sustainable human development.” (Human Development Report, 1994) Now, human security is an integral part of deliberations on

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security. Back in 1945 at the San Francisco Conference that led to the creation of the United Nations, the essence of human security was expressed by the then US Secretary of State as: (Human Development Report, 1994) The battle of peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is the economic and social front where victory means freedom from want. Only victory on both fronts can assure the world of an enduring peace.

The primary components of human security are: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political (Human Development Report, 1994). The General Assembly Resolution 66/290 stated that “human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people”(UNGA, 2012). An important paradigm of human security is health security. The loss of life due to disease is one of the greatest threats to people in many developing countries. The Goal 3 (Establish Good Health and Well-Being) of the Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reinforces the significance of health for peace and development.

Health issues are no longer confined to domestic boundaries and there is need for serious deliberations on “transnational aspects of health” (Venkatapuram, 2020).The pandemic has once again made us realise that “we need to learn how to globally govern biological contagion with as much dedication as we give to governing economic and security matters”(Venkatapuram, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, there have been several instances like SARS outbreak in 2003, growing threat of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), *Zika*, *Ebola*, *Chikungunya*, HIV/AIDS highlighting the global ramifications of health hazards.

Health emergency is a challenge to international peace and development. The pandemic has highlighted the strategic significance of health issues. The World Health Organization (WHO) has noted that “pandemics, health emergencies and weak health systems not only cost lives but pose some of the greatest risks to the global economy and security faced

today” (World Health Organization, 2023). Peace and development will remain elusive if people lives are under constant threat. The Human Development Report (HDR) of 1994 writes: “the world will never be secure from war if men and women have no security in their homes and in their jobs” (Human Development Report, 1994). Thus, the pandemic is “not only a challenge for global health systems, but also a test of our human spirit” (UN, 2020).

The impact of COVID 19 is universal but its disproportionate effect on women and girls makes it imperative to understand the challenges emerging from the pandemic through a gender lens. Like any other crisis, the COVID 19 is also not gender neutral. Time and again it has been proved that “crisis and conflict have profound and disproportionate impacts on women and girls, amplifying pre-existing inequalities” (UN Women, 2020). The vulnerabilities faced by women and girls in wartime like food and housing scarcity, loss of livelihoods, increase in vulnerability to gender-based violence, and more burden of unpaid care work echoes in the challenges women are facing because of the pandemic (UN Women, 2020).

Gender Dynamics of the Pandemic

The challenges humanity are facing from the COVID 19 pandemic is not limited to health issues; it has deeper ramifications. Looking at some of the data on the impact of COVID 19 on women/girls since 2020, it is critical to address the crisis from a gender perspective.

The economic burden on women since the outbreak of the pandemic is a concern. The UN Women in a report in September 2020 notes that the pandemic has economically affected women “harder” because of several factors like women earn less, engaged mostly in informal sector, have fewer savings, limited access to social protections and had to leave work as they are mostly burdened with unpaid care and domestic work (UN Women, 2020). The Report further highlighted that 70 percent of the health workers and first responders in the world are women but are not at par with their male counterparts (UN Women, 2020). In 2030, it is

expected that there will be 121 poor women for every 100 poor men (UN Women, 2020).

The industries in which women are mostly engaged like food services, retail and entertainment industries are worst affected by prolonged lockdowns. About 40 percent of employed women work in “hardhit sectors” compared to 36.6 percent of employed men (UN Women, 2020). An analysis by McKinsey Global Institute in July 2020 highlighted that women are more vulnerable to suffer economic losses because of the existing gender inequalities (Madgavkar & White 2020). Women constitute 39 percent of the global employment but account for 54 percent of the job losses (Madgavkar et. al., 2020).

Profeta highlighted the vulnerability of women’s work during the COVID 19 (Paola, 2020). She indicated that the income of women is lower than men and their poverty rates are high. Moreover, she highlighted that single mothers are particularly vulnerable. She further stated that considering age and occupation, working women are not less susceptible than men; rather it is working women who are at more risk than men. Women constitute two-third of the health workforce and have lower risks of unemployment but work in the health sector exposed women to greater risk of contagion. She further argued that the pandemic has further raised the issue of family relationships. Women are primarily responsible for housework and childcare and thus lock down, closure of schools and working from home increased their burden manifold.

Mental health issues are yet another ramification of the pandemic. The emotional footprint of the pandemic is “disproportionately falling on women’s shoulders in most countries” (UN Women, 2020). Some of the prime reasons contributing to more stress and anxiety among women are increase in unpaid care and domestic work, income loss, rise in gender-based violence (UN Women, 2020). Also, there is increase in social evils like child marriage, trafficking, domestic violence, school dropouts and many more since the outbreak of the pandemic. Economic insecurity as a result of the pandemic has led to increase in girls dropping out of school. According to the UNESCO, about 11million girls may dropout from

school (UNESCO, 2021). Young girls out of school become more vulnerable to gender abuses, trafficking, early marriage and other evil practices. Another threat girls are facing due to the pandemic is the increase in child marriage. In the last decade, the proportion of young women globally married as children had decreased by 15 per cent, a progress that seems to be severely challenged by the pandemic (UNICEF, 2021). Now, about ten million more girls are at risk of becoming child brides (UNICEF, 2021). About 650 million girls and women alive today in the world were married in childhood, mostly from Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, India and Nigeria (UNICEF, 2021).

There is a surge in violence against women and girls across worldwide. Globally, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 3 women experienced physical or sexual violence mostly by an intimate partner (UN Women, 2020). About 243 million women and girl aged 15-49 faced sexual or physical violence from intimate partner in 2019 across the globe (UN Women, 2020). The UN reported that “violence against women, and particularly domestic violence, have increased in several countries as security, health, and money worries create tensions and strains accentuated by the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown”(UN Women, 2020). For example, in France, the cases of domestic violence have increased by 30 percent, in Australia about 40 percent of frontline workers reported of increase in request for help by survivors and 70 per cent of them have reported that the cases received have increased in their level of complexity during the COVID-19 outbreak (UN Women, 2020). Highlighting the seriousness and the vulnerable position of women and girls, the UN has termed the violence against women during the pandemic as “shadow pandemic”.

The present COVID 19 crisis is not the only time that health hazards have increased violence against women. For example, Sierra Leone saw a rise of 19 percent in gender-based violence during the *Ebola* outbreak in Africa in 2014-16 (Suri & Mona 2022). Looking at the increase in violence against women during health emergency, it is important to address the violence against women during health emergencies as a “public health priority” (Suri et.al.,2022).

Impact of the Pandemic on Women in India

India ranks 140 out of 156 in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 published by the World Economic Forum (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021). COVID 19 has pushed the lives of many women and girls in India and in the world to a bleak future. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, women in India have also been vulnerable to various threats and challenges. The prevailing patriarchal social structure and practices further makes the condition of women difficult.

Increasing unemployment among women since the outbreak of the pandemic is worrisome. According to a Survey by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. unemployment among women increased to 17 percent, more than double the rate for men (Beniwal, 2021). The survey conducted by the Nudge Foundation reported that there is about 76 percent reduction in weekly income for women due to lockdowns, resulting in severe hardship (Beniwal, 2021).

Women as primary care givers are overburdened with household chores leading to stress and anxiety. Also, women are employed as frontline workers as paramedic staffs, which make them vulnerable to the disease and other health problems. Further, lack of adequate and accessible health facilities for pregnant and new-borns, *etc.* added to the difficulties for women.

The pandemic time also saw increase in domestic violence against women in India. In 2020, the National Commission for Women (NCW) had received 23,722 complaints of crimes committed against women, which was the highest in the last six years (Kumar, 2021). About one-fourth of these complaints were cases of domestic violence (Kumar, 2021). 7,708 of these complaints were under the right to live with dignity clause, which includes emotional abuse of women and 5,294 complaints were of domestic violence (Kumar, 2021). In India, more girls (3.2 percent) are out of school than boys (2.7 percent) in the age group below 15 years of age (Right to Education Forum, 2021). It is projected that about 10 million secondary school girls in India could drop out of school due to the pandemic, which will lead to increase in other evil social

practices like early marriage, early pregnancy, poverty, trafficking and violence (Right to Education Forum, 2021).

In a Study in 2021 titled 'Impacts of Covid-19 on women in low-income households in India' conducted by *Dalberg*, a Social Impact Advisory Group stated that in India about 8.7 million women who were working before the pandemic were out of work in October 2020 (Dalberg, 2021). Also, the study suggested that women made up just 24 percent of those working before the pandemic but accounted for 28 percent of those who lost jobs (Dalberg, 2021). The Study highlighted that among the women in surveyed areas, the pandemic has increased their nutritional challenges, decreased access to menstrual pads and increase in unpaid work and reduced time for rest.

The Study recommended a gender perspective in designing and executing government programmes to address the problems women are facing due to the pandemic. It also highlighted the need to address some of the structural reasons that makes women vulnerable during crisis like the pandemic. The Study suggested that the government policies and programmes need to have women specific programmes and welfare schemes to address the challenges women face in times of crisis like the pandemic. A few measures like provision of pads and contraceptives in essential supplies, women enrolment in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGA), improving utility of *Jan Dhana* accounts, *etc.* will address some of the concerns of the women, suggested the Report.

Akshara, a Mumbai-based Non-Governmental Organisation working for women's empowerment in a report titled "Grappling with the Shadow Pandemic: Women's Groups and Domestic Violence in India" highlighted the conditions of victims of domestic violence during the pandemic in India (Bavadam, 2021). The report indicated that the slogan 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' did not provide safety and security to many women across India. The report wrote that "with family members at home all the time, women were doubly impacted not only with economic and other losses but also with a heavier burden of housework and with

the ugly spectre of domestic violence looming over them” (Bavadam, 2021).

To address the impact of the pandemic, “public activism as well as state intervention and collaboration between different entities need to be carefully utilised”, suggested the Report (Bavadam, 2021). The government used services of the private health sector for supplementary hospital beds and vaccination but such collaboration was missing with Women’s Rights Groups, indicated the report. The Women Rights Groups deal directly with the affected women and the state has a vast network of departments and human resources like ASHA workers. Hence, the Report recommended that the collaboration between the government and Women Right Groups is critical in addressing the genuine concerns of the vulnerable women.

The government took several measures to address the woes of the affected people during the pandemic. Also, several measures were taken to specifically help women and girls. To help the poor to tide over the crisis, the *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana*, a relief package of Rs 1.70 Lakh Crore was announced in March 2020, in which 20 crore women *Jan Dhan* account holders was to get Rs 500 per month for next three months (Government of India). The government also took several social protection measures like direct cash transfers to women. Over 200 million female account holders received monthly cash payments from April to June 2020 (Khan & Nikore, 2021). Collateral-free lending limits increased from 1 million rupees to 2 million rupees to benefit 6.3 million women-organized Self-Help Groups (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021) The MGNREGA employed about 108 million persons between April-October 2020 and reserved one-third work for women workers (Khan et al., 2021). In India, a supportive step taken to help women during the pandemic was to include domestic violence shelter and support services as “essential”. (UN Women, 2021) During the first and second waves of the pandemic, 700 One-Stop-Crisis centres remained open in India, supporting over 300,000 women who suffered abuse and needed shelter, legal aid and medical attention (UN Women, 2021).

Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

In a conflict situation the burden on women and girls aggravates and the way women and girls experience the conflict is different from men. However, women have always been in the periphery in the peace making and peace building processes. Traditional and non-traditional security threats make women and girls vulnerable to myriad hardships. The struggle for gender equality has a long history. Among other initiatives, a major step was to include women in the decision making, peace-making and peace building processes. The Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 that resulted in the historic Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda emphasised on “the important role of women in the conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of women’s equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security” (UNDP, 2019, p 5).

The prime focus of the WPS Agenda was to include women’s participation in peace and security processes. Lakshmi Puri, the former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women noted that the WPS is “an important rallying point for gender equality related multilateral and bilateral diplomacy in the hard core areas of ‘waging’ peace, assuring security, countering violent extremism and conflict related humanitarian action”(Puri, 2020).

Resolution 1325 does not deal with “one type of development or conflict context, but for all contexts” (UNDP, 2019, p 5). It applies to women in “ongoing violent conflict” and in “stable” countries dealing with violence against women (UNDP, 2019, p 5). The countries engaged in peacekeeping operations ensures that “women are included in decision-making and leadership roles in military and civilian peace operations, and that all forces are properly trained in gender-sensitive peace operations, have the skills and resources to address the conflict issues faced by women and girls where they are deployed”(UNDP, 2019, p 5).

The four pillars of the WPS Agenda are: prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery. WPS Agenda aims at prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, ensures women's equal participation and gender equality in peace and security decision-making processes at all levels, women and girls are protected from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and their rights are protected and promoted in conflict situations and stresses on specific relief needs of women are met and their capacities to act as agents in relief and recovery are strengthened in conflict and post-conflict situations(UNDP, 2019, p 5).

The Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is followed up by nine follow-up Resolutions. There are few more UN Security Council Resolutions related to Women Peace and Security like: Resolution 1820 (2008), Resolution 1888 (2009), Resolution 1889 (2009), Resolution 1960 (2010), Resolution 2106 (2013), Resolution 2122 (2013), Resolution 2242 (2015), Resolution 2272 (2016) and Resolution 2467 (2019). These Resolutions dealt with various aspects relating to women security like sexual violence, establishing Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, post-conflict peace-building focusing on increasing the number of women participating in peace talks, importance of civil society in preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict, stronger measures to improve women's participation and representation in conflict resolution, especially through leadership positions, women's roles in countering violent extremism and terrorism, provides measures to address sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations, introduces accountability measures for perpetrators of sexual violence and calls for effective support measures for victims of sexual violence to be implemented.

The global South has raised concerns with the WPS Agenda. Critics of UNSC Resolution 1325 argue that the Resolution has been used by powerful countries in the Global North to push for favourable policies in post-conflict countries in the Global South in the name of gender equality (Basu 2016, p 364). Critics point out that the global South is a "passive recipients of policies" developed in the North (Basu 2016, p

364). However, the countries from the global South have been instrumental in linking gender inequality and international peace and security. Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury of Bangladesh in his press statement presented at the Security Council on 8 March 2000 for the first time highlighted the linkages (Basu 2016, p.366). Later in May 2000, Namibia hosted a workshop on gender and peacekeeping leading to the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action, which emphasised on gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations (Basu 2016, p 366). Namibia also held the Presidency of the Security Council when UNSCR 1325 was adopted. Two of the three follow-up WPS Resolutions UNSCR 1889 (2009) and UNSCR 2122 (2013) looking beyond ‘protection’ were adopted during the presidency of Vietnam and Azerbaijan, respectively (Basu 2016, p 366)

India and WPS

India is yet to develop a WPS National Action Plan, which is a national-level strategy to meet the WPS Agenda obligations. India has actively participated in the Security Council’s debates on WPS Agenda. Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, the former Permanent Representative of India at UN in a statement at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women and Peace and Security, on 23 February 2012 had said: “India will continue to contribute positively to UN efforts in protecting vulnerable sections, particularly women and children, in conflict and post-conflict societies” (Ministry of External Affairs 2017). Keeping with the commitment to implement the WPS Agenda internationally, India had sent an all-female police unit in the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia in 2007 and South Sudan in 2019. Also, in 2019 India deployed a Female Engagement Team as UN peacekeepers in Democratic Republic of Congo. In January 2023, India sent the largest unit of women peacekeepers to Abyei at the border of Sudan and South Sudan, which witnessed violence in recent times.

Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations at the UNSC Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on 18 January 2022 had said: “Women’s participation in public

life and elimination of violence against them are pre-requisites for promoting lasting peace and security around the world. India firmly supports women's full, equal and meaningful participation in political processes and decision-making to promote an inclusive society. India has today moved from a paradigm of women's development to women-led development" (Permanent Member of India to the UN, 2022). He further said "Member States should identify and address barriers to women's meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict, and in post-conflict peace-building efforts and programs. This requires devising a legislative and judicial framework, providing economic opportunities, undertaking institution and capacity building, ensuring accountability and checking impunity of those perpetrating violence against women"(Permanent Member of India to the UN, 2022).

Beyond the Pandemic

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women/girls has yet again raised many issues. The pandemic has once again pointed how the existing social structure makes women more vulnerable in times of crisis. In addition to the health issues, pandemic has posed economic, social and mental health challenges for women. Statistics reveal the vulnerability of women and girls during the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on women/girls could "reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights" (Guterres).

Without gender equality, sustainable development will be incomplete. In the SDGs, gender parity is a vital theme. Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 Goals. Further, SDG 5 specifically addresses the issue of Gender equality, indicating the significance of gender parity in the development process. Gender equality and human development are deeply linked. Investments in gender equality will reflect on the targets of the SDGs and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (Osland& Røysamb, 2020)

The disproportionate impact of the crisis on women/girls emphasises the need for a more focused gendered approach in dealing with the crisis. The UN Secretary General in April 2020 had urged governments to "put women and girls at the centre of their recovery efforts" (UN News, 2020). The UN

has suggested five priorities to deal with the crisis: Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is mitigated and reduced, Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls, people support and practise equal sharing of care work, Women and girls lead and participate in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making and data and coordination mechanisms include gender (UN Women).

The pandemic reinforces the vision of the WPS Agenda, which outlines “a people-centric vision for human security through a gendered lens” (UN Women). Reaffirming the pivotal role of women in peace and security, the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2013 at the Security Council’s debate on “Women, Rule of Law and Transitional Justice” said: “Women’s participation in peace efforts is a matter of gender equality and universal human rights – and crucial to achieving sustainable peace, economic recovery, social cohesion and political legitimacy” (UN News, 2013).

Gloria Steinem, an American feminist journalist had said: “Don’t think about making women fit the world - think about making the world fit women”. A gendered policy framework will be beneficial to address emergencies like the pandemic in future. As highlighted by the historic statement of the former UN Security Council President Anwarul Karim Chowdhury: “Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men”, women voices need to be included in decision making processes (Piga, 2021).

Post-COVID-19 recovery strategy needs to focus on gender-sensitive measures. Also, collaborating with women rights groups to address the concerns for women and girls in crisis like pandemic is critical. Some of the suggestions put forward by *Akshara* like creating safety nets and issuing directives based on the demands made by women’s rights groups, starting a national emergency helpline with a common number with trained women personnel, publicising a directory of services which can be accessed by survivors and their well-wishers during crisis, strengthening the capacity of functionaries of One-Stop Centres and other shelter and safe spaces for women in the State will be beneficial in addressing future pandemics.

