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HINDU COLLEGE GAZETTE

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2020

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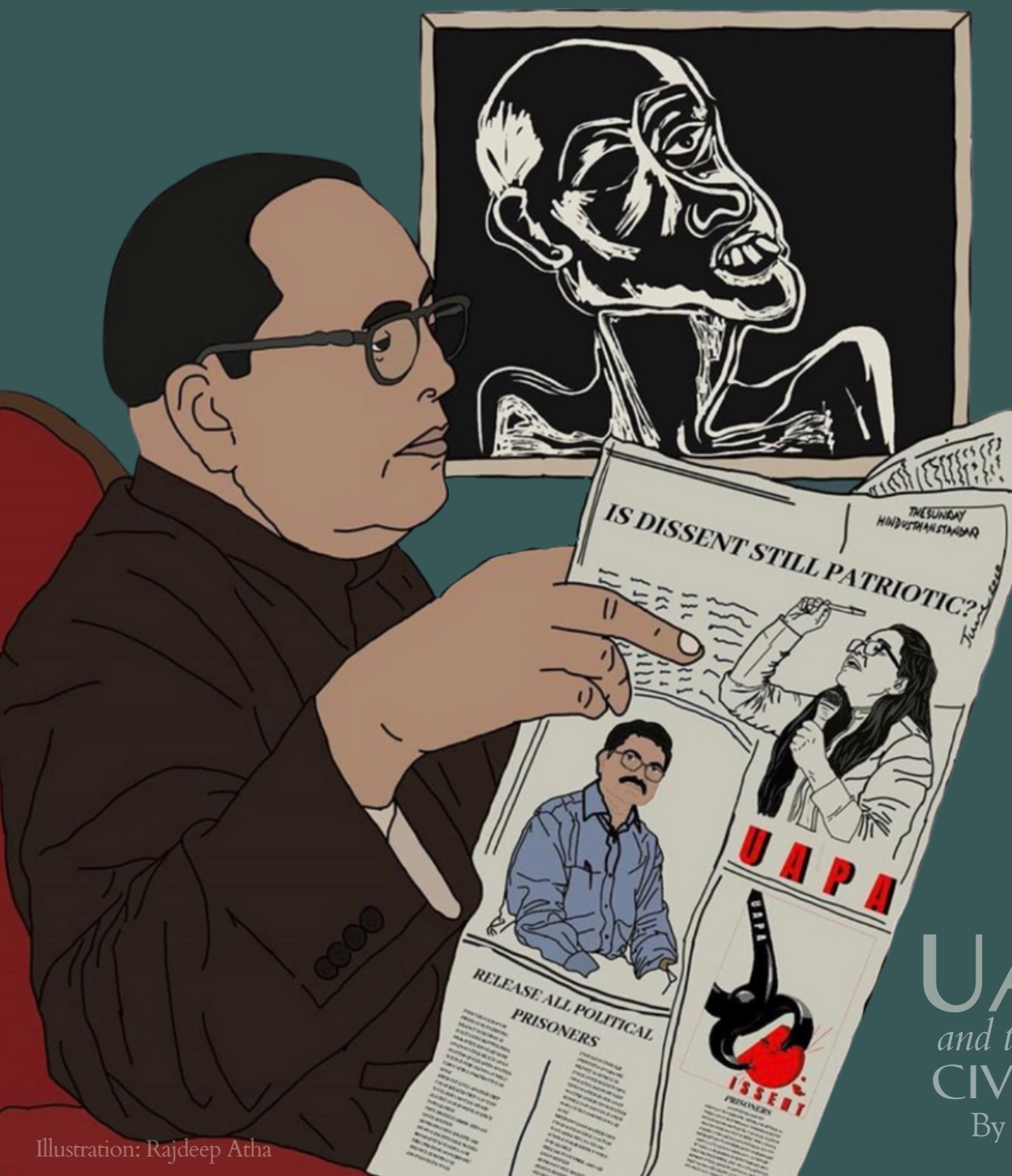


Illustration: Rajdeep Atha

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HINDU COLLEGE GAZETTE

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2020

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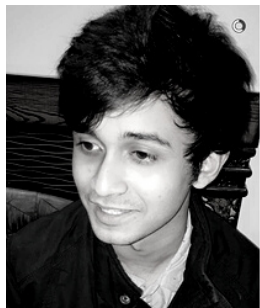
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CONTRIBUTORS



Akshansh Singh is a student at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University. You can always find him captivated by a book or passionately voicing his political outlook. He enjoys playing video games while being engaged by some intellectual podcast. He has several research papers to his name and is always looking forward to broaden his horizons. He is a full-time Law student and a part-time meme-monger.



Ishita Singh is in her third year of BA (Hons.) Political Science. She enjoys the company of her books more than that of people. She is a proud feminist and is a member of COLLECTIVE.



Arpita Chowdhury is pursuing English Honours with a minor in Journalism from Lady Sri Ram College for Women. She is the founder of Jazbaat Foundation. An avid writer with various published articles over National level platforms. She is an advocate of youth leadership. She is a public speaker and has spoken at various international platforms such as Further Girls Summit.



Shantanu Mishra is a II year BA LLB Hons. student at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. He has a keen interest in Ancient and Medieval history and analyse them with new theories he learns in his curriculum at NLS. He is cricket aficionado and a part time Clash of Clans enthusiast.

CONTRIBUTORS



Rajiv S Krishnan likes to look at the world through his own lens and loves to analyse politics with a centric, issue based approach. He is a Political Science major at Hindu College.



Krishna Priya K is a final year Political Science student at Hindu College. She enjoys writing on Indian politics and believes that writing fosters her creativity and critical thinking.



Mucheli Rishvanth Reddy is pursuing Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Political Science and Sociology from Christ University, Bangalore. He was editor and contributor for Constructive Programme: A Manifesto for New India and Musings on the Mahatma.



Nikhil Jois K.S. is a politics and philosophy enthusiast. Finds solace in Indian Classical Music. He is an aspiring civil servant. He studies History, Economics and Political Science at Christ University, Bangalore.

CONTRIBUTORS



Abhinav Bhardwaj is a published poet and researcher, has been a longlist awardee of the Wingword Poetry Prize and his works have been published by portals and journals like Feminism In India and Contemporary Literary Review India. He completed his undergraduate studies in English Literature from Hindu College, University of Delhi, earlier this year.



Preet Sharma is a third year student of Political Science Hons at Hindu College. She is a simple girl who loves engaging with complicated political theories. She is also deeply passionate about cooking other than reading and writing.



Ananya Anand is a History major at Hindu College, University of Delhi. She hates billionaires and dreams of a proletarian revolution



Shankar Tripathi is the former President of The Symposium Society. Indulging his socially-distanced time in writing about the arts, Shankar's interests lie in art, history, and coffee, while reading art history and sipping on coffee. A regular contributor to spaces like Art Fervour, he recently completed his undergraduate studies in History.



AMITOJ SINGH KALSI
Publisher & Creative Director



AKSHAYA SINGH
Head of Operations & Senior Editor

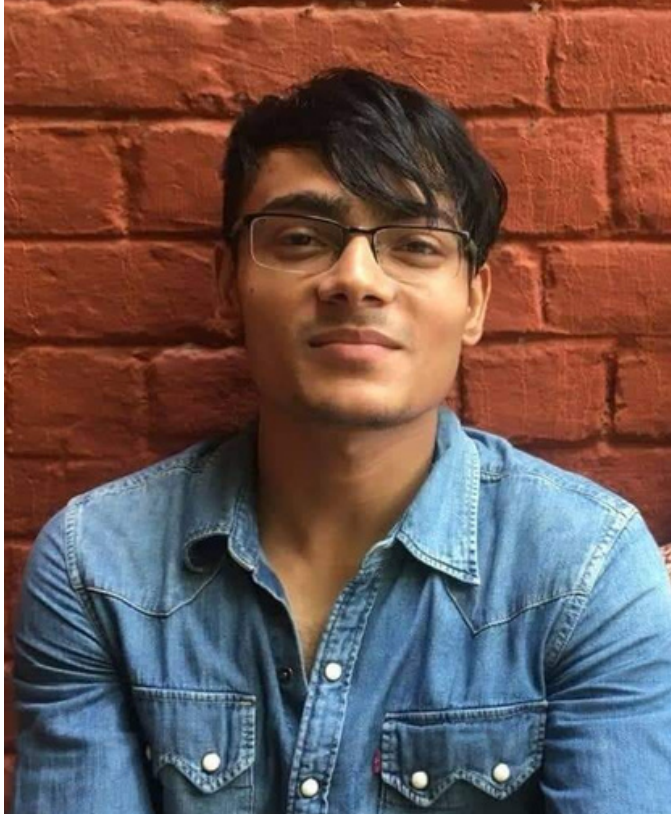
FROM THE FOUNDERS' DESK

Hindu College Gazette is the product of a conversation we had a few months back. The presence of an informant magazine is something that Hindu College has lacked, which is what motivated us to establish this magazine under the aegis of The Symposium Society, Hindu College. Making quality opinions and analyses of global affairs and socio-cultural issues accessible for our readers as well as providing a platform to Hinduites to engage in academic deliberation and research is our mission. We envision Hindu College Gazette to be the go-to for our readers for insights in politics, economy, society, history and everything in between.

Through this initiative we aim to create a community of enthusiastic writers and budding researchers who are passionate about writing and researching. As we regularly solicit, review and publish guest opinions from writers across the country, this very community, we believe, would extend far beyond our own varsity campus in New Delhi. This magazine is inline with the ideals of deliberation, ideation and research, which are the core ethos that we believe in at The Symposium Society.

The current pandemic has left many of us feeling uncertain, underproductive and even anxious. It has taken a toll on the mental health of many people. Many of us have also felt the loss of human social contact. We as a publication have also been constrained and confined during this time. However, the pandemic- apart from a great deal of other lessons has taught us on one hand the importance of culture and the comfort it provides in times of global catastrophe, and on the other hand the importance of valuable conversations and intellectual discourse, and how these can help create accountability for governments. Hence, another motivation for creating this platform has been to provide a platform for this very discourse.

We hope that all our readers, during the time of this pandemic and after it, are able to engage and connect with the issues and themes we publish about. We intend to make this initiative successful with our dedication and your support.



FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Finally, after months of effort and brainstorming, we are able to present the inaugural magazine issue of the Hindu College Gazette. Despite starting out with one-off articles, a magazine had always been in the works and now we are proud to finally publish it for our readers. As this is the first issue, I would like to address this message to our readers on behalf of the entire team.

First, what is the *Gazette*? We envisaged this magazine to be a place for rigorous analysis and opinion on some of the most important issues around us. We wanted to cover a myriad range of themes from politics and policy, international affairs, and economy to culture, society, and history, and everything in between. It is our hope that our readers would find our magazine to be highly diverse in the themes and topics it covers. We also set high editorial standards for our articles and ensured that everything we published went through meticulous proofreading and quality checks. The editors did not only edit the pieces sent by the writers; we also worked with them. Even for the guest submissions, we often conversed with the writers—sometimes just to make sure that we understood clearly what the writers wished to convey through their work. The idea was to make the editing process a collective effort and not a bureaucratic system of checks.

We also hope to eventually do more ground reports on news about education and our universities. However due to colleges remaining shut, we could not focus on this area as much as we would've wanted. Still, we have not compromised on the quality of our content.

Our intention was never to remain restricted to Hindu College even though that's where we are based. And we've been able to ensure that we follow this vision. Since our inception, we have been receiving guest submissions from not just across Delhi but the whole country. In fact, our cover article for this issue has been written by Nikhil Jois, a student from Christ (Deemed to be University), Bangalore. This has allowed us to give a platform to some highly talented writing without restrictions of geography. At the same time, we feel privileged to have received such quality work for our magazine.

In this issue, our readers can expect to read a variety of articles. Ananya Anand writes on the need for affirmative action in a meritocratic world; Shankar Tripathi dwells on the politics of cultural spaces; Shantanu Mishra reads Kalidas from a Marxist perspective; Abhinav Bhardwaj navigates the socio-cultural responses to suicide; Ishita Singh calls for a move away from privacy-based arguments for LGBTQ+ rights; Akshaya Singh comments on the discourse around the song WAP; Amitoj Singh Kalsi analyses the media's creation of scapegoats; Samya Verma examines the current state of Indian democracy; Harsh Suri's piece deals with the rise of China as a challenge to the West; Shefali Verma evaluates Jammu & Kashmir's 4G clampdown, and much more.

Alongside the effort, of course, is a desire to learn. Working in a team of writers, editors, and designers, trying to produce content that is not only of high quality but also appealing to a wide and diverse audience is not easy. We are yet to see what kind of reception the magazine gets. While we are hoping for the best, we also wish to hear all kinds of feedback from you, our readers. Send us your feedback [here](#). Tell us what we did well, where we fell short, and what we need to keep in mind the next time, so that we keep improving.

PRATEEK PANKAJ



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DEMOCRACY & INDIA: LOVE STORY 2020?

OF STAR-CROSSED LOVERS, POLITICAL
DEMAGOGUES AND MODERN GOEBBELS

BY SAMYA VERMA

Indian republic's seven-decade long romance with democracy and 'tryst with destiny' seems to have hit the rocks. This anomaly has surfaced at a time when we are looking at a long and arduous decade in the face.

The constitution enacted on 26th January 1950, is a weather-beaten, stolid entity, forged in the fires of partition with such foresight and prescience, that it stood resilient in the wake of Pt. Nehru's demise, four wars, Indira Gandhi's tyranny, the collapse of the Congress system in 1990 and the resurgence of partition's legacy: communalism. But it seems to have met its match at last

in the rise of long-prophesied majoritarianism.

The idea is simple: draw out from the heart of Indian republic the dormant fears of one all-encompassing majority, and play on them. The entrenched and systemized hierarchies of this country will then rise unbidden to your aid. Which is this majority, so full of fear, and overly-protective of the power it wields?

To answer that, we must first understand who the minorities are. The real minorities aren't just religious, as the country's dominant political forces are wont to simplify, but in-fact 'the poor and the down-trodden' as N.G. Ranga once argued in the Constituent Assembly Debates. Or, to quote Mr Yogendra Yadav, "India is a country of many minorities", of many natures: from the socially powerless SC's, ST's, and Dalits (who are numerically a majority) to OBC's who suffer economically, to numerically small religious minorities with their consequent limited access to political power. The majority then are upper caste, upper-class Hindus, who wield power in every sphere mentioned before, 'privilege' being the keyword in this discussion.

Our minorities aren't free from insecurities either and fall prey to the artifice of our neighbours. This gives ever more brazenness to our political overlords to inject fear into the hearts of the majority. There is thus a vicious cycle plaguing the country, putting the majority and minority at constant odds with each other, where, at the cost of sounding partisan, I'll concede that the minorities suffer more. Therein lie the foremost factors posing grave harm to India and its lover democracy.

Aravind Adiga, in his 'White Tiger', suggested an antidote to this. Referring to the Maoist movement and allegations of foreign intervention in the same, he asked Indians to understand, once and for all, that both: their revolutionary aspirations and the love of India and democracy, would be driven to a consequence not with the aid of ill-intentioned outside forces, but only when the struggle arose in their own hearts, and took roots in the annals of their own country's history. And when that happens, the majority too will no longer remain subservient to the words of its demagogues, and proceed to join the minorities in their fight for equality.

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The system is aware that it can sideline the innumerable, powerless minorities in its quest for complete despotism. But what about the one true majority, with the privilege to promptly take to the streets demanding its rights? The solution uncovered by the esteemed demagogues was a simple series of steps aimed at veiling the majority's eyes and creating a vague fear of the 'Other' on the horizon. The majority, in short, has been tricked into donning mental shackles of subservience. In a recent interview to Akash Banerjee (of Desh Bhakt fame), Mr Ravish Kumar discussed at length the tactics that had been adopted to uproot the opposition and spirit of questioning from the very hearts of the people. A culture has been wrought where the very idea of having an opinion averse to the rulers has been demonized. I would like to add here that I believe that the persistence of the mental slavery of 200 years of colonial rule, from which we are still trying to emerge, as well as the very young age of democratic thought in the country, are what have together made people vulnerable to the seeds of subservience and 'thought-crime.' That said and done, we now come to the protagonists of our show: the star-crossed lovers, Indian Republic and Democracy, given over to misunderstandings, and the Goebbels-Esque villain hiding in plain sight: the turncoat Indian media. Eating through media ethics and vulnerabilities of the privileged, the worm of fascism has at last managed to bore into the corpus of the nation and is slowly alienating it from democracy. When news becomes pro-aganda, a nation becomes an autocracy. What becomes of a nation whose media remains little more than a weapon in the hands of its leaders, their clarion call asking the citizen's mute spectatorship to blatant violations of civil rights? It gets red-listed, of course: today India ranks 142nd on the Reporter Sans Frontières Report. None of the other red-listed countries has ever claimed





IN SHORT: 'THE MEDIA HAS BECOME AN EXTENSION OF THE STATE ITSELF' AND 'INSTITUTIONAL JOURNALISM IS DEAD IN INDIA.' - RAVISH KUMAR

to be democracy, or possesses a constitution as intricately made as ours.

A simple analysis of 3 months-worth of news stories, covered by some of the top-ranked media houses of the country, unearthed a curious trend: out of every 365 debates, only one was on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and issues of governance in the times of Corona. The vile media trial on the SSR death case, a brutal witch hunt of the woman in his life by mobs of 'journalists', as well as putting down most unabashedly of anyone who dared to question why the issues of the debate weren't Indo-China border tensions, falling GDP etc., have all eroded the faith of Indian thought-conscious in Media. Media is supposedly the fourth pillar of democracy, the most vibrant arm of civil society that shields the citizens from their rulers. But this corporatism, a blind chase of TRPs and political sycophancy have most significantly contributed to a systematic breakdown of democratic consciousness amongst the masses.

In Mr Ravish Kumar's words, 'The media has become an extension of the state itself' and 'Institutional journalism is dead in India.'

That these channels are still being consumed with utmost relish, come evenings, by households countrywide, points to a deeper rot of morality plaguing the country. When did our value system degrade to such an extent that we became this voyeuristic audience, happy to watch a hundred men with cameras violate the person of a woman who has not even been proven guilty of the charges levelled against her as yet? Had we not been vultures in the guise of television viewers, no channel would've dared to chase TRPs in this manner. The need of the hour is for common citizens of the country to pause and reflect: are our values being destroyed to further our mental enslavement? The layers of the answer born out of this reflection will scare us. Perhaps we will even stop recognizing whom we encounter in the mirror. To conclude: this moral collapse is a tragedy of our times.

Finally, the Indian judiciary, instated with the noble goal of complete justice to every citizen, is falling weak before a string of debilitating autocratic ethos that mark the arrival of a new India. A state that claims to be a democracy, but fails overtly on the judicial front, is one bound for a dim future. When judges who have given over important verdicts to the ruling party, are immediately bestowed with parliamentary positions post-retirement, one cannot help but question the veracity of those judgements. It might've been a just verdict, but such explicit acts of patronage sow seeds of suspicion in the general public's mind. Moreover, when people openly denounced as rioters even by tech giants like Facebook, continue to roam free, while laws like UAPA jail a pregnant woman for 'conspiring to block a road for a protest' (read: conspiring to exercise the constitutional right to dissent); or arrest people for 'thought-crimes', then one can be sure of the extent to which India and democracy's love affair has soured.

THE NEED OF THE HOUR IS FOR COMMON CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY TO PAUSE AND REFLECT: ARE OUR VALUES BEING DESTROYED TO FURTHER OUR MENTAL ENSLAVEMENT? THE MORAL COLLAPSE FACING THE INDIAN SOCIETY IS A TRAGEDY OF OUR TIMES.

Previous Spread: Shammi, a 38 year old resident of Khajuri Khas, looks at the damage done to her home after an attack by mobs with petrol bombs. By Sandy Ford for The Caravan.



BY AKSHANSH SINGH

A SHORT DISCOURSE ON INDIAN SECULARISM

When the State itself turns its back on a certain group or community, and defines and demarcates its enemies, nothing but State-sponsored violence can ensue.

