



THE ANNUAL MAGAZINE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
SHAHEED BHAGAT SINGH COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
(ACCREDITED BY NAAC WITH 'A' GRADE)

चक्रVIEWह



DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS IN INDIA

Featured in this Edition

**AMB. SHIVSHANKAR
MENON**

Former National Security
Advisor, Foreign Secretary

*on The Current Trajectory of India's
Foreign Policy*

**PROF. ANUPAMA ROY
AND PROF. UJJWAL
KUMAR SINGH**

Professors

*on Electoral Integrity and the role of
the Election Commission of India*

**PROF. SURINDER
SINGH JHODKA**

Professor, JNU

*on The village economy is not
going anywhere nor is the
agrarian economy.*

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA



Preamble

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC** and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

चक्रVIEWह

“Democracy and Elections in India”

The Annual Magazine
Department of Political Science
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College
University of Delhi

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PRINCIPAL'S NOTE



I am delighted to introduce the 2024-25 edition of चक्रviewह, the annual magazine of the Department of Political Science. The theme - Democracy and Elections in India is an excellent choice, especially in the context of India's dynamic and ever-evolving democratic fabric. In a world where democratic values are increasingly tested, India stands as a beacon of resilience and diversity, showcasing the spirit of electoral democracy on an unprecedented scale.

Elections in India are a celebration of diversity and a testament to the resilience of democratic ideals. They represent the voices of over a billion citizens, reflecting their aspirations, concerns, and vision for the nation. However, democracy and elections are not without challenges. From the integrity of electoral processes to the influence of socio-economic disparities, there is much to explore and address.

This magazine serves as a platform for critical engagement, encouraging students to delve into these complexities and contribute meaningful perspectives. The articles, poetry, and illustrations featured within reflect the intellectual vigor and creative spirit of the department.

I applaud the editorial team and contributors for their dedication to producing such a remarkable publication. This edition will undoubtedly inspire readers to critically examine the role of elections in safeguarding democracy and shaping India's future. May this edition inspire readers to engage critically with the democratic processes shaping our nation.

Best Regards!

Prof. Arun Kumar Attree

Principal

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

University of Delhi

TEACHER IN CHARGE'S NOTE



Dear Readers, as we bring the current edition of our magazine to a close, I am filled with immense pride in presenting this literary endeavor that captures the spirit of 'Democracy and Elections in India'. This magazine stands as a testament to the intellectual vigor and creative potential of our students and faculty members. The journey of putting together this publication has been both challenging and rewarding.

Through these pages, we have attempted to showcase not just the academic excellence of our department, but also the fresh perspectives and analytical thinking that our students bring to contemporary political discourse.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors who have enriched this magazine with their insightful articles, thought-provoking essays, and creative pieces.

Special thanks to the dedicated magazine committee members who worked tirelessly to bring this vision to fruition. Their commitment to excellence and attention to detail have been truly remarkable. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Political Science Department for their constant support and guidance throughout this process. This magazine would not have been possible without their encouragement and valuable inputs.

As we look forward to future editions, I hope this magazine serves as a platform for many more voices and continues to foster intellectual dialogue within our academic community.

With Best wishes!

Dr. Saima Iqbal

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

University of Delhi

CONVENOR'S NOTE



I am pleased to write a note for the third edition of 'चक्रviewह,' the Annual Magazine of the Department of Political Science, Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi. It is the sheer perseverance of our department's students who could maintain the consistency of planning, executing, and implementing the third edition of the magazine. The theme of our third edition is "Democracy and Elections in India".

The magazine was launched under my Teacher-in-Chargeship and the current Teacher-in-Charge was the first convenor of the magazine. I was delighted to become the convenor of the magazine this year.

This edition of the magazine includes more than a dozen articles. The theme of democracy and elections is too vast to capture in one edition. Nevertheless, the students have made a constructive attempt to explore the multifaceted nature of democracy and elections in India.

Students from various colleges have enthusiastically contributed to the magazine, which gives me solace to start a student-centric magazine in our department. Contemporary democracy is uniquely associated with elections, limited government, representation, and separation of powers.

Elections are an integral part of political democracy and pave the way for the citizens to take part in the Indian political process. Democracy in praxis acts as a guardrail between the extremes of autocracy and anarchy.

The completion of the magazine epitomizes the zeal and determination of the students. It is in the context that 'चक्रviewह' brings our perspectives from students that keep the tradition of democracy alive through the constant churning of thoughts and re-looking at political ideas. Once again, I commend the students for their collective efforts to come up with this magazine.

Dr. Krishna Murari

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

University of Delhi

CO-CONVENOR'S NOTE



It is a matter of immense pride to present the third edition of 'चक्रवर्त', the Annual Magazine of the Department of Political Science. This year's theme, "Democracy and Elections in India," reflects the essence of our nation's political identity and provides an opportunity to delve into the complexities of our democratic framework. Elections are not just a procedural exercise but a reflection of the aspirations, struggles, and diversity of our society.

Through this edition, we aim to present a nuanced exploration of the historical evolution of elections in India, their role in shaping governance, and the continuing efforts to enhance inclusivity and transparency in the electoral process. The contributors have thoughtfully examined key issues such as voter behaviour, the influence of technology on elections, and the significance of student-led democratic practices. This critical lens highlights the role of youth in shaping the democratic future while addressing modern political challenges.

This magazine serves as a platform for dialogue and reflection, fostering an informed understanding of democracy's triumphs and trials. It celebrates the resilience of Indian democracy while encouraging readers to critically examine the path ahead. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the editorial team, contributors, and faculty members for their tireless efforts and commitment to this endeavor.

I hope that this edition inspires our readers to engage actively in democratic discourse and contribute meaningfully to the democratic process.

Mr. Gadde Surya

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Shaheed Bhagat Singh College

University of Delhi



"The act of voting is one opportunity for us to remember that our whole way of life is predicated on the capacity of ordinary people to judge carefully and well" — Alan Keyes

Alan Keyes rightly captures the essence of democracy, which is predicated on the operation of free and fair elections.

In India, elections have been an integral part of democracy. While India is dubbed as a 'failed state' in the economic sense, it is hailed as a successful experiment of 'political democracy'.

While the relationship between elections and democracy is not necessarily positive, however in the country, democracy translates to free and fair elections. The initial period is dubbed as 'the Congress system', by Rajnish Kothari, subsequent to that, coalition govts have emerged with short lived coalitions as well as long cum-stable ones such as the NDA and the UPA-1, UPA-2. Ever since the BJP clamored to power in 2014, the country has seen tectonic shifts both in the structural and institutional sense.

The general election of 2014 can be characterized as having changed Indian politics, and the 2024 elections can be dubbed as 'the Election that surprised India', in terms of the blow dealt to the BJP, and the resurgence of coalition politics. The theme of 'Democracy and Elections' in India becomes all the more important considering the multitude of elections that have taken place in the country both at the national and state level. Various trends, patterns and dynamics at large have come out of the results, provoking serious debates about their consequences. Three developments have occurred in Indian politics since 2014, and discerning them is extremely important for a better country.

Firstly, 'de-ideologization', that implies the parties have succumbed to self centred politics, with turning sides again and again, which can be encapsulated by the famous adage 'Aaya ram gaya ram'. Other features associated include the rise of personality cult, tinkering with caste census to resurrect social engineering for popular and polarised mobilisation.

Secondly, 'invisibilisation' of minorities, and other disadvantaged sections of society, by way of a war of narratives, making the system immature at large, and indifferent to the predicaments. This could be termed as the resurgence of 'identity politics'.

Thirdly, 'the politics of compromises', more so in the 2024 elections. Considering the chequered history of political developments since 2014, it is a win for the country at large. Various highlights of the 2024 elections include the return of democracy to J&K after 2019, with the National conference clinching to power; the return of the BJP in Delhi after 27 years; the surprising results in Haryana elections.

For India to be Viksit by 2047, we need the third democratic upsurge that would come with giving way to the politics of development, the strengthening of the institutional infrastructure, the involvement of every stakeholder and section of society. People have to be vigilant to prevent the degeneration of the country's electoral system into something that could endanger the future of people.

With this hope, I am thrilled to present to you the third edition of the magazine 'चक्रviewह'. The volume covers almost every trend that has emerged out of the elections. More than that, it is a collective hope for the betterment of the country. It has articles contributed from across the country by students, prestigious world scholars, interviews, books, etc. This year's magazine is special because of the people who are featured in the edition, who have illuminated the message of the volume by their scholarly insights. I hope readers enjoy each and every part, and we welcome constructive feedback from everyone.

Happy reading!

Azher Ahmad Dar

Editor-in-Chief



*“A key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals.” — **Robert A. Dahl***

India, the world’s largest democracy, is a case study of how electoralism, civic participation, and constitutional governance can be successful.

Dahl’s perspective on democracy emphasizes the fundamental principle of political equality and the responsiveness of governments to the will of the people.

India’s democratic framework embodies this principle through its vast and complex electoral processes, ensuring that citizens’ voices are heard at multiple levels of governance. Whenever there is an election, national, state, or local, we see and marvel at the vast democracy working the fate of over a billion, and we are a part of all of them. Having faced complex interplay between political philosophy, the demands of voters, limits of institutions, and an array of new challenges, Indian democracy is an extremely dynamic adaptive system.

With a lot of enthusiasm, we launch this issue of “Democracy and Elections in India,” a magazine that seeks to study, chronicle, and critically scrutinize the electoral and democratic processes of our country. Our aim is to offer judgmental and objective information about both elections and the government, all the while promoting thinking among our readers.

In this magazine, we try to push and investigate to what extent Indian democracy has survived the test of time, with its triumphs and failures. Various questions that are dealt with in the issue include: How inclusive and representative is our electoral system? Does the increasing commercialization of elections undermine democratic principles? What role do institutions such as the Election Commission of India play in ensuring free and fair elections? Tracking the impact of demography, social media, and grassroots mobilization on voter behavior and campaign tactics.

Analysis of the function of political funding, election spending, and the consequence of politicization in politics. Effects of federalism, regionalism, and state aspirations on electoral results on both the state and national levels.

At a time when misinformation and political polarization threaten objective discussions, “Democracy and Elections in India” aims to be a credible platform for factual analysis, diverse opinions, and scholarly perspectives.

We strive to bring forth well-researched articles with the objective that the readers engage in critical analysis of the past journey of the democratic emergence of India. As we present this issue, our objective is to foster a deeper understanding of democracy and elections in India, encouraging informed debate and engagement. Through the diverse perspectives featured in this magazine, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring electoral integrity in the country.

In closing, we extend our gratitude to our esteemed contributors, editorial team, and readers for their unwavering commitment to intellectual discourse and democratic values. As India stands at the crossroads of political transformation, it is our collective responsibility to safeguard the principles that define its democratic character.

Happy reading!

Aashutosh Kumar

Managing Editor



COVER STORIES





ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND THE ROLE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

*Prof. Ujjwal Kumar Singh and
Prof. Anupama Roy*



ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND THE ROLE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Prof. Ujjwal Kumar Singh and Prof. Anupama Roy



The Election Commission of India (ECI) is widely perceived as a regulatory authority responsible for enforcing rules to ensure the smooth conduct of elections. However, this article argues that the ECI's role extends beyond mere regulation, encompassing substantive functions that shape India's electoral democracy. The authors explore how Article 324 of the Indian Constitution has transformed the ECI into a powerful institution, providing it "a reservoir of powers" in electoral matters. The article is structured into three major sections:

1. The origins and expansion of the ECI's powers under Article 324.
2. The legal doctrine of electoral exceptionalism and its manifestation in the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).
3. The evolving role of the ECI in promoting electoral integrity through voter education and awareness initiatives.

The overarching argument is that the ECI has become a significant democratic actor, actively shaping procedural and substantive electoral rules rather than simply enforcing pre-existing regulations.

THE AUTONOMY OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION AND ARTICLE 324

Established in 1950, the ECI was envisioned as a neutral constitutional authority to oversee elections, distinct from other administrative bodies such as the police or civil services, which had colonial legacies. Unlike many other institutions, the ECI derives its authority directly from the Constitution rather than a parliamentary statute.

Article 324 of the Indian Constitution grants the ECI control over the “superintendence, direction, and control” of elections. However, Article 327 also empowers Parliament to legislate on electoral matters. This duality has resulted in an ongoing contest over the extent of the ECI’s authority. Judicial interpretations of Article 324, starting with the Supreme Court’s 1978 decision in *Mohinder Singh Gill vs Chief Election Commissioner*, have reinforced the idea that the ECI possesses vast “residual powers” to act where the law is silent. This judicial endorsement has significantly expanded the ECI’s autonomy, sometimes causing friction with Parliament and the executive. The authors highlight how the ECI’s actions in areas such as voter registration, candidate nomination, and electoral campaigning reflect an assertive exercise of its constitutional mandate.

ELECTORAL EXCEPTIONALISM AND THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT (MCC)

The concept of electoral exceptionalism refers to the idea that elections create a special legal environment in which standard rules of governance and legal oversight are temporarily altered to ensure free and fair elections. This principle underpins the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which was initially a voluntary agreement among political parties but has evolved into a powerful regulatory tool wielded by the ECI. The MCC is unique because it applies during election periods and is not enforceable as statutory law. Nevertheless, political parties largely adhere to it due to the ECI’s authority. The MCC’s key provisions regulate the conduct of political parties, government actions, and campaign practices to prevent undue influence on voters.

The MCC’s enforcement has led to several conflicts between the ECI and political parties, particularly concerning the commission’s authority to discipline ruling parties. The 1977 general elections, held after the Emergency, marked a turning point, with the ECI using the MCC to restrain the incumbent government’s misuse of state resources.

Source: www.gettyimages.com



Over time, the MCC has evolved from a moral guideline to a quasi-legal instrument enabling the ECI to intervene in election-related misconduct.

However, the ECI has resisted calls to make the MCC legally binding. The authors argue that a statutory MCC would shift enforcement authority to Parliament and the executive, undermining the ECI's discretionary power. By maintaining the MCC as an extralegal tool, the ECI preserves its ability to act decisively in electoral matters without waiting for legislative or judicial intervention.

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND VOTER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF SVEEP

In addition to its regulatory functions, the ECI has played an active role in enhancing electoral integrity through voter education and outreach. The authors highlight the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program as a key initiative in this regard. Launched in 2008, SVEEP aims to increase voter turnout and engagement, particularly among marginalized groups. It employs a range of strategies, including public awareness campaigns, partnerships with civil society organizations, and targeted interventions in low-turnout areas. The program reflects the ECI's broader shift toward a proactive governance role rather than merely an administrative function.

The authors examine case studies of SVEEP initiatives, such as efforts in Jammu and Kashmir to engage historically excluded communities like the Gujjars and Bakerwals. These efforts have led to significant increases in voter participation, illustrating how the ECI's interventions have helped strengthen democratic engagement.

SVEEP also represents a shift in the ECI's approach from regulatory oversight to governance-oriented electoral management. Unlike the MCC, which has sparked political controversy, SVEEP has largely been embraced as a non-partisan effort to enhance democracy. However, the program also aligns with the ECI's broader institutional objective of consolidating its authority in electoral matters.

THE ECI AS A REGULATORY AND POLITICAL ACTOR

The article situates the ECI within the broader transformation of the Indian state from an interventionist entity to a regulatory one, particularly since the economic reforms of the 1990s. During this period, the ECI, along with institutions like the Supreme Court, emerged as a key player in maintaining democratic stability amid political decentralization and coalition governments. The authors engage with scholarly debates on whether the rise of "referee institutions" like the ECI signals the strengthening or weakening of Indian democracy. Some argue that the expansion of ECI's authority reflects a crisis of political representation, where independent institutions fill the governance vacuum left by declining party credibility. Others view the ECI's growing role as a necessary response to democratic challenges, ensuring procedural fairness and electoral legitimacy. Former Chief Election Commissioner James Lyngdoh famously described the ECI as a "pitcher" rather than a mere referee, underscoring its active role in shaping electoral outcomes.

This perspective challenges conventional notions of regulatory neutrality, suggesting that the ECI is an engaged participant in India's democratic process.

CONCLUSION

The authors conclude that the ECI has evolved from a rule-enforcing body into a dynamic institution that actively shapes electoral governance. Through its expansive interpretation of Article 324, the strategic use of the MCC, and voter education initiatives like SVEEP, the ECI has asserted its autonomy and influence.

However, this transformation has also led to tensions with the executive and political parties, raising questions about the appropriate limits of the ECI's power.

Ultimately, the article presents the ECI as an indispensable institution in India's democracy, balancing regulatory enforcement with proactive governance. Its trajectory reflects broader trends in Indian politics, where independent institutions have gained prominence in response to evolving political dynamics.

This is a shortened and revised version of the original piece written by the authors titled as 'Regulating the Electoral Domain: The Election Commission of India', published in the Indian Journal of Public Administration, 2018, 64 (3).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA: BALANCING GOVERNANCE, ECONOMY AND DEMOCRACY

Dr. Krishna Murari



SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA: BALANCING GOVERNANCE, ECONOMY AND DEMOCRACY

Dr. Krishna Murari



From 1951-52 to 1967, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were mostly held simultaneously and thereafter this cycle was broken and now, elections are held almost every year and even at different times within a year, resulting in huge expenditure by the Government and other stakeholders, deployment of security forces and other election officials in such elections other than their basic duties for significantly longer periods, disruption of development work for long periods due to long periods of invocation of Model Code of Conduct, etc. The Law Commission of India in its 170th Report on Reforms of Electoral Laws has observed: "The cycle of holding elections every year and without any proper timing must be put to an end. We must revisit the earlier position where elections to the House of the People and all the Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously. While it is true that we cannot envisage or provide for all situations or possibilities that may arise whether by reason of the use of Article 356 (which has been substantially reduced after the decision of the Supreme Court in *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India*) or for any other reason, the holding of separate election for a Legislative Assembly should be an exception and not the rule of thumb that 'elections to the Lok Sabha and all the State Legislative Assemblies once in five years'."

HOW DID THE ISSUE OF HOLDING SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS ARISE?

When the BJP came to power under the leadership of Narendra Modi in 2014, the issue of one nation, one election started being raised loudly. PM Modi also called it necessary for the country. After this, in 2015, the Law Commission suggested that implementing it would save crores of rupees for the country. After repeated questions were raised about holding separate elections in the country, the idea came that all elections in the country should be held simultaneously. To find the answer to this question, a committee was formed in September 2023 under the chairmanship of former President Ram Nath Kovind. This committee was asked to consider the feasibility of one country, one election. Recently, the report of this committee was accepted by the Modi cabinet, and two bills related to it were introduced in the Lok Sabha. The first is the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, and the second is the Union Territory Laws (Amendment) Bill 2024, which is related to conducting assembly elections in Puducherry, Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir. The Lok Sabha Speaker has now sent these bills to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for detailed discussion and consensus.

THE NEED FOR ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION (ONOE)

Simultaneous elections will bring continuity in governance. Every year, on average, 5 to 7 assembly elections are held in the country, which means that India is always in election mode. This affects all major stakeholders, such as the central government, state government, government employees, teachers on election duty, voters, political parties, and candidates.

Due to elections in various states, the focus of political parties and their leaders and governments remains on elections. If simultaneous elections are held, the focus will also be on implementing welfare policies for the people. Frequent elections also shift the focus of governance from long-term policy goals to short-term policy goals. Due to this noise, economic planning takes a back seat, and the government sometimes indulges in excessive expenditure. Officials will be able to focus on work. Due to elections, a sufficient number of personnel from many departments, including the police, have to be deployed. Conducting simultaneous elections will reduce the need for frequent deployment, which will enable government officials to focus on their core duties.

Frequent elections in India encourage political parties in power to take populist measures rather than undertake nationalistic developmental work. It is widely believed by political parties that it is the surest way to win the confidence of voters, especially the poor, by offering individual benefits. This perception is following our political tradition, which is more focused on the individual voter than on interest groups. Indian politics is replete with numerous examples of political parties competing in promising individual benefits such as social welfare, such as pensions, loan waivers, free housing, food subsidies, free electricity, etc.

The Supreme Court in S. Subramanya Balaji v. State of Tamil Nadu (2013) held that such practices shake the very foundation of free and fair elections.



Therefore, the concept of simultaneous elections can substantially reduce the malpractices arising out of the frequency of elections and also enable the government to better focus on adopting measures that can prove beneficial to the public at large.

Holding simultaneous elections also provides an opportunity to curb the role of black money in election funding, as political parties will stop resorting to illegal sources of funding for recurring election expenses, and the continuous movement of money will greatly reduce the possibility of misuse of money.

Elections require enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct by the Election Commission. Implementation of the Model Code of Conduct during elections halts regular administrative activities. Simultaneous elections will reduce the time for enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct and reduce policy paralysis.

According to the 79th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee, enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct suspends normal government activities and programs of the Central and State Governments in the state where elections are being held.

This leads to policy paralysis and government deficit. Prolonged enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct disrupts the normal life of the public. This also happens due to frequent election campaigns.

Simultaneous elections will also reduce the financial burden and reduce the cost of managing manpower, equipment, and security measures. Frequent elections cost the central and state governments heavily. This leads to the wastage of public money and hampers development work. A large number of security forces also have to be deployed in case of elections. In the 16th Lok Sabha election, the Election Commission of India employed 10 million government officials to run the election.

DEMERITS OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

Even if simultaneous elections become a reality, there are many drawbacks to such a reform. Many opposition political parties have made their opinion clear against this reform. Having simultaneous elections can affect the decision of voters. Voters will focus more on national issues rather than local issues.

Regional parties will not be able to raise regional and local issues in a proper way due to strong central politics. Thus, it will further the centralization trend of Indian politics and polity.

Having simultaneous elections can harm the accountability of the government towards the people. Frequent elections keep the government and legislature in check which will not happen in case of simultaneous elections. According to Dr. SY Qureshi, frequent elections where politicians have to face the voter more than once every year increase accountability as well as create many election-related jobs. This is important for the grassroots economy. But India will have to sacrifice these things if simultaneous elections are held

To have simultaneous elections, elections in some states will have to be postponed. This can only be done through the president's rule, which would be problematic for democracy and federalism. Though simultaneous elections would reduce government expenditure, it is unlikely to reduce the expenditure of political parties, which is one of the reasons for corruption in politics.



The provision of a no-confidence motion in the House may also have to be removed to avoid mid-term elections. Such a constitutional amendment could end this feature of parliamentary democracy.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL CHALLENGES IN INDIA FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

When considering holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, it is pertinent to have a look at the existing provisions in the Constitution as well as other laws relating to elections and the stability of government in general. For instance, the Constitution has prescribed a maximum term of five years for the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures. The Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, derive their powers from the Constitution, which also has an effective anti-defection law. All these provisions together provide a wide range of options for voters to elect their representatives of choice through the electoral system in place in the country.

Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution prescribe a maximum term of five years for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, respectively. They direct that they shall continue for a term of five years from the date of their first sitting “until the term expires.”. There is a provision for extending the term of the House for a limited period only when a proclamation of emergency is in force. Articles 85(1) and 174(1) deal with the session, prorogation, and dissolution of Parliament and state legislatures. They stipulate that the interregnum between the last session of the Lok Sabha/State Legislative Assemblies and the first session of the subsequent House/Legislative Assemblies shall not exceed six months.

Articles 113 and 203 lay down the procedure for grants. Grants for proposed expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India/Consolidated Fund of the State are

required to be submitted to vote by the Parliament/State Legislative Assembly, and if the government fails to pass it, the term of the Council of Ministers is deemed to have expired, paving the way for a change of government. Articles 75(3) and 164(2) provide that the Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assembly. These articles provide that the Council of Ministers shall remain in power as long as it enjoys the confidence of the majority of the members of the House. Article 243(2) deals with elections to municipalities, their duration, and the period of premature dissolution of newly constituted municipalities.

Part 15 of the Constitution deals with elections. Article 324 prescribes the superintendence, direction, and control of elections. Article 326 secures the right to vote on the principle of adult suffrage. Drawing power from Article 327, which deals with the power of Parliament to make provisions relating to elections to the Legislatures, the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, were enacted. Article 328 enables the Legislature of a State to legislate on all matters relating to elections to the Legislatures of the State if Parliament has not so enacted. All these above provisions would require necessary amendments.



CONCLUSION

Considering the Indian demographics and the ever-increasing expectations of the young population, it is imperative to address the impediments to governance and to do so quickly.

Recently, at a public forum, the Hon'ble Prime Minister remarked, "If India is to rise to the challenge of transformation, incremental progress alone is not enough. A metamorphosis is needed...My vision for India is rapid change, not gradual evolution." Unlike gradual, incremental measures, transformational measures generally involve short-term pain and are therefore considered politically risky and unpopular to implement. Therefore, frequent elections reduce the risk-taking capabilities of the government and instead encourage it to opt for a safe status quo approach. Hence, getting out of this "permanent election mode" would be a structural change in mindset that could potentially provide the necessary space for governments to focus on long-term transformational measures without worrying about the next imminent election.

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**THE VILLAGE ISN'T GOING
ANYWHERE, NOR IS THE
AGRARIAN ECONOMY.**

Prof. Surinder Singh Jodhka



THE VILLAGE ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE, NOR IS THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY.

Prof. Surinder Singh Jodhka



Talking about agriculture has not been fashionable for quite some time. This is surprising because agriculture remains the single most important sector of the Indian economy. Its share in the national GDP has indeed been coming down over the past seven decades. However, it still makes up nearly 15 percent, which is not significantly any less than the manufacturing sector. Even more importantly, it remains the biggest source of employment in the country. Furthermore, the effective value of agriculture far exceeds its share in GDP figures or the number of workers to whom it provides full-time employment.

It continues to be a critical source of livelihood for many more, who may have found alternative sources of employment but have not completely given up working on their small plots of land. Besides the value addition to their household economies, owning and working on their agricultural land also gives them a sense of belonging and a dignified source of identity.

Surprisingly, it is not only agriculture that has seen a steady decline in the narratives on the Indian economy; the village too has been relegated to the margins in the national imagination. This is despite the fact that nearly two-thirds of India continues to be “rural.”. It now only appears as a site of deprivation, seeking state benevolence and welfare schemes. The middle-class-centric urban media actively reinforces such an image of the village.

Narratives on the rural are also marked by an utter ignorance of the nature of rural life across sections of the urban middle classes and the elite. The rural, for example, is often viewed as being synonymous with agriculture. Everyone living in a village is presumed to be a farmer/peasant. However, this is far from true.



The social organization of the Indian village has always been a very complex and diverse reality. The popular notion of a 'peasant economy,' where families cultivated their small holdings with family labor and produced food grains primarily for their own consumption, was never the case in India.

The norm of caste did not allow nearly half of the rural residents to cultivate land. However, not all the artisans and Dalit castes in the village were dependent slaves of the local landlords. Many of them were skilled and specialized in producing a wide range of commodities. Today, a larger proportion of rural incomes comes from non-farm activities across regions of the subcontinent.

COLONIAL NARRATIVE

The narrative of the village as a depressing place begins with its colonial representations. They popularized the view of it being a stagnant economic system for centuries and millennia, caught in the whirlpool of caste and a self-imposed culture of isolation. And that the local people purportedly surrendered to the vagaries of nature and their pre-given karma.

In reality, however, the agrarian economy of the pre-colonial period had neither been a "backward" system nor a homogenous universe or a sea of isolated villages. For example, Indian cultivators did not depend solely on rain. They had evolved a range of sustainable systems and modes of irrigation involving wells and ponds. The cultivators also produced a substantial surplus. Thriving urban centers and flourishing political empires of ancient and medieval times are proof of this.



Much of the wealth that the empires possessed, in search of which the European colonizers came to India in the first place, was sourced primarily from its agrarian riches.

However, by the time the British left, Indian agriculture indeed presented a sight of hopelessness. Driven exclusively by their colonial interests, the British experimented with cultivators, forcing them to pay land revenues in cash, which in turn made them switch over to cash crops such as cotton. The British exported cotton to their cloth mills running on power looms. These policies also killed the local craft in the towns and cities of India, resulting in the de-industrialization and de-urbanization of the region. While the dependence of the population on agriculture grew, production of food grains declined, resulting in misery and hunger. Millions perished in frequent famines.

AGE OF DEVELOPMENT

By the 1960s, the Nehruvian state managed to find the resources to invest in modernizing its agrarian economy. Helped by some global agencies and using new technologies developed elsewhere, India moved onto a path of increased productivity. Though confined to a few promising pockets, the state investment in agriculture provided an impetus to growth. Within a decade or so, the country was producing enough food.

The success of Green Revolution technology during the 1960s and 1970s in select pockets was an important turning point in the development history of India. Its implications were not confined to economic growth.

It transformed rural social relations and traditional authority structures in the regions where it succeeded. The face of the countryside began to change rapidly. In terms of social groups, the most visible beneficiaries of this change were the substantial landowners from the locally dominant caste groups, who had traditionally been landowners and cultivators.

The newly emergent agrarian elite farmer did not speak only for his own caste or class. He spoke on behalf of the entire village. However, this excitement about the new technology and growing incomes did not last too long. By the mid-1980s, the Indian countryside began to show a new kind of restiveness; this was particularly pronounced in the pockets that had been at the forefront of agrarian modernization. The surplus-producing farmers began to mobilize themselves into unions demanding subsidies on farm inputs and higher prices.

Farmers mobilized themselves in different parts of India quite successfully for over a decade. Their movements of the 1980s also signaled the rise of a new mobile social category of rural people. They had prospered, which had also brought them close to the market economy. Though they spoke for agrarian interests, they aspired to go beyond the village.

The agrarian economy could not satisfy their aspirations for social and cultural mobility. They were quick to move from their local seats of power to legislative assemblies in the state capitals. The surplus they generated from agriculture went into the education of their wards and into urban trade and other non-agricultural occupations. Their educated children often found jobs in the local bureaucracy and other expanding departments of the state government.

The neo-liberal reforms of the early 1990s proved to be a turning point for the Indian economy. The private corporate sector moved to the driving seat, and its growth was rapid. The size of the national economy expanded, but it did not generate too many new jobs. Thus, unlike the “classical” growth trajectories of the industrialized nations of the Global North, even when the share of India’s agriculture declined rather rapidly, a much larger proportion of the workforce remained employed in agriculture. Such a decline in the relative size of the agrarian economy in terms of its value addition has produced many imbalances, going beyond the sphere of income and employment.

The growing size and power of the urban and corporate capital also marginalized the agrarian economy in the national imagination, the effects of which began to also be felt by those working in the sector. For example, as mentioned above, the growth in agriculture had previously given enough income and aspiration to the landowning classes/castes to educate

their wards, hoping that they would find employment outside the village. But in the new schema, this was no longer the case.

Those who controlled corporate capital preferred their own, those from the urban upper castes and urban educated individuals with the required cultural capital, leaving those coming from agrarian backgrounds in the lurch. As the “reforms agenda” spread across the states, their ability to generate jobs began to shrink. With their own growing debts, the state governments had no choice but to reduce their salary budgets and cut down on hiring.



WAY FORWARD

What could be the way forward? From a purely market- and growth-driven perspective, agriculture is merely an economic activity that needs to be rationally incorporated and integrated into the larger corporate economy. Indian corporate capital also appears willing to engage with agriculture, albeit on its own terms. Food processing could be a big business in a rapidly urbanizing world with growing numbers of the middle class, within India and abroad.

To the neo-liberal policymakers of the Indian state, unwilling to invest in agriculture, this appears to be the most desirable solution for a sector complaining of crises for a long time. The eagerness with which the Union government legislated the three farm laws in 2020 is clear evidence of it.

However, Indian farmers have also come to see themselves as citizens who not only have a sense of what is good for them but also want to be involved in the policymaking process. While the logic of corporate-led growth may make sound economic sense, the farmers' anxieties of losing control over their livelihoods are not entirely baseless. The challenge is not simply that of reconciling two divergent views. It is far more fundamental. Who decides for whom? As primary stakeholders, the farmers' wish to be heard is hardly illegitimate in a country that claims to be a democracy.

However, the 'Indian farmer' is also not a singular category. They are diverse and divided by their regional histories, climatic conditions, and even social identities. Yet they are not anti-development. On the contrary, they too are eager to enhance their incomes, and improve their welfare and capabilities, as any citizen of a developing country would be.