Conclusion

The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated that “development and security are inextricably linked. A more secure world is only possible if poor countries are given a real chance to develop. Extreme poverty and infectious diseases threaten many people directly, but they also provide a fertile breeding-ground for other threats, including civil conflict” (United Nations, 2004). The pandemic has reinforced the ramification of the health crisis on peace and security.

The pandemic has been a challenging experience for all. However, since the impact of the crisis on women and girls is different from men, we need to focus on the gender dynamics of the pandemic. In future, gender sensitive policies in consultation with women rights group and involving more women policymakers in post-pandemic recovery planning and strategy are critical. Also, it is also imperative that voices of women rights groups from the global South are heard. Women across the globe have been disproportionately affected during the pandemic. However, because of the prevailing social structures and practices the experiences of women from global South is different from women in global North. It is imperative that gender responsive measure according to the local needs be designed to help women and girls in emergencies like the pandemic. Under India’s G20 Presidency where voices of the global south find special focus, it is critical to raise the concerns of the women from the global south. The G20 under India’s Presidency focuses on ‘human centric development’, which will be incomplete without gender justice and equality.

The year 2020 was the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which is the blueprint for promoting women’s rights. Even after more than two decades of the historic Beijing Platform for Action, gender justice and equality is still a long way. The pandemic has yet again established the need for inclusion of women voices in decision making, a lesson we need to take seriously.

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China's Engagement with the Island States of East Africa in the Western Indian Ocean: A Geo-economic Perspective

Raghvendra Kumar

Abstract

China's grand strategy to create a Sino-centric world order by expanding the People's Republic of China's (PRC) 'sphere of influence' is evident in the strategic island states of east Africa in the Western Indian Ocean. This is craftily done by fostering closer economic integration with countries along China's periphery and beyond, thereby shaping these countries' interests to align with the PRC's. The Belt and Road Initiative helps PRC's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to export overcapacity, such as in the cement, steel, and construction sectors. It creates investment opportunities for the PRC's large reserve of savings. Beijing's strategic financing and predatory lending of infrastructural projects in participating countries are modelled to create dependency creating a conducive environment for debt-trap, which the PRC could leverage to pursue its geopolitical interests. Against this backdrop, the proposed paper intends to examine the strategic salience of these Island States of East Africa to Beijing's grand strategy. It will further investigate the geoeconomics of China's engagement with these four island states, namely Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. Lastly, it will end with an analysis of China's economic polarisation.

Keywords: China, Island States of Africa, Western Indian Ocean, Geoeconomics, BRI

Introduction

China is 'constrained by geography' so long as it lacks direct access to the Indian Ocean. As Colin Gray argues, that "geography is

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inescapable...Geography not only provides ‘the physical playing field for those who design and execute strategy but also drives, certainly shapes, the technological choices that dominate tactics, logistics, institutions, and military cultures’ (1999: 165). China's prominent role in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) must be understood in the context of the larger geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. China has become an important player in the geopolitics of the WIO due to its wide-ranging economic, political, and military involvement in the region (Kuo, 2018). The engagement between China and the island states of Africa in WIO is now getting more visible, particularly in the wake of the changing strategic environment of the region. China's increasing footprint in the region is the cause of this change in the regional strategic setting. Over the past three decades, China has significantly increased its engagements in the Indian Ocean region. As a result, strategists are now concerned that China's growing naval presence, combined with its use of so-called “debt-trap diplomacy”, could provide China with permanent military advantages far from its shores (Chellaney, 2017). China having no direct access to the Indian Ocean region, which is critical for Beijing's economic and energy security, makes it vulnerable, creating a security dilemma in its strategic thought. China's access to the Indian Ocean is long and challenging as a result of the country's lack of simple access to the ocean through land routes. On the other hand, taking into account the degree to which China is reliant on oil imported from other countries as well as its other interests in the area, many analysts believe that, in the long run, China will focus a great deal of its attention on the WIO, which is the region in which the majority of its interests are concentrated (Brewster, 2018). Thus, China's new thrust in the WIO region is a result of China's broader maritime strategy to expand its presence in the region, in which island states with weak and fragile economies are its primary targets.

China, anxious about India's geographical advantage and New Delhi's strong political and security ties with WIO island states of Africa, has led Beijing to devote greater attention to the small island states of the WIO. Beijing's strategies are aimed at having a higher level of physical presence in the WIO island states of Africa than would be warranted by its present levels of trade and other economic activities. China is

increasing the scale and intensity of the economic, diplomatic and political engagement with the island nations of the region, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. China's strategic intentions underlying its high-profile outreach to these island states are mostly driven by India's rise as an economic power. David Brewster argues that "China and India are emerging as major maritime powers of the Indo-Pacific as part of long-term shifts in the regional balance of power. As their wealth, interests, and power expand, China and India will increasingly come into contact in the shared maritime security space of the Indo-Pacific. How India and China get along in this new context - cooperation, coexistence, competition, or confrontation - will be one of the key strategic challenges for the region of the twenty-first century" (Brewster, 2018, p. 5).

The critical significance of island territories has been well established. Throughout history, rising powers have commanded strategic control over islands to project power far beyond their shores (Baruah, 2020). However, they have always been seen as an object of competition or a tool to extend the major power's sphere of influence (Sora, 2022, p. 114). In the current era, especially in the 21st century, the strategic islands of East Africa in the WIO region, namely: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles, are trying to negotiate their strategic importance highlighted by their location along key sea lines of communication (SLOCs) with powers like Indian and China to maximise their gains. These islands are crucial to maintaining a constant naval presence along vital international shipping routes, as they provide a strategic geography from which a navy can patrol and secure SLOCs in times of peace and from which it can interdict and cut off enemy communication in times of conflict (Michaelsen, 2003, p. 365). The major maritime nations have used these tactics to constrain the movements of ships and deny access to the open ocean deterring trade and other activities (Michaelsen, 2003, p. 366). In this context, the significance of smaller but strategically located island states is crucial. Their role in providing security presence in the form of military bases, naval monitoring stations, listening posts, logistical support facilities, joint military exercises, etc., aid in providing the naval forces with the capacity to monitor the key maritime routes to

ensure free flow of energy and other critical commodities. The island nations are also becoming more vulnerable due to the 'great power' politics of the major powers in the Indian Ocean. Non-traditional security risks, including piracy, terrorism, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, are on the increase, endangering regional security and stability and undermining their other role and comparable importance in global geopolitics, especially in the discourse surrounding climate change and blue economy are often overlooked (ICWA, 2023, p.9).

Since both India and China are rising at the same time, their interests clash in many common sectors. In this context the paper presents a comparative and analytical investigation of the importance of the island states of Africa in WIO region for China. Focus of the paper is on the contemporary developments in the region vis a vis China's aspiration to influence the region and reorient the power relations. This paper is aimed at examining the nature of engagement China has with the WIO island states of Africa. In conclusion it has looked into China's the dimensions of engagement with the WIO island states of Africa and how it shapes up the strategic environment of the WIO island states of Africa having a substantial effect on the strategic balance of the Indian Ocean region as a whole.

Strategic Significance of WIO for China

The strategic importance of the WIO has been increasingly recognized, with various countries vying for influence in the region. In addition to France (a resident power of the IOR) and the United States (the only extra-regional power having a permanent presence in the WIO), China has emerged as a significant player with substantial interests in the WIO. China's engagement in the WIO can be categorized into four main areas: dual-use infrastructure development, politico-diplomatic endeavours, connectivity and access initiatives as tools to attain its geoeconomics goals, and military activities in the wider canvas of geosecurity objectives (Gurjar, 2019, p. 385). These four aspects are interconnected and serve China's overarching goal of power projection and expansion of Beijing's 'sphere of influence'. While Beijing has no direct access to the IOR in general and the WIO region in particular, leading to a security

dilemma, China has devoted much of its focus on building dual-use infrastructure in the WIO, which is aimed at creating facilities that can serve both civilian and military purposes. By investing in infrastructure projects such as ports, roads, and railways, China seeks to enhance its economic and military capabilities while ensuring access to vital resources and trade routes. This strategic approach aligns with China's objective of securing energy supplies, sustaining economic growth, and safeguarding military interests.

In recent years, the Indian Ocean, in general, and WIO, in particular, have gained significant strategic importance as emerging powers in Asia focus their attention on this vast expanse of water. The region's international shipping lanes, sea lines of communication (SLOCs), abundant energy reserves in coastal states, fisheries resources, and rapidly growing economies in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) have attracted attention from various nations (Suri, 2017). The WIO plays a crucial role in global trade as it serves as a vital conduit connecting West Asia, Africa, South Asia, and other regions. Several highly important and strategic chokepoints, such as the Straits of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Malacca, are situated in the IOR. These chokepoints facilitate the transportation of approximately 32.2 million barrels of oil and petroleum per day. It is estimated that the sea routes in the Indian Ocean handle two-thirds of the world's seaborne trade in oil, half of the seaborne container traffic, and one-third of the world's seaborne bulk cargo (IORA, n.d).

China's rapid economic growth has resulted in ever increasing demand for fossil fuels, especially oil and gas. China is a net importer of oil and gas and is heavily dependent on overseas energy supply for its sustained economic expansion and development. To meet these demands, China has increasingly relied on international trade, particularly merchandise trade (90 per cent seaborne trade and 50 per cent across the Indian Ocean). The country's industrialization and urbanization processes have driven the need for commodities such as metals, minerals, and petroleum-based energy sources. It is predicted that the demand for oil and gas will continue to rise, accounting for 32 per cent of the total

energy mix by 2050 (IEEJ, 2018). Therefore, China's continued global outreach for oil resources revolves around two regions, West Asia and Africa, which account for almost 63 per cent of its crude oil imports (EIA, 2022). Much of these energy supplies pass through the Indian Ocean region (IOR), to which Beijing has no direct access and is often considered by many analysts as its most critical vulnerability (Brewster, 2018). The pause in economic activity caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in China seems to end with the lifting of 'zero-covid policy' restrictions amid mass protests (Huang & Han, 2022). The economic recovery, thereafter, will end the decline in energy consumption. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has affected Europe's oil and gas supply, increasing the demand for hydrocarbons from West Asia and Africa. To ensure an affordable and consistent supply of oil and gas, Beijing is increasingly engaging with the resource-rich countries in the world.

While China has emerged as the world's largest exporter and the second-largest importer due to its significant trade surplus in recent years, despite implementing stringent policies, China maintains a relatively open approach to foreign trade, with trade accounting for approximately 37 per cent of its GDP in 2022 (World Bank, 2023). A major part of all these merchandise trade passes through the Indian Ocean, and its critical chokepoints to which Beijing has no direct access make it vulnerable. The most crucial chokepoint is the Strait of Malacca through which a significant portion of China's energy and merchandise trade passes. The Strait of Malacca serves as the most direct sea route linking East Asia and the Middle East, playing a crucial role in reducing transportation time and costs for trade between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Its strategic location makes it an essential waterway for the shipment of hydrocarbons, container goods, and bulk cargo. According to the US Energy Information Agency (EIA), in 2016, around 16 million barrels of crude oil and 3.2 million barrels of liquefied natural gas (LNG) were transported daily through the Strait of Malacca (EIA, 2016). This volume represents the second highest globally, following the Strait of Hormuz, which connects the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), approximately 70 per cent of China's petroleum and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports,

pass through the Strait of Malacca. This dependence on the Strait underscores its critical importance in China's energy security policy (Nakashima & Medeiros, 2017). However, the significance of the Strait extends beyond energy transportation. The CSIS also calculates that around 20 per cent of global maritime trade and 60 per cent of China's trade flows traverse the Strait and the South China Sea, making it the most crucial sea line of communication for the Chinese economy. In November 2003, Chinese President Hu Jintao described this reliance on the Strait as the "Malacca Dilemma," emphasizing China's vulnerability to a naval blockade due to the lack of alternative routes. President Hu referred to "certain powers" encroaching on and attempting to control navigation through the Strait, a veiled reference to the United States and its naval capabilities (Nakashima & Medeiros, 2017).

China's Expansionism: Beijing's Growing Footprint in the Island States' of Africa in the WIO

China's robust economy and geopolitical aspirations have contributed to the country's rising profile in the global geopolitical order. The mission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' which aims to create a Sino-centric world order by reorienting the present for a dominant future. China's economy which has taken a historic leap in the last decade has added much required impetus to the "Chinese Dream". Peoples Republic of China's (PRC) exponential growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from USD 8.53 trillion to USD 17.77 trillion and from 11.3 per cent to 18.5 per cent of the world's total economic volume, places Beijing as the second largest economy globally (Chinese Embassy in Seychelles, 2022). The authoritarian regime in PRC has helped it achieve significantly in the manufacturing sector which has made the average Chinese contribution to global economic development to 38.6 per cent, making it the most by any country (Chinese Embassy in Seychelles, 2022). Therefore, as its economy grows, China is also taking real measures to expand its maritime reach beyond its borders. China's maritime strategy to displace US and encircle India is a function of its "grand strategy" in the international security context. This goes beyond maritime, military, or

even regional planning. It details China's ambitions to upgrade its military and expand its influence beyond the South China Sea to the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Gulf by gaining access to new ports and airfields and forming new diplomatic ties and military alliances. China is showing increasing might in the Indian Ocean area as it becomes more aggressive.

For China, the WIO region is critical for its economic and energy security. The WIO is a sub-region that connects with the resource-rich regions of the African and Arabian Peninsula. It is one of the connecting links between the Eastern and Western hemispheres as well as the Northern and Southern hemispheres. It connects Asia, Africa, and Europe on one hand whereas the Atlantic and Indian Ocean on the other. Therefore, WIO region is a critical transit route through which bulk of China's energy imports and merchandise trade passes. The region is also home to some of the vital chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the Mozambique Channel demonstrates China's vulnerability which can be compounded in an event of disruption of the free flow of energy supply and merchandise trade. For instance the blockage of Egypt's Suez Canal for six days by the ship Ever Given in March 2021 led to a disruption of the flow of critical commodities necessitating re-routing (through another weather-determined chokepoint a route dangerous for transit, the Cape of Good Hope) thereby increasing not only the transportation cost significantly but also the chances of ship disaster manifold (Baruah & Duckworth, 2022). In this context, China aims to attain its geo-economic and non-geo-economic goals by approaching small states first, such as Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles through a web of complex and predatory economic policies. Therefore, the lack of investigative research on Sino-Small Island States geo-economic relations provides ample scope for exploring the need to examine the factors influencing trade flows between them. As China's political economy motives are hidden in the Chinese international investment treaties, and their designs aim to create dependencies that suit Beijing's pursuit of a Sino-centric world order.

Geo-Economic Engagement

Due to its growing influence and economic power, China is implementing a geo-economic strategy of centrality in various regions of the Indo-Pacific, including the East African Island States. Beijing's geo-economic approach involves a diverse set of tools, such as trade, investment, finance, development aid, and infrastructure alliances. Over the past decade, China has become a significant player in the East African Island States, actively engaging through extensive aid programs, expanding trade and investments, and proactive political-diplomatic initiatives. Notably, these island states have also been included in China's ambitious 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) initiative, specifically as a crucial node of the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road'. Historically, China's involvement in the East African Island states of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles has been primarily motivated by its diplomatic recognition of the 'One China Policy' and UN accession. However, in recent times, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has increased its investments in the East African Island States to assert itself as a significant global and Indo-Pacific power. This strategic move aims to challenge the existing regional order and gain political support for Chinese policies in other regional forums or on a global scale. Furthermore, Beijing sees the East African Island States as a testing ground to assess the resolve, capabilities, coordination, and resilience of Western stakeholders in the broader Indo-Pacific context.

China's provision of aid is not treated as an isolated policy but rather as an integral part of its broader economic statecraft. Through its geo-economic activism, and statecraft of economic polarisation, China has significantly expanded its influence in the East African Island States and is reshaping the regional development model and discourse. The substantial financial assistance provided by China represents a "silent revolution" as it offers an alternative source of funding and a broader range of policy options for its SID economic partners in the WIO. As major bilateral lender in the region, China becomes an attractive destination and opens up new economic opportunities, including the potential for large-scale investments. Consequently, the established norms of regional economic governance

face challenges and undergo rewriting (Dornan, 2018, p.467). China's increased engagement with the East African Island States has presented significant economic development opportunities for both the countries and the region. However, it is important to note that China's economic pursuits are not solely driven by economic objectives but also serve strategic and foreign policy interests, often at the expense of established regional partners. Beijing's geo-economic strategy seems to involve gradually weakening the bonds between Pacific Island nations and their traditional Western allies, using a "one loan at a time" approach. China provides substantial loans to small island countries, even though their ability to repay is questionable, with the intention of leveraging economic indebtedness for geopolitical advantages. Through reshaping the regional economic landscape, China aims to reconfigure the geopolitical order in the region to align with its broader Indo-Pacific strategic goals (Friedman, 2019, p. 21).

The Island governments of East Africa have responded somewhat positively to China's offers of long-term commitment, showcasing of wealth and expertise, comprehensive aid packages, regional development plans, and defiance of Western powers. Despite Western concerns and objections, the economic partnership with China has been enthusiastically embraced by the East African Island States, as Chinese loans and investments have been perceived as coming from a friendly nation of a "Win-Win Cooperation" without imposing stringent conditions (Breslin, 2020, p. 251). East African Island nations that have become recipients of China's strategic generosity are exposing themselves to the risks of "debt-trap diplomacy." These countries have accepted substantial loans from China without a clear path for repayment, potentially leaving them vulnerable to Chinese demands regarding strategic assets or diplomatic influence. As China gains increasing economic leverage through its lending practices, the debtor countries find themselves increasingly dependent and susceptible to a state of clientelism, where their resources, policies, and diplomatic actions can be instrumentalized by China to undermine the established rules-based order (Rabobank. 2019, p.4).

