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Media Consumption in the Digital Age: A Study on the Cultural Reception of Over-the-top (OTT) Video Streaming Platforms in India

Ronie Thomas *, Sony Jalarajan Raj* & Adith K. Suresh*

Abstract

The dissemination of over-the-top (OTT) video streaming platforms is gradually replacing traditional television in India. With the aid of cheap mobile data, increased smartphone usage, and new technological advancements, the Indian OTT market is enforcing a digitalization that integrates information, communication, and entertainment to engender a new mode of media discourse. This spontaneous digital change has reshaped the cultural reception of media consumption where user interactions and gratifications play a significant role in the process of adapting to a new streaming environment. Based on the Uses and Gratification (U&G) framework, this paper investigates how OTT platforms offer a set of cultural motives for users to explore gratifications that collectively encourage them to achieve a point of cultural reorientation. By following an empirical approach using semi-structured interviews, this study found that active users when exposed to diverse OTT content often assimilate cultural elements normally unfamiliar to them, followed by developing new cultural practices or reorganizing existing habits to have new experiences.

Keywords: OTT, cultural reception, Uses and Gratifications Theory, cultural motives, new media

Digitalization of everyday life has become a recognizable phenomenon as technological developments and new media forms are exponentially transforming the social and cultural coordinates of populations all over

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the world. Entertainment platforms are expanding to integrate more heterogeneous, complex, and interdisciplinary elements to create more content. Studies show that global over-the-top (OTT) media services are highly competitive in limited regional markets and are affecting the technological, economic, and cultural effects of broadcasting and content production (Chen, 2019; Ramasoota & Kitikamdhorn, 2021). The popularization of OTT video streaming platforms exemplifies this specific phenomenon of concocting information, communication, and entertainment to engender a new cultural mode of interactivity; which emerged to encapsulate the change in both universal and local structures of culture, society, and the individual.

The emergence of OTT platforms not only conceptualized the possibility of a newly 'connected user' who has 24/7 access across multiple devices and media contents, but also initiated a behavioral shift of viewers from traditional cable television to OTT media through a process known as 'video cord cutting' (Fuduric, Malthouse, & Viswanathan, 2018). Although this is relatively a slow process in countries like India where television is still controlling media consumption, recent studies found that Indian users have more reasons to subscribe to over-the-top services than reasons to resist using them (Nagaraj, Singh, & Yasa, 2021). India, currently the second-largest smartphone market in the world, has cheap and affordable internet access. This enhanced the burgeoning of the low-cost, subscription-based OTT platforms, which are replacing the complex, linear, and vertically integrated television distribution industry of the country.

As the role of traditional television viewing is being replaced by OTT platforms in the country, the contents of these platforms and their impact on culture are also widely debated, criticized, and challenged (Ahmed, 2017; Chatterjee & Pal, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2019; Jin, 2017; Khanna, 2017; Raikar, 2017). Regarding the self-regulating nature of content creation and distribution, there is growing anxiety concerning the structure, content, and impact of OTT on society. Previous studies observed the digitalization of culture as a significant effect of media use

(Abeelee, 2014; Mihelj et al., 2019) which indicates how new media interferes with existing cultural practices of society (Pathak-Shelat & DeShano, 2013). Combined with globalization and technological expansion, media delivery is marketized by external forces (Chalaby & Plunkett, 2020), thus compromising the pre-existing structural configurations of cultural modes. This article argues that OTT platforms have a strong and dramatic influence on altering cultural codifications of geographical areas that show less resilience to cultural changes.

This article is based on a contextual study about the cultural reception of OTT streaming services in South India. The city of Bangalore, often referred to as the 'cultural capital of India' for its distinct cultural dynamics (Srinivas, 2013), is selected for sampling. In this context, this study makes a qualitative approach using interviews with open-ended questions (Lotz, 2000) to analyze the reception of OTT platforms, and the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory to predict specific cultural motives. U&G Theory assumes the position of an active user in consuming media, therefore constantly challenges the longevity of existing media forms. For example, consumer priorities for real-time broadcasting have challenged traditional cable TV to adopt new strategies to cope with the market (Shin, Park, & Lee 2016). This paper found that OTT platforms are engendering new reasons for using them (Steiner & Xu, 2018), thereby gratifying new motivations. These new motivations have affected the everyday cultural existence of users, resulting in the adoption of new habits and practices that reconfigure the coordinates of the existing culture.

Culture and OTT Use in India

The cultural landscape of India is shaped by a long history of collective changes that continues to be affecting the mode of cultural operation involved with its population. Therefore, culture is a continuously changing and emerging category that depends upon the exposure of new changes with which people interact to form new habits. These changes become the characteristics or signifying practices of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine,

social habits, music, and arts. New perceptions of popular culture encompass the subjectivity of the participants and the preferences of the individual in a collective manner (Storey, 2009), and modern media studies tend to focus on 'adding cultural values on an individual level' (Sheldon et al., 2017). As a consequence, new information fusion methods propose that OTT services overlap with other telecommunication services (Seo, Lee, & Kim 2020) and suggest that such investments are required to meet a more personalized digital life of users (Chen, 2019).

Since over-the-top services are defined as 'digital services deployed on the already existing physical network infrastructure' (Kramer & Wohlfarth, 2018), the arrival of OTT platforms in India was a sign of threat to an already established television culture. For instance, platforms like Hotstar, Amazon Prime, and Netflix have increased their viewership by allowing easy and early access to popular reality shows via mobile phones (Natarajan, Jayapal, & Gangadharan, 2021). The expansion of the OTT industry created a 'content overflow' that underscored the need to define a new media discourse (Cunningham, 2012; Hallinan & Striphas, 2016) where platforms like YouTube became a technical and cultural intermediary between television and audience (Kumar, 2016; Lobato, 2016). Their proliferation was elevated by the availability of a large market of diversified cultural fabric in which more original contents are produced and distributed in a localized manner. One report found that in India, with 22 official languages and more than 450 dialects, 45 percent of the users consume regional language content (MICA, 2018). This is also reflective of a complementary relationship between OTT services and traditional television broadcasting where OTT platforms are inclined to produce content preferred by users rather than mere cord-cutting (Kim, Lee, Lee, & Kim 2021).

According to Cunningham and Craig (2016), India is emerging as one of the largest non-Western online spaces in the world, indicating that global OTT platforms facilitate, rather than control cultural participation. After India embraced globalization in the 90s, this form of

glocalization began to appear as a 'cultural anxiety' for social, political, and religious commentators (Butcher, 2003). Their accusations were centered on the observation that the 'invasion' of Westernized media forms corrupted the 'Indian way of life'. Similar to the arrival of satellite television, the fear of cultural invasion was magnified by anxieties surrounding consumerism and religion (Bodle, 2010; Jin, 2015; Ninan, 1995; Punathambekar & Mohan, 2019; Smith, 2015).

This deliberately-enforced transmutation of the Indian television landscape by the sudden sprout of online streaming platforms has reconfigured the fragile cultural fabric of Indian society. These platforms did not just increase the 'screen time' of the audience but carefully amplified their 'cultural galaxy'. The audiences were opened to new content, style, and presentation which, often conflicted with their perceived ideology, and pushed them into confusion, coercion, and confrontation. However, it is quite difficult to measure the impact of mass media on people as different people consume media differently, and the way they perceive the content is an intangible process for a laconic conclusion. This leads to the expansion of new theories that focus on the users and their specific motivations.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s concluded that viewers interpret television programs according to their social, cultural, economic, and individual life experiences (Fiske, 1987; Kottak, 2012; Roach, 1997). Summarizing the mass media effect in a technologically expanding era, therefore, demands the need to centralize the consumer in an active position where selectivity and convenience are of supreme importance. This conceptualization of the independent user is the driving force of the modern digital consumer culture where telecommunication service providers and OTT platforms fight for customer ownership (Dairo & Szűcs, 2021; Dey, Yen, & Samuel, 2020). Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G), instead of treating its audience as passive consumers, argues that people use media for their own needs

and get satisfied when their needs are fulfilled, allowing them access to more possibilities to use media.

Theories that focus on consumption value/customer value have found unique factors like fandom and social viewing are deciding online media viewing behavior (Yoon, Kim, & Kankanhalli, 2021). Jang, Baek, and Kim (2021) also found that movies with fandom or part of a shared imaginary entertainment environment are more accepted in the video-on-demand market. However, the cultural effect of such factors needs to be elaborated to understand the degree to which they become established as collective effects. Here, U&G models are useful in understanding the 'mediated communication situations' by studying 'psychological needs, motives, communication channels, communication content, and psychological gratifications within a cross-cultural context' (Lin, 1996, p. 574). The media culture is therefore defined by different scales of motivations for using particular media platforms (Sheldon, 2012; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017).

New advancements in U&G research deal with new media technologies in an evolving psychological, sociological, and cultural context to answer why people prefer one medium over the other to gratify their needs (Ruggiero, 2000). New media often blends technology with culture to execute new styles of behavior (Sheldon et al., 2019) where new motives like 'interactivity' are key to future research (Leiner & Quiring, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000) that predicts streaming television viewing (Tefertiller & Sheehan, 2020). A combination of different attributes of these platforms has integrated diverse business models for the user (Park, 2019) and practices like 'binge-watching' have emerged as a cultural behavior (Steiner & Xu, 2018).

Since online streaming platforms are transforming the television landscape by the way users select, view, interpret and decode the content (Raikar, 2017; Seetharam, 2017; Wayne, 2018), U&G can predict how OTT contents are locally produced and are in tune with local popular interest to cope with exploding market challenges. This is

more crucial in the Indian context which, after the popularization of the internet and mobile phones, has transformed from television to OTT platforms to carve a new niche in the media landscape. Hence, to understand the relationship between mass media and society, the focus needs to be on the reception of these new media forms, and how it varies with a particular social and cultural fabric.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The objective of this study is to investigate how technology-assisted new media forms interact with culture and bring changes to society. Since culture is a discursive category with more descriptive connotations, we chose a qualitative method, where semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used as the mode of data collection. Typically, gratification motives of television viewing or emerging new media are tapped by quantitative analysis using surveys. We decide to deviate from this practice because of two reasons: (a) Most of the past studies on usage motives of OTT are based on existing literature. For example, the study of Tefertiller and Sheehan (2020) is based on Rubin's (1983) scale, Camilleri and Falzon (2020) was based on the scale developed by Tefertiller (2018), and Chen (2019) is based on the scale of Rubin (1983) and Ferguson and Perse (2000). However, this kind of survey method is criticized as participants often need to respond to questions that have been used in prior research (Massey, 1995), and this fails to consider gratifications emerging from new media (Steiner & Xu, 2018). (b) Although quantitative studies have used factor analysis methods to extract the emerging gratifications from OTT, the nuances of new gratifications from the media (Sundar & Limperos, 2015) remain undiscovered. We believe that qualitative method can overcome these limitations. Also, semi-structured interviews are helpful in maintaining a natural flow of conversation that is essential in the production of new themes, understanding lived experiences, and endorsing subjective viewpoints of individuals (Choak, 2012; Flick, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This approach was adopted as it was rationalized as useful in giving more freedom to the respondents to actively express their

motives and experiences in using OTT platforms. To pursue the objective of the study, we articulated the following research questions:

- RQ1:** What are the cultural motives for using OTT platforms?
- RQ2:** Does culture interfere with the production and consumption of OTT content?
- RQ3:** How does OTT viewing affect the lifestyle and existing culture of users?
- RQ4:** How does the cultural impact result in a cultural change?

This research is based on the data collected from the interviews conducted with participants from the South Indian city of Bangalore between 2020 March and July. There was a total of 38 participants which consisted of 22 women and 16 men. To use purposive sampling, the socio-economic status of the participants was considered, and it was operationalized into categories of age, educational qualification, occupation, and monthly income to ensure a varying range of representations of participants. All the interviews were conducted through online mode as in-person interactions were restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were in a time frame of approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

The questions of the interview were divided into two parts and asked in a definite order proceeding from general to more specific issues. The first part contains 14 questions that intend to examine the interviewee's cultural motives for using OTT, which were found by analyzing the user's preferences over various OTT platforms, program preferences, viewing habits, etc. This also explores more about cultural motives; such as whether they are natural or forced and which direction they are projected. The second part of the questionnaire addressed how using OTT platforms affect the everyday lifestyle of individuals. The interviewees were asked a set of 22 questions to study the possible lifestyle changes to understand the cultural impact of OTT use.

Data were collected and recorded using memos to find patterns of motivations, behaviors, and themes associated with OTT use in India. The analysis was based on the grounded theory approach and the data were coded, closely reviewed, and theorized (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The data were subjected to a thematic analysis as it is an important process of identifying recurring responses, themes, and trends associated with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the next step, the latent analysis is employed to the level of interpretations that foreground the U&G theory. Further theoretical assumptions are made from developing and categorizing the specifications of user interactions with OTT to attain general conclusions regarding the cultural repercussions of OTT use in India.

Findings and Discussion

Cultural motives for OTT use

After analyzing the data, it was found that Indian users prefer OTT platforms for a number of reasons that significantly affect their cultural life. This paper identified the following cultural motives as strong influences for OTT use: a sense of mobility, community inclusion, desire for exotic content, imitation of external culture, and violation of taboos.

The interviewees iterated that OTT platforms have given them a sense of freedom and choice which allowed them to experience a new form of mobility. They suggested the convenience of OTT platforms as opposed to traditional methods of broadcasting which lack a 'user-friendly' approach. OTT video streaming is focused on the consumer desire to ensure a more satisfactory experience like ad-free viewing (Shon, Shin, Hwang, & Lee, 2021). This centralization of the user as an active agent is a virtual displacement as interviewees opined that OTT has replaced television, radio, and newspaper. Instead, platforms like YouTube are preferred, suggesting its easy use and free availability of massive content of information as motives. Six interviewees revealed that this new 'boundless' and 'fluid' nature of OTT platforms gave them 'anxiety' as they are lost in a 'vast sea of content'. This virtual mobility is cultural mobility as users literally experience their 'movement' within different

forms of content and information. Their convenience of use is maximized by modes of 'anonymity' and 'free access'.

Users acknowledged that OTT platforms have created a 'community feeling'. According to them, people watch multiple contents because they were recommended to them by friends or family. 'Exploring new content', 'familiarizing with famous shows', 'updating with new trends', and 'peer pressure' emerged as reasons that wield community inclusion. An interviewee stated that not watching '*Game of Thrones*' or '*Friends*' made her feel alienated from peer discussions. But once she has watched it, she was included in new 'groups' that are exclusively dedicated to conversations exploring new dimensions of the show. Besides this, there are instances cited by interviewees where multiple users; usually family members or friends, use a single account for access. Those who paid for using a particular OTT are willing to share it with others whom they consider kin. Interestingly, recent research reports also stated that Indians lead amongst 70 million global OTT account sharers (Bhattacharya, 2018; Indian Television, 2020).

As OTTs have proliferated in content production and expanded their space across regional landscapes of India, new users are exposed to new content which often gives them the opportunity to explore more exotic content. Viewers responded that they always have an affinity to watch the 'new releases'. Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar have massive content, which they 'recommend' to users. Kwon, Park, and Son (2021) argue that recommendation agent artifacts like thumbnail images and recommendation lists are related to search experience variables such as perceived diagnostically and perceived serendipity. Accidental as well as the deliberate discovery of new content satisfy users and enforces them to continuous use. Interview responses indicated that users often fail to resist the curiosity to look for external elements of culture in the form of web series or movies. They specifically stated that elements of sexual activity, violence, and vulgar comedy are subjects of curiosity for the Indian users as their home media are deprived of it since they are subjected to cultural,

moral, and political censorship. This leads to new cultural motivations like imitation and violation.

Users revealed that the imitation of external cultural elements includes imitating food habits, clothing styles, language use, new temperaments, and perceptions. Some interviewees reported that after exposing to OTT platforms, they have significantly improved the way they see the world. Some said that they have become more 'liberal' in their approach to certain topics such as religion and sexuality. This act of imitation has consequences such as more people being able to violate existing cultural taboos. Interviewees responded that they are 'less guilty' and 'freer' when it comes to making opinions about discourses related to homosexuality, gender equality, and extramarital affairs. Many of the OTT contents have depictions of extreme violence, nudity, and sexual activity that raised concerns to regulate their content. For example, web series like *Sacred Games*, *Laila*, *Ghoul*, *Godman*, and *The Patriot Act* were criticized by the Hindu right-wing organizations as they were perceived as "Anti-Hindu" and posing a serious threat to Indian Culture (The Print, 2019). Therefore, OTT platforms have become a safe space for both creators and users to explore media without barriers. These platforms have also helped to depict topics that are taboo in mainstream society. For example, EOR TV, an OTT platform launched exclusive original content focusing on the LGBTQ community (Farooqui, 2020).

OTT platforms use the religious, political, and social dimensions of the cultural quality of the Indian population to create original content. Since we have seen motives like mobility, inclusion, desire, imitation, and violation are cultural, OTT viewing is also a cultural activity, thereby indicating a significant impact on the daily activities and preferences of the users. It suggests that the users have to change many of their previous activities to accommodate the new motivations for using OTT platforms. Further study is intended to explore how these new changes and gratifications boost new habits and result in a new cultural restructuring of the individuals.

OTT use and cultural change

As a result of the cultural motivations for OTT use, further analysis of the data indicated a strong impact of cultural change on perceptions, behavior, and lifestyle of users. Many of the responses revealed that OTT platforms have reduced social interactivity. For example, binge-watching favorite shows forced them to limit themselves within the space of their rooms, thus, interaction with family members and friends is reduced to a great extent. Some people said that they have skipped social gatherings and family functions to watch their favorite shows. Their work life was also affected, oftentimes postponing work to finishing a TV series. Students showed a great trend of missing school, refusing to do homework, and postponing their assignments as part of consuming OTT content; suggesting a new mode of media interactivity that instigates active procrastination (Filemoni, 2017).

Binge-watching has emerged to pose a risk to personal life and habits such as sleep, exercise, and healthy eating (Exelmans & Bulck, 2017; Vaterlaus et al., 2019). A number of candidates revealed disparities in eating habits and sleeping cycle; one user frequently postponed eating meals while watching TV shows or movies. As indicated by one interviewee, the continuous Netflix use has transformed him from a 'morning person' to a 'night owl'. He suggested that the 'one more episode' rule has forced him to sleep very late. The convenience of using OTT platforms can also influence users to explore different modes of purchasing such as online shopping (Ho & Rajadurai, 2020). A majority of the interviewees specifically preferred to have an Amazon Prime membership as it can be used for both OTT viewing and online shopping. This resulted in new habits replacing old ones, such as developing a habit of ordering food online instead of cooking. This hybridization of user motivations integrates cultural activities like shopping and media consumption to cater to multiple gratifications at once.

The increase in OTT use also affected other media use of individuals. For instance, the dissemination of numerous OTT platforms has taken over film theaters during the Covid-19 lockdown in India (ETGovernment,

2020). Interviewees emphasized the convenience of OTT platforms over traditional theater releases. They argued the easy availability of quality content, saving time and effort, the convenience of 'pause and resume', more concentration, and avoiding other 'nuisances' and distractions as reasons for preferring OTT to cinema halls. Another major change was a decrease in the frequent use and checking of social media apps; as one participant responded: 'after OTT subscription, I feel that I spend considerably less time on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp'. There was also a reduction in the consumption of news and news-related programs.

Responses showed that exposure to OTT platforms has affected the users to have new imaginations and fantasies about the content they consumed. This is partly because of a new environment created by OTTs where the inflow of overseas content takes over the production of domestic content (Shon, Lee, & Kim, 2021). Interviewees expressed the desire for exotic content and an affinity for imitating and practicing foreign lifestyles. Many responses indicated an active urge to transgress existing cultural taboos to normalize new external values they inherited from using OTTs. There are many shows on OTT platforms with a storyline that has premarital, extramarital, and homosexual affairs; themes unfamiliar to standardized Indian culture (BollyTVadda, 2017; India Today, 2016; Top Lead India, 2019). For example, the OTT platform ALTBalaji has same-sex love series like *Boygiri* (2017), *Class of 2017* (2017), *Gandi Baat* (2018), and *Romil & Juagal* (2017). After watching them, some interviewees realized the universality of such acts and even questioned their presentation as immorality in the Indian culture. This is also reflected in society as some reports suggest that there is an increase of infidelity in Bangalore (Menon, 2020). Also, these cultural shifts became officially evident when the supreme court of India recently decriminalized extramarital affairs and homosexuality in India. The depictions of explicit sexual imagery in many shows were a new exploration for the traditional users. Users suggested that this provided new information about areas that were least explored in the traditional media forms in India. OTT exposure to foreign/transnational shows

helped to learn and accept new lifestyles; this includes imitating the mannerisms and aesthetics of OTT characters, using famous quotes/lines from OTT shows in real life, and purchasing products /apparel seen in OTT shows.

When users are exposed to new media and technology, their preferences change according to what uses they were catered by the media and how they were pursued to achieve new gratifications from it (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Lifestyle plays an important role in adopting OTT (Li, 2017) and new motives and gratifications result in a change in lifestyle among a group of users who either adopt new norms or rearrange existing patterns of culture (Cashmore, 1994). This also indicates that the cultural changes must maintain the previously observed connection between the product's quality of service and the user's quality of experience (Ahmad, Floris, & Atzori, 2016; Li et al., 2018). Interviewees stated that using OTTs has helped them to transgress the barriers of language and culture. OTTs help users to turn on subtitles or switch between different audio versions to understand more foreign and local content. Many users felt that OTT platforms are creating more local content to increase viewership. Such cultural impacts indicate that the involvement of OTT platforms in India is active and continues to reinterpret cultural norms, and therefore reconfigures the local cultural paradigms with external norms.

Conclusion

The cultural changes brought by the new medium of OTT indicate that there is a significant correlation between the process of consuming content from OTTs and the shaping of new cultural norms. These changes suggest a systematic reduction or increase in certain personal and social activities of users that continually affect future endeavors of the individual, either by reinforcing new motives or withdrawing old motives for media use.

This analysis found that new cultural motives like a sense of mobility, community inclusion, desire for exotic content, imitation of external

culture, and violation of taboos have influenced Indian users to choose OTT platforms over traditional satellite television. This brought relative changes in lifestyle and a cultural shift in attitude which are broadly reflected in the personal, interactive, and social modalities of users. Extensive use of OTT platforms affects daily routine, work schedule, physical health, and social media use; forcing users to develop new habits to cope with phenomena like 'binge-watching'. As a result, traditional social interactions are replaced by a new form of virtual interactivity and communication.