History has been witness to the horrors of right-wing nationalism that arises out of creating a false sense of threat or instilling insecurity in a group of people along the lines of race or religion. The events that unfolded in Nazi Germany should forever remain evidence of the State's responsibility to remain positively neutral among its peoples; for when the State itself turns its back on a certain group or community, and defines and demarcates its enemies, nothing but State-sponsored violence can ensue. Out of the ideas of liberalism emerges freedom of thought and expression. Freedom of belief and the liberty to individuals to choose an idea of God to believe in is a tenet of secularism. Indian secularism is different

from the secularism that developed in the West. While the idea is Western, it does not function in a manner similar to how it does in the West. For starters, Indian secularism is not a total inaction of the State in matters related to religion. Given the undemocratic nature of many religions and their oppressive laws which have existed particularly in our society, the Indian secularism model, along with the far progressive Constitution of India, is of a reformative nature: in the Indian context, it is the duty of the State to further the process of social justice and equality of opportunity—necessary in a democratic society. This endeavour cannot be made possible if the secular and democratic laws cannot intervene to facilitate reforms in the religions to make their nature less oppressive and more egalitarian.

The Constitution of India provides in no uncertain terms that India is to be a secular State. However, in reality ample evidence exists of Hindu right-wing mobilisation by political parties; and use of the secular nature of the State and intertwined policies of positive discrimination provided by the constitution as instruments of minority appeasement to secure votes. This has created inter-religious as well as intra-religious hostilities among various communities as identity politics on religious grounds deepens, and has further moved the discourse of Indian politics towards a more right-wing focussed narrative, as one group seeks the vote of the majority and another group seeks the votes of the minorities. This was supposed to be prevented under the secular state.



Activists from the Hindu Bajrang Dal Party , the youth wing of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, at a procession marking the anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6 1992. (Narinder Nanu/AFP)

While the State granted ample freedom of conscience to all persons to believe in a religion that they wanted to, and no favour was given to any single religion, this has not been the general feeling among the masses who have felt that their faith was threatened by attack from an "outsider" that could erode their system of belief.

The colonial policy of divide and rule pitted Hindus and Muslims as mutual antagonists who were perpetually locked in a struggle to win favours and be considered more favourably so as not to be oppressed at the hands of the British. The British put forward several policies including separate electorates, introduced with the Morley-Minto reforms. The idea was that only Muslims could protect the rights of Muslims and therefore they alone shall have separate Muslim representatives voted to power by Muslim voters. If Hindus and Muslims kept fighting with each other, they could never be united under a common identity—that of Indians.

This colonial divide on communal lines seems to have translated fairly easily into the modern-day politics. Right-wing Hindu nationalistic parties have been propagating for over 30 years now that India is a land of Hindus in an effort to unite them against a common enemy—Islam—with the RSS at the head of this. All of this is to create a solid and unfailing electorate that has been brainwashed into thinking that, were they to lose their unity and not stand together against this common enemy, Hindus would be subject to the wishes of the minority and be dominated thereof. In a country with about 80% of population following Hinduism, the antics of religious divide used by the British play very well to create a communal electorate that would help elect that party to power that claims to work to protect the community from the said enemy. And when such party is elected to power, then the Government, as well as the State has a clear enemy.

This is against the spirit of secularism enshrined in the Constitution of India. A secular State cannot and should not have space for such right-wing mobilisation. However, there is evidence this exact strategy coupled with riots on communal lines has led to increase in popularity of the BJP. A Yale study states that BJP leaders benefitted in state elections from communal riots. The riots polarised the electorate and saw an increase in the Hindu majority vote of the BJP while the same situation caused reduced votes for the Indian National Congress, which relied on minority support for winning elections. While the Congress has been accused of minority appeasement, and to some extent it may be true, there is also merit to policies that look after the interests of the minorities since the same study proves that due to such policies by the Congress, it had resulted in more communal harmony overall. And, had the Congress lost in

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these elections, there would have been an 11% increase in communal riots and thousands more would have died.

India has failed to be a truly secular state as it does not separate the State from religion. For all major religious communities exist their own personal laws, which mean that the Constitution and laws of the State are not the sole authorities, with the civil society is being governed by religious personal laws. This, therefore, expands religion to take the form of a governing authority over the citizens, whereas, religion should not exist beyond the scope of faith and personal belief as enshrined under the Constitution in Article 25, which offers no explicit right to be governed by individual personal laws. Religion therefore, needs to be reduced to a mere personal identity and personal belief, away from the governing authority in the Indian State that it is today. Across all religions exist oppressive, misogynistic, and paternalistic laws that enforce dogma and morality. The Indian State has no religion. And therefore, citizens of India should only be governed by secular laws of the State. One way to do this is to introduce a Uniform Civil Code, so that religion is only reduced to a personal identity that cannot be weaponised by politicians to cause communal disharmony and gain votes by polarising electorates.

Moreover, religious organisations like the RSS should not be allowed to control political parties like the BJP. RSS members go on to join Hindu-nationalist parties like the BJP. When organisations carry a sectarian goal like that of the RSS, naturally their members carry those same ambitions. And, when such members are allowed to contest elections and form the Government, the Government then carries the same goals as the political leadership. Slowly, the whole state machinery succumbs to the hidden agenda and all wheels are turned to carry out said agenda and achieve specific goals. Therefore, a ban on religious organisations from contesting in elections would mean an en masse eradication of hidden communal agendas. Politicians would be encouraged to talk more in terms of secular and constitutional values of nation-building rather than frenzied rhetoric of a Hindu rashtra.

In a secular State such as India, ample space still remains for right-wing polarisation due to factors ranging from religion being weaponised as more than a mere personal faith and identity, and the admission of religious organisations into politics and governance. Parties polarise the electorates to gain benefits in the elections at the cost of the Indian peoples and tear the democratic fabric of the nation. True separation of the State from any religion is only possible if the only governing laws of the society are the secular and egalitarian laws tested on the anvil of constitutional morality. Therefore, it is imperative that a Uniform Civil Code should replace the personal laws that govern the Indian society as of now.



ON THE COVER

UAPA *and the* SUBVERSION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

BY NIKHIL JOIS KS

On September 13, 2020 former PhD scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University and political activist Umar Khalid was arrested by the special cell of the Delhi Police following 11 hours of detailed interrogation. Umar Khalid was charged under the sections of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act of 2019 under FIR 59 of 2020 which was filed on March 6 in relation to the Delhi violence, which broke out in February and claimed 53 lives. This was in the context of raging nationwide demonstrations against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019, which makes sweeping changes to the original statute, religious criteria being one among them. Umar is charged under four sections of the UAPA 2019 which include abetment, causing death, fundraising and conspiracy.

On September 13, 2020 former PhD scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University and political activist Umar Khalid was arrested by the special cell of the Delhi Police following 11 hours of detailed interrogation. Umar Khalid was charged under the sections of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act of 2019 under FIR 59 of 2020 which was filed on March 6 in relation to the Delhi violence, which broke out in February and claimed 53 lives. This was in the context of raging nationwide demonstrations against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019, which makes sweeping changes to the original statute, religious criteria being one among them. Umar is charged under four sections of the UAPA 2019 which include abetment, causing death, fundraising and conspiracy. To back up this claim, the Delhi Police claimed in an affidavit filed on July 13 that the motives behind anti-CAA protests were "secessionist" in nature and that the protesters were using "the façade of civil disobedience" to destabilize the government. In FIR number 65 of 2020, the police further claimed that Khalid allegedly hatched a broad conspiracy along with former AAP councillor Tahir Hussian to defame and malign the duly elected government at the centre in relation to the CAA and link it with the February visit of the US President Donald Trump. The affidavit further stated that 750 FIRs and 200 charge sheets have been filed relating to communal violence in Delhi.

The Delhi police claim: A holistic view of all the three phases and the investigations which have been conducted so far in individual FIRs and the leads which the Delhi Police have been able to ascertain, clearly demonstrates that the present incidents of violence were not instigated in a spur of the moment or because of any tensions between two communities for an obvious religious cause, but were carefully engineered and funded by mischievous elements and fringe groups, who, in pursuit of their motivated hidden agendas, instilled a false fear and panic in the minds of a section of society and provoked/ instigated them to take law and order in their hands and resort to violence.

However, Khalid does not stand alone in being a recent victim of the draconian UAPA and the significant toll it takes on the question of due process of the law, civil liberties and on the whole, the question of justice and the statutory mandate to determine "truth" while adjudicating on "crimes". Several of the anti-CAA protestors ranging from students to academics have been detained under the UAPA under precarious charges and absence of transparency. Since 2018, prominent social activists have been detained and arrested under the UAPA for alleged involvement in the Bhima-Koregaon violence, however, without a shred of evidence. Before delving into the anatomy of the UAPA, it is imperative

to look at what the Home Minister had to state while placing the amendment bill in the Parliament last year. He stated: I believe heavy-handedness is essential to root out terrorism and not soft approach from the government. It is essential to look at the implementation of the law rather than the law itself which the opposition leaders have alleged to be draconian. Tell me, isn't it required to designate an individual or individuals who take part in a terrorist act a terrorist? Not just those, those who aid and abet terrorism are equally culpable in terrorist acts. Those who spread the frenzy of terrorism through possession and disbursement of terrorist material and terrorist propaganda are also required to be prosecuted. And if all such individuals are designated as terrorists, I don't think any member of parliament should have any objection. (Emphasis mine).

Therefore, the amendment made to the UAPA 2019 is as such: 5. In section 35 of the principal Act:

(i) in sub-section (1),— (A) in clause (a), after the words "First Schedule", the words "or the name of an individual in the Fourth Schedule" shall be inserted; (B) in clause (b), after the words "United Nations", the words "or the name of an individual in the Fourth Schedule" shall be inserted; (C) in clause (c), after the words "First Schedule", the words "or the name of an individual from the Fourth Schedule" shall be inserted; (D) in clause (d), after the words "First Schedule", the words "or the Fourth Schedule" shall be inserted; (ii) in sub-section (2), for the words "an organisation only if it believes that it is", the words "an organisation or an individual only if it believes that such organisation or individual is" shall be substituted; (iii) in sub-section (3), for the words "an organisation shall be deemed to be involved in terrorism if it", the words "an organisation or an individual shall be deemed to be involved in terrorism if such organisation or individual" shall be substituted. 6. In section 36 of the principal Act,— (i) in the marginal heading, for the words "a terrorist organisation", the words "terrorist organisation or individual" shall be substituted; (ii) in sub-section (1), for the words "an organisation from the Schedule", the words "an organisation from the First Schedule, or as the case may be, the name of an individual from the Fourth Schedule" shall be substituted; (iii) in sub-section (2),— (A) in clause (b), for the words "Schedule as a terrorist organisation", the words "First Schedule as a terrorist organisation, or" shall be substituted; (B) after clause (b), the following clause shall be inserted, namely:— "(c) any person affected by inclusion of his name in the Fourth Schedule as a terrorist."; (iv) in sub-section (5), for the words "an organisation from the Schedule", the words "an organisation from the First Schedule or the name of an individual from the Fourth Schedule" shall be substituted; (v) in sub-section (6),



after the words "an organisation", the words "or an individual" shall be inserted; (vi) in sub-section (7), for the word "Schedule", the words "First Schedule or the name of an individual from the Fourth Schedule" shall be substituted.

However, the Home Minister has conveniently refused to look at the fact that Chapter 4 of the previously existing statute provides for prosecution of individuals involved in the "unlawful" and "terrorist" act. Here is what Chapter 4, Section 15 states: [15. Terrorist act.— [(i)] Whoever does any act with intent to threaten or likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security [, economic security,] or sovereignty of India or with intent to strike terror or likely to strike terror in the people or any section of the people in India or in any foreign country,— (a) by using bombs, dynamite or other explosive substances or inflammable substances or firearms or other lethal weapons or poisonous or noxious gases or other chemicals or by any other substances (whether biological radioactive, nuclear or otherwise) of a hazardous nature or by any other means of whatever nature to cause or likely to cause— (i) death of, or injuries to, any person or persons; or (ii) loss of, or damage to, or destruction of, property; or (iii) disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community in India or in any foreign country; or [(iiia) damage to, the monetary stability of India by way of production or smuggling or circulation of high quality counterfeit Indian paper currency, coin or of any other material; or] (iv) damage or destruction of any property in India or in a foreign country used or intended to be used for the defence of India or in connection with any other purposes of the Government of India, any State Government or any of their agencies; or (b) overawes by means of criminal force or the show of criminal force or attempts to do so or causes death of any public functionary or attempts to cause death of any public functionary; or (c) detains, kidnaps or abducts any person and threatens to kill or injure such person or does any other act in order to compel the Government of India, any State Government or the Government of a foreign country or [an international or inter-governmental organisation or any other person to do or abstain from doing any act; or] commits a terrorist act. (Parenthesis original).

The expanse of the definitions for "terrorist acts" or "unlawful acts" along with the inclusion of the "individual", let alone the association, indicates the amassing of executive power to reign in on individual citizens solely based on the presumption of a commission of an act deemed to be "unlawful" by the State. Such expansive laws are prone to gross abuse and result in systematic erosion of institutional safeguards in place to defend individuals against the arbitrary exercise of executive power. This takes us to look at the anatomy of the UAPA, which erodes civil liberties.

First, let us look at the example of the custodial remands and the provisions under the UAPA. Under normal circumstances, an accused person under

section 167 of the IPC has to be produced before a judicial magistrate if the investigation is not complete within the 24 hours of the arrest. The transmission shall take place if and only if, "there are grounds for believing that the accusation or information is well-founded" and the magistrate must authorize detention from time to time. The magistrate cannot remand the accused of days exceeding fifteen in number. There are further checks in place. The magistrate cannot extend the total number of days in "police custody" for the accused beyond ninety days and in a timely fashion. However, ninety days of remand is only if "the investigation relates to an offence punishable with death, imprisonment for life or imprisonment for a term of not less than ten years" and sixty days for relatively minor crimes. Such measures are to ensure that the police shall not exercise brute force or act in any way that violates the custodial liberties of the accused until proven guilty.

However, here comes the single biggest blow with the UAPA as a draconian alternative. The UAPA, under section 43D-(2) states: (2) Section 167 of the Code shall apply in relation to a case involving an offence punishable under this Act subject to the modification that in sub-section (2),— (a) the references to "fifteen days", "ninety days" and "sixty days", wherever they occur, shall be construed as references to "thirty days", "ninety days" and "ninety days" respectively; and (b) after the proviso, the following provisos shall be inserted, namely:— "Provided further that if it is not possible to complete the investigation within the said period of ninety days, the Court may if it is satisfied with the report of the Public Prosecutor indicating the progress of the investigation and the specific reasons for the detention of the accused beyond the said period of ninety days, extend the said period up to one hundred and eighty days: Provided also that if the police officer making the investigation under this Act, requests, for the purposes of investigation, for police custody from judicial custody of any person in judicial custody, he shall file an affidavit stating the reasons for doing so and shall also explain the delay, if any, for requesting such police custody.

This means indefinite detention of the accused during the pre-trial process and the police are empowered to extend the detention period by producing documents through the public prosecutor. The possibilities of subsequent emotional and physical trauma faced by the accused worsen the safeguards in place. The Huffington Post reported on 21 September 2020 that a UAPA detainee, Gulfisha Fatima had been facing "mental and emotional harassment" in jail. She further claimed that the jail staff called her an "educated terrorist", telling her "you die inside, outside you have orchestrated riots". Second is the question of presumption of innocence in

terms of bail for the detainee under the UAPA. Under the general law, the statutes point to what is called “anticipatory bail” for an accused to apply for when he/she perceives the actions of the police to be arbitrary and “wrongful”. The accused can apply for bail prior to the arrest in order to ensure against the misuse of powers during criminal trials by the police. This bail allows for the accused to remain away from the police custody during the course of the investigation provided that the accused shall not flee from the scene.

Here, “wrongful” action is assessed as a combination of malafide intent on the part of the police and the lack of necessity for the accused to be in custody. However, the UAPA perverts this basic but significant institutional/legal safeguard by totally disallowing anticipatory bail for all offences and placing significant barriers for the obtainment of ordinary bail. Here is what the section 43D-(5), Chapter VII under the “Modified application of certain provisions of the Code states: (5) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV and VI of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release: Provided that such accused person shall not be released on bail or on his own bond if the Court, on a perusal of the case diary or the report made under section 173 of the Code is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is *prima facie* true.

This effectively translates to the fact that the statute under the UAPA allows for ordinary bail if and only if, the special courts—designated to try the accused and grant bail based on the merit of the material solely produced by the concerned authority (read police)—find the accusation to be *prima facie* not true. It is imperative to remember the fact that the procedure takes place at the initial stages of the investigation. This effectively means, one, the courts cannot rely upon the contrary materials to refute the charge made and two, the incontrovertible principle that an accused is innocent until guilty is flipped around. The police are empowered to withhold undesirable material to produce in the special courts. The end result will be a long period of detention combined with the denial of bail. The UAPA, as argued by the Home Minister, now empowers the State to declare an individual a terrorist merely based on presumption and not through due process. Mere possession of the materials cannot be construed as a commission of unlawful activity. If it were, suppose I was known to be in possession of, say, Mao’s Red book or Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, I can be booked as a terrorist without a fair trial. It is essential to note the judgement pronounced by NIA Kochi special court Judge, Anil Bhaskar in the *Allen Shuhaib, Thwaha Fasal v. Union of India* case. On page 19, para 31, the court states, “At the same time, the court has an equal responsibility to see that human rights are not violated in the process of combating terrorism. In all cases, the fight against terrorism must be respectful to the human rights”, while quoting the SC judgement in *PUCL v. Union of India* (2004). It further noted in a crucial paragraph 33 of page 20: “essentially granting bail is discretionary. It is well settled that discretion when applied to a court of justice, means sound discretion guided by laws, rules and principles as laid down by the court and judicial decisions. While exercising discretion, the court has to balance the mitigating and aggravating circumstances...”

It states in para 34 on page 21: “In other words, the duty of the court at this stage is not to weigh the evidence meticulously but to arrive at a finding on the basis of broad possibilities. It is a finding tentative in nature, which may not have any bearing on the merits of the case.” Subsequently, in para 61, page 41, the court vehemently states: “Any evaluation diverted from the context will lead to bad conclusions. Right to Protest is a fundamental right. It is well settled that the expression ‘Government established by Law’ has to be distinguished from persons for the time being engaged in carrying out the administration. A protest against the policies and the decisions of the government even if it is for the wrong cause, cannot be termed as sedition or an intentional act to support cession or secession.” In Para 62, the court states: “Being a Maoist is not a crime, though the political ideology of Maoists does not synchronize with our constitutional polity”. The Court, concluding the said case, stated that there was *prima facie* no deliberate intent to commit a terrorist act.

Some important inferences can be drawn from the above-quoted lines of the judgement. First, the court has held conclusively that mere possession of materials or professing an ideology deemed to be violent cannot be construed as intent to commit a terrorist act or an “unlawful act”. Second, at the initial stage of the investigation, the courts have limitations to come to tentative conclusions due to the presence of less satisfactory materials and the absence of contrary documents. Third, dissent towards the ruling dispensation cannot be construed as an act of sedition. Fourth, the watered-down reading of the statute is at the discretion of the courts. As noted earlier, it is the discretion of the courts to interpret the existing statutes and thus grant bail to the accused. In other words, the law leaves room open for misuse and perversion of generally established laws outside the ambit of preventive detention mechanisms. It is therefore essential to look at the fact that 1182 UAPA cases were registered in 2018 as per the National Crime Records Bureau data. However, the conviction rate in 2018 was 27% as opposed to other cases remaining in the courts, which stood at 93%. By the end of 2018, it is reported, only 317 out of 2,008 cases were sent to trial. The extremely low conviction rates indicate that the law is grossly abused and misused against individuals with limited to no *prima facie* evidence to prove the accused to be guilty. However, denial of bails to the accused due to multi-layered barriers within UAPA results in longer periods of detention. The law skews towards the wider interests of the State as against the interests of the individual citizens, which becomes a breeding ground for resentment towards the system and trauma due to being socially outcast as a “terrorist”. It further erodes the civil liberties meant to safeguard the individual citizens against a leviathan State. Thus, what needs to be done? A radical solution would be to repeal all statutes in place which inhibit civil liberties and to make sweeping constitutional reforms which firmly enshrine fundamental rights of individual citizens and leave no space for the State to crack down on dissent. The majesty of law must supersede political culture and fragmentation of power. This is being prescribed keeping in mind various socio-political factors which led the newborn Indian Republic to betray liberal principles. But time has definitely come to rectify historical errors beginning with reinstating the same liberal values to empower individual citizens and hold the State power within its philosophically intended bounds.



Students wait for their turn to get online in Srinagar (AFP/Getty)



ROTI, KAPDA, MAKAAN & 4G

How Insidious is Jammu & Kashmir's 4G Clampdown?