China's insecurity coupled by its geographic vulnerabilities linked to its increased dependence on the WIO region has led Beijing to devise strategies for navigating through these security dilemmas. Therefore, China is expanding its outreach in the WIO region specially with the Indian Ocean Island states of Africa, as they are situated along the key transit routes that passes through the WIO. China has increased exchange and cooperation since diplomatic ties were established with these island states in the 1970s. China's engagement with Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles the small island nations situated in the WIO near the northern mouth of Mozambique Channel – a critical transit route through which 30per cent of the global tanker traffic passes, is an important actor in China's geostrategic calculations.

Comoros

“Comoros is one of the least developed nations in Africa, and with an estimated gross domestic product (GDP) per capita income of about USD 700, is among the world's poorest nations” (BharatShakti, 2022). For a long time now, China has surpassed France as the region's leading economic and military power, making Comoros its most important developmental partner. Political instability and fragile economy have given Beijing the opportunity to step up its presence in Comoros, a strategic island state of East Africa. China's strategic investment was mostly aimed at receiving support from the small island state in international forums like United Nation to its One-China policy. The trade-off for China was very reasonable as it warranted a very insignificant amount of financial aid compared to China's size. The engagements grew deeper with Beijing's growing strategic interest in the region. Regular diplomatic visits, financial and developmental aids, medical aid, infrastructure development helped Beijing surpass France as Comoros's leading development partner.

Comoros lacks proper infrastructure that would aid in its development and has therefore signed a commercial deal with Beijing's China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) in March of 2018, for the purpose of redeveloping the current port of Moroni by constructing a deep-water

port by means of dredging at a cost of USD 165 million (BharatShakti, 2022). In March 2017, Beijing's China Communication Construction Corporation (CCCC) constructed the Port of Moheli on the island of Moheli at a cost of USD 149 million (BharatShakti, 2022). China's strategic design is given shape by undertaking critical infrastructure projects (airport, ports, rail, road, palaces, etc.) and completing it in record times. The installation of undersea fibre optic network cable between Comoros and East Africa is one such project that gives China an edge to gain geopolitical advantage over the small island territory. Therefore, with China's extensive engagement in Comorian infrastructure projects, it's reasonable to assume that Moroni would eventually become China's strategic partner in allowing port facilities for dual-use purposes.

Madagascar

The Sino-Malagasy relations date back to 1972, and the year 2022 marked fifty years of diplomatic and economic relations between Madagascar and China. Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world and a former French colony situated at a strategic junction of the global maritime shipping route close to the Mozambique channel, is of critical significance for the regional and extra-regional actors present in the region. China is Madagascar's biggest trading partner and supplier of essential primary products. Since 2001, China has been Madagascar's leading trading partner ahead of France, which till recently was its biggest partner. China and Madagascar have had strong relations since 1972, primarily in the areas of trade, investment, infrastructure development, and diplomacy. In 2020, China's exports represented 25.1 per cent of the total, far ahead of India, whose exports have been growing since 2010 (8.6 per cent), France (7.2 per cent), the United Arab Emirates (6.6 per cent) and South Africa (4.2 per cent) (Giovalucchi, 2022). Madagascar became the first group of African nations to support the growth of Chinese footprints in Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) after signing the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on BRI with China in 2017, perhaps without fully comprehending the ramifications of doing so (IFFRAS, 2021). Over the years, China has become Madagascar's largest trading partner, its biggest source of

imports and its fourth-largest export destination. In 2020, the trade volume reached USD 936 million, with exports to China worth USD 118 million, and imports from China worth USD 818 million (WorldBank, 2020). The bilateral trade has grown 100 times since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. However, the trade volume is highly imbalanced tilting heavily in China's favour.

China has also invested heavily in infrastructure development projects in Madagascar, such as building roads, bridges, and airports. Madagascar's strategic geographic location and abundant natural resources are the major reasons for China's increased interest in the island state. Beijing's outward-looking economy is making deeper inroads in the developing world of Africa with vast aid amounts. "China has aided the building of infrastructure, has poured in massive revenue resulting in an increased number of Chinese-funded enterprises who now comprise 90per cent of the market. This is an alarming trend for a small nation like Madagascar which runs the risk of falling prey to Chinese predator like policies" (IFFRAS, 2021). Madagascar's debt vis-à-vis China represents only 3.7per cent of the total external debt in September 2021 (Bertrand & Zoghely, 2021). Through BRI, China is fast making Madagascar an important destination for its strategic financing to create a sphere of influence. China currently has invested in five infrastructure projects through its flagship BRI projects. In 2007, Beijing invested 53 million USD through its Export-Import banks (Exim bank) for the construction of 'the Golden Peacock five-star hotel in Antananarivo. Other strategic investments by Beijing in Madagascar's infrastructure development include a 105 million USD investment in road transport in 2017; 41 million USD in road transport in 2018; 157 million USD in road transport in 2019; and 59 million USD in road transport connecting the Port of Toamasina in 2019 among several other sectors (CARI, n.d; & Africa Intelligence, 2022). The Chinese state own companies are also positioning themselves on major strategic port and airport infrastructure projects but with not much success, as their offer for the construction of new terminals in Antananarivo and Nosy Be has been withdrawn, which was won by an ADP-Bouygues-Colas consortium in 2015 (WorldBank, 2022). During the 2017 meeting between President Rajaonarimam-

pianina and President Xi Jinping, a memorandum was signed for the construction of a deep-water port on Narindra Bay, on the northwest coast of Madagascar, facing the Mozambique Channel (Honoré, 2020). In fact Madagascar is one of nine sub-Saharan members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) launched in 2014 by China to counter the influence of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank (IFFRAS, 2021).

Mauritius

Mauritius is one of Africa's most stable and thriving democracies and has grown to be one of Africa's wealthiest countries. According to a 2019 World Bank survey, Mauritius is the best in Africa for ease of doing business and the 13th best in the world. Mauritius has the second-highest per capita income in Africa. Mauritius has grown into a regional financial hub, and the current government hopes to make the country a gateway to Africa for foreign investors interested in entering the African market. Despite the fact that India is Mauritius' most significant strategic partner, Chinese efforts to build influence in the country have increased in recent years. In 2019, China concluded a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Mauritius, which went into force in 2021 (China's first FTA with an African country). Chinese state-owned firms invest in infrastructure, telecommunications, and energy.

Trade between Mauritius and China has been rapidly expanding. Beijing's geo-economic outreach to Mauritius is driven by strategic considerations where it views Mauritius as an important actor in the region to expand its sphere of influence. Since 1972 with the initiation of diplomatic engagements between the two, China's longstanding bilateral ties have expanded in scope and intent. The increasing momentum of bilateral engagement between the two countries is driven by several factors of which the geopolitical objectives of Beijing are strategised through its geoeconomic tools. Mauritius has experienced notable advantages from Chinese technical assistance in agriculture and certain infrastructure projects (Bakshi & Deelchand, 2017). The Chinese government has consistently provided scholarships to Mauritian students

for higher education in China, beginning in 1984 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Mauritius, n.d.). In the realm of economic cooperation, Mauritius and China have entered into treaties aimed at avoiding double taxation and preventing tax evasion (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2018). Furthermore, an Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement was signed between the two nations in 1996 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, 2011). Cooperation, particularly in the economic and technical sectors, has gained significant momentum since 2004, which is evident in the signing of eight agreements by the governments of Mauritius and China between January 2004 and March 2007 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, 2007).

In 2020, China emerged as the primary source of imports for Mauritius, comprising 24.6 per cent of the total imports (Mauritius Revenue Authority, 2020). The substantial share of imports from China underscores the growing economic ties and trade relations between the two nations. Trade between China and Mauritius has experienced rapid growth in recent years, although Mauritius has faced challenges in accessing the vast Chinese market. Despite this, China holds the top rank as the largest source of imports for Mauritius, with imports reaching USD 0.84 billion USD in 2019, accounting for 16.69 per cent of total Mauritian imports and one-third of imports from Asia (Mauritius Revenue Authority, 2019). Over a span of 20 years, imports from China have grown by 13.7 per cent. In contrast, the volume of Mauritian exports to China remains relatively low, constituting a mere 1.71 per cent of total exports (Mauritius Statistics, n.d.). This disparity has resulted in a significant trade deficit for Mauritius.

China has also made significant investments in Mauritius, particularly in infrastructure development and special economic zones. Notably, China has supported the construction of the Jinfei Economic Trade and Cooperation Zone, aimed at attracting Chinese investment and promoting bilateral trade (Xinhua, 2019). Mauritius has expressed interest in participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This initiative aims to enhance connectivity

and promote trade between China and countries along its envisioned land and maritime routes. Mauritius, with its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, has been considered an important partner in the BRI (The Diplomat, 2019). In 2013, China's investment in Mauritius amounted to USD 190 million, while Mauritius's investment in China reached USD 870 million, showing a notable increase of 27 per cent. During this period, various China-aided projects, such as the construction of operation theatres and wards at Victoria Hospital, maintenance of the MBC headquarters, and agricultural technology cooperation, progressed smoothly, further enhancing the bilateral relationship between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, n.d). China has also shown interest in supporting Mauritius in developing its renewable energy sector. In 2018, China and Mauritius signed an agreement to cooperate on the development of a solar energy project in Mauritius (Xinhua, 2018).

Seychelles

Seychelles, despite its small landmass of 452 sq. km and a population of approximately 98,000, holds significant geostrategic importance due to its location at the convergence of Africa, West Asia (the Middle East), and India. This has made it a strategic destination for various major powers with vested interests in the region, a trend that dates back to the Cold War era (Hu, & Ali, 2020, pp. 177). The significance of Seychelles to China has been further enhanced by President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the establishment of a Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) base in Djibouti. While China established diplomatic relations with Seychelles in 1976, it wasn't until 2004 that relations between the two countries intensified. In 2004, a memorandum of understanding on military cooperation was signed, allowing PLA vessels to dock in Victoria, the capital of Seychelles. The relationship between the two countries received a significant boost in 2007 when then-Chinese President Hu Jintao made the first-ever visit by a Chinese president to Seychelles. This visit led to an increase in grants and cooperation projects funded by concessionary loans (Hu, 2020). Since 2012, Chinese presence in Seychelles has increased further, partly influenced by the intensifying competition between China and India.

While China's methods of influence have predominantly been economic and cultural, there have been attempts to expand security cooperation and increase its political influence in the country through indirect means. The evolving dynamics of Sino-Indian competition have played a role in shaping China's strategic interests in the Seychelles.

According to Jovanovic and Marroushi (2021), Chinese economic cooperation projects in Seychelles have witnessed significant growth since 2012. One notable example is the accord signed in August 2016, where China provided a generous grant of USD 15 million for the construction of the Seychelles Broadcast Corporation (SBC) House in Victoria (Jovanovic & Marroushi, 2021). As part of the agreement, the SBC would also purchase new and modern equipment for radio, television, and their online platform from China. However, it is important to note that the construction of projects like the SBC House has given China and its propaganda apparatus a unique advantage in influencing the content of Seychelles' radio and television programs, enabling the promotion of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) political narrative. The increasing number of Chinese projects has contributed to the growth of Seychelles' total external debt, which stood at 110 per cent of its USD 1.6 billion GDP by the end of 2018 (Jovanovic & Marroushi, 2021). Recognizing the burden of this debt and aiming to encourage Seychelles to accept further loans, the Chinese government made a significant move in August 2018. They decided to write off a loan to Seychelles amounting to 37,816,400 renminbi, equivalent to USD 5.5 million (AllAfrica, 2018). These actions highlight China's strategic approach in leveraging financial assistance to enhance its influence and shape the economic dynamics of Seychelles.

During President Faure's visit to Beijing to attend the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), significant developments took place between China and Seychelles. Following President Faure's meeting with Xi Jinping, two memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were signed, focusing on trade connectivity, investment, industrial cooperation, and marine collaboration (Bonnellame, 2018). The first MOU aimed to enhance cooperation within the framework of the Silk Road Economic

Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, promoting socio-economic development and infrastructure projects between China and the Seychelles. The second MOU focused on marine cooperation to strengthen oceanic understanding, climate change awareness, marine environmental protection, and integrated marine management. In addition to the MOUs, China provided a grant of USD 7.5 million to Seychelles to support mutually agreed projects, reflecting China's ambition to deepen its strategic understanding of the Indian Ocean and leverage its closer relationship with Seychelles for this purpose. Furthermore, an Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement signed in October 2017 resulted in a USD 7.3 million grant for the construction of a post-secondary commerce and visual arts school in Anse Royale. In June 2019, China provided an additional financial assistance package of USD 22 million to Seychelles, which included funding for a new technical and vocational school. These projects were financed through a grant administered by the Central Bank of Seychelles (Laurence, 2019). These initiatives demonstrate China's commitment to strengthening its engagement with Seychelles and signify its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean region.

Apart from economic ties, China has provided medical and agricultural assistance to Seychelles. Since 1985, China has dispatched medical teams to Seychelles, with a total of eight batches consisting of 102 medical personnel sent as of 2019. In the same year, there were six Chinese medical team members present in Seychelles, providing training to local medical personnel. Furthermore, China has trained approximately 1,500 individuals in various fields by sending eight batches of 106 young volunteers and two agricultural technology experts to Seychelles. As a gesture of goodwill, China also donated five ambulances to Seychelles in 2013 (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Conclusion

China's aid to Africa has often been viewed as part of its strategy to gain influence and secure its accession and global recognition to the United Nations (UN). According to Gregg Brazinsky's study on Sino-American

rivalry in Cold War Africa, enlarging China's status in the Third World was a central goal of Chinese foreign policy. The provision of aid served as a means to achieve this objective (Brazinsky, 2015). Historically, Chinese friendship treaties and aid agreements were devised as tools to supplement Beijing's diplomatic recognition from the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China especially by Small Island States of Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (Larkin, 1971). This pattern indicates that aid was instrumental in securing diplomatic recognition for Beijing. Therefore, China's transformation from a regional player with a narrow focus on its immediate surroundings to a global actor has been remarkable.

In just a few decades, China has emerged as a major player on the world stage, with its interests and influence extending across the globe. Today, China stands among a select group of nations capable of pursuing and asserting its interests on a global scale. Its presence is strongly felt in diverse regions, spanning from the South Pacific and South and Central Asia to the broader West Asia, Africa, Latin America, and beyond. According to numerous experts, China has been employing predatory economics and the weaponization of supply chains as strategies to enhance its sphere of influence. These tactics have been observed in various contexts and regions, indicating a pattern of behaviour lending China a neo-imperialist character. For instance, in a report by the Centre for a New American Security (CNAS), it is argued that China's economic practices, such as debt-trap diplomacy and unfair trade practices, enable it to extend its influence over other countries and regions (CNAS, 2019). Today, China employs a range of geoeconomics tools to expand its sphere of influence and attain its geopolitical goals. China utilizes economic statecraft, including infrastructure investments and financial assistance, to establish closer ties and influence the domestic policies of other countries. This strategy is often referred to as "debt-trap diplomacy." According to a study by researchers at AidData, Chinese infrastructure projects in recipient countries correlate with increased support for China in international forums (Dreher et al., 2019). The BRI is a massive infrastructure development project aimed at enhancing connectivity across Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond. It serves as a platform for China to extend its economic and political influence. The

Jamestown Foundation notes that the BRI provides China with greater leverage in recipient countries, allowing it to shape their policies and secure access to strategic resources (Blanchard, 2018). These tools play a strategic role in Beijing asserting itself and taking unilateral decisions such as the construction of artificial islands (in the South China Sea) and the establishment of military outposts in distant geographies of Africa and Asia, enabling it to project power and expand its influence in the wider Indo-Pacific region and beyond. China strategically invests in and acquires companies and industries critical to national security and economic competitiveness in other countries. China also employs information warfare and influence operations to shape narratives and perceptions in its favour. The United States Department of State has published reports highlighting China's use of disinformation campaigns, media manipulation, and propaganda to advance its interests globally (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

China's engagements in the WIO are driven by its pursuit of securing markets, obtaining raw materials and energy resources, and enhancing its international stature. Against this backdrop, China's claims of aiding Africa in bridging the infrastructural deficit, socio-economic development and digital divide should be approached with cautious optimism. While China introduces its infrastructure and digital technology, offers attractive concessional loans, and promotes the so-called win-win cooperation, Africa's economic structures are increasingly at risk. The implementation of port infrastructure and other connectivity projects highlights the damaging consequences of opacity and impunity. Therefore, it is crucial for stakeholders within and across East African island countries to intensify their efforts in resisting such projects. They must scrutinize the geopolitical motivations, key actors, and priority status of these geo-economic initiatives, challenging not only China but also national governments and local elites who benefit from such secretive dealings.

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NEW AGE BANKING AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Deepa Kamra, Samir & Neeraj Gupta*

Abstract

The digital shift witnessed by the banking sector over the past three decades has finally started bearing fruits. The initiative of the governmental policy towards a better and inclusive approach to overall development is more than evident in the form various schemes launched since 2014. This paper explores the role of banking network in the country in furthering the objectives of social and economic change. It is broadly divided into five sections namely, the policy regime and recommendations that led to the introduction of the socio-economic schemes, objectives of the study, the process and impact of automation, data to support the policy initiatives and the road ahead. The popular schemes include "Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)" which has been coupled with insurance and safety benefits, and the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Ltd.) which seeks to support and nurture the micro enterprise sector of the country. This paper seeks to discuss the details of the above schemes and their penetration, while highlighting how banks are the key intermediaries in identifying beneficiaries and disbursement of funds.

Keywords: Digital banking, PMJDY, PMMY, Financial inclusion, Micro Credit

Introduction

The Indian banking industry has been progressively adopting the digital technology to expand its outreach. In this context, it may be noted that the use of credit and debit cards, digital transfer of funds (RTGS and NEFT), adoption of digital wallets and the like has promoted the use of online payment methods. But these small steps were never enough as their reach was considered limited to the urban-elite and supposedly the

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well-off section of the society. The present paper explores and to a great extent substantiates the policy framework of the government that envisioned an inclusive approach, by increasing the beneficiaries of the banking and other ancillary services.

RBI governs the banking sector and has been instrumental in the initiation of various policy changes and reforms to ensure its robustness and well-being. When India gained its freedom there was a dire need to strengthen the banking system to boost the economy and industry. With this vision, in the first phase (up to 1980) banks in India were nationalised, and brought under the governance of the Reserve Bank of India and the Government of India. The broad objective of this endeavour was to ensure that the banks in the country play a pivotal role in the social and economic progress of the country. This move strategically led to opening of additional branches in the rural parts of India, motivated people to open bank accounts and thus, led to a four-fold reduction in the population served per bank branch.