A scale of culture is persistently present in media consumption as new media exposure results in comparisons with different cultural modes and activities. An important aspect of this cultural comparison is the reciprocity of its operation. This study revealed that such comparisons made by users often persuade them to have motivations for obtaining information about new cultural practices existing outside their observation. The curiosity for information led them to consolidate new knowledge that they used to imitate and integrate into their own lives and sometimes helped them to overcome existing cultural barriers and taboos. Since these platforms do not fall under any umbrella of content regulation, these shows explicitly portrayed sexual content. The main reason behind this popularity is the possibility of OTT platforms providing personalized content to its consumers which the viewers can anonymously stream on their mobile phones rather than showcasing on a big screen. This indicates that OTT platforms, by their technological advantage over traditional television, are successful in altering the existing cultural milieu.

The result of this study shows that, besides the content of the programs, OTT as a medium has an impact on its viewers. Unregulated, liberal, glocalised, and micro-targeted cacophony of moving imageries emulating from OTT platforms have redefined many of the traditional parameters of Indian culture and cleaved new gestures, behaviors, and lifestyles by intruding into the 'techno-cultural vacuum' left by the traditional television. Contents of the OTT platforms; original contents

in particular, influenced the viewers by altering their language and changing their attitude towards many of the so-called taboos. Unlike conventional cable or satellite television which 'filtered content', OTT platforms bring unregulated syncretic images which cross traditionally demarcated boundaries of 'Indianness' by constantly synthesizing the meaning of culture.

This study has several limitations that demand more future research. Firstly, although in-depth interviews have many advantages, there are limitations as well. This study considered limited participants and hence we acknowledge that they may not be sufficiently diverse to extrapolate this finding to another cultural setting. Secondly, it focuses on the cultural implications of OTT use in the Indian context and suffers from the lack of a more generalized theoretical framing. It does not explain how the complex regional cultural elements of India are interfering with media use, instead, it used relatively small samples from a limited section of society. The behavioral changes identified in this paper are therefore specific and subjective to a particular population. More research on this topic might reveal new motivations for using OTT content, and large-scale studies on different cultures will be effective in conjoining multiple perspectives and unique cultural changes.

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Dara Shukoh: The Lost Lineage of Universalism

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Abstract

Dara Shukoh represents the great literary and spiritual tradition of India that attempted to construct a 'weave of congruence' in the seventeenth century what Kabir and Akbar had done before him in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries respectively. He discovered the roots of Islam in the ancient Indian Upanishad. He also seized upon a Qur'anic passage starting that the Qur'an itself is 'in a hidden Book [that] none but the purified shall touch, a sending down from the Lord of all Beings'. Placing this passage side by side with his monotheistic reading of the Upanishads, Dara convinced himself that the 'hidden Book' mentioned in the Qur'an was in fact the Upanishad. He patronised Sanskrit scholars with whose help he translated the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Jog-Vashistha* (*Yog- Vashistha*), under the title of *Tarjuma-i-Jog-Vashistha* (1656), the famous play *Probodha-Chandrodaya* and 50 volumes of *Upanishads* into Persian. The list may still may not be complete for many of Dara's writings and work of art were deliberately obliterated from the royal catalogues.

Keywords: Dara Shukoh, Majma-ul-Bharain, Risala-i-Haqnuma, Sirri-i-akbar, Tragedy of Dara's life, Prince of Great Fortune, *ya takhta ya tabut*.

'Mughal history's biggest puzzle solved by municipal engineer - where is Dara Shukoh buried'? (Menon, 2021) The above line reads like a dialogue of some sensational television serial, but alas, it is the heading of a news piece claiming to have located the 'grave' of Emperor Shah Jahan's eldest son Dara Shukoh. The news also tells us that the Ministry of Culture, Government of India had set up a seven-member panel of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for locating the grave of the Mughal prince in 2020. There are about 140 graves in the Humayun Tomb complex of Delhi, and most of them are 'not marked or inscribed'.

The claims of assistant engineer of South Delhi Municipal Corporation, Sanjeev Kumar Singh are contested by some and confirmed by others, but the fact remains that Dara Shukoh, for whom Shah Jahan is known to hold special affection for, met with one of the most tragic deaths in

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the Mughal history. The question here is less about 'who' killed Dara and 'how', but actually the 'why' of the entire episode. Amongst all the claims and repudiations about the location of Dara's grave, one truth is certainly undisputable, that not only the destiny but also the history has been heartless to this tall personality, who is believed to have opened the gates of the subtle knowledge of ancient India to the world. Not only a gentle luminary been forsaken, but the entire lineage of an ethos has been lost. The present paper seeks to trace the marks of this lost lineage in the history of India.

Dara: Early Life and Times

Dara Shukoh was the eldest son of Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz Mahal, born in the suburbs of Sagartal Lake near Ajmer, on 30th March 1615 C.E. His birth was said to be the blessing of the Sufi saint Muinuddin Chishti to the father - Shah Jahan, who had performed earnest prayers for a son, since all the earlier children to him had been daughters. The new-born was hailed as *Gul-i-awwalin-i-gulistan-i-Shahi* meaning "The Prime Rose of the Empire" (Qanungo, 1935, p.2). We know comparatively little about the childhood days of Dara because almost all the official court records describe more about the political events, ranks, promotions, royal gifts and visits of Dara once he attained the teenage. Even in his own account in *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, we get a glimpse of Dara when he, along with elder brother Aurangzeb were handed over to Jahangir (grandfather), as hostages on behalf of their father Khurram, who had turned a rebel against Jahangir. Dara was about ten years and his younger brother Aurangzeb was just about seven, when they witnessed the bloody battle between their father and grandfather's armies. As captives of the royal family, their stay at the imperial court was not easy. They were covetously guarded by their step-grandmother Nurjahan and they hardly knew whether they would re-unite with their family or not. Supriya Gandhi reveals, while the young boys were under their grandparent's surveillance, the royal army of Jahangir constantly fired on the tents of their father Khurram. The bloody ordeal for the three princes was over only at Shah Jahan's accession in February 1628, when they got united with the family. (Shuja, the younger son of Shah Jahan was already in the court with

Nurjahan throughout his father's rebellion, for he was the most beloved of the grandchildren). (2019, pp. 56-8).

Political contestations for the throne have been a common feature for a number of ruling dynasties all over the world. Gruesome fights for the throne in the run-up to a dynastic change was a normal phenomenon of Mughal India. Records by European travellers, traders and historians cite conflicts and homicides in this pursuit. However, Shah Jahan's ascendancy to the royal throne defined a new scale of violence in the bloody war for power. Supriya Gandhi observes in this context that though the Mughal history is replete with examples of rebellions by the sons and severe treatment of brothers, but if we look at the count of princes killed by Shah Jahan on his route to the coveted throne, he did 'set a new standard for bloodiness' (2020, p. 62). Faruqi confirms, that by executing five princes in asserting his exclusive right to the throne, Khurram (Shah Jahan) 'set a bloody precedent for future princely rivalry'. (2012, p. 37) A few years down the history, Aurangzeb, the son of Shah Jahan went beyond his father's standards of brutality in his pursuit for the throne. He not only got his elder brother Dara Shukoh captured, humiliated and killed, but according to Manucci's accounts, is also said to have sent the beheaded skull of Dara to his father Shah Jahan, whom Aurangzeb had kept under his captivity. (Manucci, 1907, pp. 359-60)

In his work on Dara, Kalika Ranjan Qanungo cite Manucci's version of Aurangzeb sending the severed head of Dara to Shah Jahan at the suggestion of Raushanara Begum, but also raises doubts about its authenticity by calling Manucci 'a violent partisan of Dara'. According to him, the contemporary chroniclers and the later historians uphold that the cut-off head of Dara was joined to its trunk and sent for the grave. However, he confirms that the body was not washed and neither were any prayers performed for the deceased prince. Nonetheless, Qanungo does comment that given the character of Aurangzeb, presenting the severed head of the son to the father was 'perhaps not too atrocious' to be credited to him. (Qanungo, 1935, pp. 320-21)

Education, Marriage and Family Life

The official chronicles do not say much about the education of the prince. Hasrat reveals that *Padshahnama* by Abdul Hamid Lahori mentions '*ba maktab raftan*' or 'the going to the school' of the prince at the age of thirteen. Dara did the primary and secondary education like the other Mughal princes – Learning *Qur'an*, the standard Persian poetry and history. He cites Mulla Abdul Latif Sultanpuri, as Dara's guide and teacher, responsible for his 'intellectual advancement' and 'scholarly habits'. (1953, p.3) Dara had a speculative mind from the very childhood for he would study even Quran and Hadith with an open mind, and many a times rejected the commentaries of the orthodox school. He took keen interest in reading Aristotle and Plato. Dara had a taste for fine arts like poetry and calligraphy. Rumi was one of his favourite poets. He learnt calligraphy from the famous calligrapher of his times, Abdul Rashid Dailemi. He took more interest in the mystic readings of different saints rather than the valiant deeds of the past warriors and war heroes. (Qanungo 1935, pp. 5-6). Dara was initiated in the Qadiri order and his close association with Mian Mir, Mulla Badakhashi and other saints is said to have brought about a change in his outlook towards life.

Jadunath Sarkar gives an insight into the education system of the times in his work, *Studies in Mughal India*. According to him, education for both Hindus and Muslims was 'purely a private matter', related intrinsically to religion, since it was not a State's duty even in Europe of the 19th century. The Kings and Sultans used to make hefty grants to mosques, monasteries, individual saints and scholars, which made education available to all. However, there were certain renowned scholars in certain parts of the country like Tatta, Ajodhan, Sialkot, Sarhind, Kanauj, Nagor, Ahmadabad, Pattan, Jaunpur who attracted students because of their dedication and speciality in some subjects, and who also 'maintained high schools and colleges'. These were the times when Arabic was not a popular language, but the 'highest Muhammadan education' was imparted in this language. Persian was one of the common language of communication and was 'studied only as an accomplishment necessary for cultivated society' and not as an important mode to serious learning. Mecca was the centre of higher

knowledge for the Muslims and a degree from Mecca 'commanded the highest respect in India'. A scholar with a degree from Mecca was often sought for the princes to impart education (1919, pp. 299-301).

Two incidences that marked the 'adult status' for a Princes in the royal tradition were: marriage and a 'share' in the 'financial resources' of the empire, which meant official ranks or *mansabs* and territories or *jagir*. Dara's wedding to Nadira Begum in February 1633 is guessed to be the costliest marriage of the Mughal history. The records of the marriage particularly mention the details of the expenditure of this grand event. Qanungo mentions the total expenditure to be thirty-two lakh rupees, of which sixteen lakhs were given by Jahanara (sister) from her own inheritance. (1935, p.12). Peter Mundy, an English traveller (also served in the East India Company), who was present in the city at the time of Dara's wedding gives a vivid description of this extravaganza of more than million lights or *chirag*, and lively but 'loud' noise of hundreds of fireworks as a part of the festivities for many days. (Temple 1914, pp. 201-2). Apart from this, numerous lavish gifts were a part of the event, a description of which runs into pages and Shah Jahan made sure that the *Padshah-nama*, the imperial manuscript by Lahori illustrates the same for 'splendour and posterity'. (Tabatabai cited in Gandhi, 2019, pp. 80-1) Though Dara's harem did have the 'usual supplement of slave-girls', he did not enter into any other marital contract. Manucci does mention one Hindu dancing girl Rana Dil, whom Dara is said to have fallen deeply in love with. But, "all his sons and daughters were born of Nadira Begum", a practice that was quite rare in Mughal India. (Qanungo, 1935, pp.12-19).

When Nadira, Dara's 'constant companion and counsellor' passed away due a prolonged illness, he was totally shaken and stumped. He is said to have grown 'frantic with grief' and lost his 'judgement and prudence'. He was so stupefied with grief that despite strong warnings from his sons and followers, entered the house of Jiwan Malik, who treacherously made Dara captive and brought him to Delhi. After the death of his beloved wife, Dara wanted to spend three days in mourning before proceeding to his next expedition to Persia. Since he wanted to fulfil his wife's last wish of laying her in Hindustan, Dara sent her corpse

to Lahore to be buried in the graveyard of his spiritual master and renowned saint Mian Mir. In his bewilderment, he made the major mistake of sending his trusted officer Gul Muhammad along with all the seventy soldiers as escorts to the coffin. He was 'utterly helpless' and 'dependent of his host's fidelity', when Jiwan Malik captured him, (Sarkar, 1925, pp. 333-5) informed Aurangzeb and brought him to Delhi.

Ranks, Promotion, and Emoluments

The education for a prince of royal families was not considered complete unless the same was substantiated with the professional talent of combat and a hands-on learning in warfare and administrative skills. For the purpose, the princes were assigned independent Jagirs to give them practical experience on the ground. Dara had a command of some very big Jagirs, which were larger than the combined Jagirs of all the young princes put together.

Dara received his first military command or *mansab* on October 5, 1633 with a grand ceremonial honour, when he was in his early twenties. It consisted of 12000 *zat*,* 6000 *sawar* and Hissar (Punjab), a territory associated with Babur (*Zat was a rank in the Mansabdar system in Mughal India). Qanungo says, the choice of the territory by the emperor was "not accidental but made deliberately to proclaim the eldest prince as the Heir Designate to the Throne." (1935, p. 21) Thereafter, Dara was accorded 'rapid' and 'high' promotions, breaking 'all previous records of the family.' Within a period of five years his *zat* got increased to 20,000 and *sawars* to 10,000. The upgradation did not stop here, in 1648 and 1656 Dara received two 'lifts' adding 10,000 *zat* each time. Dara also received an extraordinary rank of 60,000 *zat* and 40,000 *sawars* as a recognition of the care and nursing during the illness his father, the emperor. He commanded the viceroyalty of Allahabad, Kashmir, Punjab, Gujrat, Multan, Kabul and the region between Agra and Delhi etc. during his lifetime. (1935, Chapter 3) Dara was a wealthy prince for his military ranks alone fetched him a salary of two crores, seventy five thousand rupees per year. Besides this, the income from his fiefs and Jagirs was around twenty two lakhs.

A point worth noticing in this context is that while Shah Jahan bestowed on Dara all the resources – military and financial, he failed to give him enough opportunity to utilize them on ground. Dara was seldom sent away from the court. The result was that when he was actually faced with resistance on the field and lead real expeditions, he lacked in political and strategic astuteness to manage them well. At the first expedition against the Persians, the Prince was re-called to Kabul (1639). The second expedition of Dara to Qandahar could be won because of the intelligent decisions by Shah Jahan and able generals in his army. However, Dara was given the honour of a victorious general on his arrival back at the Lahore court. Dara was 'renowned as scholar than a soldier' in his empire. Qanungo observes:

During his official career he [Dara] commanded three military expeditions against the Persians, and of these two were almost holiday parades without any enemy to encounter, but in the third fortune deserted him sadly....The Crown prince was reared up like a green-house plant carefully shielded from dangers and disappointments, and watered by the perennial spring of Shah Jahan's affection. (1935, pp. 26-7)

Avik Chanda recounts when Shah Jahan took along Dara to the war of Deccan in December 1629 but, was deliberately kept away from the frontline. Dara Shukoh did gather a feel of the horrors of war field, but only with a 'second-hand' experience. He describes thus:

When the army was on the march, the Prince could see beyond the fringes of the camp: a reddish, arid ground, starving peasants, bodies of slain rebels heaped like rubbish along both sides of the road....There were also those gruesome trophies of war that made Dara cringe: heads that had been hacked off, unwrapped and rolled onto the ground, kicked and spat on, amidst a general wave of approbation....What more horrors would he witness if he were leading the campaign from the front? (2019, p. 35)

That Dara was kept away from the battle-field by Shah Jahan is a fact that many scholars recount, but the explanations for the same is a subject that has not been seriously discussed. What could have been the reason for the same? Dara's own inaptitude to handle the battlefield? Lack of trust by the Emperor? Shah Jahan's over-affection towards Dara? Or, the fact that as the eldest son, he was proclaimed Heir Beneficiary by the Emperor and thus he wanted to protect the 'would be' Sultan? The answer to these questions is not likely to be definite, for most of the historians count either all, or some of the above explanations to the question. The ambit of the present paper doesn't allow to delve this problem in details. However, we shall look into a related issue - the norms of succession in Mughal India and its political attributes.

The War of Succession and its Political Magnitude

Shah Jahan proclaimed Dara as his Heir and publically indicated it time and again. Firstly, by assigning him Hisar - the ancestral territory associated with the lineage of Babur, as a part of Dara's very first *mansab* in 1633, when he was still in his early twenties. Secondly, by giving him speedy promotions and extending his fiefs to larger than the combined strength of all the younger sons, raising his financial returns to the tune of rupees two crores plus annually. Thirdly, according him the title *Prince of Great Fortune* (*shāhzāda-yi buland iqbāl*), when he had not even completed thirty. Fourthly, keeping Dara by his side during the royal '*Darshan*' to the public in the morning hours. Since the times of Akbar, *Darshan* was the 'sole prerogative of the Emperor', but Dara's face became familiar to the public as 'he stood beside the Emperor at the *gharokha*'. (Chanda, p. 40) There are other signs in Shah Jahan's chronicles that indicate Dara as his choice for the next emperor. Many historians count this inclination of Shah Jahan as the chief cause of rebellion of the younger princes against their father.

The compelling question here is – if Shah Jahan was fully aware that there was no established 'law of primogeniture' in Mughal history of India, why did he envision such a possibility for his eldest son? There existed an 'unspoken rule' of an open-ended system signifying an equal

share for all males of the royal family in ‘father’s patrimony’, which had its genesis in the ‘Turco-Mongol ideas’. The norm of a Persian phrase – *ya takhta ya tabut* (either throne or coffin) conveys the political necessity of the war of succession at every dynastic change, that assumed the primary mode to decide the next emperor. Since this was an accepted norm, all the princes knew that their very existence depended on their achievements, strengths and skills of manoeuvring their way out, linkages of support, and networks of reliable relations - they were trained from the early age to be ‘independent minded, tough, and ruthless’. (Faruqui, 2012, *Introduction*). A letter written by Muhammad Akbar to his father Aurangzeb bears an interesting testimony to this fact. It reads:

The duty of a father is to bring up, educate, and guard the health and life of his son. Praise be to God, [that] up till now I have left no stone unturned in service and obedience, but how can I enumerate the favors of your Majesty? . . . it is brought to the notice [of Aurangzeb] that to help and side with the youngest son is the foremost duty of a revered father always and everywhere, but your Majesty, leaving aside the love of all the other sons, has bestowed the title of ‘Shah’ upon the eldest son [i.e.,Muazzam] and declared him the heir-apparent. *How can this action be justified? Every son has got an equal right in his father’s property. Which religion permits preference of one over the others?* [Emphasis added] (B. N. Reu, “Letters exchanged between Emperor Aurangzeb and his son Prince Muhammad Akbar,” Proceedings - Indian History Congress cited in Faruqui, 2012, p. 11)

Discussing the succession in contemporary Islamic Empires, Faruqui reveals that during 1362-89 and until early 1600, the Ottoman codes of succession were not only narrowed down to the direct heirs of the ruling emperor, but passed to the prince who managed to kill the other contenders inside the Ottoman royal family. These norms were codified and the ruler Mehmed II (r. 1444-6, 1451-81) issued an imperial decree that plainly stated: “For the welfare of the state, the one of my sons to

whom God grants the sultanate may lawfully put his brothers to death". Even the majority of the 'ulama' consented to this without any objections. (Halil Inalcik, cited in Faruqi, 2012, p. 14) However, the Mughal system in India never codified its law of succession, no matter how brutal the process was. And, this could be another reason for Shah Jahan to gamble a chance in favour of his favourite son, who also happened to be the eldest among the contending princes. Establishing the *raison d'eter* for the Mughal laws of succession Faruqi, in his work *The Princes of the Mughal Empire* says, "no matter the outcome of a particular conflict between father and son, I argue, rebellions served to reinforce the foundations of dynastic power and authority". (2012, p. 12) However, Faruqi leaves one wondering, if the brutal and bloody war amongst the sons and between the sons and the fathers of the same family was a source of 'power and authority', then what could be the reasons for the tumbling of the Mughal Empire.

Whatever may have been the laws of succession in Mughal India, and how bloody the battle amongst the political contenders, the common people did not lose their sense of wisdom, justice, pity and compassion. They may, or may not have taken the relevant action at the appropriate time, but did seem to register their reactions at the injustices, some even at the cost of losing their lives. The gruesome battle for the throne generally limited itself to the royal family and at the most the family confidants. Jadunath Sarkar gives a peek into the day when on August 29, 1659 Dara was paraded on the roads of Delhi in chains along with his fourteen year old son Sipihr Shukoh. He describes the kindness that Dara exhibited in the nastiest of the life situations, in response to the frenzy amongst the audience:

Dara was seated in an uncovered *hawda* on the back of a small female elephant covered with dirt. By his side was his second son Sipihr Shukoh, a lad of fourteen; and behind them with a naked sword sat their gaoler, the slave Nazar Beg....The captive heir to the richest throne in the world...was now clad in a travel-tainted dress of the coarsest cloth, with a dark dinge-coloured turban, such as only the poor wear, on his head, and no necklace or jewel

adorning his person. His feet were chained, though his hands were free. Exposed to the full blaze of an August sun, he was taken through the scenes of his former glory and splendour. In the bitterness of disgrace, he did not raise his head, nor cast his glance on any side, but sat "like a crushed twig". Only once did he look up, when a poor beggar from the road-side cried out, "O Dara! When you were master, you always gave me alms; today I know well thou hast naught to give." The appeal touched the prisoner; he raised his hand to his shoulder, drew off his wrapper and threw it to the beggar. (Sarkar. 1925, p. 336)

The parade was organised by Aurangzeb to ridicule Dara in the public eye. On the contrary, the outcome proved otherwise as the "pity of the citizens swept every other feeling away". The incident proved unfortunate for Aurangzeb and fatal for Dara. Aurangzeb probably did not expect the public outburst of love and sympathy for Dara at the sight of his 'fallen greatness'. (Sarkar. 1925, p. 337). Dara had been popular amongst the 'lower orders' because of his 'lavish charity'. Francois Bernier who stayed for 12 years at the court of Mughals and was present at the scene gives an account of the incident. He says:

...when the prince was brought to the gates of Delhi, it became a question whether should he be sent to Gwalior or should he be passed through the city to strike the terror....The crowd assembled was immense; and everywhere I observed people weeping and lamenting the fate of Dara in the most touching language....From every quarter I heard piercing and distressing shrieks,...men, women and children wailing as if some mighty calamity had happened to themselves...for the Indians have a very tender heart. (1916, pp. 97-9)

The evening of August 29th, the parade day, Dara's fate was the subject of debate in the 'emperor's Hall of Private Audience' or *Diwan-i-Khas* of the Delhi Fort, where some ministers pleaded for Dara's life. But, many others including Dara's own younger sister Raushanara were against any

mercy for the *infidel* who had turned a *kafir*. Sarkar says, “The pliant theologians in the Emperor’s pay signed a decree” for the death of Dara on the grounds of “deviation from Islamic orthodoxy”. These, so called pillars of the ‘Canonical Law and Faith’ feared several instabilities and conflicts if Dara was left alive. Thus, the official history published under Aurangzeb’s reign ‘justified’ this act of political murder as a “necessity to protect the faith and Holy Law”. For the sake of the State it was considered ‘unlawful’ to let Dara live, because he had proved to be a ‘destroyer of public peace’. (Sarkar. 1925, pp. 337-8). Dara did write to his brother for mercy, but the overall political situation after the parade deteriorated to such an extent that Aurangzeb could possibly not consider the plea of his brother.