Thus, the answers too should not be visualized in the singular. Plural modes of development are not only possible but are also an urgent need of our times. The way forward does not lie in an alternative policy frame to be visualized by yet another set of experts. It ought to emerge from effective and meaningful conversations.

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SCHOLARS SPEAK





MAKING OF THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION

Dr. Rupak Kumar

MAKING OF THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION

by Dr Rupak Kumar

Political parties are averse to be called as “undemocratic”; thereby, welcoming opposition in the dynamics of power in the political system. What makes a democracy backslide in absence of a robust parliamentary opposition? An old proverb ‘the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy’ is apt to explain the norms. The essence of parliamentary democracy lies in its substantive representativeness, accountability, scrutiny and transparency.

A parliamentary opposition is prerequisite to a parliamentary democracy, as it holds the executive (who commands power) to account and acts as a political alternative for a political system. Dahl famously writes that the Opposition is an essential component of democratic representation. It can be said that the opposition occupies a space between guardrails. The space between the guardrails is supposed to be a legitimate space guaranteed constitutionally under the domain of the state. No system other than democracy can sustain and nurture thick and thin diversities and pluralities of expression, thought, deliberation and action. The realization of this system, at least in the contemporary world, is premised on the basis that the people will elect the government in a competitive mode of free and fair elections ascertaining legitimacy to the structure of the legislature and executive. Those who cannot form the government will sit in the opposition and will be equally considered as legitimate as they have participated in the larger political processes of a parliamentary system. Sartori argues that the constitutional opposition does not merely recognize the legitimacy of the state but also functions and adheres to the structures and processes stipulated by the constitution. Additionally, the competitive mode of free and fair elections yields governments and oppositions which may, over time, alternate in terms of holding office or being in opposition upholding democratic principles. As the axiom goes, today’s opposition is/may be tomorrow’s government and vice versa.

The underlying assumption in the government-opposition dynamics is that there are multiple voices, ideas, principles and concerns of parties who may or may not necessarily agree with the government. A democracy ensures constitutional safeguards to guarantee that even the voices that oppose or differ from the majority have enough space to co-exist and express dissent. The performance of a parliamentary opposition can be judged based on how effectively and coherently they counter government’s policy agenda, democratic decay and backsliding in case the government’s leadership betrays and shows authoritarian propensities. The parliamentary opposition acts as a constraint when any government behaves unconstitutionally, subverts constitutional values and violates fundamental rights. In turn, a robust democracy ensures the presence of parliamentary opposition without the fear of being annihilated, intimidated, controlled or managed by institutions or those in power, i.e., the government and ruling party/ies.

Why is it the case that often ruling parties are averse to good opposition, at least in action or on the ground? The riddle is that the moment ruling parties start opposing/repressing/intimidating the parliamentary opposition even at the level of ideas and as a normative possibility, one loses the claim to call oneself democratic

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**SAVARNA PARTIES HAVE ONCE
AGAIN ISOLATED DALIT VOICES**

Dr. Suraj Yengde

SAVARNA PARTIES HAVE ONCE AGAIN ISOLATED DALIT VOICES.

by Dr Suraj Yengde

The BJP and Congress's fear tactics triumphed because Mayawati and Prakash Ambedkar failed to convince Muslim and backward class voters they relied on. Then, there is their working styles, both vastly different.

Commentators and political party leaders seem to habitually attack Dalits for exercising their right to vote and choosing whom to support. These offhand remarks are usually made to psychologically pressure Dalit voters to get agitated with their leaders. The mistrust, clubbed with critiques of opponents, cements the view that Dalit politics is doomed and, thus, a better option is to choose between the lesser evil.

The lesser evil is a system that benefits people with certain last names and their cabal. They are found in all political parties and social movements. It is this hidden state that the Ambedkarite political sphere can decipher, for they have seen first-hand how exploitation is managed by the iron fist of handlers who now claim political leadership.

The success of the 2024 general elections was the return of coalition governments. Dalit-led parties that fought as coalition partners like the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, Lok Janshakti Party and Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) made gains in their vote share and even had their leaders in Parliament.

However, two parties suffered major electoral setbacks: the Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and an experimental Maharashtra-based Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) led by Prakash Ambedkar. Both gained the feared suspicion of the media and Savarna parties. They did not win the mandate but circumstantially established their impetus. Ironically, both are absent from popular social movements. There are many reasons for their defeat.

Besides distancing of urban middle-class Dalit voters, acquiescing to unfavourable parties and attitudinal drawback of the leadership, propaganda against these parties also played a role. Dr Ambedkar envisioned a non-hegemonic force that could act as a power broker and force the ruling dispensation to act in their favour. The Scheduled Caste Federation's Manifesto before the 1952 polls resolved to not have an alliance with "Congress, Hindu Maha Sabha, R.S.S., Communist Party and Jan Sangh".

In 1956, the Republican Party of India's foundation was also based on similar ideals. Kanshi Ram famously interpreted this as "mazboot nahi, majboor sarkar chahiye (we need a helpless government, not a strong one)". The logic was that this would force the majoritarian party to not act in self-indulgence.

The purpose of Ambedkarite parties has been to protect their interests and rule the country. This is against the belief of the political class, which prefers a subordinate leader as opposed to an articulate one. The Congress, with its divisive agenda, has once again isolated independent Dalit political voices, calling them second-rank subalterns of the BJP. The very Congress that was against Ambedkar and preferred Jagjivan Ram as an ideal opponent now acknowledges the former's credibility. With that, it has taken upon itself to become the custodian of Ambedkar and his people — like a new convert trying hard to denounce anyone and anything that appears inconsistent with their newfound religion. Slandorous epithets directed against Ambedkarite parties are a testimony to similar interests embraced by the Congress and BJP.

Their records demonstrate their agenda to establish a feudal-Brahminical model that leverages the human resources of the backward classes, Dalits and Adivasis to meet their goals. To do this, they also need unquestionable loyalties of reserved seats. They did not treat BSP or VBA with desirable respect in seat-sharing or make enough attempts to bring them on board. The consequence of which they're suffering now. The BJP and Congress's fear tactics triumphed because Mayawati and Prakash Ambedkar failed to convince Muslim and backward class voters they relied on. Then, there is their working styles, both vastly different. The BSP is pathetic when it comes to communication and its reliance on old style of activism, something that has cost it its future.

The lack of innovation and creativity to get influential masses on its side has isolated leaders from those who speak louder. Though attachment to the Ambedkar family lineage still draws the rural masses, the people I have interacted with in political circles and urban voters have expressed dismay over Mayawati and Prakash Ambedkar's politics and nature of interactions. However, by using the Vanchit Bahujan formula to the 'nagnath-saapnath' referencing, Prakash Ambedkar seems to have embraced Kanshi Ram's radical vision. Will the setback alarm the party leadership or will they invent new ways to blame the Opposition and the government?

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A man with dark hair, glasses, and a mustache is speaking at a podium. He is wearing a dark jacket over a blue shirt and a dark tie. Two microphones are in front of him. The background is blue with large yellow letters, partially visible as 'COUNCIL'.

HOW THE AAP LOST ITS PLOT OFFICE IN DELHI

Rahul Verma

HOW THE AAP LOST ITS PLOT OFFICE IN DELHI.

by Rahul Verma

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) pursuit for office in Delhi ended on Saturday after a long wait of 27 years. How did the BJP win the national capital, which also happens to be the nation's political capital?

A month ago, most political commentators believed that while the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) may suffer some losses, it still had the edge in Delhi given the gap between the two parties, both in terms of votes and seats. Despite sweeping the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi multiple times in the past three decades, the BJP had to reconcile with the main Opposition's slot in successive assembly polls. There were many reasons for this, including the absence of a state-level leader that could match the Congress's Sheila Dixit, and later the AAP's Arvind Kejriwal.

This time multiple factors seem to have added in small measures to deliver a clinching win for the BJP. There were indications that the party changed its strategy in the last three weeks. Initially, the BJP was more focused on attacking Kejriwal over corruption charges and the appropriation of government funds (the Sheesh Mahal allegation being an example) along with several welfare promises. Closer to the polling date, the ground-level campaign started highlighting civic issues and misgovernance. It turned the focus on the condition of roads, water supply, and garbage clearance, among other issues.

The fact that the AAP has been in power in the Delhi Municipal Corporation since 2022 did not help the party's cause. Finally, tax benefits to the middle class in the Union Budget consolidated the BJP's core constituency.

Post-poll surveys indicate that the BJP made gains among all the sections. It appears that there was greater consolidation among the middle class, men, older voters, and rural areas in western Delhi.

The advantage that the AAP expected from women voters and the poor did not materialise on the scale it expected. With a higher proportion of men in the electorate and a relatively large middle class, the AAP's equation would have worked only if women and the poor turned out in much higher numbers-the voter turnout this time was 60.54%, two percentage points lower compared to 62.59% in 2020.

There is an important lesson for all parties in the Delhi verdict: Welfare schemes work only in conjunction with other factors. On their own welfare promises cannot overcome perceptions of non-performance in government. The defeats of the BRS in Telangana, the YSR Congress in Andhra Pradesh, and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha illustrate this point.

Furthermore, the AAP did not have any new positive stories in this election. Much of its campaign plank was based on the achievements of its first term. The defeat of the party's top leadership, including Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, indicates that the AAP was facing strong anti-incumbency. The Janata darbars that were the hallmark of Kejriwal's first term halted during the Covid-19 epidemic and were not revived. The distance between the voters and their leaders kept increasing from then.

The office of the lieutenant governor did create hurdles, but that was not so much a concern for the voter:

Several reports indicated that voters felt they had given the mandate to the AAP to govern, not to constantly complain.

The AAP can take solace in that it continues to have a decent vote share. But Kejriwal's loss in the New Delhi seat will hurt: the party's narrative that the corruption cases were part of a political conspiracy did not find traction with voters.

The party, which has been in office in Delhi since its inception, must now learn to survive for at least another five years without power and stall potential desertions of leaders and cadres. The party's national expansion, which started with the win in Punjab and a decent showing in Gujarat and Goa, may now have to be put on hold.

For the BJP, the Delhi victory signals its political dominance and helps the party to put aside the setback of the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The party has shown itself to be an election machine that quickly learns from mistakes and course-corrects. It has won three states since the Lok Sabha results in June, and it was on the backfoot in each one of them at the start of the campaign. The win in Haryana corrected the perception that the BJP's and Modi's electoral popularity had peaked. The sweeping majority in Maharashtra ended whatever scepticism was left. And now, Delhi puts the party in the driver's seat ahead of the Bihar assembly elections slated later this year.

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THE VIOLENT ORIGINS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

Pooja Singh

THE VIOLENT ORIGINS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

by Pooja Singh

In light of the recent trends of democratic backsliding in the country, we must ask an uncomfortable but important question—do our current political events suggest a breakaway from India’s democratic past, or do they merely reflect a more insidious issue—India’s refusal to reckon with the violent origins of its democratic institutional structure? If we want to arrive at a meaningful response, it is important to pay attention to the latter. Among academicians and pundits alike, democratic countries are perceived as nations that have reached the pinnacle of political evolution. Democracy is synonymized with lack of violence, public accountability, and a civic culture that enables tolerant collective existence. But one quick glance at political history shows that democracies do not emerge or function as such. To become and remain democratic, countries both experience and enact violence. The story of democracy, hence, is a story of violence, and the chapter of Indian democracy must be read within the confines of this narrative.

Democracy isn’t simply a form of government. It is also an ideology that stipulates the manner in which individuals should share public space and treat each other. Insofar as its impact is concerned, it is nothing short of a way of life. As an ideology, it believes in sharing power with groups of people who have conflicting or simply different interests and requirements. Democracy envisions a civil society whose constituents are inclined towards the establishment of peace. The common perception contends that democratically inclined individuals are aware that violence is a zero-sum practice. If violence persists, the peaceful utopian society can never be fully actualized in its purest form. Therefore, the ideological bearings of democracy are not violent. The transformation of democracy from an ideology to a practice, that is, the establishment of a government and political body on the basis of principles of democracy, however, is violent.

Democratization of a society involves secularization of power, end of authoritarian rule, transition from a monarchical sovereignty to people-based sovereignty, guarantee of individual freedom and liberty among things. But democracy isn’t a pre-existing condition that needs to be brought to the forefront. The establishment of democracy is an endeavor that requires the demolition of the existing political reality to make way for the new. The people that are to be democratized are not an already instituted reality, ready to undergo the aforementioned transition. They are a constructed group. The category of “We, the people,” which is the foundational idea of any democratic regime, from whom the government and decision-making institutions derive their legitimacy, is externally imposed and is exclusionary against an ‘Other.’

For example, the French Revolution, which is seen as one of the first significantly successful attempts at establishing democracy, wasn’t just violent in terms of the tools employed but also because the identity of an indigenous population was disrupted to

construct an entirely new one, and an agreement to establish such an arrangement was arrived at by only a select group of people. The story of Indian democracy, enmeshed in the anti-colonial struggle and the artificially Hindu-other divide created by Brahmanical supremacy, is a similar story of political organization in the face of ‘two others’—the British colonial power and the non-Hindu population seen as aliens within the nationhood aspirations of a Hindu majority embedded in the social hierarchy of caste. Thus, Indian democracy was born, not simply as a force against the ‘exploitative white man’ but also within and against a constant struggle against the violence perpetuated by Hindu ethnonationalism.



The proponents of Hindu ethnonationalism argue that India as a nation primarily belongs to Hindus and thus must be governed by dictates of Hinduism, interpreted through the lens of Brahminism. Hindus, in this regard, are understood as a collective “united not only by the bonds of the love they bear to a common motherland, but also by the bonds of a common blood. They are not only a nation but also a race-jati.” Envisioned as such, Hindutva is an all-encompassing way of organizing life—political, social, and religious spheres included. All Hindus must adhere to the ideological beliefs of the project and structure their interpersonal and political existence to suit the discursive realities outlined by the movement. As early as 1931, even before the country was born, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar declared that “no self-respecting untouchable worth the name would be proud of this land,” as India’s history of caste discrimination meant that it potentially had very little to offer to Dalits as an independent political homeland.

Now, as opposition leaders and civil activists languish in prisons, as the police continue to disproportionately criminalize and penalize marginalized communities, and as India is ranked 8th among countries at risk of nonstate-led mass killings due to rising religious nationalism (Early Warning Project Statistical Risk Assessment Report 2022-23), this declaration carries an unfortunate resonance, not merely for Dalits but for an ever-expanding group of religious minorities.

Since its inception as a populist democracy, India has struggled to come to terms with this exclusionary form of nationalism that has found ideological and material support within notable parts of India’s Hindu majority. It is this struggle that has come to the forefront in recent times under the BJP’s unprecedented foothold in electoral politics and the increased radicalization of the Hindu populace.

Democratic structures, which were born out of violence, are being used for violence. In the name of strengthening a democratic civil society, institutions are increasingly being made to penetrate the bodies of minority communities to optimize the functioning and survival of the Hindutva factions. The bodies of Muslim, Dalit, and Adivasi citizens, as well as the bodies of women and queer persons, are increasingly being made available to the state as an 'object' to be acted upon. The bureaucratic fashion in which the population is imagined is making these communities into expendable non-persons. Violence under these conditions does not necessarily manifest itself in physical form. At times, it merely means a disruption of the routine lives of individuals in a manner that they cannot exercise complete personal agency.

The violent origins of Indian democracy are haunting its current life in myriad forms, every single one more cruel than the last, and as long as we do not engage with the former, it will be difficult to make sense of and fight against the latter.

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ANALYSING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN INDIA

Dr. Kamna Sagar

ANALYSING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN INDIA

by Dr. Kamna Sagar

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how social media has been used and is being used for political parties and election campaigns in India. In the Indian election system, social media plays an increasingly important role in campaigning. It is assumed that these new forms of media will play a key role in attracting voters, particularly the younger generation. The use of social media allows politicians to engage actively with potential voters, unlike traditional media. Politicians and candidates can share their beliefs, goals, and accomplishments on social media, enabling voters to feel more directly involved. The purpose of the present research is to examine the use and rise of social media in politics and how that affects public participation in politics. The study is primarily concerned with examining the rise of social media as a medium for reaching voters. Second, why people used social media during the election campaign is based on these uses and satisfactions.

Keywords: Social media, Election, political parties, younger generations, India.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the fourth estate of democracy is thought to be extremely important. In the twenty-first century, social media and other communication tools are expanding rapidly. Social networking is becoming beneficial in every aspect of society. Additionally, social media enables communication between a vast number of people and governments, businesses, organizations, and lawmakers. It has long been recognized that free media is essential to democracy and has a significant impact on election-related political discourse. Social media's structure differs greatly from traditional media, and it enables users to share news and information in a variety of ways. Today, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other social networks are regarded as equally important as traditional media like radio, television, and newspapers in terms of their ability to change politics. However, it is unclear and complex how this phenomenon contributes to a rise in political engagement and election participation.

The emergence of social media and its impact on the public and politics have started to change how campaigns are run and how politics is conducted. For example, after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, social media began to become more significant in Indian politics. During the 2009 national election, social media was utilized to engage voters. It was the first time the Indian Foreign Ministry used Twitter for diplomatic aims.

The development of Web 2.0 and ICT has given individuals a lot of opportunities. Politics is not an exception to the ways that the internet and social media revolution have impacted other aspects of society. India's digital population has been increasing over the past ten years. Scholars claim that the fast rise of the Internet has served as a companion, philosopher, and guide for many cultures in India. Some view the Internet as a potentially transformative technology that may promote development, democracy, and positive cultural change. Indians are thought to be among the world's most active social media users.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICS

The actual significance of social media for election results is mainly unclear, despite its importance in political discourse. The impact of social media on political participation has been extensively examined in Western nations, particularly the United States.

For example, most Americans use social media or texting apps. According to Pew Research Center (2019c), YouTube is the most popular social media platform in the US, with 73% of adults using it, followed by Facebook (69%), and Instagram (37%). In the United States, 22% of persons use Twitter, comparable to Snapchat (24%), and Whatsapp (20%). The Russian Internet Research Agency's attempts to help Trump's campaign (e.g., New York Times, 2017); the consulting firm Cambridge Analytica's involvement in multiple political campaigns (e.g., The Guardian, 2018); and the role of widely disseminated false information (also known as "fake news") in the 2016 U.S. elections (e.g., Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017) and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom (e.g., UK Parliament, 2019) have influenced a large portion of the recent public discourse regarding the role of social media platforms.

The first politician who successfully utilized social media for election-related communication and campaigning was US President Barack Obama. He used social media for his advantage and won the US presidential election. Once more, Obama led a triumph in the 2012 US election due to his strong social media interaction with his supporters. During the Arab Spring, social media played a major role in organizing people across West Asia



and North Africa against their monarchical regimes. During the 2016 presidential election, for instance, Trump received less votes from demographic groups who were more likely to use social media or the internet in general (The Hill, 2016; Boxell et al., 2017, 2018). Additionally, social media evidence is predominantly, especially on Twitter. Even if there seems to be a concentration of right-wing networks, according to Pew Research Center (2019d), just 35% of Twitter users identified as Republicans in 2018 and 60% as Democrats. According to the Pew Research Center (2020), Democrats who use Twitter are significantly more liberal and less interested in identifying points of agreement with Republicans.

According to the Pew Research Center (2019a), 26% of American Twitter users followed Obama in 2019 while 19% followed Trump. In addition, liberals are more likely than conservatives to follow more media and political accounts and obtain political news on Facebook or Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2014; Eady et al., 2019). According to Hargittai (2015), Clinton supporters were far more likely to use Twitter and Reddit, which are frequently cited as pro-Trump elements. Despite the fact that users may choose some of the material they view on social media, Twitter content disproportionately favors the Democratic party.

India's 2014 parliamentary election is referred to as a social media election as it was the biggest democratic election in history and a significant portion of it was conducted online. While online voting activity increased compared to previous years, the nation first witnessed several significant elections: 150 million people between the ages of 18 and 23 were given the right to vote, two out of three Indians are under 35, and 66.4 percent of voters cast ballots, an unprecedented turnout.



India's Internet penetration rate increased by an astonishing 14% over the previous year and is presently estimated to be at 243 million, or around 19% of the country's total population. The anti-corruption campaign led by Anna Hazare highlighted the importance of social media in Indian politics. Facebook and Twitter helped Anna Hazare's fight become a mass movement (Kattakayam 2011). Women utilized social networking services, like Twitter, to speak out against sexual harassment. The MeToo movement in India was inspired by the worldwide women's campaign and gained support on Twitter.

Social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, was crucial in mobilizing Delhi's citizens to protest against the Nirbhaya gang rape case. The government was obliged to make arrests and enact stronger laws against rapists as a result of the strong protests by students, members of political opposition parties, and non-governmental organizations (Padhiyar 2019). The BJP, INC, BSP, and SP were spreading controversial information and false news via their WhatsApp groups two months prior to the 2019 Lok Sabha election (Narayanan et al. 2019). Over 9 million volunteers known as "cell phone pramukhs" helped spread the word about the BJP's and Narendra Modi's development initiatives, policies, and successes by starting WhatsApp groups.

Since 2012, India has seen an increase in the use of social media for political reasons. In the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, social media's significance reached new levels. During these two elections, the BJP skillfully used social media, compelling the other political parties to use these internet channels for their own campaigns. Without allowing for digital media, political campaigning is hard to imagine. Congress, the opposing party, has also been messaging voters via WhatsApp groups.

The "Digital Sathi" app was introduced by Congress and used digital media to communicate with voters face-to-face at polling places. WhatsApp attempted to halt the disinformation campaign, but during the 2019 election, the app was widely utilized.

Since 2009, while he was Gujarat's chief minister, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been active on Twitter (Chaturvedi 2020). Rahul Gandhi, his rival, began using Twitter following his loss in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Rahul Gandhi finally understood how important Twitter was for the participation of audiences. Despite its flaws, the Congress party has made great strides in exploiting digital media after the defeat (Khosla 2018). Through strategic use of social media, Rahul Gandhi emerged as a legitimate public political rival during the 2019 election (Antil and Verma 2019). According to NDTV (2014), 227 million posts, comments, and conversations have been made by 29 million Indians between the announcement of the 2014 elections till the end of the election. According to one analysis, social media did not significantly alter the outcome of the 2014 Lok Saba elections, but it did bring up a number of other important concerns (Kanungo 2015). Additionally, it showed that while social media exposure boosted political engagement in the 2019 elections, it had no effect on participants' voting behavior.

During the pandemic, politicians relied heavily on social media to engage with their supporters. Due to the pandemic, legislative assembly elections in several Indian states in 2021 and 2022 were mostly digital. India's electoral commission has restricted physical rallies, forcing parties and candidates to rely increasingly on internet platforms. The BJP, known for its technological prowess, utilized digital media during the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. The head of the BJP's IT department, Amit Malaviya, claims that PM Modi spoke at many virtual rallies with thousands of attendees (Shekhar 2022). On their social media accounts, millions of people watched these online gatherings. Similar online rallies were hosted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at different times and locations, including during the West Bengal and Bihar assembly elections. During the assembly elections, the BJP has used social media well. The party spread its welfare initiatives locally by using these channels. The BJP cadres have received extensive training on how to use social media. With a resounding majority, the BJP won the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. The party boasts a skilled social media staff in addition to outstanding central and state leaders.

The BSP in Mayawati, Uttar Pradesh, also used virtual gatherings to promote its programs and oppose the INC, SP, and BJP. To spread its ideas and policies throughout the state, the BJP established more than 17,000 WhatsApp groups in advance of the 2022 Punjab assembly elections (PTI 2022b). The BJP used hashtags like #NawaPunjab Bhajpa De Naal and #PunjabWithBJP to win over votes in Punjab. Additionally, Congress maintained a strong social media presence throughout the Punjab assembly elections. Along with using hashtags like #CongressHiAayegi and #LokaanDiSarkar, the Congress also tried to win over people. When the Aam Aadmi Party took office in Punjab, they launched a great internet campaign.

Unemployment, inflation, the agricultural crisis, education, and COVID-19 mismanagement were the main issues of the AAP's campaigns (Dahiya 2022). Additionally, Arvind Kejriwal started a campaign called "Ek Mauka Kejriwal Ko" in which he urged Delhi residents to use their social media accounts to share videos supporting the AAP.

Due to a pandemic, the election commission limited physical rallies in Kerala's assembly election, leading to a rise in social media use. Politicians used digital media to engage people during their campaigns. During the Kerala election period, well-known professional singers contributed to party campaigns. Sitara Krishnakumar's song "Urappannu Keralam," and Sooraj Santhosh's song "Hridayapaksham" were both dedicated to the Left Democratic Front (Praveen 2021). The promotional songs were circulated across numerous social media sites. Social media was an important aspect of the BJP's campaign in the 2022 Uttarakhand assembly elections. The party made every effort to reach out to voters at all levels. The party established over 10,000 WhatsApp and Telegram groups around the state to communicate with people. The BJP has launched the "Dev Bhoomi Ke Digital Yodha" campaign, encouraging young people to join as "Cyber Yodha" (Deccan Herald 2022).

CONCLUSION

The rise of social media in India has led to a tangible and rapid transformation in politics. Social media aims to connect persons across distances. India has the highest amount of internet access, and online information is seen as more reputable than traditional media sources. This conclusion contradicts a widely held belief that social media played a key role in Trump's election victory, but it is in line with growing evidence that suggests social media users were less likely to support Trump in 2016 or have divisive opinions. We discover that throughout the presidential elections of 2016 and 2020, Twitter reduced the Republican party's vote share.

During elections, all major political parties in India use social media as a key campaign tool. Social media campaigning is becoming important in Indian elections, including the Lok Sabha and assembly. Since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, social media has become an important tool for campaigning and communication in Indian elections. During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, politicians utilized social media to engage voters in unprecedented ways. Due to the pandemic, the Election Commission of India banned physical gatherings, leaving candidates to campaign and engage with their constituents solely through social media.

During the epidemic, politicians used digital media to interact with voters in assembly elections across India. During the post-pandemic assembly elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, political parties, particularly the BJP and Congress, used social media extensively to reach out to big audiences. In India, social media platforms have improved communication by making it more democratic, inclusive, and attractive.

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ARTICLES





POPULATION CENSUS 2026: A CATALYST FOR ELECTORAL REFORMS

Maleeha Shafi

POPULATION CENSUS 2026: A CATALYST FOR ELECTORAL REFORMS

by Maleeha Shafi

INTRODUCTION

In Bihar, a single MP represents over 2.5 million people, while sparsely populated northeastern states enjoy far less representation, laying bare the cracks in India's electoral system. As the nation strives towards its \$5 trillion economic goal, its democratic foundations falter under the weight of outdated election laws and deep-rooted inefficiencies, one such being FPTP. While no alternative to FPTP exists within India's parliamentary framework, the Population Census 2026 serves as a golden opportunity to enable constituency delimitation and electoral reforms, which are imperative to breathe new life into India's democracy and restore public faith in its electoral processes.

Elections, the backbone of democracy, are increasingly plagued by systemic flaws that undermine their fairness and credibility. The shortcomings of the Election Commission of India further exacerbate these issues, as its regulatory framework remains inadequate in addressing key concerns. For instance, during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission identified 120 cases of "paid news," yet the absence of specific legislation to curb this malpractice left these violations largely unaddressed. Additionally, ruling parties often exploit government resources for electoral propaganda (Kaur, 2016), further distorting democratic competition. A particularly alarming aspect of India's electoral landscape is the increasing number of lawmakers with criminal backgrounds.

According to the Association of Democratic Reforms Report 2024, nearly half of the members of the 18th Lok Sabha have criminal charges against them, with 251 out of 543 elected representatives facing allegations. More disturbingly, 31% of these cases involve serious charges such as rape, murder, attempted murder, and crimes against women. This persistent issue calls for urgent electoral reforms, which could be facilitated through the Population Census 2026, ensuring that democratic representation is not just numerically balanced but also ethically accountable.

WHY IS THE POPULATION CENSUS 2026 IMPORTANT?

Following James Madison's famous insight, the democratic theory argues that the population or size of a republic appears to be inversely correlated with democracy (Colomer, 2007). As populations continue to grow, ensuring a fair and effective democracy becomes increasingly difficult. In India, rapid urbanization has created significant imbalances in constituency sizes, resulting in unfair representation between urban and rural India. Additionally, northern states experiencing population surges hold more seats in the Lok Sabha, while southern states that have successfully implemented population control measures are not gaining corresponding representation. This disparity leads to unequal political representation.

Yogendra Yadav argues that delimitation would only exacerbate this issue, further deepening the divide between northern and southern states (Yadav, 2023), as delimitation would be based on population, which would favor more seats to northern states.

Regional disparities in representation are strikingly evident. By the year 2031, a Member of Parliament (MP) in Kerala and Tamil Nadu will be tasked with representing a population ranging from 1.8 to 2 million, whereas an MP in states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh will be responsible for over 3 million constituents. This significant difference raises critical concerns regarding the capacity of political representatives to effectively address the needs of their constituencies, as their roles extend beyond legislative duties to encompass direct service to their voters. Recently, the concept of "constituency service" has expanded in both scope and complexity, encompassing a wide array of responsibilities that include providing individual support, educating the electorate, addressing grievances, and facilitating development initiatives (Alam, 2024).

The Population Census 2026 offers more than just demographic data; it is the key to reshaping India's electoral landscape. Articles 82 and 170(3) of the Constitution mandate periodic delimitation to ensure equal voter representation. However, since 2002, this provision has been on hold. With the 2026 census, the stage is set for a long-overdue delimitation exercise that can address regional imbalances and ensure equitable representation. It would be naive to consider the redrawing of political boundaries as a technical exercise; instead, it also constitutes rethinking representation in particular and democracy in general. (Kumar & Srivastava, 2023).



POPULATION CENSUS 2026 AND REFORMS

Political scientists are advocating for an increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats to better align democratic representation with federal interests, a change that could be informed by the data from the upcoming Census 2026. The process of establishing electoral boundaries is vital in systems that depend on single-member or small multi-member constituencies, such as India, the US, and Canada, especially when there is no preferential voting system to mitigate the disproportionality between votes and seats (Handley and Grofman 2008). A middle-of-the-road proposition is to expand the size of Lok Sabha to the extent that no state loses the seats it now holds (McMillan 2008). It is anticipated by the experts that post-census and delimitation, the seats of Lok Sabha could be raised to 720+ seats. Equally essential are reforms in the Rajya Sabha, where representation is currently disproportionate.

For instance, populous states like Uttar Pradesh (with over 200 million people) have only 31 Rajya Sabha seats, while smaller states such as Sikkim (with a population of around 700,000) have a minimum guaranteed 1 seat. This imbalance undermines equitable representation in the upper house, where regional concerns are meant to be addressed. Equalizing state representation, similar to the U.S. Senate model, could strengthen India's federal structure and provide smaller states a more balanced voice without disproportionately diluting the influence of larger states. The significant impact of census data can also be used to shape India's electoral methods. A hybrid system that combines FPTP with Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) can help check under-representation.

The MMP system allows for a more proportional representation of political parties in the legislature. Under this system, voters have two votes: one for a candidate in their constituency (FPTP) and another for a political party (proportional representation). This ensures that while local representation is maintained, seats are allocated in the Lok Sabha based on the proportion of votes received by each party. This would help ensure that smaller parties and independent candidates have a greater chance of representation. The census data can be a powerful tool in holding criminal lawmakers accountable by revealing the real-world impacts of their actions on districts. By tracking key metrics such as crime rates, unemployment, and public service access, census data can expose the negative effects of a lawmaker's criminal behavior, providing clear evidence that can pressure both the public and authorities to take action.

The census data plays a crucial role in the execution of the Women Reservation Bill 2023 in the Lok Sabha, which aims to raise the number of female legislators to 181, representing 33% of the total. This change is likely to influence the number of male representatives in the Lok Sabha. It is unclear when the promises of empowering women by enabling their “participation in debates, deliberations, and questioning on the floor of the house (Hussain, 2022)” will actualize. Women's equal representation and enhanced participation through reservations in legislatures therefore remain contingent on two events—the first census after 2026 and a delimitation exercise following that census (Naqvi, 2023).