In the next phase, (1991-2004) the Indian economy transformed from a closed and protected domain into an open and liberal regime. The winds of change swept through the industries and institutions of the country. The government as well as private firms acknowledged the need for evolving into a more dynamic set up. 'Survival of the fittest' became the buzzword with increasing competition in the economy. Banks now operated to counter the technology and rivalry faced in the form of private sector and foreign banks. It took about a decade and a half, and numerous policy changes for the public sector to outshine their counterparts.

They optimised their existence and purpose during the third phase (2004 onwards) wherein the term financial inclusion gained importance. Financial sector reforms were focused on technology driven products and services that could be made available to those sections of the society which had remained deprived so far. While the emphasis in the first phase was on raising the number of branches, the third phase witnessed

schemes that motivated people to open bank accounts in order to avail of developmental and welfare schemes of the government.

In this paper, two major welfare schemes introduced by the government, namely the PMJDY and PMMY have been reviewed and their percolation into the masses analysed using relevant data. From time to time, special committees are formed for deliberating, and as a result formulating futuristic and developmental modifications. This paper also highlights three of the recent committees and their recommendations, that have strengthened the resolve of the government to ensure that monetary aid and grants flow down to the last man standing in the queue (Antyodaya).

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the timeline that led to the shift in the policy regime towards social welfare channelled through the banking system
- To evaluate the socio-economic purpose behind digitalization of banks in India
- To study the data and assess how digitization of banks in India has aided the socio-economic development

Policy Regime That Led to Development of Socio-Economic Schemes

Consistent planning and deft implementation were behind the introduction of the new socio-economic schemes. Though the schemes were suggested earlier it was only after 2014 that the implementation started. It took almost a decade for the schemes to be put into action and their benefits to start reaching the beneficiaries. It is imperative that it will take some amount of time to precipitate to the lowest rung of the society.

Raghuram Rajan Committee (2007)

This committee focused on financial reforms and was constituted by the government of India in 2007. It was chaired by Raghuram Rajan, at that time an economist at the University of Chicago and previously having worked as a chief economist at the IMF. The Raghuram Rajan

Committee was tasked to find the challenges related to financing needs in the Indian economy and identify sectoral reforms to overcome them.

Prominent recommendations of Raghuram Rajan Committee included: boosting financial and macroeconomic reforms, financial facilities to be accessible to all, regulatory framework to promote growth in banking and most importantly revamping the credit infrastructure such that small and underprivileged participants become well-versed, educated, and are safeguarded due to the existence of an inclusive credit framework. The final report also made suggestions to improve coordination, coverage, and quality of the current regulatory architecture.

Nachiket Mor Committee (2013)

The RBI established this committee in 2013 under the chairmanship of Mr. Nachiket Mor, an RBI board member. It was known as the "Commission on Comprehensive Financial Services for Small Businesses and Low-Income Households."¹ A detailed report on this committee was issued by the Reserve Bank of India in January 2014. Several recommendations were made by the Nachiket Mor Committee, one of which was to provide a universal bank account to all Indians above 18 years of age by January 01, 2016; emphasised the importance of Aadhaar to proliferate the number of bank account holders and establishing 'Payments banks' with the primary responsibility to provide payment and deposit products to small businesses and low-income households. Such banks would not be required to offer any loans. Many criticised the recommendations as overly ambitious and unrealistic but the results of the above recommendations have been tremendous.

Committee on Digital Payments (2016)

This Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of Shri. Ratan P. Watal who at that time was Principal Advisor, NITI Aayog, and had earlier served as the Finance Secretary to the Government of India. The Ministry of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs assigned this committee with the task of evaluating the regulatory mechanism and promote payments through the digital mode. It further focused on

framing of guidelines for recording the origin and keeping track of digital payments and develop the association between inflow/outflows transaction history and credit related data.

Digitisation of Banks: Process And Results

The banking sector over the past three decades has gone through a rigorous makeover. As a result, it has witnessed a substantial shift in product design and customer servicing. This development has unleashed new opportunities and subsequent challenges for all the banks. It is worth noting that the Indian banking system at present is undergoing an important change with respect to the market structure and competition, leading to new products, services and even business models. Thus, banks will have to increasingly invest in technology upgradation and building human resource competence.

By 2014, there was ample advancement in technology for the banks to manifest their existence in digital space and enhance their reach to provide financial services seamlessly. However, due to limited understanding of the digital platforms there were very few takers for such services. The ‘pandemic’ proved to be the catalyst and resulted in people adopting the digital banking services to avail financial services. Integration of banking and digitization has improved access to credit, risk management and entrepreneurial growth in the Indian economy. The banking sector is equipped to prove its calibre in achieving financial inclusion to keep up with the changing times.

DIGITISATION of INDIAN BANKING INDUSTRY: PROCESS and TIMELINE

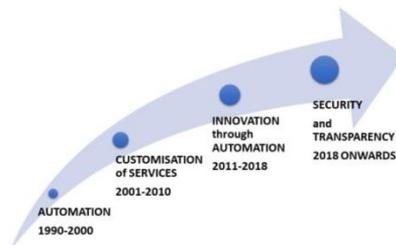


Figure 1: Digitisation of Indian Banking Industry

It is very clear that its purpose was to promote the quality, volume and speed. In spite of this, the process of digitization was implemented in phases.

A broad analysis of the progressive stages is identified as:

Stage 1: Automation

In the beginning banks sought to enhance customer convenience by eliminating long queues at the bank as well as restricted work hours. Introduction of online services and mobile apps, gave way to anytime, anywhere banking and the time taken got reduced. Simple tasks like checking account balance, transfer of money, payment of bills, and loan services could be accessed remotely and quickly.

Stage 2: Customization of Services

Digitization facilitated banks to collect and analyse customer data. Such data proved to be instrumental in understanding customer needs, perception and preferences; coupled with data analytic techniques and AI it became the key to designing better products. Personalized products gradually improved customer satisfaction and created loyal clientele.

Stage 3: Innovation through Automation

Fintech industry in India is the latest business model to leverage technology. It offers services like P2P lending, digital wallets (apps or online services that allow financial transactions electronically), automated portfolio (investment at regular interval as per a predetermined strategy or portfolio), wealth management and crowdfunding (funding a business other than traditional means, mostly with small donations from multiple entities). Hyper automation was introduced to map customer consumption pattern and other account details. It has been instrumental in detection of frauds by sifting through large databases and flagging doubtful transactions.

Stage 4: Security and Transparency

Blockchain technology is the way ahead to increase the efficacy and safety of banking processes, besides mitigating costs and risks. It can be

used to create a unique and secure digital identity for each customer. This feature ensures transparency and makes prevention of fraud almost imperative. The Internet of Things (IoT) is used in the form of sensors for collection of data from ATMs, POS terminals, and mobile banking apps to ensure cyber-security. These sensors can be used to keep vigilance to prevent lapses and cyber-thefts, and protect customer data.

The key outcomes of digitization of banking services can be enumerated as:

- Open banking in terms of interoperability among banks has improved the speed and quality of banking services. In the Indian context, open banking started with the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) which was brought about by a collaboration between the regulator that is RBI and the market (constituting banks/NBFCs/Fintech companies). Since then, there is no looking back and the delivery and access of products has increased immensely.
- User friendly technology has been developed over the years so as to ensure easy and purposeful navigation. The newest innovation being deployment of chatbots to aid customers and enhance the satisfaction derived from their banking experience. Such technology not only facilitates faster access but also reduces the paper trail involved in banking transactions.

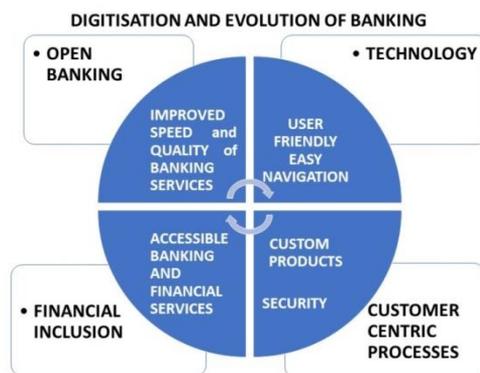


Figure 2: Outcomes of Digitisation

- Financial Inclusion is aimed at providing each member of the society with rudimentary financial services irrespective of their earnings. The focus has been on making banking and financial services accessible to the disadvantaged section of the society. The JAM trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile) has ensured that banking services are made available to the unserved as well as the underserved. There are schemes designed specially to extend loans to agriculture and MSME sectors using digital platforms, thus mitigating cost.
- Social media has evolved as an effective tool for customer relationship management. Also, it helps banks to develop customer segmentation, plan customer acquisition and eventually advancing financial inclusion. In all the above developments, cybersecurity is still an impediment in the adoption of IT systems by banks. Banks have learnt to work continuously to develop technology solutions and equip their human resource to build defences against cyber.

Key Governmental Schemes Piloted Through Digital Platform

Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)

This scheme was launched with the objective of ensuring easy access to banking for all the citizens of the country. It particularly intends to focus on the marginalised segments of the population i.e., weaker sections and low-income groups. This scheme has put technology to effective use, and has stirred a huge and positive response among the masses.

The innovation of Jan Dhan extended further and now includes a guarantee to social security for every citizen of India. With a two-pronged approach to make this scheme viable, the government moved a step ahead from *Jan Dhan* to *Jan Suraksha*¹.

The Jan Dhan Yojana was made inclusive and complete by attaching to it the following schemes:

Atal Pension Yojana	PM Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana	PM Suraksha Bima Yojana
Social security system for the poor and under-privileged individuals (in the age group of 18-40 years) by guaranteeing minimum monthly pension up to Rs 5,000 after the age of 60 years	Provision of a renewable insurance cover (of Rs 2 lakh at an annual premium of Rs 330) for the poor and under-privileged in the age group of 18 -50 years	Provision of an affordable insurance scheme [with a protection of Rs 2 lakh (for accidental death/full disability) and Rs 1 lakh (for partial disability) at an annual premium of Rs 12 for the poor and under-privileged in the age group of 18 -70 years

In the absence of a steady income and sufficient savings in the unorganised sector the above schemes were designed with a goal to secure their retirement.

Table 1 : PRADHAN MANTRI JAN-DHAN YOJANA - Beneficiaries as on 04-01-2023 (All figures in Crore)

Bank Name/ Type	Number of beneficiaries at Rural/Semi-urban centre bank branches	Number of beneficiaries at Urban Metro Centre Bank Branches	Number of Rural-Urban female beneficiaries	Number of Total Beneficiaries	Deposits in accounts (in ₹ Crore)	Number of Rupay Debit Cards issued to beneficiaries
Public Sector Banks	23.66	14.09	20.77	37.75	141952.29	28.03
Regional Rural Banks	7.61	1.22	5.09	8.83	35849.08	3.43
Private Sector Banks	0.70	0.64	0.72	1.34	5241.99	1.12
Grand Total	31.97	15.95	26.58	47.92	183043.37	32.57

Source: Progress Report displayed on www.pmjdy.gov.in

Table 1 provides region wise details of beneficiaries at the beginning of the year 2023. The total number of beneficiaries of the PMJDY stood at a whopping 47.92 Crore, which is nearly one-third of the country's total population and the pattern of region wise beneficiaries is extremely encouraging too. Two-thirds of the total beneficiaries are from the rural

and semi-urban bank branches, which is an indicator of how deeply the scheme has penetrated into the social schema of our country. The Regional Rural Banks have played an important role by contributing one-sixth of the beneficiaries and about 20 per cent of the total deposits, thus proving their mettle; however, the private sector banks are still struggling to play a meaningful role in the advancement of the social cause.

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana

The next step to improve the quality of lives was in the form of providing access to capital. The Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana was introduced in the year 2015, on the premise of 'funding the unfunded'². This venture is a step towards financing small commercial units of the country which are.

Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Ltd. [MUDRA] is an NBFC supporting development of micro enterprise sector in the country. MUDRA provides refinance support to Banks / MFIs / NBFCs for lending to micro units having loan requirement up to 10 lakhs.

Under the aegis of Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), MUDRA has created products/ schemes. The interventions have been named 'Shishu' (coverage of loans up to Rs. 50,000), 'Kishore' (coverage of loans above Rs. 50,000 up to Rs. 5 lakh) and 'Tarun' (coverage of loans above Rs.5 lakh up to Rs. 10 lakh). Each of the above scheme signifies the stage of growth stage of the venture / development and funding requirement of the recipient micro unit / entrepreneur and provide a locus to the next phase of progress. The aim is to promote entrepreneurial development. Since most such budding entrepreneurs are just starting out, additional emphasis is on the Shishu category units as compared to the Kishore and Tarun categories.

The funding support from MUDRA are of two types:

- Micro Credit Scheme (MCS) for loans up to 1 lakh finance through MFIs.
- Refinance Scheme for Commercial Banks / Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) / Small Finance Banks / Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs).

Funding small entrepreneurs/artisans/trained workers without the need for a guarantor or collateral, came as a huge boost to those who were ready to work hard but did not have the resources to muster credit. Thus, the MUDRA yojana is a bonanza to each aspiring citizen using which their dream to make it big can turn into reality.

Table 2: PMMY - Overall Performance Report (Category-wise) for the financial year 2021-22

Values (in Rs. Crore)

Category	No of Accounts	Disbursed Amt
General	25994139	207992.98
SC	9364702	36924.57
ST	3518084	14274.86
OBC	14918601	72209.8
Total	53795526	331402.2

Source: www.mudra.org.in/Home

Table 2 shows that the total number of accounts linked to the MUDRA yojana during the year 2021-22 was nearly 5.38 Crore. Out of which 2.59 Crore were for the general category beneficiaries while 1.49 Crore accounts benefitted other backward classes.

It is noteworthy that the MUDRA yojana has progressively encouraged financial liberation, especially for women who add up to more than 71% of the total beneficiaries by the end of 2021-22. The amount disbursed to women entrepreneurs was close to 49.6% of the total disbursement.

Table 3 highlights that out of the total accounts linked to the MUDRA yojana during the year 2021-22, nearly 3.84 Crore belonged to women entrepreneurs and nearly 6.5 lakh accounts linked were of new entrepreneurs. It is significant that 11.89 lakh accounts benefitted those who had earlier been enrolled under other government programs, while a similar number belonged to the unskilled category. The above figures strongly indicate that the MUDRA yojana is indeed a boon to small businesses and independent entrepreneurs. It has equipped them to face

the challenges and become ‘*atmanirbhar*’; with a strong assurance of a secure and supportive mechanism.

Table 3: PMMY - Overall Performance Report (Skill-wise) for the financial year 2021-22

Values (in Rs. Crore)

Category	No of Accounts	Disbursed Amt
Women Entrepreneurs	38429259	164441.88
New Entrepreneurs	6530351	68999.66
Minority	7448839	40857.3
PMJDY OD Account	525606	106.65
MUDRA Card	148527	4474.78
National Urban Livelihood Mission	15539	347.73
National Rural Livelihood Mission	193367	4280.99
Other govt sponsored prog.	1189071	12868.81
Skill Certified	205064	3906.84
Self-Certified	676506	10024.53
Unskilled	1183540	13386.09

Source: www.mudra.org.in/Home

Moreover, this scheme has streamlined lending procedures, reduced paperwork and built an encouraging environment for growing entrepreneurs. Analysing the bank wise performance reveals interesting observations.

SBI has been the largest and most prosperous banks among the public sector banks. Since 2015, the total number accounts in SBI, opened under the MUDRA yojana is nearly 1.29 Crore. The highest number of accounts opened was 36.7 Lakh in the year 2019-20 and the lowest was in the year 2021-22 at 9.8 Lakh.

Table 4 provides the bank wise details of accounts opened and funds disbursed to the beneficiaries. Though the total number of banks in the public sector (other than SBI) have reduced to nearly half that is from 21 in 2015-16 to 11 in 2021-22. The total number of accounts opened by these banks under the MUDRA yojana is nearly 3.24 Crore till 2021-22. The highest number of accounts opened was 65.75 Lakh in the year

2020-21 and the lowest was in the year 2016-17 at 34.56 Lakh. Evidently, 2021-22 witnessed the highest amount sanctioned during a financial year, indicating the shift in favour of entrepreneurial mindset.

Table 4: PMMY – Bank wise Performance

Amount (in Rs. lakh)

Year	SBI		Public Sector Banks other than SBI		Private Sector Banks	
	No of Accounts	Disbursed Amt	No of Accounts	Disbursed Amt	No of Accounts	Disbursed Amt
2015-16*	1300589	NA	5306988	NA	3067686	NA
2016-17*	1355806	22385.02	3456331	46063.3	8821464	38772.77
2017-18	1410005	28563.12	3723669	59067.37	10456474	49275.43
2018-19	2737079	33612.5	3927190	59754.41	13277989	63624.07
2019-20	3676217	34977.76	4304951	59201.43	20866750	91361.59
2020-21	1485576	37883.67	6575019	65066.69	20037222	93085.73
2021-22	986338	28352.89	5135452	70203.11	24549895	117406.43

Source: www.mudra.org.in/Home/PMMYPerformance

*For the year 2015-16 data is combined for SBI and Associates

The total number of banks in the private sector has varied between 18 to 21. The total number of accounts opened by these banks under the MUDRA yojana is nearly 10.10 Crore till 2021-22. The highest number of accounts opened was 2.45 Crore in the year 2021-22 and the lowest was in the year 2015-16 at 30.67 Lakh. Evidently, 2021-22 witnessed the highest amount sanctioned of almost Rs. 117 Lakh during a financial year. This is highest amount of sanction among all types of banks and may be attributed to the ease of availing banking services through private sector banks.

Conclusion

Banks have evolved tremendously by adopting technology upgradation, devising tailor-made products and services, using business models based on data analytics, resilient technological capabilities and an enhanced responsibility for banks towards social and environmental advancement. Financial inclusion had long been on government's plan but its

implementation was delayed and distorted due to structural impediments. Now with the technology driven environment it has become easier to identify the beneficiaries, offer them schemes and get favourable responses.

A positive step in this direction is the Financial Inclusion Index developed by the RBI. It is an index that uses data related to banking, investment, insurance, postal as well as the pension sector to measure accessibility of financial services across India. This is done strictly under the guidance of the government and the specific regulatory authorities.