As stated earlier, the parade proved *unfortunate* for Aurangzeb and *fatal* for Dara. Unfortunate for Aurangzeb because the very next day a riot broke out in the city. The people came to know about the treachery committed by Jiwan Malik in capturing Dara. On August 30, when he along with his Afghan followers was on their way to the Court, they were first ‘mobbed and abused’, and then ‘hurled stones’, ‘clods of earth’, and beaten with sticks by the people. They are said to have been instigated by one Haibat an *ahadi* (a gentleman trooper - a guard) and joined by ‘beggars’, ‘ruffians’ and other ‘desperadoes’ from every lane and bazaar of Delhi. Not only this, the women joined the commotion from over their roof tops and threw ashes and pots filled with filth on the trope. Some of Jiwan’s people were wounded and killed, while he himself had to be escorted under shield.

On the other hand, the parade proved fatal for Dara because immediately after this incident Aurangzeb ordered the execution of Dara. The same night of 30th August 1659, Dara was murdered in the prison, his head brought to Aurangzeb who got it washed and made sure that it was that of Dara and not substituted for some other person. (1925, pp. 339-40). Political murders are with a reason and a target. In order to fulfil the purpose and create the required fright in the public memory, the very next morning Aurangzeb (August 31, 1659) ordered the dead remains of Dara Shukoh placed on the back of an elephant and taken along the bazaars and roads of Delhi. The people standing on the

sides 'wept at the ghastly spectacle'. Haibat, the *ahadi*, who was found to have instigated the fellow citizens to attack Jiwan Malik was sentenced to the cruellest death by Aurangzeb. He was ordered to be 'sawn alive into two halves', an example of atrocious barbarism under Aurangzeb's reign. (Kanungo, 1935, pp. 319-20) Supriya Gandhi cites Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh who condemns Aurangzeb for his hypocrisy in his work *Tarikh-i-Farahbakhsh*:

...that one who clothed himself as Aurangzeb did, with a cloak of godly reverence, piety, devotion, consistency, sanctity and moderation, should treat his own father and brothers so foully as he did; should murder Dara Shukoh pleading the law of the Muslim faith as his authority. . . all this is certainly inconsistent with piety and love of God. (2019, p.248)

Violence breeds violence, for down two centuries, the Great Mughal Epoch closed down with bloodier scene. Sarkar writes:

On 22nd September 1857....Princes Mirza Mughal, Mirza Quraish Sultan, and Mirza Abu Bakht, the sons and grandsons of the last Emperor of Delhi...were shot dead in cold blood by a foreign soldier...devoid of...pity....The bodies of the last of the legitimate Timurids were flung like carcasses on the terrace of the Police Office and exposed to the public gaze, as Dara's had been. *In brother's blood did Aurangzeb mount to the throne, and in the blood of his children did the royal name pass away from his race.* (1925, p. 341)

Dara as a Person

Historians and European travellers like Bernier and Manucci describe Dara as a man of varied qualities, like 'courteous in conversation, polite and extremely liberal', kind and compassionate with a dignified and joyous persona. But, is also said to have carried some typical traits like holding too high an opinion about himself, not open to any useful advice by others. This quality deterred even his well-wishers to inform him about the stratagem of his enemies and brothers. Dara believed

that he could accomplish anything with the power of his mind. At times, he was disrespectful even to the *ulamas*. But, his anger was 'seldom more than momentary'. Born as a Muslim, participated in the activities of all the religions. While he 'publically professed his adherence to his faith, Dara was in private a Hindu to Hindus and a Christian to Christians. He is said to have been in regular touch with Hindu scholars and doctors and also bestowed on them large sums of pensions. Dara is said to have been close to Father Buzie, a Jesuit. (Bernier 1934, p.6)

Niccolao Manucci, was a Venetian, who reached India in January 1656, took service under Dara Shukoh and later Shah Alam. At intervals he set up practice as a doctor without any medical training, travelled all over India and passed his old age at Madras and Pondicherry, dying in 1717. His life in India covered more than sixty years and is said to have been quite friendly to Dara. He also describes Dara as over-confident and despising those who tried to give him advice, but it was 'very easy to discover his intentions'. Manucci marks an over-positivist trait when he says, Dara thought that everyone loved him and also that the fortunes would favour him 'invariably'. Bernier and Manucci seem to converge when it comes to describing Dara's interaction with the peers of different religion, like, praising the tenets of Muhammad while meeting a Mohammedan, admiring Jewish religion when he met a Jew and hailing Hinduism when he met the Hindu saints. He was most 'delighted' in the company of the Jesuit Fathers, and enjoyed the most when they would overcome everyone in their arguments. He sometimes drank with fathers but with discretion. While this attribute of respecting different religions is a streak of open-mindedness in today's context, did not impress the European travellers. They seem to concur with the common impulse of the time that 'Dara had no religion', the reason that Aurangzeb labelled him a *kafir*. (Manucci, 1907, p. 221-4).

When it comes to describing Dara as a person, one encounters varied and conflicting opinions. One of the reason can be that he, being the most prospective contender for the hot seat by the fact that he was indicated in many ways by Shah Jahan as his Heir Designate, Dara was under the sharp scanner of all and was expected to be the perfect person worthy of the Throne in all respects – character, military

strength, political acumen, sharp and diplomatic, kind and compassionate and above all a good Mussalman. In Qanungo, we find a more thoughtful and considerate view of Dara as a person. He says:

...chapters...dealing with his political career, are an ample commentary on the defects of Dara's character. But his virtues were his own, while his weaknesses, which leaned only to virtue's side, were the unhappy accidents of a combination of circumstances. These defects are the more deplorable...because they loom unreasonably large because of his failure in the field of politic and war. However, there was something in Dara which in spite of his weaknesses and indiscretion endeared him to all but his...enemies. Prince Dara Shukoh is often pronounced as a failure in history. This is perhaps an injustice to Dara as well as an insult to the modern conception of history. (1935, pp 373-4)

Qanungo cites Manucci, who happened to meet a person Abdul Qasim on his tour to Patna. He sincerely regretted that he could not get enough opportunity to show his love and devotion to the Prince, while repenting for having done some wrong and injustice to Dara. Qanungo says:

History cannot but judge a man by the criterion of the sum-total of the good done by him to his own species. Judged by this standard, Aurangzeb's half a century of barren rule was the most conspicuous failure in Indian history. (1935, p. 374)

There is no doubt that Dara proved a failure in war and political stratagem, but then by these standards even the other princes of the same family met with almost the same fate, though trained rigorously in all political aspects. Dara devoted his time to some finer task of carrying out literary accruals in order to promote peace and harmony among the nobler minds of Islam and Hinduism, and further the cause of collective concord in the society. The young Abdul Kalam Azad in his twenties (1910) expressed about Dara in an essay that was translated later. He said:

It is a blot on historical veracity that the pen which recorded the history of the Mughal period was always held by Dara Shukoh's enemies...From his early years Dara displayed the attributes of a Dervish...The overwhelming proof of his taste is that in pursuing his goal he lost the distinction between the temple and mosque. (Hameed, Trans. 1991, pp.29-30)

Richard Eaton observes the purpose of Dara's scholarly engagements with pious luminaries like saint Baba Lal:

One of his [Dara's] preoccupations centred on a classic theme of Indian philosophy: the problem of how to reconcile the renunciation of the world, necessary for achieving spiritual liberation, with engagement in the world, necessary for upholding and maintaining a functioning society... for a ruler charged with overseeing the social order of an entire kingdom, the contradiction could be especially acute...While returning to north India from Afghanistan, where he had just led a failed effort to recapture Kandahar from the Iranians, he passed through Lahore, where he visited a Punjabi holy man, Baba Lal. In the wake of his stunning defeat at Kandahar...the question he puts to Baba Lal...focused principally on the compatibility of rulership and renunciation. (Eaton, 2019, p.302)

We are reminded of Majumdar here when he says, "Herein lies the greatest tragedy of Dara's life. He had an aptitude for a higher spiritual life, but he had to spend his days amid the sordid materialism of the Mughal palace. His special qualities of the head and heart were meant for the ennobling of mankind, but he was called upon to use them for gaining a royal throne." (Majumdar in Foreword to Qanungo, 1935 p. vi)

The literary activities of Dara can be distinctly divided into two phases. Till the completion of his *Risala-i-Haqnuma* in 1647, he engaged himself mainly with the familiarity of mystic Islam and Sufi theosophy, under

the guidance of Mian Mir and Mulla Shah Badakhshi, the two Sufi saints. From 1647 till 1657 Dara dedicated himself to the study of Jewish, Christian and Hindu religions with the purpose of discovering the underlying principles of these religions and to harmonize them with the tenets of Islam. It was during this period that he met, among others, saint Sarmad; the four Christian Jesuit Fathers – Estanilas Malpica, Pedro Juzarte, Father Henri Busee and Heinrich Roth.

The Books authored by Dara Shukoh in Persian:

(1639) *Safinat-ul-awliya* – or Lives of Muslim Saints, his first work.

(1642) *Sakinat-ul-awliya* - dealing mainly with life of Sufi Mian Mir.

(1647) *Risala-i-Haqnuma* – or Compass of the Truth.

(1650-56) *Majma-ul-Baharain* - or Mingling of Two Oceans

(1657) *Sirr-i-Akbar* – or The Great Secret or The Secret of Secrets - the last and the greatest literary achievement of Dara Shukoh.

Minor works:

(1652) *Hasanat-ul-Arifin* –written mainly to meet the public criticism of his pantheistic views, seen as un-Islamic by the orthodoxy.

Tariqat-ul-Haqiqat – another work on pantheism.

Translation Work

With the help of Sanskrit scholars whom Dara had patronised, he commissioned translation work of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Jog-Vashistha* (*Yog- Vashistha*), under the title of *Tarjuma-i-Jog-Vashistha* (1656), the famous play *Probodha-Chanrodaya* and 50 volumes of *Upanishads* into Persian.

The list may still be only partial because many of Dara's literary and work of art were purposefully destroyed from the royal collections. We come across various royal edicts, writings, travelogues and chronicles that describe Dara as the doomed prince. But, one cannot deny the fact that close to fifty years of Aurangzeb's rule after the assassination of Dara was long enough a time for the emperor to ensure the obliteration of Dara Shukoh's memory from all tangible records. Supriya Gandhi reveals:

The new emperor was likely responsible for having his brother's name scratched or blotted out from the valuable manuscripts that bore his autograph... Though a manuscript of Dara's earliest work, the *Safinat-ul-auliya*, still survives, written and corrected in the prince's distinctive hand, there do not seem to be any remaining autographed manuscripts of Dara's *Majma-ul-bahrain* or *Sirri-i-akbar*." (2019, p. 248)

Conclusion: The Lost Lineage of Universalism

Scholars and historians see a political motive behind Dara's engagement with saints and seers of different religions. Whereas Hasrat rejects any political intent behind his spiritual probes, which was the case with Akbar for he wanted to build a 'political synthesis' for the 'divergent creeds' in India, (1953, p.6-7) Munis Faruqi (2014, p. 57-9) and Supriya Gandhi (2019, p.189) seem to converge on the political reasons behind his literary endeavours, for Dara wanted to project himself as the most worthy for the throne. Whereas the possibility of a political motive behind all of Dara's religious and spiritual endeavours cannot be ruled out, one argument may well be considered. To pursue the political motive of being a 'worthy monarch in the public eye', fifteen years of scholarly engagements seems little too long a period. It would have been enough for Dara to have sponsored the projects under his name and guidance, rather than meticulously engaging with *sufis, saints and yogis* and carrying out the literary work. The area of religious philosophies may not be that enlivening so as to enlist the interests of

anyone for that long a period (till death), unless one starts finding the inquiry satiating of a 'Spiritual Quest'.

Dara was not the first to show reverence to Sufis and saints, Jahangir and Shah Jahan both are commonly known to visit Hindu saints and Sufis quite often. As a teenager, when Dara had fallen seriously ill, Shah Jahan had taken him to Lahore to Mian Mir, the famous Sufi Qadiri of Punjab. The blessings had cured Dara, but at the same time left a mark of deep veneration for the Sufi saint, which finds a mention by him in his work *Safinat-ul-awliya*. In fact, Dara is said to have accepted the governorship of Allahabad in 1645 because of his inclination towards philosophy and mysticism. Allahabad was the seat of Allah Mohammad Allahabadi, the most famous interpreter of the philosophy of Ebn al-Arabi (1165 - 1240) in that period. Inquiring into the influences of *Majma-ul-Bahrain* or Mingling of Two Oceans, Manisha Mishra discusses in details how Dara strove to 'reconcile' the philosophies of Hindus and Muslims, knowing well the 'intricacies' of the two. Not only this, he also sought to 'synthesise' the diverse Indian 'philosophical schools of Ramanuja's *Vishistadvaita*, Shankara's *advaita Vedanta*' and the prevailing 'Pauranic views' of the times.

After completing *Majma-ul-Bharain*, Dara started the translation work of the Upanishads and established a close connection between these texts and the Quran. He got deeply convinced that the religious truth is not only contained in the books that Quran explicitly mentions - the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospels. In Quran itself a 'hidden book' not yet discovered is mentioned. Dara claimed that the "protected book" literally 'hidden' or well-guarded (*kitab maknun*) mentioned in the Quran is non-other than the Upanishads. He said this, one; because the Upanishads talk about the same concept of the transcendental unity of the absolute as does the Quran. Two; they are the oldest revelation, as contained in the Vedas and in particular the Vedanta. Since Dara deemed it necessary to reveal this wisdom to his fellow Muslims, he embarked upon his famous work - *Sirr-i-akbar* or the Secret of Secrets, by undertaking the translation of 52 Upanishads with the help of a team of Brahmin scholars. In the preface to *Sirr-i-akbar* Dara Shukoh communicates that he translated the Upanishads with the help of

pandit scholars of Banaras 'without any worldly motive'. That he regards them as 'Divine Secrets' and this is the reason that he gives them the title of *Sirr-i-akbar*. To him, the Veda seemed 'the essence of Monotheism', and also the 'most ancient book' that held in them the guarded secrets. This is how the things that were unknown became known, and that which was 'incomprehensible became comprehensible to this *faqir*'. Having made the 'bold assertion' that might send a shock wave to the orthodoxy, Dara takes a step back and writes in the preface itself, saying that the translation of Upanishads is undertaken for the benefit of his children, seekers of truth and his own self and "not for the general public". (Hasrat, 1953, pp. 268-9) According to Friedmann, "Dara Shukoh's view of the relationship between the Hindu religious literature and the Qur'an seems to be his most significant contribution to Islamic thought." (cited in Hayat, 2016, p. 52) Hayat also cite Filliozat and Tara Chand who acknowledge the scholarship of Dara and describe *Sirr-i-akbar* as a 'masterpiece' and an "achievement of the highest order."

In the house of Timurs, Dara Shukoh was undoubtedly the most learned prince, with a 'passion' to discover the 'principle of unity-in-plurality in revealed religions'. He took the initiative and the courage to sincerely venture into activities of literary discussions and researches in different religions. He was convinced that the diverse religions differ only in manifestations and not in their essence. Believed that by popularising the 'great truth' of *tawhid* or divine unity, he would be able to 'balm' the soring wounds of religious discords in the society that was 'eating into the vitals of the mankind'. He tried to establish this "not by repudiating the religion of Muhammad but by reading an original meaning into it, by removing the stigma of narrowness from the noble brow of Islam".

Even if we discount the chronicles, official records, travelogues and the writings done especially during the time of Aurangzeb, there is no dearth of material on Dara that is not only sympathetic to him, but is full of affection, and reverts him for the value that his work carries to the world of knowledge and wisdom. In fact, Dara's work thrived after his death. After some years of his killing, his literary work started getting

picked up by readers beyond the known circles of people and topography. A Persian copy of *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, along with a text of Dara's dialogues with saint Baba Lal was found in the collection of a Hindu writer and a seeker Debi Das, apparently having no connection with either the royal court or Dara. Debi Das is said to have completed his compilation *Khulasat-ul-khulasa* (or Quintessence of the Quintessence) in the thirteenth year of Aurangzeb's rule. Another copy of *Majma-ul-Bahrain* was found in Arabic translation, bearing more than one names of the owners, reflecting its journey through a 'lineage of Qadiri-affiliated Sufis'. With notes written on the margins in Arabic, the manuscript not only suggests the 'transregional reach' of Dara's work, but also indicate the 'curiosity of the Arabic-speaking migrants or travellers to India' who would have found the text fascinating and thus worthy of translation.

Sirr-i-akbar or 'The Great Secret' found notable readers amongst the Persian reading Hindus of the subcontinent. In the absence of the photocopier machines in those times, the texts were usually written down by transcribers. A few copies of *Sirr-i-akbar* had Muslims transcribers who had scribed the text for their Hindu patrons like the case of some 'Ashraf Ali' who is said to have 'copied the text for Rai Sankat Prasad, the rais of Benaras in 1875'. The details can be corroborated since several copies were found with the 'opening invocation' to Lord Ganesh, the Hindu God. One place in India, where *Sirr-i-akbar* was extensively found is Kashmir, where one can find several manuscripts bearing the names of Kashmiri Pandit scribes.

Dara's work proved to be ground-breaking, lending it the universal streak for all times to come. It was through this work that the West got introduced to the Upanishads of India. French Orientalist A. H. Anquetil-Duperron, who was keenly interested in Hindu scriptures for a long time, got hold of Dara's Persian copy of *Sirr-i-akbar* through a friend Gentil in India. Gentil, who was appointed as a French Resident at the court of Oudh and was aware of the significance of *Sirr-i-akbar*, sent a copy to his friend Duperron in France in 1775, who meticulously translated it to Latin. (Cross, 1998, pp. 123-9) This is how the Upanishads reached Europe, found their way to Libraries and the

“bedside of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. By such circuitous pathways, interest in ancient Indian philosophy quickened in nineteenth-century Europe.” (Eaton, 2019, p. 303) Dara could not possibly have foreseen that the Latin translation of his work by A. H. Anquetil Duperron, which appeared in Europe in 1801 under the title *Oupnek'hat, Id Est Secretum Tegendum*, would arouse among European thinkers an immense interest in Indian mystical philosophy and would lend India an image of a ‘home of all mystical wisdom’. (Huart and Massignon, p. 287, cited in Encyclopaedia Iranica).

Few events prove to be the ‘significant milestones of world’s history’ for they carve the pathway to the future course of mankind. One such event was the defeat of Dara at the battle of Samugarh (1658) that categorically outlined the fact, that the ‘Age of Akbar’, signifying a ‘period of nationalism in politics and culture’ and the ‘revival of letters and fine art’, was over. (Qanungo, 1935, pp. 258-9) Aurangzeb is abominated as a religious bigot, impelled by the hatred of Hindus. His aspiration to Islamize its non-Muslim populations at all costs did invite a looming threat of disintegration on the Mughal Empire. No matter, what the norms of open-ended struggle lay before the contenders, Dara is generally seen as a more tolerant and open-minded person, universally glorified as a champion of Mughal pluralism - *a lineage of universalism*. There cannot be more apt words to affirm the contribution of Dara Shukoh than these word of Qanungo, “The world has not become richer in any way by the long reign of Aurangzeb; but it would have been certainly poorer without a Dara Shukoh.” (1935, p. 375) It is high time that we accorded Dara Shukoh the prestige and recognition that is due to him in the history for so long. In fact, anyone intending to find a viable solution to the religious acrimony and bitterness that can be witnessed around the world in the present times, should step into the footsteps of Dara and begin the work where he has left. The message that Dara conveyed by his work was one of *Unity of Divinity*. If this motive is termed as ‘political’, so be it, for noble politicians are a rarity in this world.

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What Fueled the Russia-Ukraine War?

Hari Mohan Sharma* & Hari K. Sharma*

Abstract

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is a grave reminder that conflict and wars are yet to be over. Humanity has yet to find more pragmatic, effective and consensus based solutions to the deeply entrenched, persistent disagreements between the states. It has also underlined the limitations of international organizations, global civil society, mass media, international laws, treaties, conventions, regimes etc. in preventing the outbreak of conflict and wars. It has also put a question mark on the assertions and key assumptions of globalization theorists, particularly of hyper globalists regarding global exchange, cooperation and possible unification of states. It has uncovered the worst side of human beings despite all the claims of civility, rationality and a genuine common concern for lasting global peace. Now a question emerged as to what leads to this conflict, who can be held responsible for it and in what direction it's heading? Can we take it as the beginning of the World War III as said by some global leaders or it may die down with some mutually agreed solutions? The present study would attempt to explore the key causes of the Ukraine crises from its history, contemporary policies and international politics.

Key Words: Russia, Ukraine, Conflict, Causes, NATO, US

Introduction: the outbreak of the War

Both Russia and Ukraine have their own reasons for the outbreak of the present conflict, its motive, nature and culpability. Most American allies and European states blamed Russia as the aggressor and try to portray Russian leader Putin as a 'dictator' with global geopolitical ambitions and a potential danger to global peace. The Russian side accused the US and NATO's eastward expansion of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

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Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, intending to "demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine". The Russian leader Vladimir Putin has declared that he aimed to protect the Ukrainian People subjected to eight years of bullying and genocide by the Ukrainian government. Russia also wants Ukraine to remain neutral in the ongoing tussle between US lead NATO and Russia. The Chief of Russia's foreign intelligence Sergei Naryshkin has argued that "Russia's future and its future place in the world are at stake". The Russian side even refuses to acknowledge it as a war or invasion and termed it as a "special military operation" initiated to liberate Ukraine. (Kirby, 2022)

On the other hand, Ukraine has categorically rejected all such claims and blamed Russia for invading a sovereign country with a democratically elected leader. Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky has retorted to all the "false claims" made by Russia and said that "the enemy has designated me as target number one; my family is target number two". His advisor alleged that two attempts have already been made by the Russian side to destabilize the Ukrainian government. Scholars are also of the opinion that Russia has also expanded the goals and scope of this conflict. Initially, its objective was the liberation of Donbas and now it seems that it either wants to take its full control or to divide it.