Thus, census data can play a crucial role in identifying areas where women's representation is low, informing targeted interventions. The Population Census 2026 is a critical event. By providing updated and comprehensive data on the population, the census can catalyze the redrawing of electoral boundaries and address urban-rural disparities, enhancing electoral participation and representation, and thereby promoting transparency and accountability.

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THE QUESTION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: POLITICS & ACADEMIA

Aman Kakkar

THE QUESTION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: POLITICS & ACADEMIA

by Aman kakkar

INTRODUCTION

The essence of patriarchy ranges throughout the history of India. India is a land of rich culture and traditions where we pray and worship women as goddesses and symbolize our nation with the allegory of 'Bharat Mata' (Mother India). Yet there is sheer incongruence between the said idealistic beliefs and the patriarchal reality of Indian society. Our culture and epics teach us the ideals and values of tolerance, equality, and respecting others. But be it the abduction of Sita or the disrobing of Draupadi, these are the same epics that neglect the agency of women and depict disrespect towards them, while further determining the hierarchical relationships and strengthening the patriarchal mindset. The dominant discourses of these epics, which are written by men, restrict women to obey the ideal code of conduct, be faithful, submissive and passive follower of her husband; while it puts men on top of the power hierarchy structures in the society.

From ancient times, as per the feminist perspective, women have been restricted in the private sphere while politics under both the private and public spheres is considered a male-dominated line of work. It was after a first wave of feminism in the West that women got the right to vote. The suffrage movements led by women around the globe, beginning with women's right to vote, have tried to give agency to women on matters related to their bodies, their rights, and subsequently the decision-making of their country. No age, says Virginia Woolf, can ever have been as stridently sex-conscious as our own. Yet, meager women's participation in politics and women's representation in academia, even in the twenty-first century, pushes us to address the elephant in the room.

WOMEN IN ACADEMIA

It is a patriarchal absurdity to assume that women are less interested in politics as compared to men because it is the private-public dichotomy that confines women in socially constructed, rigid gender roles. Hence, to address the minimal presence of women in academia or politics, one needs to understand and interpret the history of women in these spheres. The problem is that the dominant discourse in history does not mention women or their perspectives. Before the independence of India, the role of Rani Lakshmibai and Rassundari Devi (her book *Aamar Jiban* 1876 was the first autobiography written by an Indian woman) was immense in mobilizing women. Durgabai Deshmukh, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kriplani, and other women played an important role post-independence by actively contributing to the constituent assembly of India. While the policies and administration under the Indira Gandhi government are criticized by many, she became the first woman Prime Minister of India, and no other woman after her has occupied that position to date. It is not surprising that most of these women were from upper caste families, were related to prominent political figures at that time, or were fortunate enough to receive the best education abroad.

A question that comes to mind is—what about the women from marginalized groups? The problem with Dalit and tribal literature is that most of it was carried forward through oral traditions, which get lost over generations. Also, women in these societies are doubly marginalized and hence are not allowed to write about their hardships. Any act of baring the prevalent injustices against women in these communities or any other effort that gives them an opportunity to enter the public sphere is highly despised and condemned. Despite all that, some women, like Savitribai Phule, broke the social barriers by advocating for India's feminist movement and became the first female teacher in India.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, presents an argument asking, “What would it be like if Shakespeare had a sister no less gifted than he?”. She concludes her answer to this question that Shakespeare's sister would not have been able to express or present her talent and would have been mocked and suppressed by the society. From this we can understand that back then the same society, which cherished the writings of William Shakespeare, would have detested and spurned the notable works of his hypothetical sister. This shows how gender dictated the academic success of writers back then and maybe today as well.



Even after years of campaigning to protect the girl-child against dowry, domestic abuse, etc., very few women have come up in male-dominated spheres of Indian society—politics and academia, to be precise. To date we have had one woman prime minister and only a few women chief ministers in India. Women representation in academia has seen a rise in the past few years with increased enrollment in higher studies (apart from a little growth in non-STEM courses), yet women representation in senior academic positions in India is negligible, with less than 30% of them holding professor positions.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

This essay would now like to examine the 2024 general elections of India. The newly structured Lok Sabha of 2024 has elected 74 women members of Parliament (nearly 13.6% of all MPs), which is less than the previous general elections, where women constituted 14.4% of total MPs. This means that despite various measures for women's empowerment, our parliament has regressed in terms of women's representation. As per the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Parline database, India's global ranking for women's representation in the lower house of Parliament stands at 143 out of 185 countries. While women's representation remains abysmal in politics, their participation has increased with each consecutive general election.

For a woman to become a writer, if she needs £500 and a room of her own as per Virginia Woolf, a woman to become a politician, in my opinion, may require a huge sum of money and, most importantly, genuine support from her family. Former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj mentioned in one of her interviews that her journey in the field of politics has been possible because of the constant support from all men of her family—her brother, husband, and others.

While the current policies and measures are trying to curb all the discussed barriers to women's participation in the public sphere, many challenges require immediate and exemplary action to break the dominant patriarchal thought through proactive legislation like the Women Reservation Act of 2023, which aims to reserve one-third of seats for women in parliament.

WHY ARE WOMEN MISSING FROM POLITICS AND ACADEMIA?

We can analyze this question from the works of Nivedita Menon that family as an institution is based on inequality & hierarchy and that it perpetrates a patriarchal mindset that doesn't truly support women in these fields; rather, it confines them in their home. While the government can invest in campaigning and mobilization programs to encourage families to change their outlook towards women, the government itself cannot intervene in the dense intricacies and injustices within the institution of the family' because, as per the 1984 judgment of the Delhi High Court, fundamental rights are not applicable in the family. This is why several women scholars or budding politicians who do not get permission to follow their passion from their family are engulfed in a dense web of societal expectations.



Not to forget the dual burden of looking after the family as well as their professional work. Besides this, India is not safe for women—be it inside hospitals, on the roads, in their own houses, or even in moving vehicles. Women's safety is a big issue. Tavleen Singh, an Indian columnist, writes that “it shames us all that India is sometimes described as the rape capital of the world.”. How did we, as a nation, fail to protect and provide a safe space for women to grow in any sphere they desire to? Did the idea of ‘Motherland’ invoke a sense of respect towards women (moreover, the people) of our land? The world we live in has been in a state of abysmal disregard and ignorance towards women politicians, authors and academicians. Be it literature or politics, women's participation is welcomed with societal rejection and criticism from the then-prevalent regimes. Be it Chandrabati's Ramayana or lectures of Nivedita Menon, both were openly criticized for speaking against the dominant patriarchal ideas of Indian society. Academic freedom is a necessary and integral part of generating critical perspectives, which, when curbed, leaves no room to question dominant discourses in society.

CONCLUSION

The question of locating and enhancing the position of women in politics and academia is of urgent concern. While there is a need for an immediate revamping of laws and policies at all levels of society, a change in perspective or vantage can give a nudge to these efforts. The same epics we discussed in the beginning, when looked at from non-dominant perspectives, especially from the folklores, present a different perception of women. For instance, Nabaneeta Dev Sen discovers that “folk traditions carry an antidote to the patriarchal representation of Sita in the epic.”. Hence, be it academia or politics, critiquing the dominant discourse becomes a vital act of redefining the agency of women in these spheres.

Through the understanding of the two texts used as references for this essay—Seeing like a Feminist by Nivedita Menon and A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf—one can propose certain measures for an increased participation of women in the public sphere. There is a need to make daycare for children



and old-age support centers for the elderly the responsibility of employing institutions (with aid from the state) so that a woman can work without the constant stress of taking care of her family. There needs to be a change in patriarchal discourse that names most literary and performance awards after famous men in that field—Dadasaheb Phalke award, Rabindranath Puraskar, etc.—undermining and being oblivious to the contributions of all women in those spheres. One little step could be to name awards after Durgabai Kamat, Nirupama Roy, Durga Khote, and many others who shaped Indian cinema as much as any male counterpart did. Lastly, one might hope that the Women Reservation Act in India, post its implementation, will bring better policies for the women by a parliament that has an echo of women as well. With hope and constant efforts of government and Indian society, the gender question in politics and academia might unravel with victorious answers.

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DECODING UCC: A PATH TO JUSTICE OR A CHALLENGE TO DIVERSITY?

Bhavya Patidar

**Note: This map is not on the scale*

EXAMINING UNIFORM CIVIL CODE IN INDIA

by Bhavya Patidar

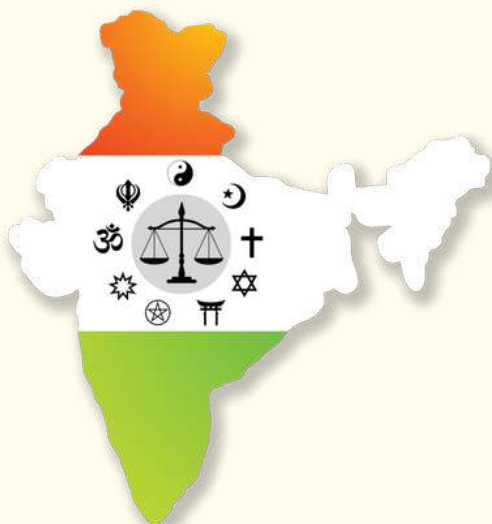
With the rise to power of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for a consecutive third term, all eyes are set on the issue of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for the country. With the abrogation of Article 370 and the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the third major manifesto agenda of the BJP is to bring a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to the country. Of the three agendas, a UCC is the most complicated and difficult one, requiring a detailed understanding and analysis of the various dimensions that it deals with.

A Uniform Civil Code (UCC) indicates uniformity in the civil laws of a country for all its citizens, regardless of the distinctions of religion, gender, or any other identity. These laws are non-discriminatory and secular in nature. A UCC primarily suggests three things—uniformity, civil, and codification. Uniformity demands the abolition of personal laws and the enactment of a nationwide law that governs all citizens alike. Civil matters are those that deal between two legal persons or entities (as opposed to criminal matters, which deal between the individual and the state). It primarily includes family laws such as marriage, divorce, maintenance, adoption, succession, etc. And at last, a UCC suggests codification or systematization of the practices and customs of a society. In order to avoid any ambiguity or conflict in its meaning or interpretation.

Article 44 in Part IV of the Indian Constitution, the Directive Principles of the State Policy, deals with the UCC. It suggests the state to endeavor for a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India. And here we look into the significance or need for a UCC in India.

Firstly, in a country like India that is full of cultural diversity, a UCC is not to suggest a homogenization of the diverse practices and customs of various communities. It is not about replicating the model of UCC prevalent in countries like France, Germany, Portugal, etc. Rather, it is primarily about abolishing the discriminatory practices prevalent in the personal laws of various communities. It is state intervention in favor of the disadvantaged sections of society, primarily women.

Hence, a Uniform Civil Code in India will respect and maintain the cultural diversity of the country in accordance with the rule of law. Most major countries of the world, including the United States, England, and China, follow a Uniform Civil Code. As the country approached independence, the voices both for and against a Uniform Civil Code in the country emerged. Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was a staunch advocate for a UCC in India. He wanted to imbibe this in the constitution itself.



**Note: This map is not on the scale*

Later, it was added as a Directive Principle. He argued that a UCC is a must for securing the rights of disadvantaged sections of any society. He vociferously tried to pass the Hindu Code Bill (HCB) as the law minister in the interim government of India. Later, he resigned in 1950, discontented with Nehru and other party members on HCB.

The 1952 General Election led to a massive victory for Nehru and a mandate to pass the Hindu Code Bill. He passed HCB as four different acts: the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956, and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956. These four acts collectively led to the codification and reformation of Hindu personal laws. The term Hindu here includes not just Sanatani Hindus, but also Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs.

These four acts are progressive, modern, and moral in nature. They abolished any form of caste- or gender-based discrimination in the personal laws of Hindus. Bigamy or polygamy was made a punishable offense, women had equal rights on divorce, and absolute rights over property. Maintenance rights to women were also ensured. Hence, a UCC in the country will not mean much to 'Hindus' in terms of adaptation. Their existing laws are already secular and universal in nature.

The minorities In India, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, and Jews have their own personal laws. Except for Muslims, which are dealt with under Shariat laws, the personal laws of Christians, Parsis, and Jews have to become largely progressive and modern in nature. The Indian Divorce Act 1869, the Christian Marriage Act 1872, the Guardianship and Wards Act 1890, the Indian Succession Act 1925, and the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act 1936 are the major laws that govern civil matters of these three communities in India. These laws were enacted during the colonial era and have been amended multiple times subsequently based on various Supreme Court judgments. So that they are made compatible with modern progressive ideals.

Muslims, the biggest minority in the country, are governed under 'Shariat' laws in civil matters. Shariat refers to the divine laws in Islam. In India, the Hanafi Law School (Sunni) is followed by Muslims, similar to the text of Fatwa-e-Alamgiri by Aurangzeb. They are governed under the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. This act applied Sharia laws in the civil matters of all the Indian Muslims. Largely, there were four main contentious issues in Muslim personal law that were incongruous with contemporary ideals. And some of them persist to date.



Source: www.gettyimages.com

The first major issue was about 'maintenance' rights for Muslim women in India. The Shariat laws prescribed a 3-month maintenance period for a divorced woman, also known as the 'Iddat Period.'. It was against the right to a dignified life of Muslim women.

The Supreme Court's judgment in the Shah Bano case of 1985 upheld the High Court's decision of maintenance rights to Muslim women under section 125 of Cr.P.C. However, the Congress government headed by Rajiv Gandhi passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 and exempted Muslims under section 125 of Cr.P.C. The 'title' may suggest otherwise, but one should make no mistake in identifying that the Act actually took away the maintenance rights of Muslim women granted by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. The political inexperience of Rajiv Gandhi and the pressure from the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a male-dominated, conservative Muslim organization, plunged Muslim women in India into medieval-era-like conditions. The injustice done to Shah Bano is a blot on the Indian state.

Finally, in the Daniel Latifi Case 2001, the Supreme Court interpreted the Muslim Women Act 1986 in a way that ensured maintenance rights to Muslim women too in India. The Court interpreted the 'reasonable and fair amount' in the Act to mean an amount that is compatible with the standard of living of a divorced woman for the rest of her life (not just three months).

The second major contentious issue was Triple Talaq. Where the husband could dissolve a marriage by iterating Talaq three times, in a written or spoken manner, also known as Talaq-e-Biddat. This practice left Muslim women with little control over their lives and civil rights. It was a repugnant practice in contemporary times, a practice declared 'haram' in the Shia sect of Muslims itself. In the Shayara Bano Case, 2017, the five judges' bench of the Supreme Court declared Triple Talaq unconstitutional with a 3:2 majority judgment. Notably, the two judges who were 'against' the judgment were not in favor of Triple Talaq either. Their position was that Parliament, rather than the Supreme Court, should pass legislation and declare Triple Talaq unconstitutional.



The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act 2019 was passed in the Parliament. And it declared the practice of Triple Talaq 'unconstitutional' and a cognizable crime.

The two remaining contentious issues in the Muslim Personal Law are polygamy and Nikah-Halala. Polygamy refers to the practice of having more than one wife at the same time. As per Shariat laws, a Muslim man can marry up to four women. However, the Quran itself mentions that such marriage (polygamy) is permissible under only two conditions (it is important to remember the medieval era 'context' of these conditions wherein the women were dependent on the male population for their subsistence).

First, if there is a sex ratio issue in the society, i.e., the number of women is significantly higher as compared to men. And secondly, only if the husband is capable of maintaining both wives with equal respect and dignity. None of these conditions stand true in contemporary times. And the abolishment of 'polygamy' in many of the world's Muslim countries itself makes a strong case for abolishing this incongruous practice in modern-day India.

Nikah-Halala, the last and most repulsive practice in Muslim personal law. 'Nikah' refers to marriage in Islam, and 'Halala' refers to the process by which something is made permissible (halal). Hence, Nikah-Halala refers to the process by which a marriage is made permissible in Islam. If a divorced Muslim woman intends to remarry her husband, she must marry and 'consume' the relationship with some 'other man' beforehand. In all other religious communities of India, a couple can remarry after divorce without any restrictions. There are three fundamental problems in this practice—first, the brunt of indignity is borne by women only (even if the husband initiated the divorce). Secondly, and more notably, in Islam, any marriage that is done with the intention of dissolution is in itself a 'haram.'. Lastly, there is always a possibility of the 'other man' denying divorce to the woman and further exploiting her.

Nikah-Halala is a truly repugnant practice prevalent in modern-day India. It is banned in most Muslim countries and even in pre-Taliban Afghanistan.

Both polygamy and Nikah-Halala are not 'mandatory' practices of Islam (as evident with their ban and abolishment in many of the world's Islamic countries). And they are against Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Indian Constitution (as discussed later). A survey report by Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA)—a Muslim women's rights organization—revealed that over 90% of Muslim women in India are in favor of codification of Muslim practices, equal rights for them at par with other Indian women, and the establishment of a legal system in place of the Qazi system. Hence, the Indian government must form a secular and uniform civil code (UCC) and protect the rights of Muslim women in India.

Now, we look at the constitutional dimension on the question of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Those who support or advocate for maintaining personal laws do so primarily under Article 25 and Article 26 of the Indian Constitution—the Right to Religious Freedom. Article 25 mentions the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate any religion, and Article 26 talks about the freedom to manage religious affairs. On the other hand, those who advocate for a UCC or argue against the discriminatory aspects of personal laws do so under Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the constitution. Article 14 talks about equality before law and the equal protection of laws. Article 15 states that the state cannot discriminate against anyone only on the basis of sex, caste, race, religion, or place of birth. And article 21 states the right to live a dignified life (expanded interpretation by the Supreme Court in the Maneka Gandhi case, 1978). Also, UCC is advocated under Article 44, the directive principle of state policy.

However, it is important to note that the religious rights under Articles 25 and 26 are not absolute. Rather, there are reasonable restrictions on both of them. Under Articles 25(1) and 25(2), there are six reasonable restrictions on the fundamental right to religion.

It is subject to public order, health, and morality, those aspects that are in violation of any other fundamental right, social welfare or reforms, and secular aspects of religion. The state can intervene in the affairs of any religion under these six reasonable restrictions.

Hence, Articles 25 and 26 do not advocate for absolute freedom. India is not a theocratic state. It is a secular state where the rule of law takes precedence above everything. The rule of law is also a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Therefore, those practices or customs of any religion that discriminate against any particular section of that society are not exempted under articles 25 and 26. But the judiciary in India missed this crucial interpretation once in the *Narasu Appamali Case* in 1951. Wherein the Bombay High Court ruled that 'customs' are not subject to fundamental rights and hence exempted 'uncodified' Muslim personal law from the ambit of constitutional scrutiny. It was only in the 2018 Sabarimala Temple Case that Justice DY Chandrachud made it clear in the opinion section that the reasoning employed in the *Narasu Appamali case* was based on flawed premises. He criticized the Bombay High Court judgment, citing that it denied the primacy of the constitution. He stated that the commitment to pluralism and respect for group autonomy must be understood within a Constitutional framework that places individual freedom and dignity at its heart.

Over time, the Supreme Court of India has developed a Doctrine of Essentiality. This doctrine basically states that only those practices and customs that are essential to a religion are protected under the fundamental right to religion. And any other practice that is not essential and comes under the secular aspects of a religion can be intervened in and amended by the state as or when needed. The tribes in India have had a distinct culture and life for thousands of years now. They have not been exposed to modern 'scientific' society or civilization. The Indian Constitution has special provisions in it for the protection of the rights and interests of tribal communities in India. Under Article 371(a), Nagaland and under Article 371(g), Mizoram have been provided special constitutional status. So that the rights of tribal communities in these states can be protected. The parliamentary laws are applicable in these two states only when a resolution allowing them is passed by the state Legislative Assembly. On matters such as social and religious practices, customary laws, land ownership, and the administration of civil and criminal justice in some affairs.

Further, the sixth schedule in article 244 in part X of the Indian Constitution lists down 10 tribal areas in India in the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam, and Tripura. These areas have Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) or regional councils. These ADCs have autonomy and judicial proceeding rights over certain civil and criminal matters.

The question arises as to whether a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) should be applicable to these 10 ADCs and the states of Nagaland and Mizoram or not. Or their customary laws and rights will prevail over UCC. The opinion suggested here is that these tribal areas should not be incorporated into a Uniform Civil Code at this stage. Rather, slowly and steadily, these tribal communities should be integrated into mainstream society over a period of time. Also, any practice or custom in these areas that is fundamentally flawed should be abolished.

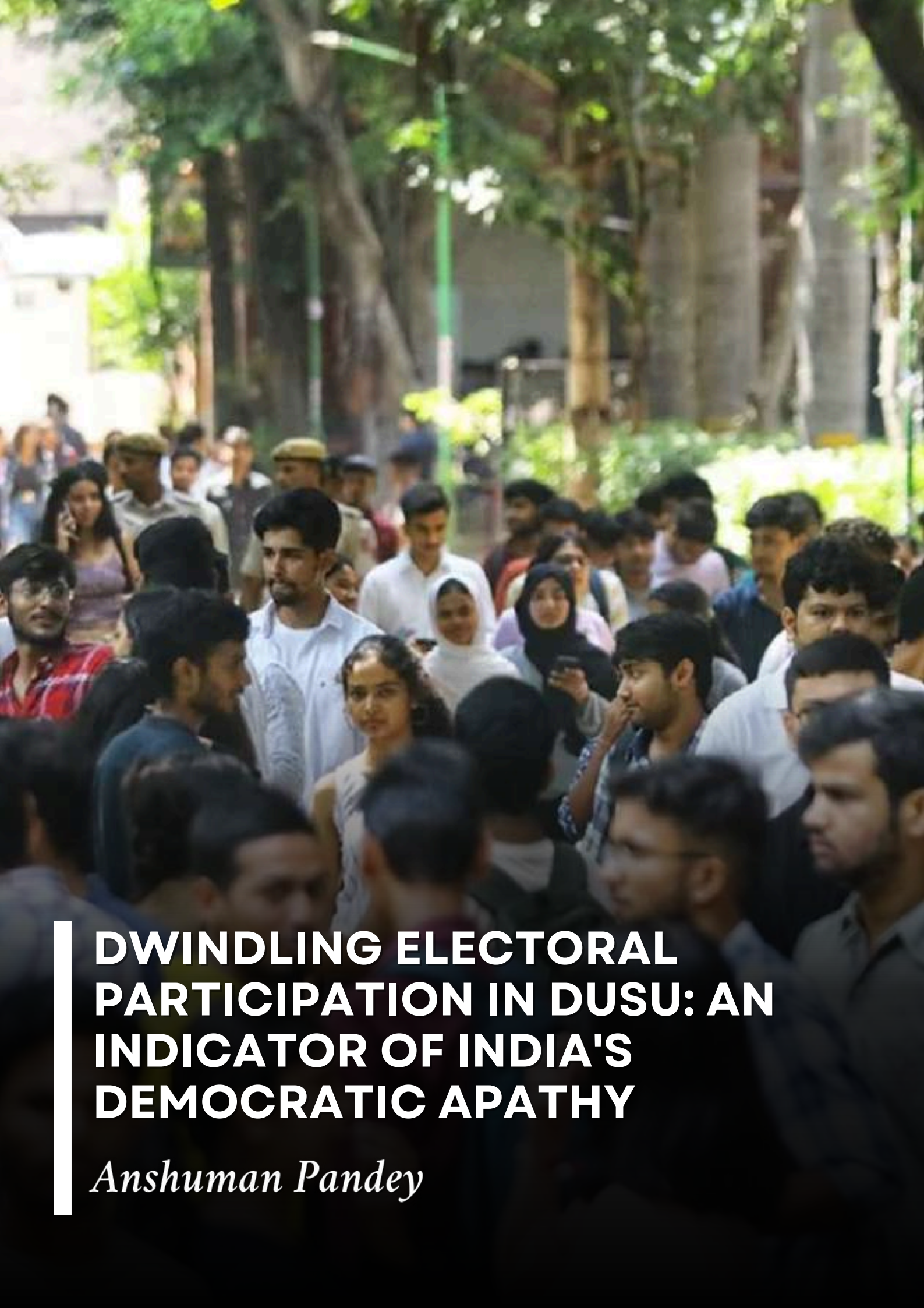
The 21st Law Commission of India stated in its report that a Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage. Rather, it focused on non-discrimination over uniformity and a plurality of ways to govern personal laws. However, if the interpretation of the term 'Uniform' as outlined in this essay is taken into consideration, then there is not much to contest over a Uniform Civil Code.

In conclusion, a 'Uniform' Civil Code in India will primarily mean three things. First and foremost, it will abolish the discriminatory practices or customs prevalent within various religious communities of India. The individual freedom and dignity will be at the forefront. Secondly, it will incorporate the diverse cultural practices and customs of these communities. Thirdly, and lastly, the uniform civil code in India will mean the incorporation of best practices from all the religions in India. Further, there have been a number of Supreme Court judgments where it has pointed out the need for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the country. It will ease out the governance of the citizens and avoid the complexities of a number of laws in civil matters for different religious communities. In 2023, the 22nd Law Commission of India requested inputs from religious organizations and the general public regarding the implementation of such a code.

Finally, and crucially, the implementation of a UCC must be preceded by extensive and inclusive deliberations and consultations with the public. This process is essential to ensure that the code reflects the diverse voices and perspectives of the nation.

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A large, diverse crowd of people is walking along a tree-lined street. The crowd is dense, with individuals of various ages and ethnicities visible. Some are looking towards the camera, while others are looking away. The background is filled with tall trees and greenery, suggesting a park or a well-maintained urban area. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, public gathering.

DWINDLING ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN DUSU: AN INDICATOR OF INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC APATHY

Anshuman Pandey

DWINDLING ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN DUSU: AN INDICATOR OF INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC APATHY

by Anshuman Pandey

Elections at the national and state levels, and most importantly, at the local level, mark the pinnacle of democratic expression in India. Student elections at Delhi University have been a mini-enumeration of the major democratic processes unfolding in the country, wherein students find their voice for themselves in the fabric of academic and social lives. The concerns about democracy being at risk are high, as some salient trends, barring the election, show a very quick erosion of participation. Yogendra Yadav described the DUSU elections as an effective ground for political leadership, just like the competitive and participatory dynamics of Indian democracy. Student participation generates a culture of debate, dissent, and political action in democracy. In the DUSU elections of 2024, voter participation declined sharply because elections were cast only by 32.8 percent of the eligible ones, which declined to 44.5% in 2018. This kind of issue has a certain broad character of disengagement, pretty evident during the last couple of years.

The DUSU elections, actually, are the best barometer of how students engage with democratic processes. Indeed, through these elections, students become their own representatives to voice their concerns by electing their leaders and deciding what matters in their daily lives. It has always been a battlefield for student groups—from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and the National Students Union of India (NSUI) to the smaller, progressive parties like the All India Students Association (AISA) and the Students Federation of India (SFI). The DUSU elections somehow represent a microcosm of India's overall general elections in that they reflect the competitive essence of elections, ideological divisions, and the effort to strategically campaign



These are the areas where manifesto commitments, appeals to specific voter demographics, and personality-driven campaigns have dominated both the campuses and the streets. Issues of polarization, social media for outreach, and electoral malpractice allegations feature strongly in both spheres; their inscriptions find a way into the microcosm of democratic and electoral politics in India through DUSU. The very important body has witnessed dwindling involvement by the student constituency in the last few years. It was perhaps one of the most abysmal turnouts in years, especially during 2024, but indicative of a broader issue affecting Indian student unions.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LOW VOTER TURNOUT

The major factor is the disconnection between the students and the candidates. Most of the students claimed that the candidates going to campaign for DUSU positions were not focused on the problems of the students but appeared to be more obsessed with personal political ambitions. Election campaigns were often characterized by "hooliganism," as money and muscle power often marred the democratic nature of the process. This intimidation and political manipulation environment that characterized elections often scared off many of the students from participating in elections. Besides, poor diversity in manifestos put forth by candidates and general indolence towards political issues were pinpointed as other factors that led to such a low turnout. Rajni Kothari's observations regarding grassroots disengagement point to a decline in faith in democratic institutions and the mechanisms around them. While some realized that most of the candidates believed in the same ideas, others just felt that their votes were insignificant and so did not bother to go out and vote. For most students, though, it was logistical difficulties: issues with suspension of classes for sure, but other issues while commuting to the polling stations as well. Interestingly, even though the students reported voting, many indicated that their vote choices were highly influenced by the manifestos and ideological stances of the particular candidates. Christophe Jaffrelot has commented on the fact that caste, religion, and identity are increasingly salient elements in India's electoral politics. However, 11% reported voting based on peer influence, which in essence meant voting by uninformed choice, which again suggests that more students may not have been fully involved within the democratic process. This is detrimental as it then runs the risk of a trend whereby voters are influenced by external forces rather than holding their own political belief-identification.

The Lyngdoh Committee Guidelines, established by the Supreme Court in 2006 to study student union elections, was meant to bring balance and transparency to the electoral process. One of the significant issues is the unrelenting infraction of expenditure caps on the campaign, with candidates very often covering quantities many times the statutory Rs. 5,000. Further, the unbridled use of vandalism, such as posterage, graffiti, and spray paintings, has been taken up as a form of unethical campaigning as political parties indirectly facilitate candidates to attain influence. These violations have been so aggressive that the High Court in Delhi recently ordered to stop counting votes of the 2024 elections till the defacement is cleared. This incident of legal intervention projects how student elections are fast sinking into a crisis of integrity in which students and administrators lose confidence in the electoral process.



WAY FORWARD - A WAKE UP CALL

To address these troubles, the electoral reforms need to come from both institutional and grassroots levels. The most effective action could be a proper formation of an election committee that is non-aligned with the university machinery to conduct DUSU elections. Such an election committee would guarantee that the polls are conducted cleanly and in a completely party politics-free, externally manipulating manner. For instance, the Delhi High Court has expressed discontent over the university's failure to enforce election norms; an independent committee is expected to play a critical role in restoring this accountability. The Lyngdoh Committee Guidelines need to be suitably modified so that loopholes are plugged and loopholes required for the spirit of democratic engagement are maintained. For example, with such a huge institution like Delhi University, it is quite impossible to reach out to a large population using handmade posters within the available budget. This makes restrictions on printed campaigning materials unfeasible. Instead, the expediency caps of large campuses can be increased, or even a limited usage of printed materials can be allowed in order to uplift campaign effectiveness and initiate more people among students. There is also a need to involve students in some meaningful political dialogue. Debates should therefore be organized, and interviews with candidates, who go ahead to present their manifestos to the student body, are necessary to allow for sound decisions. This would easily wash away the feeling that all the candidates are of similar stature and give a much better perspective to the students in matters of dispute. The use of social media has to be factored in. In this, reaching out to a greater population becomes cheaper through social media than traditional campaigning. Researchers say that the platforms allow for micro-targeting of particular student demographics and messaging tailored to their concern

Research indicates that the youth demographic, particularly university students, is more responsive to social media campaigns. The accessibility of campaign information online has increased voter awareness and engagement. However, echo chambers on social platforms may reinforce pre-existing biases, limiting diverse political discourse.

Experts like Joseph Czapovsky point out that the speed at which false news spreads on Instagram and WhatsApp is shaping voting choices and undermining trust in the electoral process.

Social media has fractured audiences, polarizing voter bases. According to Shannon McGregor, "The algorithms that amplify certain voices also deepen political divides—the challenging environment for balanced debates in DUSU elections

Data InsightsStudies indicate that more than 70% of students find updates from DUSU campaigns through social media, showing its growing centrality. Conversely, about 45% of them also opine that it is too much to handle the overwhelming political content on the net. This points to a double-edged sword in digital platforms for political communication.

It is a sign not only of campus apathy but also of the health of democracy in India in the future. The disengagement of its future citizens with such a process at this early stage poses a significant threat to the very foundation of democratic participation being built at large in the country. Restoring faith in DUSU elections among students is a multi-pronged exercise: addressing the twin issues of hooliganism and political manipulation, alongside a lack of transparency; modifying the Lyngdoh Committee Guidelines to add and correct loopholes; and infusing a culture of informed political engagement. It should be a collaborative effort between the administration, the election authorities, and the students, ensuring that the voice of the student body is heard, valued, and respected. In fact, the future of India's democracy rests in the country's young citizens. Future voters and leaders, students have to realize that their vote can shape up the academic as well as the political landscape. If DUSU is to once again reflect the will of the student body, it has to do so with integrity, transparency, and genuine commitment towards the democratic values that DUSU stands for.