Though it has been introduced very recently, that is in 2021, the index is quite robust and representative. Interestingly, it does not have a base **year** and consists of 97 different indicators focused on access (35%), usage (45%), and quality (20%), where weights of each parameter are indicated in the brackets. Its value ranges between 0 and 100, where 0 denotes zero financial inclusion while 100 shows complete financial inclusion. It generates data on availability of financial services to facilitate policy making. India's Financial Inclusion Index as in July, 2022 is pegged at 56.4 and is expected to improve progressively in the coming years.

The analysis of the data from PMJDY and PMMY prove that India has evolved and the new policy regime will be instrumental in transforming the Indian landscape into one with prosperity and orientation towards inclusive development. In addition to this, the entire network created by the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has contributed towards accelerated implementation of the Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) scheme. Individual bank accounts linked with the account-holder's Aadhaar has indeed proved to be a game changer. It led to the elimination of redundant regulations and the government acquired an unparalleled reach to the poor. Jan Dhan and the other schemes unleashed the "JAM" revolution- which has brought an upsurge in financial inclusion (Jan Dhan), biometric identification (Aadhaar) through the use of (Mobile) telecommunication.

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The Tight rope Walk between the geo economic implications of Trans Pacific Partnership and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership: India Responds

Manan Dwivedi * Gayatri Dixit*

Abstract

The paper aims to delineate upon the theme of Regional trade agreements such as RCEP and TPP in the larger context of the regional and international system. The tenet of Regime theory of IR serves as an ideal buttressing on the idea of RCEP. Then, the paper dwells upon the theme of whether New Delhi ought to become a member of the RCEP or the TPP in the larger light of regional and global geo economics. The rationale of India pulling out of the RCEP, the Chinese and the Oriental perspective of the Asian space are also elaborated upon in the paper. The paper thus strives for enumerating the Indian choice in the larger setting of Regime and interdependence.

Introduction

A nation needs to respond to a multifarious array of challenges in the context of the larger ecosystem of geo politics and geo economics. In a Regime led international firmament, Globalization segmented by regional multilateralism is the accepted order of the day where-in nations coalesce together for the sake of trade partnerships and geo economics oriented fulfillment of national interest.

In the context of the China factor, the RCEP (Regional Cooperation and Economic Partnership) and TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) subsist with their own significance in the Asia Pacific and the Indo Pacific chain of events in the region. It is common knowledge that RCEP is influenced by the People's Republic of China while the grouping of TPP has been lead and nurtured largely by the United States of America. Thus, a Regime of Regional trade has been much in the offing as an offshoot of the larger block of ASEAN, (Association of South East Asian Nations) since its inception.

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It can be very well ascertained that the twin nations of the order of United States and India, are, the first runners in the rigmarole to dominate and lord over the Asia Pacific in order to spawn and develop their respective *Dominoes*, all as a part to curb and contain the larger influence of PRC in the sub region. US under the presidency of Donald Trump, had, already made it clear to India that New Delhi can count on the American pelf and stealth to serve as a bulwark to be utilized against China through there are no permanent enemies and friends in the world of International Politics. India is a member, interestingly of both the regional economic groupings and thus has to carry on its deft balancing tight rope walk in the region divided into spheres of influence between arguably the most powerful nation state on the face of the Planet along, with, the rise of the Chinese Dragon.

In the context of TPP and RCEP, the tentacles of geo-politics and geo psychology, are, too attached with a greater role for India in the Maritime space of the Indian Ocean and the controversy laden, South China sea, keeping in view the high volume of trade passing through the Malacca straits. Robert Keohane argues that in order to subsist in the arena of World Politics and the larger International system, a, rules based order and the *nom de plume* of norm setting is what the IR doctor ordered for the day. Regimes gained popularity during the 20th century as states began increasingly to get involved in international agreements and rules. Globalization has aided interaction in the international realm and greatly contributed to their establishment and mass popularity. Regimes have created a framework within which states and NGO's follow the same rules and norms, which in turn facilitate interstate relations. There are different definitions of the term regime, but the one formulated by Stephen Krasner in the 1980's has prevailed as standard. He defines them as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations" (Little, 2001). Thus, Robert Keohane asserts that a regionalism oriented and convergence inclined geo political and geo economic system needs to be the order of the day. Thus, the quintessential essence of both the present day Delhi dispensation is standing for in the form of norm setting in the global

sphere imbued with the concern of a collective security is an entity which gets a practicalisation in the general format of RCEP and TPP.

Noted International Relations theorist Strange asserts that. “The term “regime” has a wide range of meanings and applications. This prevents it from having instant recognition and widespread significance. Furthermore she acknowledges that treaties in large part are for those who can afford them and not necessarily for those who need them. An example of that is the establishment in 1980 of an agreement by INMARSAT for the creation of the Future Global Maritime Distress and Safety System. It operates by utilizing a satellite to locate a ship when a distress call is made and automatically sends that distress signal to any vessel in that area. For the large part, only big ships and tankers could afford the installation of that system on their ships. In comparison, due to the lack of effective regimes that could solve the problem of famine that same year millions died due to lack of nutrition” (Strange, 1987). Thus, Robert Keohane who initialized the nomenclature of Regime theory, vows for the idiom of interdependence, convergence within the ambit of neo liberal Institutionalism. The author posits that arriving at a consensus for international cooperation and camaraderie along with gelling together for the Global commons happens to be the order of the day in a post September 11 Global geo-politics and global geo-economics. International agreements and treaties are the order of the day as both the Neo Realists and Neo liberal Institutionalisms support the theme as advanced by Robert Keohane and the entities such as RCEP and TPP are nothing but a regional geo economic avatar of the proposed Regime theory.

The idiom of global commons is not the latest theoretical approach to have emerged out of the portals of International Relations matrix but still the consonance approach premised upon unifying the various binaries happens to be the order of the day. As is evident in the collective security theme of the North Atlantic Treaty Association, the conjoined strivings of the larger international system in tackling global issues and geo strategic and geo political challenges has become the *nom de plume* of the day. Thus, Regime is about a globally consensual theme which becomes a driving light and beacon of the day in the larger context of

Global politics. NATO has become a prime strategic and political mover in the larger context of the Ukraine Russia war which has nearly posited the NATO and the west on a literal war pathway with Kremlin. Thus, engendering a confrontationist veneer to the real of International Organizations and International Institutions.

The notion can be safely proposed that “While the precise definition of a regime is debated, a regime is most commonly understood to refer to a set of ‘principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations’, as Stephen Krasner has suggested. A regime creates convergence of expectations, establishes standards of behavior, and cultivates a general sense of obligation. Regimes mitigate anarchy that would otherwise prevail in international relations and thereby facilitate co-operation among states and other potential actors. International regimes should not be seen as quasi-governments (Governments), the purpose of which would be to create a centralized authority to govern world politics” (Bradford, 1998). The scholars further contend that, “It is more accurate to think of regimes as institutions involving States—and increasingly also non-state actors—who seek to realize their long-term objectives and structure and stabilize their relations to the benefit of all the members of the regime” (Bradford, 2021).

Regimes need to be delineated adequately so that their difference in origin and their nature of explanation can be stoutly underlined. It has been posited that, “Regimes should also be distinguished from formal international organizations (International Organizations or Institutions, General Aspects). While many regimes are accompanied by formal organizations, they can also consist of a looser set of norms, principles, and procedures that shape states’ expectations, capacities and guide their behavior. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), for instance, is an international organization that forms part of a more broadly understood nuclear non-proliferation regime, which again belongs to a broader collective security regime” (Bradford, 2021). The scholars contend further that, “Similarly, the WTO is a part of a larger trade regime that encompasses rules, norms, and principles in addition to the procedures and the organizational capacity that the WTO provides for the

regime. Trade regime, on the other hand, is nested within a broader international economic regime. International regimes can also be distinguished from international organizations by thinking of regimes as being restricted to a particular issue-area of international relations (eg collective security, economic relations) whereas an international organization (including, for instance, the UN), can have a sphere of activity that spans various different issue areas. However, the studies of regimes and international organizations are closely related and often overlap” (Bradford, 2021). Thus, it appears that the codification and the definitional oeuvre of the Regime theory and International Organizations is slightly premised on different groundings but it overlaps too and there are ample instances of consonance between the twin constructs of Regime theory and the larger collectivities of national interests and nation centric global objectives of respective foreign policies. Also, realism happens to be the theoretical order of the day where-in, the idiom of pessimism differentiates the tenet of realism from the collectively conjoined approach of the Regimes. Realism too portends a kind of norm setting but the excessive insistence on power and national interest places it into a slightly different context and meaning.

We have had a precursor look at the myriad perspectives of the Regime theory along with its hybridity and diffidence in interpretation with other IR theory constricts. But, lets zero in now on what the theme means in the perspective of Robert Keohane. He posits that, “Previous work on this subject in the rational-choice tradition has emphasized the, "theory of hegemonic stability": that is, the view that concentration of power in one dominant state facilitates the development of strong regimes, and that fragmentation of power is associated with regime collapse. This theory, however, fails to explain lags between changes in power structures and changes in international regimes; does not account well for the differential durability of different institutions within a given issue-area; and avoids addressing the question of why international regimes seem so much more extensive now in world politics than during earlier periods (such as the late 19th century) of supposed hegemonic leadership” (Keohane, 2022). Keohane further suggests that, “The argument of this article seeks to correct some of these faults of the hegemonic stability theory by incorporating it within a supply-demand

approach that borrows extensively from microeconomic theory. The theory of hegemonic stability can be viewed as focusing only on the supply of international regimes: according to the theory, the more concentrated power is in an international system, the greater the supply of international regimes at any level of demand. But fluctuations in demand for international regimes are not taken into account by the theory; thus it is necessarily incomplete. Thus one can focus upon on the demand for international regimes in order to provide the basis for a more comprehensive and balanced interpretation” (Keohane, 2022). Thus, once again the Regime theory dabbles in upon the theme of pessimist realism and the related hegemonic Stability theory. All in all, the concentration and unification of power is considered to be the order of the day in relation to the larger construct of a conjoined approach of International relations theory.

Scholars have further contended that, “Regimes are more like contracts, when these involve actors with long-term objectives who seek to structure their relationships in stable and mutually beneficial ways. In a discussion of "spontaneous," "negotiated," and "imposed" regimes, see Oran Young's contribution to this volume” (Harsanyi, 1962). For a lucid and original discussion based on this obvious but important point, regimes resemble the "quasi-agreements" that Fellner discusses when analyzing the behavior of oligopolistic firms (Fellner, 1949). In both contracts and quasi-agreements, there may be specific rules having to do with prices, quantities, delivery dates, and the like; for contracts, some of these rules may be legally enforceable. Keohane further posits that, “The most important functions of these arrangements, however, are not to preclude further negotiations, but to establish stable mutual expectations about others' patterns of behavior and to develop working relationships that will allow the parties to adapt their practices to new situations. Rules of international regimes are frequently changed, bent, or broken to meet the exigencies of the moment. They are rarely enforced automatically, and they are not self-executing. Indeed, they are often matters for negotiation and renegotiation; as Puchala has argued, "attempts to enforce EEC regulations open political cleavages up and down the supranational-to-local continuum and spark intense politicking along the cleavage lines" (Lowry, 1979).

Shintaro Hamanaka argues in an Asian Development Bank's Working Paper that, "The formation of regional integration and cooperation frameworks can be best understood as a dominant state's attempt to create its own regional framework where it can exercise some exclusive influence. In this context, it is important to observe not only which economies are included in a regional framework, but also which economies are excluded from it. The distinct feature of TPP is that the PRC is excluded, and that of RCEP is that the United States is excluded" (Hamanaka, 2014). Thus, the *nom de plume* of great power intervention is the *de rigueur* order of the day as far as International Geo Politics and Geo-economics is concerned. It is the policy of prestige and a zero sum game which is characterized by the formation of RCEP and TPP, wherein, the balance of power equations with the great powers in the fray form a significant pedestal in the garb of BOP concerns and the related tenet of the dominance in the maritime space in the Indo Pacific where-in, alliance making and counter alliance spawning happens to be one of the key IR lenses through which the entire debate about RCEP and TPP can be visualized and imagined objectively.

What is the RCEP Quandary?

The facet which has been raised by the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, raises the theme of Indian concern about joining RCEP in the light of the Chinese sway over the regional economic grouping. The Hindu Reports that through TCA Sharad Raghavan, that, "The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement looks like an extension of China's Belt and Road initiative, former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said, adding that he understood India's reluctance to join the pact. He also said he was keen to see an India-Australia bilateral deal being signed" (Raghavan, 2019). The author further writes that, "I think we were quite right to focus on China for the 30 years or so, from the Deng reforms until quite recently, but I think the neglect of India is a pity. Mr. Abbot said, One of the things I was able to do as PM was to end the neglect of India. Let's ensure that in the years to come there is at least as much Australian focus on the relationship with India as there was in that 30-year period on the relationship with China" (Raghavan, 2019). In the current context, with the Australian Government embracing the US led idea of Indo Pacific, the confrontation

has been attempted in order to expose the Chinese guilt over the origins of COVID-19. India too harbors the dream of being a world leader and not a mere balancer state and in order to achieve that the present New Delhi denomination is aligning with the United States ingrained with the larger global collective strategy of containment and sequestration of China.

The RCEP necessitates it that both India and Australia need to bridge their age old thaws and embrace the nation down under. Even the American President in his 2017's National Security Strategy, has, contended that India needs to take on the role of a Global leader and strive for influence in regions such as South China Sea along with in the badlands and the twilight zone of Afghanistan, thus, underlining the rising name and pelf of New Delhi. Thus, India intends to partner anew with nations and carve out alliances and *Telling Bilaterals* with the regional nations in order to carve out a niche for itself as well as a conducive market for its Industry and corporate stratosphere. The impact of these groupings on the North Korean Quandary, too, cannot be overlooked in the context of the South Korean struggle against the North Korean blackmail.

India Today has beautifully narrated the reasons why New Delhi stayed out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The excerpt from India Today as a secondary source argues that, "India's economy is passing through a difficult time. The rate of GDP growth has been slowing down for five consecutive quarters, that is, since January-March 2018. The GDP growth figures have been a topsy-turvy curve since the roll out of goods and services tax. Combined with demonetization move in November 2016, the GST rollout proved to be a double-disrupter of the economy, which is yet to fully come to terms with these two key decisions. As the industry is reeling under pressure and the government is grappling to deal with the domestic economic situation, a massive free trade pact like RCEP would have exposed the Indian businesses and agriculture to unequal competition from countries which are lurking like giant sharks in the export arena. India, as a whole, is a 'bad' business entity" (Dutta, 2019). Due to the limitations of a slow Indian economy, the Prime Minister took an approach of constraining of staying out of the

Chinese reach and influence by not being a party of the RCEP alliance and sided with the counter alliance in the form of TPP (Nobel, 1995).

Prabash K Dutta further writes that, “India's trade deficit with these countries has almost doubled in the last five-six years - from \$54 billion in 2013-14 to \$105 billion in 2018-19. Given the export-import equation with the block, a free trade agreement with the grouping would have increased it further. At present, India ships 20 per cent of all its exports to the RCEP countries and receives 35 per cent of all imports from them. China is the ringmaster of this export-import circuit. It is the largest exporter to almost all countries of the group, including India. Of India's \$105 billion trade deficit with RCEP countries, China accounts for \$53 billion. Widening trade deficit would empty foreign exchange reserve of India at a faster rate. And, a depleting foreign reserve is never good for any economy and is least desirable for the one trying to recover” (Nobel, 1995). Thus, it's this racket and rationale of trade deficit along with the trade imbalances with the RCEP nations and PRC which has been instrumental in making Prime Minister Modi decry the utility of the Regional Comprehensive Economic partnership (RCEP). Other themes of the order of the fate of domestic industries and farmers, too, persist as a spanner in the works of India joining RCEP apart from the China factor.

It can be further cited that the services sector and the other important factors too made PM Modi to opt out of RCEP such as the attendant manufacturing output and agriculture. India Today further informs us that, “Services sector is also not doing well, of late. It has seen, in the NPMI=ECI survey, first back-to-back monthly slowdown since July-September 2017 in October. China and ASEAN countries have robust service sector, and a free entry to these players may damage the lone savior of Indian economy in these times of crisis. In agriculture, domestic players dealing in dairy products, spices -- chiefly pepper and cardamom, rubber, and coconut would face dumping from the South Asian spice majors. Sri Lanka is already giving a tough time to Indian spice growers” (Nobel, 1995). Thus, its akin to Indian protectionism like Trump's America First Inward Outlook that certain set of sectors have been protected and taken away from the brunt of South East Asian giants where their governments too protected them as an initializing trend

towards a convergent amalgamation. India is doing the same and taking the road to protectionism to a geo economic national interest orientation.

Economic Times had argued in the favor of India joining RCEP. Devasish Mitra contends that, “Unlike unilateral trade liberalization that results only in trade creation, an FTA leads to both trade creation and trade diversion, the latter being diversion of imports from more efficient FTA non-members to its members that now face lower tariffs within this group. This latter element is the protectionist part of an FTA, while the former is the free trade component. Overall, an FTA will lead to freer trade if trade creation is greater than trade diversion. When initial tariffs are low, with the exception of a small number of industries, trade diversion should be relatively small” (Mitra, 2019). Indian horticulture, floriculture and sericulture would too, will be harmed if New Delhi had decided to join the much-vaunted RCEP (Krishnan, 2019). New Zealand, too, competes with our resource-strapped farmers. Both these countries, are, eyeing the huge market in India. It is notable that New Zealand exports 93.4 per cent of its milk powder, 94.5 per cent of its butter and 83.6 per cent of its cheese production. Removal of tariffs, which at present are 60 per cent for milk powder and 40 per cent for fats, will allow dumping of these products (Krishnan, 2019).

Thus, one can delve inside India’s trade deficit with RCEP nations and the trade balance with the ASEAN nations, to, arrive at a certain and standard perspective. It can be gleaned from the tabular statistics that India has a mammoth trade deficit with the People’s Republic of China and a smaller but yet ignoble trade imbalance with countries such as South Korea and Japan which has made New Delhi move the other way towards the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in the context of the regional trade and its attendant balance of trade. All these trade factoids have a stark and telling impact upon the political and Diplomatic substratum of this geo economic base, to utilize a Marxist terminology and comprehension over here in the presented narrative.