Causes of the Conflict

In general, every conflict starts due to some instantaneous factors amounting to its sudden outbreak. But, every conflict also has a background and history behind it that keeps the disagreements and hostility alive and lets the parties and scholars keep anticipating its abrupt outburst at a particular time in future. The following are some of the probable reasons for the conflict between Russia and Ukraine:

Historical reasons: contested "commonality"

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not new. It has a long history stretching from the times of imperial Russia. The present territory of Ukraine became part of the Russian empire in the late 1700s after successive rules by the Mongols, the Poles and Lithuanians. After the

success of the Bolshevik revolution in 1918, Ukraine declared independence; but by 1921 the Red army conquered most of it and Ukraine became a republic within the Soviet Union. (Donahue, 2022) After the disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991, this conflict took a new shape as now the re-unification becomes one of the goals of the political heir of the Soviet legacy, Russia.

Supreme Russian leader Vladimir Putin had expressed his worldview and vision way back when he argued about the inherent unity among the Eastern Slavs—Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, who all trace their origins to the medieval Kyivan Rus commonwealth. It was an indication and desire that the modern states of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus should share a common political destiny in present and future. (Mankoff, 2022) Vladimir Putin has always sought to reverse the "disintegration of historical Russia" and declared his intentions to restore Russian greatness. (CEPA, 2022) He has claimed that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, denying Ukraine its long history and termed the independent status of the state merely as an "anti-Russia project". He also asserted that "Ukraine never had stable traditions of genuine statehood" which can be seen as a crude expression of his future intentions.

Disagreements always persist between the two regarding the nature and extent of the relationship of Ukraine with the European Union, NATO and the United States of America. Armed conflict erupted in Eastern Ukraine in early 2014 after the Russian troops took control of Ukraine's Crimea region in March 2014. At that time, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that there was an emergent need to protect the rights of Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Crimea and southeast Ukraine. Later on, Russia formally annexed the Crimean peninsula through a disputed local referendum in which the Crimean population voted to join the Russian Federation. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022) It leads to further ethnic divisions within Ukraine and after a few months, pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine held a similar referendum to declare independence from Ukraine. Soon, an armed conflict in the region broke out between the Russian-backed forces and the Ukrainian military. The present

conflict can be seen in the continuation of the old hostility and rivalry between Ukraine and Russia. Other than the political reasons, it also has an ethnic dimension that provokes Russia time and again.

Table 1: Key Dates in Russian Ukrainian Relations

Date	Event
1918	Ukraine declares independence
1922	Ukraine becomes a republic within the Soviet Union
1991	It regains independence with the Soviet Union's collapse
2004	Orange Revolution annuls the rigged election of Russia-backed Viktor Yanukovich as president
2008	Ukraine applies to join NATO
2010	Yanukovich is elected president
2012	Ukraine and the EU draft an agreement to foster closer ties
2013	Yanukovich rejects the EU deal, sparking mass protests
Feb. 2014	Yanukovich is overthrown
Mar. 2014	Russia seizes Crimea
Apr. 2014	Pro-Russia separatists begin seizing territory in eastern Ukraine
Feb. 2022	Russia launches full-scale war on Ukraine

Source: Bloomberg, Asia Edition

Nord Stream II Project

Under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin Russia emerged as an energy giant, becoming the world's third-largest producer of oil and the second-largest producer of natural gas. Russia has used energy revenues to accumulate around \$630 billion in foreign exchange reserves to boost its economy. (Krishna, 2022) The relationship between Russia and Europe is based on some mutual requirements and dependencies. Russia is the largest single energy source for European Nations. While Russia needs revenues through the export of energy resources to European states the latter heavily depends on the supply

of energy to keep their economies moving. Currently, Russia was supplying about One-third of Europe's natural gas consumption and more than one-quarter of crude oil imports.

Due to this interdependency, it would be unlikely for Europe to impose any tougher sanctions on Russia. Here, particularly the case of Germany, which is the largest economy in Europe, is important because it was getting more than half of its natural gas and over one-third of its crude oil supplies from Russia. From the cold war days, there have been disagreements between the USA and Russia (former the Soviet Union) regarding Europe's energy dependency on Russia. It has the potential to prevent any punitive action against Russia, if required or make those actions largely ineffective. Successive US governments from John F. Kennedy to Ronald Regan have faced this dilemma as to how to tackle this problem. On the other hand, Russia has always been looking for some alternative routes and supply lines to directly supply energy to its largest customers in Europe like Germany rather than through some proxy US ally like Ukraine. Russia stopped its subsidized supply through Ukraine after the Pro-US governments came into power there. When Ukraine refused to comply, Russia earnestly started looking for some alternative energy supply routes as it has to fulfil its contracts and commitments with other European states. It was at that juncture a new pipeline named Nord Stream- that can directly supply gas from Russia to Germany was planned. Nord Stream pipeline became operational on November 8, 2011, and was hailed by political and business leaders as making a significant contribution to Europe's long-term energy security. (Nord Stream, 2011) It has two long-term consequences- It inflicted a huge annual loss of transit fees to Ukraine and further increased Germany's energy dependency on Russia.

Many scholars view the ongoing crises in Ukraine from the prism of the US attempt to derail the Nord Steam 2 pipeline project, which is an expansion of the original Nord Stream pipeline. It was approved by the German government in 2018 and its construction was completed in September 2021. Once operational it would smoothly transit a higher level of energy supply from Russia bypassing Ukraine, Poland and other

countries. Norm Stream 2 not only inflict huge revenue losses; but was also seen as an attempt of Russia to divide Europe along their energy requirements and supply lines. America and its allies also believe that once it becomes operational it can be used to arm-twist Europe to meet Russian geo-political goals in the region. However, on February 22, 2022, Germany halted the Nord Stream 2 Baltic Sea gas pipeline project after Russia formally recognised two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine. (Marsh & Chambers, 2022)

Ukraine's relationship with the West and NATO membership

Russia fundamentally believes that the existence of NATO and its expansion in the post-cold war era in Eastern Europe is an imminent danger to the Russian political and security interest in Europe. Russian leadership considers that the sole aim of NATO is to weaken it, divide its society, isolate it and ultimately destroy it. Russia has accused NATO that the primary motive of its eastward expansion was to launch an "active military build-up on territories adjacent to Russia". Deployment of weapons and Missile Defense Systems in territories close to Russian borders, which means Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, were viewed as a direct threat and challenge by the Russian leadership and they have raised this issue multiple times with European states. Russia has warned Ukraine to shun its ambitions of joining NATO otherwise it would be forced to take military action.

Russia has expressed its concerns regarding the cosyng up of relations between Ukraine and the West. We can partially blame this on the cold war mentality and lack of trust between the US and Russia. On numerous occasions in the past two years, Putin has publically expressed his thinking and concerns regarding Ukraine; but the other side seems determined to ignore it or took it too lightly. Some scholars believe it was more of testing Russia's patience, its political will and its capability to act.

US culpability

Eminent scholar John J. Mearsheimer while giving a speech on June 16 at the European Union Institute (EUI) blamed America for the current crises in Europe. He argued that "The United States is principally

responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis. This is not to deny that Putin started the war and that he is responsible for Russia's conduct of the war. Nor is it to deny that America's allies bear some responsibility, but they largely follow Washington's lead on Ukraine". He largely attributed this to "America's obsession with bringing Ukraine into NATO and making it a Western bulwark on Russia's border". He further said that rather than trying to settle the issue through constructive dialogue Biden administration has reacted to the outbreak of war by doubling down against Russia. (Mearsheimer, 2022) America's punitive approach, arming and rearming of Ukraine, running global propaganda to unilaterally blame the imperial intentions of Russia for the war and creating hurdles in positive dialogue, amplified the scope of the war. It seems that the United States of America is not willing to find a diplomatic solution to the problem.

Apart from that Russia has repeatedly blamed and warned America against arming Ukraine. In April 2022, Russia sent a formal diplomatic note to the Biden administration warning the U.S. against further arming Ukraine as it could have "unpredictable consequences". Although the US officially denied receiving any such communication but reiterated, "What we can confirm is that, along with allies and partners, we are providing Ukraine with billions of dollars' worth of security assistance, which our Ukrainian partners are using to extraordinary effect to defend their country against Russia's unprovoked aggression and horrific acts of violence." (Brennan, 2022)

On the other hand the Secretary of State of the US, Antony Blinken has described this strategy as part of its plan to increase Kyiv's leverage at the negotiating table which may eventually help in settling the differences and end the conflict. It has been reported by The New York Times that in less than a week after the outbreak of the conflict the United States and NATO have pushed more than 17,000 antitank weapons, including Javelin missiles, over the borders of Poland and Romania to be transported to Ukraine. In April 2022 President Biden further approved fresh military assistance to Ukraine, including \$800 million worth of arms including artillery such as medium-range

howitzers for the next phase of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The US President also announced \$500 million in direct economic assistance to the Ukrainian government as it battles to save the lives of people under siege by Russian forces. (Holland, 2022b) It has been reported that Washington has already provided \$6.9 billion in military assistance to Kyiv since the beginning of the Russian invasion. (Euronews, 2022) The supply of weapons and other logistical and economic support has been continuously provided by US and NATO in this conflict.

An opportunity to unite Europe against Russia

It has also been argued that for long US was looking for an opportunity to unite the European countries against its perceived enemy Russia, but it was not getting a solid reason and purpose to do so. The European countries have diverse economic and political interests that obstruct common reasoning and action. Somewhere, the European countries also want economic sovereignty and freedom from great power global competition and domination. It is pertinent to note that China and the United States couldn't separate their economic interests from geopolitical interests, but the member European Union states have learned this art. (Pisani-Ferry et al., 2019)

However, the Ukrainian crisis has provided that very ground to solidify NATO, persuade other countries like Finland and Sweden to join NATO and isolate and punish Russia. The US was looking for some kind of a broader alliance of democracies against the 'authoritarian states. As a Presidential candidate, Joe Biden had expressed his intent to "organize and host a global Summit for Democracy to renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world". (Miller, 2020) Such an alliance would be useful and relevant in furthering American interests in different parts of the world once the Ukraine conflict gets over.

To seize Ukrainian territory and rebuild the Russian empire

It has long been argued that Russia under Putin is determined to rebuild 'Soviet' Russia. Vladimir Putin has been at the helm of affairs in Russia either as the President or Prime Minister of the Russian Federation

since August 9, 1999. It has been more than 20 years since Putting took over. Many scholars believe that ever since Putin took over the control of the Russian state his attempts were directed to strengthen Russia militarily and economically, unite Russia, deal with all the internal challenges with an iron fist and ally with like-minded states globally. (Shvangiradze, 2022) While addressing Duma in one of his initial speeches Putin said, "Russia has been a great power for centuries, and remains so. It has always had and still has legitimate zones of interest ... We should not drop our guard in this respect, neither should we allow our opinion to be ignored". His annexation of Crimea, political intervention in former Soviet states, opposition to NATO's eastward expansion, crushing of internal dissent, and separatism within Russia can be seen from that perspective. Putin's tough response to the secessionist rebels in Chechnya at the start of his premiership boosted his popularity and credentials among the Russian people. Domestically, his policy was to ensure stability at any cost and his foreign policy was to regain Russia's lost place in world affairs.

Russia under Putin has started withdrawing from some of its earlier commitments and common European security architecture. Ambassador Kurt Volker has argued that President Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference amounts to Russia's rejection of the existing European security architecture. Russia had already withdrawn from its commitments to the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and opposed all NATO future plans in Europe.

However, this hypothesis has been questioned by Mearsheimer in the context of the current Ukraine war. He stated that Putin has never hinted or shown any interest to make Ukraine part of Russia until the Ukraine crisis first broke out on February 22, 2014. He was even an invited dignitary to the NATO summit at Bucharest in April 2008 where the alliance announced that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually become its members. We should analyze before assuming that it was a well-calculated move of Russia. Here, it is important to explore the shreds of evidence on three grounds- first, is it a desirable goal; second, was it a feasible goal and third, was he really intended to pursue that

goal? Evidence suggested that Putin was not intended to make Ukraine part of Russian territory however he has made some references such as Russians and Ukrainians are “one people” with a common history. However, the possibility of it now can’t be denied under the changed circumstances and progression of conflict.

Fear of Escalation

Ever since the conflict started leaders and scholars are investigating its probable outcome and future course of action of the parties involved. Although, at the end of March Ukraine proposed not to join NATO and would become a non-aligned and "non-nuclear" state, with no foreign military bases or contingents on its territory but the conflict is intensifying. Noted scholar John J. Mearsheimer has argued there is a danger that the war will escalate, as NATO might get dragged into the fighting and nuclear weapons might be used. He said that we are living in perilous times. The same fear of nuclear escalation was also expressed by the Russian leadership. In an interview with Russian state television in April 2022, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told the world not to underestimate the “considerable risk” of nuclear conflict. He said that NATO's supply of weapons to Ukraine "in essence" meant that the Western alliance was engaged in a proxy war with Russia. (Reuters, 2022) He warned the world that the risk of World War III "is serious" and criticised Kyiv's approach to floundering peace talks at the behest of the US. (Agence France-Presse, 2022) Responding to this both Ukraine and the US have rejected Russian claims. The U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said Lavrov’s comments were part of a “pattern of bellicose statements” from Russia that is not irresponsible but indicates “a clear attempt to distract from its failure in Ukraine.”

In one of the most recent cautionary, on July 6, 2022, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told the United States that attempts by the West to punish a nuclear power such as Russia for the war in Ukraine risked endangering humanity. He further said that the United States as an empire had spilt blood across the world by killing Native Americans,

nuclear bombing Japan and a host of wars in different parts of the world from Vietnam to Afghanistan.

Amidst the current crises, Russia announced its new naval doctrine on July 31, 2022, and avowed the United States' pursuit of global maritime dominance and the growth in NATO activity as the two main threats to Russia's national maritime security. The concerned document categorically that, "The main challenges and threats to the national maritime security and sustainable development for the Russian Federation related to the world oceans are the strategic course of the US toward domination in the world oceans and their global influence on the development of international processes, including those related to the use of transport communications and energy resources of the world ocean". It further read that the expansion of NATO's military infrastructure progressively closer to Russian borders and the growing number of naval drills in areas adjacent to Russian waters are also posing threats to the national security of Russia. (2022)

Under present circumstances, it is difficult to predict the future of this ongoing conflict, but the fear of its escalation to a dangerous level can't be denied. It is the collective responsibility of the international community to resolve it amicably. Currently, tensions are also piling up between US and China over the Taiwan issue. China's unconditional support to Russia during the current conflict might prove to be ominous for world peace and stability in future.

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Strategic Significance of Sri Lanka in India's Indian Ocean Approach

Debasish Nandy & Alik Naha*

Abstract

The Indian Ocean has long been a significant topic of historic-strategic debate in the annals of world history. The region, which is home to a variety of activities ranging from trade to transportation, and a tangled web of power struggles, is also gaining prominence as a major energy corridor for Asia's energy-hungry nations. For India, a close relationship with Sri Lanka is important for several reasons: first, the latter's proximity to the strategically important Andaman & Nicobar Islands, as well as the SLOCs that fall under India's EEZ; second, safeguarding Indian initiatives in the Western Indian Ocean; and, third, Beijing's antagonistic and hegemonic advancement in the region. On the other side, for Sri Lanka, which is mired in debt, cooperating with old friend India can help alleviate the load while also contributing to the country's development. Sri Lanka has lately realized that in Beijing's Indian Ocean strategic chessboard, it has been more of a 'pawn' than a 'pearl'. For Sri Lanka, India is an ideal partner due to its geographical proximity, historical linkages, and strategic location.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, India, Sri Lanka, China, and Maritime strategy.

1.0 Introduction

The Indian Ocean has emerged as the focal point for international concerns since the turn of the century, and it continues to be a site of collaboration, competition, and conflict. The world's third-largest body of water has been neglected for generations. Despite its geographic importance and large population, its position in global politics and geostrategic planning has been weakened by economic and political events elsewhere. Furthermore, during the majority of the preceding century, geopolitical processes were centered in various geographic settings, but have recently shifted to the Indian Ocean. Superpower

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rivalry conducted abroad and across seas has now relocated to the IOR as the geopolitical framework has moved beyond the aegis of the American empire, and Asian countries such as India and China are rising as powerful in the international environment. As a result, this body of water's geostrategic and economic significance is greater than it has ever been.

The Indian Ocean is without a doubt the most lively and sought-after nowadays. The world's rising reliance on nonrenewable energy resources from the Middle East and Africa, the ocean's abundant hydrocarbon resources, and the increasing reliance on the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and chokepoints for global trade are all contributing to the Indian Ocean's importance. Its geographical features of several small chokepoints make it vulnerable to power domination, putting other countries at risk. In addition, these waters transport 90% of India's trade by volume and 90% of its energy imports (Kanodia, 2020). Thus, India emphasizes peace and security in the Indian Ocean for both economic growth and social stability. India's position allows it to play a key role in the developing geopolitical landscape of the IOR.

The expanding presence and involvement of far-off powers such as China, Japan, and the United States, as well as the advent of India, are among the factors that have propelled the Indian Ocean to the forefront of world attention. Their presence has altered the dynamics of the region and has influenced the policy of littoral states. The increased competitiveness creates possibilities for tiny littoral governments by giving them a greater voice, as well as problems by forcing small countries to rethink their approaches and policies to avoid becoming embroiled in power struggles.

Sri Lanka, a small littoral state in the Indian Ocean, is caught in the middle of this regional power struggle. The strategic importance of the island nation does not need to be explained. Its strategic location in the middle of the Indian Ocean's busiest shipping channels, connecting the East and the West, explains why it has been a site of strategic

contestation in the Indian Ocean's evolving geopolitical dynamics for millennia.

China and India regard Sri Lanka as a necessary element of their Indian Ocean maritime discourse. The two players have been attempting to garner influence through multipronged initiatives since the early 2000s. China utilizes its economic might to entice the island nation with much-needed aid and investments. India, for example, leverages historical ties and geographical proximity to exert influence in the country. To Sri Lanka, India was more of a 'big brother' and an 'intrusive neighbor' than a helping hand (Attanayake, 2021). However, as a result of China's spectacular entrance, India is rethinking its role in Sri Lanka and focusing more on improving the economic and development partnership.

In his book 'Asia's Cauldron', Kaplan predicts that the IOR will be the century's most intense point of confrontation. This puts pressure on Sri Lanka to comply with global demands or remain neutral. As a result, maintaining Sri Lanka's sovereignty and non-alignment foreign policy will be difficult. Since the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka has gone through its transformations. Its strategic horizons have been broadened to include the maritime environment. As a result, Sri Lanka has a revived interest in the Indian Ocean after decades of neglect. It now occupies a central position in the country's strategic planning and policymaking. As such, Sri Lanka is seen emphasizing its Indian Ocean identity as never before. In this context, the chapter, using a *content analysis methodology*, will examine the strategic relevance of Sri Lanka in the IOR, Indian interests in Sri Lanka that contribute to its multifaceted engagement in the IOR, and the importance of New Delhi-Sri Lanka-Male Trilateral for fostering maritime security and regional peace.

2.0 Geographic Significance of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's geographic location as a littoral has historically been significant for global and regional power rivalry and struggle. Sri Lanka is situated in the heart of the Indian Ocean and the southernmost section of the Asian continent, on the world's busiest shipping channel and second-largest oil transit chokepoint. In terms of transportation, about

two-thirds of the world's oil and half of the world's container shipment pass via Sri Lanka's southern coast, making it crucial for the security of regional Sea lanes of communication (Wijesinha, 2016). Apart from that, Sri Lanka has several ports that, if fully developed, may become important commercial and strategic hubs in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka's geographic location and access to regional markets benefit its economic interests greatly, and because the region is a hotbed for great power projection, its location makes it a significant role in the IOR security and geopolitics.

Sri Lanka was governed by both the Portuguese and the Dutch before becoming a British colony. As these colonial powers established authority over enormous swaths of territory in Asia and Africa, there was a heated battle for control over the Indian Ocean, which included vital sea lanes for maritime trade and from which the empires drew their strength. The British Defense and External Affairs Agreement of 1948 and the Maritime Agreement with the Soviet Union of 1962 (Lee, 2013), both signed during the Bandaranaike administration, are two examples of major powers' interests in Sri Lanka's strategic location (Nissanka, 1984). Sri Lanka was chosen to establish the Voice of America transmitting station (suspected of being utilized for intelligence collection and electronic monitoring of the Indian Ocean) even during the tenures of J.R Jayewardene and Ranasinghe Premadasa. Sri Lanka's geostrategic importance increased manifold during the Cold War. As a result, major powers have strived to influence the island nation, which grew in importance in the global geostrategic battle (Chauhan, 2020).

Sri Lanka has several strategically important ports along the world's busiest shipping corridors. According to the Lloyds List, Sri Lanka's Colombo Port is the world's 25th busiest container port (Fernando N. , 2018). Trincomalee's natural deep-water harbor is the world's sixth-largest natural harbor. During WWII, the port city of Trincomalee was the principal base for the Eastern Fleet and the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom (Nissanka, 1984). This port serves as a key transit route due to its strategic location in the Indian Ocean in terms of armed and unarmed ships. The Hambantota port, one of the controversial ports

built by China in the southern part of Sri Lanka, plays a strategic role in the Maritime Silk Road in the Indo-Pacific region, in addition to the Colombo and Trincomalee ports. Sri Lanka's ports are very close to the major SLOCs in the east and west IOR, compared to other ports in the region. Sri Lanka has become an attractive trading hub in terms of terminal productivity and the successful handling of mega-ships because of its unique physical setting in the IOR.