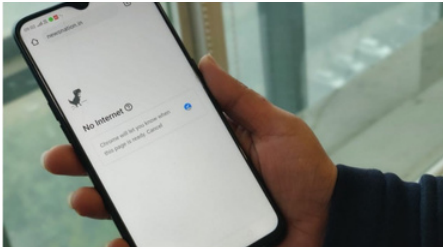
BY SHEFALI VERMA

The 'Internet Express' is the name given to the train in J&K that shuttled out thousands of internet deprived citizens per day from Srinagar to Banihal, the nearest town with a steady connection, so that the people in the state could have access to internet even for a few minutes. The place would be crammed with students who were there to fill up their examination forms, professors who just had to check an email or tax consultants who were there so that they could file some returns.

Imagine a world where you can't call home. You pick up your phone to call your family to let them know that you are safe or that you are in danger and need help only to reckon that your phone doesn't work – you are stranded.

The internet blackout began last year in August 2019, when the Government of India went ahead to repeal the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and converted it into two separate Union Territories. Initially, the internet shutdown was imposed for a period of five months, but soon after, Kashmir became witness to the longest period of internet shutdown in a democracy.

After receiving thousands of petitions -including human rights organisations and civil societies the Supreme Court of India in January 2020 went ahead to direct the Jammu and Kashmir administration to review all orders suspending the internet services in the valley within the week and put them in the public domain.



“The Internet is a major means of information, therefore, Freedom of Speech and Expression through the Internet is part of Article 19(1)(A) and restriction on it should be in accordance with restrictions to this right”, the court said. The judgement was preceded by the Kerala High Court’s judgement in the *Faheema Shi-rin v. State of Kerala*, wherein the said court declared the Right to Internet as a Fundamental Right forming a part of the Right to Privacy and the Right to Education under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, becoming the first state in the country to do so. Finally in March 2020, the Jammu and Kashmir administration decided to lift the ban on access to social media sites but permitted internet usage only on a 2G speed. This was followed by a vast amount of petitions yet again, emphasising the need for a higher internet speed given the challenges posed by the pandemic.’

This partial clampdown of the internet significantly affected the healthcare professions in the region. The petitions asserted, “With limited and restricted access to the internet by allowing only 2G speed in the UT, patients and doctors are unable to access latest information, advisories, and guidelines”. The petitions highlighted the difficulties being faced by health care personnel in the UT and states, “Various public health practitioners, medical professionals, and doctors have repeatedly expressed their concern about wasting precious time trying to download the latest studies, protocols, manuals and advisories on treatment and management of COVID 19. In some cases, doctors are not able to access these resources at all, due to the internet speed being too slow to download heavy files.” In a counter affidavit, the J&K administration informed the apex court that right to access the internet is not a Fundamental Right and that free speech and expression, including the fundamental right to trade, business and occupation over the Internet, can be restricted by the State in pursuit of general public interest.

Many human rights organisations were enraged when the Supreme Court of India, on May 10, declined to restore 4G services in the territory and called for the formation of a Special Committee to determine the necessity of the ongoing restrictions on 4G internet in J&K. While pronouncing the judgement, the apex court noted that it needed to ensure a calculated balance of national security and human rights.

The importance of high-speed Internet services was never as critical as it is in the ongoing pandemic. The judgement shows an unwillingness to understand the fundamental role the internet plays in the lives of individuals and communities.

Unavoidably, covid-19 pandemic has shown the necessity of universal internet access by how it has become the safest way to stay in touch with our family, a

Initially, the internet shutdown was imposed for a period of five months, but soon after, Kashmir became witness to the longest period of internet shutdown in a democracy.

medium to carry on our work online and most important of all, the fact that it has been helping the students in saving an academic year. In contrast, for the people in J&K, the transition through the pandemic has become relatively more gruesome and has exposed the sheer violation of human rights and civil liberties.

Students are not able to take their online examinations and check their results, traders cannot receive orders, tour operators cannot continue working from their websites, the platform of online payments is essentially defunct and finally the buffering internet is taking away the right to work from people in the state pushing them to the brink of unemployment.



In July 2016, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution condemning measures by countries to prevent or disrupt online access and information and called for free speech protections under articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR. In 2015, Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Responses to Conflict Situations, UN experts and rapporteur declared that, even in times of conflict, “using communications ‘kill switches’ (i.e. shutting down entire parts of communications systems) can never be justified under human rights law.”

In lieu of limitless cyber blackouts and repression of non-violent dissent, authorities should use social media as a tool to provide transparent information so that they can deter and effectively diffuse the very source of violence. Marginalisation and deprivation are the main causes of the barbaric cycle of violence in the valley.

The untold stories of gross violation of human rights in Kashmir are a blot on the face of Indian democracy. In a statement, Amnesty International India executive director Avinash Kumar said: “Over the last one year, the Government of India has been systematically dismantling all avenues for justice for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. With zero representation, protracted Internet restrictions, arbitrary use of some of India’s most stringent laws, verbal orders of detention and crippling of the local media — most of this disproportionately higher in Kashmir — it’s been a complete year since we have heard the people of Jammu and Kashmir speak.”

Any legitimate process of conflict resolution in Kashmir needs to take into account the real aspirations of the people by treating them with the dignity that they have always deserved. Is it possible to balance liberty with security? The Government needs to find the answer to that question if it wishes to live up to its promise of *Acche Din*.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH & EXPRESSION

THE GOLDEN FRUIT IN THE TREE OF DEMOCRACY

BY RAJIV S KRISHNAN AND KRISHNA PRIYA K

Freedom of speech and expression has the potential to guard the rest of the rights and liberties. When the citizens are free to express their thoughts, to demand what is rightfully theirs, the rest of the rights and liberties automatically start to flourish.

It is two factors which makes democracy desirable even in its worst of times, something every citizen of a democratic setup proudly states. One, it has inbuilt methods to thwart attempts at upending the foundation principle of democracy, which to Abraham Lincoln is the very definition of democracy - "rule by the people, for the people and of the people". The second one is the determining factor though. A simple attempt at checking its presence tells you whether it is a democracy or not. It lets one distinguish pseudodemocracies like the People's Republic of China from the relatively genuine ones like the United States of America or India. It is that golden fruit hanging in the tree of democracy, the presence of which tells you that you are indeed looking at the democracy tree, passionately known and referred to as liberty or freedom.

If we were asked to choose between a monarchy/dictatorship which has been functioning remarkably in areas like health, education, economy, technological progress and many other; and a democracy which has been performing abysmally in these aforementioned arenas, we would most likely choose a democracy no matter how prospective and lucrative the former might seem.

What drives our decision making here is the paramount value of freedom. No amount of financial progress or development would bestow one with a sense of satisfaction, pride, and happiness that the realisation of being an autonomous individual provides.

Of all the different varieties of freedom, freedom of speech and expression has been given a special treatment to its critical value over the others. Freedom of speech and expression has the potential to guard the rest of the rights and liberties. When the citizens are free to express their thoughts, to demand what is rightfully theirs, the rest of the rights and liberties automatically start to flourish. Development and progress never become a full circle without the lasting presence of freedom of expression. Amartya Sen, in his book 'Development as Freedom', has taken cognisance of the same when he said that the expansion of freedom is both the primary end and the principal means of development. In India, the constitution guarantees via article 19(1)A, the right to freedom of speech and expression. Constitution makers have emphasised the relevance of this right to freedom by enshrining it as the first one. The founding fathers of

the nation envisaged India as having a people-centred politics and governance, where people have the space to comment, dissent and oppose anything under the sun. But the catch here is that it is also not unrestrained. The right to freedom of expression can be restricted by the state involving reasonable restrictions in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence. Though prima facie it would seem that this deluge of restrictions gives a picture of an inconspicuous absence of free speech, the constitution prevents any arbitrary attempts to shackle by letting the independent Supreme Court of India define what is 'reasonable' and what is not, within the boundaries of constitutional morality.

Does all this mean that the status of freedom of speech and expression has been uniform? A sagacious study of the immediate history says otherwise. From the Padmavat movie issue to the very recent issue of Bloomsbury-Delhi riots book and the contempt of court charges on Advocate and activist Prashant Bhusan-





the evidence reflects that the notion of 'free speech and expression' needs a thorough re-analysis.

Each issue opens different fronts of contention regarding this. While Padmavat issue and the Bengaluru riot incident is about whether the freedom of speech should be subjected to restrictions if it attempts to hurt the sentiments of a section of the society, the Prashant Bhushan case is about whether the state, or judiciary to be precise, can curtail a person's will and wish to criticise the institutions of the state. On the other hand, the call to ban movies like Kabir Singh and Arjun Reddy have been about whether the right to free speech holds precedence over the movement against patriarchy. These issues churn out different interpretations of the scope and relevance of the right to free speech and expression.

The society's response towards each issue has been remarkably interesting and contributes towards developing a better understanding of the matter. If we are to look at the Padmavat issue or the Bloomsbury issue, what is evident is that the opposing sides have made their stand based on the speculative idea that it distorts history or presents a skewed picture of reality. In the Padmavat case, it was found that such apprehensions were unfounded while the more recent Bloomsbury incident is still in a baby stage vis-a-vis the Padmavat issue. The book on Delhi riots is yet to be published formally and only the e-copy of the book is being sold. The opposition that the book attracted can be perceived as unwarranted to some extent since the book was then yet to be published and making a normative judgement without having first-hand knowledge about it goes against the scientific and empirical ethos as well as the call for scientific inquiry that the constitution (via article 51A(g) of fundamental duties), as well as the left-liberal side, aims to nurture. It is one thing to deliberate upon restricting something after having a concrete understanding based on facts and to do so based on speculations. Selective knowledge, which can be misleading, is insufficient to call for action and will only result in silencing of genuine attempts at expression as people with malicious intent would then be able to curtail it. This principle applies to the Sudarshan TV controversy as well, because no matter how controversial it seems, instead of going by the well-established procedure of law, if the free speech is curtailed

through public pressure, it will start becoming an accepted norm and the societal evils will thrive through that window. A better solution could have been to have a censor board like body to vet such programmes and then air it.

The Prashant Bhushan-contempt of court case helps one look at the institutional response aspect of free speech. The case from a constitutional perspective would seem completely justified but from a moral and normative standpoint, if the state were to thwart any attempt at criticising it, it goes against the democratic essence of the nation. Quite contrary to the SC argument that criticisms would result in people's loss of confidence, it is most likely to be strengthened if the SC is found to be open to criticisms, inquires into the matter and is open enough to correct itself if the criticism is found genuine. Public confidence and trust in such a judiciary would strengthen and solidify beyond doubt. V.R. Krishna Iyer, pioneer of judicial activism once wrote in *The Hindu* - "Parliament should wake up and implement glasnost and perestroika in the judiciary. In the name of independence, we cannot have judicial absolutism and tyranny". Free speech could guide in its path towards reforms for the same and to strengthen people's confidence in the judiciary. The sedition law should also be seen from a similar vantage point as the arbitrary use of such laws results in the erosion of trust in the system which not only turns its back towards any difference of opinion but also suppresses the same. The sedition law that is in force in India at present, brought by the British, is archaic and obsolete. The British revoked the sedition law in their land in 2010 while we still import the Indian counterpart, IPC section 124A, in cases very extravagantly. That being said, since a nation cannot survive efficiently for long without the sedition law, it should act to prevent direct incitement of violence or direct harm to the integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

The technology and the internet in the modern era, have expanded the purview of free speech-concept. Social media now has an extended base which is ever-growing and every 'social media citizen' is making use of the proliferation and opening up of public platforms to share their thoughts and perspectives. Something to muse over here is whether this newfound liberty, wide and relatively unchecked, needs a check? We are

witnessing instances like a Kolkata guy giving rape threats to someone over comments on Pulwama attack and many other cyberbullying incidents. Would curbing them be tantamount to hindrance on free speech? Exercise of the 'reasonable restrictions' that the constitution permits comes into the picture - public order and morality assumes precedence here. For such exercises to be reasonable, the message that the constitution intends to convey should be clear and popular.

A key factor towards ensuring that is to set the political discourse in the right path. The current narrative of political discourse presents a dismal picture. It is marred with vested interests and has been heavily influenced by psephological factors, with the actors showing utter disregard and contempt for righteousness, moral responsibility and scientific reasoning, while conjuring lies from thin air and selectively using facts to present a distorted and skewed picture. We see the right-wing

supporting incidents of arbitrary use of sedition law while voicing their concern for the Delhi riots book authors' right to freedom of speech and expression being curtailed. We see the left wing's vociferous support for the free speech right of the likes of Sharjeel Imam and Kafeel Khan while screaming that online media like Opindia and books like Delhi riots 2020: an untold story should be banned. Both sides have stooped to such lows to satisfy their ideological moorings that values, rights and duties have become irrelevant to them. The political discourse needs to be cleansed of selfish ideological interests and should be made issue-based. Criticism of the hypocrisies of both sides might be a good way to make them mend their ways and ensure that the idea of free speech stays intact and relevant.

In short, freedom of speech and expression has to be given paramount status and the restrictions should only be exercised during times of dire need, like for direct incitement of violence

or damage to the constitution specified arenas - sovereignty, integrity and security of the state, public order, decency, morality, etc. Restrictions are justifiable in instances like that of the murder of outspoken journalist Gauri Lankesh where the writings have directly incited the perpetrators towards the commission of such a heinous crime, not when rumours about an unpublished book or movie makes you 'feel' that it will hurt your sentiments. Above all, society is bound by a duty to improve itself in the conviction of what is right and wrong so that no one's speech or acts of expression incites them into doing harm or wrong. The societies should grow to a level where they are not swayed or incited by any film like Kabir Singh or Arjun Reddy, giving space to all for free speech and expression and at the same time being morally incorruptible. That is when we would be able to make the most out of the tree which provides us with the golden fruit of right to free speech and expression - the tree of democracy.



Tsering Topgyal / AP



Long lines of migrants hoped to board buses for home on the outskirts of New Delhi in March. Most were turned away. Credit...Yawar Nazir/Getty Images

INDIA'S PANDEMIC *and* MODI'S LEADERSHIP

BY PRATEEK PANKAJ

The centre's handling of the coronavirus pandemic has been a mixed bag. But the shortcomings expose serious flaws within Modi's leadership—flaws that we should be familiar with by now.

Seven months after the country first went into lockdown, in an effort to stem the coronavirus pandemic, we are still struggling with the virus. For much of the television media, the pandemic might have been forgotten and been replaced by film actors, drugs and alleged rating scams; but for much of the country, the virus is still alive and well, although things seem to be getting better

To be fair, the whole world, for the most part, is also on its knees against the pandemic. A vaccine is still unavailable; people are dying; economies are falling; people seem to be getting more careless. Some countries, which seemed to have reined in the virus earlier, are now going through a second wave. Still, that should not prevent us from inspecting how India performed.



Migrant workers walking along a highway in May, as they tried to make their way back to their villages during India's lockdown. Credit...Atul Loke for The New York Times



Watching Prime Minister Narendra Modi's televised address in Amritsar, India, on Tuesday. Credit...Raminder Pal Singh/EPA, via Shutterstock



"You fear the disease, living on the streets," said Papu, a migrant worker in Delhi. "But I fear hunger more, not corona." Credit...Rebecca Conway for The New York Times

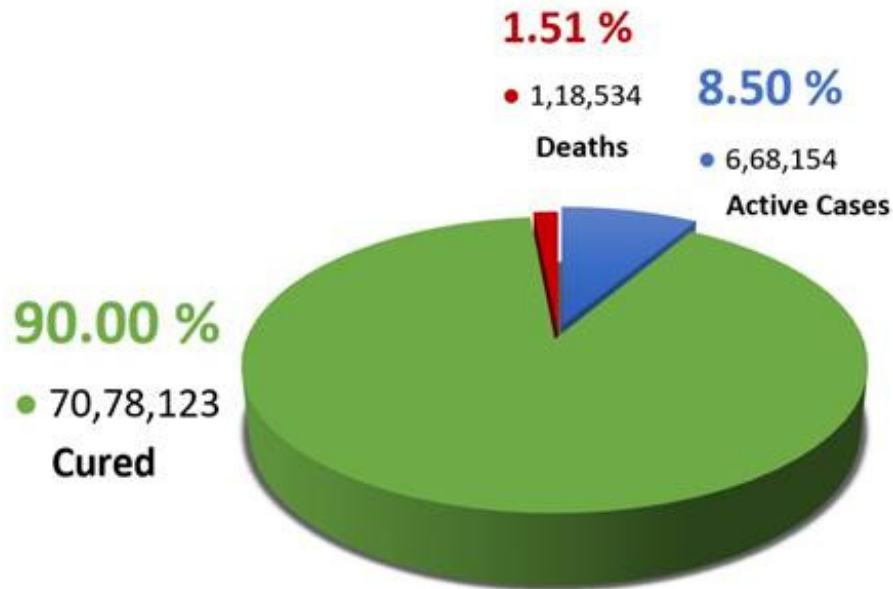


A shelter for homeless women and children in Delhi. Credit...Rebecca Conway for The New York Times



Randhir Singh's widow, Paramjeet Kaur, and son Rashpal Singh at their village home in the northern Indian state of Punjab. Randhir Singh was already deeply in debt when the coronavirus pandemic struck. Looking out at his paltry cotton field by the side of a railway track, he walked in circles, hopeless. In early May, he killed himself by lying on the same track. "This is what we feared," said Rashpal Singh. Mr. Singh's 22-year-old son, choking back tears in his family home in Sirsiwala, a small village in the northern Indian state of Punjab. "The lockdown killed my father." By Karan Deep Singh for New York Times

90% of the total cases are recovered



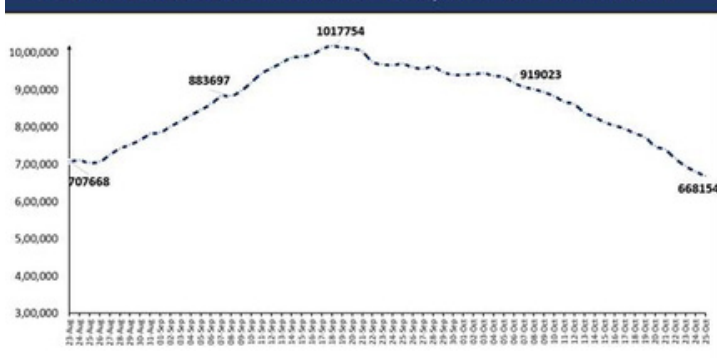
Current recovery rate in India. Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

AS THINGS STAND

At the time of writing, India seems to be better placed than many other countries. According to the latest data, the number of daily new infections in India has been the lowest in months and “for the 22nd consecutive day, more people recovered from the disease than fell ill, a trend that has resulted in a significant decline in active cases in the country.” The number of active cases, the data tells us, is now around 6.7 lakh as opposed to over ten lakh in September. The September peak is receding while testing rates have also gone up. As per the centre’s Mini-

stry of Health data, India’s recovery rate now stands at 90% while the fatality rate is 1.51%. The data also shows that the number of active cases has now been under 7 lakh for the third consecutive day, as of 25 October. Daily deaths have also been constantly less than 1100 since 2 October. Till now, over 1.18 lakh people have died of the virus. However, some questions have also been raised about possible undercounting of deaths. India has also made advances in the production of PPE kits, from being an importer to now the second-largest producer of the same.

Active cases continue to decline, now below 7 lakhs



Active cases have fallen below 7 lakh. Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Less than 1100 deaths have been reported continuously since 2nd Oct



Declining daily deaths. Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

LOCKING AND UNLOCKING

India went into a nationwide lockdown on 25 March and remained in that state till the beginning of June, when the government started easing restrictions. It is difficult to determine how successful or unsuccessful the lockdown has been. While the government has claimed that the lockdowns prevented tens of thousands of deaths and lakhs of infections, some experts have also argued that lockdowns do not work. At the same time, others have also warned against pursuing relentless herd immunity strategies in the absence of a vaccine.

Measuring the successes and failures of the lockdowns is also difficult because state-wise variations still exist, both in terms of restrictions and the healthcare systems. Maharashtra was the worst-hit state till some time back; now, Kerala is leading in the number of new cases having reported over 2000 more cases than Maharashtra in the last 24 hours, as of 25 October. Kerala is followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Delhi. However, Maharashtra still led considerably in the daily number of deaths, as of the time of writing.

THE UNDENIABLE CRISES

While the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the lockdowns can be debated by experts, some accompanying crises have clearly emerged.