The economic times informs us that it’s beneficial for New Delhi, not to join the RCEP grouping for a slew of reasons which have been internalized by the Indian trade strategists. The ET report runs as thus, “The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi no longer needs to make difficult concessions on agricultural trade. Other members of the

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership group, or RCEP, won't need to open their home markets to India's thriving, and low-cost, services sector. China, the linchpin of a zone that also includes the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, will be able to move forward faster with an agreement that was at risk of being jeopardized by India's foot-dragging." (Newspaper Correspondent, 2019)

The Economic Times Report further contends and informs that, "The US, meanwhile, can take satisfaction from the fact that its key regional ally in New Delhi is remaining outside of Beijing's orbit. A stronger RCEP that included India would almost certainly have revived politically fraught question of whether Washington should rejoin the rival Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement or TPP, which died in Congress under the Obama administration and was formally killed off by President Donald Trump." (News Paper Correspondent, 2019) Any nonchalance and geo economic obstructionism or a regional waiting game would have been construed by various regional and global countries and actors as quintessential foot dragging by India so thus one reaches the idiom of co-existing in collaboration with the Trans Pacific partnership (TPP.) This would please the ears and eyes of President Trump as the Indian decision would make India part ways for a certain distance from the hegemonic ides of the People's Republic of china and navigate closely with the America led TPP block with its own strategic and geo economic ramifications. What remains to be seen is the idiom that what does the new American President Donald Trump does in the context of realigning the United States with the Trans Pacific Partnership as it was the key percept of his campaign trail in 2020 that the ides of protectionism imposed upon US will be reversed if he enters the portals of the White House.

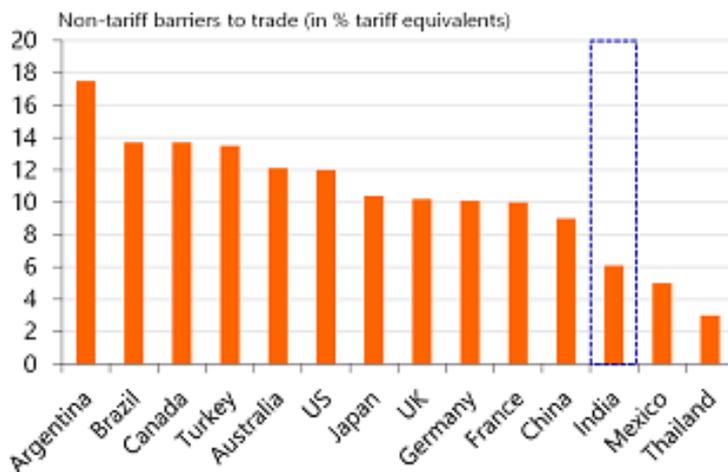
The Trans-Pacific Partnership (or the TPP as it is generally known) is a free-trade agreement being negotiated between 11 countries of the Pacific rim including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States of America and Vietnam. Japan is the 12th country that has entered into the negotiations to join the TPP. The US administration under President Barack Obama seems to have prioritized the TPP as the economic component of its "rebalancing" to Asia strategy. Rukmanini Gupta writes in the Institute's of Defense Studies reportage and commentary that, "There is clearly an

overlap in the membership of these two trade agreements. However, this does not necessarily imply that the goals of the two agreements are antagonistic. The TPP seeks to vastly reduce tariff levels among member countries and standardize policies on various issues including safeguarding intellectual property rights. The ambit of the RCEP is not quite as vast. The two can therefore be seen as different rungs on a free-trade agreement ladder. Although some American officials have stated that the US would welcome India's participation in the TPP, India has not made any official statement on the issue suggesting such a move. It may be reasonable to expect that it will take some time before India would be amenable to joining a trade agreement such as the TPP, whose scope extends well beyond other trade agreements India has partnered in" (Gupta, 2019). Thus, both the agreements of the order of TPP and RCEP are part and parcel of regional geo-economic and trade Diplomacy to stitch together a much efficient and somber regional trade ecosystem but something which has to belabor under the shadows of the Great powers such as United States, People's Republic of China and India. At least, the flavor and rare practice of Free Trade is being inserted in the Asian Space with Great power interventions along with the aspirations and statute of a rising New Delhi in the aftermath of the strivings since May, 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

But, jarringly, akin to the unpredictable policy nature of President Donald Trump, United States of America has withdrawn from the TPP way back in 2017 placing a spanner in the works of a new and rising, New India. A Brookings Report contends very pithily about the allegations that pit nations such as India and China against the founding principles and stand points of the Trans Pacific Partnership but with the TPP's denial by the American President the pitch has generally been ruined for new risers such as, New Delhi. The Brookings Report can be quoted here verbatim, "There are several common misconceptions about TPP. One is that it is simply a trade agreement, when it is actually much more than that. Not only does TPP slash tariffs, it contains anti-corruption measures, intellectual property obligations, human rights and child labour conditions, and environmental commitments. As a result, neither India nor China would have been ready to sign on. Comparisons that are often drawn in India with the proposed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – which includes China and India, but excludes the United States – are not entirely apt. Countries that are party to both negotiations –

Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, and New Zealand – do not see one as a replacement for the other” (Jaishankar, 2019). The Brookings report further furnishes the information and analysis that, “A second misconception is that TPP is directed against China and India. This is only partly true. Officials from TPP countries would often reiterate that China and India were hypothetically welcome to join TPP at a later stage, as long as they meet its conditions, knowing full well that this could not happen in the short-term, if ever” (Jaishankar, 2019). Thus, another *novae* and balanced approach might be the order of the day where-in, the rationale of TPP being against the nations of the order of China and India can be looked into. As we also need to keep it in our minds the aspect and the fact that there are a few nations which are part and parcel constituents of both the groupings that is, TPP and RCEP. Both these agreements are not merely trade agreements but they also ensconce within their rubric other snippets of intellectual property rights and other aspects which move beyond a bland and simpleton tariff regime. Also, it should not be borne in mind that RCEP and TPP can serve as ideal replacements of each other if any of the constituent conditions of both RCEP and TPP do not gel with the arguments of the respective tenets of foreign policy aims and national interests for individual nations.

Hugo Erken and Marken Every contend that, “If it joined the RCEP, India would also have access to a new playing field. Participating would offer Indian firms new markets and technologies and new sources of foreign capital to drive economic transformation. This is the line of reasoning Bloomberg has presented” (Mekel & Every, 2022). One further rationale for India not joining RCEP happens to be that of India realised that the RCEP agreement was more externally oriented than internally posited and placed and RCEP members were responsible for furthering India’s trade deficit since the last few years. Thus, the internal economic weakening of New Delhi augments the negative precedents and the growing creditworthiness of the country and its attendant economics. Further on, India’s surge of industrial one-uppance could have been hampered by joining the RCEP in the light of the RCEP induced volley of imports and any ways, New Delhi is not a tariff imposing regime and system which can embolden our incorporation into the rubric of RCEP. They further contend that, “

Figure 4: Where is the level playing field for India here?

Source: OECD

“Yet, it would also introduce enormous amounts of additional foreign competition – and the RCEP playing field is not exactly level. For example, lower tariffs within the RCEP is a step towards a Ricardian optimal outcome, but again, reality is more complex. Trade barriers are not just about tariff rates. Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade, ranging from administrative burdens to outright quantitative restrictions, have become increasingly important. Furthermore, OECD data on NTBs indicates that India is hardly the most protectionist country, being outflanked by RCEP members Australia, Japan, and China (Figure 4). Importantly, the RCEP has not made any arrangements on lowering NTBs” (Mekel & Every, 2022).

The poser of state support to Indian corporates can be further mentioned over here. “How can Indian firms compete with Chinese state-owned enterprises that have access to all kinds of official and unofficial support and all that excess capacity to boot? One possible outcome of India joining the RCEP could be a failure to industrialize in the face of a surge in imports, which would leave its economy dominated by agriculture and services. That kind of Ricardian comparative advantage would mean a larger number of lower-wage jobs, which would bring a halt the economic aspirations of

campaigns like "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" intended to boost local manufacturing” (Mekel & Every, 2022).

Conclusion

Thus, the entire TPP and RCEP debate and deliberation is about the idiom that India need not worry too much about inviting the antagonism of either United States or the People’s Republic of China as far as its balancing act between RCEP and TPP, is concerned. Every maneuver which China and United States might indulge in, goes by a canny adherence to the notion of nation’s national interest which is always how the Political leaders and Diplomats respond to any balancing act between twin treaty choices, so that way the TPP and the RCEP debate too follows the lines of the national interest argument which cannot be given the sobriquet of selfish national interest as its argued by the cabal of left liberals and Progressives in the larger regional and international firmament. The purity and domestic sovereignty of regionalism is made impure with Great power interventions as is the case with the regional Asia Pacific jostling between United States of America and People’s Republic of China. The argument which contends that regionalism is the ideal solution and geo strategic and geo economic panacea for the international system gets strengthened with the consternations and contestations caused in the micro alliance context of RCEP and TPP which once again reiterates the larger idea and tenet of the Regime theory and how it actualizes itself within the ambit of great powers and the states and their individual economies under contestation and great power legerdemain.

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A Critical Re-engagement with Traditions: Women, Agriculture and Agroecology in India

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyse the erosion of seed sovereignty over the past five decades in light of green revolution and modernisation of Indian agriculture with reference to its impact on smallholders in the country, a majority of whom are women. In India and in most part of the Global South, women farmers have played a distinct role as seed saver and crop diversity manager. The loss of control on seed and farming in new global agricultural regime led by agribusiness not only undermines their role in agricultural production, but also raises issues about farmer's autonomy and food security. Additionally, there are questions about overuse of land and water resources, health problems, environmental trade-off, sustainability of modern agricultural systems. This article proposes that the agroecological traditions, already practiced by women in the farming communities in India, emerges as a viable alternative recourse to petro-based, resource guzzling agriculture as they help in diversifying the crops and incomes while also providing women an agency. It is in this sense that a re-engagement with traditions in farming may help conceptualise a democratic framework for agriculture in which women farmers remain at the centre of seed and crop management

Keywords: agroecology, farming traditions, agriculture, seed policies, women farmers.

Introduction

Women farmers have played a crucial role in agriculture in India and in most of South Asia since the antiquities. A majority of women farmers are small and marginal, under-resourced, engaged in subsistence farming, yet they produce the most diverse crops through a variety of sustainable cropping methods. They have been the doyens of farming, being central to the food production in the Indian agricultural system with their involvement at every stage of production. In this process they acquire specific skills and knowledge of farming, especially pertaining to

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seed. Women have played a crucial role in seed saving, grain storage, seed selection and in this capacity, they have been the custodians of indigenous knowledge systems associated with these practices. Because of their multiple roles as farmers, gardeners, cooks, keepers of culinary traditions, women have been curating seeds and have maintained agrodiversity (Pionetti, 2005). However, over the past five decades, seeds have slipped away from farmers control and have become propriety of breeders, genetic engineers, registered seed dealers and agribusiness who regulate the seeds in the contemporary times (Shiva, 1993; Pionetti, 2005; Peschard, 2017). There is increasing technical control in seeds to achieve economic efficiency in the form of higher yield. The rapid commercialisation and corporatisation of seeds aided by trade liberalisation and intellectual property rights not only undermines women's role as seed saver but also pose serious challenges to the erosion of seed sovereignty of the farmers.

This very process of erosion of seed sovereignty and the parallel loss of agrobiodiversity in wake of productionist technology such as green revolution and agribiotechnology and its specific implication on women seed savers is explored in this article. Seed policies further entrenched the shift in Indian agriculture making it centralised, market dependent, externally-driven. To a great extent, the genesis of current agrarian distress can be traced to the political and economic foundations of modern agrarian arrangements. Discourse analysis of legislations explicates how the vision of agriculture of the country is deeply informed by productionism. In other words, the larger scheme of agricultural development believes that increasing production is the solution to all problems.

The article is structured in three sections: The first section traces the legacy of seed legislations of colonial and post-colonial India in a historical perspective to demonstrate how agricultural narrative is a continuum. The second section will discuss the seed legislations in contemporary India, specifically to assess the impact of trade liberalisation on seed savers. The third section discusses the conceptualisation of a democratic framework for seed governance keeping women farmers at the centre of seed management.

Research Design

This article foregrounds the subsequent erosion of seed sovereignty in the process of agricultural modernisation as observed in the field study in five districts in Odisha conducted in 2018 by the author namely-Nayagarh, Ganjam, Bargarh, Sambalpur and Sundargarh. These field sites were selected based on the prominent role of some voluntary organisations working to revive agroecological farming traditions. The information generated from the interviews and discussions with 30 farmers and four seed saving network coordinators were interpreted in light of the seed policies in India. While field explorations reflected the lived realities of farmers and farming, the policy analysis demonstrates how change in the international climate on intellectual property rights (IPRs) and trade liberalisations have eventually dovetailed into a seed regime monopolised by the global agro-industrial complex in which farmers have lost the control of seed and crop management. Because of women's role of being the seed custodian, the emergent exclusionary regime of seed impacts them in very specific ways as reported by the women from in their interviews. A closer look at historiography of the policies enables mapping the breaks and continuities in the policy conundrum and will evince the objectives by which agricultural policy on seed have been guided so far. The discussion would highlight if the policies subsequently gravitated towards progressive commodification of seeds, having severe implications for sustainable food and farming. In the end article would discuss how agroecology with women in the central role offers a sustainable alternative, that would possibly democratise the discourse of agriculture.

Literature Review

There are crucial works that provide a foundational understanding on this subject matter. To begin with, Akhil Gupta (1998) and Ashutosh Varshney (1998) exhibit the wider politics and political economy of agrarian transformation in India. The gender dimension of the effects of agricultural modernisation is discussed by Bina Agarwal (2016) and Vandana Shiva (1988, 1993). These works showcase how the consolidation of industrial agriculture and private seed industry has systematically eroded women's control over food and farming, not to

mention the associated environmental trade-off. Based on her extensive field study of South India, Carine Pionetti (2006) offers substantive insights into how women farmers individually as well as in communities are resisting this agribusiness-corporate takeover. They struggle for their farming autonomy in order to retrieve their agency through local seed networks in the Deccan Plateau of India. Seed policy analysis by Suman Sahai (1994, 2005), Shalini Butani (2015) and Ian Scoones (2002) depict that state, through its regulatory policies, has been the most decisive factor shaping the agricultural discourse till 1980s. However, this changed with India signing the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights of Agreement (TRIPs) in 1994 leading to trade liberalisation and consolidation of commercial-corporatist agricultural regimes.

In order to get a complete picture of these developments, it is pertinent to trace the legacy of seed legislations in India.

I. Legislation on Seeds in a Historical Perspective: Colonial and Post-colonial India

As discussed in the preceding section, seed policies of colonial and contemporary times will reveal the politics and political economy of transformation of the seed. The seed sector was marked by strong presence of the state and the public sector till 1980s, however, later witnessed their withdrawal due to rapid ascendance and take over by the private sector.

The agricultural policies of British India were aimed at maximization of profit and hence, they mostly focused on revenue and property laws. In this period, there was no separate legislation on seed. Guided by the urgency to increase the revenue, the colonial administration introduced several new measures like the policy of land revenue settlements beginning with the Permanent Settlement of 1792. They imposed intensive cultivation of cash crops like jute, indigo, cotton, sugar, tea, coffee for export purposes. Development of railways and road transportation enabled expansion of the cash crop to be exported to national and international markets resulting in commercialisation of Indian agriculture (Washbrook, 1994). The colonial administration also

created 'Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce' in 1871 with the aim of ensuring the timely supply of cotton to the textile industry located in Manchester, United Kingdom. Colonial policies resulted in farmers entangled in the matrix of inequality and exploitative relations among peasants, landlords, moneylenders causing considerable distress (Klein, 2008). They not only caused the indebtedness of the farmers but also led to ecological imbalances and famines (Whitcombe, 1972).

Though the British administration did not formulate a clear policy on seeds, yet it intervened in the seed markets by installing a system of testing and developing new varieties of seeds with higher yields and distributing them to farmers through extension (Pray and Ramaswami, 2001). New improved seeds were imported from the US and Europe as early as the 1850s, and introduced in various regions of India. For example, New Orleans cottonseed was introduced in Banda district in 1861 and Carolina rice seed was introduced in Northern Western Province in 1869 (Singh, 1982). To carry on the research on these seeds, model farms were created in Allahabad, Bulandshaher and Kanpur, but they could not succeed in their endeavours in absence of supervision by a responsible authority. Aiming to raise the export of cash crops, the Government tried to persuade the cultivators to adopt the new seeds however, they were not adopted by farmers largely. The crop research also started in colonial India, though in a very limited sense, and the initiative covered cash crops like cotton rather than food grains (Roy, 2007).

Post-colonial India inherited the debilitated economy of the colonial state. For an agrarian country, agriculture was seen as the only way to salvage the society from rampant poverty, malnutrition and chronic underdevelopment. Hence, agriculture was identified as a foundational tool of development and a number of initiatives were adopted in the first decade after independence to improve agricultural production, the Grow More Food Programme being the significant one. Under this programme, new improved varieties of seed, fertilizers, drilling of wells, loans to farmers were introduced with an aim of attaining food-sufficiency (GOI, Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee, 1952). However, due to limited resources of the post-colonial state and the ambivalence of state policies, this programme came to be perceived as a failed project at its end in 1952 (Sherman, 2013). After this, the government directly took the charge of modernising agriculture by giving it a place of primacy in

the planned economy of India with a substantial outlay of 15.1 per cent in the First Five Year Plan (GOI, First Five-Year Plan 1956-61).

The Government of India in alliance with the U.S. State Department and its philanthropic organisations like the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation implemented a variety of measures for agricultural development that culminated in the green revolution in the 1960s. This was operationalised through the meticulous efforts in seed improvement by the national agricultural research systems (NARS), particularly Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI). The modern improved varieties of seed such as high responsive rice and wheat varieties were multiplied by the state seed farms and distributed to farmers through official agencies (Rao, 2004). Resultant sharp rise in grain production led to huge surge in demand for quality seeds of hybrid high yielding varieties (HYVs). To produce and market quality seeds, National Seed Corporation (NSC) was established in 1963 and to regulate seed sector, the first systematic seed policy in form of the 'Seed Act 1966' was enacted. The objective of this Act was to monitor the quality of notified seed sold for agricultural purposes through compulsory certification and voluntary labelling. The process of new plant breeding and HYVs production remained dominated by the public sector institutions through the 1960s and 1970s.