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DEMOCRACY/PLUTOCRACY IN INDIA?

Kushagra Mishra

DEMOCRACY/PLUTOCRACY IN INDIA?

by Kushagra Mishra

India's journey to democracy has been shaped by centuries of invasions, monarchies, and colonial rule, all of which left the people with limited choice and autonomy. The freedom movement highlighted the significance of democracy, individual rights, and the notion of choice. With these principles in mind, the framers of India's Constitution enshrined the concept of democracy and instituted universal adult franchise to reflect the people's will. But over time, certain questions have emerged: Do we truly have a democratic choice? Can every citizen realistically contest in elections?

WHY PLUTOCRACY?

Plutocracy refers to a society governed by the wealthy. While democracy implies rule by the people, these two forms of governance should theoretically be mutually exclusive. However, in India, elements of both seem to coexist. A primary factor contributing to this phenomenon is income inequality. Meena Ganpathy says that the richest 10% of India's population control 77% of the country's wealth, while the poorest 60% hold only 4.7%. The influence of wealth on politics has grown so strong that affluent individuals often wield a greater say in policymaking. During elections, political parties rely heavily on financial contributions from elites and large corporations, and candidates with substantial resources are often favored. This preference for wealth creates an unequal playing field, leading to an oligarchy-like structure where power is concentrated among a wealthy few, rather than being distributed across society. Election expenditure, which has skyrocketed over the years, further limits electoral participation to those who can afford such costs. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report on 2024 elections, reveals a startling trend. Out of 543 winning candidates, 504 were crorepatists, meaning over 93% of members of Parliament possess wealth in the millions. This marks an increase from 88% in 2019 and 82% in 2014. In the new cabinet, 99% of ministers are crorepatists, with average assets valued at around ₹107.94 crore, and six ministers hold assets worth over ₹100 crore.

WHY ARE WEALTHY INDIVIDUALS SO DRIVEN TO HOLD OFFICE?

The answer lies in the power and influence that elected positions bring, far beyond the benefits of official salary or allowances. This dynamic has created a nexus between politics and wealth, tightening the hold of elites on the democratic process. Gangesh Gauri, in the Times of India asserts, "Politics has long become big business; once a politician, always a politician—not motivated by a genuine desire for social service, but by self-aggrandizement. No lofty ideology drives them as much as the pursuit of survival and wealth, whether in or out of power. Journalist Prasenjit Chowdhury adds "Most Indian businessmen operate in oligopolistic markets and in sectors where the government grants special privileges.

This collusive business-government relationship enables corporations to gain undeserved benefits, concentrating industrialization in the hands of a few powerful industrial houses.”

The plutocratic shift in Indian democracy has eroded people’s trust in the electoral process. Many now believe that only the rich can win elections, diminishing the spirit of democratic participation. Even at the panchayat level, wealthy landowners often dominate elections, sidelining those with genuine public interest. This situation also affects policy decisions. Wealthy individuals and corporations, who fund political campaigns, often exert influence over government policies, ensuring they align with their interests. This creates a disconnect between elected representatives and the people they serve, as policies may prioritize the wealthy over the broader population. A unique issue in India is the rise of elites from traditionally marginalized communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), women, and farmers. Such that it's a situation of "exploiters being picked amongst the exploited class.". Although reservations in the Lok Sabha provide these communities with representation—84 seats for STs and 47 for SCs—only a few leaders truly advocate for their communities. Instead, many benefit personally from these policies without fostering development for others in their groups. For instance, Mayawati, the president of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), declared assets worth ₹111 crore in the 2012 assembly elections.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

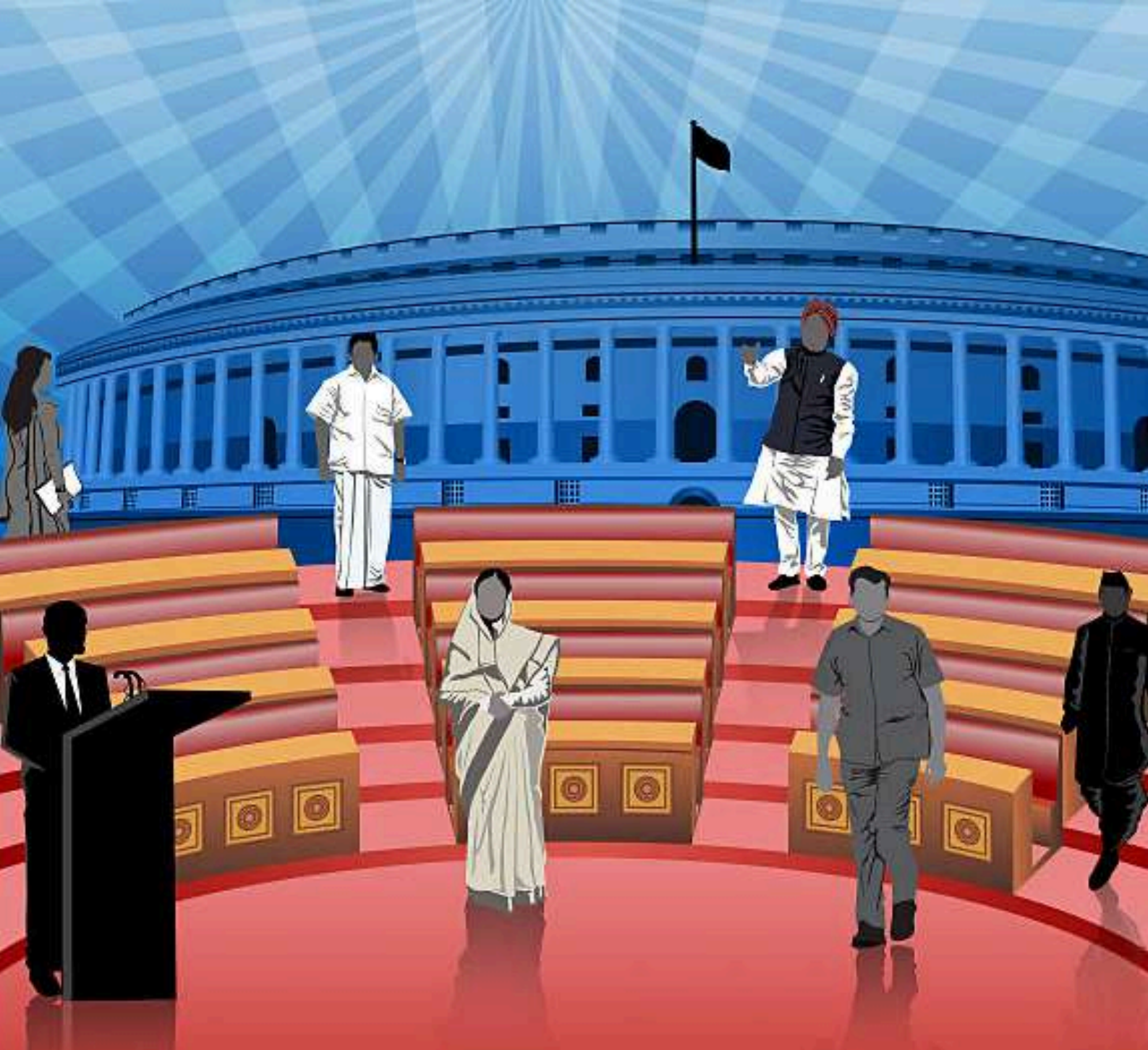
Sudhanshu Roy says “that globalization could benefit the average Indian if the government increases investments in public services such as health, education, and nutrition. The authors propose a 2% "super tax" on the net wealth of India’s 167 richest families, which could generate revenue equivalent to 0.5% of the national income. Such funds could be allocated to essential public investments, promoting more inclusive growth.

Strengthening civil society organizations could also help check political excesses by promoting political awareness, filing Public Interest Litigations (PILs), and advocating for greater accountability. As citizens, we must engage in political discourse, ask the right questions, and prioritize candidates based on merit rather than wealth. By doing so, we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive democratic process.

In conclusion, India's democratic framework faces significant challenges from a growing plutocracy. While some genuine leaders still emerge, they are few in number, overshadowed by a political landscape dominated by wealth and influence. However, there is hope. By remaining vigilant, voting wisely, and holding our representatives accountable, we can move towards a more authentic democracy that reflects the values enshrined in our Constitution. Only then can we begin to break free from the grip of plutocracy and ensure that India remains a democracy in both letter and spirit.

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WHAT DO COALITIONS TELL US ABOUT POLITICS?

Azher Ahmad Dar

WHAT DO COALITIONS TELL US ABOUT POLITICS?

by Azher Ahmad Dar

The recent elections, with results having been declared on the 4th of June, are surprising for various reasons. The BJP was anticipating that it would win a 2/3rd majority without the support of the NDA, with politicians assiduously saying, 'Ab ki baar 400 paar'. It is a surprise for both the BJP and the India Alliance, with the India Alliance having taken a leap and the BJP recording a reduction in its tally.

At the meeting of the NDA in New Delhi on June 5, the NDA chose Narendra Modi as the leader of the NDA, with the social media buzz calling Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu the 'Kingmakers'.

What do coalitions entail for politics, and how will they have an impact on the political situation of the country? is an interesting question.

Political parties have been important tools of interest articulation, and non-political associations have to pin their interests and issues through the political parties. With the first general elections in 1952, the Indian National Congress clinched to power with a handsome majority because of the nationalist legacy of the party and the stalwarts that were in the party. Many would say that the period between 1952 and 1967 was an era of single-party dominance. But they are practically wrong; technically, it may have been so, but the great Indian political scientists like Rajni Kothari and C.P. Bhambari have quelled all such assertions as baseless.

The INC has been a catch-all party, drawing people from every segment of society, supported by the fact that in the very first Cabinet, Nehru had invited Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee.

Juxtaposed to the present opposition, there were a number of factions within the Congress party who used to criticise or appraise the party for that matter. This mechanism had kept the party under strict regulation.

The factions had bargaining power, as do today's coalition partners. Rajni Kothari calls this 'competitive dominance'. The opposition parties too had bargaining power, which they got through the factions in Congress. There was always a tussle going on between the government wing and the organisational wing of the INC, with plans like the Kamraj Plan testifying to it, according to which those who had served for a considerable period of time now should work for the strengthening of the organisation.

Every decision taken was on the basis of consensus, and the PM had no penchant for interfering in it, as it would have negatively affected the party. This was the beauty of the Congress era in terms of its accommodating nature, which others could not.



Now we come straight to the Janata Party coalition in 1977, formed under the leadership of Morarji Desai, in opposition to the excesses that were committed during the emergency, as 676 opposition leaders were arrested. The revelation of the Shah commission confirms the atrocities that were committed during the emergency. Luckily, the coalition clinched the top spot, and the government was formed. This marked the beginning of the coalition era in the country. Morarji Desai was chosen as PM of the country. However, within a matter of two years, the coalition fell apart, the major reason being the struggle for power within the coalition, leaving the party in the doldrums. It revealed both the positives and negatives of a coalition. Then various other coalitions were formed, which proved short in duration.

This reveals several things about the coalition government.

A coalition is good, as totalizing power in a single party leads to power becoming arbitrary, which has authoritarian tendencies and takes away the rights of people, especially their political rights. This is evident in China, Indonesia, and Latin America, which have had a single-party system and where the human rights of the people have been subverted.

Rajni Kothari, in his famous book 'Politics in India, says that a coalition is the regionalization of politics, or politicisation of the regions. While it is desirable that the regional parties play a role at the centre for the prosperity of their regions, it has a negative effect too. While it may mean government intervention in regional issues, the kind of issues that are raised depends also on the type of parties in the coalition and the demands that they are pressing.

The famous French aristocrat Alex de Touqville says in his book 'Democracy in America' that the coalition is a den of corrupt politics. Regionalization has a negative tendency too; it may sometimes give room to regionalism, which is usually perceived as negative, leading to unbalanced regional development. Drawing on John Dewey's 'Social endosmosis' and Rajeev Bhargava's definition of a nation where people are in close communication with each other, it may lead to bitterness in interstate relations.

Francis Fukuhama, in his celebrated book 'The End of History and the Last Man', reiterates this very fact that drawing on Plato's 'thymus' and Friedrich Nietzsche's calling people 'the beast with red cheeks', it can be said that people will only be in a web of cordial relations when they are recognized. This seems to be missing in Indian politics.

The parties are seen as antagonists, which should not be the case. Seeing them as part of a developmental process is what is desirable for a country like India. The asymmetrical devolution of funds among states is done on the basis of the fact that where the central government has a majority, it is favoured, and vice versa, which is at odds with the essence of cooperative federalism. A coalition also means that the main party may not be able to take bold and good decisions because of a lack of majority. There are various problems too in the India alliance; while group representation is the essence of Indian politics, the allies have a particular target group, leaving others at the mercy of God. SP is for Yadavs; BSP is for Dalits; AIMIM is for Muslims, etc.

As long as they don't widen their social bases, how are others going to be included in the governance of the country with the faulty first-past-the-post system of representation? Pratap bhanu mehta says that the failure of the communal parties has partly been because of their small social base; as long as the social base is not widened, it is likely that in the long run they will suffer. The BSP in this election has not been able to get even a single seat.

How are Hindus or Muslims going to vote for a party that has a particular orientation? This gives room to appeasement politics and the politicisation of ascriptive values like religion and caste, which is dangerous for the well-being of people. The parties must contest on issues like employment, basic needs, etc. The immaturity of the country's political system explains this predicament. Now, seeing the trend of the past five years, it is highly desirable for a democracy like India to go for a coalition. Now that we have a strong opposition, it is a win for democracy, which will keep the ruling government in perpetual check.

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HARD REGIONALISM IN INDIA: A COMPLEX TAPESTRY OF IDENTITY, POLITICS, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

Ashutosh Sharma

HARD REGIONALISM IN INDIA: A COMPLEX TAPESTRY OF IDENTITY, POLITICS, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

by Ashutosh Sharma

ABSTRACT

The very complicated and heterogeneous phenomenon of regionalism, therefore, has deep inroads into the political dynamics of the country and the social structure of India. This includes determinants, outcomes, problems, and mechanisms for tackling "hard regionalism" in the Indian context. This research looks into the historical underpinnings of regional identities, the role of political parties, voting behavior, caste interaction, and the impact of the ideology of Hindutva, more particularly represented by the BJP, in enforcing strict regionalism in many places. It also discusses the issue of women's political representation in North and South India and examines variation in electoral competition and performance. Through historical analysis and data and facts, it provides a deep understanding of hard regionalism and how it may play out to be for India in the future.

Key Words: Regionalism, Hard Regionalism, Voting Behavior, Hindutva, Soft Regionalism, Dravida Movement, Intercommunity conflicts, socio-economic conflicts, cultural conflicts, etc.

INTRODUCTION

It is not only through its rich diversity of languages, cultures, and traditions but also through the growth and evolution of specific regional identities that India presents its diversity. Regionalism essentially articulates a shared sense of belonging and identity expressed within certain geographical areas. It has always been a constituent element of the political scenario of India since it gained independence and has varied in intensity and expression at different points in time. Although regionalism has many forms, "hard regionalism" is a more radical and potentially conflictive one and expresses demands for greater autonomy, separatist movements, and sometimes secession. (Brass, 1991).

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF HARD REGIONALIS

In India, hard regionalism is an aggressive pursuit of local interests that poses a potential risk to national cohesion, fueled by pronounced regional pride and belief in the neglect of the central government. This phenomenon, as distinct from cooperative "soft regionalism", has a historical origin, particularly regarding the reorganization of states on linguistic lines, which has nurtured regional identities and ambitions. These conflicts intensified with political opportunism, with the rise of regional parties and how they capitalized on regional emotions for electoral purposes.

Other reasons were socio-economic imbalances of uneven development and distribution of resources that have fueled the idea of injustice and marginalization; these are communicated through calls for greater autonomy. Finally, regional media and social media proliferated the voice further, mobilizing them for an uprising. Regional identities must be recognized and constructively engaged; strengthening national identity in the long run would only ensure stability and integration at the national level, and inclusive growth and inter-regional cooperation are necessary for tackling hard regionalism.

Regionalism in India is a very intense problem and is marked by strong and different regional identities and demands for their autonomous state. Regional political parties and their electoral successes highlight an interest in the control of resources and decision-making powers at regional levels against national parties and heightening regional identity politics. On the other hand, it means regional interests take over national interests and hence present a barrier to national integration and balanced development. It has come out in language and culture, sometimes intercommunity conflicts, and social inequality, with regards to resource allocation and policy implementation. Finally, India has the stern test of balancing regional aspiration with national integration towards an equal and integrated future.

The consequences of hard regionalism, with deep integration and exclusionary practices, are profound and difficult. On the one hand, it promotes economic growth and stability within a region (Baldwin, 2006), but on the other, it causes trade diversion and welfare losses for outsiders (Viner, 1950). This can enhance global inequalities and create protectionist tendencies, which can limit multilateral trade liberalization



(WTO, 2001). This leads to political tensions since it is exclusionary (Mansfield & Milner, 1999) and complicates international relations further. It may also limit the benefits from specialization and comparative advantage in general and decrease total worldwide efficiency in the economy. For this reason, maintaining regional integration in ways compatible with global trade goals has long remained the ultimate test of navigating the hard regionalism effects.

Hard regionalism in India with parochial political interest and discriminatory practices is opposed to national unity and inclusive development. This needs a multi-pronged approach towards the problem. Equitable distribution of resources and infrastructural construction across regions, as pointed out appropriately by Sen, will be one of the most important steps towards it. Building a national identity and inclusive political participation suggested by Brass will also be a vital step toward the goal. Improving inter-regional linkages and cross-cultural activities, as Kohli (2001) has envisaged, can break down regional barriers. Federalism and decentralization emphasized by Bardhan (2005) can strengthen the power of the local community and promote greater regional integration. Effective strategies should focus on developing a shared national identity and respecting regional identity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

Regionalism in India manifests itself in many forms, from the Tamil identity of the Dravida movement to the ethnic focus of the Gorkhaland movement and the economic interests of Telangana. This is compounded by the nation's varied geography and history, along with strategic political moves. Political units often exploit regional sentiments to gain electoral benefits, thereby fostering regional identities through discourse and policies, as in the case of the DMK's promotion of Tamil nationalism. It highly affects voting behavior because of caste and regional identity: the political parties play on this factor to collect votes from election constituencies like Uttar Pradesh, which results in deeper polarization and regionalism. The ideological Hindutva spearheaded by the BJP also impacted regional politics as their pursuit of a single, unified, homogenous Hindu identity—a pursuit that neglected regional differences. For example, the Assam movement and anti-Hindi protests have politicized fears of cultural assimilation and linguistic domination to forge regional identities. A proper analysis of political parties and their election strategies, along with caste considerations and Hindutva, can better capture the complexity of the regional debate in India. Regional identity is an integral part of the Indian psyche, and political manipulation could potentially vitiate national integration.

Regional factors influence the representation of women in both North and South India, henceforth resulting in differences in their political activism and status. In the north Indian region, conventional patriarchal systems and rigid caste systems have, from time immemorial, kept women far away from the public realm. For example, the Yadav dynasty's political dominance over Uttar Pradesh has kept the women out of political participation (Chhibber, 1999). But, in South India, the matrilineal traditions of Kerala state have enabled a higher number of women's representations in politics (Ramachandran, 2006). The Dravidian movement of Tamil Nadu has also empowered women in education and politics as an opposition to the dominance of North Indians (Pandian, 1992). Two case studies are those of Mayawati, the Dalit woman leader in Uttar Pradesh, and Jayalalithaa, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Mayawati's ascension to power was an exception in North Indian politics, whereas Jayalalithaa's political career was facilitated by the Dravidian movement's emphasis on women's empowerment (Jeffrey, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Hard regionalism in India is a multi-layered phenomenon steeped in deep historical roots, complex social dynamics, and huge political implications. While regional identities and aspirations are part of the country's diversity, an assertive pursuit of regional interests can become a challenge to national unity and integration. Knowing the factors causing hard regionalism and its impacts and consequences that have been made out of it will be important for appropriate strategies to work against this phenomenon's negative implications.

It can ensure that the variegated tapestry of regional identities contributes to national strength and unity rather than sowing seeds of social division and instability by way of cooperative federalism, an inclusive political discourse, and redressing regional imbalances.

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BANGLADESH BEYOND HASINA: OPPORTUNITY OR CRISIS FOR INDIA?

Prince Kumar

IMPACT OF SHEIKH HASINA'S OUST TO INDIA

by Prince Kumar

In August 2024, Sheikh Hasina resigned in response to the widespread protests, and this development had several implications for India and South Asia. She was PM for 15 years and played an important role in spurring the economic growth and political stability of the country. However, her administration is compared with authoritarianism due to the allegations of silencing dissent. Sheikh Hasina, under pressure from violent protests and civil unrest, represents a turning point in the country's political landscape. For India, which has had extensive historical, economic, and strategic ties with Bangladesh, but at the same time opportunities that require careful navigation of the patronage politics.

BACKGROUND

Sheikh Hasina's tenure led Bangladesh to achieve notable economic growth and turned it into a global garment export hub, with extensive infrastructure development. However, the government faced allegations of corruption, nepotism, and repression, particularly from opposition parties. A student-led protest demanding changes to the quota system for government jobs turned into people calling for wider democratic reforms. The protest turned into violence, attacking the official residence of the PM and leading to the ousting of Hasina to India. In the meantime, the political vacuum has been filled by an interim government led by Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Laureate, who will be responsible for guiding the country till the elections. The troubled situation has led to serious tensions in the regions, with various challenges for India.

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DIPLOMATIC CONSEQUENCES

India has had long friendly ties with Sheikh Hasina's government. Both countries focused on strengthening the bilateral relations in various fields, such as infrastructure projects, trade agreements, security cooperation, etc. India has given political asylum to Sheikh Hasina, which subsequently led to certain challenges and difficulties for the country. The interim government sees the asylum granted by India as an interference in the internal affairs of the country. India should carefully handle the situation to retain its strategic national interests. Here, it is important for India to establish fresh bilateral talks with the interim government on key issues, while sidelining a big brother perception. This type of dialogue is essential for ensuring continued cooperation on critical issues, including border security and counter-terrorism.

SECURITY CONCERNS

Bangladesh's political instability has also increased the threat over regional security. The violence against the Awami league has now mushroomed into attacks being done on the minorities of the country. Such communal tensions risk spilling over into India's bordering states, aggravating social and political problems there. They are also challenged with issues such as illegal migration, human trafficking, and smuggling across the 4,096-kilometer unfenced India-Bangladesh border. Continued turmoil could spark an influx of refugees, including Rohingyas, adding yet more pressure to India's resources. At this time, border forces have to be more alert and cautious towards the potential risk.

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ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia, with bilateral trade at \$12.9 billion in 2023-2024. India has a trade surplus, exporting \$11 billion worth of goods to Bangladesh, including staples such as machinery, vehicles, electricity and petroleum. But the ongoing instability risks the blockage of trade routes and supply chains, especially for perishable goods. Joint infrastructure projects, including the Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant, the Akhaura-Agartala cross-border railway, and the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, could also be delayed or put on hold. These initiatives are particularly important for improving connectivity and economic integration between the two countries, especially in India's northeastern states. In fact, the political turmoil provides an opening the way for other regional powers, especially China, to expand their influence in Bangladesh. Beijing's investments in infrastructure and defense may also tilt the strategic balance and test India's competitiveness in the market.

GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS

The removal of Hasina and rise of anti-India sentiment will pave the way for the government to look into other opportunities, including the potential of moving towards China and Pakistan. In particular, China has been expanding its influence through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) across South Asia, including Bangladesh. To stabilize its economy and growth with the focus on infrastructure improvement, the interim Bangladeshi government might tap Chinese investments, complicating India's strategic calculations further. Pakistan similarly sniffs an opportunity to bridge its relationship with Bangladesh by calling Bangladeshis as brother. The two countries have also allegedly agreed to conduct combined military drills in February 2025. These developments challenge India's Act East Policy and aspirations for regional leadership.

CHALLENGES WITH OPPORTUNITIES

The present scenario provides yet another opportunity for India to readjust its policy and approach. The political change in Bangladesh offers India a chance to reset its relations with its neighbor. With a neutral stance and engagement with the interim government, India can emerge as a reliable, steady partner concerned about the stability and prosperity of Bangladesh. India can also use its economic power to strengthen ties. These can include offering economic aid like lines of credit in 2010, 2016, and 2017, and technical expertise that would help stabilize Bangladesh's economy while realizing India's position as an important market. India should strengthen its ties with neighbors through regional forums, such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

WAY FORWARD

India's approach towards Bangladesh should be multifaceted, focusing on maintaining neutrality, strengthening border security, fostering economic development, reducing external influence, and addressing communal violence. First and foremost, India should maintain a neutral stance, avoiding any overt support for political factions in Bangladesh. This is crucial to uphold goodwill across the political spectrum, as the opposition in Bangladesh has previously used India's involvement as a political tool to stir anti-India sentiments through allegations of interference.

Strengthening border security is also essential, with enhanced cooperation between the border forces of both nations to tackle issues such as illegal migration, smuggling, and human trafficking. Additionally, fostering economic development is key, and India should continue to build on existing infrastructure initiatives while exploring new economic cooperation projects. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) offers an opportunity to further enhance trade and investment, which could benefit both nations mutually.

To counter the growing influence of China and Pakistan in the region, India must focus on reducing their impact by strengthening diplomatic and economic ties with Bangladesh. This can be achieved by promoting people-to-people connections through cultural and educational exchanges, fostering goodwill. Finally, India should take a firm stance on protecting minority rights in Bangladesh and work towards cooperative measures to promote communal harmony, ensuring that tensions do not spill over into Indian territory. This comprehensive approach can help strengthen the relationship between the two countries and promote regional stability.

CONCLUSION

The removal of Sheikh Hasina is a major turning point in Bangladesh's relations with India. Without stability in the neighborhood, India cannot lead to progress and prosperity. Through a pragmatic and neutral stance, India can play a vital role in regional stability while both protecting its strategic interests and cementing its status as a key partner in South Asia.

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NAVIGATING TRUMP'S RE-ELECTION: INDIA'S STRATEGIC CHOICES.

Aashutosh Kumar & Kashish Garg

WHAT DOES TRUMP'S VICTORY IMPLY FOR INDIA ?

by Aashutosh Kumar & Kashish Garg

INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump's victory in US Presidential elections 2024 has been a hot topic across the globe and India is no exception. As Trump is likely to prepare for his second term, Indians and experts are wondering what this victory means for their country. Trump's "America First" policy and his previous stance on issues like Kashmir issue, trade, immigration, and terrorism are likely to impact India's economy, politics, and global relationships. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has congratulated Trump on his victory, Modi felicitated the Republican Party candidate calling him as "my friend". Modi clearly mentioned in his tweet about future collaborations to further strengthen Indo-US partnership and experts are speculating and assuming that the India-US relationship will continue to evolve under Trump's leadership. However, having said that there are concerns about potential trade tensions, immigration etc.

REVISITING INDIA-US RELATIONS IN TRUMP 1.0

India had emerged as an indispensable partner from a strategic partner for the US during the first term of Donald Trump. Despite the fact that the relations of the US with many closest countries had deteriorated in this period.

COOPERATION IN DEFENCE, TERRORISM AND ENERGY

Modi-Donald ties at the individual level have been very significant for developing ties at the global level. India-US relations have been cooperative during the Trump regime in different spheres of the States. Both the leaders had met several times between 2017 and 2020 leading to successful bilateral engagements. According to Shivshankar Menon, India-US has seen improvement in defence, intelligence cooperation, maritime security and bilateral trade.

India had enhanced its defence collaboration to the next level during Trump's first term. The defence procurement had climbed to \$ 18 billion annually in 2019, as India came under the category of Tier 1 of the Strategic Trade Authorization (STA) license exception. Further, the US cooperated to share intelligence with India, thereby enhancing military preparedness and scope of defence acquisition. It is evident from the intelligence shared by Washington to New Delhi in the Galwan Valley conflict between India and China in 2020.

China has been the other factor for increasing cooperation between India-US relations. Emergence of China creating a new world order has been a threat to many countries, especially challenging the hegemony of US as a global power.

Thereby, the US has been cooperating with India strategically to counter the rise of China. The rise of India and other countries in South-Asia would challenge the rise of China by creating a multipolar world. India-US had also worked together under the Trump's administration to eliminate terrorism. It is clearly reflected when the US supported the designation of declaring Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist following the Pulwama attack in 2019. It has also shown its support in greylisting of Pakistan by the Financial Action Task Force in 2018.

During this period, energy was a significant area where ties had strengthened, as bilateral Strategic Energy Partnership was held in April 2018, marking the start of import of crude and LNG from the US. With this India became the US's sixth largest hydrocarbon importer. However, Trump's diplomacy is based on giving and getting favours rather than a particular common purpose.

TRUMP 2.0 AND INDIA

Donald Trump in his second term has come into the position of the President of America by giving a lot of promises. Among all these messages, he laid emphasis on "Make America Great Again". He also promised to "Make America Affordable Again". Trump had particularly highlighted realignment of foreign policy, advancing a protectionist state and reducing immigration. He is determined to achieve his promises unlike other politicians.

Source: www.gettyimages.com



Foreign policy of the US under the leadership of Trump would be based on an "America First" vision. His policies at the global level would be shaped accordingly. The global order and US role prominently would be based on Trump's transactional approach and the other would be strengthening the US position in relation to Europe and China. Under Trump's presidency, the defence and technology relations will probably continue as seen in the first term of Trump. During Modi's visit to the US last year in June, US and India signed new defence deal allowing New Delhi to buy military equipment and defence technologies worth \$20 billion. From all this it can be analysed that India-US have been defence and strategic partner over all these years consistently.

Bilateral relations will probably be deepened. However, there are chances of unpredictable steps by the US changing the global order. Strategic threat of China to both India and the US would be of special interest to Delhi. Even the quadrilateral framework was revived in 2017 under the first Trump administration. It would be in the interest of both to work together to limit Chinese power in Asia and the Indo-Pacific and to mitigate the rising threat from China.

Further, Trump's focus on ending the long escalating war of Russia-Ukraine would be in favour of India. The end of war would be not only resolving world problems but also tackling the problem of India to isolate Russia.

AREAS OF CONCERN FOR INDIA

Trump's view of dismantling the regulatory state paving the path for US capital to invest and enhancing in the field of technologies. As far as India is concerned it has to change its approach in shifting from state led technology advancement to private technological advancements. The priority to be emphasised on collaboration with the US technology giants.

Trump emphasis on tariff policy is clearly reflected in his second term election messages. Trump considers tariff as an instrument to re-industrialise America. He is of the view of charging 10 per cent tariff on all imports and a special 60 per cent on Chinese goods. US being the most important trade partner, India has to work more to strengthen India-US relationships in terms of Trade.

Immigration is one of the major concerns for India as far as Trump's administration is concerned. It is evident from Trump's first term that immigration is what India has looked into with special emphasis. However, Trump has differentiated between legal and illegal immigration. India also shares a common interest to tackle illegal immigrants. India has to develop a sustainable framework beyond the H-1B visa to tackle such issues.

AREAS OF CONCERN FOR INDIA

At the global forum we can analyse and assume both these countries aimed at countering China's influence. As Foreign affairs minister S Jaishankar also mentioned about maintaining close relations with Washington with their shared objective of containing China in the Indo-Pacific region.

Over these years, China has been the major focus to the US engagement with India. Thus Trump can focus on deepen geopolitical engagement with India and the QUAD(Grouping of US, India, Japan, and Australia) at the same time intensifying contestation with China also mentioned by former diplomat Ajay Bisaria. All these nations are trying to send a message to China, reaffirming commitment of four nation coalition to vision of free and open Indo-Pacific and responding to future needs of the region. All this cooperation and coordination among these four nations are in response to counter the hegemonic aspirations of China in the Indo-Pacific region.

With all these engagements and advancements as a result we can assume that New Delhi may attract more global supply chains and private investment which will provide a boost to defence and technological partnership in future.