The harsh and abrupt lockdown led to thousands of migrant workers being trapped in cities. In absence of appropriate facilities and savings, many had to walk thousands of miles back to their villages. The visuals of huge crowds of migrants at railway and bus stations showed some of the most explicit impacts of the lockdown on common people. Many people ended up losing already precarious livelihoods. This has also brought about food insecurity and consequent fears of long-term damage to children as a result of malnutrition. Results from surveys of “nearly 5,000 self-employed, casual, and regular wage workers across 12 states of India, conducted between 13 April and 23 May” by Azim Premji University found that “almost 8 in 10 are eating less food than before. More than 6 in

10 respondents in urban areas did not have enough money for weeks worth of essentials. More than a third of all respondents had taken a loan to cover expenses during the lockdown. More than 8 in 10 respondents did not have money to pay next month’s rent.” The study finds that among the sample surveyed, 66% workers lost their jobs, 77% households were consuming less food than before, 47% households did not have enough to buy essentials to last them a week. 77% vulnerable households—those defined in the study as having a total income of less than ₹10,000 in February—received ration and 49% of such households received a cash transfer. 87% self-employed workers in urban areas reported to have lost employment, while 66% casual workers in rural areas went out of work.

The harsh and abrupt lockdown led to thousands of migrant workers being trapped in cities. In absence of appropriate facilities and savings, many had to walk thousands of miles back to their villages.

The haste in which the lockdown was imposed by the centre has also been criticised. With barely any timely notice, the lockdown left many stranded with no time to prepare. The economist Kaushik Basu called the lockdown a failure: it could not prevent the spread of the virus as large sections of migrant workers had to be on the move, but at the same time it led to the economy freezing up. The 23.9% contraction in India’s GDP in the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21 has been a major cause of concern. However, top economists have been puzzled by the centre’s response, calling for the government to do a lot more to fix the collapsing economy.

MODI’S LEADERSHIP

How has the Prime Minister acted as the head of the government all this while? On the one hand, he has conducted himself responsibly. Unlike other nationalist leaders such as Trump and Bolsonaro who have underplayed or even denied the virus, Modi has admittedly shown a much more cautious side. He has been advocating the use of masks and following social distancing norms in his addresses, cautioning people from becoming careless in the absence of a vaccine. This was again reiterated in his latest address to the nation in the wake of the upcoming festival season. However, Modi’s leadership also has some serious flaws, which have made their impact known again in his handling of the pandemic.

First, much of his conduct has been based around rhetoric and perception management. When the Prime Minister announced a ‘Janata Curfew’ for 22 March, Sunday, it was supposed to be a preparation for the days to come. However, while he did urge citizens to be vigilant, a one-day curfew could not have been a preparation at all. It could obviously not have broken the chain of transmission and in absence of clear guidelines about what could happen next, no one knew how to prepare, especially those stranded far away from their homes. But Modi instead seemed interested in keeping the citizens on their toes in suspense of what might happen next. He also urged Indians to show their gratitude to essential workers by clapping or banging thalis on the day of the ‘Janata Curfew’. A novel gesture. Indeed, we should be showing gratitude to people saving lives at this critical moment in history; however, in absence of many much needed responses, all this rang hollow. Similarly, lighting diyas was good enough to create a spectacle and perhaps also to create a sense of solidarity among Indians. But, it does not make the situation better. Add to this the media lapping up these small gestures and blowing them out of proportion, and the focus shifts from actual handling of the pandemic to a celebratory spectacle. Modi, of course, isn’t one to stay behind image management.



A fabric manufacturing business in Surat, India, has been shut since the coronavirus lockdown in the spring. Credit...Saumya Khandelwal for The New York Times





A politician of his political acumen knows how to control narratives.

These gestures of solidarity also fall flat in light of the fact that Modi, continuing his past trend, has not held a single press conference even in this critical time. His monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' speeches often gloss over pressing issues. His addresses recently have not said much, except making routine announcements that sometimes arguably did not even need a televised speech. Many other world leaders have done a much better job of communicating with their citizens in times of crisis. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Facebook Q&A sessions became popular because of her calm demeanour in times of crisis and an honest conversation with her citizens. Even Trump held multiple press briefings in front of reporters and faced questions. Modi never did.

There has also been a targeting of many journalists who have reported stories critical of the government's handling of the pandemic. At the same time, doctors who have complained of poor facilities and equipment have also faced backlash by authorities.

Moreover, Modi's lack of transparency has been evident in the controversy behind the PM CARES fund as well. Even though the PMO asserted that the fund was not a "public authority" and hence not covered under the RTI Act, much of the funds have come from staff salaries of central government departments like the railways, public sector banks and the RBI, and central educational institutions. Yet, the cloud of uncertainty over the exact nature and finances of the fund remains.

The suspension of the Question Hour and the reduction of the Zero Hour in the monsoon session of Parliament were further blows to executive accountability, especially needed in times of crises. Even with the Parliament, the hasty passing of bills, and specifically the controversy over the passing of the farm bills in the Rajya Sabha raised important questions about parliamentary functioning.

Even more distressing was when the centre's Ministry of Labour admitted in Parliament that it had no data about the number of migrant deaths during the lockdown, even while it said that over 1 crore migrant workers had returned to their home states in that period.

This haste, lack of transparency, and a taste for theatrics invoke parallels with Modi's failed demonetisation experiment. A sudden 'major announcement' with no prior warning—and what seemed like no prior preparation or consultation—along with highly exaggerated claims about the effectiveness of the activity also marked the 2016 episode. There too, an uncertainty remained over the deaths of common people. Once the failure began to be seen, the theatrics and tall claims soon stopped being mentioned in political speeches. However, the accountability never came.

The pandemic could have been a time for Modi to reinvent his leadership for the better. He could have become what he needed to be: accountable and honest. With the kind of sway he perhaps still commands in the public mind, he should have been honest with the people. Instead, he continued his long aversion to accountability and being questioned. He rather went for a cleverly crafted new look, theatricality, and an ever-growing authoritarianism.



Women who are migrant workers queuing for food in Mumbai in April, during India's coronavirus lockdown. Credit: Atul Loke for The New York Times





THE ROMANS ARE WORRIED

THE RISE OF CHINA & FUTURE OF THE WEST

Since the times of the Romans, Spaniards, Portuguese, the French, the British, the Germans, the Russians, and now the Americans - the Western civilisation has never seen a more prominent challenger to their hegemonic and pre-eminent place on the wrld stage until now.

BY HARSH SURI





Be it economics, political influence, geopolitics, soft-power, military power and cyber realm, the West for the first time in centuries is on the receiving end and is facing the onslaught of the Dragon and tigers who are now out in the wild. Napoleon once said, "Let China sleep; when she wakes she will shake the world." China and the Asian tigers are no longer sleeping and this a wake-up call for the West which is sleeping now or we can say is helpless. The sheer swiftness and magnitude of this change could never have been imagined. We move on to examine how the West has been challenged not only in above-mentioned arenas but also psychologically.

THEY CALL US WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS

During an interview with Vox, President Obama said that when something happens in the world, they don't call Moscow or Beijing, they call Washington. Well, that isn't wrong but the pre-eminent stature and the global image of America as a beacon of stability and authority have been damaged not because of American miscalculations but due to China's rise as an economic superpower. History tells us that whenever a nation is economically strong and stable, it dictates its terms and conditions. This show of authority by Obama is not limited to the Americans but is deeply vested in the Western civilisation. They have been at the forefront and on the winning end of every major event in the modern and medieval era. This past glory brings with it the notion of responsibility to keep things in fixed world order. The west has shaped the modern world and the word modern itself is mostly seen as a western synonym. Their languages, culture, traditions and institutions have shaped the world as we know it. History is evidence, for when a person is on top, he shapes the narrative in a way that benefits his/her goals primarily. So now, when many nations are rallying behind China for the One Belt One Road initiative, it is making the west nervous and precarious.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BEING NUMBER 1

After WW2, the British and the old European powers were no longer the masters of mankind. The British empire was collapsing and many colonies were gaining independence.

Finally, the United States of America took over the global scenario after centuries of European domination, but this power was western too and the institutions of Europe and America were largely the same. There was no large scale threat to the Europeans. Even after the psychological setback of not being number 1, the Europeans made peace with America being a new hegemon but they are not okay with any Eastern power or for that matter China being the number 1. Since a hundred years, the Americans have not known what it is to be runners-up in the world rankings. This onslaught on their ranking from China is going to be a huge psychological setback to Americans and the western civilisation as a whole. Imagine, Americans going to Beijing for the UN General Assembly meetings and WTO HQ to ask for favourable deals while the Europeans ask for loans from major Chinese banks. All these changes will come with the change of ranks. International order being reshaped under the new power will be a huge mindblowing shock to the establishment and will take many years if not centuries to stabilise.

YES! MR XI, WE WILL CHANGE IT

After world wars, an international system of the United Nations was created and later we had IMF, WTO, WHO, INTERPOL and others. When the USSR collapsed, the process fast-forwarded and the world was in a hyper globalisation period. All this was led by the Great American power and economy.

But now China is taking over in terms of Naval buildup, Economic development, Artificial Intelligence, Soft-power and Political influence. It is increasingly destabilising the nerves of the western establishment as a whole. "With great power comes great responsibility and in the 21st century comes great change". When a new hegemon rises it has to make sure that the global order is shaped in a way that it protects its interests and helps it to remain preeminent. That's what China is doing. Through its economic influence, it is shaping the media, politics and economic policies of many nations. Its size is so big that many small nations' arms are already twisted to benefit the middle kingdom. Many western institutions are not in support of Dalai lama or teaching about Taiwan or Tiananmen square massacre just because they want to receive

the aid of Confucius institutes.

Media houses in many nations don't broadcast about human rights violations in China as these nations have huge Chinese investments. Some nations have implemented pro-China policies to facilitate Chinese investments and involvement. The South China Sea region is a big example of how China can rewrite international rules without facing much backlash. All this makes the west nervous and there is not much that they can do about it. Due to the huge interdependence of economies in this globalised world, it is difficult to decouple with a nation and engage in conflict. The West is not used to this defensive behaviour but it has to adopt it in-case of China. Receiving orders from China is psychologically difficult for the west. A global order based on the western mechanism is being brought down brick by brick. It won't be late when the orders from Beijing will have a global effect.

WHY WORRY ABOUT CHINA?

The west is worried and concerned about China's rise because the two aren't similar in any manner. Chinese are people of different cultures and traditions. Their institutions are based on different histories and perspectives. Asian powers will still be able to handle the rise of Chinese global order as they share somewhere similar political culture. The new Chinese order will lead to a new rules-based system and global institutionalism. This new order will not suit the preferences of the old westerners and hegemony of America. They fear a weakening of the democratic order and the rise of the communist regime on the global platform. This fear is backed by the history of the Cold War when the liberal world went all out to stop the USSR from becoming a global hegemon. Now, we can see the threat arising in a much more powerful way. China has blocked many western initiatives in UNSC and on the international stage. It has restricted those who have gone against it. The close links between the Communist regime, army and the corporations have also raised alarm bells in the western capitalists. The classic example of an internet firewall, Huawei 5G, mass surveillance and economic deception has threatened many western countries. Coronavirus has accelerated the process of power shift from west to east. Western concerns stem out of psychological aspects too. The fact that the west will be the economic and



In a divided America, the Trump administration's tough stance towards China is a rare instance of unity
Illustration by Foreign Policy Magazine

political subordinate to China is revolting to them.

THE CHINESE CHALLENGE

The West still dominates the world in terms of soft-power, military prowess, big tech corporations, political influence and cyber advantage.

Well, no one is denying the western powers' dominant status. What we are analyzing is the speed with which all this is being challenged and shifted. China now has the world's biggest manufacturing companies and construction companies. They are home to Tencent (a tech goliath), Ali Baba Group (an E-commerce company), Byte dance. China is moving ahead rapidly in the domain of Artificial intelligence domination and has a huge 5G equipment manufacturing company called Huawei. Chinese media houses, Global times and CG-TN are taking over the global intelligentsia by storm. In the 21st century, the one who will control the internet and information will control the world. These media houses have become the narrative shapers and propaganda promoters for communist China. China's military is advancing at a great pace too. A pentagon report now says that the Chinese have the largest navy in the world. They are developing missile defence systems and advanced military equipment indigenously.

China is increasing its activities in Space exploration and militarisation aspects. It has tested anti-satellite missiles successfully. In the arena of cyberspace, China is moving ahead from the west. They are developing institutional level surveillance and hacking systems to sabotage if the need arises. China has significantly invested in soft-power promotion and its ranking has increased. In 2016 Hillary Clinton wished Chinese people a Happy New Year, which was called the 'year of the pig'. On the global political sphere, China's stature has increased. Now, China's voice is heard all across the globe and it uses its veto and voting powers

in the International arena to the benefit of its allies. The pace at which China is accelerating was highly unprecedented. The west may be dominant but even now, its basic structure is dependent on China. We saw this during the pandemic when western markets were almost on their knees due to supply chain shutdown in China because of Coronavirus.

2049 - CHINA'S GREAT OVERTAKE

In 2049, China will be celebrating 100 years of the communist regime but that won't be all. The celebrations will be for China becoming a "fully developed, rich, and powerful" nation. The hundred-year plan would have been finally achieved. Many say China will take over.

Well, in terms of GDP (PPP) it already has. It won't take much time when they replace the USA in terms of other balance of power measures too. While western manufacturing will go down, Chinese manufacturing would surge. It will be the greatest and fastest overtake in history. When China takes over the global order it's going to be different from what we now live in. China will reign the way it wants to. What remains crucial to the big picture is when will the major structural change happen? For now, I want you to think about what the China-led world will be like from 2049 onwards. Rise of any nation to the global stage is not peaceful, it will be accompanied by conflicts and issues. Also, the rise is not limited to years but decades. Any geopolitical or global disruptive change will take time to absorb but will set in with time. For now, we face many questions like What would be the break-even point? How will the nations resolve issues? What will the China-led world look like? And last but not least is the concern whether the international order will survive the rise of a hegemon or will the "the middle kingdom" create one, in which all nations orbit it? Till then we need to stay informed and monitor daily changes. Even a small move on the chessboard is a strategic one. Zai Jian!



REBR AHMANISATION OF EDUCATION

*Analysing the education
system in India after the
National Education Policy*

BY ADITHYA M.
& MEENAKSHI SENAN

B

eginning in October 2019, we witnessed how one of the best universities in India, The Jawaharlal Nehru University (popularly known as the JNU) went on a massive strike which lasted for months. Student communities from all across the country announced solidarity to JNU. The protests were against the newly updated fee structure which increased the fees of different services to around 20 times of the existing fees. There were also some restrictions like curfew and dress code, but the most significant issue was the renewed fee structure. There was a substantial amount of criticism from political parties as well. Arguments were raised that JNU being a university that educated even the poorest of poor in India, would now become inaccessible to a vast majority of the Indian society.

Education in India in the early times was an asset limited to the upper castes, particularly the Brahmanas. The priest class, the Brahmanas, were imparted knowledge of religion, philosophy, and other ancillary branches while the warrior class, the Kshatriyas, were trained in the various aspects of warfare. The business class, the Vaishyas, were taught their trade, and the working class of the Shudras were generally deprived of educational advantages. The Atishudras who were a class placed even lower than Shudras were completely deprived of any form of education and were forced to serve the other castes. Knowledge surrounded religion and Brahmanism. All the texts were taught and written by Brahmanas and they were thus, their monopoly. This continued into the 20th century where education was still limited to the Savarnas. Ambedkar was among the first Dalits to gain education. He along with Periyar, Phule, and Savitribai Phule fought for making education available to Dalits and women. Savitribai Phule set up schools to teach women. Phule and Periyar wrote extensively on the need to make education universal. They were staunch supporters of empowerment of women and lower castes.

In 1947, India gained independence. The Constitution came into force in January 1950 and called for the provision of free and compulsory education for all children until the age of 14. There were many other policies introduced for the same purpose. Yet, in 1953 the C. Rajagopalachari government in Tamil Nadu passed a legislation for building Kula Kavi Thittam which supposedly was based on a Gandhian model of education. In these thittams, in the second-half of the day, children were allowed to nurture their parents' traditional jobs, and these traditional jobs were caste-based. The Dravidian parties vehemently opposed it saying that the scheme would only reinforce the archaic caste segments the opportunity to pursue other vocations since they are bound by law to practice their hereditary jobs. It was then taken down in the next year due to huge criticism. The right to education was added in the 86th amendment in 2002.

Though there have been several efforts to make education universal, even today there is a huge number of Dalits who have been deprived of their right to education. And in this context, the National Education Policy 2020 comes into the scene. The policy was passed by the Indian Parliament in July 2020.

The NEP was passed amidst the pandemic when educational institutions were closed. Thus, there couldn't be proper discussion in the student community regarding the pros and cons of this policy. Recommendations and feedback given by scholars to the draft were not considered and were thrown into the dump. Delhi University professor Abha Dev Habib called it the 'New Exclusionary Policy'. What is the reason behind this uproar?

While the Dalit-Bahujan and left organizations are criticising the policy, RSS affiliated institutions are welcoming the same. 60-70 percentage of the recommendations made by the latter organizations have found a place in the policy. Persons who are in opposition to the policy argue that it reflects a Neo-Brahmanical framework, excluding the minorities. The NEP fails to address the disparities in accessibility to education among Dalit and other minority communities. It does not recognise the hegemonic role caste and patriarchy play in access to education.

The policy states that colleges would be given an autonomous status after a few years. This kind of privatisation will prove disadvantageous to students from minority communities as it would lead to a surge in fees. Autonomous colleges would also mean that universities and colleges would introduce courses that will charge exorbitant fees from students to meet the financial needs of institutions. The percentage of marginalised and lower middle students enrolling in universities would go even lower than the existing 26.3%. (AISHE report 2019).

Also, throughout the document there is an emphasis on science and vocational courses, clearly showing how the policy refuses to recognise the significance of arts, humanities and social sciences.

The concept of multidisciplinary courses is not clearly manifested and the plan to build more universities in every district is again unclear. Following the public-private-partnership method for regulating universities and colleges will exclude students from marginalised communities. The policy lightly mentions that private firms would take decisions regarding the foreign universities that it hopes to build in India.

NEP proposes to over-centralise with forming new institutions like the National Testing Agency, Higher Education Commission of India, the National Research Foundation, the National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for ECCE, the General Education Council, National Professional Standards for Teachers, and so on. As a result the powers assigned to state/union territories, village and zilla panchayats, and tribal councils will be reduced or withdrawn altogether. Under HEFA, mostly financial assistance will be provided as loans rather than grants. This will pressurize public universities to collect their funds in their own way resulting in constant fee hikes and initiation of self financing courses. Further, eradicating permanent teaching posts and attracting private corporations will privatize university spaces and will be exclusive in nature for the marginalized and under privileged sections in society.

Replacing UGC with the HECI is not a mere name changer act: UGC is an autonomous body under the 1956 act of UGC. HECI/HEGC (higher education grants council) will be under the direct control of the central government. Here, the members will also be appointed by the central government. This is an attempt to deeply politicize the higher education system, which will facilitate enormous power to the central government in administrative and economic levels. If the university is faced with an economic crisis, these policy measures will act as a cross cutting catalyst for the process of privatization which will essentially lead to a corporate demand. The Birla-Ambani report submitted to the central government in 2000 demanded complete de-politicisation of higher education campuses and prom-

oted a market oriented education which also encouraged legislation of Private University Bill. When the fee hike becomes a reality in the central universities, marginalised sections will be further alienated from these spaces.

The NEP proposes an informal role for "trained volunteers from both the local community and beyond, social workers, counsellors and community involvement" in the school system. This could clearly be seen as a path for the RSS to enter educational institutions and spread their agenda.

The NEP also ensures that the medium of instruction in schools till upper primary classes should be the mother tongue of the students. This will remove English as a medium of instruction. This may seem as positive and important in promoting local languages, but this is also quite problematic. English is a social currency for the marginalised communities. When English is replaced, the language becomes a little more alien to them. They will not be able to access the language as their upper-caste peers and will affect them when the two meet in the open-playing field. According to a 2017 British council study, 2017 British Council study, "There is little or no evidence to support the widely held view that EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) is a better or surer way to attain fluency in English than via quality EaS (English as Subject). A move to EMI in or just after lower primary, commonly found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, yields too shallow a foundation of English to sustain learning across the curriculum from the upper primary years onwards." The 3 language policy that NEP lays down completely fulfills the demand of RSS- and also as an effort to make Sanskrit a modern day language along with national language Hindi in higher education- this clearly shows a cultural hegemony. In existence, the opportunities of other classical languages like Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu etc are limited, this will give on to further divide. Ultimately, invisible Brahmin hegemony will emerge and act with the official support of the state.