II. Trade Liberalisation and Seed Regulation: Impact on Women Farmers and Seed Savers

Despite huge investments and overarching paraphernalia of institutions in the 1970s, it was felt that the public sector in India was performing well below its capacity. Concerns about the efficiency of the public sector started moulding the discourse slowly in favour of the private sector. Whereas there were external pressures from sources like the World Bank that wanted the government to make space for rapid privatisation by 1980s, on the other hand there were internal pressure from Seed Association of India (SAI) (representing the interest of the upcoming private seed industry) for removal of trade barriers. The generous funding for the National Seed Programme (NSP) (1975-85) from the World Bank arrived only at the conditionality of enlargement of the private sector and downsizing the public sector's role in agriculture.

Unambiguously, the objective was to prepare the Indian seed market for its participation in the globalised seed market and its eventual assimilation in it (Jafri, 2018). Meanwhile, the government was also looking forward to the idea of inviting investments and collaborations with the companies abroad.

However, these imminent shifts required substantial changes in the policies. New Policy on Seed Development 1988 was adopted for greater liberalisation of the seed sector. Under this, the government introduced measures for reducing trade barriers on import of new agricultural technology, allowing entry of foreign firms and incentivising large Indian corporations in the seed sector (Pray and Bharat Ramaswami, 2001). For example, quick approvals were given to agreements on foreign technology and their investors while Indian subsidiaries were provided upto 51 per cent foreign equity, private Indian companies were allowed to collaborate with foreign companies for seed production and so on (Seshia, 2002). Later on, with the greater relaxation on tariff bindings under Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP) and Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), more foreign investments arrived in the Indian seed industry, making it a core industry by 1986. The industrial policy of 1991 further boosted trade and commerce by delicensing and deregulating the industrial sector. By 1995, the number of private seed companies with R&D swelled to almost 40 (Gadval, 2001).

Due to the lack of provision of dealing with Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) in the 1988 policy, there arose a demand for a new policy ensuring plant variety protection by the private seed industry. India signed the agreement on TRIPs of Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiation of GATT in 1994 (that later became WTO). This agreement required all signatories to introduce strong systems of plant variety protection laws in the form of either patent or by an effective *sui generis* system or by any combination of both. As a result, the Indian Parliament passed the Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers' Rights Act 2001 (PPV&FRA). One of the progressive aspects of this Act is the provision of 'farmer's rights' that was inserted in it due to strong civil society mobilisations in the country. On the contrary, most of the countries of the Global South adopted plant protection in conformity with the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).

With the arrival of new policies like PPV&FRA 2001 with stringent IPRs and the mounting pressure to ease the norms for introduction of genetically engineered food crops, there has been dwindling space for autonomy of farmers and the food they cultivate. Seeds have always been understood to be belonging to the 'commons' and hence have been freely saved and shared by the farming communities in India and in many parts of the world. The increasing control of seed by the private seed companies and global agricultural conglomerates highly restrict farmer's access to save, share, exchange and sell their seeds. Though these provisions have been granted in PPV&FRA 2001 under 'farmer's Rights', they are conditional. A closer reading of the Act reveals that the criteria of 'DUS' that mandates the fulfillment of the condition of 'Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability' for a variety to be registered. Farmers find it problematic as their seeds are not morphologically uniform or in terms of its other characteristics and therefore usually do not conform to the DUS criteria. Farmer's varieties are constituted very differently as they are ecologically adapted, diverse, resilient and add on to the wide spectrum of plant genetic resources available, but the provision of DUS remains unmindful of these aspects.

It appears that the focus of the Act remains the regulation of commercial seed ensuring its associated IP protection. Also, as the share of hybrid seeds are fast growing with annual growth rate of 36.1 percent between 2006-13, whereas the rate of varietal seeds has sharply declined from 72 per cent to percent 36.8 percent by 2013, the non-hybrid open pollinated varieties will slowly be lost (Chandra, 2016). Given this scenario, if agriculture remains predominated by hybrids only, the whole purpose of insertion of farmer's right to save, exchange and sow seeds would become farcical. It is in this light PPV&FR Act 2001 is said to harbour countervailing norms and principles (Rangnekar, 2014). Though, the saving grace has been that the Indian plant protection Act did not subscribe to UPOV which is inclined strongly in favour of breeder's rights while farmer's position and assurances are either absent or poorly worked out. PPV&FR Act 2001 was followed by National Seed Policy 2002 to outline the orientation and vision of the Indian seed sector. New Seed Bill 2004 was proposed to replace the Seed Act 1966, but was revised as Seeds Bill 2011 that lapsed and reformulated as new Seed Bill 2019. However, this version of the proposed Bill carries forward similar problems like its predecessors. The definition of the term farmer itself, which now has been redefined as 'anyone who owns cultivable land or any other category of farmers who are doing the

agricultural work as may be notified by the central/State Governments. In this way, with the liberalisation of agriculture, the seed has become the pursuit of increasing commercialisation and profiteering (Kothari, 2000; Kohli & Bhutani, 2015).

III. Agroecological Traditions and Women: A Sustainable and Democratic Framework for Indian Agriculture

As discussed in the section above, the seed legislations need to work on those aspects that would strengthen the position of farmers vis-à-vis the agricultural corporations. Also, they must factor in the specific role of women in seed saving, biodiversity and local resource management. Most of the women farmers are small holders engaged in subsistence farming. They cultivate a variety of indigenous crops by frugal use of resources, maintaining the diverse genetic pool of the plant germplasm. This rich germplasm is used in the research on varietal crop improvement. Selection and cultivation of diverse heirloom varieties by women have ensured food security in different parts of India. Women have played cardinal role in agroecological practices like Baranaja, that involves the inter cropping and mixed cropping of 12 compatible crops in the Uttarakhand in the Himalayan foothills. Similarly, women play crucial role in farming in different district of Odisha as found in the field studies, due to their knowledge and practice of organic methods of pest, soil and crop management they make food production sustainable (Singh, 2021). Alongside, their role also allow them to generate agency of their own in terms of choices of crops, farming methods, farm managements especially in light of men's increasing outmigration for better jobs in the urban cities (Singh, 2022).

However, despite the enormity of women's contribution towards food production, the sphere of agriculture is marked by a gnawing gender gap globally (Huyer, 2016). In India, 78 percent of all female workers, and 86 percent of all rural female workers are engaged in agriculture, nonetheless only a few women own arable land and even fewer effectively control some (Agarwal, 2002). Women's lack of equal access and control over the land and resources makes them invisible as peasants. Gender inequality is reproduced in agriculture due to traditional gender roles and gender relations that hinder women's accessibility to sufficient financial and material resources in deeply patriarchal societies. Men and women play different roles in the domestic sphere and in society, that gets replicated in

all other domains including agriculture. In the hierarchy of sexes, women always occupy the secondary status vis-à-vis men (Beuvoir, 1949) and this subordination determines their restricted access to not only the means but also to relevant information, collaborative networks that men possess. Women farmers are unable to benefit from government schemes and agricultural credits as usually, land title is the condition for availing them. With this background of agricultural gender gap, in spite of their seminal role in agricultural productivity women are not able to generate any substantial overall gain in their status.

Efforts towards creating a gender sensitive policies in agriculture require revisiting the discourse of agriculture from the perspective of seed saving and a number of in-farm and off-farm functions performed by women. The goal of high production achieved through capital-intensive, agribusiness-controlled industrial agriculture would have to be balanced with the autonomy and space of the farmers to continue with subsistence agriculture with their farm saved seeds. This also fulfils a larger task of maintenance of agrodiversity. With the rising awareness about the extractive relationship of high input agriculture towards environment and natural resources, there is a requirement of supportive policies for regenerative agriculture widely engaged by women. Alongside, the minimum support price must cover other crops like millets, pulses and nutritive crops instead of selected crops like wheat and rice. Too much dependence on rice and wheat undermines effort in the diversification of crops and promotes their monoculture among farmers. To promote crop diversity, resilient crops like millets should be included in public distribution system (PDS). The news about cabinet approval of inclusion of raggi ladoos in Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) by the Government of Odisha (Balam, 2020) is a welcome step in this direction. Such initiatives should be emulated by other states as well as it will not only mainstream the marginalised crops like millet, but will also ensure the inclusion of the local nutritious crops in the diets of people.

Women farmers optimise the use of natural resources by engaging in agroecological farming but agroecology remains the poor child of agriculture. Most of the subsidies and funding flow towards petrochemicals used in large-scale mechanised conventional agriculture. This is due to the reason that a neo-liberal framework of agriculture seeks solution to everything through the unifocal lens of the market, which may not be viable in the long run. Now that agroecology is being identified as a highly

efficient adaptive and mitigative tool to climate change, it should be incentivised at different levels through public policies and government schemes. As a remedial measure, public spending needs to increase on agroecological research and alternative agriculture representing localised, diverse cropping that carry a transformative potential. The diversion of support from conventional agriculture to regenerative agriculture will also address the problem of heavy metal contamination of water and soil caused by the chemical run off from agricultural fields. At the same time, it will also ensure the propagation of native heirloom varieties of seed used in natural agriculture by the women farmers. This will help in sustaining our rich legacy of tropical germplasm, which once lost will never be recovered. Numerous women farmers are engaged in rain-fed agriculture in different parts of India. Connecting them well with the local markets will financially empower them. Some grassroot farming organisation are already working on these line, for example, *Gram Disha Jaivik Samuh*, a SHG constituted primarily by women farmers, located in Pangna village Mandi District, Himachal Pradesh presents an example of how natural farming can be financially viable when directly connected with the consumers who want to buy from trustworthy farmer's groups. *Gram Disha* offers an example of creating a fair market of local supply chain *Jaivik Haat*, that sells its produce in the local and distant market and enjoys high consumer patronage. Such initiatives will decentralise food and farming and would encourage 'grow locally; consume locally' trend, minimising the carbon footprint on the environment.

Conclusion

The discussion in this article aimed to foreground the gender-blindness of the agricultural development paradigms and policies that have become sharper with the trade liberalisation and are further marginalising women farmers. The resilience of agricultural sector of India, to a great extent owes to the countless women engaged in seed saving and various kinds of subsistence farming that enhances the overall sustainability of the production process. Hence, the most rational response from the government should be to harness the synergy that these women create with the native seed varieties, optimised recourse use and community based conservation. This would require the policies to close the gender gap in agriculture by erasing inequities in access, ownership and participation and recognise the role of seed saving by women.

A democratic framework of governance can be created by supporting the agroecological farming and other diverse cropping systems practiced by numerous women farmers. Farmer's informal seed system should be supported and enabled to coexist along with the formal institutional seed system as farmers native heirloom varieties are crucial in maintaining the agrobiodiversity and a rich plant genetic pool. By formally recognising and incentivising women for seed saving and for their stewardship in biodiversity conservation, the policies can help check not only the erosion of plant germplasm but will also provide women a source of empowerment. These policies would carry tremendous potential of improving women's overall status in the society, thus also achieving a wider objective of women's empowerment. Such efforts would surely democratise the framework of governance in the domain pertaining to the seed and would ensure capability and autonomy of women farmers across the country.

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Book Review

Johansson, A, & Vinthagen, S. (2020). *Conceptualizing Everyday Resistance: A transdisciplinary Approach*. Routledge: New York and London. 348 pp. Rs. 4027.

In the present times, everything has been politicised. Either seemingly apolitical behaviours like choices of food and dress or rather political choices of boycotts, writings and speech, each action has its own politics. Hence, in a world of dynamic political relationships, it becomes more important than ever before to keep ourselves aware of new forms of resistance and to defy traditional means of resistance.

The book “*Conceptualizing Everyday Resistance: A transdisciplinary Approach*” by Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen focuses on “everyday resistance”, where people engage with power relations in their daily lives. It attempts to capture the patterns or gestures of resistance at informal gatherings and networks of resistance where they face collision with power. These patterns are often not perceived as a part of politics in any conventional sense and hence remain invisible to mainstream politics, society or science. (p.3).

Anna Johansson is a Lecturer of Sociology at the Department of Social and Behavioural Studies, University West, Sweden. Her areas of interest include resistance studies, critical fat studies and gender studies. Stellan Vinthagen is a Professor and Endowed Chair at the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is also a Co-Leader of the Resistance Studies Group at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and co-founder of the Resistance Studies Network. His research is focused on resistance, power, social movements, nonviolent action, conflict transformation and social change.

From 1980 onwards “resistance” became a major attraction in academic dialogue. There are lots of single case studies and edited works that bring together the views of different scholars across the globe. Much of the research that has emerged so far, particularly during the last decade, is primarily based on case studies, focused mainly within areas of subaltern, feminist, cultural, queer, peasant and post-structural

studies. But specialized and systematic research on “resistance” is still uncommon, it is still fragmented and emerging, and there are many areas where we need to find the basis for the translation and communication to grasp the concept better. Since the introduction of James Scott work *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), a new area of interest within the resistance studies i.e “everyday resistance” became a major issue in academic research. This is an informal and non-organized resistance, to which Scott categorised as ‘infra-politics’ or ‘an art of being ungoverned’. Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen focus on this area in this book and try to scrutinize everyday resistance in context of time and, space, and also, how it engages with a variation actors, techniques and discourses. This work will help us to understand how everyday resistance varies between contexts, how it connects to collective actions or social movement activism, how it might scale-up and spread, and last but not least how it impacts social change, etc.

Where the first part of the book helps us to know the basic concepts and assumptions around theoretical understanding of “resistance”, “everyday resistance” and “power” in the second part the authors engage in elaborating their own analytical framework to study everyday resistance. But before going into that lets begin with what is everyday resistance, how people perceive it and what the authors say about its exclusive characteristics.

Johansson and Vinthagen argue that resistance is both a popular as well as a largely misunderstood concept. Though it is frequently conjured, in day to day talks, in media just as in the scholarly community, and then subsequently identified as a limited phenomenon. It is sometimes seen as a progressive reaction and at other times reactive. Where resistance led by a group which threaten powerful elites is opposed, while the courage shown by an individual who refuses to participate in atrocities is generally admired. There are others who romanticise the idea of resistance and acknowledge it as a process of liberation of those who live at the bottom of the society. This works helps us know the variant forms of resistance in everyday life but remain ungoverned and unrecognised, (p.2).

Everyday resistance is different from formally organised resistance: - Its located in the actions of subordinate actors and denotes acts by people in daily routines that might undermine power. (p.5) This form of resistance can be both individual or collective but it requires neither organised structure nor political platform to convey its message. It's rooted in the daily lives of subordinates as a normality rather than as dramatic or strange as assumed. (p.24) This everyday resistance involves anything that an individual as well as a collective do covertly in opposition and for self-help against domination. Here the identity of the resister is kept secret or even the whole act is kept concealed, (p.26). It includes those acts and gestures that could not be treated as a direct or open challenge, (p.26). Hence it is not easily recognised like movements and mass resistance since, it's a particular hidden and disguised method, individual and not politically articulated, (p.30). Such exclusive characteristics makes it's tracing difficult and pose a challenge even in academic research, (p.5). This book opens up the heterogeneousness of social and political associations and theorise how power operates not just from above but also horizontally and from below.

Everyday resistance does not mean that it has no association with the organised form of resistance, the authors emphasise that one form of resistance actually compliments, and inspires the other form of resistance. Existence of everyday resistance often provides a mediating ground for the projection of open rebellion and mass mobilization, particularly when it is supported by organisations leading on the front. This also strengthens the network and connection among those who are active as a resistant at ground level and those who lead the agenda or resistance movement at state or provincial level. And also connect the informal and scattered form or resistance which people lead of their own in their daily life, at workplace, neighbourhood, families and at kind of public gathering which we easily identify as resistance. The chain which connects everyday resistance to organised mass mobilisation can be marked as a culture of resistance, (p.2). Basically, the authors argue that waves of mass mobilisation can be fed into daily form of resistance or vice versa, in a way that both forms act as an inspiration or complimentary to the other, (p.2).

The exclusivity of everyday resistance lies in the fact that, though it is of self-help character and involves acts that do not conform to conventional understandings of politics but at the same time it does represent a political category as it involves variant gradients of intensity, exposure, engagement against claims and intentionality, (p.24). It does not include direct leadership from more organised trade union organisations, or facilitates formal negotiation of work condition, but it undoubtedly compliments it, which subsequently encourage the class-war. Also, it has a potential to secure material and symbolic gains such as dignity for the workers which often organised actions fail to ensure, (p.2).

This book seeks to find ways to analyse everyday resistance by asking questions: Who, where, when and how is the process of everyday resistance being implemented in relationships? This kind of scrutiny is essential to understand complex situations. This book avoids the simple categorisations and rather engages to unthread a more complex relationship between everyday resistance and power structures. It provides a theoretical and methodological framework to facilitate empirical studies in different research fields focusing on everyday resistance. It aims to answer various curiosities that surround the concept of everyday resistance. Like how to define everyday resistance in a more meaningful sense by avoiding restrictions and compartmentalisations to bring forward its creativity; and innovations. The authors emphasise that those who are engaged in everyday resistance are not necessarily politically motivated. Resisters might instead be led by desires, needs, affects or intentions that can be hard to define as political. The authors claim it is enough with merely the possibility of a success or effect of an act to undermine power to categorise it as a part of everyday resistance, (p.3).

Key elements and debates around which this book moves and opens our vision includes

How the definition of "resistance" and "Everyday resistance", varies according to the intentions, motivations or consciousness of the resistant and how each definition serves a different purpose. How power and resistance are intrinsically linked in opposition duality. Can we separate the resistance from power not only analytically but also empirically? Is

resistance linked to a multiple power structure simultaneously? (p.9). Though the book does not concentrate on discussing the empirical effects and impact of specific cases on everyday resistance as it is not based on case study. but what makes this work unique is that it incorporates and engages with core ideas e.g. structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxism, feminism, postcolonial studies, peasant studies, etc. With such an analytical approach it has created a huge scope or space in contemporary social sciences and opened it for utilization for the authors of variant research fields, (p.11). Key elements in the analytical framework are forms, actors, sites and strategies, (p.10). where authors' tried to read the everyday resistance in context of time, space and relations, and how it engaged different actors, techniques and discourses. Book is helpful, in not just having a theoretical and conceptual understanding of everyday resistance, but also understanding or giving insight into various competing theoretical aspects such as "hidden transcripts", "infra-politics", "off-kilter resistance" and "tactics of the weak, (p. 9, 31). It discusses everyday resistance in relation to other contested concepts such as: body, emotions, bio-politics, social change, etc.