Small powers, such as Sri Lanka, can be influenced by superpowers, great powers, and regional powers in terms of strategic importance. Sri Lanka's strategic location in the IOR is a major bargaining chip for a small country. However, in the international system, each state must fend for itself. In the international arena, all states are equal, but their capabilities are not. Sri Lanka is the only country in the IOR with the strategic location to become a maritime hub, and it may evolve as a major sea-trade facilitator in the IOR. As Mahan observed: *"Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. In the 21st Century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its water"*. In the IOR, Colombo has become a major epicenter of great power struggle and a vital strategic asset for all major powers hoping to dominate the IOR.

3.0 India's Strategic Interests in Sri Lanka

India's interests in Sri Lanka have evolved from geostrategic power balance to pragmatic security considerations since the end of the Cold War. Efforts to help Sri Lanka's peace and stability were overshadowed by India's strategy to escape the Cold War power struggle in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, in the post-Cold War period, India's economic and pragmatic security interests drove it to place a greater emphasis on Sri Lanka's peace and security to contain the conflict's externalities, which jeopardized India's security. As a result, India's top focus now is Sri Lanka's unity, peace, and stability. Maritime security in the Indian Ocean, particularly between India and Sri Lanka, has also become a major worry for Indian officials. Third, China and Pakistan's involvement in Sri Lanka is concerned with India's security concerns.

Many geo-strategic analysts have remarked that the start of the post-Cold War period weakened Sri Lanka's strategic prominence in regional affairs (Sahadevan, 2007). Because of the impact on India's stability, India's main strategic focus switched to Sri Lanka's instability. Sri Lankan ethnic violence harmed India-Sri Lanka relations. Instability in Sri Lanka also jeopardizes security in the Indian Ocean, which India has a vested interest in safeguarding. International shipping channels pass immediately near Sri Lanka's southern coast, making it an important location in the Indian Ocean's strategic environment.

India, in particular, has significant economic incentives to maintain a secure security environment in and around the Indian Ocean. Maritime trade accounts for approximately 89 percent of India's total transnational trade, and nearly all of the country's oil imports arrive by sea. Sri Lanka is particularly important in India's maritime trade: the port of Colombo receives more than 70 percent of Indian imports. India's reliance on the Indian Ocean as a maritime trading zone and transitway for oil trade has meant that securing the Indian Ocean is crucial to its continued engagement with the international marketplace in the post-Cold War period, particularly since India passed trade-oriented economic reforms in 1991.

Sri Lanka is also strategically located to project naval might into the Indian Ocean, making it a sought-after military staging point for large nations with interests in the region. Even though the post-Cold War balance of power conflict has subsided, India has strategic interests in Sri Lanka due to pragmatic security concerns.

4.0 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Cooperation in IOR

India's maritime engagements with Sri Lanka include training, ship visits, staff meetings, intelligence sharing, the supply of military assets such as ships and planes, hydrographic assistance, and exercises involving the Indian Navy and Coast Guard. Sri Lanka, along with India and the Maldives, participates in the trilateral maritime security cooperation exercise DOSTI (Naha, 2020). The Indian Navy undertakes an exclusive bilateral exercise with Sri Lanka named SLINEX since 2005. Sri Lanka is

also a member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and Exercise MILAN, a multilateral maritime exercise conducted by India. In addition, the Indian Navy trains officers from the Sri Lankan Navy regularly. Importantly, the Sri Lankan navy personnel make up the largest number of foreigners trained by the Indian Navy (Ministry of Defence, 2005). Sri Lanka has also received the most military help and exports from India (Q-Tech Synergy, 2015). The SLNS Sayura, Sri Lanka's largest ship, is an offshore patrol vessel (OPV) presented to the country by India in 2000. The Sri Lanka Navy has received two Barracuda-class OPVs from India (PTI, 2014).

Amid the presence of Chinese shadow all over the island, the return of the Rajapaksa brothers has caused considerable alarm in India. However, Colombo's close ties with Beijing only serve to drag the island nation deeper into debt. Sri Lanka owes China at least \$8 billion (Malhotra, 2022). Sri Lanka has been forced to surrender Hambantota, to the Chinese since 2017 owing to its inability to pay \$ 1.1 billion Chinese debt (Schultz, 2017). Sri Lankans are becoming increasingly resentful of China and its presence in the country, and this feeling could benefit India if it decides to resolve the bilateral irritants with Sri Lanka (Srinivasan, 2021). However, China's constant intervention makes it difficult for Sri Lanka to pursue development goals with other significant countries such as India, Japan, and the United States, which Beijing regards as competitors. This is seen in the cancellation of the Eastern Container Terminal (ECT), a trilateral initiative with India, and Japan, the suspension of the Japan-funded Light Rail Project, and the risk of abandoning the US-backed Millennium Challenge Corporation Project (MCC) (Fernando A. , 2020).

At a time when Sri Lanka's tourist-dependent economy has been severely harmed by the extended Covid crisis, Colombo is beset with embarrassingly large debt, which it has requested Beijing to restructure. China has refused to comply with the request. It could be one of the reasons why Sri Lanka's Rajapaksa brothers - President Gotabaya, Prime Minister Mahinda, and others – believe it's time to diversify their international interests and stop putting all their eggs in the '*Chinese*

basket' (Malhotra, 2022). In this context, India's decision to grant a \$912 million loan and a \$1.5 billion credit line for the purchase of food and gasoline from the country is seen as a big rebuke to China (Dikshit, 2022). The Sri Lankan government recently cleared the way for the collaborative development of the Trincomalee oil tank project in eastern Sri Lanka (Srinivasan, 2022). India has also outsmarted China in terms of vaccine diplomacy during the pandemic. Sri Lanka has flatly rejected the Sinopharm vaccine developed by its 'closest friend' to combat the COVID-19 outbreak. Instead, it preferred the AstraZeneca-Covishield vaccine that was gifted by India (ANI, 2021). As Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India observed,

'The west terminal [at Colombo port] and the tank farm are two very important transactions (with India). Of course, given the nature of the power play in this region, Chinese presence can be looked at differently. In that context, I think our dialogue with India is what is important – to build trust and to understand each other...' (Dikshit, 2022).

India and Sri Lanka have an equally important strategic position, which forces them to work together to keep the Ocean rim peaceful and secure. Above all, India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean means it is directly accountable for regional security. President Gotabaya recognizes India's critical contribution to the IOR's peace and security. During his visit to New Delhi, Gotabaya declared that Colombo will never do anything to harm India. Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Colombage also stated that the country's new foreign policy will be based on an 'Indian first approach'. (Sri Lanka will adopt 'India first policy': Foreign Secretary Jayanath Colombage, 2020). India has also designated its southern neighbor as a 'Priority One' defense partner (Moorthy, 2021). The Indian Air Force took part in the Sri Lankan Air Force's 70th-anniversary festivities. During his visit to Sri Lanka, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval too reaffirmed India's commitment to complete cooperation in the fields of defense and security (Subramani, 2020). This marks a sense of renewed strategic pragmatism in the relationship. In November 2021, Chief of the Indian Navy Admiral Karambir Singh and Sri Lankan Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne met at the Goa Maritime Conclave. They addressed ways to improve mutual

collaboration in maritime security, mutual support, information sharing, and navy and coast guard training, among other things (Times of India, 2021).

With escalating Indo-Chinese competition in the Indian Ocean, their respective military ties with Sri Lanka are becoming increasingly essential in this great maritime game. Thus, Sri Lanka must conduct a balancing act between India and China, which it does admirably (Rajagopalan, 2021). In the words of Induja JS, *'This balanced nature provides the island immense possibilities to shift according to its national interests and gain.'* (JS, 2021). The narrow space that occurs as a result of this pivoting nature serves as a platform for India and China to project their might. Sri Lanka is trapped in the middle of a strategic conflict between India and China, from which the island benefits by playing the 'China Card'. Maintaining a balance in South Asia despite the India-China rivalry is achievable if Sri Lanka takes a more balanced approach based on the realization of a multilateral system (Basu, 2021). In the post-covid world, Sri Lanka can act as a stabilizer amongst powers, resulting in a less chaotic zone where powers cooperate to achieve good outcomes and mutual progress.

5.0 Combating Terrorism

Ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka have resulted in violent terrorist assaults. Thousands of people had died and many more had been injured as a result of decades-long civil warfare. With the death of LTTE supremo Prabhakaran in May 2009, the LTTE episode came to an end. Terrorism, on the other hand, has not yet been eradicated. Terrorism has been a constant threat to India and Sri Lanka. The deadly Easter Sunday assaults in Sri Lanka in 2019 leftover 250 people dead and exposed significant flaws in the country's security structure. Despite many warnings from Indian intelligence, the criminals were able to carry out various acts, inspired by ISIS. Due to a breakdown in the working relationship between Sri Lanka's former President, Sirisena, and then-Prime Minister, Wickremesinghe, as well as a sense of complacency in

Colombo following the end of the civil conflict in 2009, these warnings were missed.

Both countries have taken several collaborative steps to combat international terrorism. In November 2015, India announced a USD 50 million special line of credit to help Sri Lanka improve its counter-terrorism capabilities, especially the skills of its intelligence services. This is the first time India has granted a credit line to another country just to fund counter-terrorism efforts; previous lines of credit have been used to pay infrastructure projects and defense equipment purchases. ISIS has attracted Sri Lankan and Indian youth. More than a hundred Indians are thought to have traveled to Syria to join ISIS. The security of South India has been jeopardized as a result of the influx of Indian youngsters from the region. The credit line from India will mostly be utilized to give further counter-terrorism training to Sri Lankan police, as well as bomb disposal help.

In a recent piece published in *The Hindu*, Meera Srinivasan discussed Sri Lanka's pleas for military help from India. Sri Lanka has sought increased military training from India as well as security and defense cooperation in a variety of sectors, including regional security, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and security force training. India and Sri Lanka should continue their bilateral cooperation and dialogue on (i) delimitation of the continental shelf in the Bay of Bengal; (ii) adopting a common position on the statement of understanding concerning a specific method; and (iii) strengthening measures to prevent poaching in the two countries' internal waters, territorial seas, and Exclusive Economic Zones.

6.0 New Delhi-Colombo-Male Maritime Trilateral

The Maldives is strategically important for Indian security. Located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, it is situated about 450 miles westward of Sri Lanka and its northernmost tip is nearly 300 miles away from the Southern coastline of India. To mitigate conventional and non-conventional maritime threats the littorals of the IOR must develop 'cooperative security' to explain the underlying logic of regional

cooperation, which according to C. Rajamohan, could be understood, as policies of governments, which see themselves as former adversaries or potential adversaries to shift from or avoid confrontationist policies (Rajamohan, 2004).

In 2020, after a gap of six years, the triangular maritime security dialogue started between New Delhi, Colombo, and the Maldives. Mr. Ajit Doval, the national security advisor of India, and the defense minister of Maldives went to Colombo to attend the meeting. In 2014, when the first trilateral maritime security was started with a lot of expectations then it was very responsive. After becoming the President of Sri Lanka Gotabaya Rajapaksa gave a proposal to resume the trilateral meeting, but the pandemic COVID-19 made an unprecedented obstacle in this regard. However, this meeting among the South Asian Indian Ocean littoral states created an opportunity towards ensuring collective security in IOR. This meeting focused on trilateral naval exercises and defense cooperation and preparing a legal framework and policies to stop sea piracy. On July 2021, a virtual trilateral meeting was conducted to discuss the best practices to counter common trans-national crimes, such as narcotics, sea piracy, etc. The top-ranked defense officers of India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives had given their opinion. As a part of the cooperation, the trilateral exercises are very caring about the safety of cargo ships also. As a part of trilateral maritime security, through the successful operation of Sagar Aaraksha-2, the Singaporean cargo ship MV X-Press Pearl was rescued from a fire in May 2021. After a very difficult joint operation by India Coast Guard and Sri Lankan Navy the fire was doused (The Print, 2021). Through the trilateral maritime cooperation, these three countries of IOR not only ensure the potential Interaction among India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives but also protects these states from external traditional and non-traditional security threat.

In November 2020, the 4th trilateral meeting of the National Security Advisors was held in Colombo for enhancing trilateral maritime security. In March 2021, these countries formed a trilateral secretariat for National Security Advisors (NDSA). The member countries agreed to enhance maritime domain awareness. They also discussed introducing an automatic identification system and long-range identification and tracking to identify suspicious vessels. As a part of the activities of the NSA, some

mechanisms were taken to stop illicit maritime activities in the Indian Ocean region. A coastal surveillance radar system was installed to ensure the surveillance of the security of Indian Ocean littoral states including Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep. The last southern edge of Lakshadweep is geographically very close to the northern edge of the Maldives. Most of the islands of the Maldives are vacant. These islands can be occupied by China or any other extra-regional powers. The security of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep are also threatened by China. So, the security of India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives can be ensured by umbrella diplomacy. As an important initiative for the maritime security of the Indian Ocean, India set up the CSRS in the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles (Sultana, 2021).

7.0 Sri Lankan Economic Crisis and Indian Efforts

Since gaining its independence, Sri Lanka's economy has consistently experienced a trade deficit since its import expenses have constantly exceeded its export earnings. For years, a sizable portion of the foreign exchange earnings has been used to pay import expenses. The government's commitment to debt servicing has increased the strain on foreign reserves in recent years. On the other hand, foreign exchange inflow to the nation decreased, first as a result of the Easter Sunday attack's effects on the tourism sector in 2019 and then as a result of the Covid-19 that affected all of the island nation's main foreign exchange earning sectors, including '*export, remittances, and tourism*' (Sultana, 2022). Sri Lanka lost almost \$4 billion in annual tourism-related foreign currency inflows as a result of the pandemic.

The government's obstinate refusal to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and careless economic policy adjustments, such as the tax cuts offered in late December 2019, led to a steady decline in the country's credit ratings. The reluctance to seek IMF's assistance was because the Rajapaksa administration promptly slashed tax rates and eliminated several taxes following its election victory. The IMF has strongly backed the proposed law that would have guaranteed the independence of the Central Bank, but the government decided against moving forward with it. Additionally, contrary to what the IMF advises, the

Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has been managing the exchange rate. Therefore, requesting IMF support would require the Rajapaksa administration to implement economic reforms and revise the majority of its economic policies. On the other hand, China and India may lend Sri Lanka money without any restrictions. Of course, some stipulations and agreements must be met to receive this financial aid. However, these criteria diverge from those promoted by the IMF since Chinese and Indian interests are more geopolitical compared to the economic interests of the IMF.

Indian bilateral assistance can be broadly categorized into two groups: (i) assistance to meet immediate needs; and (ii) assistance to Sri Lanka in its efforts to revive the sectors that were negatively impacted by the global pandemic and the foreign reserves crisis. Sri Lanka and India agreed to a \$500 million credit facility in February for the importation of fuel (Jayasinghe, 2022). This was a component of the \$1.5 billion financial aid India had pledged to give Sri Lanka to help it through its current economic crisis (Chaudhury, 2021). On June 23, 2022, a group of senior Government of India representatives traveled to Colombo under the direction of Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and included Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs Ajay Seth, Chief Economic Advisor Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, and others. Their goals were to assess the situation on the ground in Sri Lanka and look into potential areas of cooperation for mutual benefit. It is important to note that India has been a key player in the IMF, as well as in regional and plurilateral organizations, in urging other nations to assist Sri Lanka in coping with the post-COVID normalization of economic activity, which has been well acknowledged and appreciated by the island nation.

The Indian government gave the Sri Lankan government a US\$ 1 billion concessional loan in March 2022 that will be available until March 2023 in addition to more than 3.5 billion dollars in foreign reserves assistance and a shipment of 40,000 MT of fuel delivered outside the LOC facility by Indian Oil Corporation. India has also provided a US\$ 400 million currency swap facility under the SAARC Currency Swap Framework 2019–22 and a US\$ 1 billion deferment of dues until March 2022, to be paid by the CBSL

to the Reserve Bank of India under the Asian Clearing Union, to support Sri Lanka's declining foreign reserves.

Additionally, in response to the urgent need for medications, a sizable shipment of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies was donated to numerous hospitals in Sri Lanka. Additionally, kerosene has been provided for Sri Lankan fishermen to use. Ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr in April 2022, representatives of the Indian High Commissions gave dry ration packs to widows and other impoverished families in Kalmunai, Ampara District. The Tamil Nadu government has also promised to provide \$16 million in humanitarian aid, including 40,000 MT of rice, 500 MT of milk powder, and medications for the people of Sri Lanka. The government of India has agreed to provide a US\$55 million-dollar credit line at the request of the government of Sri Lanka for the purchase of 65000 MT of urea fertilizer for the Yala season's planting. India and Sri Lanka have also entered into several cooperative agreements to strengthen the ailing energy sector. These agreements include one to jointly develop the Trincomalee oil tanks farm, one between NTPC Limited from India and the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) to develop a 100 MW Solar Power Plant at Sampur, and another for the establishment of two renewable energy projects in Northern Sri Lanka.

India's support for Sri Lanka is consistent with its 'neighborhood first' strategy and '*Security and Growth for All*' (SAGAR) agenda. These two guiding principles highlight India's priority of becoming a first respondent and collaborating with other nations to satisfy the needs of neighbors in the region. India has therefore taken a multifaceted approach to the Sri Lankan problem, not just to offer urgent aid but also to assist the nation in recovering the economy and maintaining stability. India has been successful in changing the thinking of the people of Sri Lanka thanks to their concerted efforts. While a sizable portion of Sri Lankans appreciates India's efforts, there is still a constituency in Sri Lanka that is dubious and skeptical of India's strategy for solving the Sri Lankan crisis.

8.0 Conclusion

The geopolitical map of the world has shifted faster than it did in the preceding century with the center of gravity shifted to the Indian Ocean.

The strategic maneuvering of the powers might be interpreted as a return of great power politics to the IOR. As a result, the Indian Ocean's prominence has been established in the new geopolitical map. The new alterations are having a significant influence on the littorals. Sri Lanka is no exception. Sri Lanka transformed the end of the conflict in 2009. It has expanded its strategic horizons to encompass the maritime environment. As a result, after decades of neglect, Sri Lanka has rekindled its interest in the Indian Ocean. It now plays a key role in strategic planning and policymaking in the country. It is difficult for a small country like Sri Lanka to emphasize its Indian Ocean character in the face of changing geopolitical imperatives. As a result, Sri Lanka is presented with a wide range of opportunities and problems. It is, however, placed at the core of a regional geopolitical power struggle. It urges Sri Lankan policymakers to develop ways to fully exploit the potential. Due to the ferocity of the power battle and the quick changes in the geopolitical landscape, Sri Lanka will need to be watchful and modify its policies regularly to survive in this big power war.

India's key goal will be to preserve a stable and peaceful Indian Ocean, with an emphasis on economic and military changes that will eliminate the frightening Chinese menace. New Delhi has expanded its military capabilities from a local presence to a regional presence spanning the Malacca Strait to the oceans of the African shores. India would seek to enhance its position in the IOR in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak when the world order is projected to undergo a geostrategic upheaval. In this dynamic, India will look forward to expanding its engagement with Indian Ocean littorals, particularly Sri Lanka, to monitor China's rise. While Modi has not made a significant change in India's general policy toward Sri Lanka, the present government's outreach to Colombo appears to be much more focused, focused, and energetic. The implications of China's rise have been a recurring issue in much of Modi's foreign policy activity, and this is reflected in the way Sri Lanka is addressed. Modi also appears to be less bound by the traditional Tamil Nadu factor, suggesting that he may be able to reach out to all of Sri Lanka's many constituencies and achieve a favorable outcome for India.

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Understanding Baloch: Genesis and Continuum of their grievances

Bipin Kr. Tiwary & Akansha*

Abstract

Pakistan has been a multi-ethnic nation. All the ethnic groups feel marginalised vis-à-vis Punjabis. Within this marginalisation, the Baloch ethnic group is the most exploited one. With a unique combination of largest area and smallest population, Balochistan is rich in natural resources. Due to its trivial population, Pakistan has constantly exploited it at every level. This is one of the most troubled and exploited areas of South Asia, which needs a thorough analysis of the inception of their grievances and the failure of Islamabad government to address them even after almost 75 years of Pakistan's creation.

Keywords: Balochistan, Ethnicity in Pakistan, Grievances of Baloch, Sardari system

Ethnic politics in Pakistan is a story of ambiguous, often turbulent relations between the center and the provinces and the net result of political, economic, and cultural alienation of minority ethnic groups. At another level, it is a tale of majority-minority bickering, exacerbated by rapid demographic changes propelling new economic forces and contestations over census statistics, quotas, and jobs.

This research paper is focused on the historical analysis of the problem that this marginalised group is facing at the hands of the Pakistan government. The various reasons for the discontent of this minority group are analysed and how Islamabad had failed to address the grievances at every level, be it political, economic, or social.

The Balochistan region and Baloch ethnic identity are quite complicated and intertwined with many factors like fractured leadership, historical grievances, and economic exploitation. Nationalism is generally seen as an effect of industrialisation and print capitalism by the modernists, but

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Baloch ethnonationalism refutes this claim as it is a highly fragmented tribal society with the least industrialisation and least literacy rate. It is seen as a response to alien domination, first by British colonialists and then by the Pakistani state (Bansal, 2006, p. 5).

Historical Overview of Balochistan

The tribal setup of the Baloch group has a long history that needs a thorough analysis to understand their psyche. The genesis of ethnonationalism can be traced by considering many variables constituting its identity. The existing issues can be understood when placed in the background of their historical development, as the historical narrative provides a context to view the colonial and contemporary stereotypes of the Baloch.

Geographic Location and Strategic Importance

Balochistan is significant for Pakistan due to its geopolitical setting and its strategic importance. In the words of Carol Mc C. Lewin, "Occupants of a frontier area on the crossroads between the Indian Subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Iranian plateau, the Baloch presently sit astride the boundaries of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Moreover, as an eastward extension of the Iranian plateau, Balochistan presents an arid and rugged terrain, traditionally supporting various combinations of nomadic pastoralism, date palm cultivation, dry-crop agriculture, raiding, and (on the Arabian Sea coast) fishing. As a result, Balochistan has been a pawn in several versions of the geopolitical 'great game' in Asia, notably played by Russia, Persia, and Britain in the nineteenth century and the Soviet Union and the United States in the 1980s. In both instances, the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, that is, the southern boundary of Balochistan, have been an issue" (Lewin, 1996, p. xv).

Balochistan is a land of contrast. It has lofty and rugged mountains under Chiltan, Takatu, Sulaiman, Sultan, and plains stretching hundreds of miles. It has fertile land like Nasirabad and tracks that have been thirsty for centuries, and even a bush could hardly be sighted like the Pat section of

Sibi District and Dasht-e-Makran in Makran Division. It has the hottest places in the country, like Sibi and Dhadar, where temperature shoots up to over 120 degrees Fahrenheit, as well as coldest towns like Quetta, Kalat, Ziarat, Kan Mehtarzai, where mercury falls much below freezing point (Khan, 2012, pp. 200-223).