Prof. Hany babu in 'BREAKING THE CHATURVARNYA SYSTEM OF LANGUAGES' argues that official language policy of the state does not envisage a holistic relationship between states, but promotes a hierarchical system that is similar to the chaturvarnya system.

Eventually, the resisting students and teachers who were calling out against the regime will fade away leading to the disappearance of critical dissent because of the savarna public sphere. The end result of these will be the savarna capitalist satisfaction process which will produce a generation of teachers and students who are mechanistic in nature and extremely weak in their political imagination. In this scenario, those who can afford education like the upper caste, upper class will be silent and not be vocal for the rights of Dalit, Bahujan adivasi sections of the society as the latter were. By transforming these spaces into neo liberal camps will sooner or later lead to parting of the idea of social justice. NEP lays an emphasis on Indian tradition and values, which it showcases as monolithic in nature is a clear representation of totalitarianism.

This expression is disregarding the federal nature of Indian political system. The urban middle class liberals who essentially talk for anti-reservation policy will be easily attracted to the apolitical language of merit in NEP that evidently lacks the concept of 'social justice'.

Indian political-cultural-economical scenario witnessed a radical change after the post independence period. In the Post-Mandal period, bahujan sections formed their own political and theoretical foundations. Even the existing central universities are dominated by upper caste-class groups. Recent data on the share of positions of Professors will show the domination of these particular sections in the Indian universities. Every new policy is advocating the idea of development/ progress in India. But we have to deconstruct the normative idea of progress in a nation like India which is divided on caste, class, race, and language that ultimately determines the power hierarchies and position of people from the inception of a nation-state. This will possibly encourage us to ask the question- progress for whom?

Illustration by Kathleen M.G. Howlett.





HISTORY & CULTURE

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The background of the entire image is a highly detailed, ornate ceiling fresco. It features a central oval medallion containing a classical scene with several figures, including a woman in a pink and blue robe and a cherub. The medallion is surrounded by a wide, decorative border of golden garlands and floral motifs. The entire composition is set against a dark, possibly painted, background of the ceiling.

SPEECHES *and* SILENCES

What Our Cultural Institutions Speak
For & Remain Silent Over Today

BY SHANKAR TRIPATHI

It did initially feel like a little bit of a hollow statement to make, given the limited nature of our contracting with police, but as days went on and I had conversations with staff, artists, and other people in our community, I recognized it is a powerful statement to make. The goal (in) making such a statement public is to compel change.”

Speaking to ARTnews, the statement that Mary Ceruti, the director of Walker Art Center in the US, is talking about is the institution’s decision to stop contracting the Minneapolis Police Department for matters of security. Yet while Ceruti imagined the idea of disbanding the relationship “hollow” (even when one considers the seven long years of this partnership with the MPD), the same couldn’t be said for the rallying cry that’s bellowing deep in the heart of America today: that of defunding the police, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. If you’re curious about why Walker took the first step, jog your memory—Minneapolis is where George Floyd was killed.

Let’s come to another museum, the Nelson-Atkins in Kansas. In a statement, its director Julián Zugazagoitia mentioned: “The museum’s security approved this request from the KCMO Police Department on Friday, and this was not unusual, given the spirit of our long history of cooperation.”

This approval was about the Kansas Police Department’s patrol units being given permission to utilize the museum premises for staging purposes if needed to physically brace against BLM protesters.

No sooner was this information made public that outrage poured from all over about the museum and the director’s complicity in supporting racist structures of oppression.



It took a few days for the units to vacate the lot, but the message had come across clear.

Amidst calls for defunding the police and divesting assets in support of Black and other marginalized communities, art workers have been quick to point out the collaboration galleries and museums have with the police today. We fail to realize today that standing beside the artworks for security is often a retired or off-duty cop. Breaking off such ties is a bold and powerful statement; museums are seen as bulwarks of culture, heritage, and what politics would call ‘soft power’ centres, and a reaction from them is bound to shift gears.

So what are we to make of the organizers of the India Art Fair, when this year they allowed the Delhi Police officials to cordon off and disrupt a part of the fair over complaints of some artworks being too political and against the recent CAA?



ART REMAINS POLITICAL

'The Wall: Community Art Building Mural' was imagined as a collage of paintings inspired by the women at Shaheen Bagh, while a performance of Faiz's song Hum Dekhenge (We'll See) would be played in the background. The concept was about highlighting the solidarity and celebration of women who had come out on the streets from the comfort of their homes. Yet before this could be properly executed, scores of Delhi Police officials arrived at the scene in what could only be felt like a raid and stopped the proceedings. The organizers were quick to shut down the performance.

It's interesting to note that PTI recorded the statement of a senior police official saying: "We received a PCR call that some paintings depicting the CA-A were being exhibited at the fair. A police team was sent to check it, but no such painting was exhibited." Myna Mukherjee, the curator for the exhibition that was cordoned off, however, wasn't angry at the presence of the police, but rather the organizers:

"India Art Fair organizers don't seem to have a spine whatsoever.

Police were more fair to us than the organizer folks. We deferred to the Fair's rules. There was no sloganeering. We talked of unity, resurgence and solidarity, and women's leadership."

The hullabaloo was at the cost of a bystander's islamophobic reaction towards the art carrying Urdu calligraphy and Faiz's lyrics.

But to disassociate the idea of contemporary political happenings from art in India would be a pitfall into which we can't afford to jump. Indian art post-independence owes its growth to socio-political engagements that were happening in the country. The Progressive Artists Group embracing western modernism was a clear reaction to break away from the pre-colonial idea of a 'court-artisan' in a newly independent India; The Radical Group of the 1980s emerged a result of an anti-feudal, anti-caste sentiment that arose against the backdrop of the Emergency; and today's prevalence of protest art is just another mark about how art is influenced by societal thought and changes.

So it's fair to ask, what does the establishment, which we know has a powerful stake in influencing such thoughts and changes, do about it? Not much, I fear.



OLD BUILDINGS IN NEED OF NEW IDEAS

'When the Progressives of the '50s detached themselves wholly from precolonial conceptions of patronage, they embraced the salon/gallery system of the West. What became its unintended consequence, however, was that art, which earlier rested at the heart of village life and community, now became confined to four walls often out of reach of the common masses. In their zeal of distancing themselves from their past, they distanced themselves (and their new art) from the masses.

The presence of the Radicals was a challenge to this—their exhibitions were done in public squares and open markets for the layperson's eyes, which couldn't be bothered about dressing impeccably and walking through a gallery. But the Radicals' existence majorly revolved around the Emergency, and its dismantling saw the gradual dismantling of the movement. To take down this literal image of high art from its plinth now required the action of government institutions—museums and galleries that weren't going anywhere, that were made for everybody.

If we remove the question of funding and management, I would not hesitate to compare the size and importance of the Delhi's National Gallery of Modern Art or National Museum with the Museum of Modern Art or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both in New York. They're all spaces of phenomenal heritage and value, and they're all deeply seared in the public mind as the seat of our histories and culture.

If there's an exhibition at the NGMA today, it's automatically assumed to be of importance and value that would enrich all of us. If I'm to give in to my boyhood's fervent want of seeing the Koh-i-Noor diamond back on Indian soil I know



it would be in a vault in the National Museum or the Rashtrapati Bhawan Museum.

When the Guerrilla Girls staged their protests about the misrepresentation of female artists vis-à-vis male artists, they were held in these very spaces because they knew their value; and because museums held such power over the public's mind, the authorities knew they had to change what they were doing for fear of a lashing that would tarnish their reputation.

In India, however, things aren't particularly taking that course. National museums & galleries today are slowly becoming what they're meant to house: relics of the past.

Their non-participatory role in social changes today is only ensuring their removal from the public mind, which we can't afford to imagine. We'd need to begin by grasping transparency around issues like wage disparity, discriminatory patterns of hierarchy, and language barriers to initiate change. These spaces are bastions of history and culture, and with every revising morsel of history that we're consuming, they need to reexamine their exhibits, recontextualize their objects, and seek to highlight what history has hidden in our annals of independence. Indian cultural institutions need to proactively concern themselves with providing the marginalized a platform of accessibility.

True, today we have a richer variety of art and artists that are engaging with contemporaneous

times and while it must be acknowledged that private spaces have become much more accessible, it's still not enough—ask yourself, would you prefer a field trip to a biennale which you can't even pronounce or an exhibition at the National Museum? In fact, the greater art ecosystem is also largely an enterprise in a capitalist world, and no space would wish to endanger its flow of money by being too political.

And at a time when I see more art coming up on walls and roads, I can only imagine what that money is ultimately enriching us with. A part of the problem rests with the absence of a space that caters to contemporary art on a national scale (the 'modern' art period ended by about the early 1990s) and a part rests with the decisions of its management—private or government alike. But change is being seen: ICOM, the international body for museums, has found itself in the middle of a bitter debate regarding the age-old idea of "what is a museum?"—an idea that today feels inadequate and discriminatory to hundreds of spaces that have come up.

The existing definitions were established by the first world; now, the third world is shaking things up. Times are changing, and museums and galleries can't afford to stay neutral anymore, but if I could be allowed to be cheeky here, *kya hum de-kh paayenge?*





History of Kalidasa's Works

THROUGH A MARXIST LENS

BY SHANTANU MISHRA

The ancient period of the Indian subcontinent was marked with the writing of rich Sanskrit literature which provides us with an in-depth insight into the society of that time. There had been various revered Sanskrit poets and dramatists whose works are studied till date. One amongst them is Kalidasa who is considered the greatest Sanskrit poet of all time. His works vary from plays to epic poems and minor poems.

There is always a reason behind everything. Similarly, there is an objective behind every author's works and the factors which made him write the way he did. Studying these factors becomes necessary in the sense that they help us connect with the past. This essay is an attempt towards the same.

In this essay, the economic structure prevalent during Kalidasa's time has been analysed to study its effect on social relations during that period. The society, as depicted in his works, will be studied to understand why he wrote the way he did. Further, in the light of facts collected, the reasons for the popularity of his works will be studied. This essay aims to trace the history of the evolution of the importance of his works. The spatial constraints of this essay force the analysis to be limited to a few of his works.

DATE OF KALIDASA

We do not have any reliable source of information about the time and place of Kalidasa. He has left behind him a treasure of highly revered and celebrated works. Seven works of Kalidasa are known till date which include three epics, namely: *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvasiyam*; two epic poems, namely: *Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarasambhava*; and two *khandakavyas* or minor poems, namely *Meghadutam* and *Ritusamhara*. Unfortunately, he has left no clue of his personal information (Mirashi and Navlekar 3). There are various theories about the time in which he lived, which some historians and scholars have tried to justify by giving facts and interpreting them. They base their conjectures on references from his works.

Amongst all, the theory of Kalidasa

being the court poet of Chandragupta II of the Gupta empire has gone down well and is accepted by most scholars. The mention of Vikramaditya as his patron in *Malavikagnimitram* alludes towards Chandragupta II who had taken up the same title during his reign (Kosambi, An Introduction 304). Kumarasambhava is supposed to be alluding towards the birth of Kumaragupta, the son of Chandragupta II (Ramulu and Ramalu 655). The mention of the celebration of sacrificial rites of the Vedic age in *Raghuvamsa* relates to the frequent mention of restored Vedic practices, which had not been practised for a long time in the records of the Gupta period (Mazumdar 732). The Sanskrit inscription of Mandsaur's Sun temple dated 473 CE is believed to be the earliest evidence of Kalidasa's time as the inscription resembles the verses of *Meghaduta Purva*, 66 and *Ritusamhara V.2-3* (Gopal 8). Thus, Kalidasa is believed to have lived between 400 and 500 CE.

NATURE OF THE SOCIETY DURING HIS TIME

The period before the Gupta dynasty was inclined towards Buddhism and Jainism. The Mauryan king Ashoka was an ardent believer and propagator of Buddhism. The Brahmins had substantially lost their importance during that time. Prevention of ritual sacrifices by Ashoka had hit the interests of the Brahmins because animal sacrifice was the source of their livelihood (Jha 106). Brahminical supremacy, which had been gradually built during the later Vedic period, turned out to be attacked by Buddhism (Thapar, "Asoka and Buddhism" 46). The nature of religion was gradually changing and people were losing touch of the later Vedic tradition. The secular epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were rewritten and were given a religious touch by the Brahmins (Jha 137).

Post Mauryan rule, Brahmin hegemony was furthered with the practice of land grants to the priests and temples. Instead of paying the priests and officials directly, they were given land grants and the rights to collect taxes over them. This enabled them to live a lavish and comfortable life for generations (Thapar 48). This practice gradually led

to the development of a feudal society. The Brahmins and the officers became the masters of their lands and started exploiting the peasantry and the labourers who were generally from the lower varnas (Jha 155). The Brahmins made the varna system stringent by redacting the Puranas and advocating their supremacy over the other varnas. Religion was used as a tool to maintain social order. Emphasis was laid on adhering to the duties assigned to the varnas religiously and even a shudra could attain salvation with the service of the twice-born and devotion to God (Jha 161).

During the Gupta period, Sanskrit was made the main language of inscriptions due to the strong influence of Brahmins. This shows the connections between the ruling class and Brahmins, who supported their rule. Classical Sanskrit was not the language of the commons (Kosambi 69).

HIS WORKS

According to Marx, the social existence of a person determines his consciousness (Aron 120). Similarly, Kalidasa's works can be considered a reflection of the society he lived in. His works were written in Sanskrit and all his works have two things in common, i.e., they are comedies and people of the upper and lower castes do not speak the same language. Women and the shudras spoke Prakrit (R. Sharma 146). In *Raghuvamsa*, Kalidasa talks about religiously following the varna system and that going against it would not bring happiness to the society. He gives a reference of Rama cutting off the head of a shudra for practising penance—which is supposed to be the prerogative of the Brahmins (Jones 641). Characters of shudra varna do not feature much in his works, which are instead centred on Brahmins and the ruling class. He also gives the reference of the land grants in the form of villages to the Brahmins (Jones 472).

The usage of Sanskrit in his works implies that the target audience included the political elites and those sections of the society who were familiar with the language, i.e. poets and courtesans. Women and shudras were not a part (Singh 344). Kalidasa reflected the social consciousness of the society through his

orks. His works grew popular because they advocated the ideology which the dominant section of the society wanted to promulgate. In Raghuvamsa and Abhijnanasakuntalam, we see instances of Kalidasa's characterisation of women as meek and docile. Sita, as portrayed by him, speaks ill of herself and her fortune when abandoned by Rama (Jones 631), which is in total contrast to Valmiki's Sita, who is bold and a woman of pride and self-respect (Kumar 61). Shakuntala of Mahabharata is a fearless character who confidently confronts Dushyanta when she takes her son to his court whereas Kalidasa portrays her as a damsel in distress when left alone by her friends in Dushyanta's court (Rustomji 47). His works helped in promoting the supremacy of upper varna s and subjugation of women through the religious stories. He had chosen the characters of his works from religious texts due to the strong influence of religion in society.

POST KALIDASA

Kalidasa was famous from the time of the conception of his works. He is believed to have had the patronage of Chandragupta II. Sanskrit theatre enjoyed the patronage of the Gupta kings (Varadpande 237). The Mandsaur inscription of 473 C.E. also alludes to the fact that Kalidasa was famous during the time in which he is contested to have lived. In the times after Kalidasa, various poets have lauded his literary brilliance.

The sixth century writer Dandin praises him for refining the Vaidarbha style of composition (Gopal 1). The 634 CE Aihole inscription of Chalukya king Pulakesin II mentions Kalidasa as a famous poet. He had also been praised for his sweet and charming way of writing by Banabhatta in Harshacharita written in the seventh century (Gopal 1). Cambodian inscriptions ranging between the seventh and the tenth century CE have references of Raghuvamsa. An eighth century Javanese inscription also alludes to his work (Singh 343). Rajasekhara in the tenth century AD, Padmagupta and Soddhala in the eleventh century AD and Govardhanacharya in the twelfth century AD have all written in Kalidasa's praise (Mirashi and Navlekar 459). We do not get any mention of Kalidasa during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal rule. The reason could be the advent of Persian and Arabic literature and meagre royal patronage to Sanskrit scholars. However, we get the reference of a poet with the pen name

Akbariya Kalidasa in the court of Akbar in the sixteenth century. His real name was Govinda Bhatta (Chaudhari 5). This alludes to the popularity of Kalidasa among Sanskrit writers of that time so much so that his name was adopted as a pen name.

Kalidasa's works were translated into English by Sir William Jones in the late eighteenth century. The intention was that the Indian people "might be ruled justly according to their prejudices, civil and religious, and suffered to enjoy their customs unmolested" (Cannon and Pandey 528). He was eager to know whether Sanskrit plays contained some information on Hindu law. He chose to translate Abhijnanasakuntalam, the most revered Sanskrit play. He published the translation in England in 1789. It was translated in German in 1791. It was heavily lauded by eminent European poets of that time which included Herber and Goethe. Impressed by Kalidasa's works, Goethe praised him by writing a note on Shakuntala in his play, Faust (Cannon and Pandey 529). This was followed by a flurry of translations into various European languages. His works have also inspired Indian authors like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Rabindranath Tagore (Mirashi and Navlekar 460).

CONCLUSION

Kalidasa has been lauded for his literary brilliance from the time of the inception of his works. His works have been a source of inspiration for various writers who have followed. Being written in Sanskrit, his works would have been limited to the upper varna s of society. He is contested to be a Brahmin whose works were centred around men and power. Brahminical hegemony, as a function of land grants made to them, worsened the status of lower varna s due to exploitation at the hands of landowners. The idea which the dominant section of the society wanted to propagate was at the centre of his works. His works tried to manifest the idea of the Gupta age being the "Golden Age". This itself explains the reason for his works being very popular.

Therefore, this essay establishes that his works were the reflection of his society, written with a male Brahmin's perspective, limited to a section of society which was in power due to changes in the economic infrastructure, popular because they depicted the mindset of the audience and sounded music to their ears, and remained popular during the course of time among other Sanskrit writers.

DR. STRANGELOVE

*Analysing the relevance of
Stanley Kubrick's 1964
nuclear holocaust satire,
starring Peter Sellers*

BY AKSHITA RAMOLA

T

his generation may perhaps never understand the gravity of the situation which prevailed during the height of the Cold War when the struggle for power between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the international world order. During this period, the prospect of a potential global conflict between the two nuclear giants was at its peak which would have resulted in the annihilation of the entire human race. At a time when the paranoia of a possible nuclear holocaust and anti-communist sentiments grew among Americans, Stanley Kubrick directed, produced, and wrote Dr. Strangelove or: How I learnt to stop worrying and love the bomb to illuminate the anxieties, the fears, and the horrors of the Cold War through a dark political satire which humorously ignites the realities of the political climate of the early Cold War.





Photograph: PictureLux/The
Hollywood Archive/Alamy

Though this intense tussle between the two states never escalated into a direct confrontation-almost 30 years down the line the threat of a large scale nuclear war is dangerously close to us more than it ever was before and Kubrick's 1964 film continues to hold relevance even in the political climate of the 21st century.

Dr. Strangelove which loosely drew inspiration from Peter George's 1957 novel *Red Alert*, is a story that begins when an Air Force General launches an unauthorized military strike on the Soviet Union because he fears the Communists are plotting an absurd plot against Americans. All diplomatic interventions to alert the Russians went in vain and by the end, the actions of an anxious General triggered a nuclear holocaust leading to the end of the world.

Released two years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Stanley Kubrick utilizes satire in the film to critique and comment on the international scenario of the period with every character and every line

Kubrick illustrates unconventionally the paranoia, hysteria, and impulsive decision skills that go behind the scenes of a threatening nuclear war situation with absurd humor, irony, sarcasm, and unsettling realism which is bound to make one reflect on the present day scenario of the international world.

Though made in the 1960s, Dr. Strangelove was intended to be a cautionary movie; to remind us that an individual's mad impulse can one day blow up the entire world, especially by those in power.

It's a jolting alarm for us to think about the dangers of the bomb, which is just a button away. The film is bound to fill us with uncomfortable laughs but this absurdity in the script only makes it close to reality (on the potential outbreak of a nuclear war).

It is difficult for a 60s political satire to stay relevant however Kubrick's art has always been an exception. Dr. Strangelove continues to exist as the best black comedy ever written on nuclear warfare.

Even in 2020, we are living in Dr. Strangelove's time; where the world is on thin ice.

The year started with a possible outbreak of World War III when American forces killed Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani invoking the anxious war fantasy all around the world. Later in June, Sino-Indian border clashes erupted and a recent fire of conflicts and tensions created an imbalance in the South Caucasus Region; all while the world is dealing with a global pandemic.