CONCLUSION

Actions of America are going to be shaped by its self interest. Considering the overall scenario India need to work to improve its capabilities prioritizing the defence and technological relationships to be sustained in the coming second term of Trump.

Ultimately, Trump's victory serves as a reminder that the global landscape is constantly evolving, and India must remain adaptable and responsive to these changes to ensure its continued growth and prosperity. However, the relationships under Trump are going to be mutual. New Delhi might have to give something to get something.

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A high-angle, wide shot of a massive crowd of people. The crowd is so dense that individual faces are not clearly visible, but a sea of heads and shoulders fills the frame. Numerous small, colorful pieces of confetti or streamers are falling from the crowd, creating a dynamic, festive atmosphere. The colors of the confetti include red, green, blue, yellow, and white, contrasting with the darker tones of the crowd's clothing.

POPULATION CONTROL BILL: PROSPERITY THROUGH PLANNING

Vansh Sharma

POPULATION CONTROL BILL: PROSPERITY THROUGH PLANNING

by Vansh Sharma

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections were both the biggest festival of democracy and an expensive political drama. With the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) securing a consecutive third term, the country awaits what new initiatives the party has to offer to the people of our nation.

While the government has already ticked off the majority of its agendas or “promises,” like the abrogation of article 370 and the construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the population control bill seems to be the next big agenda on the list, paving the way to take India’s economy towards the 5 trillion-dollar mark.

In today's time, where the country is facing issues like poverty, income inequality, and economic disparity, these issues could be solved by roping in a population control bill. Population control efforts in India have evolved over time, and there isn't a single, definitive "first" population control bill.

HISTORY OF POPULATION STABILIZATION

India was one of the first countries to launch a national family planning program in 1952. This marked the beginning of organized efforts to manage population growth. Prior to this, committees like the Bhole Committee (1943) addressed health concerns, which were indirectly related to population matters, and those committees’ made recommendations that involved family limitations. Additionally, the Radha Kamal Mukherjee Committee (1940) also looked into ways to arrest the growing population numbers. The approach to population management shifted over time. While early efforts often emphasized sterilization, later approaches focused on education, empowerment, and reproductive health.

In the 1970s, the country was going through a period of emergency. During this period, there was a push for more aggressive population control measures, including forced sterilizations. But with time there has been a pragmatic shift in the governments’ approaches from being coercive and authoritarian to giving emphasis on voluntary family planning initiatives with a special focus on education, awareness, and access to reproductive healthcare. Various population control bills introducing incentives for small families or disincentives for larger families have been proposed till date, but none have been successful. In fact, there has never even been a proper formal law or policy formulation addressing this issue.



WHY POPULATION CONTROL?

One must think, why do we really need to control our population? What harm will it do to us if we have more people? To answer this, let us understand that India is the world's most populated country, with a total population of around 1.4 billion people. All living in an area of 3.28 million square kilometers, this density means that roughly 2342.86 square meters of land per person, a striking example of how a vast population occupies a comparatively smaller area. Many scholars believe that population control is the need of the hour because for a developing country like India, it is necessary that the population be kept under control in order to sustain growth and development of all sorts, ensuring that its benefits are equally and equitably distributed amongst those who really require them in order to survive. But it becomes difficult if the population keeps increasing, eventually leading to economic disparity and income inequality that directly influence unemployment and poverty.

To grasp the concept of population control, it is essential to first understand the total replacement rate (TRR), or replacement level fertility, and its impact on us.

In layman's words, it is the average number of children a woman must have to replace herself and her partner, ensuring the population remains stable (without migration). The global standard replacement rate is 2.1 children per woman. If the replacement rate is more than the standard replacement rate, the total population of that country or region will increase, and if it is less, the population will see a decline.

In 2014, India's population was approximately 1.2 billion, and by 2024, it had risen to around 1.4 billion, reflecting a population growth rate of about 17 percent over the past decade. But if we analyze the world population, which was around 7.2 billion in 2014 to 8.2 billion people in 2024, reflecting a 14 percent growth rate. These numbers clearly tell us that India is growing at a faster pace as compared to the entire world. We have a TFR that is more than the global standard of 2.1 children per woman. The resources that our country has are limited in nature and due to such a large population, rapid exhaustion occurs; which implies that the resource extraction is higher than its rate of regeneration, leading to environmental degradation.

Around 66 percent of our country is below the age of 35 years, comprising a major proportion of students and working-class people. However, due to overpopulation, not all of them are able to secure employment or gain admission to good institutions. As per the official data by the National Medical Commission (NMC), the total number of seats for MBBS in India is 109095, cut to the aspirants in the year 2024, which was roughly around 23,33,162. This means that for each available seat, 22 students pile up, this just depicts the amount of pressure that these students must go through to pursue higher education, and many eventually commit suicide due to financial and societal struggles. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics showed a consistent, concerning rise in suicide rates from 9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh population in 2022.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

For the very first time, the population control bill was introduced in July 2019 by Rakesh Sinha at the Rajya Sabha, which was ratified by 125 members. The act talks about the end number of ways through which the population of India can come under control. The central government shall ensure that contraceptives are available at reasonable rates at all sub-health centers in the country.

If both the husband and the wife in the case of a married couple who have only one child voluntarily undergo sterilization operations, the appropriate government shall provide them with some benefits, like giving preference to their single child for admission in institutes of higher education or giving preference for selection to the single child in government jobs.

If both the husband and the wife in the case of a married couple who are living below the poverty line and having only one child voluntarily undergo a sterilization operation, in addition to the benefits granted under section 6 by the appropriate government, such married couple shall be eligible for payment from the central government of a one-time lump sum amount of sixty thousand rupees if the single child is a boy or one lakh rupees if the single child is a girl. Both the husband and the wife in the case of a married couple who have more than two children shall be debarred from contesting in Lok Sabha, State Legislature, and Panchayati elections as well as getting elected to the Rajya Sabha, the State Legislative Councils, and similar elective representative bodies. The appropriate government shall introduce a compulsory subject relating to population control in all senior secondary schools in states where the average fertility rate is more than the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman.

BJPs' initiative to control the growing population is really necessary if India wants to continue to sustain its growth, but to believe that it will be 100 percent successful is really questionable.

Critics argue that the intent of such laws is not good. Does the state want to empower its people and eradicate issues caused by overpopulation, or do they just feel that it will be easier to control and manipulate a smaller number of people?

Also, the government is planning to introduce the UCC under which live-in relationships are legal, so why is this law only focusing on married couples? These questions are still being deliberated upon and are open for discussion and debate.

DEVOTION VERSUS RATIONALITY

The whole notion of population control at times has faced social as well as religious backlash from common people as well as big influential public figures. India as a country till today has a very narrow and orthodox mindset where notions of sex education, family planning, and reproductive health are still considered a taboo, which can be gradually changed with the help of education. Relying entirely on laws and incentives seems insufficient; scholars argue that education can play a much bigger role among the masses; hence, more focus should be made in the field on education rather than just relying on laws. India is a very religious country. Various religious organizations and figures are looked upon by common people, wherein almost all of them advise their followers to have more children. Current RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, while addressing a crowd in Nagpur, urged families to have 3 children in order to preserve their language, identity, culture, etc. Whereas various Muslim leaders and scholars, like Shoaib Jamai and Samajwadi party member Shafiqur Rehman, on numerous occasions cited that having more children is important for their religion, culture, and identity to grow.

What people are most concerned about are mandatory population control measures that can infringe upon individual reproductive rights and freedoms. There's a risk of coercive practices, especially targeting marginalized communities.

CONCLUSION

To summarize this article, we see that the need for controlling India's population is very essential at this point. But the government must not forget that if implemented poorly, it can lead to total social as well as political unrest in the society. The population control bill should be diligently and carefully implemented and should not totally rely on legislative measures. Education awareness campaigns through movies, literature, and folklore must be promoted as well. The most important thing that one must remember is to choose rationality over devotion and give priority to one's own future. Maintaining physical, mental, and social well-being is crucial for ensuring a sustainable future for our country, where individuals can live lives of dignity and happiness.

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THE FREEBIE DILEMMA: BALANCING POLITICS, ECONOMY, AND WELFARE

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THE FREEBIE DILEMMA: BALANCING POLITICS, ECONOMY, AND WELFARE

by Piyush Chaudhary, Siddhita Mishra and Vansh Gaur

INTRODUCTION

In the country, especially during the recent elections, has there been a surge in the political parties, offering free goods, provoking debate across the spectrum. What is the impact of freebies is an interesting question? The literal meaning of "freebie" refers to something given free of charge, often as a promotional tool or incentive. In politics, freebies are incentives offered by parties to voters in the form of subsidies, free services, or direct financial aid. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) defines freebies as “non-merit subsidies”—expenditures that do not contribute to long-term economic productivity but add financial stress to government budgets. The Supreme Court of India has also cautioned against reckless freebies, warning that they could push states into economic crises if not backed by sustainable financial planning. It is crucial to differentiate between welfare and freebies. Welfare Schemes are Government-funded programs designed to address societal needs and promote social justice. While Political Freebies are Goods, services, or financial incentives offered by politicians to gain electoral support. In India, the line between well-intentioned welfare schemes and vote-grabbing "freebies" has been blurred, creating a dilemma for policymakers and citizens alike—misappropriation of public assets.



With the elections ending, The debate is more pressing than ever. While social support is necessary, voters must ask: Are these promises sustainable? Will they improve lives in the long run, or are they just political tactics to secure votes? Understanding this difference is essential to making informed electoral decisions.

RATIONALITY BEHIND FREEBIE POLITICS

The rationality behind freebie politics is ingrained in economic, psychological, and social factors. It first formed in India during the 1990s and early 2000s in states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. When they introduced schemes such as free electricity, subsidized food, and financial aid for the underprivileged people. But during its early era, it seems like a positive idea since these programs were initially designed to address poverty and ensure basic needs were met. However, it came in a different form, when over time political parties realized that promising and delivering freebies could be an effective vote-bank strategy, especially for lower-income groups. As a result, politics has become the hub of freebies where political campaigns increasingly revolve around offering free healthcare, debt waivers, and welfare benefits, making freebies a central element of electoral competition

Source: www.gettyimages.com



From the lens of economics , rationality behind freebie politics aligns with Keynesian principles, which is the idea of advocating short-term government intervention to address economic imbalances in the country. It could also be seen as Welfare schemes providing immediate relief to marginalized communities, boosting their purchasing power and improving their quality of life. However, the excessive reliance on freebies can lead to severe fiscal consequences, when political parties make reckless promises without taking in consideration of economic sustainability, which results in budgetary deficits and long-term financial strain on governments. Instead of investing in infrastructure, education, and employment opportunities, resources are diverted to short-term political gains, which can hinder overall economic development.

The psychological idea of freebies on voter behavior is another critical aspect. The principle of reciprocity, a well-established concept in social psychology, suggests that when individuals receive gifts or favors, they feel compelled to return the favor. In a political context, this means voters may develop a sense of indebtedness toward parties which provide material benefits and influence their electoral choices. Additionally, cognitive biases like the anchoring effect and the endowment effect further shape voter perceptions. When people receive something tangible from a political party, they tend to assign greater value to it, by subconsciously developing a positive bias toward the provider. This psychological dimension explains why freebies are deeply rooted and remain a powerful electoral tool, despite ongoing debates about their economic feasibility.

Beyond psychology, freebies ideas also could be seen in shaping political engagement and social identity. Campaign merchandise, such as t-shirts and posters, creates a sense of solidarity among supporters like Welfare-driven freebies, such as free healthcare camps and educational scholarships, mobilize specific voter groups, reinforcing political allegiances. While these benefits may seem positive, they also raise ethical concerns ,when electoral success depends more on material incentives rather than policy discussions, democratic integrity is compromised.

HISTORY OF FREEBIES

Political parties in India went from using freebies as a political tool to win elections in today's time, but freebies have not suddenly been a phenomenon in india. All of the concept of freebies started in the 1950s, when Tamil Nadu, then known as Madras State, laid the groundwork for welfare-oriented politics under Chief Minister K. Kamaraj. His initiatives, such as the Midday Meal Scheme and free uniforms for students, aimed to boost education and reduce social disparities. These programs not only improved literacy rates from 19% in 1951 to 37% in 1961 but also set a precedent for future welfare measures in the state. Building on this foundation, subsequent leaders like M.G. Ramachandran in the late 1970s and 1980s introduced schemes like distributing free color televisions to households, aiming to provide entertainment and information access to the masses. While some criticized these initiatives as mere populism, they resonated deeply with the public and solidified the culture of offering tangible benefits to citizens. But freebies didn't stop here, it went beyond Tamil nadu. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's "Garibi Hatao" (Eradicate Poverty) campaign at the national level introduced policies like bank nationalization and subsidized food, reflecting a similar commitment to direct public welfare. While some criticized these initiatives as mere populism, they resonated deeply with the public and solidified the culture of offering tangible benefits to citizens. In 2015, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) stormed to power in Delhi on the promise of providing a certain amount of water and electricity free of cost to people and this continued. Over the decades, various states adopted and adapted these strategies, tailoring them to local needs and political contexts. Today, the practice of offering freebies has become intrinsic to Indian politics, with parties across the country promising various benefits to garner electoral support.

FREEBIES IN CONTEMPORARY ELECTION

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections various political parties made bold promises, with welfare schemes taking center stage in their manifestos. The Indian National Congress (INC), through its Nyay Patra, has pledged direct cash transfers, including the Mahalakshmi Scheme, which promises to offer ₹1 lakh per year to poor families. While this proposal aims to uplift the economically weaker sections, its long-term feasibility remains a concern. Similarly, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), despite taking a more indirect approach, also relies on cash transfers, such as PM-Kisan, which provides ₹6,000 annually to farmers, alongside subsidies like free ration under PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and free electricity through PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has promised ₹1,000 per month for all women and free SIM cards with data for students, emphasizing financial independence and digital access. Meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has gone all out with pledges of free housing, doorstep ration deliveries, and ten free gas cylinders annually for BPL families. While these initiatives aim to address social inequalities, they also serve as powerful electoral incentives, as parties compete to win over key voter groups. However, the real challenge lies in funding these massive welfare schemes without jeopardizing economic stability. The estimated cost of Congress's Mahalakshmi Scheme alone is ₹6 lakh crore, while DMK's universal stipend for women would further strain public finances. At the same time, BJP's continued subsidies—though structured as ongoing welfare programs—also contribute to rising fiscal pressure. The Reserve Bank of India reports a 12.6% increase in state debt-to-GSDP ratio from 2018 to 2023, and FDI inflows have declined from 1.56% of GDP in 2018 to 1.47% in 2022, indicating reduced capital for developmental spending. Even the reason behind BJP's electoral success is largely driven by its targeted welfare schemes, which act as structured freebies without being labeled as such. Programs like PM-Kisan (cash transfers to farmers), PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (free ration), and Ujjwala Yojana (subsidized LPG) have secured loyalty among key voter groups, especially women and the poor. Unlike one-time giveaways, these schemes create a sense of continuous support, ensuring long-term political dividends. During COVID-19, free vaccines, extended ration, and financial aid further cemented BJP's image as a provider, reinforcing voter dependence on government assistance.

While in the case of 2025 state elections, political parties across India are intensifying their focus on welfare schemes, commonly referred to as "freebies," to garner voter support. In Madhya Pradesh, the Ladli Behna Yojana provides ₹1,250 monthly to women aged 21 to 59. However, no new registrations have been accepted since August 2023, and the state government has confirmed that there will be no changes to the scheme in 2025, including no increase in financial assistance or expansion of eligibility criteria. In the recent ongoing Delhi election, the competition among parties has led to a surge in promises aimed at women voters, who constitute nearly half of the electorate. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has introduced the Mahila Samman Yojana, offering ₹2,100 monthly to women, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is promoting its Ladli Behna Yojana, modeled after Madhya Pradesh's scheme.

PROBLEMS WITH FREEBIE POLITICS

In Indian politics, freebies have become an essential strategy to attract voters, where from free electricity and farm loan waivers to cash handouts, political parties compete to offer the most appealing benefits. While freebie politics offers short-term relief to disadvantaged populations, it is not a sustainable model for long-term development as the biggest challenge lies in balancing politics with economics, ensuring that welfare schemes are financially sustainable and do not weaken economic stability. But despite repeated warnings from economists and institutions, India's increasing reliance on freebies is leading to fiscal distress, governance failures, and economic inefficiencies.

1. Economic Burden and Fiscal Instability

One of the most pressing concerns with freebie culture is the financial strain on state budgets. Many states are spending beyond their revenue capacity, leading to massive debt accumulation. For example, Punjab's debt-to-GSDP ratio is projected to reach 46.8% by 2026-27, while Rajasthan, Kerala, and West Bengal are already over 35%. Despite this, political parties continue promising more subsidies and cash benefits to gain votes, ignoring the long-term economic consequences. The 2008 farm loan waiver, which cost ₹52,259 crore, is a clear example of how reckless freebies can destabilize the economy. Instead of solving farmers' problems, it led to an increase in non-performing assets (NPAs) in banks from 3.3% in 2011 to 6% in 2016, weakening credit discipline (RBI, 2016).

Another major example is the free electricity schemes, which have caused ₹3 lakh crore in losses for state-run power distribution companies (DISCOMs) between 2017-18 and 2020-21 (PRS Legislative Research, 2022). While these schemes benefit low-income households in the short run, they push the power sector into financial distress, resulting in higher tariffs for industries and businesses. This, in turn, affects economic competitiveness and job creation. Such fiscal mismanagement shows how freebies, while politically beneficial, undermine the long-term sustainability of public finances (Power Finance Corporation, 2022).

2. The Dependency Culture and Productivity Loss

While welfare schemes are necessary for social justice, excessive freebies create a culture of dependency rather than empowerment. Many reports highlight how free cash transfers and subsidies discourage work participation, particularly among the youth and productivity. Several states have reported declining workforce participation, as young individuals become reliant on government handouts rather than pursuing employment and skill development, like they went for political campaigns rather than doing their own work. In contrast, countries like China and South Korea where they reduced poverty by investing in education, skill development, and industrial growth, rather than unsustainable giveaways.

Freebies also disrupt market efficiency. When the government provides goods and services for free, it reduces incentives for efficiency and competition. For example, free electricity leads to reckless power consumption, high transmission losses, and wastage, further straining financial resources. Similarly, excessive agricultural subsidies prevent modernization, keeping farmers dependent on government aid rather than adopting new technologies. Instead of encouraging self-sufficiency, such policies create long-term economic stagnation.

3. Governance and Ethical Issues

Freebie politics also raises serious concerns about governance and democratic integrity. Instead of focusing on long-term policies like employment generation, infrastructure, and industrial development, governments are prioritizing short-term electoral gains. This not only weakens public accountability but also reduces pressure on policymakers to implement meaningful reforms.

There is also an ethical concern regarding voter manipulation. The principle of reciprocity in social psychology suggests that when people receive something for free, they feel obligated to return the favor. In elections, this translates to voters supporting parties that offer the most freebies, regardless of their governance record. This distorts democracy, making elections about material benefits rather than policy debates. The Supreme Court of India has warned that unchecked freebies could push the country toward an economic crisis, yet there are no strong regulations to prevent reckless spending.



4. Balancing Welfare and Fiscal Responsibility

The challenge is not about eliminating welfare schemes but ensuring they are financially sustainable. Many Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) emphasize social welfare, but they must be backed by a strong revenue model. Unlike countries like Norway and Sweden, which fund social benefits through high tax-to-GDP ratios (above 39%), India's tax-to-GDP ratio is only 11%, making its welfare spending highly dependent on borrowing. Instead of increasing the freebie burden, governments should focus on higher tax compliance, economic growth, and strategic public investments

COMPARATIVE STUDY

The nature of freebies offered in the United States of America is vastly different from that in India as the idea of “freebies” is not as mainstream as it is in India. Freebies in India are distributed universally without any strict criteria while in the United States of America, they require individuals to meet certain employment or income standard. The culture of freebies and welfare schemes is very much present in Brazil, where programs like Bolsa Familia, which is the country’s largest conditional cash transfer program for reducing poverty. It provides financial assistance to the people under specific conditions like time to time vaccination of children and keeping them in school. We can see a similar culture of freebies in Politics in Sri Lanka much like in India, and how it led to Sri Lanka’s economic collapse. This collapse was due to unreasonable, inflated welfare schemes, tax cuts and impractical freebies. The country relied on debt to fulfill the promises of freebies like food, water, free electricity, etc. By the year 2022, Sri Lanka’s foreign reserves ran out and it faced many agitations and demonstrations leading to an IMF bailout. The consequences of excessive use of freebies can lead India into the same situation as well.

RECOMMENDATION

There are some recommendations which existing literature has talked about. As we mentioned that a balanced approach required where following strategies could work:

1. Limiting freebie expenditure to a fixed percentage (e.g., 5-10%) of the state budget, ensuring funds are available for critical investments.
2. Linking welfare schemes to productivity—for example, conditional cash transfers tied to skill development and employment training.
3. Making election promises financially accountable, requiring political parties to submit Fiscal Impact Reports before announcing new freebie policies.
4. Investing in education and healthcare, which have a direct impact on long-term economic growth and social well-being.

To ensure financial stability while maintaining social welfare, India must implement structured reforms that distinguish between essential welfare programs and unsustainable freebies. The Supreme Court has emphasized the need to regulate electoral freebies to prevent fiscal crises like those seen in highly indebted states such as Punjab (46.8% debt-to-GSDP ratio) and Rajasthan (over 40%). Instead of indiscriminate handouts, the focus should be on fiscally responsible welfare policies that promote long-term economic growth.

First, there should be a clear legal distinction between welfare and freebies. Welfare schemes such as Ayushman Bharat (healthcare for 500 million people) and PM-KISAN (₹6,000 annual aid to 120 million farmers) contribute to long-term economic stability. In contrast, election-driven freebies, such as free laptops and household appliances, drain public finances without sustainable benefit. A Supreme Court-monitored committee should oversee and regulate these distinctions.

Second, all states should be required to submit a Fiscal Impact Report before announcing any freebie schemes, detailing funding sources and long-term financial sustainability . Many Indian states spend 0.1% to 2.7% of their GSDP on freebies, often exceeding their revenue. A mandatory financial assessment by the Finance Commission or CAG can prevent unsustainable spending.

Third, the Election Commission should enforce transparency by requiring political parties to disclose the economic feasibility of their freebie promises. Misleading election manifestos that propose extravagant freebies should face strict financial scrutiny and penalties.

Fourth, welfare programs should be linked to economic productivity. For example, free electricity schemes should have a consumption cap, and direct cash transfers should be tied to employment or skill development programs to encourage self-sufficiency. Countries like South Korea and China reduced poverty through education and skill-building rather than unsustainable subsidies.

Finally, a cap on freebie-related expenditure should be introduced, limiting it to 5-10% of a state's budget to prevent over-commitment. This will ensure that funds are directed towards critical sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure rather than short-term political incentives.

CONCLUSION

Freebies in politics may seem like a quick fix to help people, but in the long run, they can create more problems than solutions. While they provide temporary relief, they often lead to financial instability, increased government debt, and a culture of dependency. Instead of focusing on short-term benefits, policymakers need to ensure that welfare programs are sustainable and truly improve people's lives. India can implement responsible freebie policies through legal, financial, and governance reforms. A Supreme Court-monitored framework should define welfare vs. freebies to prevent reckless spending . Mandatory Fiscal Impact Reports should ensure states justify freebie expenditures before implementation. The Election Commission must enforce transparency, requiring parties to disclose funding sources for promised freebies. Welfare should be linked to productivity, such as conditional cash transfers for skill development. Finally, a cap on freebie spending (5-10% of the budget) should safeguard essential sectors like healthcare and infrastructure.

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THE EXIT POLL DILEMMA: A DEEP DIVE INTO SAMPLING ERRORS, VOTER PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE NEED FOR REFORM

Siddhant Nitawane
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THE EXIT POLL DILEMMA: A DEEP DIVE INTO SAMPLING ERRORS, VOTER PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE NEED FOR REFORM

by Siddhant Nitawane and Rishabh Mangal

Exit polls have been important ever since India had its first general election in the year 1952. They are an important means to gauge the political atmosphere at the ground level and predict the outcome of elections. They have been instrumental in the strengthening of democratic voices. The polling industry in India has an estimated annual market size of ₹250-300 crore. There are approximately 40-50 active polling organizations in the country currently. Media and political stakeholders make significant investments in polling activities.

There are varied ways by which institutes do exit polls, with the CSDS Lokniti having adopted a totally different approach, by way of seeking information after the first day of the polling. Exit polls have a significant impact on the mental psychology of people. There is evidence suggesting that around 12-15% of voter sentiment can be manipulated by exit polls. The first-round voting areas are more vulnerable to such manipulations. Significant differences exist between urban and rural populations in interpreting poll data.

However, their predictions have gone berserk in the recent elections. In the 2019 General Elections, 95% of exit polls failed to predict seat allocation accurately. On average, the predictive accuracy for exit polls for major state and national elections was about 40-45%. The margin of error frequently exceeds ± 15 -20 seat variations. During the 2014 General Elections, exit polls mispredicted 62% of state-level election outcomes. During the 2019 General Elections, the error margin in predicting coalition compositions reached 73%, and between 2018 and 2023, state assembly elections exhibited inconsistencies ranging from 15 to 25 seats when compared to actual results.

With the 2024 elections having been concluded, across the political spectrum, provoking debates have risen about the accuracy of the exit polls. Most of them have failed in their approximations in the elections. This calls for a detailed analysis of their methodology, the ways to quell their missed predictions, and the need for electoral reforms at large to regulate their impact. There are various reasons underlying their failure in the country.

The diversity of India's electorate poses significant sampling challenges. These challenges could be discerned in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, which saw more than 900 million registered voters from diverse social and linguistic groups. 543 parliamentary constituencies faced sampling complications in the 2019 National Election Study (NES) conducted by LokNiti-CSDS. Their research showed sampling errors ranging from $\pm 2\%$ to $\pm 5\%$ depending on the region, which shows how diversity creates sampling complications.



A notable example is the 2014 Bihar Assembly elections, where most opinion polls failed to accurately predict the outcome. The average sampling error was $\pm 4.2\%$, which is significantly higher than the typical $\pm 3\%$ in less diverse states. This is due to the complex social dimension of the state, which includes more than 20 main ethnic groups, along with the rural-urban diversity.

The states with greater linguistic diversity (such as Uttar Pradesh, which has 16 official languages) showed more errors in sampling, which is 1.5 times higher than in states with similar linguistic characteristics like Tamil Nadu. However, modern approaches have come up that have successfully reduced their inaccuracy. The West Bengal Election 2021 was successfully sampled through stratified sampling. The state was divided into 294 homogeneous strata based on demographic parameters. This reduced the sampling error to $\pm 2.8\%$.

Various statistical solutions include multistage stratified sampling accounting for race, religion, and language; larger sample size in different areas; and weighted sampling technique to adjust for socio-economic variations. The sampling issues are evident due to the limited survey sample sizes, typically ranging between 15,000 and 25,000 respondents.

Talking about the comparative analysis of the exit polls, international polling accuracy rates vary across different countries.

India's approach to exit polls is distinct compared to other democracies. In the United States, there are almost no restrictions on exit polls, allowing for widespread media coverage and analysis. The United Kingdom follows a self-regulatory model, where media organizations adhere to ethical guidelines rather than strict legal controls. Australia imposes partial broadcasting prohibitions, restricting the dissemination of exit poll results during election periods to prevent undue influence on voters.

In India, the accuracy stands at approximately 40-45%. The United States exhibits a higher polling accuracy rate, ranging from 65% to 70%. In the United Kingdom, polling accuracy falls within the range of 55-60% (Pew Research). These variations are largely attributed to the demographic complexities inherent in each country.

Secondly, the number of people who abstain from voting also impacts their accuracy. The context for the 2019 general elections was 912 million voters on the list; voter turnout was 67.4%; the total number of constituencies was 543. Now accounting for the factors that have led to the unfavorable outcome, they are manifold, including 17-22% of media organizations strategically abstaining from exit polling, an estimated 35-40% reduction in comprehensive poll coverage, and major networks or news channels like that of Doordarshan consistently avoiding exit poll publication.

There are various implicit factors that exit polls do not usually take into account. First is the bandwagon strategy. The bandwagon effect is a critical psychological mechanism that changes the electoral landscape in India, where collective perception significantly influences individual voting decisions. It goes beyond traditional political analysis, revealing how social psychology interacts with democratic processes. It is when perception supersedes substantive political discourse; digital platforms exponentially amplify electoral narratives; social psychology becomes a critical electoral variable.

Technology plays a significant role in modern elections, with 560 million Internet users contributing to widespread access to political information. Social media has emerged as a key platform for political engagement, with 350 million people actively participating in political discussions online. This digital expansion is further reinforced by a smartphone penetration rate of 36%, enabling more people to access political content, news, and campaign messaging instantly.

Voter susceptibility to influence varies across demographics. Young voters (18-25 years) are the most impressionable, with 37% (Source: CSDS LOKNITI) highly susceptible to political narratives, especially through social media. Young adults (26-35 years) exhibit 28% moderate influence, indicating that while they are impacted by political messaging, they are slightly more discerning. Middle-aged voters (36-50 years) show 15% minimal influence, reflecting their more stable political preferences. Meanwhile, seniors (50+ years) are the most resistant to influence, as they are more likely to rely on traditional political knowledge and personal experiences rather than external persuasion.

The susceptibility to political influence also varies regionally. The Northern states demonstrate the highest susceptibility at 45%, due to diverse political narratives and intense electoral competition; the Southern states, with 22% moderate influence, tend to have a more stable political environment with established voter preferences. The Western states experience 35% suggesting that political messaging can still shift voter opinions in these regions; the Eastern states show 28% considerable engagement, highlighting a politically aware voter base that actively participates in discussions but may not be easily swayed by campaigns. These are various underlying factors that impact how exit polls go berserk. Every polling agency must take into account the role of the psychological and personal factors before going for the surveys. It could help them in being prepared to deal with an electorate that is politically charged and influenced by social physiology.

There are various ethical issues connected with exit polls, which have to be dealt with in order for them to be people-centric at large. The sharing of exit poll data and privacy protection represents, indeed, one of the main challenges today in modern democratic societies. It is a very complex arena where balances are sought out for governance surrounding transparency, electoral integrity, and private rights to individual privacy. Various surveys about exit polls are taken as instant judgments on voter behavior and the trends that are brewing. The protectiveness of individual voting preferences is of the highest importance, as their misuse or unauthorized disclosure may raise problems.

Such basic ideas of securing exit poll data must involve multi-layered (multi-faceted) approaches involving legal, technical, and organizational procedures. Legislators must be very definite in drafting the laws enunciating the limits of data collection, storage, and distribution. Such regulations must provide for anonymization protocols so strict that tracing back to any specific respondent endangers its statistical integrity.

The core facilitation of privacy protection lies in technological infrastructure.

It consists of data protection components such as support for such advanced encryption technologies, secure cloud storage systems, and both applied and simple statistical methods of data anonymization. These could be enforced by using multi-factor authentication and complicated audit trails to bring the threats of unauthorized access to within manageable levels.



The Election Commission of India has created the strictest set of rules around exit polls that aim to conserve the electoral process's sanctity. The Representation of People Act, 1951, hampers broadcasting and polling organizations in the freedom of publication to a great extent; unauthorized publications may even cost ₹5,000, plus other regulatory action by the media. The Election Commission has implemented several measures to maintain the integrity of polls, that way they get swayed by polling agency activities. Total broadcasting prohibition 48 hours before the final round of voting; the polling agencies are required to provide compulsory disclaimers; stringent provisions ensure methodological transparency; penalties are enforced for willful misinterpretation of poll results.

THE WAY FORWARD

The debate is more than about statistical accuracy—it's an intricate mixture of democratic communication, technological limits, and dynamics of voter behavior. Complete reforms with methodological innovation and stringent regulation frameworks are imperative for enhancing electoral discourse integrity.