Balochistan comprises 347,190 sq. km, constituting around 44 percent of Pakistan's total landmass. The Baloch homeland is divided into three countries of Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. In terms of area and population, Pakistan is, by far, the largest Baloch territory. Its hugeness makes it hard to defend, and its location, stretching from the Afghan border all the way along the Iranian border to the sea, makes it strategically inviting. And not to forget the long coastline at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, through which pass almost 80 percent of the world's oil supplies (Kukreja, 2006, p. 29). It is also rich in mineral and gas deposits, uranium, and copper. The Sui natural gas field in the Bugti area produces about 40 percent of Pakistan's natural gas (Khan, 2012, pp. 200-223). According to a newspaper report of 4th April 2005, "Mineral deposits usually occur within minerogenic zones (of non-metallic minerals) and metallogenic zones (of metallic minerals)." Of nine such zones in Pakistan, five are located in Balochistan. Base metal deposits, such as copper, lead, and zinc, are found in Chagai, Khuzdar, and Lasbela Districts. In association with Saindak copper ore, silver and gold have recently been re-assessed (Dawn, 2005).

Balochistan also hosts numerous sizeable sub-bituminous coalfields in the Quetta-Harnai-Duki region. It has 49 percent of the total livestock in the country. In 2003 it produced 1.4 million tons of fruit. In 2002, 121,212 metric tons of fish were caught. However, only 11,575 metric tons were consumed locally, whereas 109,655 metric tons were available as exportable surplus (Dawn, 2005).

In the above context, if we see the statement made by Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo, the Kalat State National Party leader in the lower house of Parliament of State of Kalat in 1948: "They say we must join Pakistan for economic reasons. Yet we have minerals, we have petroleum, and we

have ports. The question is, what would Pakistan be without us?" (Bansal, 2006, p. 3) we can see the dilemma that has been plaguing the Pakistani policymakers since its inception. The prospects of survival without Balochistan look bleak even today as they appeared in 1948. Balochistan never got the merited return for what it contributed to the economic growth of the country.

Descent

Baloch, anthropologically speaking, constitutes an ethnic amalgam, speaking a language class, along with Pashtu and Kurdish, in the Iranian division of the Indo-European language family. A traditional view, supported by ancient verse, posits that the Balochs were a tribe dwelling in Aleppo (now Syria) before the time of Muhammad. The earliest historical reference points towards the Balochis living in the region around Kerman during the Arab conquest. Later on, with the advancement of Turks from Central Asia, they moved further east to Seistan and Makran. Furthermore, by the fifteenth century, they had reached Sindh and Punjab. Under Mir Nasir Khan, the newly emerged Khanate (a centralised tribal confederacy) in Kalat expanded its frontiers into Iran and Punjab in the eighteenth century. The British confronted the Khanate with its emergent Baloch identity. The two negotiated a treaty in 1854, according to which British political agents were deputed for the next 20 years in Kalat (Lewin, 1996, p. xvi). Balochistan was important to the Portuguese, the Russians, and the British from the point of view of both strategy and trade, as it lay on the crossroads of the routes joining Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Due to local resistance and the rivalries of the European powers in the Persian Gulf, the Portuguese attempts to control the Baloch coastal area failed. Britishers made the most successful attempt to turn Balochistan into an object of colonial exploitation and a pathway for penetration into Central Asia.

All through this period of settling down, the Balochs never ceased in their tribal strives for a more stabilised life. It was not until the time of Sardar Miroo Khan Mirwari- the founder of Kalat state- that the people of Balochistan could ultimately breathe in peace with a certain amount

of confidence and means of defending their hearths and homes against foreign invasions (Baluch, 1975, pp. xiii-xv). The Sardari system so profoundly engrained in the Baloch ethnic groups grew out of tribal homogeneity and loyalty towards the tribe. The hierarchy includes tribe-Sardars-Grand Sardar-Head of Confederacy (Khan of Kalat). From 1666 to 1839, the Khan ruled the 'nation-state' with absolute sovereignty. By 1876, the Britishers established their rule in Balochistan with the help of the Treaty of Gandamak signed in Afghanistan (Pande, 2005, p. 48). It points to the transnational affinities of the Baloch people. They follow the nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle, rooted in tribalism and sub-tribalism, with a societal emphasis on loyalty to the Sardars (Pande, 2005, p. 47).

Religious Orientation

The Baloch people have followed a resilient secular attitude despite the growth of religious radicalism elsewhere in Pakistan. The Baloch generally adhere to the Hanafi School of the jurisprudence of Sunni Islam and are generally casual about religious observance. Religious leaders play a marginal role in Baloch society. Baloch society has two authorities: Secular authority (vested in their elected leaders or traditional chiefs/sardars) and Spiritual authority (vested amongst Saints). The Baloch society follows a strict hierarchical pattern characterised as feudal militarism. The Sardari system is firmly rooted amongst the tribes like Bugti, Marri, Zarakzai, Mengal, and Achakzai. Inayatullah Baloch observes, "The Baloch people differ from those of Punjab and Sind and the Muslims of India in their notion of a religious state. They regard religion as the individual's private affair. An interesting story exemplifies the Baloch approach to religion: once, a Baloch was asked why he did not keep the fast of Ramzan (the holy month for Muslims). Baloch replied that he was excused, as his chief is keeping it for him" (Baloch, 1987, pp. 70-71). One more incident which shows the Baloch psyche was when a Baloch asked a practising Muslim about his evening prayers, "what are you doing?" he was answered: "Praying in fear of God." Baloch said: "Come along to my hills where we do not fear anything." A Baloch proverb says, "God will not favour a person who does not plunder and rob." It is said that in the late

19th century, when Britishers asked Baloch and Pashtuns how they wanted their civil cases should be decided, Baloch replied: "Rawaj" (Baloch customary law); the Pashtun answered: "Sharia" (Islamic law) (Baloch, 1987, p. 71).

While talking about the secular tendencies of his tribe, Baloch said, "In 1947, when the Indian subcontinent suffered under the effects of Muslim-Hindu riots, it was only the Baloch society where Hindu minorities remained untouched and lived in peace; their neighbors did not influence the Baloch. Throughout Baloch history, the Baloch people did not fight religious wars against India, except for Nasir Khan the Great, and the factors behind the Baloch invasion of India under Nasir Khan were more economical and political than religious" (Baloch, 1987, pp. 71-72).

Regarding the Two-Nation theory based on which India was divided into two parts, Nawab Khair Baksh Marri, in an interview, stated: "The Muslim nation or Pakistan ideology, of whom I am accused of being an opponent, (is) not, in reality, anything at all, how can I oppose them?... The 'Muslim nation' that does not exist in reality is simultaneously impracticable as a concept. For example, we do not give any (Muslim) Iranian, Afghan or Arab the right to vote in our country, nor can we appoint them to any high office here. However, on the other hand, we give the right to vote to Pakistan's Hindus, Christians, and Parsis, who can often be appointed to high positions. So it is obvious that this is an imaginary concept" (Baloch, 1987, p. 76). Sardar Mengal expressed similar views in another interview.

Causes of the Discontentment

There are many reasons for the Baloch's discontentment with the Pakistan establishment. The beginning of their problems with the government started with the creation of Pakistan and then, later on, the treatment met to the minority ethnic group. The causes of their grievances which went unheard and unanswered, led to many insurgencies in Pakistan by the Baloch people.

Merger with Pakistan

The roots of the crisis in Balochistan go back to the inception of Pakistan. The incorporation of the Baloch into Pakistan came as a traumatic blow to nationalist leaders who had campaigned clandestinely for an independent Balochistan during the last decades of the British Raj. During the time of the partition of India and Pakistan, many Balochs never wanted to join Pakistan in the first place. In the 1930s, some Baloch leaders, foreseeing the eventual departure of the British, started to advance claims for independence. Nevertheless, on the eve of departure, Britishers played a neat trick with the Baloch people. They composed a voting college- *Shahi Jirga*, Grand Council (to crush the 'anti-social elements' among tribes, *Jirga* was introduced. The British authorities nominated the *Jirga* members. In tribal areas, the Sardar was the head of the *Jirga*, known as *Sardari Jirga*, assisted by the selected elderly man of the tribe. Above these was the *Shahi Jirga*. Its task was to settle the intertribal conflicts and other important matters, such as revolts against the government and tribal chiefs. The cases were conducted under the 'Balochistan Penal Code' and the Frontier Crimes Regulation. The chiefs and the official *Jirgas* were entitled to pronounce a death sentence, life imprisonment, the forfeiture of property, and whipping. All Baloch national uprisings were crushed under this *Jirga* system), which would determine the future of British Balochistan. But this college limited the voting exercises to specific loyal British and Muslim League clients by excluding the representatives of the Balochistan state and the elected members of the Quetta municipality (Dhar, 2006, p. 9).

An agreement signed between the British government, Kalat state, and the government of Pakistan (proposed) was announced on 12th August 1947 regarding the establishment of the independent Kalat as proclaimed by the Khan of Kalat. After the establishment of Pakistan on 14th August 1947, the government of Pakistan, in contravention of the agreement dated 11th August 1947, pressurised the Khan to announce the merger with Pakistan (Dhar, 2006, p. 180).

Moreover, When Balochistan forcibly 'agreed' to join Pakistan, the Pakistan government agreed to pass a law that only Baloch would be recruited to government jobs in the provincial administration under the provincial quota policy. However, only non-Balochs, mainly Pakhtun and Punjabis re-settled in Balochistan, are recruited against this federal quota.

Division of Population

Despite its homogeneous name, Balochistan is heterogeneous like other provinces, with every third Sindhi and every fifth Punjabi claiming Baloch descent. Pakhtun-Baloch rivalries are inter-tribal dissensions that do not allow a well-defined, cogent, distinct Baloch ethnonationalism, especially as there are more Baloch in Karachi than in the province itself. The Baloch diaspora cannot overlook the parallel existence of three Balochi national identities in three sovereign countries- Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Therefore, any irredentist claims on Baloch areas of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, or South-western Balochistan would entail more problems than solutions. The province has also been threatened by a large influx of Afghan refugees, leading to significant alterations in the province's demography.

Of the total population of Balochistan, which is merely 5-6% of Pakistan's population, the Baloch numerically dominates the south of the province. The Pakhtuns are in the majority in and around Quetta and the northern part of the province. Many Punjabis have occupied fertile land in the east and are prominently present in industrial complexes in the Sui gas project, Port Gwadar and Port Qasim facilities, and other military installations. The majority of the professional workforce in the province originates from Punjab and Sind.

Regional Imbalances

The authoritarianism and inter-regional imbalances, uneven development, and demographic changes caused by immigration led to increased political tensions in Pakistan. It has continuously fiddled with ethnicity, and the martial-law regimes of the 1960s and 1980s have played a crucial role in ethnic marginalisation. With varying degrees of

assertiveness, some Baloch leaders have pressed for greater autonomy and, at times, for independence. The Pakistani state has, when necessary, employed all the force at its disposal to suppress such demands.

Islamabad has supported the 'Talibanisation' of Balochistan and sought to eliminate the secular identities that are organic there. Senator Sanaullah Baloch, in a seminar in 2006, explained that the Pakistani army has 69 paramilitary cantonments, six heavy weapon cantonments, six naval bases, and three nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons testing facilities in Balochistan. The central army has approximately 700 checkpoints in the region, preventing the free movement of people and goods. He said that the army's presence (in 2006) was about 150,000, and they are conducting a ruthless operation against the Baloch people, and the international community should strive to stop it (Bigham, 2006).

The gas produced from Balochistan is high-heat compared to the gas produced in the Panj Pir area of Punjab. Whereas the Baloch are paid a royalty of a meager Rs.47 per cubic foot for their superior quality gas, the Punjabis are paid Rs.222 per cubic foot for their inferior quality gas. Even this meager royalty is not being paid regularly. The Federation owes Balochistan a sum of trillions of rupees on account of royalty since 1953. Whereas the government has no difficulty finding funds for the armed forces, it does not have funds to clear the past dues to the Baloch people, who are afraid that these dues may ultimately be written off (Talpur, 2007).

Moreover, The Sui gas is the single largest source of energy supply for industries, power generation, agriculture, commerce, and domestic use all over Pakistan. The gas is also used in the manufacturing of fertilisers and chemicals. While all the cities, towns, and many villages in Pakistan enjoy the gas produced in Balochistan, only the military cantonments, four of the 28 districts, and 250 of the 28,000 villages of Balochistan enjoy the benefit. Next to gas, Balochistan has the largest reserve of coal in Pakistan. All the mining and refining contracts have been awarded to Punjabi companies. Ninety percent of the coal mine workers are from Punjab (Talpur, 2007).

Feeling of Alienation

Balochistan is a strategically important region of Pakistan that has been wrecked by insurgency since its birth. There is a general alienation of the population due to many underlying factors. The Baloch perceive the government as an alien government as they have been denied their due representation. There are hardly any Baloch in the army or in top federal jobs; even most local jobs are held by outsiders. As a result, the unemployment ratio is relatively high in Balochistan compared to other provinces. Baloch has virtually no representation in the army and very little in bureaucracy. In the central bureaucracy, though a province-wise quota had been earmarked commensurate to the provincial percentage in the total population, most of these positions have gone to non-Baloch under the 'domicile clause' of the quota system.

Ethnicity intervened with a sense of political isolation, and relative economic deprivation continues to be a potent force in evoking Baloch mobilisation. As far as the channeling of funds is concerned, it had been mainly in the hands of non-Baloch, predominantly Punjabi bureaucracy. The other dispute is between Baloch and the local Pakhtun population in the province. There is a feeling among Baloch that with the patronage of the central government of Pakistan, Pakhtun are trying to outnumber them; this fear had increased in the Zia regime and continued after that. The lack of an effective urban middle class among the Baloch and inter and intra-clan conflicts are all being exploited by Islamabad to hold the insurgency in check.

To show the level of alienation in Balochistan, let us take the example of New Kahan, a settlement outside Quetta city. It is home to the Marri tribal people who fled to Afghanistan in the 1970s. After the Taliban came to power in the mid-1990s, they returned to Pakistan. Finally, they settled near Quetta, naming New Kahan after their original homeland in the remote eastern part of Balochistan. People over there live in pathetic and relatively primitive conditions. Many in the village live in tents made up of animal hide or thatch. People often have to share living quarters with animals, especially in cold weather. The more prosperous villagers live in hard-dried mud homes (BBC News).

Education and Health Facilities

Education and health facilities are inadequate in Balochistan. The 1998 census shows Balochistan had the highest illiteracy rate in Pakistan (excluding FATA); eight of the most illiterate districts were in Balochistan. It had its first university in the early 1970s (Phadnis, 1984, pp. 188-189). The unemployment rate is the highest in Balochistan; the literacy ratio of 10+ is the lowest of all the provinces. The plight of these unfortunate people is also an indicator of the lack of medical facilities in the region and the government's and provincial government's callous inhuman treatment of the people of Balochistan. The drought-stricken pastoral economy cannot provide enough food for even the small regional population. The data for 2018 does not show any indication of improvement in the condition of Baloch. It still has the lowest literacy rate in Pakistan. The human development index also ranks lowest in the province.

Language Policy of Government

The primary grievance of the Baloch intelligentsia is that the language movement in Balochistan has been marginalised and ignored rather than suppressed. The imposition of the Urdu language also led them to get threatened about their cultural heritage as they consider language as part of their identity. One interesting aspect is that since the Baloch are educated in Urdu, the language used in the urban areas, and are prone to expressing themselves more often in Urdu than Balochi or Brahvi. The significant achievement of the language movement in Balochistan is that it has made people conscious of their identity (Rehman, 1996, pp. 170-171).

Human Development Index Report

In the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking in 2015, according to the 2017 UNDP report, Punjab comes first in the ranking with an HDI of 0.732, higher than Pakistan (0.681); Sind has the second rank, with an HDI of 0.640; Kyber Pakhtunkhwa third with an HDI of 0.628; and Balochistan fourth at 0.421 (Pakistan Human Development Index Report, 2017). The condition of human rights in the province is getting worse day by day.

International agencies are not allowed into Balochistan even during quiet periods, leave alone in conflict times.

The Human Development Index indicators show the Baloch people's pathetic situation in general and in particular if compared with the people of the remaining provinces. According to the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey 2001-02, Balochistan has the highest poor population, with 48 percent, and the worst in rural areas, with 51 percent living below the poverty line. Despite the human rights given by Pakistan's constitution guaranteeing everyone the right to be informed of the charges against them, to be brought before a magistrate within 24 hours, to have legal assistance and to see their families, and most importantly, everyone has the right to be treated per law and to enjoy the protection of the law, disappearances are some of the most distressing human rights violations happening in the region. People are held in detention secretly, and the authorities refuse to reveal their whereabouts. They are described as having been 'disappeared', which often goes hand-in-hand with tremendous torture and ill-treatment.

In Pakistani secret dungeons, Baloch prisoners are told they have no right to meet anyone, see a lawyer, or do anything except what the police and agencies tell them. It was revealed that when one prisoner asked for a lawyer, he was punched, kicked in the stomach, handcuffed, and struck with a foreign object more than ten times. He was also threatened with beheading or amputation, and he was whipped, estimated 20 or more times, while chained to the floor in a crouching position with bareback. Later on, he alleged that he told a magistrate in the court that he wanted a lawyer and he had been mistreated and that the magistrate responded. "I will ask the officials," and handed him back to the police. Afterward, the Pakistani police accused him of 'making them look bad' in court and shackled his hands to a chain hanging from the ceiling for several hours. As mentioned in the Human Rights Watch, "Even if the president or chief justice tells us to release you, we won't. We can torture you, or kill you, or keep you for years at our will. It is only the Army chief and the [intelligence] chief that we obey." This is what a Pakistani official said to Bashir Azeem, the 76-year-old Secretary General of the BRP (Baloch

Republican Party), during his unacknowledged detention in April 2010 (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan(HRCP) went to the Supreme Court with the list of 'disappeared' people and comments that over 70 percent of the list comprises people who could not be labelled jihadist, meaning that they were not wedded to the aggressive Islamism or Talibanisation that General Musharraf talked about. They were innocent Baloch and belonged to the secular local Baloch nationalist politics of the province (Amnesty International, 2008).

Role of Centre

The other grievances included the Baloch perception of the exploitative attitude of the centre in harnessing the natural resources of the province. They feel that Punjabis were reaping the benefits of the vast untapped natural resources without any benefit to Balochistan. Until now, it is the least developed province of Pakistan and gets the least amount of funds from the federal government. The deposits of natural gas in the province were discovered in Sui in 1953. Since then, the national economy has benefitted enormously from this cheap source of energy (Ansari, 2007, p. 25). Seventy percent of Pakistan's gas supply comes from Balochistan, and around 40 percent of the gas supply is from the Sui gas fields in the Dera Bugti area. Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) produces 720 to 750 million cubic feet of gas per day from its 80-plus wells. The gas reserves discovered were estimated at 9,625 trillion cubic feet. Balochistan produces natural gas worth Rs.85 billion annually but gets a meager royalty of Rs. 7 billion from the Federal Government (Talpur, 2007). The royalty is based on well-head value, not the market value, whereas Punjab is paid a royalty for the gas produced in its territory at market value. The center is exploiting the gas and mineral resources at the expense of the province, resulting in the abject poverty of the minority group. Baloch believes that without economic autonomy and self-sufficiency, political autonomy is meaningless.

It is believed that China is participating with the Punjabis in plundering the natural resources of Balochistan. Chinese firms have been given

contracts to exploit the coal reserves in Saindak. The Chinese firms transmit 50 percent of their profits to China, provide 48 percent to the Federal Government and give only two percent to the Balochs towards royalty (Talpur, 2007). The Ormara naval base in Balochistan employs 10,000 civilians, of whom only 40 are locals. The remaining are from Punjab, many of them Punjabi ex-servicemen (Talpur, 2007).

In addition to the FC, 44,000 Pakistan Army troops are deployed in Balochistan, thus making a total of 79,000 members of the security forces deployed in Balochistan to suppress the Balochs, almost the same number as General Pervez Musharraf claims to have deployed in the Federally-administered Tribal Areas (FATA) against Al Qaeda and the Neo Taliban. In Balochistan, there is one member of the Federal Security forces for every 36 civilians, much higher than the ratio when NATO occupied Afghanistan and the US-occupied Iraq. The US reportedly objected to the Pakistan Army diverting some of the helicopter gunships against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in the FATA to Balochistan for use against the Baloch nationalists. Following this, the Pakistan Army received some helicopters from China to use in Balochistan (Talpur, 2007).

Role of Chieftains or Sardars

According to Urmila Phadnis, the feeling of relative deprivation has existed in both Pakhtun and Baloch but with greater intensity in the latter. However, this feeling has not been sufficient but rather an essential condition for the collective mobilisation of these communities. She further says that if the population dispersal of the Baloch has been an added constraint in such a mobilisation, so has been the fragmented character of its leadership. The province of Balochistan has the lowest literacy rate in Pakistan, and education is a provincial matter. Regarding the role of tribal chiefs in the Baloch community, the questions that need to be answered are who keeps the masses illiterate? Why is the trickle-down effect not working? Why don't sardars allow schools in their area? Where do they spend all the royalty? It is said that the Sardars are responsible for the backwardness and non-development of Balochistan. As Musharraf says: "A few sardars have been manipulating and blackmailing every Pakistani for decades, using the militant mercenaries

that they maintain as their local militia force. They have also kept their tribes suppressed under their iron grip through indiscriminate use of force" (Musharraf, 2006, p. 59). However, a significant change that has come with the latest spell of insurgency is that now it has gone beyond the hands of Sardars, and the new middle-class intelligentsia is leading it.

The establishment continues to treat Balochistan as a conquered colony of Pakistan where Baloch can enjoy only those rights that are allowed to them. Whenever Balochistan's economic backwardness is discussed, officials in Islamabad also tend to repeat that it is due to the tribal chieftains, particularly Sardar Khair Bakhsh Marri, Sardar Attaullah Mengal, and the late Nawab Akbar Bugti. Musharraf had dubbed them impediments to constructing "mega-projects in particular and development in the province in general".