Though authors acknowledged the contribution of James Scott in setting the relation and interconnection between certain forms of resistance and certain dimensions of power and with this making us understand how variations in power as well as everyday resistance are interdependent. However, authors also identified serious flaws in his work, Scott analysis is based on structuralist and Marxist approach, but in the field of resistance studies post-structuralist is the approach used most. Authors themselves used a post structuralist approach in this work. They adopted a Foucauldian perspective of power, which is 'universal' than 'local', 'productive' than 'repressive' and rational than 'reified'. They argue that Power and resistance are two components that engage in complex interplay with one another. (p.88)

Fundamental argument author made in this book that it's impossible to fully understand the resistance outside the realm of power. Because as Foucault says "Where there is power, there is resistance". Resistance occurs in opposition of something, in order to resist some power or domination, therefore its understanding is incomplete or impossible

without taking power structure into account. One needs to analyse everyday resistance in relation to its ongoing struggle with power. (p.4, 79) However, it does not mean that resistance cannot break such relations but more precisely, this work has suggest that though we could distinguish the two for clear cut definition what is power and what is resistance, however in the real and practical world the two formed a formed a complex configuration or dynamics, which can be mixed and mutually hybrid. (p.6). In Vinthagen words power and resistance are not the dichotomous phenomenon that often collide. Resistance is always related to power and power is plural. As Foucault saw power relation as a multiple process and a dynamic relationship, authors ask its readers to view resistance with the same sense.

According to them, the relationship between dominant and subaltern in context of power as well as resistance varies and is negotiated continually in different contexts and interactional settings, also past experience and material work as footsteps to build new resistance as well as shape power structure. Relation between the two is oppositional and repetitive mode, includes actions and reactions that need to be grasped as dynamic interaction played out in history, space and context that produce unpredicted results. Stories, myths, symbols, structures and tools of the early resistance worked as source material and footprints to make new resistance innovative, experimental and creative. It helps rebels to translate the hegemonic elements, on the other hand power structure also undergoes remodulation and redefine it after its experience of collisions with resistants. hence both power and resistance are intimately interrelated and produced in a continuous process.(p.6) however the acts of negotiation in everyday resistance might not explicit, but implicit and indirect (p.7), in the process both of them become entangled and consequently it has been observed that this often resulted in elements of resistance within power structure and elements of power within resistance projects. In this way power and resistance influence each other, that live side by side, and develop together. Understanding of this entanglement is needed not just to understand what constitutes resistance but it will enlighten us about the pattern in which resistance operates, when and how, partially or fully it intertwined power. This configuration

would also reveal rules, ideas, institutes and techniques when maintained to achieve its goal.

Also, one has to keep this in mind that subordinates by resisting produce both resistance as well as power. Also, everyday resistance has to be understood as intersectionality, as rooted in concurrent combinations of several powers. Here authors emphasised that an agent of resistance where on the one hand promotes power loaded discourse, on the other are bearer of both hierarchies as well as stereotypes and stand for a change. This means an actor is both exerciser of power and a subject on which power is imposed. (P.6) In everyday resistance individuals as well as collectives, both placed themselves in various positions, creating different identities in relation to one another or in relation to the dominant. This played a vital role in deciding the path and intensity of resistance as it varies as per the position within different hierarchical orders, types of agent (individual/collective), and the way they contact and interact in particular context and situation and the kind of relation they shared. This relational pattern often encourages resistants to resist one power while embracing or enforcing another one as their strategy to make resistance stronger and more forceful. (p.73) Similarly, they also tend to lose and adopt different features of resistance according to its influence over power. This enables resistants to make choices over how and what to resist.

Despite its complexities and ambiguities, everyday resistance is an essential category to unthread social relations in any political process, and specially, during peacebuilding and the reconstruction of state authority. This work opened the ground for retrospecting the relations of domination not in the organised structural and formal politics, but in the everyday relations of the workplace, village life and at the home. Also, this study has cleared us that we need to study power and resistance as a combination in its historical entanglement, where both of them intertwined, blended, mixed and even constitute each other, rather as a dichotomy of separated or “clean” categories. In this way Everyday resistance is a matter of analysis to see how this entanglement is changing within the everyday routine of subalterns. (p.63)

The book is relevant to anyone of those engaged in studies of democracy, development, peace, social change, bio-politics, body, identity-politics, everyday resistance, globalization and/or different shapes of power, mariginal groups included women, queer people, refugees or ethnic minorities, etc. Also, this book would also attract the activists and other theory-interested, non-scholarly readers.

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Yadan, B. (2022). *The Rise of the BJP: The making of the world's Largest Political Party*. Penguin. India. 334 pp. Rs. 457.

Union cabinet minister Bhupendra Yadav and eminent economist Ila Patnaik in their work, *The Rise of the BJP: The making of the world's Largest Political Party*, lucidly narrates the story of Bharatiya Janata Party achieving political dominance nationally under the abled leadership of Narendra Modi. Though there are plenty of works on the Bharatiya Janata Party by eminent academics and journalists, there has always been a shortage of what can be termed an 'insider account.' This work by Yadav and Patnaik necessarily tries to fill this gap. Divided into twelve chapters, it starts with the story of Bharatiya Jana Sangh and ends with the 2019 general election campaign. Talking about Jana Sangh, the authors argue that from 1952 to 1967, notwithstanding insignificant political success in terms of seats. It continues to focus on strengthening its organizational structure under the leadership of Deen Dayal Upadhyay. An essential aspect of the Jana Sangh which separated it from other political parties of the time was its first generation of leaders like Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Nanaji Deshmukh, Sunder Singh Bhandari, Jagannathrao Joshi, and others started their life as *pracharak* (ideologue) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Their work in Sangh resulted in patience and ideological commitment becoming inseparable from their life. This helps them single-mindedly work to strengthen party organization against all odds.

We often see parties like Hindu Mahasabha, Ram Rajya Parishad, and Jana Sangh from the same lens. This work of Yadav and Patnaik argues that Jana Sangh founder Shyama Prasad Mukherjee had developed significant differences with Hindu Mahasabha over the question of the Party not providing space to non-Hindus and revolving around the so-called upper caste. This resulted in Mukherjee resigning from the Hindu Mahasabha and, after sustained deliberation with Madhav Sadashivrao Golwalkar, the second chief of the RSS, he formed Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

Talking about the electoral aspect of Jana Sangh, the authors illustrate with data that though Jana Sangh was not winning significant seats, its vote percentage was continuously rising. For example, in the first Lok Sabha election of 1952 party won 3 seats with 3.06 percent of votes. A decade later, in 1962, it rose to 14 seats with 6.44 percent of votes. This signifies that despite the towering presence of Nehru and the legacy of the national movement with Congress, Jana Sangh was continuously increasing its foothold in national politics and slowly but surely was emerging as the alternative to Congress. The book also provides essential insights, like after the emergency when the opposition collectively formed the Janata Party, Jana Sangh, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was its most prominent constituent. In the 1977 general election, out of 271 seats won by the Janata Party, 98 seats belonged to the Jana Sangh group. Despite this, the Jana Sangh leadership accepted Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister. Only three of its members, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, and Satish Chandra Agarwal, were made ministers.

Yadav and Patnaik highlight that despite merging with the Janata Party, the Jana Sangh leaders did not lose their unique identity. This is why when some leaders of the Janata Party objected to Jana Sangh, members of the Party having a continuous affiliation with the RSS. Jana Sangh leaders in the Janata Party happily came out of it and formed a new party, but neither compromised their ideology nor their relation with the Sangh.

There are many facts in the books that, as a student of Political Science, provide us with a crucial vantage point to ponder. For example, BJP's electoral performance in the 1984 Lok Sabha election, when the Party won only two seats, has been highlighted many times. Still, scant attention had been paid to its vote share of 7.74 percent, which was second in that election. This signifies that despite the sympathy wave in favor of the Congress Party created after Indira Gandhi's assassination, BJPs continued to muster a significant social base.

The most important aspect of this book is its last five chapters, which narrate the story of BJP's occupying a dominant position nationally and in most states since 2014.

BJP's electoral success in two general elections and in many state assemblies since 2014 has been chiefly seen through the prism of majoritarianism, communalism, polarization, etc. This book takes us away from these overused sites to study BJP and present certain unexplored domains of the Party before us. The authors highlight how Narendra Modi and Amit Shah strengthen BJP's organization nationally by replicating their Gujrat strategy. They first decided that Party would contest all elections from Panchayat to Parliament with all its rigor and resources. How BJP added new members through missed calls, amended the constitution to upgrade primary members into active members, co-opted prominent leaders from other parties who were disgruntled in their own Party, creating new positions like *Panna Pramukh* (in-charge of the particular page of the electoral roll) and giving them due importance in the Party are all discussed in detail in the book.

Yadav and Patnaik have especially highlighted how both Modi and Shah learned from the Party's defeat in the 2004 general election and ensured better communication with the masses. According to the authors, whether Man Ki Baat or devising the Namo app is the end product of this thinking. Badri Narayan, in his recent book 'The Republic of Hindutva.' argues that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emerged in the Indian Political landscape as a political and social leader. The authors of this book also tend to suggest that direction. Modi's initiatives like *Man ki baat*, *swach Bharat Abhiyan*, *Namami Gange*, *Beti bachao*, and *Beti Padhao* with commoners. He appears as a social leader whose concern is not to win only elections but to bring substantive change in people's life by talking about social problems.

This work also has some shortcomings, like any good work. As an insider, Yadav could have provided more profound insights into many incidents of the Party, like what led to the marginalization of K.N Govindachaya, relations between the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and RSS from 1999 to 2004, and their differences. Discussions within the Party after the loss in the Bihar assembly election in 2015 etc.

To conclude, I would like to say that one should read this book to understand how BJP under Narendra Modi is redefining Indian politics and why the opposition is failing to counter him nationally and in most states.

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Book Review

Geiselberger, H. (2017). *The Great Regression*. Polity: Britain. 220 pp. Rs. 1232.

"The Great Regression" is a book by Heinrich Geiselberger that explores the rise of populism and the decline of democracy in the 21st century. Geiselberger argues that globalization, the financial crisis of 2008, and the influx of refugees have created a sense of anxiety and insecurity in many people, leading to a rejection of the political establishment and a turn towards nationalist, authoritarian leaders.

Geiselberger examines this trend in countries such as the United States, Germany, France, and Hungary, and explores the common themes that underlie the rise of populism across the world. He argues that the erosion of social trust, the breakdown of traditional political parties, and the rise of social media have all contributed to the decline of democracy and the rise of populism. Geiselberger also examines the role of neoliberalism and the free market ideology in the current political climate, arguing that the pursuit of profit and individualism has led to a loss of collective values and a sense of community. Overall, "The Great Regression" offers a critical perspective on the current state of global politics and suggests that a new approach to governance and a renewed commitment to democratic values are necessary to address the challenges of the 21st century.

The Great Regression is a book that encompasses the regressive phases of the existing world order. The book focuses on the challenge to the liberal order and makes an effort to foresee these outcomes. The editor asserts that the growth of authoritarianism and scurrilous demagogues in the twenty-first century will result in a sharp increase in social disparity. Many developments, including Brexit, anti-immigration laws in European countries, nation-state securitization, genocide, rising terrorism, and the resurgence of the old identity, might be seen as a crisis of the liberal world order. According to the author, the perils of advancing globalization, neoliberal politics, and the greed of political players in the states could be the cause of the breakdown of the global order.

The worldwide decline of democracy is the protagonist factor that cracks the liberal wall of the global world. These days majority votes oppose the liberal values and elites. The emergence of Trump in the United States and Modi's second victory with a full fledged majority can be attributed to shifting voter perception, as pointed out by Arjun Appadurai in the first chapter. The political leaders who failed to ensure the country's economy played a culture and nationalism card to secure their position. However, voters now care more about preserving national sovereignty than the country's economic position.

However, there is a worldwide rise of voices against marketization and commodification to save and restore traditional guaranteed rights. The third chapter by Donatella Della Porta asserts that both the left and the right are a little uneasy about the relentless rise of neoliberal policies. The flourishing of the neoliberal world also helped create a social base to protest and counter the challenges of globalization. She argues that right-wing populism thrives among the middle class since this is where the left opposition's social base has already relocated from the working class. Zygmunt Bauman berates neoliberalism for creating a fluid society that obliterates the previous foundations for individual, social, and political identity due to forced migration and associated insecurity. The second leading event that pushes the regression of world order is the intolerance of European countries towards immigration. As highlighted by Zygmunt Bauman in the second chapter due to rising cultural heterogeneity, white people fear becoming a minority in their own nations. Similarly, Nancy Fraser also considers the rise of Trump in the US as a distortion of neoliberal influences. The deterioration of the paradox of liberation, as described by Eva Illouz, may also be attributed to the internal increase of radicalization, fundamentalism, religious and ethnic pluralism, and ruthless and aggressive leadership. Using the reference to Israelian politics, she also stated that somewhere the rise of the right wing took place because corporate capitalism destroyed and devolved the cultural progression of the world. Another critical point added by Ivan Krastev as the primary cause behind the crisis of liberal world order is the loss of trust and faith of people in democratic institutions, such as censorship, majoritarian representation, neglecting minority interests, and spreading obstructive conspiracy theories. He also considers the decline of the USSR in the 1990s and the lack of alternatives to capitalism as contributing factors that distorted the liberal world order. Liberal

democracy, which came as a tool to secure the interest of the minority, became a power of majoritarian rule, which created a drift between the principle of democratic majoritarianism and liberal constitutionalism. Forwarding the discussion, chapter seven of this book discusses the three major causes behind the current European crisis: globalization failure, climate change, and refugee settlement. The author believes these problems can help Europe reunite and restore its old heritage.

Another central argument Mason makes in the eight chapters of this book is the cause of accepting the crisis. Mason pointed out a trend of cultural resistance across the global world. Instead of facing globalization and financial deregulation risks, people are ready to tolerate racism, xenophobia, and extremist nationalism. There is also a narrative failure of Neoliberalism which leads to a false promise of social mobility and further results in the collapse of social democracy. Pankaj Mishra differs from Mason in that he speaks from a level of analysis known as the individual level. His principal criticisms are directed at the liberal assumption that people are rational actors acting on their material interests and the modernist conception of reason. For him, enlightenment is insufficient to comprehend the world today. Furthermore, he thinks it is false to characterize authoritarian impulses as illogical. As a result, he believes that the only way to achieve new progressivism is to do away with these outdated notions.

"The anti-politics and drift between masses expectations and professional politicians is also a vital cause behind the worldwide rise of authoritarianism" Robert Misik. In his chapter, he calls for three distinct changes to reduce the dominance of the neoliberal program. The first is the need for vibrant national parties of the left wing, which has the potential to win elections; the second is to expand the hegemony of progressive actions, and the third is to rewind left-wing government at the European level. According to him, the left-wing flourished in the world with democratic values and liberal principles and represented the working class and middle class. The left should revise itself and should fulfill the gap.

The stepping of the world towards de-civilization led to the spread of uncontrolled rage, hatred, dangerous feelings and fantasies of violence, which are the primary factor that pushed the demise of the liberal world order. Oliver Nachtwey analyzed the phenomenon that civilization

created democratic institutions and people's faith in these institutions. Giving the reference to US politics, Oliver made a point that now the liberal institutions is occupied by xenophobia, a misogynic and paranoid property developer. To overcome the current decline of world order, we need to analyze the grounded and social cause behind the de-civilization. Another argument made by César Rendueles in the twelfth chapter is that somewhere financial crisis in 2008 worked as fuel to the rise of the great regression. The economic crisis led to the decomposition of the political structure, which gave birth to inequality and poverty. Instead of handling this crisis efficiently, neoliberals developed aggressive strategies to manage the sufferings, including the degradation of public institutions, increased social fragility, cultural deterioration, and political polarization. These also gave a push to counter movements such as identitarian movements, xenophobia, religious fundamentalism, and reactionary populism. These movements started believing that, as a political system, democracy is volatile. It cannot be a way of life and cannot bring harmony and peace. But Wolfgang Streeck sees the beginning of the great regression with the rise of neoliberalism itself. The consequences of the neoliberal world, such as tight labor markets, stagnant productivity, falling profits, and increasing ambitious demands of unions and state capitalism, are all reasons behind the rise of the regressive age.

In his contributed letter, "Dear President Juncker," David Van Reybrouck problematizes democracy on a different level. He criticizes the EU and sees it as an abandoned project with flaws and limitations related to representative democracy. He challenges liberal representative democracy and its institutions on behalf of the EU. In the last chapter, Slavoj Žižek began the discussion by pointing out that two false generalizations are now being spread regarding today's culture. The first is that since fascism was militarily defeated, anti-Semitism has become pervasive in our time. The second generalization is that many new walls were built after the fall of the Berlin Wall to keep us out of danger. He sees the potential in the left to tackle the current chaos of the world order. He also considers the current chaos as a reaction of the right wing against the neoliberal.

Overall, the Great Regression provides a holistic view of the rise of regressive politics and a decline of democracy and questions the neoliberal age. The motive of this book is to make its readers understand

that the different causes that push forward the ideology of the rise of authoritarianism are quite clear and understandable. Some authors blame structural change behind the demise of the liberal world order, whereas scholars such as Arjun Appadurai affirmed voters' perception behind the current chaos in the global world. The book is an in-depth analysis of the current transition of the world order and why we are witnessing it. Scholars pointed out different views and perspectives towards current global problems, i.e., climate change, poverty, democracy, inequality, and xenophobia nationalism. This book's insight may help readers develop or predict the future strategies of popular world leaders. It can also help policymakers tackle the mentioned problems and cause behind the demise of world peace and how we can step towards a world that overcomes the failure of globalization. The book enlarged the ongoing debate among academics, journalists, governmental officials, and other intellectuals over what factors led to the decline of the liberal age.

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