Some of the strategic suggestions could be ensuring that exit poll methodologies are clearly communicated, which can enhance public trust and reduce skepticism about their accuracy; strengthening legal guidelines can help balance the need for transparency while preventing misinformation or undue electoral influence; greater cooperation between media, polling agencies, and regulatory bodies can improve data reliability and ethical polling practices; leveraging AI-driven analytics and improved sampling techniques can increase the accuracy and representativeness of exit poll predictions.

The road ahead demands the convergence of NEW ADVANCED statistical methods, technological advancement, and knowledge of the wide electoral diversity in India.

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INTERVIEWS



**In Conversation on Comparative
Analysis of India and China**

with

**PROF. MANORANJAN
MOHANTY**

Interviewed by: Azher Ahmad, Editor-in-Chief



ABOUT

Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty is currently a distinguished professor at the Council for Social Development, New Delhi. He had been the founding director of the prestigious Institute of Chinese Studies. He has also taught at the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, till 2004.

Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty is a teacher, researcher, and writer. A political scientist, China scholar, and peace and human rights activist, he has many books and research papers on theoretical and empirical dimensions of social movements, human rights, development studies, and global transformation. He is also Chairperson, Development Research Institute, Bhubaneswar; Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi; and Fellow at Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, UC, Santa Barbara.



Azher Ahmad : My first question to you is that there has been this perspective in the media that both India and China started almost at the same time; then how did China manage to take the leap ahead of India?

Prof. Mohanty : The so-called China leap has to be put in perspective. In terms of economic indicators, China has made substantial progress in terms of poverty eradication, most importantly in terms of achieving livelihood standards for everybody. The world prestige of China has grown tremendously, infrastructure in terms of roads, hospitals, schools, etc., has improved. So these are good indicators, and to that extent, we are far, far behind China.

But what are our goals? The goals are good living standards, abolition of poverty, education, health., employment, clean environment and egalitarian conditions for all. Those are goals for which both India and China are still struggling.

Therefore, don't get too preoccupied with this business that China has made a leap and India is far behind . India has also made strides, but India has a longer way to go to achieve even those levels.

Azher Ahmad : Comparing the political landscape of India and China, we have China, where there is little democracy. Various institutions such as the media and judiciary are not free, while in India, they are comparatively free; how do you view this perception?

Prof. Mohanty : India has lots of constraints on democracy, but no doubt, India has greater democracy than China. China describes itself also as a people's democracy, with people's congresses, which are elected, and so on. The big difference is this: it is a one party system, even though there are other parties, but they have a consultative role. We have a multi-party system, even though it was Congress-dominant for many years, now BJP-dominant, but the opposition is very powerful in some respects, and now even the ruling party has lost its absolute majority. So that is a big difference.

Secondly, the freedom of press and independence of judiciary are two big differences, and the election systems are different. But as far as human rights are concerned for example the right to livelihood, the right to food, and the right to education—these are very important human rights, which they have accomplished much more than India has accomplished. But the right to freedom of press and speech is very much limited in China.

Gender disparity is equally bad in both the countries. In India, we have a vibrant women's movement; China has a subdued women's movement. It has a women's movement, but it can't be as active and vocal as in India, though representation of women in grassroots politics and right up to the national legislature is higher than in India, but in the top leadership, participation of women is almost nil.

Azher Ahmad : China is continuously trying to influence India's neighborhood through various policies, but you in an interview with the News Click said “India and China should be partnering rather than competing in the region, how is it possible, sir?

Prof. Mohanty : Very possible and it was demonstrated between, 2005 to 2014, even to some extent the first two years of Prime Minister Modi. It is possible that has been demonstrated.

We are complementary economies in many ways. China has generated more capital to invest, and we are short of capital, so China is keen to invest in India. They now have not only money; they have technological capacities, including number one in AI in the world today. India on the other hand is good in the textile sector and chemicals. India still has many positive things to share with China. We were in fact responsible for the creation of a joint economic study group of India and China during that period. Although there has been a trade imbalance between the two in the form of China having a \$100 billion surplus, it was during the covid-19 pandemic that India needed its technology and raw

materials to catch up with the world's supplies. We should not worry about the trade deficit. Chinese capital should be allowed to improve the capacity building of India. Allow the Chinese capital to come just like the German, Canadian, and American do. Chinese capital comes indirectly from either Singapore or Malaysia or some other third country. Chinese capital should come directly to India, and it should help us in the capacity building of our capital as well as our export capacity.

Therefore, India-China economic cooperation is possible. Amid the growing tensions between China and the US, America-China trade is going fine, and American businessmen are the ones who want America-China relations to flourish. That is why we have to learn from their relations.

Azher Ahmad : Where do you see India compared to China in the next 30 to 40 years?

Prof. Mohanty : Already, the projection is China will become the number one economic power by 2040, and India will be number two by then. In other words both are aiming at economic growth rates. But my problem is that I am not impressed by either- the Chinese slogan of developed modern socialist prosperous strong country that they want to be. Likewise, PM Modi has also called for India to be a Viksit by 2047. My definition of beautiful China and India is that they have to eradicate poverty; they have to reduce inequality to such an extent that gender disparity, caste disparity, religious disparity, and regional disparity should be such that people will be more free and equal and free citizens.

The environment should be so healthy that we can breathe clean. Nowadays in Delhi, everyone is asking me what my plans are to be out of Delhi in November, December, and in Beijing we have the same conversations. I want my planet to be beautiful and equal, friendly, just so that India and China and India can be partners in recreating our world into a beautiful planet. In an interview with the News Click said "India and China should be partnering rather than competing in the region, how is it possible, sir?"

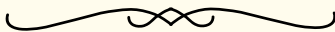
Azher Ahmad : My last question to you is, what can India learn from China and China from India?

Prof. Mohanty : Both have to learn. India should learn from China- how it has sometimes relied on small-scale industries, grassroots democracy and local production for the local market and the national market, not for the global market, which came later. But they went for the global market, it increased inequality, especially regional inequalities.

My book is called '*China success story and success trap*,' this is the success trap—great economic growth with so many problems: environmental problems, social problems, alienation, inequalities.

Therefore, India should learn from Chinese success and Chinese failures in economic development. China should learn from India's political management of democracy and how the development debate is still going on. We have had debates and movements by Mahatma Gandhi, Keshav Pattnaik, and Jaya Prakash Narayan.

China should learn from India's Democracy and development debates. India should learn from China's successful strategy and its failures and how it is readjusting its policies. They have much to learn from each other.



**In Conversation on The Current
trajectory of India's Foreign Policy**

with

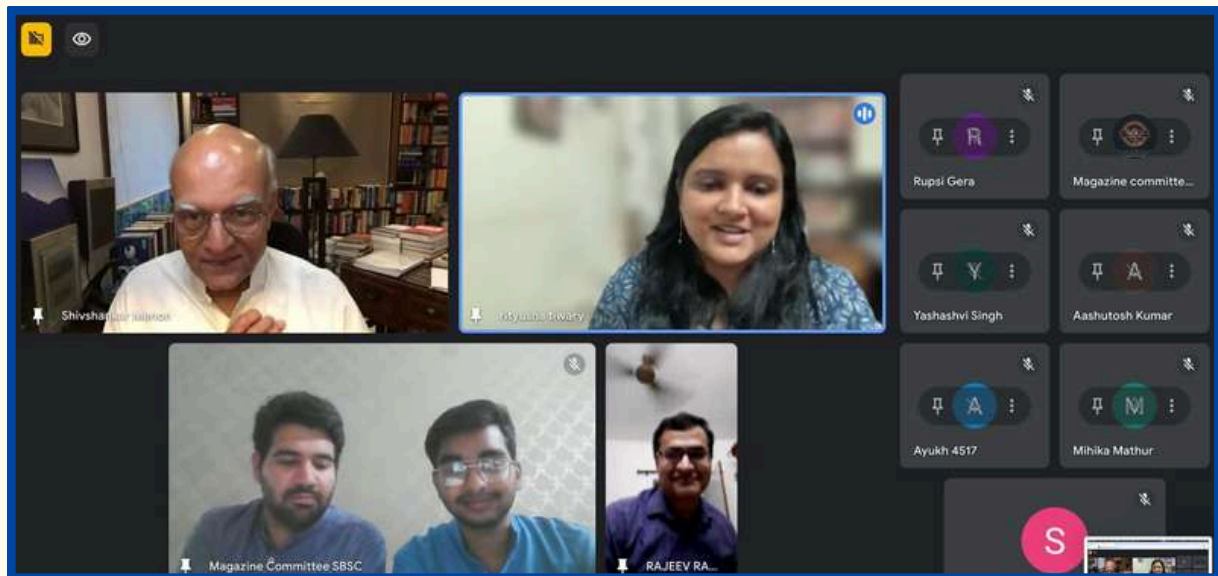
**AMBASSADOR
SHIVSHANKHAR
MENON**

Interviewed by: Aman Kakkar and Prateek Aggarwal



ABOUT

Shivshankar Menon is an Indian diplomat, who served as National Security Adviser of India under Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh. He had previously served as the Foreign Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. Prior to that he was Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, and Sri Lanka and ambassador to China and Israel. He is currently Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress. He is also Visiting Professor of International Relations at Ashoka University.



What are some of the continuities, diversions, and new trends in India's foreign policy since 1947, in your opinion?

About continuities and divergences in policy, I think we are now in the fourth phase of sort of Indian foreign policy since independence, and we've reacted tactically to the changes that we see in the world situation around us. But strategically, I think we have fundamental continuity, and this is true across governments. And for me, the most basic continuity of that is strategic autonomy. Now, each government wants to be seen as different, better, and new. So they've had different words, whether you call it non-alignment, multi-directional policy, or genuine non-alignment. I mean, different governments have used, and each one will say, we are unique; we are better; nobody else knew what they were doing. That's all right. That's part of democratic politics. But for me, the continuities are strategic. So strategic autonomy is one. The other is that the goal of Indian foreign policy is the transformation of India. And to make India a country that is prosperous and secure, where every Indian citizen can realize their full potential. And that, for me, has been common. We might have differences on what kind of India we will ultimately be in.

And thirdly, I think every government has recognized that we can't do this alone. We can't do this by cutting ourselves off from the world; we need to work with the world, partly because of our resource environment, but also because frankly, we don't have the resources to make ourselves a developed, prosperous, secure country on our own. We need to work with the rest of the world. These three are, to my mind, the basic continuities. Within this, tactics will change depending on the world situation, the situation you find yourself in, and also depending on your capabilities. As your capabilities grow, your ability to do things will change.

But so far it's been tactical, and is expected to stay tactical for some time to come because it's going to take a long time before we abolish hunger, before we abolish poverty, before we abolish disease, before we can say that we are truly developed in terms of human development, and all our citizens.

Do you think India has the potential to reshape the world order in the post-Covid world?

Not for some time. Today, we don't have the power. And let's be honest, we like to feel good about ourselves. So does every other country on Earth, which is why you'll notice nobody in the world except Australia describes themselves as a middle power, which is also why all governments will tell you this is a multipolar world, because the implication is we are a pole, and we can shape the environment. It's very flattering for all governments to tell their own people. But let's face the facts.

Today, when you look at the way power is distributed in the world, almost 50% of the world's economic power is concentrated in two countries, China and the US. A little less of world GDP is concentrated again in the same two countries. So they are in a category by themselves. But China is not the same as the US. The US is the sole military superpower in the world who can project military power where she wants, when she wants, across the world. China is still a regional military power. She's a global economic superpower. So you have a situation today where it is much better, by the way, than the Cold War.

In the Cold War, over 80% of world military power was in the two blocs, the Warsaw Pact and NATO. And about the same proportion of world economic power was actually in the developed world, in these two blocs. So that was actually a much worse world. You notice that today we've managed to achieve a situation where over half of Asia's GDP is India and China, thanks to what we have achieved, particularly in the last 35 years. What we have done is by every metric of power, we have improved our position vis-à-vis every other country except China, which improved her position even faster than us in the same period. So when I say that, can we shape the environment? Yes, if we work with other people, but we can't do it alone. And there's no guarantee that you can actually shape the environment, because that also depends on the environment, on the nature of the environment.

And I mean, my own view is when you look at the world today, why did I say we're in a fourth stage? We went through a bipolar Cold War, then we went through actually a much more confused Cold War, where in Asia, at least the bipolar had broken down with the Sino-Soviet split from the 60s, and then the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, until 2008, the global financial crisis.

Now where are we? To my mind, you are between orders. You're in a world of drift. Why do I say this? Because economically, we are multipolar. It's true. There are three big poles now. I mean, there's Asia, where China is the leading economy, the EU, and the U.S. So economically, it is a multipolar.

Militarily, it's still a unipolar world with regional challenges to the global superpower. Politically, we can see how confused the world is. There's no agreed order, there's no norms, no principles. I mean, when the Court of Arbitration tells China you're wrong on this, China sees what they do. They ignored it in 2016-18. So therefore, I think this is a world between orders. So can we shape this world? It'll take a tremendous amount of power to shape a world. I mean, when the US created the post-war system, she accounted for over 45% of world GDP, and the rest of the world had just fought itself to a standstill and almost near death through two world wars. So the US was really predominant and then built the system that we take as the postwar Western system. So first let's take care of ourselves. Let's get our own people to the stage of being prosperous and secure and achieving that potential. Let's abolish our own poverty, hunger, disease, etc. And we have enough to do and use the world for that.

India is a country of Kautilya, Gandhi, Kalidas, Ashok, and Nehru. And we are a nation built with their ideas. How far have their ideas propelled India's foreign policy, and what all needs to be extracted from their ideas?

None of them wrote a manual for you. It doesn't mean you pick up their book and you look at it and see what it tells you exactly. What they all teach you is how to think and how to think about these problems. They give you an approach. What's Kautilya's brilliance? He thinks of a state system, tells the elements of power in a state, how to think about what states do, and how they interact, 2,000 years before anybody else has even done this. In fact, until this last century, the English school was the first people who started looking at an international community and telling you how international society works. So it's remarkable. He's actually talking about the world, but because he looks at it in the broader sense, it still applies today. He's talking about a world composed of all kinds of states, city-states, confederations, tribes, kingdoms, city-states, empires, and the modern empire. So he's talking about a world that is plural and how they all interact with each other. He teaches how to think of that, how a state gets power. You learn from each of them; you learn how to think about these problems. It's not that they said you must do this; therefore, you do that. You still have to apply your mind to your problems.

Your problems are still your problems. You can't duck that. But for me, we're lucky that we have a heritage of thinking about these issues, which we can draw on, which we can actually take inspiration from. And we also have a record of actually dealing with them successfully, which not many civilizations have. That kind of heritage, or that kind of record, which I think says something. So it should give us enough confidence that we can think these problems through for ourselves and we can actually, we know how to deal with them.

In your past events, you have talked about the past and present realities of Asia or South Asian geopolitics. So if you were to comment on the biggest challenges to India's rise apart from China, what would they be?

It's actually our resource endowment because we still have to solve the fundamental problem of energy. We depend on the world for energy. We import 80% of our energy needs from abroad. The other is we also need a clearer vision of what kind of India we are trying to build. If we're going to spend our time arguing among ourselves and fighting among ourselves and polarizing ourselves, then frankly, it's going to be very difficult to create the kind of developed India in which every Indian feels they can achieve their potential well.

This is what Kautilya says: *the happiness of the king should lie in the happiness of the people*. The world will always be difficult because the world doesn't have an interest in it, in what you are trying to achieve. In fact, as you rise, you must expect that beyond the point established, powers will actually resent your rise because they see power as zero-sum. They see you as taking away their stature, their power in the world. So the more you rise, the more resistance you will face. China faces this problem today, clearly, from the established powers. She grew very fast, and as far as she can see, she can't understand why they are preventing her from doing what is good for her. It seems that we have to list the things in priority, the ultimate goal of which should be transforming India. We need to increase what helps us and mitigate or deal with what can stop us. For me, that's the one goal that's worth applying. Not ego, not status, not any of these other things, not revenge for history. You can waste your time doing all these things, but much more important is what you, Yoga Kream, do for your own people to transform India.

You've mentioned in the interview with Indian Express that it is not acceptable to claim the title of Vishwa Guru in Indianow

Vishwaguru needs a shishya also. This is a two-way process. It's not a self-appointed job. So first, you must have some knowledge. And in today's world, what is that knowledge? Who contributes to the body of human knowledge? Scientists, I mean, science is driving most change today. Technology in various forms comes out of science. What is your contribution to basic science today?

What is your contribution to human knowledge? Are you an exporter or an importer of intellectual property? You have to ask yourself the basic questions. Then you can be a Vishwa Guru.

The students have to come to you and want to learn from you. Then you are a guru. So first, I think, concentrate on building up that body of knowledge. Start making fundamental contributions to human knowledge in various ways. And you can; you have. You've done it in the past; you will do it in the future also. But you need to create an environment that does that. Then the world will learn from you. And the world will learn from you in various ways, whether it is, and I don't mean only in terms of fundamental knowledge of all the fundamental sciences and so on, but also in your practices, your political practice, or whatever; they will look at what you've done, and if they find it works and it looks good to them and they think it will work for them, they'll pick it up.

But I think you, by any definition, are still far away from that definition, from that stage. The idea of Vishwa guru, when Vivekananda used to speak of it, was that you need to have, we need to learn what European society has done and science and ally it with Indian thinking and spirituality, Indian metaphysics. And that combination would make you a Vishwa guru and bring peace to the world. Now that is the source of the idea. But we can't forget both parts. He meant to reform yourself also. Change yourself into a modern society and economy. and be true to your traditions of thinking and so on and contribute, then you'll be a Vishwa Guru. And that's what I meant when I said that you can't call yourself a Vishwa Guru today yourself. Secondly, you shouldn't be calling yourself a Vishwa Guru because the world has to come to you.

What role do you see for India to play in the Israel-Palestine and also Russia-Ukraine wars? Also, do you think India's neutral position can backfire in later phases?

A mediator can only be successful if both parties who are actually involved in the conflict want a way out, but neither of them can climb down off the tree that they've climbed up. Then the mediator offers a way out and can be successful. So this is not a test of your cleverness or your wisdom or how good you are. This is a test, actually, of the situation and of the two parties to the conflict and how much they both wanted. Today in both these cases that you mentioned, Ukraine and Palestine, it doesn't look as though either side actually wants a quick resolution. In any case, right now they're all waiting for a week for the US elections to see what happens and who wins because it will make a difference to their support and what they get. But that is apart. Is it right today for Indian intervention as mediation and so on? I would say that what we've said is right. We're available. We're ready to help. But we'd like to see them seeking it. And so this, by making it available, what we have done right, I think, is to be objective about the situation. I wouldn't call that being neutral. That doesn't mean that you just split the difference down the middle and say, both sides are equally right or equally wrong. No, you take an objective point of view based on what you see and what you think.

And if they see that you understand what you're doing and that you have certain principles and can be objective, then actually they will come to you and ask you to mediate, and your mediation could be successful. But as I said, the first primary condition is they must want it. They must want a way out. I don't think that's quite the case yet, because they're still talking past each other. As long as either side thinks they can win, you know, it's unlikely that they'll look for a mediated or fair solution. And that's part of the problem.

With the regime changes in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Afghanistan, it is becoming difficult for India to establish firm communications after the fall of their popular regimes. What is your take on it, and what do you think India should do to navigate through these difficulties to establish proper communications?

I'm not sure if communication is a problem because traditionally at least we've always stayed in touch with everybody in our neighborhood, whether opposition or ruling party, and so on. Because ultimately our neighbors are our neighbors, whether we like them or not, and they are composed of all kinds of people, all kinds of parties, all kinds of... And given our situation in the subcontinent, where borders are porous, where there are cross-border ethnicities across every border, where if you actually look at it, informal trade is almost twice as much as formal trade across every border that you have, not just Pakistan but even with Bangladesh, with Myanmar, and so on. India has an affinity with its neighbors in food, religion, etc.

Given that situation, I don't think you can afford to say, I'll only talk to my friends, or I'll only talk to whoever's ruling, whoever wins your election. You have to stay in touch with everybody and deal with everybody. But you don't have to sacrifice your interests; you have common interests here, in peace, in development, at the broadest level, and you can also work it out in practice. So I'm not sure that communication is the problem. There are two fundamental issues here.

These are all new states. They may be old nations, but they're all relatively new states. So because they are new states, they are still in the process of nation-building, of building nationalism. And the obvious way of building nationalism is you need another. You need it, and it is India that is preponderant in your life. It's a constant presence, whether you like it or not; in terms of music, film, or whatever, it's there in your life, in your politics, in your economy, everything. So they look for outside balancers. Used to be the US; now they look to China. And they will not, this doesn't mean that they want to become clients of China, but they don't want to be anybody's client. They want agency of their own. And for that, they will play between the bigger powers. Exactly what you did between the Soviet Union and the U.S, when you were weak and you had to, they will do to you. So don't expect them. Don't expect monogamy. And you cannot exclude outside powers from the subcontinent because of this. this huge preponderance that you have within the sub-formula and the fact that these are new nation-building efforts.

So it will always be difficult. And their internal politics anyway is quite complex. You look at Pakistan, you look at Nepal, you look at Bangladesh—very polarized. Even Sri Lanka, which is probably the most stable in terms of internal politics, has gone through convulsions, right, in the last few years and has an economic crisis still. So... for us, therefore, to say, I'll only talk to my friends; I'll only do this, doesn't make sense at all. You need to follow a policy that actually also shows everyone that, look, our interests are not contradictory.

We have common interests in peace and in development. Our security interests are compatible, and we need to therefore work with each other. And it's in your interest to work with us, just like it's in our interest to work with you. And I think that kind of policy is the only one that will work in the long run, where you make yourself indispensable to your neighborhood, and your preponderance then works for you rather than as a spur to all kinds of hostile actions.

The recent visit by S. J. Shankar to Islamabad for the SCO meet and meeting with the PM and foreign minister of Pakistan has been called by some scholars the 'icebreaker' between the countries. So what are the possible solutions to resolve the conflict with Pakistan or come to a ground that will be beneficial for both countries?

About the visit, I think we should believe what Jay Shankar is telling us. He himself is telling you, "I didn't go to settle bilateral issues; I went to SCO". What should we do? That's a much bigger question. And I'm sorry to say this, but I've come to the conclusion that both sides have worked themselves into a situation where their domestic politics actually require a certain managed level of hostility in the relationship. It worked for the Pakistan army to have an enemy, but managed. They don't want it to get out of hand. They're not looking for some big military victory, no. But they need a hostile neighbor to justify their role at home. And politically also, it's useful to some people in India also to have a hostile Pakistan for whatever reason. So given that, it seems to me that our domestic politics today prevents any dramatic breakthrough or great progress. But it also means that it will stay managed.

We have other things to worry about, including the Chinese on the other side in Ladakh. So you have animosity, but not out of control. When the Pakistanis get an Indian pilot on their hands, they return him within 24 hours, quickly. They don't let it escalate into an impossible situation where both sides feed. So to that extent, I'm not saying that we're doomed; this relationship is terrible. No, I think we are both mature enough, but since it serves domestic politics to have this certain level of animosity, it looks like this will go on for a while. Unless something fundamental changes, either in the domestic politics or in the balance of power between the two sides, I don't expect anything drastic right now. So the backchannel talks, which went on during 2004 were pathbreaking. But today it doesn't seem likely that there's going to be any big breakthrough with Pakistan.

After being in the government for more than 10 years, what changes do you think that the current government should make for a more successful foreign policy in the coming years?

I think that the biggest challenge is the fact that the world has changed very fast in the last 10 years in many ways, for instance, the sharpening of China-U.S. rivalry and contention. The new one is actually close to an alliance between Russia and China that we see operating in our neighborhood. All these, in many ways, have made life more complicated than it was when they came to power. So they need to find new ways of dealing with these things. I'm sure they're thinking about it. But so far we haven't seen it. So far it's still... What we've seen is a continuation in the fundamentals of older policy.

Whether it is the transformation of the relationship with the U.S., whether it's working both with BRICS and the EU on the one hand and with the Quad and the Indo-Pacific organizations, and so on. Act East is really a continuation of Narsimha Rao's Look East. So in many ways, actually, what we're seeing is a continuation of policy in changed circumstances. And that's always a tough thing to do, to actually adjust policy to a strategic shift. And it's hard to say how far this shift will go.

Why does everybody worry about the U.S. election next week? Because nobody's quite sure what Trump will do. Will he continue doing what he's doing, or will he do a deal with China? Anything is possible with somebody who's unpredictable. So it's not an easy situation right now. So far, what they've done to my mind makes sense. They've kept our auctions open, they've maintained strategic autonomy, and they've worked very hard for India's transformation. See whether maybe they could have done more to see whether China plus one, de-risking with China, could have worked for us. But overall, I think in a situation of great uncertainty, I don't think they've done badly. But there are fundamental decisions to be taken now. Part of the problem is the neighborhood, where you can see the relationship with the Maldives, with Bangladesh now, and with the others, with Myanmar. There are big decisions to be taken about Myanmar, as Myanmar seems to be sinking into anarchy and the whole of the junta is weakening. So for me, there are a whole series of things to be done, which, let's see, I hope they manage to do in the months to come.

How do you think the Indo-Pacific region is significant for India and its foreign policy? And within the same question, I would like to also ask about India's involvement in QUAD and BRICS and how it aids India's... achievement of its position in the multipolar world.

As I said, if your criterion is the transformation of India, how do you do it? You need the rest of the world because of your resource endowment. You don't have energy, 80% of your imports today are maintenance imports. There are things like fertilizer, potash, and copper.

You don't have non-ferrous metals. These are things you need for your economy, to grow your economy, but also to run it. And 93% of your trade is by sea. So maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, therefore, becomes critical for you. And you can say it's not all in the immediate neighborhood. In fact, most of it is outside your immediate neighborhood. 38% of your trade actually goes through the Taiwan Strait. So you need to worry about what's happening across the whole maritime space. It's important for us. But as I said, if your criterion is clear, then you'll know which things are high priority. Who do you work with in this maritime space in the Indo-Pacific? Those who are present, and who's present? Russia's not present in the Indo-Pacific. You work with the U.S., you work with Australia, you work with Japan, and you work with those whose interests coincide with yours. And that's exactly what you're doing, and you've been doing it now for about 15 years, actually since 2005, when you signed your first defense agreement with the U.S. But on the continent, who do you work with? The West is absent in Eurasia. Ever since the Americans withdrew from Afghanistan and Iraq, there's been nobody in Eurasia from the West. So you work with who you can, traditional friends who work with Iran, who work with Russia. You try to work with the Central Asians even though you don't have direct physical access. You work with whoever you can, whoever is present and who is. So you are the only member of the Quad who is both a continental power and a maritime power. Your big concerns are both continental and maritime. and you need to be able to cope with both. So you will work with whoever you can for that. So when people say, why don't you choose a side? It doesn't make sense from our point of view. Because you need to worry about Eurasia, you need to worry about the Indo-Pacific, and both are going to determine your future. So you will, it seems to me, have no choice but to follow a multi-directional policy, whatever you call it, strategic autonomy, or whatever you want to call it.

Recently PM Modi attended the BRICS Summit. Do you think India should be part of it, and do you think it has the potential to help India in its journey?

My own attitude is that BRICS does serve a certain purpose, and it has served a purpose so far. And most of it on the economic side is actually in creating a new development bank, creating alternate payment systems that enable you to deal with countries like Russia, and so on. I don't think you should worry about its expansion. I mean, frankly, do you want to be a big fish in a small pond or a big fish in a bigger pond? I mean, I don't know why we worry about other countries. I mean, India. is today, whether you look at it in terms of the economy, in terms of our location, in terms of our history, or in terms of every rich respect, we are a big country. And I don't think we should get worried because, oh, there are more people in the room, and not all of them are exactly like us. If that was our attitude, then you can't deal with the rest of the world because the world is going to be full of people who are very different from you, who have their own points of view. We've handled it before when we were much smaller and weaker, and I'm sure we'll do it again. So, I don't see walking away as a solution. You know, Krishnamurti used to say it's very easy to walk out of a conference, but it's very hard to walk back in.

**In Conversation on The future of
Social Justice and Affirmative
action in India**

with

**PROF. ASHOK
ACHARYA**

Interviewed by: Azher Ahmad, Editor-in-Chief



ABOUT

Ashok Acharya is Professor of Political Science at the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi. He is also a Global Justice Fellow at Yale, US. He had also held the Henry Hart Rice Visiting Professorship at Yale, and is Director of the Delhi School of Transnational Affairs. He specialises in Political Theory—Contemporary & Comparative, Political Thought—Western & Indian, Ethics and Governance, Indian politics and institutions. He is the author of many renowned books in political theory.

Additionally he has been awarded with the following accolades:

Birmingham-India Social Science Fellowship, University of Birmingham (Spring 2012),
Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship (1994-2000),
Munk Doctoral Fellow, University of Toronto (1999-2001),
Diljit and Gulshan Juneja Award for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto (1998).



My first question to you is, how would you evaluate the impact of affirmative action policies in India?

. It's been quite some time since the affirmative as mandated constitutionally was implemented. It has been fairly successful, albeit in a manner that the scope of such reservations has expanded over a period of time, and the initial beneficiaries were seen to be SCs and STs, and now we have a whole lot of OBCs coming within the purview of reservations. But if you look at whether or not the policies have been successful, then my opinion is that it has been successful in many ways and more so because affirmative action has provided a platform on which many of the beneficiaries have found some ground for politically mobilizing themselves, and that is the biggest impact. In terms of how much justice has been done to these communities, that's a separate thing on which I would say there is a mixed record, but in terms of helping them mobilize politically, I think the policies have been a huge success.

How do such policies balance group and individual rights?

Our constitution has always believed in a simultaneous commitment to both individual and group rights. There are two types of justification for group rights in the Indian case: one is what we call a respect for difference, on the basis of which the Constitution mandates several cultural rights. The second one is the group disadvantage, on the basis of which the Constitution mandates affirmative action policies. Even if we take the whole question of group disadvantage on the basis of which we then decide which groups ought to benefit from the affirmative action policies, the entitlement is usually to individuals. So individuals belonging to certain groups have certain rights or claims. In that sense, I think it's a good balance between the two. The groups are decided on the basis of disadvantage and individuals by merit of who belongs to which group.

Recently we've seen a lot of cases where there has been misuse of OBC cream. Ias Puja Khedkar, despite having assets worth 40 crores, had obtained admission in civil services and M.B.B. on a non-creamy layer OBC certificate. In this light, what do you think are the various loopholes with the OBC reservations and what should India learn from other countries in this regard?

Many of the people want this non creamy layer status. In some places, it's pretty easy to procure the non-creamy certificate. So Puja Khedkar got caught; there are many who haven't been caught, and so there are many people, even for that matter on the EWS, you know, the economically weaker section.

How do you view the recent Supreme Court's verdict on the subcategorization of reservations for SCs and STs? Do you think it will give way to political opportunism, and what are your views on extending the non-creamy layer section to these also?

The Supreme Court by speaking about subcategorization; it's actually taking a very strong stand. The fact is that 80% of the Dalits in this country are landless laborers. For many of these Dalits, social justice means having access to some of the means of livelihood, and also, it's only once you ensure some of those means of livelihood that they can really take advantage of education and then qualify for the jobs. All that is not happening. There are intrablock inequalities, and so the subcategorization at a certain level is somewhere going to remedy these intrablock inequalities that exist, because otherwise those who are excluded, or rather, permanently excluded, let us say for the last 30 or 40 years, if some groups have been excluded from this entire system of reservation, then even while we try to impose social justice through reservations, within the block itself we create more sinister and insidious forms of injustices. I think if the Supreme Court has said something about subcategorization, we should be taking it a little more seriously and come up with all kinds of ideas, beyond the pale of politics, and look at the ways in which we could

actually do justice within that block to people who have been sort of excluded from reservation benefits for a long time.

Do you think that this subcategorization is the only way to ensure substantive justice? Also, do you think that this logic of subcategorization should also be applied to the women's reservation bill?

I'm not looking at the whole question of subcategorization; I'm trying to say that a good deal of what is called social justice doesn't go squarely or cannot be squared up with the idea of reservations all the time.

After the Mandal Commission report, which actually makes a kind of a clear preference for an equality of outcomes approach over an equal opportunity approach, I would say that unfortunately since then we have never been able to go back to the drawing table to reconsider what kind of balance we wish to bring about in a country of such size and diversity and see in what ways we balance an equal opportunity approach with an equal outcome approach. Unfortunately in our country, the political discourse is so skewed that we don't consider there can be a very radical equal opportunities approach very much in tune with the social justice approach.