Kalim Bahadur talked about some of the leading social, economic, and political issues that need a solution. Some of them are: the Sardari system, which is the relic of the feudal system, should be abolished; the implementation of the 1973 constitution's provisions of center-province relations; the announcement of the National Finance Commission award; the implementation of the resolutions of the Provincial Assembly; restoration of the right of the Provincial Assembly to legislate on local government laws; Balochis must be given the administration and control of the mega projects; jobs for the indigenous Balochis under the constitutional job quota; concurrent list to be abolished and provinces should be delivered right to legislate freely; gas royalty formula should be worked out based on equity for all provinces; no voting right for settlers for ten years (Bahadur, 2006, p. 27).

The killing of Akbar Bugti in 2006 may still be fresh in many minds. If one reads the narrative of Baloch nationalist historiography, their roadmap would have signposts like the hanging of Nauroz Khan's two sons in 1960 in Sukkur and Hyderabad jails. Prisons of Sindh coincidentally become places of choice to incarcerate agitating Baloch high-profile leaders. Akbar Bugti ironically was on the side of Z.A. Bhutto during the military operation in Balochistan in the mid-1970s when the triumvirate of Marri, Mengal, and Bizenjo was tried on charges of treason in Hyderabad jail.

Federation in name but an excessively over-centralised state in practice, run mainly by the army, has often been incapable of negotiating political solutions with the representatives of the constituent units forming Pakistan. Balochistan is the arch-example of a province that is marginalised in the current political economy of Pakistan.

The problems in the province are multi-dimensional, which includes political segregation, economic exploitation, and cultural alienation. The unaddressed grievances have led to various spells of resistance movements in the province, which were crushed repeatedly by the respective governments, leading to a strong sense of ethnic consciousness in the Baloch population. The Islamabad government's constant denials of any serious problem in Balochistan have estranged the group even more. The blames put on the Indian government by Pakistan for igniting the Baloch issues have no grounds but rather just an attempt to divert attention from the gross injustices happening to the minority ethnic groups in the country. The unaddressed grievance of Baloch will have implications not only for Pakistan or India but for the whole South Asian region.

While the Balochs, since the beginning, have fought for a separate state or at least autonomy and fair representation, none of the uprisings has gained them much. With the Pakhtun-dominated Taliban forming government in Afghanistan after 20 years, it will also have a spillover effect in the region of Balochistan, as the northern part of the province is majorly resided by the Pakhtun tribe. This issue has remained unsolved, rather unacknowledged, for a very long time. The alternating democratic and army regimes have failed to provide any answers to the grievances. The Afghanistan crisis in the neighborhood of this area might backfire for Pakistan. The violence in the region will increase due to the Baloch-Pakhtun rivalry in the province. It may turn out to be a significant security threat to the internal dynamics of Pakistan. The last nationalist movement of Baloch has been going on for around 20 years with varying intensity. Assimilation of the demands is the need of the hour. However, democracy in Pakistan could not develop under firm army control. Armies do not give autonomy, and they run strictly on hierarchy and chain of command. Baloch, sadly is at the lowest level of that hierarchy.

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A decade of Dragon's Debt & Trap Initiative in South Asia

Saurabh *

Abstract

In order to expand its influence through the harshly criticised Belt and Road programme, China deliberately enters into unsustainable debt-for-infrastructure agreements with emerging nations, particularly those with weaker political and economic situations. Beijing's debt-clench policy, using its economic superiority and influence to extend outsize loans to weaker foreign countries on favourable terms and later playing hardball to recover them, forcing the beneficiaries to give up their sovereignty of their controlled territory. As Chinese investments, land acquisitions, space and military projection, in grow, Beijing taking more aggressive approach in name of collaboration to serve its long-term interests.

William Shakespeare in his preeminent play *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare, W) delineates the character of notorious Shylock who mercilessly insists from the borrower a pound of *his own flesh* as collateral. Drawing inspiration from the character, the contemporary Shylock of the globalised world, the China, in name of selling the idea of a new silk road, consisting shipping routes, ports, refineries, industrial parks, port cities, roads, railway lines, roads and power plants lured number of developing countries across the globe by providing heavily subsidised loans more than they could afford for constructing the proposed mega projects, and when the mendicant countries defaulted the borrowings, China enslaved them by seizing their strategic assets as collateral.

The historic Silk Road served as the world's arteries for people, products, and ideas for centuries (Frankopan:2015). It is a prime example of a dynamic route. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is now the most ambitious, extensive, and expensive initiative in the world, was first moved by the President of China, Mr. Xi Jinping in

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2013(Chatzky and McBride: 2020). It aims to revive the ancient route and build other routes for the purpose of integrating global markets. With an estimated cost of between one and eight trillion dollars (Hillman:2018), this would result in a massive collection of investment and development projects spanning from East Asia to Europe in at least 140 countries (Nedopil:2021), considerably increasing China's economic and political influence.

The BRI unites two programmes: First, the Silk Road Economic Belt, a land-based initiative that consists of six growth corridors, including Jilin to Saint Petersburg in Russia, Kazakhstan to Turkey, Shandong to Denmark, Guangdong to Bangladesh, Hainan to Malaysia, and Xinjiang to Pakistan. Another is the maritime *Silk Road of the 21st Century*. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the BRI's *crown jewel project* in South Asia. It travels from Xinjiang to the Gwadar Port in Pakistan (*The Dawn: 30 June 2022*) giving Islamabad a new alternative route for oil and gas through West Asia as well as a crucial outlet to the Arabian Sea, estimated cost to be US \$62 billion (Small:2020) and it seeks to expand the Karachi Trade Corridor to create a dedicated railway line from Karachi port to Pipri at an estimated cost of Rs130bn (*The Dawn:4 April 2021*), or about 25% of Pakistan total GDP e.g. \$278.22 billion (*Macro Trends:macrotrends.net*). It is important to note that Pakistan's total external debt climbed as high as US\$ 116 billion (*CEIC Data:ceicdata.com*). It is easy to imagine the precarious economic condition of Pakistan and its repayment capacity of the loans taken for CPEC. Pakistan has already handed over the Gwadar port to China on lease for forty years which will also keep 91% share of the income generated from the port (*The Dawn:23 June 2022*).

Similarly, Habanbatota Port of Sri Lanka, constructed under BRI, is also a striking example of China's wolf-warrior diplomacy (Hillman:2018). In a contentious loan swap, Sri Lanka was compelled to give China a 99-year lease on its port (*ibid.*) demonstrating that China is aggressively building naval outposts as part of its sea pearls theory (Hankwon:2013) to advance Chinese strategic interests across the globe. China is constructing another nest in Sri Lanka, a gateway to South Asia in the

Indian Ocean, a new metropolis that will expand Sri Lanka's largest city, Colombo, roughly the size of central London, creating a financial hub as Dubai with a business friendly atmosphere like Singapore, lined with Chinese skyscrapers, exotic hotels, high-rise homes and theme parks (*Safi:2018*). It is claimed to create thousands of new jobs and have a population of about three lakhs people with thousands more commuting each day, raising serious concerns not only of environment, local livelihood, and the sovereignty of the island nation but also of neighbouring India. The Port City of Colombo (CPC) becoming a reality in the backyard of India, possibly less than three hundred km away from India's southern-most tip Kanyakumari.

In order to offer China a strategic advantage along its much-discussed Maritime Silk Road, the CPC is being built by reclaiming many hectares of land from the Indian Ocean. This would also glorify Beijing's wolf-warrior Belt and Road Initiative which the world witnessed Sri Lanka to hand over its Habanbatota Port on a controversial debt-swap, fulfilling strategic ambition of China in South Asia. Through this exercise, it is widely considered that Chinese are aggressively creating naval outposts as part of its string of pearls theory along the salami slicing approach that enhances pressure on competing states for favourable gains to Chinese interests (*Chellaney:2021*).

The Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill was approved by the Sri Lankan parliament on May 20, 2021. It establishes the nation's legal framework and designates 269 hectares of land that was reclaimed from the ocean and annexed to the city of Colombo as the country's first special economic zone (SEZ) for service-oriented industries (*dailymirror.lk:20 April 2021*). With an estimated US\$1.4 billion in investment, may further spur a US\$13 billion in secondary investment, CPC is the largest foreign direct investment project ever for Sri Lanka (*Rossi:2019*). It is also believed to be China's largest investment to date in the island country in the Indian Ocean.

Further, compromising sovereignty, Sri Lanka sold its land and resources for Chinese investment for undergoing Colombo Port City which raised

deep concerns in Sri Lanka parliament dubbing the City as a *Chinese enclave* (*Ceylontoday.lk:25 May 2021*). Sri Lanka's dependence on Chinese financial largesse is also growing exponentially. In fact, various political parties cutting across Sinhala-Tamil lines expressed deep concern on these issues in parliament and described the CPC a Chinese enclave as many of Sri Lanka's laws would not be applicable there and also questioned whether One country, One law meant Chinese law. (*Ibid*) Some opposition leaders accused the government to pave the way for Cheelam (China & Eelam) in place of Tamil Eelam (*Sumanthiran: 2021*).

Further, this port could be used to augment China's Intelligence and counter-intelligence operations and eavesdrop on Indian Intelligence and communication, enhance cyber threats and satellite tracking and ultimately challenging India's clout in this region. Chinese may also help anti-India elements to enhance their operations against India. In the past, Pakistan used its High Commission in Colombo to infiltrate agents and terrorist into India from the sea (*Roul:2014*) With increased Chinese threats from mountains to oceans, India will have no option but also to tighten its coastal security to prevent any belligerence like Dokalam in 2017 or the continuing provocation in Ladakh region of India.

In another stark examples of Beijing's debt-clench policy, Maldives met the same fate as Sri Lanka when it got Chinese assistance for economically unsustainable China-Maldives Friendship Bridge (*Ethirajan:2020*), under BRI. The former President of Maldives, Md. Abdullah Yameen obtained Chinese assistance for China-Maldives Friendship Bridge under Belt and Road initiative. Now, the Maldives is facing heavy Chinese debt burden of US\$ 3.1billion, an astronomical sum for Maldivian economy with GDP of around US\$ 4.9 billion while Bangladesh is facing the fund crunch under BRI (*thedailystar.net*). The new Maldivian government under President Md. Ibrahim Mohammed Solih may scrap the Chinese plan of constructing underwater Joint Ocean Observation Centre (JOOC) like constructing at South China Sea, in a Maldivian island, close to India's Lakshadweep port to open a Chinese maritime front against India. Previously, in 2017, a formal

agreement between the two nations on the establishment of a joint ocean observation station was signed with the goal of ensuring the safety of the Indian Ocean shipping route (*Parashar:2018*). This agreement would serve both civilian and military purposes. It is also significant to remember that Md. Nasheed, the former president of the Maldives, asserted that China had already bought the 17 northernmost atolls from the Maldives for a throwaway price, promising to develop tourist attractions without providing enough information about other Chinese activities on these islands (*Macan-Markar:2020*).

It is important to remember that China is not happy at all with the US, India, Japan and Australia led-QUAD which China believes has been formed to sow international discord by projecting China as a potential threat (*thewire.in:19 October, 2022*) The CPC will make it easier for Chinese navy to track the warship movements to control shipping routes, to dictate Maritime trade rules including overall future operations of the QUAD. For India, the best hope to salvage some foothold in Sri Lanka is if the Quad, particularly the United States, acts on behalf of New Delhi. While there are no signs of that at the moment, it may just be a matter of time before Colombo feels the pressure from the US. In June 2021, feeling threatened by the QUAD's future prospects of expansion (*Ananth:2021*).

Li Jiming, China's ambassador to Bangladesh, cautioned Bangladesh against jeopardising Chinese promises for large-scale infrastructure projects under BRI and that the country not contemplate joining the Quad grouping (*thedailystar.net:28 June 2022*). Although there are currently no plans to expand the Quad framework, Mr. Li's comments were viewed as a warning ahead of time and were in line with earlier comment made by China's Defence Minister, Wei Fenghe, who urged countries in South Asia to avoid joining any military alliances during visits to Colombo and Dhaka (*Ejaz:2021*), Mr. Fenghe added that China and Bangladesh should work together to counter hostile forces attempting to impose hegemony and form a military alliance in South Asia (*ibid*). In light of this, China is attempting to forge military links with India's neighbours Bangladesh and Nepal and consolidate existing

relations with Pakistan. Notably, some Chinese officials have referred to the Quad as an Asian NATO and a military alliance, terms that its participants have strenuously rejected (*Zhang:2020*)

There are frequent incidents of Chinese official's aggressive misbehaviour/assault on Bangladeshi nationals at the various BRI project sites in Bangladesh, shows the mind-sets of Chinese (*Choudhary:2021*). In the under-construction BRI-Lebukhali Bridge area over the Payra River of Bangladesh, when the matter of assault came to light, the agitated Bangladeshi construction workers attacked some of the Chinese workers and vandalized their cars and barracks (*Anisur:2021*), Security risks and costs of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor are also rising amid a resurgence of the deadly attacks by the locals in Pakistan also (*Adnan:2021*).

It is important to note that the BRI is a debt trap designed to entice developing countries into taking on more debt than they can handle. Once these countries are buried in debt, the Chinese use confiscation of key assets as collateral to enslave them. During the protests in Myanmar, Chinese BRI investment projects located inside an industrial park in Yangon were looted and damaged. Chinese workers reported suffering a number of injuries, and an initial count indicated a 240 million yuan (\$36.93 million) damage of property. (www.the-global-times.com, 16 March 2021). In light of worries about debt, project viability, the ecology, and earthquakes, the route connecting Tibet and Kathmandu is having difficulty taking off (*Bhushal:2019*). Nearly all BRI member nations are burdened with exploitative Chinese loans (*Mark:2019*). According to the Centre for Global Development, more BRI countries, including Djibouti (*Cheng:2018*), Kyrgyzstan (*Furukawa:2018*), Laos (*Hunt:2020*), Malaysia (*Shepard:2020*), Mongolia (*Younis:2020*), Montenegro and *Aleksandar:2018*), Nigeria (*Unekwu:2020*), and Tajikistan (*Sodiqov:2011*), face a serious risk defaulter because the BRI's procurement and contract handover procedures were hardly transparent and competitive.

A minimum of nine key naval stations are also being built by China as part of the BRI's string of pearl plan (*Lim:2020*). These outposts will provide China

the ability to keep troops stationed far from home, station warships, control maritime lanes, set trade regulations, etc. Keeping the completion date of each project in 2049 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, it seems not just an economic plan but also a strategy to rule the globe (*Lehmann:2019*).

Nearly all Chinese participants in this financial and infrastructure spree, including bankers, managers of public enterprises, and envoys, face warped financial and political incentives to look for more BRI deals. This is a major concern. It is understandable that Chinese financial officials, construction companies, and envoys have pursued unviable projects in unsustainable ways given that upfront economic and political incentives seem too often exceed worries about transactions going wrong (*Deutsche:2021*). Chinese entry in the Maldivian water, through economically unsustainable projects significantly attracted major stakeholders like US and India to protect their commercial/military interests. China's increasing investments and political influence in south Asian countries prompted India to increase its diplomatic presence in order to appropriately counter Chinese-game plan in the region.

It is widely known that China aggressively and irresponsibly plays aid/loan diplomacy card to trap the small, weaker and corrupt governments of the South Asia. These nations take out new loans to cover the interest on their existing debt, which compromises their sovereignty and traps them in a never-ending debt cycle. Corrupt politicians of these countries excuse for sinking to Chinese promising its people of sparkling new infrastructure (*Wade:2020*), China would become the new imperial power by using its economic superiority and influence. Beijing taking more aggressive approach in name of collaboration to serve its long-term interests. It is widely known that China aggressively plays aid/loan diplomacy card. Finding out that the BRI is quickly becoming a belt whose roads are blocked for the borrowing nations by heavy debts. The road to global dominance built by Xi Jinping is undoubtedly full of potholes (*Anisur:2021*) and a worried sign for the world because of dragon's robbing in several countries together.

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India-China Border Dispute and the Hanging Future of South Asian Region

Aparna *

Abstract

The world has not changed much since the Melian dialogue was conducted between Athenians and Melians. International politics guiding spirit is might is right. Foreign policies of major powers like USA, UK, Russia and Germany or in Asia, China, are evident to it. India-China decade long border dispute can be seen or analysed with comparable continuum. Historically a land power China is eager to get a bigger role in world politics in 21st century. Presently, when the world is facing economic, political, social and other related problems due to the deadly corona virus, Indian neighbourhood is restless.

Introduction

India is living the spirit of *Vasudhev Kutumbkam* and *Sarve Bhawantu Shukhinah* during the course of the pandemic. India's humanitarian assistance and global diplomatic outreach is being appreciated at every forum. Voluntarily India has contributed \$10 million to the SAARC Covid19 emergency fund; to the Indian Ocean countries, Indian Navy ship INS Kesar was sailed to Comoros, Maldives, Seychelles and Sri Lanka with essential goods and medicines like hydroxychloroquine and paracetamol tablets (reportedly India has supplied these medicines to 133 countries); beyond the South Asian region, India has extended its help to the Latin America, Indo- Pacific and Africa; Nepal and Afghanistan are also among those countries who got benefited by India's philanthropic works (The Mint, 11 May 2020).

In another hand ironically, Indian neighbours have chosen this indeterminate time for claiming to the different Indian territories. Nepal has claimed to the Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani region (The Hindu, 24 May 2020). Strategically this tri- juncture is very sensitive for India, especially after 1962 Indo- China war. This claim was made by the

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Nepali government when the India government has inaugurated 80 kilometre road for the pilgrimage of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. Immediately, on 15 June 2020, Peoples Liberation Army, China had a violent face off with the Indian army in the Galwan valley, Eastern Ladakh region (H. Davidson. and B. Doherty, 2020). It has resulted into the death of 20 Indian soldiers and 40 Chinese military personals (approximately) (B.B.C. News, 30 May 2020).

Critically, after 1962 war it was 1967 (Nathu La border) when both the border patrols had confronted each-other (88 Indian soldiers have lost their lives). After that in 1987 and 2003 an intense skirmishes was reported in the borders of Arunachal Pradesh and in the Ladakh region respectively. India has avoided any provocative incidents or clashes with China in the Himalayan region every time.

Skirmishes in Galwan and its Strategic timing: Revenging Doklam or Beyond?

India and China shares 3488 km land border. Indian states, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Arunachal Pradesh boundary links with China. There are 24 disputed points between India and China over this border. It is the first time when Galwan valley is being pointed out as disputed area. Notably China shares its territory with almost 14 countries and it claims the land from 23 countries (with 12 countries China has resolved border dispute). India- China border is named as LAC (Line of Actual Control) or Mac Mohan line. China considered as it as mark of colonial period with India and thus does not pay respect to LAC. But in its relationship with Myanmar, China respects Mac Mohan line as the base of their relationship. This is unfair and unfortunate!

China's strategy is to lag behind India over border dispute (maritime and land border). In 2017, Doklam standoff between India and China was a recurrent story. It has gained international attention and given a clear message to Indian policy makers that China is still leaving in past and has hegemonic intentions. Doklam is a tri- juncture between India, Bhutan and China. For the better access to Chumbi Valley in Bhutan

and Siliguri corridor (which connects mainland India with its north-eastern region) in India, China wanted to control over this reason. This standoff was stretched for two months. Over the present border dispute, the Chinese Communist Party's mouth-piece, Global Times had stated that, "The Galwan Valley is not like Doklam because it is in the Aksai Chin region in southern Xinjiang of China, where the Chinese military has an advantage with advance infrastructure. So, if Delhi escalates the conflict, the Indian military could pay a heavy price" (Global Times, 18 May 2020). Interestingly, over the deescalating tensions at Line of Actual Control (including areas like Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang plains), apart from 11 rounds of Corps Commanders-level talks, the two forces have also held 10 Major Generals level, 55 Brigadiers-level talks and 1,450 calls over the hotlines (Business Standard, 31 July 2021).

Historically, China is deemed to be an aggressor. It has illegally occupied Tibet, East Turkistan, Inner Mongolia, Paracel and some of the Spratly Islands. China has invaded Vietnam 17 times in its recorded history. Foreign policy experts say, China has been always assertive and aggressive in developing infrastructure in border areas. Certainly India's advantageous stand in Doklam, Kailash Mansarovar road and now its presence in Galwan valley and Pangong Lake area have pushed new skirmishes.

Why China has chosen this tensed and complicated time (when the whole world is fighting with covid-19) can be a million dollar questions? There can be different reasons. Firstly, may be with the apprehensions that it will take a lead over unprepared India. Secondly, India's ally USA is also busy in overcoming the Covid19 crisis and preparing for the next Presidential election. Perhaps this would pave the way for easy and swift accumulation of land!

Thirdly, after the amendment in the Article- 370 and separation of Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir has put China on toes. As India's Home Minister Amit Shah has stated in the Parliament on August 5, 2019, asserting: "Kashmir is an integral part of India, there is no doubt

over it. When I talk about Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan- occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin are included in it” (The Indian Express, 6 August 2019). But unfortunately all its assessment went wrong.

Fourthly, for China’s OBOR (One Belt One Road) project, Himalayan region holds the utmost important position. Heavy investments in Pakistan and in Nepal are part of this strategy (Eurasian Times, 20 June 2020). Accept this what potential buffer zone Nepal or an unstable terrorism promoter Pakistan (Grey zone) has to offer China? Almost nothing, except there advantages of geopolitics! Economically or politically Nepal can give nothing to China but strategically there are number of things which Nepal can offer to China. China’s president Xi in his recent visit to Nepal, said that Beijing will seek to boost economic cooperation and look into the construction of a cross-border rail link in Nepal.

Fifthly, India's mounting figure in the Indo- Pacific region would defeat its purposes. Equally India-USA tuned interest and cooperation is also making China worrisome. India's refusal to OBOR project may have worked as an area irritant for China. Last but not the least; QUAD can also affect China’s interest in the South Asian region. China’s suspicious behaviour is being criticised globally over the spread of Covid19. Now, WHO is also planning to investigate the same? As a saviour China is doing all these notorious activities in the Indian border area or elsewhere in the world.

Hanging future of South Asia!

South Asia is a home to almost 24% of world population and it occupies approximately 3% of worlds land. A huge market and young workforce has become the identity of South Asian region. Paradoxically the stained bilateral relationship, particularly India-China and India-Pakistan relations has jeopardised its growth since long. SAARC is the living evidence. Simultaneously it provides swift and unwanted accesses to the major powers in the active politics of South Asian subcontinent. The defining event of 1960s (India- China war) has made China the most decisive determinants of South Asian politics. China’s South Asian vision

is mostly perceived as India centric but it has other folds moreover. In South Asia, China shares border with India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan. With smaller South Asian countries China has resolved its boundary issues but its boundary dispute with India is still unresolved. This makes China very integral to South Asian Security architecture.