Gopalkrishnan Gandhi says, "... (if) consensus fails to last, ballistics could bloom over the borders and that is perhaps a day none would like to see. Wars and Virus make a deadly cocktail"

While the global key players have changed since the period of the Cold War, public paranoia towards the 'D-Day' is increasing. As the Doomsday Clock ticks, it is reminding us that mankind is close to a 'mutually assured' destruction. They thought the idea of nuking other

It's time for us to reflect on how our politics are getting played around nuclear warfare and though it is inevitable, it is important we think more about war and nuclear holocaust and where we're heading.

countries is very much there even if no their intend of a lateral launch.

Diplomatic interventions and military talks may only be the best route to maintain the status quo but with the increasing pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons, the reality is that nuclear-armed states dictate international politics. It's time for us to reflect on how our politics are getting played around nuclear warfare and though it is inevitable, it is important we think more about war and nuclear holocaust and where we're heading.

As Martin E. Hellman best puts it, *to avoid extinction, we must take action to shift from an old mode of thinking which justifies war as necessary for survival to a new mode of thinking which recognizes war as the ultimate threat to survival.*



Columbia TriStar/Getty Images

THE SOCIAL PARIAH: MY WAP

Crass hyper-sexualisation of women or a tribute to empowered women who own their sexuality?

BY AKSHAYA SINGH



It was a sultry, Tuesday evening when it happened. The single greatest moment when my class

friends and I streamed 'WAP'. Yes, the oh-so-controversial Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's 'Wet Ass Pussy'. The lyrical melody elicited furore and contemplation. Unaware of the spicy soup it had stirred within and outside the music industry, I mindlessly dismissed the song as one-and-the-same. Even so, anxious thoughts provoked me: 'is this against feminism?'. Is it against all that the movement wishes to destroy—hypersexualisation of women, provocative clothing, sex-spewed stereotypical symbolizations, the inherently carnal imagery of women in animal-print outfits? Wasn't Cardi a feminist herself? The questions couldn't help themselves.

A week later, post a very monotonous lecture a couple of my friends brought up the song again, this time it wasn't as passive as just streaming it. Both equally committed to female empowerment, they took extremely contrasting views on the 'wet and gushy' video. While one stood firm on its hampering women's pleas to equality, the other slid deeper into her opinion on empowering achievement WAP symbolises.

In the discourse that followed (where I continued to be a passive participant) what became clear, and extremely important to understand was the nature of the feminism movement itself. The following is my take-away.

Women through centuries have been pushed out of all mildly controversial spheres of society and polity. Sex, apparently still, continues to be one of such spheres. The narrative of the 'virtuous, shy, clean girl' fed to generations of females has had us shy away from expressing the desires of the female libido.

Very much a reality, that libido, in the same society where female orgasms continue to be fake and damsels-in-distress applauded. To put things into perspective, the sheer number of '90s 'chick flicks' where the underconfident, non-demanding, shy girl is paired with a 'tomboy' to go out and find love, is tragically devastating.

The blatant expression of libidinous and lecherous desires of women, by women, thus, was a definitive and the biggest threat to patriarchy. Sex has always been a topic of conversation in the hip-hop, rap, and even pop music industry. Male singers are often seen lying on silky bedspreads surrounded by women massaged in sparkling gold oil (as if flown directly from the UAE). The unapologetic hypersexualisation of the female body has never been contentious when partaken-in by men. Nevertheless, when a female decides to express her own primal sexual needs on an independently produced and marketed platform, the world promptly falls on a bed of nails. The loud and clear articulation of the mere existence of female sexuality, when expressed by a female sets politicians and opinionists ablaze. The narrative of the artists sticks to pleasure for the self—the woman. It isn't gift-wrapped and concealed behind prioritization of any male's enjoyment. We didn't start the fire, it was always burning, since the world's been turning, we just made society aware of its burning.

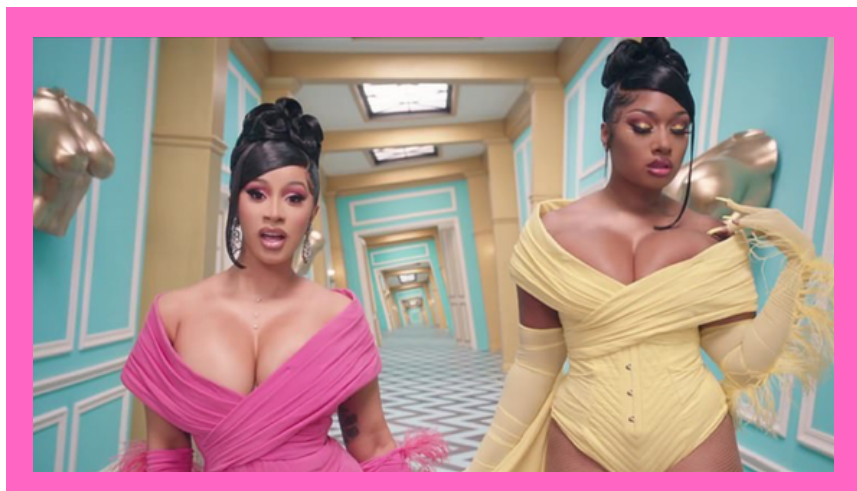
The unbridled use of animal motifs portray the class discrepancy, namely 'classy v/s trashy'. Through the colonial occupation of the African states, animal prints and furs became an image of everything 'exotic' and 'wild'.

This wild eroticity and savageness attached to black women (undoubtedly damnable) came to be laced with racially discriminatory connotations. These stereotypes have left black women, often, as epicenters

of facetious narratives. Black women have little or no control over society's perception of their bodies.

'We, as women, aren't all empowered by the same things and that's okay. Some women enjoy allowing their "freak flag" to fly. Others don't. Neither preference makes us any less as women. However, by putting down those women that do feel comfortable flaunting their sexuality, we inadvertently help those that insist on upholding a controlling and archaic patriarchy that allows men to maintain power over how women are allowed to represent themselves sexually or even as independent beings that have a mind and agency of their own.' - Jasmine Chantel

The reigns of my sexuality are in my hands. The freedom to choose. That's what the empowerment movement has always been, and will continue to be about. The fluidity of feminism, its ability to progress with the times and people, is what makes it so wonderful. One doesn't need to stick to age-old archaic notions of where the female morals lie (they definitely don't lie in the vagina, the roundness of the bust, or the nature of the fabric on the body). This song is the epitome of women's liberation. Celebrating female sexuality through and through, on her own terms, in her own way. While criticism runs on various rounds such as lewd imagery, 'pornographic content', hypersexualization, what's better than destroying a patriarchal system with its own structures (r. stereotypes)?







PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

*'Mrs. America'
Who Opposed Feminism*

BY ANUSHKA TOMAR

Recently, FX released a miniseries called "Mrs America" which received a lot of appreciation for its unique and appealing plot. It is an intense psychological portrait of a conservative American woman who believed that women do not need rights. The story talks about the time when women got together to support the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment but it received an unexpected backlash from a movement which was led by a woman named Phyllis Schlafly, aka, "the sweetheart of the silent majority".

The second wave of feminism was in its full swing during the 19-70s. All the feminists were trying to eradicate the challenges faced by women in their daily lives. One of the major steps taken during this period was the introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment or ERA, but it wasn't that easy. Soon feminism hit a roadblock. A woman who was known to open her speeches by thanking her husband for letting her attend the event, because "it irritates the women's libbers", started rallying against the ERA. Her name was Phyllis Schlafly.

Schlaflly believed that women did not wish for equality with men; rather they wanted to remain at home and be homemakers. She advocated that feminism was a losing battle and striving for gender equality was “a fight with human nature”. Schlaflly was a conservative author and a political activist committed against feminism and communism. She became a household name within the last half of the twentieth century and staunchly demeaned the entire plan of gender equality; as per her this idea was against ‘family values’.

Growing up in a very middle-class family, Schlaflly was a formidable figure. Once her father lost his job because of the Great Depression; her mother worked as a lecturer in addition as a librarian to support her family. Schlaflly completed her education with a master’s degree in politics from the Radcliffe College and later became an attorney. Schlaflly had seen her mother working day in and out because of which she couldn’t give her family enough time. After seeing all this Schlaflly strongly believed that there was no need for equal rights for women and stood powerfully against the ERA during the ’70s.

She was a far-famed anti-feminist icon. However, she was known as a hypocrite in the feminist movement for using the activist framework pioneered by feminism to grow her influence in politics and squaring against that very movement. Schlaflly played an awfully necessary role within the 1964 Republican Presidential nomination for the conservative candidate Barry Goldwater. Together with her ‘good woman of the house’ image, she brought thousands of white women supporters for the Republicans.

She started an organisation known as STOP ERA—the STOP being ‘Stop Taking Our Privileges’—to fight the ERA. She also founded an organisation known as the Eagle Forum through which she commented against gay rights, abortion rights, pornography—name the social issue associated with women and Schlaflly was there to discard it. She powerfully stood against the liberation movement of women in the US, arguing that it was causing same-sex marriages, gender-neutral restrooms and ladies being written within the armed forces.



As per the feminists, Schlaflly had entered politics thanks to her husband’s wealth, who was a lawyer himself. She was a savvy politician, who, however, tried to disguise it by saying that politics was simply a hobby for her. She was a staunch conservative Catholic and had no problems arguing against women’s freedom, arguing that God had created a distinction between men and women for a reason. Though her arguments were conservative, her language was dominated by the feminist concepts of liberation.

After understanding the intensity of personal politics, she leveraged her identity as an ‘average housewife’ and a mother of six kids to defend her gender roles. She was even an award-winning author and wrote many books. Out of these, *A Choice Not An Echo* sold several copies and was considered instrumental in Goldwater’s cause. Schlaflly spent years painting feminism as a war against men. She also insisted that “virtuous women aren’t sexually ha-rassed” and that “there was

no such thing as marital rape”. According to her, “sex-education classes are like in-home sales parties for abortions” and that the “atom bomb was a marvellous gift that was given to our country by a wise god.”

Although she was a sigh of relief for the conservatives, her ideologies and beliefs were packed with hypocrisy for the feminists and liberals as she claimed that women ought to stay homemakers while she herself travelled around the country giving speeches, authored many books and even became a lawyer.

Betty Friedan, feminist and a liberal, compared Schlaflly to a religious heretic and lashed out at her during a debate by telling her that “she should burn at the stake for opposing the ERA”. Ms Friedan even called Schlaflly an “Aunt Tom”. Liberals and feminists criticised her conservative thinking and hypocritical approach towards women empowerment.

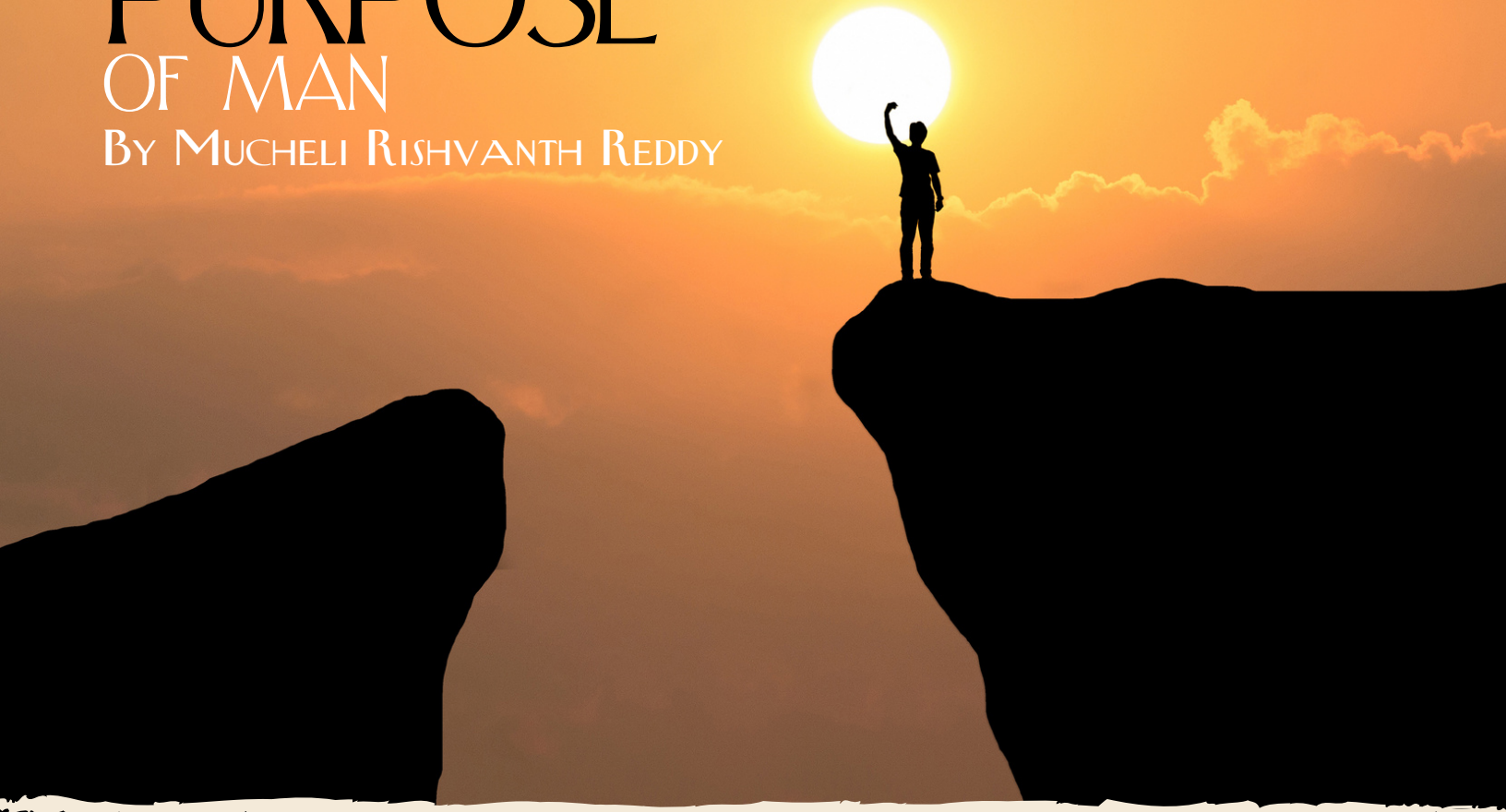
With her death in 2016 at the age of ninety-two, Schlaflly’s vision for an America that was conservative and biased towards men came to an end. However, are we actually free from considering women as inferior? As humans we’d like to stay moving forward, learn from our mistakes, get out of our orthodox mindsets and stop living within the past. However, do we actually do that? Is our society nowadays fully gender-equal or is it still a far-fetched dream?



Bettmann/Getty Images

PURPOSE OF MAN

BY MUCHELI RISHVANTH REDDY



One of the fundamental characteristic features of all the philosophers is to ask questions. They ask endless questions which never seem to have concrete answers but certainly have endless objections. This is why many are fascinated by the subject of philosophy and also the same feature contributes to the bitterness against it. Since its origin, philosophers left unlimited questions and many are still deeply involved in adding to the pool many unanswered questions. Interestingly there is still no agreement among the philosophers on the question of 'What is Philosophy?' itself. Such is the nature of philosophy. It is tough to reach an agreement on any question in philosophy even if it is debated for centuries.

One such question debated in philosophy since its origin by all the giants of that subject is the 'concept of man'. This is a very significant question because the philosophy aims to, as Marx said, "go to the root of the matter" and "for man however the root is the man himself" and Sudipta Kaviraj wrote a two-part essay^[ii] where he tried to trace the evolution of this

concept exploring diversity in its evolution from the declarations made by Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Mill, Marx and Engels and how this concept was influenced by various epochs of human history like periods of continuous wars, feudalism, capitalism, industrialisation, and movements of democracy. It is a fascinating read which ended up with no conclusions! Not surprised. But there is some agreement on one facet of the concept of man among many philosophers: Man is functional. He performs some or other function. His functions are either defined naturally based on his inherent nature, or by god, or by other people or institutions above them or by circumstances or by himself. Each philosopher defined his own 'Man' and his functions.

What is most radical among them is Rousseau's 'Man'. Though his concept of man is liberal being, it is in all senses the most radical pronouncement. What is a Man to Rousseau? "A man is somebody responsible for his acts- capable of doing good and evil, capable of following the path either of right or wrong".

Rousseau envisaged a man who exercises absolute liberty and is free. For Rousseau, "to say that a man is a man, and to say that he is free, are almost the same"[iii]. He is critical of the man who is not free to an extent that he declared that such a man will cease to be a man. "If a man is not free, if a man is not responsible for what he does if a man does not do what he does because he wants to do it because this is his personal, human goal because in this way he achieves something which he, and not somebody else, at this moment desires- if he does not do that, he is not a human being at all. The essence of man almost more than his reason depends upon the fact that a man can choose, choose between alternatives, choose between them freely, be uncoerced". If a man is not free, he becomes "a thing, a chattel, an object in nature, something from which no accountability can be expected". Reflecting on Rousseau's conception of man makes one thing very clear- it is very tough to qualify as a man of his conception.

Is it possible for such a man? Is it possible to have a completely free man? Will a free man act virtuously? Wouldn't a society of free men lead to complete anarchy? – many such questions arise immediately with a simple reflection on Rousseau's conceptions. But at this point, it is equally important to recognise the fact that no man would oppose the notion of completely being free. That is the aim much of humanity is chasing for.

Keeping aside the investigation into the pros and cons of having a completely free man, it is necessary to see if there can ever be a free man. If the answer to this question is no, then it is not necessary to look at its pros and cons. Many philosophers advocated that the society is a 'structure' whose survival depends on the performance of several different tasks by the individuals residing in it and these different tasks are given a hierarchy. People at each stratum or layer (these two words will be used interchangeably) in the hierarchy are obliged to perform certain tasks as directed by the people belonging to the strata above them. People in a particular stratum consciously believe or are made to believe that they are free to perform certain tasks which they want to do. This is a complete illusion because the things which they think they are free to do are offered to them by the people above them. People in the upper stratum decide on what the people lower to them should do and draw a boundary of that task and make everything beyond that invisible.

Society's structure is the summation of the people at different strata. No individual living in that structure can claim to be free and can perform the tasks which he freely desires. Society as a whole is a 'series of coercions in disguise'. This 'structure' erases the possibility of a free man.

So, to see if there is a possibility of a free man, it is necessary to break or change this 'structure'. Thankfully this 'structure' is not an indestructible one, it is a product of man's creation and destroying it, even if it is toughest, not an impossibility. But it is dangerous to suggest the breaking of this 'structure' and all individuals jumping out of it because it has raised itself to the level of indispensability through its perpetual survival for centuries. So, is a free man an impossible ideal? Not yet.

One of the interesting things about philosophy is the role of mathematics in it. Many great mathematicians are also great philosophers. There is a special fondness towards mathematics among many philosophers. Philosophers tried to find methods of philosophising, explanations and justifications for philosophical concepts through mathematical tools. Descartes, Galileo, Gottfried Leibniz and Newton to name a few.

One such mathematical tool, more specifically a statistical tool can help us to chase for the ideal of a free man. It is the concept of range. It is a gap between two limits or values. The hierarchical 'structure' of the society has ranged between different stratum. This is a social reality. The indispensable 'structure' is not insulated against the possible changes in the range between various layers in it. The range can increase through the perpetuation of inequities, instruments of domination and exploitation and reiteration of the status quo of the individuals. The range can also be decreased. When we think about reducing the range between layers in the structure, one immediate question which needs to be addressed is- who can reduce the range?

One of the unique things about the 'structure' is that it is assimilative, it is not a static one. People in one layer can be assimilated into another, upper layered into lower and vice versa. Let us imagine the 'structure' of society as a series of concentric circles. Each layer is bound to have a concentric circle and it is assumed that each concentric circle represents the limits of the activities or tasks that can be performed by the people in that circle, which they assume as their freedoms. They are circles of 'coercions in disguise'. The circles corresponding to each layer is drawn by people in the upper layer and as it is already said above, the residents of upper layers make it invisible for the residents of the lower layer to look beyond their circles. It makes it clear that the people in the lower layers have the smallest circles of activity and going up, each layer has a much bigger circle.

This also means that, compared to a lower layer resident, upper layers are aware of the sphere of activity beyond the circles they have drawn for the lower layers- this facet opens up

the possibility of assimilation. The approach of assimilation is a top-down approach, rather than the bottom-up.