So of course it depends on what we understand by an equal opportunity approach, and many people or many groups actually may or may not deserve reservations, but they do certainly deserve an equal opportunity, whereby they have access to all facilities leading to education and health. So I would say that most of the creamy layer should be excluded from the system of reservations and give them equal opportunities, but not exactly reservations.

The equal opportunity approach needs to counterbalance the equal outcomes approach, on which we have failed. Coming to the second question, where you talk about women, I would say the same thing: a certain kind of balance needs to come. Should we speak about a subcategorization within the women's reservation bill with regard to representation I would say well let's not worry so much about it because what has happened in our country is that many political parties use this to deny women the opportunity to represent themselves, and by insisting on this there was a kind of an unholy alliance between many political parties that jeopardized the bill from being passed, so the passing of the bill is good, but I don't think at this point of time we need to go to the subcategories. I welcome it as a better step, but eventually it must lead us towards trying to balance out between an equal outcome and equal opportunity approach.

Now I'm not for the subcategorization of the women; I would say let's first have the women representatives in the legislatures. But after an assessment of, let us say, two or three elections, maybe we could, if you think that it doesn't deliver, then we could think about a subcategory, but not exactly now.

Despite reservations and other constitutional guarantees that have been given to various communities, communities such as Muslims have been facing a representation deficit in politics, education, etc. Do you think the time has come for India to switch over to proportional representation, or what do you think is a solution to this problem at large?

There was a time when we did consider proportional representation as an active option when the Constitution was being written between 1946 and 1949. Two events actually changed the destiny of the country; one was, of course, the creation of Pakistan in 1947, and the second was the assassination of Gandhi in 1948.

These two events put to rest all serious discussions on proportional representation in the constituent assembly forever, and after that, nobody brought it up. There was opposition to it in order to rise above the divisive terms, which it could have created like the separate electorates tended to, and to consolidate the country; it was not adopted.

However, the fact of the matter is that in most liberal democracies around the world, we find that in the first-past-the-post system that exists in most liberal democracies, gender representation is always below 10%, and representation of minorities is below their proportion of their population. So you have hardly 2% to 3% of Muslim representation or less than 10%, say, in 1984, when Rajiv Gandhi came to power.

When the Congress came to power under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, then the women's representation had shot up, but before that and after that, the representation was always below 10%, and the same is the case with minorities, so there has been a kind of a permanent underrepresentation of minorities for which we might be tempted to think that probably a proportional representation system is a suitable policy. I somehow don't think that PR might deliver.

I think somewhere that a party list system of PR is something that we might wish to go for in order to strengthen the representation of all sections of the population, something that the Nordic countries are actually engaged in. The Nordic countries' PR system is more geared towards giving more representation to women. Because of the PR system, they have a very high system of representation, but at this point in time, you know, even if normatively and on principle you might agree with the attractions of the PR system, I don't think politically it may be a very viable option at this point in time.

I think we live in a state of the world where there are other challenges of integration at the global scale that have become far more significant than how countries organize their internal affairs with regard to their diversity.

Do you think there's an end to reservations in the sense that it will end?

Everybody wishes that we reach the stage where we may not need reservations. Knowing fully that we want a system that could deliver benefits to the most disadvantaged sections of society, I would speak for an equal opportunity approach.

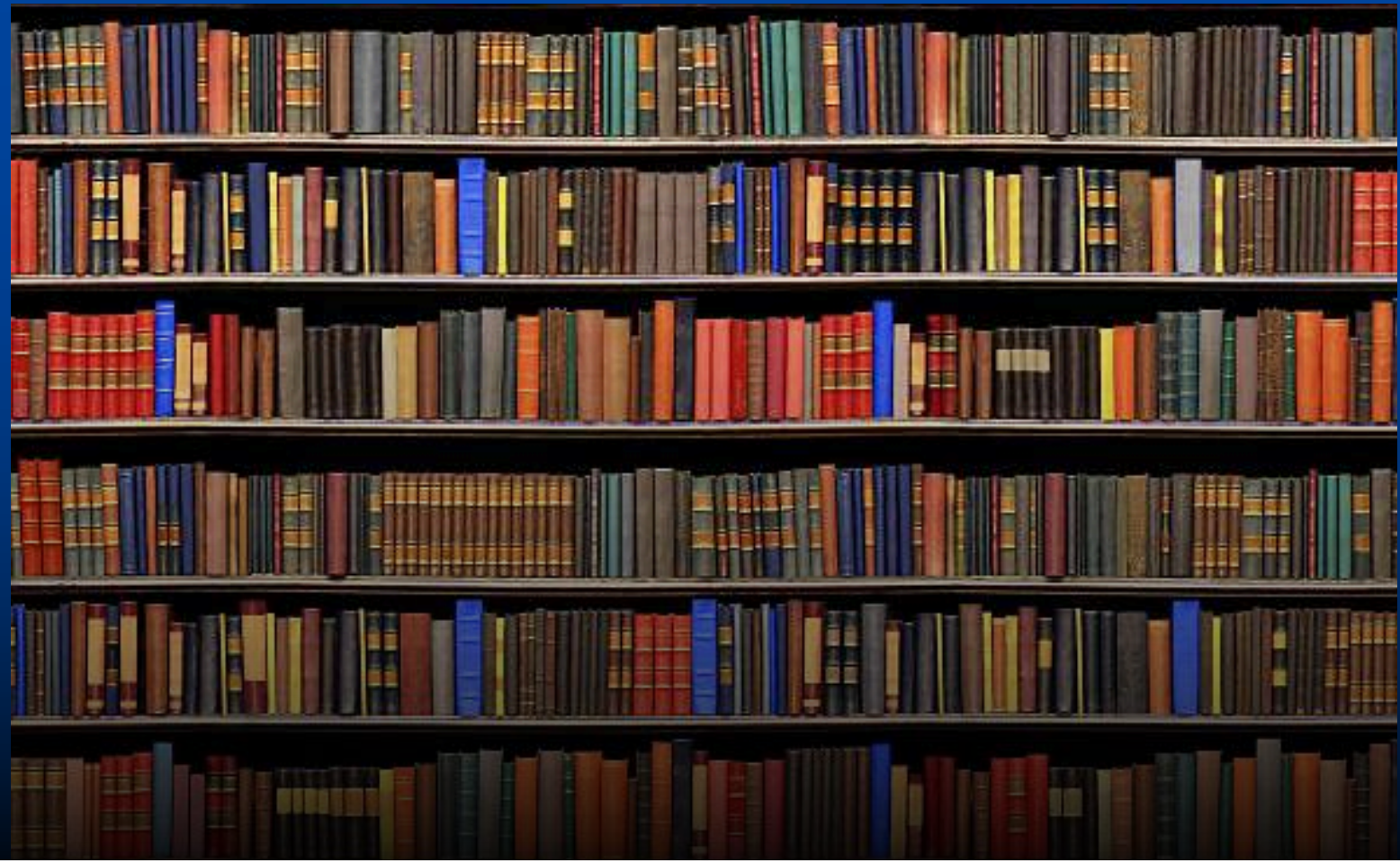
So I would say that if we want to Fast Track that system, there should be an end to this whole problem. But there is a scholar who has written on preferential policies, Thomas Seall, and he argues that whatever affirmative policies have been introduced, they are bound to stay for political reasons for a long time. It's very difficult to get a country out of that mode, so they are stuck in there, and what's worse is that the number of beneficiaries keeps expanding, and they don't get less and less as time progresses; more and more people are added to this. So there is a natural tendency for a system like a reservation to stay for a long time. However, I think that you know that an equal opportunity approach is the only solution. The job market is getting significantly less, so our jobs are not expanding, yet our youth needs opportunities, and we can only enhance that by devising a system where we think beyond these job reservations. If you're at all talking about Viksit Bharat and all that, I think that can only be tenable if you're talking about expanding the entire scope of opportunities, especially for the youth, who constitute roughly one-third of the population. So while the global population is aging, India's population is becoming youthful, and they need more opportunities. So I think in the long term, or maybe in the next two or three decades, I think there would be a very strong call for more opportunities and less equalization of jobs.

How is the concept of caste-based affirmative action different from that of a race-based one?

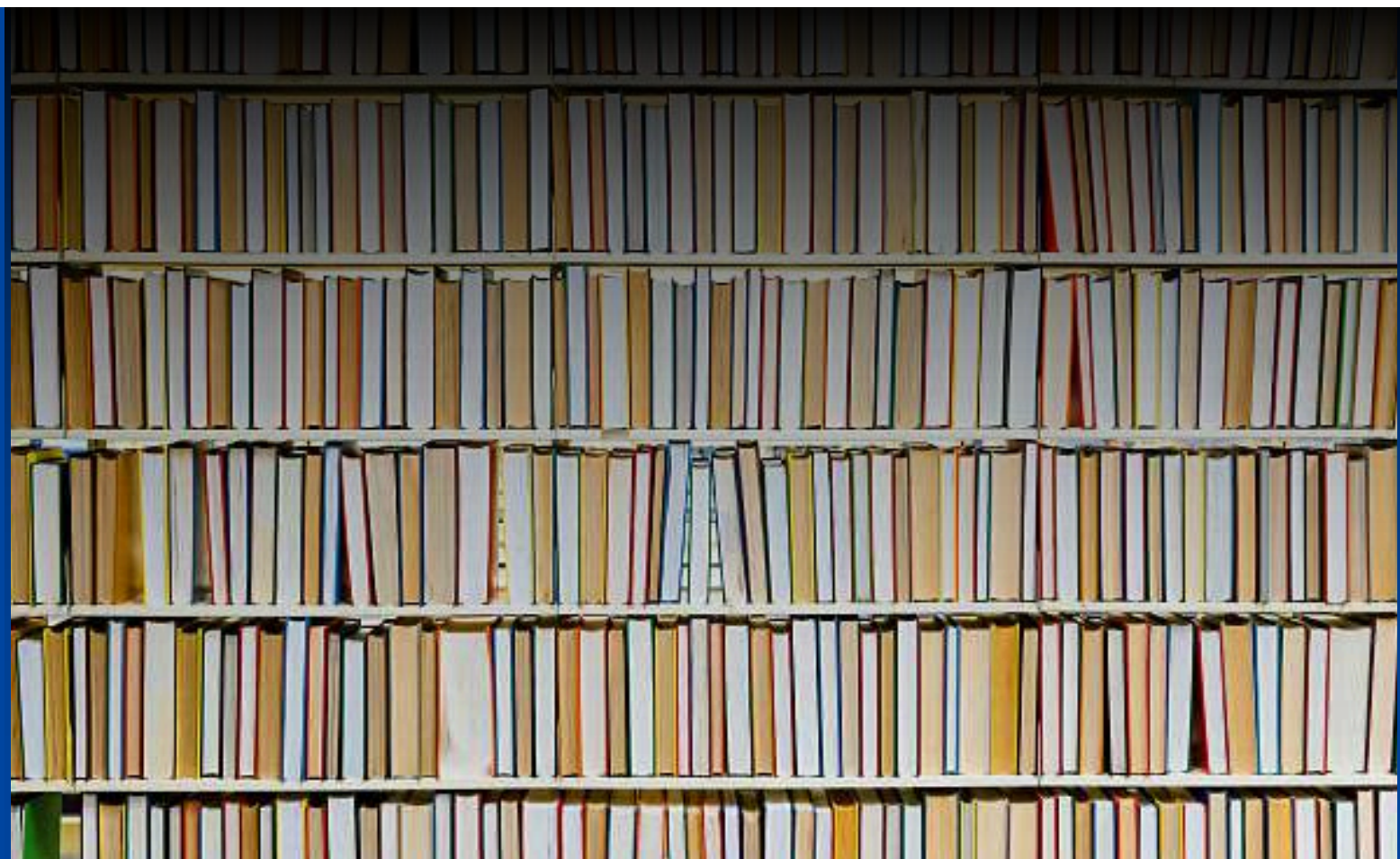
They are both the same if you are applying the group disadvantage principle, which in the US is applied by a Black scholar called Owen M. Fiss. back in the 70s. If there are certain sections in society that have been discriminated against, they will also be given benefits, but America has never given up on the equal opportunity approach. On the other hand, India has fallen prey to the equality of outcomes approach.

The last question of this interview is, What would you say about the future of India's affirmative?

I hope that affirmative action policies will trigger some serious, prudent, rational deliberations and discussions on where we think we are going. We can't always be looking backwards because we have to move forward as well. If our eyes are always fixated backwards, we can't be moving forward. So we need some hindsight, and yet at the same time we need to move forward, and the way to move forward is to have a more open assessment and an honest system where we fix our goals for the future. I do not know what that means, but I think when we are having a deliberation on these open, honest goals, we can't be thinking about who gets what, but I think we have to first set the goals and the objectives of the country, which we are at this point in time actually doing, and then see how this or that policy fits in with the larger goals that we set for ourselves.



BOOK REVIEWS





FRIENDS: INDIA'S CLOSEST STRATEGIC PARTNERS

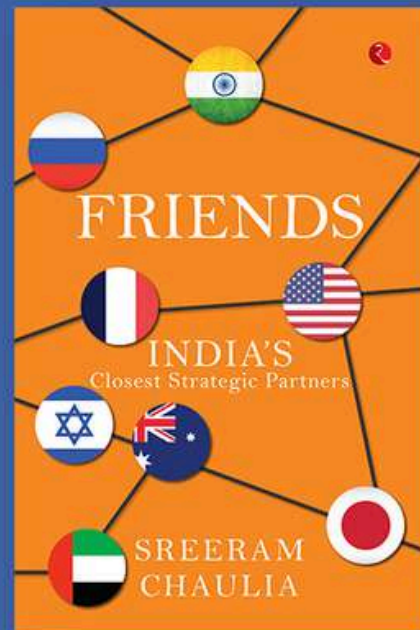
Pandey Rajnish Rajesh

FRIENDS: INDIA'S CLOSEST STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Authored by Sreeram Chaulia

Reviewed by Pandey Rajnish Rajesh

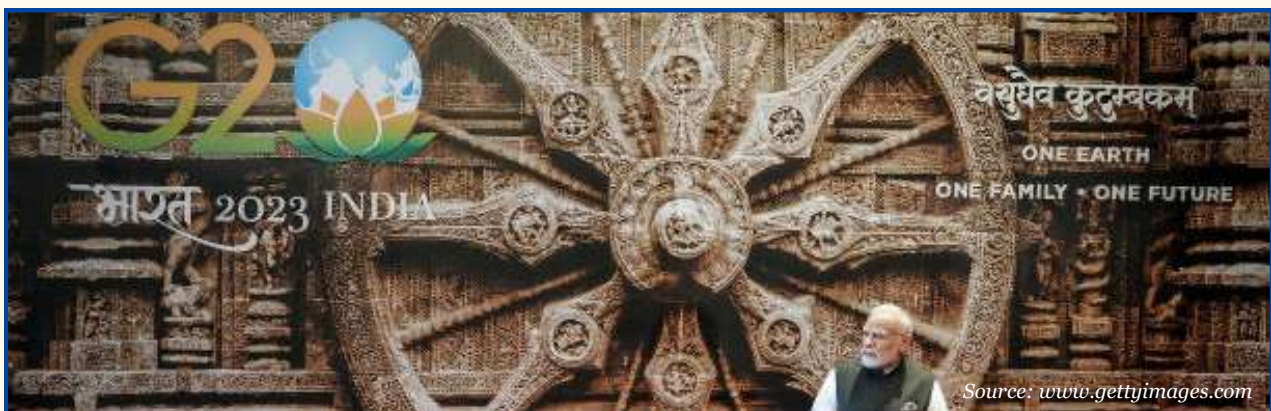
Friends: India's Closest Strategic Partners powerfully articulates the multidimensional aspect of India's engagements with countries which not only define the parameters of India's connectivity with the world but also have a bearing on how they contribute to or constrain India's rise.



INTRODUCTION : THE ART OF MULTI-ALIGNMENT

In a world characterized by shifting global alliances and an increasingly multipolar order, Sreeram Chaulia's *Friends: India's Closest Strategic Partners* is a compelling exploration of India's relationships with the major powers of the day. This book is a timely reflection on how India navigates the complex choppy waters of international diplomacy to safeguard its national interests and amplify its global influence.

The book opens with a vivid description of the G20 Summit held in India in 2023; as described by the Author 'the first-ever Indian-hosted G20 gathering underscored...India's rise as a pivotal power'. The theme for this summit was 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', which also reflects many aspects of author's narrative that are meant to present India not just as an adept practitioner of diplomatic maneuvering but also as a country that seeks to exercise leadership on global challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, and digital governance through what he terms 'multi-alignment' diplomacy.





THE SEVEN PILLARS OF INDIAN DIPLOMACY

Through a careful examination of India's connection with countries like Japan, Australia, United States of America (USA), Russia, France, Israel and UAE, the author intricately presents the threads that constitute India's multi-alignment strategy. The argument that is substantiated by an effective use of historical anecdotes as well as real-time examples leaves one wondering as to how has India managed to navigate between such strategic allies with profound contradictions in ideological and political beliefs.

What sets this apart is its nuanced understanding of how these partnerships collectively serve India's broader strategic objectives. The author shows how each such partnership serves a specific Indian purpose: Indo-Pacific security architecture with Japan, Australia and United States; technological collaboration with Israel; defence engagement with France; economic ties with United Arab Emirates.

The choice of the seven countries - Japan, Australia, United States of America, Russia, France, Israel and UAE, makes sense given their geographical location as well as economic, political and security concerns. This is not an arbitrary or complete list but a good cross-section of India's most high-stakes relationships. These examples illustrate India's multi-alignment approach to geopolitics and how it manages to keep its autonomy despite worrisome imbalances in power. Subsequently then the author goes on systematically to explain each strategic relationship with historical background leading up to contemporary times. Perhaps there could have been other important strategic relationships that could have made it to the book but by selecting only seven author manages not going overboard either. While some might argue that other strategic partnerships could have been included, the seven that Chaulia has chosen represent some of India's most vital bilateral relationships.

The Author's central argument revolves around India's strategy of "multi-alignment", the ability to engage with different actors across the world while still fiercely preserving its strategic autonomy. He notes that "India has shown an ability in contemporary times to maintain parallel relations simultaneously with a major power like the United States and its rival Russia, or in closer immediacy with Israel and Palestine", a diplomatic high-wire act that few other nations can pull off.

The Author's insights resonate with contemporary geopolitical developments. For instance, India's decision to lead at COP28 and show zeal on issues of renewable energy, as well as its engagement with institutional groupings such as BRICS or Quad, aligns with the book's thesis on the growing assertiveness of rising powers in global governance. The book also aligns with India's ongoing efforts to reform global governance structures, including its push for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

The Book's Primary strength lies in its comprehensive approach to examining India's strategic relationships and its ability to demonstrate how bilateral relationships form the bedrock of multilateral success. The analysis made by author is particularly valuable which shows how partnerships help India to maintain its strategic autonomy while allowing India to pursue its national interests.

The book however has some limitations that are worth noting. The Author's analysis occasionally leans toward idealism, particularly in presenting India's ability to navigate conflicting relationships, without sufficiently addressing the contradictions and realpolitik challenges inherent in such partnerships. While the strengths of India's alliances are well- documented, there is limited exploration of their shortcomings, such as trade disputes with the US. When describing India's growing ties with US, the book does not make a clear reference to the US's relationship with Pakistan, which some might find to be a significant omission. Furthermore, the book largely overlooks the role of regional organizations, non-state actors, and internal challenges, factors that significantly influence India's foreign policy.

Additionally, the book could benefit from a deeper examination of how domestic challenges impact strategic partnerships and challenges like economic inequality or political polarization could shape these strategic partnerships.

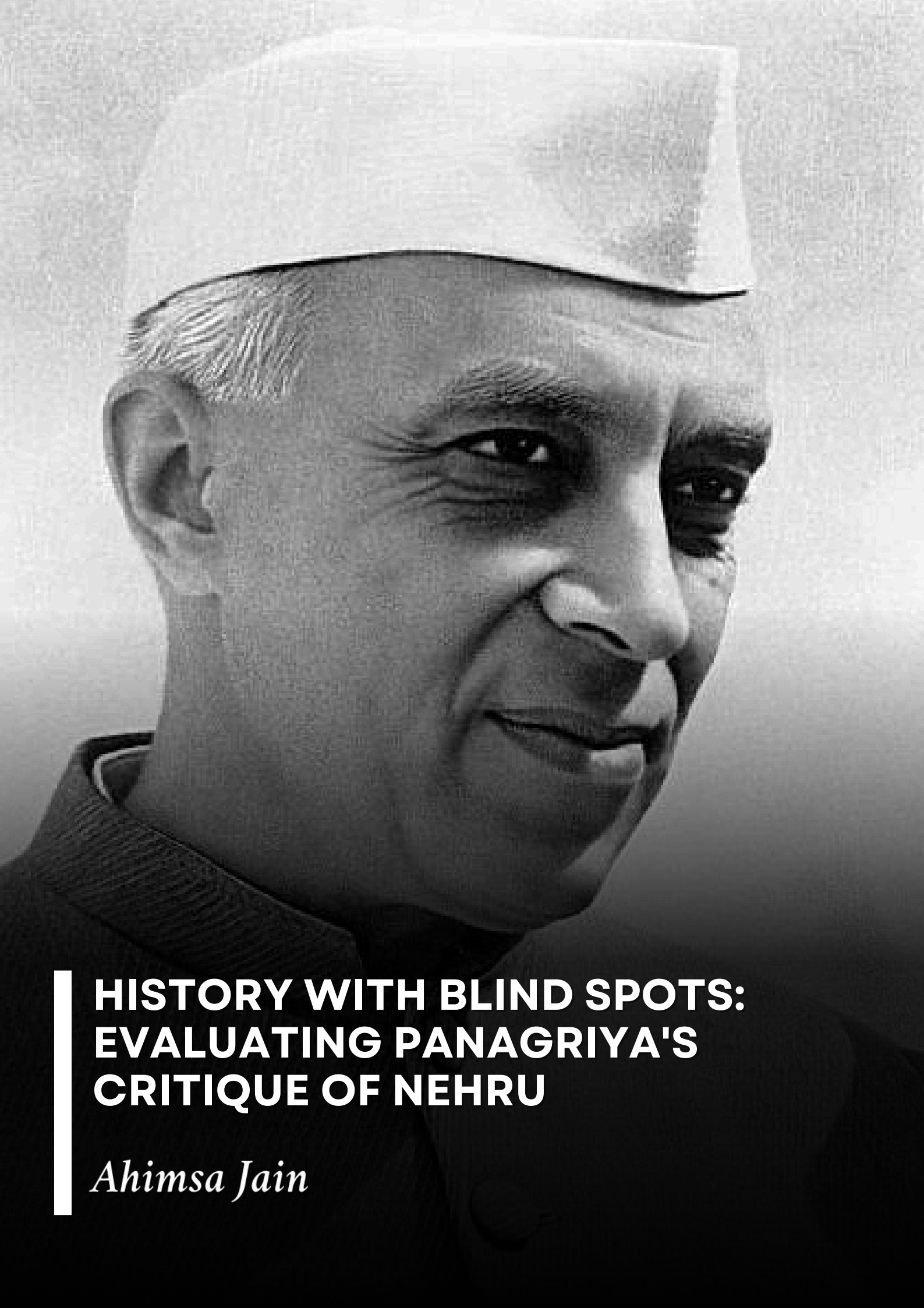


The book carries strong admiration for current government's diplomatic moves. Some readers may find this admiration possibly limiting the critical approach. Nevertheless, the approach permits a detailed examination of India's contemporary foreign policy framework of India and its practical implementation.

The author weaves an interesting narrative about how these seven closest strategic partners can help in propelling India's being on the ascent. The metrics put forward to measure these partnerships are quite compelling enough to underline how qualitatively and quantitatively these partnerships have developed or are developing for India opening new avenues for India's increased global footprint and strategic flexibility in years ahead. The Author's take is very interesting as he lucidly argues that while India has strategic partners because it requires them for achieving its larger foreign policy endowments as a 'rising great power'. The Author not only helps readers understand India where it stands now, but also potential future trajectory as an aspiring world power.

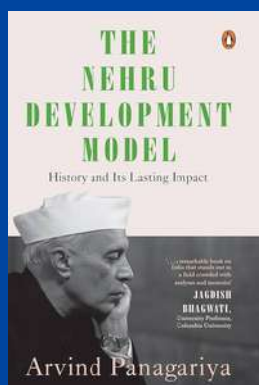
ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Pandey Rajnish Rajesh is pursuing Bachelor's in Political Science from Shaheed Bhagat Singh College, University of Delhi.



**HISTORY WITH BLIND SPOTS:
EVALUATING PANAGRIYA'S
CRITIQUE OF NEHRU**

Ahimsa Jain



HISTORY WITH BLIND SPOTS: EVALUATING PANAGRIYA'S CRITIQUE OF NEHRU

Authored by Arvind Panagariya

Reviewed by Ahimsa Jain

In 1947, one of two people had been living in poverty. Nehru rose to the occasion as an economic doyen who would have a significant impact on how the economy of the nation was to be shaped. What were the central tenets of his economic outlook, and what impact had they had on the overall situation prevailing in the country?

The three much cherished goals of socialism, the removal of poverty, and self-sufficiency were at the forefront of his economic thought. The book *Nehru Development Model*, a recently published book written by the 16th Finance Commission chairman, offers a detailed account of what Nehruvian economics entailed and was it able to remove people out of the shackles of poverty, or was it just politicization of economics?

The book is divided into three parts, each part covering various dimensions of Nehruvian socialism. Nehru's study at Cambridge is believed to have attracted him towards socialism bordering communism, till 1936, which subsequently turned into moderately closer to Fabian socialism, with its own features called Nehruvian socialism. There was widespread poverty in India at that time, with per capita income amounting to Rs 65. The strategy that came up was to build a complex of heavy industries vis-à-vis basic industries in the form of steel and iron, considered the bottleneck sector by Mahalanobis.

This mushroomed into the state assuming totalitarian control over the economy, with the aim of providing everyone with a minimum standard of living. However, the reason why this strategy failed to make a dent in poverty and other industries was that it neglected India's competitive advantage in light-based industries such as cotton, tea, etc., based on cheap labor, labor availability, etc. While the east Asian miracle was manifesting, with countries opening economies to external investment and capital, Nehru adopted a totally different path that worked to the detriment of India's export sector and spilled over to other sectors of the economy. The state had taken the course of the erstwhile Soviet Union in the form of five-year plans that made India a bureaucratized state. Various instruments that were chosen proved ineffective and included reserving the products exclusively for the public sector manufacturing, licensing of private sector production, import licensing, price controls, and distribution controls. This period was characterized by socialist indoctrination of everyone, such as policymakers, politicians, etc., with a near absence of a development discourse, with exceptions such as Shenoy and Milton Friedman, who had recommended a totally different path based on India's comparative advantage.

This governmentalization of society and economy stifled growth by completely hollowing out the country's export sector, domestic inflation because of import controls, etc. The author succinctly traces out various failures of his setup. However, one point which the author misses is that then there had been the absence of any systematic financial markets, so generalizations about the role of the state may prove reductionist and misleading. While the magnitude of the state action was overarching, the moral legitimacy of state action was self-evident, especially keeping in view the postcolonial chequered history. The statement of industrial policy of 1945, the industrial policy resolution of 1948, and the industrial policy resolution of 1956 worked out detailed plans for the development of heavy industrialization. This was done through production licensing, production targets, and other forms of controls.

An important limitation of such controls was that the mechanism behind them was vague, not based on any economic efficiency principle but on a first come, first serve basis, compounded by the corruption of bureaucracy. The fact that the systems of command and control proved antithetical to growth and development is indisputable. A result of the regressive policies was that India enjoyed 2.5% of total world exports, which came down to 0.9% in 1966. India failed to fill the vacuum created in the export of cotton textiles, in which Japan's share rose to 18.1% in 1966.



GDP grew at an annual average rate of 4.1%; that was insufficient to save India out of poverty and other development problems. To add to the imprint of Nehru's development model on India's successors, the author details down the evolution of leadership from 1947- till now, tracing out various reforms that have been carried out.

To begin with, Lal Bahadur Shastri had shifted the focus to agriculture but did not abandon the path bequeathed by Nehru. Indira Gandhi was more socialist than his father, who brought hard-core socialist programs such as the ten-point programs that entailed wholesale nationalization of banks, social control of insurance, etc.

Rajiv Gandhi was the first to have escaped the socialist indoctrination, with a tilt towards liberalizing the economy, that slowed down subsequently because of various political reasons. It was Narsimha Rao who completely hollowed out socialism by dismantling all sorts of controls and allowing the currency to devolve for export promotion.

However, the pace of reforms has been slow, with matters getting worse under Manmohan Singh, who introduced various social legislation that proved antithetical to the flourishing of the private sector in the country. Modi has had a mixed record on reforms, with reducing labor codes to just 4.

The book is a compelling case that argues how giving a big role to the government can be detrimental to growth, poverty, etc. However, there are various areas where the details are ambiguous, such as the Gujarat Model of Development and economic reforms roped in under PM Modi, which he seems to be praising.

However they merit critical analysis, the Gujarat Model was unequal to the core, as Christophe Jafferlot would argue. Also, the logic put forward by Mahalanobis for heavy emphasis on heavy industrialization does not find mention in the book. At that time, export options to India were limited, and heavy industry was the bottleneck sector. Overall, the book is a good contribution to the literature on Nehru's development model, which the author concludes was an unqualified failure.

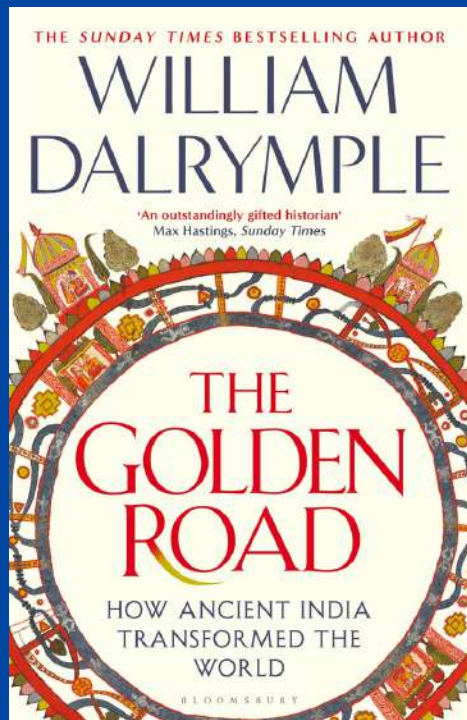
ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Ahimsa Jain is a second year student of Political Science at Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi.

5 BOOKS THAT SHAPED THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN 2024

Book: The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World

Author: William Dalrymple

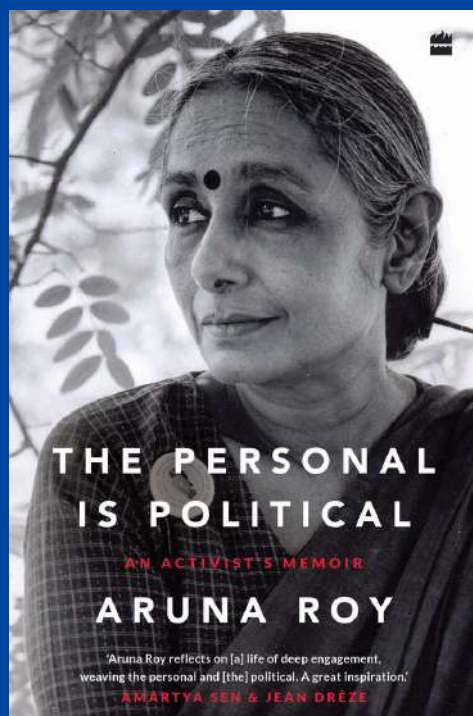


This book is a compelling narrative that highlights the remarkable ways in which ancient history impacted the global world. With his signature blend of thorough research and eloquent prose, Dalrymple reveals how India served as a hub of cultural and intellectual exchange, influencing societies far beyond its borders.