Perhaps seeing Asia as a whole also tells a never ending story of China's ravenousness for land. As China has border dispute with number of countries, i. e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei and above all Japan. Nevertheless, Nepal also has to fear from China but only to counter balance India, Nepal is moving to a deadly end! Recently in May 2020 in a tweet, China's Global Television Network (Chinese state run) has claimed over the Mount Everest but after massive protest from Nepalese people it was deleted (Eurasian Times, 23 June 2020). Previously in 2019 also China was accused by Nepal for grabbing its northern territory namely, Sindhupalchowk, Humla, Sankhuwasabha and Rasuwa. It is speculated that later China may develop BOP (Border Observation Posts) in these areas.

The stained bilateral relation between the giant nuclear weapon states may lead to an unstable and fragile South Asia. This acrimonious relationship will also dismantle regional security and provoke a "big conflict" and arms race in the region (Eurasian Times, 21 June 2020). South Asia can be a new laboratory for a new cold war between USA and Russia. Notably South Asian region is a cluster of developing countries and they need food, money and opportunity instead of weapon and war!

Therefor on altruistic terms countries are expected to corporate and develop mutual trust. At the national and regional level new public health strategies and policies should be made. Reports say in every country (rich or poor) public health is kept or given the last priority. It is a timely demand for the countries of South Asian region to break the cocoon and think beyond the box. Simultaneously, substantial developments are happening in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinxiang province and South China Sea. Prime Minister Modi's "Neighbourhood First"

policy is India's attempt to counter China's Belt and Road plan and keep New Delhi's regional influence strong. This would be a litmus paper test for India's strategic vision and planning. It will be stimulating to see that how the political rivalry between the duo, India and China will shake the future of South Asian region?

What is the way out?

Flaring Tibet issue

India under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru signed the Panchsheel Treaty, 1954 with China and subsequently acknowledged China's sovereignty over Tibet. It was a historical blunder that India has made and paid heavily in 1962 war with China. China considers Tibet as its inevitable part so do not respect to either Shimla Treaty or the Mac Mohan line. China's hidden strategic interest is to keep Himalayan border disputes alive so that time to time Chinese interests shall be bargained (Asia Times, 19 June 2020). Raising and recognising Tibet as a sovereign country shall help India in deterring Chinese movement in the region. Exile government of Tibet is already running in Dharamshala, India and it is one of the most annoying factors for the Chinese government.

Shift the conflict to South China Sea and Indian Ocean

China's provocative actions in the high peak of Himalayas should be responded by India which counters moves in South China Sea. This is the black hole of Chinese foreign policy. Historically and culturally East Asian countries share a much trusted relationship with India. Since decades small countries of East Asia are looking hopefully towards the powerful projection and presence of India in the region. It will be a saviour against Chinese bandwagon and debt-trap. India already has a strong hold on Indian Ocean. Inevitably and immediately, India should extend its naval exercises and exchanges with the East Asian countries. It will help India to deter Chinese creeping policy of transgression from taking a hard line on territorial dispute.

Chinese assertive foreign policy in South China Sea (in reference to the Great wall of sand and Nine Dash line) is bullying Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Japan. China claims over 90% of South China Sea. This notorious claim aims to control over the global trade (50% of global trade route is the South China Sea). ASEAN (as a group) has given clean chit to China over this issue. But in South China Sea, USA is also a party. So, annoyed US have deployed three Aircraft carriers in the South China Sea (Eurasian Times, 20 June 2020). This has enhanced the probability of war or conflict in the region. India has to harness its interest from this palpable situation.

Revival of the Quad

The first Quadrilateral summit was held on the side-lines of the ASEAN regional forum meeting in the Philippines in May 2007 between India, Japan, US and Australia. Since its inception this Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has not grown much and was ill fated (as its objectives were not pointed)! Chinese growing assertiveness in the Indo- Pacific region has made revitalisation of QUAD a necessary necessity of the time (Asia Times, 27 July 2020). Regrettably, before 2018 India was perceived as the weakest link in QUAD, Australia was reluctant for its active participation; and except Japan USA was also a hesitant observer. But, China's bullying policies towards Senkaku Islands, South China Sea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Corona virus controversy (laboratory made), military standoff in Doklam and violent skirmishes in Pangong Lake and Galwan Valley; human rights violation in Xinjiang province, trade war and so on has increasingly pushes all four nations to strengthen their bond, bilateral as well as quadrilateral.

The paramount results are evident and they need to be encouraged in pursuit of the "free and open" Indo- Pacific region, i. e. Malabar naval exercise, Japan's Ministry of Defence new arrangements of cooperation and coordination with India and Australia (Japan also shares its intelligence with the USA regularly), USA Indo- Pacific Strategic Report and planning to train the fighter jet pilots of India, Japan and Australia at Anderson Air force base at western Pacific Ocean, Australia's Defence

Strategic update (Asia Times, 27 July 2020) etc. Presence of USA in the Indo-Pacific region will help to keep a check on China's rise, freedom of navigation, maritime security, non-proliferation, terrorism and last but not the least the North Korean threat. Deepening strategic and defence cooperation between the QUAD partners shows their profound determination and preparedness. Together with these likeminded countries India would be able to put China on margin (odd man out!).

US President Joe Biden will host the leaders of Japan, India and Australia at the end of 2021. While China sees the Quad, as the new NATO framed against Beijing, whereas the Quad nations view it as a grouping of democratic countries tool of cooperation for maritime security, human disaster relief and management, counter- terrorism, defence and trade cooperation, freedom of navigation (in the Indo- Pacific and South China Sea) etc. (Hindustan Times, 6 July 2021).

Limiting imports and exports from China

Known diplomat G. Parthasarathy says that time has come when India should review and reduce its economic dependence on China (The Hindu, 16 June 2020). India's supply chains critical dependence on Chinese imports is more tormenting, especially for electronic equipment, mechanical appliances, semi-conductor devices, iron products, steel merchandises, coal, fertilisers, auto machineries, textile materials, antibiotics etc. (The Quint, 2020). India has a huge promising market but it does not have manufacturing or industrial ecosystem, i. e. India has the second largest smartphone market in the world but it does not manufacture anyone of them. India has completely missed out the third industrial revolution. The Hindu writes from the account of D. Raghunandan, that the very idea of LPG (Liberalization, Privatisation and Globalisation) has ruined the spirit of 'self-reliance'. Since then with the rented or borrowed technology we are running our economy (The Hindu, 27 May 2020). Needless to say over the night India cannot erode the Chinese influence over its domestic industries! The profits of trade and investment with China are colossal and lucrative.

The most effective and robust response to present Chinese antagonised behaviour would be replacing China by other potential countries like, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and others though who shares friendly bonds with India. For an example, Taiwan's electronic and high-tech industries have the capability to replace China. Perhaps in 2018, globally China's overall export was \$2.5 trillion, in this India's part was only \$70 billion (approximately 3% of total export). Through simple boycotts Chinese economy will neither be affected nor be damaged. So India has to significantly change its policies and carefully make a web to trap China by mobilising other countries though who are against China.

Conclusion

Two Lions cannot live together! Best policy of survival would be confining the territories, either with dialogue or with war. India and China both has to make their choices unblemished. Simple diplomatic mistakes or strategic choices will change the course of the regional as well as International politics. Both are potential nuclear powers and giant nations (in terms of population, economy, market, geographical stretch etc.). India has always been a responsible country and has a proud history of non- intervention in other territories but reversibly China has a long history of intervention and aggression. Beside this Chinese history, socio- cultural practices, political institutions and political leadership etc. differs with India. To deal with communist China, Indian foreign policy should be primarily offensive rather than defensive. New Delhi's message to Beijing should be clear and loud that if you will irritate us here we will irritate you there! Now, one million dollar question would be what the rest of the world is going to do about China? Because singularly Indian efforts will not lay any fruit!

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Book Review

Hasan, Z. (2009-19). *Ideology and Organization in Indian Politics: Polarization and the Growing Crisis of the Congress Party*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2022, 224pp. Rs. 1495.

Indian Politics has witnessed transformational changes for the past few decades including a political shift of upper and middle castes to the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and of lower-caste elites to regional parties; blunting of identity politics based on caste; expansion of majoritarianism and the rise of Right. Majority of the recent scholarship has seen these changes in the light of the rise of the BJP. Hasan, on the other hand, tries to see these trends in Indian politics from an alternative vantage point, placing the Congress party at the centre of enquiry and exploring the *Crisis* of the once-dominant party. Although the book specifically refers to the time period between 2009 to 2019, the author builds upon her previous works and provides readers with a multi-dimensional, comprehensive, historical, detailed and analytical account by trying to locate the crisis in factors, both internal and external to the Congress party and the interface between the factors. She seeks to further study the role played by context, ideology and organization in making and unmaking of political parties.

The text is thematically divided into six chapters spanning across issues and trends in Indian Politics. Chapter One, titled 'Democratic Reorganization Eludes the Congress Party' shows how Congress traversed from being a party of conflict mediation, bargaining and consensus to a party characterized by organizational decay, atrophy, ideological obfuscation and leadership crisis. She gives a background of the factors which ailed the Congress since the time of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and identifies reasons for the same, such as institutional erosion, organizational stagnation, irregular elections, a lost connection with grass-root level, side-lining of state leaders and centralization at the cost of party's ideology of consensus. This ultimately led to the breaking away of regional parties, defections, lack of intra-party democracy and internal resistance to change, despite Rahul Gandhi's keenness to democratize.

In Chapter Two, 'Collapse of the United Progressive Alliance', Hasan looks at the political fallout of the Congress Party in the 2014 general elections and identifies what went wrong during the UPA regime which preceded the elections. The Congress had lacked a cohesive ideological ground and

suffered from policy paralysis, leadership and organizational gap, unchecked corruption and indecisiveness. Despite the introduction of an array of progressive, social welfare legislation during its two tenures such as that of food security, rural employment guarantee, Right to Information, Congress could not take any credit for the same in wake of corruption scandals, incompetence, favouritism, the BJP's obstructionist tactics in Parliament, and a concerted effort by the powerful right-wing groups which wanted to see the end of Congress. This also got manifested in India Against Corruption Movement which drew the public sentiment against Congress, and both the capitalist class and media got inclined towards pro-business BJP.

In Chapter Three, 'The Gujarat Model and the Turn to the Right', the author critiques the much-revered Gujarat model of economic development and looks at the rightward shift of Indian Politics. The 2014 general elections were fought on the idea of development and Gujarat model was seen as a key example of development, led by the then Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP, Mr. Modi, who was seen as a pro-business, strong leader, a 'Development Man' with great oratory skills and hopes for the masses. The BJP came to power and this uncritical acceptance of pro-business model led to a rightward turn of Indian politics. In contrast to a lacklustre campaign by the Congress party, BJP had an elaborate outreach programme. The author contextualises BJP's win in its electoral management with the support of RSS (and affiliated organizations) in providing a 'well-oiled political machine' and helping 'election engineering, propaganda, mobilization and booth management' with a dedicated cadre of grass-root workers. The elections witnessed an unprecedented use to techno-led mobilization and use of modern communication technology by the BJP, with the help of social media platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter.

In Chapter Four, 'Secular Politics on the Back Foot', the author writes that the BJP envisages India as a majoritarian nation-state rather than a pluralist multicultural one. It could consolidate a political majority beyond other factors of identity like caste, and religion took over. Unsure of a response to BJP's Hindutva, the Congress Party took to 'Soft Hindutva', which did no good to the electoral results of the Congress and in fact hampered the idea of secularism that the Congress Party had so far stood for. Furthermore, arguing against the accusations of Muslim appeasement, she opines that political pampering of Muslims by the Congress provided only a symbolic support and no substantial benefit to the Muslims.

In Chapter Five, 'Hindu Nationalism to the Fore', the author argues that in 2019 general elections, the BJP put forth an idea of majoritarian symbolism instead of development. Backed by enormous money and the support of electronic and print media, those elections were fought on a three-point campaign of Nationalism (national security, Pakistan and terrorism), Hinduism and anti-corruption. Hasan distinguishes between the post-independent 'inclusive nationalism' of the Congress and the 'Hindu nationalism' of the BJP. While material politics occupied a backstage, Congress could not build a counter-narrative highlighting its own idea of nationalism. BJP's massive victory in 2019 election shows, in her words, 'a structural shift in Indian politics reflected in the emergence of a de facto majoritarian democracy'.

In Chapter Six, 'Opposition Interrupted' Hasan takes a critical look at the events such as abrogation of Art 370 and 35A of the Constitution (pertaining to the Union territory of Jammu & Kashmir), settlement of Ayodhya dispute and Citizenship Amendment Act. She further points out at the erosion of institutions such as Election Commission of India, Central Vigilance Commission; dilution of Right to Information; usage of corporate power and election financing during 2019 elections. She points at the largely non-existent politics of Congress outside the Parliament and its non-impactful social media presence, which ultimately led to a weak opposition to the ruling party.

However, she emphasizes the fact that the Congress is the only party with social, intellectual and historical capital, having a pan-India footprint and that a liberal consolidation against the BJP is not possible without Congress. She, while identifying problems within the Congress, gives hope and suggests reforms. In a deeply divided polity where centrism and consensus don't seem to work, she advises Congress to widen its electoral bandwidth by banding together with opposition parties, strengthening the alliance-coalition framework, electing a leader to keep the party united, reconstructing its organizational structure across the states, conducting a pan-India membership drive and projecting as well propagating a clear alternative ideological narrative to the BJP by reaffirming its philosophy of secularism, nationalism, social justice while underlining its past achievements. She vouches for a democratic renewal of the Congress party in accordance with the contemporary needs.

Although she focuses upon Congress but refers largely to challenges facing the non-BJP parties and centrist parties in other democracies 'in the wake of upsurge of populist nationalism and right-wing parties.'

The author, by a wide coverage of primary and secondary sources, gives a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter and significantly contributes to the field of study pertaining to Indian politics and political parties. She draws her thesis from authentic sources and quite elaboratively provides an analysis about factors that led to the crisis of Congress and its impact on the Indian political scenario over the past decades. She explains her thesis in a quite lucid manner using easily comprehensible, crisp arguments.

The text provides useful insights to scholars of social sciences in general, and Indian politics in particular. It may prove useful for scholars dealing in election studies, psephology and study of party system and political parties. It may also be helpful to political analysts, journalists or readers interested in knowing politics, in general. Furthermore, it may provide some important inputs to the Congress party, owing to the various measures and reforms that the author suggests.

As compared to recent works on Indian politics like *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (2021) by Christophe Jaffrelot and *India After Modi: Populism and the Right* (2018) by Ajay Gudavarthy which see the changes in Indian Politics keeping the rise of BJP at the centre of enquiry, Hasan takes a more comprehensive view and views the changes from the perspective of the Congress party.

However, even though the author claims that her thesis applies to centrist parties in major democracies across the globe, she barely provides examples or gives references. Providing examples would have helped in substantiating her thesis better. Also, she doesn't give a hopeful picture of regional parties and fails to contemplate upon them in the text. She further fails to talk about parties such as Aam Aadmi Party which maintain a pragmatic silence on issues concerning minorities and practice a silent majoritarianism.

Withstanding these issues, the text certainly provides important and critical insights into the changing nature of Indian Politics and makes a strong case for future scholarship towards further research and exploration on the subject.

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Ray, N.(2021) India and Africa: The Road Ahead by, New Delhi, Indian Council of World Affairs, ₹918

India and Africa are the shore neighbors separated by the Indian Ocean. History is evident of their close friendship, cultural affinity, super bonding and cooperation. Africa is being the cradle of human civilization and India is the ancient civilization in natural alliance and contemporary partners. Since time immemorial, India and Africa are linked through historical ties, trade and cultural relations. Although this relationship has lost direction in between the geopolitical importance of the 21st century but growing prominence of India in world politics once again brought these two reasons together. As we stand in 2022, Africa constitutes 54 countries and has 1.37 billion populations. According to the latest survey of the World Bank, seven out of ten developing economies of the world are from Africa. Apart from this, Africa has been home to 99% of world chromium, 11% of world oil, and 9% of world gas, huge deposits of gold, copper, manganese and cobalt. This is reason enough to state the growing importance of Africa in world politics. Therefore, it is no surprise that countries like India, China, USA and other developed countries want to establish positive and progressive relations with the African countries. However, India's relations with Africa are not gigantic like China and USA, for the reason being India's policy of cultural connection, soft power diplomacy and sharing African dreams creates natural relations with the African states. In fact, India's relation with Africa is a golden leaf in its foreign policy doctrine.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on India-Africa relations and it is the outcome of the Conference on India-Africa relations held in Delhi in 2019, and all the contents are holding glorious writings of different experts positioned in various Academic fields. The selected papers mostly discuss India and Africa engagement in the context of global governance, democracy, common security and development challenges, diaspora and people to people connections also contain the perspectives shared by Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri M. Venkai Naidu and Ministry of External Affairs, Shri TS Tirumurti

to attract the reader's attention. Overall this volume has created a roadmap for future India-Africa relations and helps the researcher in further research.

Dr. Nivedita Ray explores her excellent ideas in 'Strengthening India-Africa Ties: Initiatives, Approaches and Emerging Prospects' to make a better understanding among scholars about the different dimensions of Indians in Africa and Africans in India over the century. She rightly point out the significance of 'India- Africa Forum Summit' for both the India and Africa foreign policy objectives. Her writing also includes Indo-Africa partnership in the trade sector, security concerns, and defense cooperation over the period. Initially, India has developed maritime relationships with Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Seychelles, and Mauritius, assisting in terms of military aid. No doubt India is the major fourth largest investor in Africa after the USA, UK and UAE, but the growing importance of China in Africa is putting difficult questions for India to develop its projects in Africa. So, India tries to diplomatically engage with African countries through Telemedicine, scholarships, defense trade, training and capacity-building programmes in the health, education, agriculture, counter-terrorism, maritime, peacekeeping, space and cyber security sectors. Pranav Kumar has rightly observed the importance of WTO in India- Africa increasing fair and systemic trade cooperation. Over the period major areas of convergence and cooperation between India- Africa are based on Agriculture, General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), Trade-related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), etc. However, in the 21st-century issues related to global trade governance create obstruction in India and Africa trade relations and leave far behind both these countries on the global trade map. Looking for the solutions to these issues, India and Africa need to explore new avenues of cooperation at multiple levels and make WTO more rule-driven, transparent, enlightened and equitable.

To reform International Economic Institutions and develop South-South cooperation, Priyanka Pandit provides vivid account of ideas that the coalition of global South can make an effective change in the

international economic organizations. Initially, the growing presence of global powers like China in India and African region put difficulties to develop fair and fastest trade relations. So, both need to clear their controversial areas and develop cooperation in these sectors. S. Shaji specifies in his chapter that the reason behind Asian involvement in Africa and its implementations for democratization and political reforms in the African states. To look into Asia's investment in Africa after the Post Cold war period creates a different picture of Africa in world politics. Chinese are mostly engaged through the public sector companies but not interested in facilitating domestic development and other side India connected through the substantial private companies with the various African states, which attracted certain criticism relating to democratization debates in Africa. In the last two decades, the involvement of these two Asian giants in Africa actively rebuilds the economies and concerns about the protection of human rights, sensitivity to the customs and traditions and non-interference to the domestic affairs of the African States. Sanjay Kumar Pradhan tries to overlap India Africa relations in the energy sector to make better footprints of the Indian companies in the African oil and natural gas market. Africa has now emerged as a hotspot of the global energy market. India's growing energy need in 21st century, creates big issues for future energy security concerns. To meet India's domestic needs, it seeks to maintain a strong partnership with African countries based on the principles of mutual respect and mutual benefit. Delhi needs to strengthen relations with AU member states to ensure good corporate governance, transparency and resource management with equity to play an assertive role in the African energy market. Chander Prakash Wadhwa in his research defines the role of India in UN Peacekeeping missions in Africa and how it works for mutual benefits. Looking to the recent decades Africa is the major contributor to the UN peacekeeping security challenges and out of the total operations Africa hosts 50 percent of these missions. India's help to these missions in Africa creates great scope for cooperation in both these countries in terms of bi-laterally as well as multilaterally.

Now terrorism is the global headache in international politics, and to make it more precise Arvind Kumar broadly looks into the various issues and challenges relating to terrorist activities in India and African states, also focusing on various terror networks and their mode of operations in both these countries. He has also the view that to counter these terrorist coalitions both are need to develop strong counter-terrorism cooperation with a strategic action plan. Highlighting the significance of public diplomacy in India- Africa relations Sanjukta Banerji mostly focuses on the role of the Indian ITEC programme, Indian cinema, civil societies, ICCR fellowship, and medical tourism in African states. Her research argues in the era of new diplomacy to promote south-south cooperation, P-2-P strategy is one of the modern methods to get close engagement with different African states. Promoting the role of Indian Diaspora in Africa Rajneesh Kumar Gupta and Paokholal Haokip both are looking different angles of India- Africa relations. Initially, Rajneesh Kumar rightly observes the significance of Diaspora in Anglophone Africa and divided them into four groups based on their numbers and activities. Mauritius is the only country in Africa having a large number of Indian Diaspora with possibilities of dominant role. In South Africa, Diaspora plays substantial role and the countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia, Botswana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe Diasporas perform possibilities of marginal or indistinct role. To understand the role of Indian Diaspora in Francophone Africa Haokip goes through the history of Indian Diaspora in the West Indian Ocean region and analyzes the policy measures taken by Indian leaders from Nehru to Modi to make Indian Diaspora as a part of great Indian family. From his observations he suggests, that the Indian government needs to more particular Diasporic-centric policy towards Francophone African countries to get close relations with its Diasporas. Living in a digital world, social media played a major role in our day-to-day life. Nandini Sen tries to speak about the significance of Indian cinema, music and dance for the Indian Diaspora (especially third and fourth generation) settled in Africa. In countries like South Africa and Durban, Bollywood works as an Indian Cultural Export to reset socio-cultural and religious ties with its Diasporas.

This book is one of the momentous for research scholars to understand India and Africa relations in general to particular method. It covers several aspects like trade, energy, terrorism, diplomacy, diaspora and so on. Starting from India- Africa forum summit on defense and security fields and understanding the importance of WTO and IMF for India-Africa relations, this book address a unique model of development relevant to the priorities of both countries. It is not only lock up policy-focused discussions on developments in different countries but also highlights India's bilateral relations with different African states as well. All the contents of this book are clearly discussed by the author with adequate data and proper citations. This book shaped a new arena of academic research and suggestive for the Indian government to reset India-Africa relations in a gigantic way.

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