People residing in the upper layers can redraw the circles with a much bigger radius of activities and this opens up the possibility of assimilation and also reducing the range between the strata. Upper layers are not devoid from the capability to redraw the circles. For centuries, residents of the upper layers have continuously squeezed the radii of lower circles and assimilated the squeezed-out portions of the latter into themselves, leaving the least possible sphere of activities for the lower strata. Now, in the process of assimilation, the residents of upper layers must redraw the circles. If the same process occurs across all the spheres, then the range between the layers reduces and its value moves towards 'zero'. Range as Zero is the state of a free man. Will we ever reach the range of zero? – this question should be better left to time to answer, but the possibility is shown here that it is not an impossibility. So, a free man is not an impossible ideal. But qualifications that have to be fulfilled for it are not so easy. Why will upper layer residents accept to take up the task of assimilation and redrawing?

The answer to this lies in history. There are instances in the history or the history itself to a larger extent is a process of innumerable assimilations. The sections which took up the task of assimilation are, as called by Dipankar Gupta, 'Citizen Elite' or 'Elite of Calling'. In his work 'Revolution from Above: India's Future and the Citizen Elite', Gupta developed the thesis of citizen elite and limits its scope to democracies. But this thesis, though there is a substance of utopia, can be applied to the whole humanity. These elites work, not just for the maximization and fulfilment of their interests, but sometimes go against their interests, and have the vision to pull up the bottom. Their actions must be two-folded: assimilation and range suppression, simultaneously. Primarily, they should work in redrawing the spheres of lower layers by providing more opportunities and goad the lower layer residents to move up, reducing the range. This collective action across the layers is the move towards the creation of a completely free man. This, I believe, should be the purpose of man.

If every individual living in the society's 'structure' puts himself at work to attain the goals of assimilation and range reduction, it can finally result in the creation of a free man. In this process, the indispensable 'structure' is not only changing or reforming but eroding without damaging the man. The idea of a free man is a dream that is fair, but not unreal or non-existent. Achieving that ideal depends on man's action and it is certainly, the most fundamental and virtuous purpose of man.



SHE WAS NEVER AN ABLA

Bollywood's iconic characters who broke gender stereotypes

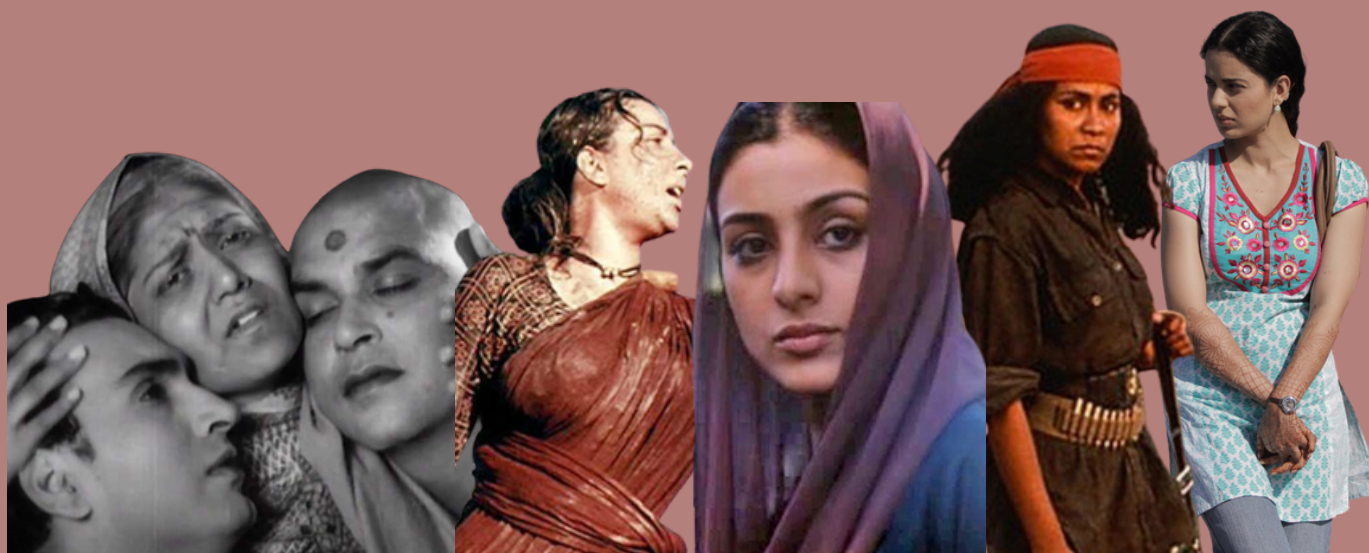
BY ARPITA CHOWDHURY

The moment someone asks you to think about a woman character in Bollywood cinema, most of us would think of a typical Indian woman fulfilling her household duties, looking after her family and husband and essentially killing her own aspirations. However, in the last decade, we have seen an upswing of women-centric movies. My question here is why do we designate a movie with a female lead as a revolution? Have we ever said that movies like Dabangg or Singham are male-centric? No, right?

The issue here is that women have continued to play bold and powerful roles since the '40s and even before that. No movie is complete without a woman taking a strong decision

in the climax. In the present times, we think that the new generation is bringing about a revolution through movies like Raazi, Pink, Thappad, etc. However I would like all of us to go back to the time when various powerful movies such as Abla Ki Shakti, Dahej, Seeta Aur Geeta were produced which garnered immense praise from the audience.

Mapping the entire period from the 1940s to post-2010, let's make an attempt to identify those landmark films that established the fact that a woman was never an abla. She has continued to grab her position in society whether by becoming a politician or by becoming an opinionated housewife.



1940s to 1960s

AURAT (1940)

“Bhagwan tune mujhpar badi daya ki, maine sansaar me sab kuch paa liya ab mujhe kuch nahi chahiye, raat din mehnat karke ek-ek paisa sabka ada kar diya”

Even before one could think of a full-fledged women-centric movie, Mehboob Khan produced a movie which was actually revolutionary. Ideas were independent even if India wasn't. A woman who worked for her entire life to raise her children hits back at the cruel society when her elder son dies. At a time when women were supposed to restrict themselves to the kitchen, this woman fought the entire society boldly.



MOTHER INDIA (1957)

”Sansaar ka bhaar utha logi devi. Mamata ka bhaar na uthaya jayega. Maa ban kar dekho, tumhare paaon bhi dagmaga jeyenge”

A landmark movie released seventeen years after Aurat, Mother India won numerous hearts. A woman changed the entire perception of a woman's character in this film. She did not even think twice before killing her son because he had turned evil to society. The strength and power of a mother were aptly portrayed in the movie. “Nargis's role as a mother has undeniably inspired generations of moviegoers. There is no doubt that she has given a great performance. I cannot say how any other competent actress of her generation would have performed that role, but for the audience of our generation, Mother India means Nargis, just as Devdas means Dilip Kumar,” said Javed Akhtar.



1970s to 1990s

AANDHI (1975)

“Jahaan paisa nahi ho kharch karne ke liye, wahaan akal kharch karna chahiye, Choudhury sahab”

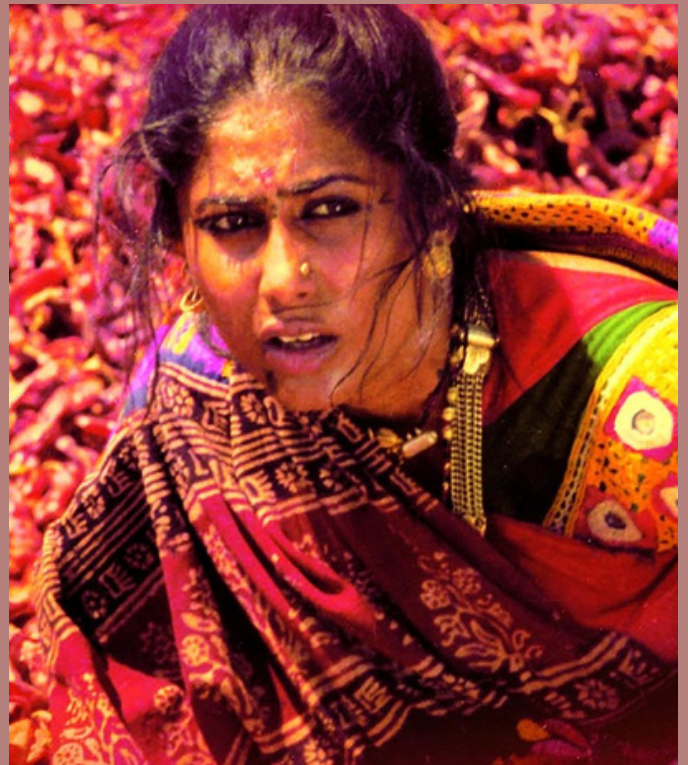
Aandhi was another such movie that depicted how women took to the professional field and came out as pertinent leaders. Suchitra Sen played the lead role of a politician. The dignity and poise in her character raised a lot of debates in the patriarchal society. She was a rebel in the movie who defied the norms of society and decided to fulfil her aspirations, which further led her to face increased opposition. Even in the film, all the male characters were seen demoralizing her and they were also apprehensive of her increasing popularity in the political arena.



MIRCH MASALA (1987)

“Main nahi jaungi...main nahi jaungi. Agar mera marad kahega na to bhi nahi jaungi. Main jaan de dunga lekin uske paas nahi jaungi”

Sonbai played by Smitha Patil is an intelligent, beautiful and strong woman. Her confidence intrigues the subedar. The film is set in a colonial world. Despite living in a stereotypical and conservative village where women were considered to be a burden, Sonbai depicted the role of a fierce woman who had the capacity to voice her desire and even say no to the cruelty of the society as and when required. Portraying such a strong role in the '80s was in itself a 'risk' for the society as it influenced the women of that age to be strong and fierce.



INSAAF KI DEVI (1992)

“Tum jaisa kameena insan maine aaj tak nahi dekha. Paison ke khaatir apni biwi ko kisi gair mard ke hawas ka shikar hone ke liye bhej diya?”

Often in the Bollywood movies of the '90s we have seen how a woman gets abducted by a villain who tries to make his advances on the heroine and then the hero comes to her rescue. This entire narrative was changed in the movie *Insaaf Ki Devi*. As the name suggests, the movie is a courtroom drama. When Suraj is arrested for allegedly killing his wife, Sita, Kanoonilal proves to the court that Sita had committed suicide after Suraj caught her having an affair, resulting in Suraj's acquittal. Later, Suraj is again arrested for the murder of his niece, Pinky. Sadhana, Pinky's mother, played by Rekha, vows for revenge and to seek justice. She depicts how women would not succumb to the societal pressure and would always resist it.



1990s to 2000

BANDIT QUEEN (1994)

“The sound of bangles jangling on my forearms would be delightful. I looked forward to being able to wear bells around my ankles and silver necklaces around my neck, but not anymore, not since I had learned what they represented for the man who gave them. A necklace was no prettier than a piece of rope that ties a goat to a tree, depriving it of freedom.”

Bandit Queen is a 1994 Indian biographical film based on the life of Phoolan Devi as covered in the book *India's Bandit Queen: The True Story of Phoolan Devi*. A lower-caste woman who was raped at a young age fights all odds to become a bandit queen. Though her story has faced severe criticisms and controversies yet the character depicts the true essence of a woman who, subjected to severe atrocities since her childhood, finally sets out to break the shackles of orthodox society.



2000 to 2010

CHANDNI BAR (2001)

“Mujhe khushi thi ki ab dubara mujhe kabhi bhi iss beer bar mein naachne ke lie nahi aana pdega. Meri majburiyon ka ek na khatam hone wala silsila shuru ho chuka tha. Apni tammanaon ko beer bar mein kaid karke main apne bachchon ki zaruraton ko puri karne me jut gyi”

Post-globalization Chandni Bar was a movie that entirely changed the concept of film-making and even story writing. The film starred Tabu who was forced to work as a dancer in a bar. She subsequently falls in love with a don and gives birth to two children. The moment she thought she would not have to face any atrocities anymore, her husband died. She was again taken back to the dark world. Since then, despite facing the apathy of society, she worked day and night to raise her children. This fight of women in a modern world establishes a new era for women.



CHAMELI (2003)

“Yeh bolta hai haath mat lagao, duniya haath lagane ke liye paisa deti hai!”

Mainstream actors often abstain from taking up roles which may turn out to be controversial. However, star actor Kareena Kapoor took up the role of Chameli, a prostitute. The movie actually brought into light the heartfelt stories of a woman who spends her life in a brothel. From shaming her to understanding and respecting her after delving into her story, the film chronicles the life of Chameli. This film with such a contemporary issue brought about a revolution in the realm of mainstream cinema.



Post-2010

QUEEN (2013)

““Mera sense of humour bahut achha hai, aapko dheere dheere pata chalega”

Queen is a movie which shall remain in trend for years to come. This movie won Kangana Ranaut a national award. When a sweet and innocent girl gets shocked to know that her would-be husband will not marry her, she stands tall and decides to go for her honeymoon alone. Taking such an extraordinary decision while living in a conservative family is something that reflects how the thinking of the times is changing. Visiting Paris changes her life altogether. She meets different people, which makes her more outright and confident.



MARDAANI 2 (2019)

“Auraton ko nahi, Sharmaji, poore samaj ko aatmavishleshan karne ki zarurat hai. Auratein jab bhi field pe utarti hain, wo chahe police ho ya politician, peshwa koi bhi ho, humesha usi ki kabiliyat pe kyon sawal uthaya jata hai?”

Mardaani 2 is the sequel to Mardaani, which had bagged huge success at the box office as well as garnered immense praise from the critics. The movie stars Rani Mukherjee who plays the role of a cop, Shivani Shivaji Rao. Playing the role of a female cop was already bold and the immense popularity gained by this woman-led movie was a cherry on the cake. The movie highlights the burning issues of rape, abduction, kidnapping and murder. Shivani single-handedly resolves all the cases despite facing immense opposition.





THE WAY FORWARD

Cinema is often considered to be a reflection of society. It is clear that since ages women have strived to achieve their desired aspirations in India and the world at large. When India saw Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India in 1966, the theatre audience saw the struggle of a woman in Mamta the same year; when PV Sindhu won the Padma Bhushan in 2020, a film like Chhapaak hit the screens. An important issue to be understood here is that films with women-leads have

always been there in the realm of Bollywood and will continue to be made. Over the years, filmmakers have also managed to portray strong and independent women, who have careers, speak their minds, are in control of their lives, and need no men. As times change, approach towards filmmaking is also changing entirely. Now the term “women-centric movie” ceases to be in vogue as movies such as Thappad or Mardaani don’t need any label to achieve success.





HIJAB:

The meaning, disputes and different perspectives.

BY AALIYA ZAIDI

Singapore: When Sarah arrives at the clinic, she removes her veil. "They told me that I can't work here if I wear the Tudung (local Malay term for the hijab) during my job interview", recalls Sarah, two years ago. While Sarah isn't new, in many professional settings of Singapore, many women are debarred from wearing the headscarf. The hijab debate fumed up again when a woman in a department store was asked to remove hijab to work in the store in recent months. Nearly 15% of

the 4 million resident population are calling for the ban to be ended in Singapore. "If Sikhs can wear a turban while working why can't we work with a headscarf? Why this discrimination?" asks Aarzu, a Muslim law student from Singapore. However, this Islamic veil debate isn't new, it pervades everywhere and occupies our societal spaces in polarised forms. The western world view regards it as a sign of oppression while the other perspective sees it as a compulsion, mostly prevalent among Arab countries. Hence, it is important to understand it in these contexts. But, at first, let us understand its relevance in Islam.

The veil concept has been developed to live a modest and decent life. According to the Holy Quran, covering of the body dates back to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: "So, when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness became exposed to them, and they began to stitch over themselves with the leaves of paradise", Holy Quran (7:22). The verse explains that modesty is innate and it concerns both men and women. Moreover, it is important to understand the mean-

HIJABOPHOBIA REFERS TO THE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN WEARING ISLAMIC VEILS. WITH THE RISE OF VIOLENCE, JIHADIST FORCES AND TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE IDEA OF ISLAMOPHOBIA GREW.

ing of the word hijab that is used frequently. It doesn't mean absolutely, the headscarf covering hair of Muslim women. In the holy book Quran, nowhere the word hijab is used for this purpose. Hijab means curtain, separation, something that hides and protects something. The verse "O you who have believed, do not enter the house of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal... And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a separation (Hijab)", Holy Quran (33:53). In this verse as we can see the word hijab is used as a curtain, separation and circumstantial requirement to respect the

circumstantial requirement to respect the wives of the Prophet. It didn't indicate any style of clothing. It is a symbol separating private and public life of the Prophet. It is to respect and honour the private life of the Prophet. The other verse that clearly mentions about headscarf says "...And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not to expose their adornment

(zinatahuna) except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers (Khumurihina) over their chests (Juyubihina) and not to expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons", Holy Quran (24:31). The term Khumurihina (plural of Khimar) in this verse refers to the headscarf. The verse allows women to cover their body and institute a sense of decency, simplicity and modesty in public life. Khimar protects the women from the lustful eyes of men and develops the code of moral and ethical values. It is used to separate the public and private life of women.

However, the modesty in Islam doesn't just concern women, but equally concerns men too. As it is stated in the Holy Quran "Tell the faithful men to cast down their looks". The absolute minimum covering prescribed for men is loose and unrevealing clothing from his navel to his knee. Men shouldn't wear gold jewellery, silk clothing, or adornments that are considered feminine. Here, Islam clearly mentions the code of conduct for both men and women. In social interaction, men and women are equally told to have decency, to protect themselves and stay away from satan and materialism. Hence, the veil concept is more of liberation, decency, mutual respect, and is equally applicable to both men and women. It allows both men and women to transcend materialism and lustfulness.

At this stage, it is imperative to ask why the word hijab is used frequently, not the khimar that is used specifically for headscarf in the Holy Quran. Hijab as a headscarf is human intervention and the result of incorrect translations. Using hijab for headscarf serves the interest of both the worlds. The word hijab meaning 'separation' or 'hide' has many implications. It is used to separate the women from the social interaction and exclude them from the sociopolitical space. It gives the patriarchy the right to issue directives to women, as a compulsion and to control their life. But as mentioned above in the verses of the Holy Quran, there is no reference for women to reduce their sociopolitical space and interaction. The verse referring to Khimar and other verses in the Holy Quran is to recommend the 'attitude' of moral and ethical values in public life for both men and women. Therefore, Khimar in Holy Quran represents the social visibility of women, not the obstruction to it. Hijab, on the other hand, promotes the restriction of women to private space. Thus arises the notion of the headscarf as a symbol of oppression.

This symbolisation of headscarf with the word hijab has resulted in 'Hijabophobia' in western societies. Hijabophobia is a term referring to discrimination against women wearing Islamic veils. With the rise of violence, Jihadist forces and terrorism in the Middle East, the idea of Islamophobia grew. The link of hijab was woven into Islamophobia, making the Islamic veil a symbol of discrimination and subordination. The rise in the social position and visibility of Muslim women along with the influence of Islamophobia has resulted in the questioning of the faith and identity of Muslim women. It creates a difficulty for them to manage their professional and religious identity. Imperative in this context, Islam isn't the only religion where veil concept is practised. As we have seen, veils have

existed in forms such as those of Christian nuns, Judaist women, Zoroastrian women and Hindu women. In all these religions, the veil concept prevails. However, the Islamic veil catches the limelight because of the influence of Islamophobia and incorrect usage of the word 'hijab'. As we have observed above that Khimar (headscarf) is not the pillar of Islam but more of a moral and ethical value. Also, religion is practised more meaningfully when it is without compulsion. Any obligation to wear a headscarf is unacceptable because the Holy Quran says "No compulsion in religion" which forms one of the main principles of Islam. Therefore, in between these extreme worldviews lies the importance of 'free will and voluntary practice'. Hence, we ought to make Khimar the symbol of expression not of oppression. "I feel a sense of pride and respect when I wear the headscarf," says Rahima, a student and basketball player in America, wearing a headscarf from her teenage. This is the true meaning and purpose of wearing a headscarf as mentioned in Islam, to embrace and accept it with your own will.

The Holy Quran interjections call upon us to behave with decency, simplicity and modesty. It also emphasises to practice the wearing of headscarf willingly by choice. According to the Quran, 'Libas-a-Taqwa' (clothing of righteousness) - that is the best. But, due to human interventions and prejudices, different interpretations are made that are biased and induce a compulsion on women. It creates nuances for women who wear Khimar as an expression of free will and those who don't. Moreover, it is often seen that one community is stigmatized as a result of such orthodoxy. Clearly, we need to emphasize the values of toleration, righteousness and respect in the multi-religious and multi-cultural world. We need to be cautious of different interpretations and meanings attached to religious symbols.