The book traces India's contributions to philosophy, trade, religion, and science, illustrating how its innovations shaped the course of civilizations. Dalrymple vividly describes ancient trade networks that carried Indian goods, ideas, and knowledge to Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. His ability to portray the historical accounts with the story narration skills makes this book more informative and attractive.

Book: The Personal is Political

Author: Aruna Roy

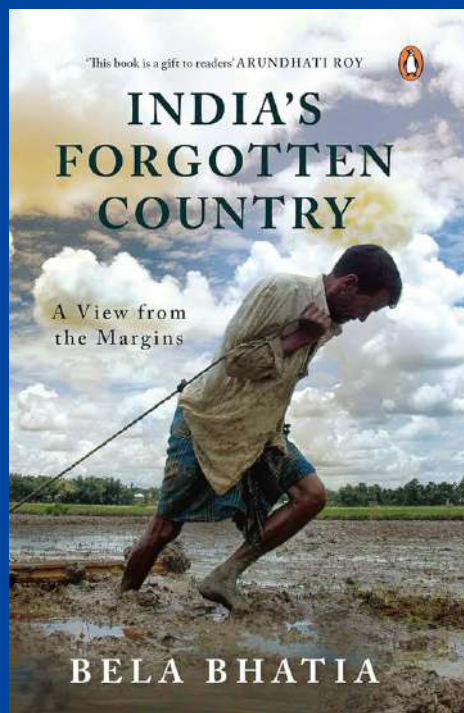


Aruna Roy's *The Personal is Political* is a compelling memoir that intertwines personal anecdotes with her transformative journey in activism. Through this book, Roy offers an insightful glimpse into her life—from her resignation as an IAS officer to her pivotal role in championing social justice and transparency in governance.

The narrative is deeply rooted in her work with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), where she led movements advocating for the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Roy's eloquent storytelling highlights how systemic inequalities intersect with everyday life, underscoring the idea that personal struggles often mirror broader societal issues.

Book : India's Forgotten Country: A View from the Margins

Author : Bela Bhatia

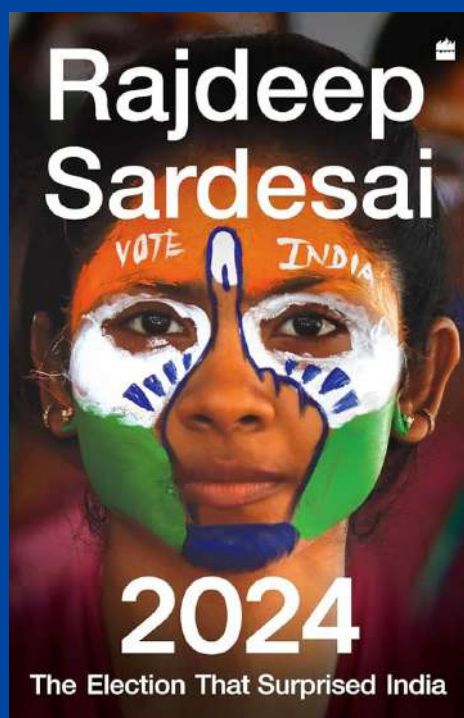


Bela Bhatia's *India's Forgotten Country: A View from the Margins* is a deeply evocative and incisive account of the marginalized Adivasi communities in India, particularly in the conflict-prone region of Bastar.

Through a blend of meticulous research, vivid storytelling, and her first-hand experiences, Bhatia provides an unfiltered view of the systemic injustices faced by these communities. The book delves into the harsh realities of displacement, poverty, and violence, often exacerbated by the state's policies and the presence of insurgencies.

Book : The Elections That Surprised India

Author : Rajdeep Sardesai

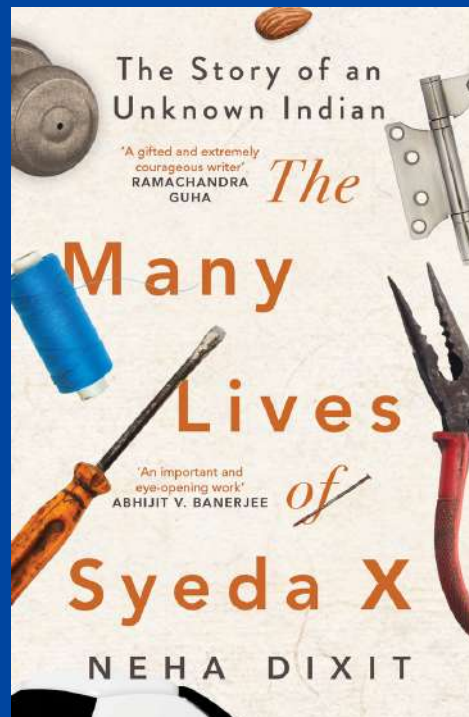


The Elections That Surprised India is a compelling analysis of one of the most crucial general elections in India's history. As a seasoned journalist and political commentator, Sardesai presents a detailed account of the events, strategies, and key players that shaped the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The book offers an insider's perspective on the unexpected turns and political strategies that led to the final results, making it an essential read for scholars, journalists, and political enthusiasts.

Book : The Many Lives of Syeda X

Author : Neha Dixit



Neha Dixit's *The Many Lives of Syeda X* is a powerful and deeply unsettling narrative that blends investigative journalism with personal storytelling. The book chronicles the life of Syeda, a woman who endures multiple layers of oppression—patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, and state violence—across different stages of her life.

Through Syeda's journey, Dixit exposes the intersections of gender, identity, and politics in contemporary India, making this work a crucial addition to feminist and socio-political literature.



EXPRESSIONS



VEILED CRIES : THE INSURMOUNTABLE GRIEF OF THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

by Anshuman Pandey

*We walk through nights, in silent haze,
Carrying truths, the world won't raise.
Veiled by a cloak of forced disguise,
We share our truth in whispered sighs.*

*In parents eye, we hide our soul,
yearning for love, that would make us whole.
Wearing a mask, day after day,
Our dreams locked up, hopes cast away.*

*We carry storms of judgement and pain,
Bearing pride, though hearts remain slain.
Each line reveals, what we can't confess,
The furious strength, in our silent distress.*

*We hold words, we want to say,
But fear within us, keep them at bay.
Behind the mask of fright and shame,
Our souls take flight, denied their flame.*

*If they knew, the weigh we bore,
Would they love, or close the door?
A scream lies, silenced in our veins ,
pure in passion , seared in pains.*

*Can a man not love, pure and true,
Another man, like skies love blue ?
Can a woman not walk, her path unfurled,
Free to live, in her own world ?*

*The ones who blessed you at life's first cry,
Transgender souls, whom now you deny -
How shameful, how vile can a society be,
That denies love's truth, our right to be free ?*

*They claim, it's against our Shashtra's code,
Yet where is it written, in a sacred ode?
Marriage is union, two souls as one,
no mention of gender ,no love to shun.*

*With each breath, a protest thrives ,
With every step, the battle strives.
In darkness deep, we hold our ground,
For courts may deem our love unsound.*

*But love remains, a spark so bright,
Unchained by verdicts, free from fright.
The world pries hard, demand we yield,
but we stand firm, our hearts unsealed.*

*They mock and taunt, degrade our soul,
Trying to silence, take control.
Yet here we stand, despite their scorn ,
Spirits worn, but never torn.*

*Each pain we carry a weight too dire,
Is this the punishment of a vengeful sire?
Why me, God? we ask in despair,
Yearning for a world that actually cares.*

*Our clothes, our love, denied in shame,
Ousted if we dare, stake our claim.
Haunted by fear, mocked with glee --
Has the humanity, ceased to be?*

*Are we not humans, just like you?
Don't we get hurt? Don't we bleed too?
Our love, our truth, a silent fight,
So why this hate? Where is the light?*

*Forced to bow, we face their scorn,
Harassed, cast out and torn.
Yet in our hearts, a word we make,
Where love is free, and fears forsake.*

*One day we will rise from silent tears,
Unbound by hate, beyond their fears.
We will build a place, where love can bloom,
And hearts are free, to heal their wounds.*

*We dream of a place, where truth is born,
An impregnable heaven, where no soul is torn.
We pray to God, hear our plea,
Grant us the freedom, to simply be.*

सच

सुजल

किसका सच कितना सच है,,
न्यूज़ का सच सच है,
या आँखों देखा सच सच है,
क्या ये सच है कि हिंदू मुसलमान लड़ते रहते हैं,
या सच ये है कि मैं और मेरा दोस्त कैफ तो साथ रहते हैं.
क्या ये सच नहीं कि खुसरो ने छाप तिलक छिनते देखा था,
या सच ये नहीं है कि हजरत निज़ामुद्दीन में मैंने बसंत पंचमी बनते देखी है,
नफ़रत का सच सच है, की प्यार का? धर्म का सच सच है, की इंसान का?
फिर मैंने राम से ही पूछा,
हे राम किसका सच सबसे सच है, राम बोले मैं तो आजकल खुद बस हिंदुओं का सच हूं,
तू एक काम कर, खुदा से ही पूछ ले, खुदा बोले कि मैं तो खुद बस इस्लाम का सच हूं,
पंडित बोला भगवा ही सच है,
मौलवी बोला हारा ही सच है,
ये बातें सुनके तो बेचारा तरबूज घबरा गया कि मैं झूठा हु
या सच्चा,
फिर थक हार कर में मैदान में लेट गया,
आसमान में देखा तो ढलते सूरज की भगवा रोशनी हरि
घास पर पड़ रही थी,
सूरज भी अपना सच चुन लेता अगर तो शायद कोई हारा पेड़ पोधा ना जिंदा बचता,
और ना ही हम सब,
हमारी औकात उस ढलते सूरज की भगवा रोशनी और हरे पेड़ की पत्ती पर बनी हुई है.
और हम निकले हैं दुनिया को अपना अपना सच बताने, सच ये है कि तुमको सच पता ही नहीं है,
सच है दूसरे को अपना मान लेना,

जैसे चाँद और सूरज ज़मीन को मानते हैं,
जैसे पड़े तुमको मानते हैं, जैसे पानी मछलियों को मानता है,
जैसे आसमान पंछियों को मानता है,
कहने को खुदको समझदार सबसे कहते हो,
और भेद करते रंग,
कपड़े, धर्मों का जैसे अब भी गुफाओं में रहते हो,
तुम एक बार दुनिया को जान के तो देखो,
तुम भी दूसरे को अपना सच मान के तो देखो,
क्या पता तुमको दुनिया का सच उसी में दिख जाए,
जिस सच को ढूँढते हो तुम मंदिर मस्जिद में,
क्या पता वो दूसरे से प्यार में मिल जाए,

THE PRETENDING PARTNERS

by Mihika Mathur

"Consensus is a myth"—oh" wait, are you talking about coalition government in India?

Coalition government in India is like a never-ending talent show where politicians showcase their finest skills: negotiation, compromise, and, of course, Olympic-level blame-shifting. In an era of Tinder and Bumble, True love is rare—but one match made in heaven is the coalition government. Political parties start with ideologies, only to toss them aside faster than a bad Hinge date. In fact, dating apps may have taken notes from politics: swipe right for power, left for principles, right again for a better deal—until the perfect "vibe" (read: profit) seals the deal. And just like that, Democracy finds its most modern romance.

Coalition governments are truly the power couples of modern-day politics. Their public declarations of unity rival even the best. online relationship status updates. Unlike the usual dating dynamics where two Individuals genuinely seek compatibility; coalition politics demands something. far deeper—a shared "vibe" for gains that can triumph over incompatible principles. Here, values are flexible, and ideologies are more like seasonal outfits. When the need arises, these parties unbutton, unzip, and toss their Ideals straight out of the window with grace! Political actors swipe right when A selfless term called profit comes into the picture.

Dating apps promise love; coalitions promise survival. No chemistry? No problem. In politics, companionship is a press conference, and "Happily ever after" lasts until the first tough decision. Then comes the grand ballet of blame. And isn't that the pinnacle of political maturity? Two sides, devoid of romantic delusions, standing together in a joyless but lucrative marriage of convenience. No love, no passion—just a solemn vow to stay united. for as long as the profit pool remains well-stocked. 'Till deadlock do they part.

Gone are the archaic days when ideology was sacred!
Coalitions are here to say, "My gain is our gain."

"Manifestos today are just glorified dating apps. bios—crafted to impress but conveniently forgotten when a better match (or deal) appears. Coalition governments have mastered this art, shedding ideologies faster than a snake sheds its skin, all to woo their latest political soulmate. Because in the world of coalitions, flexibility isn't just a virtue—it's survival. And let's be honest, no Tinder bio ever said, "Looking for a loyal, principled partner. No flip-floppers."

Conspicuously, it's a game of thrones. They say an unhappy A wife is a wine merchant's best friend. If we take a glance at the political scenario in Bharat, it's so infelicitous that "infidelity" is the main component of this marriage, where the public and political parties are spouses and "wealth" is the paramour.

Annulment of the marriage contract is no option here, and what's Ominous is the absence of alimony, notwithstanding the profligacy done by the dominant spouse (the political parties). It's a lucrative business altogether. Politicians are sorcerers, casting their "philanthropic" spells on the public, which is another masquerade of fake vows and deceptions. The word of gospel marinated in political debauchery and treachery, has mastered the skill of manipulation like a modern-day toxic boyfriend, who anyhow persuades and dupes his partner and maneuvers her towards a productive and robust future.

This leaves her (the public) in a state of quandary and perplexion where her cooperation is justified as austere and requisite. The deceiver pledges his allegiance and begs his pardon. As usual, she (the public) succumbs to flattery and gets stranded in the dreamy castle of imagination, which is a dungeon she cannot escape and is incarcerated due to oblivion.

Ah, the great political marriage—where the spouse (politician) is a serial cheater, wealth is the mistress, and the public is the ever-forgiving, ever-suffering partner.

With every election, politicians whisper sweet promises. only to wake up in bed with corporate deals and offshore accounts, leaving the public drowning in inflation and broken dreams. And wealth? Ah, the irresistible third wheel—the real main character of this sordid affair. Politicians chase it with a passion that makes Romeo & Juliet look like casual acquaintances, leaving the public abandoned in the ruins of inflation, unemployment and misplaced faith And when caught? Out comes the classic gaslighting. anthem—"Let bygones be bygones."

Apology accepted, betrayal forgotten, and the cycle repeats—because in this marriage, divorce is not an option; only suffering is. Bravo!

Ah, the ever-glorious Mr. Nitish Kumar—Bihar's very own political chameleon, a maestro in the grand orchestra of musical chairs. Once a Railway Minister, once an Agriculture Minister, and now (for the nth time) the Chief Minister—because, why not? Politics, after all, is his personal revolving door. This high priest of political flexibility has an uncanny knack for ideological gymnastics, switching allegiances with such grace and agility that Even Olympian gymnasts would take notes. Principles? Ideology? Oh, those are just ornaments for speeches, neatly tucked away once the elections are over. Profit is the only compass—and let's not pretend otherwise. And the people? Ah, the ever-loyal choir of democracy, clapping along as their fate is sealed and Their voices are drowned in the euphoria of political grandstanding. They watch. in admiration as their leader pirouettes from one alliance to another, whispering, "At least he keeps things exciting!" The Constitution? It cries. itself to sleep, but who cares when the political circus is in town?

Nicknamed "PALTU RAM"—the official recognition of his Migration expertise—does this tarnish his political empire? Of course not! Scandals, shameless U-turns, and backstabbing are mere decorative trophies in the grand Indian political tavern, where

powerful leaders toast to victory, dance in intoxicated joy, and exchange allegiances faster than they exchange wedding vows.

So, a standing ovation to the blindfolded masses, ever-so-loyal, never-so-questioning. For in this grand democracy, where leaders Jump ship at will; the only ones who sink are the people.

Bravo! Encore!

Seems like a typical Indian household where domination, Misogyny, mistrust, and deception constitute the prime components of a marriage. and one is asked to stay quiet and not react, or society would deem it immoral. or inappropriate, leading to a conventional happy ending with compromises, disappointment and societal validation, where false promises breathe and Duplicity prospers.





Credits : Keshiha

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE SHAHEED BHAGAT SINGH COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

The Department of Political Science at Shaheed Bhagat Singh College was established along with its inception in 1967. The Department has fourteen faculty: two Professors, one Associate Professor and eleven Assistant Professors. Each faculty of the Department comes with diverse and crucial research specialisations in comparative politics, political theory, political thought, Indian government and politics, development processes, International Relations, security studies, public policy and administration, peace and conflict resolution and foreign policy. The faculty regularly update their research with academic publications, presentations and research projects. In addition, the faculty members regularly partake in syllabi creation/updating of the university and undertake MA/MPhil/PhD supervision.

The department reflects an ethos that has been nurtured with great commitment and dedication by both faculty and students. The decades since its inception have seen the department emerge as a nodal point of heterogeneous deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas and vibrant debates in the discipline. Apart from providing a stimulating academic environment to the students, the faculty seeks to familiarise students with contemporary academic debates. The department is emerging as a training ground for in-depth research and reference work. In this regard, the department has developed crucial linkages with research institutions, organisations and public institutes in India, opening up interactive platforms for students to develop long-term research interests. The department seeks to be a space for joint exploration in research and academic practices by students and faculty.

The department seeks to develop critical thinking, activism, advocacy, and leadership in Indian Government and Politics, Political Theory, International Studies, Public Policy and Public Administration. The Political Science graduates from the Department have established careers in higher academics, law, bureaucracy, international relations and media, among many other fields. The department's efforts reflect Shaheed Bhagat Singh College's commitment to nurturing and creating cosmopolitan citizens who espouse a democratic celebration of diversity. Within this overarching ideal, the department has been facilitating explorations in knowledge, continuously engaging with humanist concerns by creating a liberating, empathetic, immersive and empowering pedagogy.

Through the last five decades, the Department has continuously endeavoured to contribute to critical and creative thinking, sustaining democratic spaces, broadening access and inclusivity in quality education, and consistently working towards empowering women and men. It has provided a context of learning that enhances professionalism, humanism and social responsibility.



BATCH OF 2024-25



BATCH OF 2023-24



BATCH OF 2022-23

POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

The Political Science Association (PSA) comprises the President and the Executive Board (which has Class Representatives from the three years as well as the PSA executive board representative from each class). The Political Science Association, under the guidance of staff advisor, serves as a medium of interaction, participation and learning in the Department. It organises various student-oriented activities including the special lecture by eminent scholars and practitioners from diverse fields. In addition, the association acts as key student body in assisting the department in regularly organising national and international seminars and workshops, book discussions and hosting the annual festival- Chanakya, whereby a plethora of activities like MUN, MIP, inter-college competitions in street theatre, painting, photography, debate and quiz take place.



PSA 2024-2025

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Established in 2024, the Research Cell of the Political Science Department, SBSC, promotes critical thinking, policy analysis, and research. Through research projects and career guidance, it prepares students for careers in academia, policymaking, and research.

Objectives:

1. Advance Political Research – Encourage faculty and students to contribute to academic knowledge.
2. Enhance Critical Thinking– Develop students' ability to analyze political ideologies and systems.
3. Expand Political Knowledge – Generate insights that advance political science.
4. Inform Policy – Provide evidence-based research for governance and policy making.
5. Promote Collaboration– Foster interdisciplinary approaches to political issues.

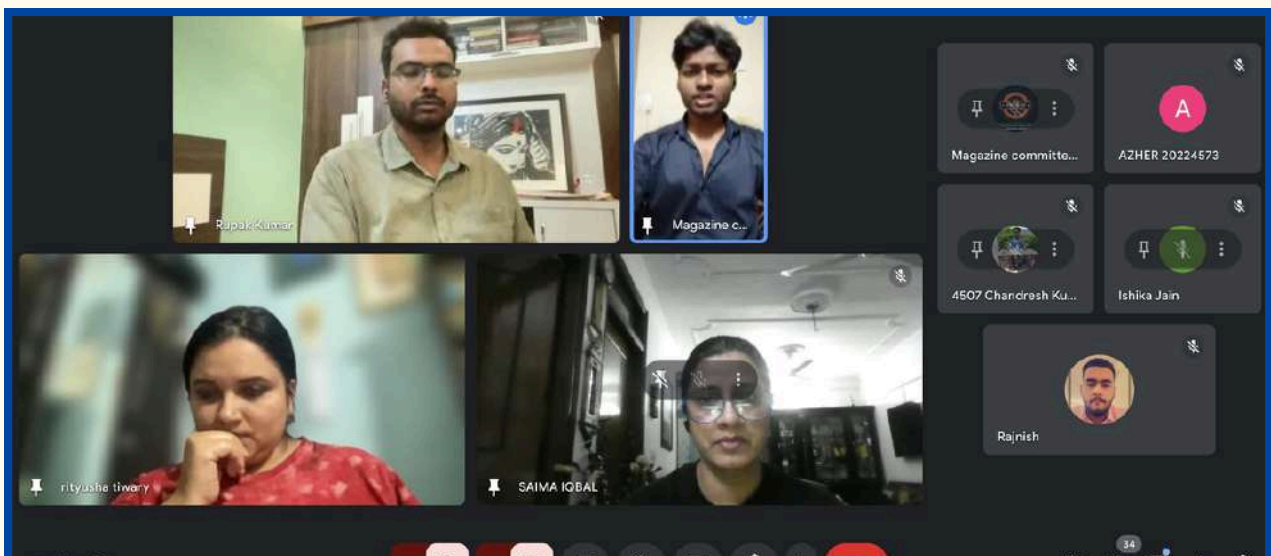
Research Articles:

1. "*The Freebie Dilemma*" by Piyush, Sidhita, and Vansh explores freebies' shift from welfare tools to electoral strategies in India. It links excessive freebies to economic instability and advocates Fiscal Impact Reports to balance welfare and economic stability, offering key insights for policymakers.
2. "*Exit Polls and the Missed Predictions*," examines their accuracy, ways to improve approximations, and broader electoral reforms. Factors contributing to inaccurate predictions include the vast population size and the number of abstained votes. Sidhant, along with Rishabh, worked on the project.

Both articles were completed under the supervision of Azher Ahmad, the coordinator of the cell.

Activities and Workshops:

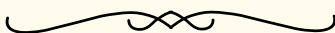
The Research Cell organized a workshop, "Writing Research Articles: Tracing the Steps," led by Dr. Rupak Kumar from VIT Vellore. The session covered research gaps, structuring, literature reviews, methodologies, originality, and ethics in academic writing.





RESEARCH COMMITTEE 2024-25

Siddhant Nitawane, Azhar Ahmad Dar, Dr. Saima Iqbal,
Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary, Piyush Chaudhary, Vansh Gaur, Rishabh



THE PODCAST CLUB

The Podcast Club of the Department of Political Science at Shaheed Bhagat Singh College is an initiative aimed at fostering intellectual discussions, critical thinking, and engagement with contemporary political issues. Our club serves as a platform where students interact with eminent scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, enriching their understanding of national and global affairs. Through our podcasts, we strive to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world political dynamics.

Aims and Objectives:

- To create a space for meaningful dialogue on political, social, and economic issues.
- To encourage student participation in public discourse and analytical discussions.
- To provide first-hand insights from experts in politics, governance, and international relations.
- To enhance the research and communication skills of students.
- To build a repository of thought-provoking discussions accessible to a wider audience.

Activities:

The club conducts podcasts in both online and offline modes, hosted by the students of the department. Each episode features an engaging conversation with distinguished guests from academia, bureaucracy, diplomacy, and policymaking. Some of our esteemed speakers and their discussion topics include:

- Shivshankar Menon – The Current Trajectory of India's Foreign Policy - Former National Security Advisor of India and ex-Foreign Secretary, known for his expertise in Indian diplomacy and strategic affairs.
- Anubhav Singh – UPSC (Preparation & Experience) - An IAS officer, sharing insights on UPSC preparation, strategy, and administrative experiences.
- Rituraj Sarma – UPSC (Preparation & Experience) - A UPSC-qualified candidate, discussing his preparation journey, challenges, and career path.
- Professor Manoranjan Mohanty – Comparative Analysis of India and China - Renowned political scientist and China expert, specializing in comparative politics and development studies
- Professor Anuradha Chenoy – Great Power Politics - Former Dean of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), an expert in international relations and security studies.
- Dr. Nupur Ray – Gender and Politics - Political theorist focusing on feminist political thought, gender justice, and democratic theory.
- Professor Ashok Acharya – The Future of Social Justice and Affirmative Action in India. Noted academic specializing in political philosophy, social justice, and affirmative action policies.

These discussions cover a wide range of themes, including international relations, governance, public policy, human rights, political theory, and competitive exam strategies.

All interviews are uploaded to the department's YouTube channel, THE CHANAKYAS, making them accessible to a broader audience.

The Podcast Club is more than just a platform for dialogue, it is a community of learners, thinkers, and changemakers dedicated to making political discourse more accessible and engaging.



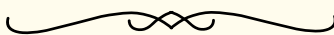
THE PODCAST CLUB

First Row

Prateek Aggarwal, Yashwardhan Singh, Prince Kumar, Sameer Kumar,
Dr. Saima Iqbal, Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary, Raunak Chauhan,
Aditya Raj, Yashashvi Singh, Aman Kakkar

Second Row

Shresth Kumar, Piyush Chaudhary, Pandey Rajnish Rajesh





YEAR AT GLANCE





PANEL DISCUSSION

Hosted a panel discussion on “China in the World Order: Implications for Indian Security” on 20th September 2024, featuring Major Namrata Dhasmana (Retd.), entrepreneur, IIM-L alumnus, geopolitical analyst, and IR expert

SPECIAL LECTURE

A special lecture on “Gandhi’s Concept of Satyagraha: Relevance in Today’s Times” was organized in collaboration with the Gandhi Study Circle on 1st October 2024, featuring Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty (Retd.), Political Science Department, University of Delhi.



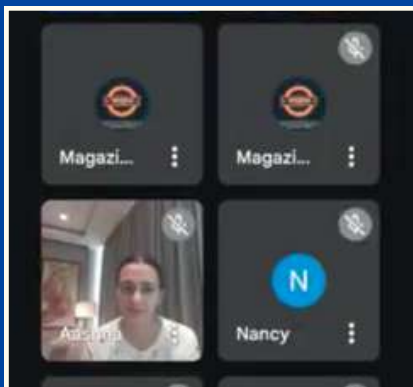
WORKSHOP

A workshop on “The Gender Lens: Approaches and Praxis” was organized in collaboration with The Economics Society on 7th October 2024, featuring Dr. Nupur Ray, Associate Professor, Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi.

INTERVIEW

An online interview session was organized by the Magazine Committee on 8th October 2024, featuring Mr. Rituraj Sarma, who secured an All-India Rank (AIR) of 462 in the UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2023. He shared his preparation journey and strategies.



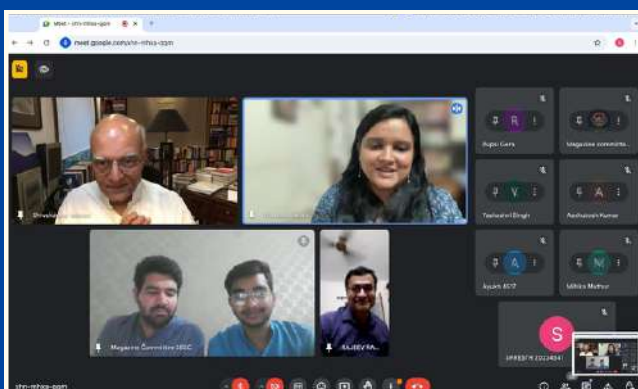


INTERVIEW

An engaging online interview session titled “Civil Services Preparation and Life as an IPS Officer” was held on 25th October 2024, organized by the Magazine Committee, featuring Ms. Aashna Chaudhary as the guest speaker. She shared valuable insights on preparing for civil services and the experience of being an IPS officer.

INTERVIEW

The Magazine Committee organized a special online interview session with Mr. Anubhav Singh, IAS officer, on 27th October 2024. He shared his experiences and insights on civil services and governance.



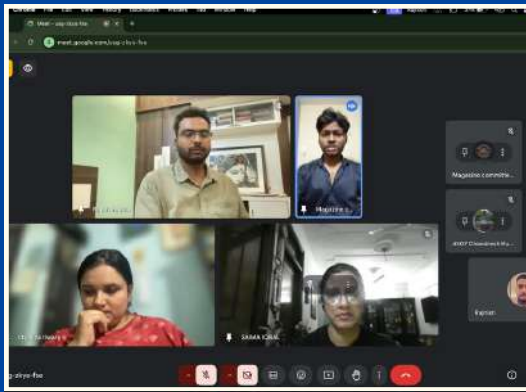
INTERVIEW

An online interview session on “Current Tracing to India’s Foreign Policy” was organized by the Magazine Committee on 28th October 2024, featuring Mr. Shivshankar Menon, an eminent diplomat and former National Security Adviser of India

BOOK DISCUSSION & SPECIAL LECTURE

The Book Discussion Committee organized a review of “Hobbes Against Friendship” by Prof. Gabriella Slomp and a special lecture on “Hobbes and the Modern Political Community” on 8th November 2024, featuring Prof. Ashok Acharya, Political Science Department, University of Delhi.



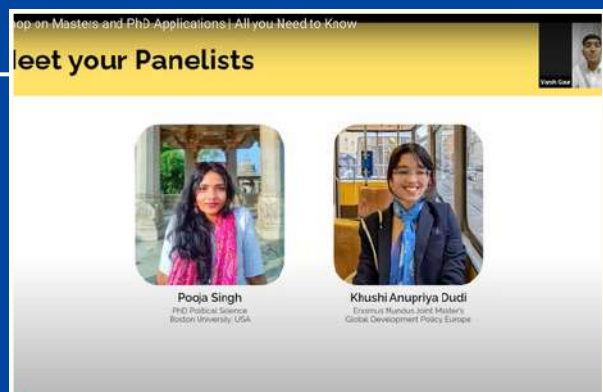


WORKSHOP

A workshop titled “Writing Research Articles: Tracing the Steps” was organized online on 12th November 2024, with Dr. Rupak Kumar, Author and Assistant Professor at VIT Vellore, as the guest speaker. The session focused on the essential aspects of writing research articles effectively.

WORKSHOP

A workshop on Masters and PhD Applications Abroad was organized in collaboration with Project Ed. Access on 16th November 2024 in online mode. Guest speakers Ms. Pooja Singh and Ms. Khushi Anupriya Dudi shared valuable insights and guidance for prospective applicants.



DISCUSSION

A discussion on “Indian Judiciary and impending reforms, with special evaluation of DY Chandrachud’s term,” was held on 23rd November 2024 in online mode. Mr. Saurav Das (investigative journalist), the guest speaker, provided in-depth insights into the current state and necessary reforms in the Indian judiciary.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The Gandhi Study Circle and the Department of Political Science organized a Roundtable Discussion on "गांधी: बहुसमयता और सतत् सांवद" on 1st February 2025. Delegates from Gujarat Vidyapith joined faculty and students in a thought-provoking exchange on Gandhi's philosophy, led by Dr. Saima Iqbal and Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary.



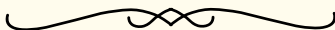


WORKSHOP

A workshop on "Policy Research" was organized on 3rd February 2025, featuring Mr. Ritwik Mehta as the keynote speaker. The session explored policy research, governance, and career prospects, providing students with valuable insights through interactive discussions.

WORKSHOP

A faculty-led session on "The Role of Blockchain in Financial Services" was organized in collaboration with Mahindra University on 13th February 2025. Led by Prof. Sanjay Mansabdar, the session explored blockchain's impact on transparency, security, and efficiency in finance, engaging students and faculty in insightful discussions.



MAGAZINE COMMITTEE



EDITORIAL TEAM

First Row

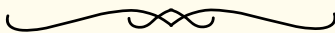
Kashish Garg, Nancy Dhankhar, Prince Kumar, Dr. Krishna Murari,
Dr. Saima Iqbal, Mr. Gadde Surya, Dr. Rityusha Mani Tiwary,
Azhar Ahmad Dar, Vansh Gaur, Sameer Kumar

Second Row

Pandey Rajnish Rajesh, Siddhant Nitawane

In Absentia

Aashutosh Kumar

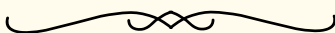




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Designed by Rajnish Pandey