SOCIETY

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A CASE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN THE WORLD OF MERITOCRACY

In the United States it is based
on race, in Europe it is based on gender
and in India it is based on caste.

BY ANANYA ANAND

Coined in 1958 by the sociologist Micheal Young in his book *The Rise of the Meritocracy*—describing a dystopian society in which intelligence and merit have become the central tenets of society, creating a society stratified between a merited power-holding elite and a disenfranchised underclass of the less merited—the nightmare of “meritocracy” has become the reality.

Defined as a social system in which advancement in society is based on an individual’s capabilities and merits rather than on the basis of family, wealth, or social background, the system came into prominence with the advent of capitalism and cemented itself after the two world wars when democracy became the norm in the majority of the world. Meritocracy presented itself as the antithesis of aristocracy, where power had been concentrated in the hands of few privileged individuals, who commanded these powers not on the basis of their own merit but on the accident of birth.

But in a world riddled with inequalities, are a person's capabilities enough? Is the playing field levelled enough? Are the doors of opportunities open enough? In his book, *The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite*, Daniel Markovits answers with a resolute "no". He offers an eye-opening critique of the system and posits that meritocracy produces radical inequality, and stifles social mobility. He draws these conclusions by studying the composition of students in Ivy League institutions and their varied socio-economic backgrounds.

He presents a vicious cycle playing out in the United States. On average, children whose parents make more than \$200,000 a year score about 250 points higher on the SAT than children whose parents make \$40,000 to \$60,000. Only about one in 200 children from the poorest third of households achieves SAT scores which are acceptable to Ivy Leagues. Further, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale collectively enrol more students from households in the top 1 percent of the income bracket than from households in the bottom 60 percent. Legacy preferences, nepotism, and outright fraud skew the results further to the advantage of the rich applicants. Meanwhile, the top banks and law firms, along with other high-paying employers, recruit almost exclusively from a few elite colleges. So the cycle continues. Markovits concludes that the only way to correct this grave wrong is, among other things, affirmative action.

Affirmative action originally referring to policies and practices to prevent discrimination based on race, creed, colour, and national origin, has now expanded into policies that give historically disadvantaged groups adequate representation in areas of education and employment. In the United States it is based on race, in Europe it is based on gender and in India it is based on caste.

India has the most unique and perhaps the longest history of affirmative action, known as reservation. Unlike other countries, reservation in India is enshrined in Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution, allowing the Indian government to set quotas to ensure that "socially and educationally backward classes of citizens" are properly

represented in public institutions. Though popularly the history of reservation can be traced to Shahu Maharaja. He introduced reservation in favour of non-Brahmins and backward classes in the princely state of Kolhapur. Interestingly, the first act of affirmative action was not for the backward castes, rather it was for the Brahmins.

In his article, *Why discuss Aarakshan with an immoral upper class?* Chandra Bhan Prasad uncovers an incident when Tamil Brahmins petitioned the Governor General that a Third Class be introduced as their children were not able to cross the minimum pass percentage of 45 percent. Consequently, realising the enormity of the problem, a Third Class was introduced and the pass percentage was brought down from 45 percent to 33 percent. Prasad uncovered this incident from a report of the Indian Universities Commission of 1902. In the report, the commission was analysing the matriculation examination results of 1901 as it was worried about the low percentage of students who passed. According to the report, out of the total 21,750 students from all over British India only 7,953 managed to pass – a success ratio of just 36 percent. The report also tells us how the pass percentage was brought down from 40 percent to 33 percent.

It is important to note that this student body consisted mainly of Dwijas – Brahmins and Kayasthas in particular. The untouchables – then called the Depressed Classes – didn't find any representation in this body. In the first quarter of the 19th Century, British officials undertook an extensive survey of the indigenous system of education to find out how many students there were from the Depressed Classes. "Sir Thomas Munro, the then Governor of Madras, in his survey of 1822, stated that there was no student from the Depressed Classes," says a report on the indigenous system of education. The report adds: "Mount Stuart Elphinstone, the then Governor of Bombay, had carried out a similar exercise in the Bombay Presidency in 1824. He too stated that there was no student belonging to the Depressed Classes in his presidency."

Comparing the system of Third Class with the current system of reservation, Prasad remarks, "Thankfully, Dalit parents never

demand a Fourth Class for their children, and they didn't pray before upper caste administrators to bring down the minimum pass percentage to 16.8 percent. They just asked for Aarakshan."

The case against reservation in India, mainly has three arguments. First, the caste system in India is a thing of the past and reservation perpetuates the caste system. Second, instead of caste-based reservation, it should be on economic grounds. Last and most importantly, reservation kills merit.

On August 23rd, Kangana Ranaut tweeted, expressing her distaste for reservation, "Caste system has been rejected by modern Indians, in small towns everyone knows it's not acceptable anymore by law..." But a simple Google search and a look at the statistics is enough to know that the caste system is very much alive and thriving in India. Caste-based atrocities take place every hour across India. According to the latest National Crime Record Bureau's (NCRB) report, 45,593 cases of crime against Dalits were registered across the country in 2019; a 37% rise in the last decade from 33,594 cases registered in 2009. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, enacted for the protection of SC/ST, has not aided in the protection of these communities. The conviction rate under this act is an abysmal 16.3% in 2017-18, according to data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Interestingly, the POA Act is often seen as unjust and is often the cause of worry for being misused; but the statistics show otherwise.

It is not uncommon to hear the argument that instead of caste-based reservation, it should be on economic grounds, because rich Dalits take advantage of the policy. Varun Grover, in his article, Vinod Kamblis was reduced to his assumed ('lowest') caste identity, hits the nail in the head when he writes, "If we are okay with poverty-based reservations then merit is not a genuine concern. That means we hate its bypassing only when a 'lower-caste' person gets ahead and not when a poor from our own caste does. That's casteism 101." It is also important to note that the purpose of reservations is not alleviation of poverty-stricken communities, rather to ensure proportional representation of the disadvantaged groups. In the case of India, it was the lower castes and tribes who had been denied access and opportunities in public institutions.

Lastly, coming to the argument of merit. What is merit? It is often defined as the quality of being particularly good or worthy, especially so as to deserve praise or reward. But what makes an individual meritorious? Is it the inherent talent of an individual or their hard work? Maybe a combination of both? On the surface it does seem that hard work and talent is all it takes to become successful; but like all the things in this meritocratic or rather capitalist world, this is a just a farce, concealing the structural inequalities and the systems of oppression. All around the globe, societies are designed and developed to limit opportunities of groups based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and other social markers.

While oppressing one group, the system gives an undue advantage to the other. The dichotomy of the oppressor and the oppressed can be seen in white and black, rich and poor, men and women, upper caste and lower caste. The meritocratic system has been unable to break this system, even though it had been built to promote social mobility. Instead, now it acts as a smokescreen for inherited privilege as can be seen from the vicious cycle presented by Markovits. He terms this as “inherited merit”.

All this not to say that reservation as is operating in India is perfect and above criticism. A panel led by retired Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini was formed in October 2017 to examine the sub-categorisation of OBCs. According to its finding only 40 out of 5,000- 6,000 (which is less than 1 percent) castes among the OBCs

have cornered 50 percent of the reservations benefits. Sub-categorisation seems to be the most logical course of action, with even the Supreme Court giving it a go ahead in its recent judgement. A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice Arun Mishra held that states can sub-classify Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Central List to provide preferential treatment to the “weakest out of the weak”.

The reserved
communities should
be divided into two
categories of family,
those that have
availed reservation
and those who have
not. Reservation
should be prioritised
to the families that
have not availed it
so far.

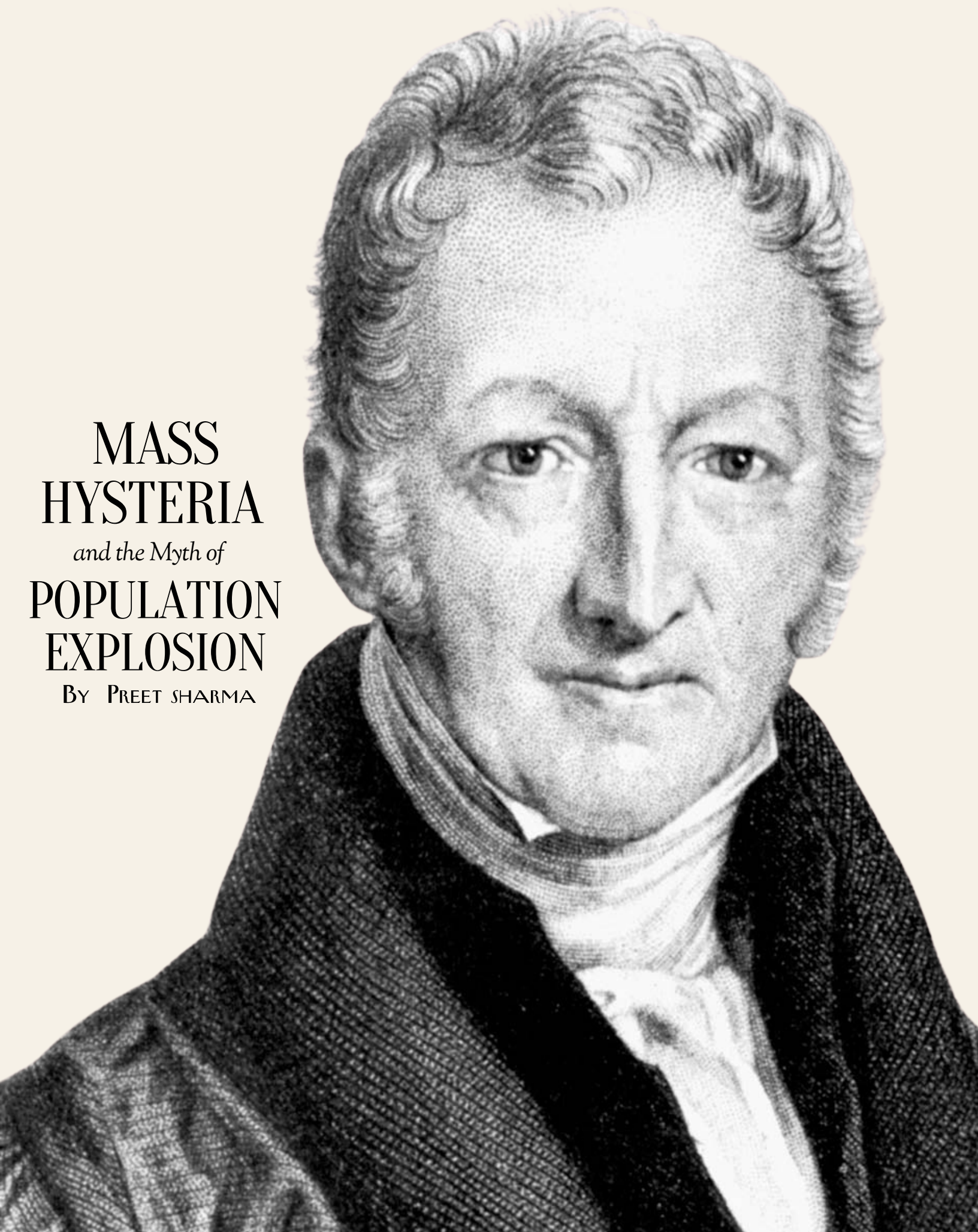
But sub-categorisation, as the possible solution for equitable distribution of the reservation benefits, is also fraught with issues. Anand Teltumbde in his Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva, points them out: how can the statutory 27 per cent (for OBCs) be equitably distributed among 5,000- 6,000 castes?

The average share per group would come out to be less 0.0054 per cent. He poses the question, “When and how with such a hare-brained scheme would the weaker castes hope to benefit?” Teltumbde provides “an amazingly simple solution to such a vexatious problem.” Instead of a “caste-based solution” he states that the nuclear family should be seen as a basic unit. The reserved communities should be divided into two categories of family, those that have availed reservation and those who have not. Reservation should be prioritised to the families that have not availed it so far. The family that has already had access to reservations will now get it only after those who have not availed of it are given access to it.

In the end, in this meritocratic world, strife with inequalities and structures of oppression, affirmative action is the first and the smallest step towards social justice. It is time we give up the idea of winner takes all and gaslighting and blaming victims of oppression for their “failure”. It is time we make far reaching changes in this society to make this world inclusive and safe for everyone.



MASS
HYSTERIA
and the Myth of
POPULATION
EXPLOSION
BY PREET SHARMA



English economist, cleric, and demographer Thomas Robert Malthus is famously known for his theories on

population. In his famous book "An Essay on the Principle of Population" (1798), he argued that the human population grew in geometric progression while food supply grew in the arithmetic progression. Thus, in no time the population will outstrip the food supply causing disequilibrium. Therefore, adversities like famines, war, and starvation will occur. These are named as the positive vices by Malthus. Nature will intervene when the population grows and will bring back population equilibrium. Then, he proposed negative checks such as late marriage, self-control, and celibacy. He was hinting at the population explosion which should be controlled immediately. Though his findings were later proved wrong and heavily criticized, this narrative of population explosion is continuously generated in the form of propaganda for implementing stringent family planning laws in democratic countries and authoritarian states alike.

Population explosion is often invoked in India leading to a kind of hysteria in local people. Often leaders and organizations alike have advocated for stringent family planning laws, the one-child policy, and even forced sterilization. This hysteria around population growth is very misleading. It tends to roll back the benefits of democratic programs that were undertaken by the government in the last decades and also reveals the spurious conjectures that people have about the actual figures of population growth in India.

The recently published study in the Lancet Medical Journal can reduce such apprehensions to an extent, as it indicates that India's Total Fertility Rate (the average number of children born to each woman) may decline to 1.29 by 2100 from 2.14 in 2017, which itself is significantly less from 5.6 in 1950. The study conducted by the Lancet was done by researchers from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) and funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that analyzed population trends in 195 countries.

According to the study, India will be the most populous country in the world in the year 2100 but the population of India will reduce to 1.9 billion, it will be less than the present population of India. India will see its population peak in the year 2048 with around 1.61 billion but after that population will start to decline. By 2100 India will lead the world in the working-age population. The other countries having the highest population in 2100 will be quite surprisingly Nigeria in the second position followed by China, the United States, and Pakistan.

The people who try to create bedlam and chaos or sing the songs of the pandemonium of population explosion also fail to notice that the growth rate of India's population has been falling since 1971. It is also clear that the total fertility ratio which has been defined as the average number of children borne by a woman in her entire life has been continuously falling across India

. According to the UN projections 2019, India's total fertility rate or total fertility ratio has declined from 5.9 children per woman in 1950 to 2.2 children per woman in 2020. It is very close to the replacement level of 2.1 per woman.

Urbanization has also played a crucial role in reducing fertility rates. Greater development is inversely linked to birth rates, this is a time-tested proposition. According to William Reville, urbanization plays an important role in addressing the concern of overpopulation as in cities children do become an economic liability till they attain a certain age whereas in the rural areas they can always help at the farm. Women in cities do have less social pressure of having more children and an increase in access to media, school, and contraceptives also lead to a voluntary reduction in the number of children people wish to have.

The zealous spokesman during debates often use the narrative of population explosion in India and continuously press the government to bring central legislation to control childbirth in India without recognizing that India signed the International Conference on Population and Development Declaration in 1994 and is bound to honor a couple's decision to determine the size of its family and space between childbirths. The rhetoric of population explosion is also the favorite of authoritarians and inefficient governments around the world as they find it convenient to brush aside the claims of effective delivery of services and also set aside the demands of people for better lives by claiming that overpopulation has swept the benefits that their policies had to offer.

Coercion has never been successful in controlling the population of any country. There are not only prudential but also moral reasons for not using coercive population control measures. If we bring the ends – means discussion in the ambit of population control then coercive population measures, treat their citizens as a means towards the goal of population control, and hence the end of individual liberty of decision making in the personal space of an individual is brutally crushed. Secondly, humans are rational agents who are capable of reason and making sound decisions, coercive measures present them as irrational agents incapable of decision making thus preventing them from their

The present population of India must be treated as an asset, and not a liability. We must strive towards the success of voluntary programs of population control and should not sway away with the demagogic authoritarian projections of population explosion.

ability to exercise reason.

Thirdly, coercive measures of population control treat women as a child-producing factories as they have been treated in China where at will the government tell them to hasten the production or lower it. This takes away the decision making power and empowering instincts away from women. This is thus harmful and leads to suppression of their personality. Furthermore, these kinds of population control measures also lead to the intervention of the state in the personal and private spaces of individuals thus violating the principle of non-intervention in the private realm and also taking away negative liberty from individuals which Isaiah Berlin ranks above positive liberty. These provisions downgrade the individual from the level of citizens where they are seen as active agents in decision making processes to the status of irrational subjects.

Stricter family planning schemes in India might contributed to an even more drastic decline in sex-ratio considering that sons are preferred over daughters by considerable amount of parents. Similarly, population control measures have had a history of being more harmful to certain sections of populations and lesser to others. In the times when religious, racial, gender and sexual minorities are arguably being sidelined, these repressive population control measures would not only enhance deep-seated racism, majoritarianism, and islamophobia but the provisions of population control will be much harsher on these communities.

The coercive one-child policy in China which was ultimately reversed in 2013 has led to an irreversible aging population, sex-selective abortions, and has also impacted the economy due to shortages of labor and economic slowdown. In a study conducted by Nirmala Bharuch[3], on the laws restricting the eligibility of people in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan concluded that the two-child policy leads to violation of democratic and reproductive rights of individuals.

To control overpopulation, the best mechanisms are voluntary. Governments around the world have been successful at reducing the total fertility ratio from 4.5 in 1970 to 2.5 children by increasing the focus on education and by increasing the availability of contraceptives. This has made women free to choose smaller family sizes. Additionally, criminalising marital rape will at one hand lead to the empowerment of women and a reduction in unwanted pregnancies and on the other would help alleviate exploitation of women. The present population of India must be treated as an asset, and not a liability. We must emphasize on development of human potential and strive towards the success of voluntary programs of population control and should not sway away with the demagogic authoritarian projections of population explosion in the country. The world should certainly maintain its calm and put an end to the hysteria around population explosion.

AN ESSAY
ON THE
PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION;

OR,
A VIEW OF ITS PAST AND PRESENT EFFECTS

ON
HUMAN HAPPINESS;

WITH
AN INQUIRY INTO OUR PROSPECTS RESPECTING THE FUTURE
REMOVAL OR MITIGATION OF THE EVILS WHICH
IT OCCASIONS.

BY
THE REV. T. R. MALTHUS, A.M. F.R.S.
LATE FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, AND PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND POLITICAL
ECONOMY IN THE EAST-INDIA COLLEGE, HERTFORDSHIRE.

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF FREEDOM IN INDIA

Freedom as observed in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions is not defined in the lines of freedom as seen in the West.

A young man, Siddhartha, set out with his charioteer, Chandaka, to see the town.

He was startled by the sight of an old man, a diseased man and a corpse. These sights of human suffering provoked thought in him and he renounced the world and became an ascetic. Buddha, as we know him today, can be called among the earliest persons who renounced worldly aspirations and attained enlightenment. Freedom as observed in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions is not defined in the lines of freedom as seen in the West. Here, freedom (moksha) focussed on renunciative freedom. It was to be attained by abandoning worldly desires and adopting the life of an ascetic. The Gandhian movement in the twentieth century of nonviolent resistance against British colonialism had its own discourse of freedom, grounded in a different tradition of thought and practice. Hence, the Indian idea of freedom is distinct from that observed anywhere else in the world.

The earliest ideas of freedom as distinguished in the Hindu tradition was of moksha or liberty which was the ultimate of human goals and to attain moksha, was to lose one's identity. While there was focus on renunciative freedom, social freedom breaking away from the varna and caste systems was also pressed in the fifteenth century by the Bhakti Movement.

The movement originated in South India and concentrated on breaking

away from the chains of Varna and caste systems. It asked the people to choose a life of ultimate freedom or moksha. This movement spread to North India. Around the same period, Buddhism and Jainism developed. Later, Sikhism also rose as a religious striving toward social freedom. Thus, it can be understood that there was an emphasis on social freedom much before a thrust for political freedom developed. In India, the idea of relevance was of collective freedom. One couldn't say that there was any idea of freedom apart from moksha, as the caste system was dominant and prevalent. Caste ran into all domains of life.

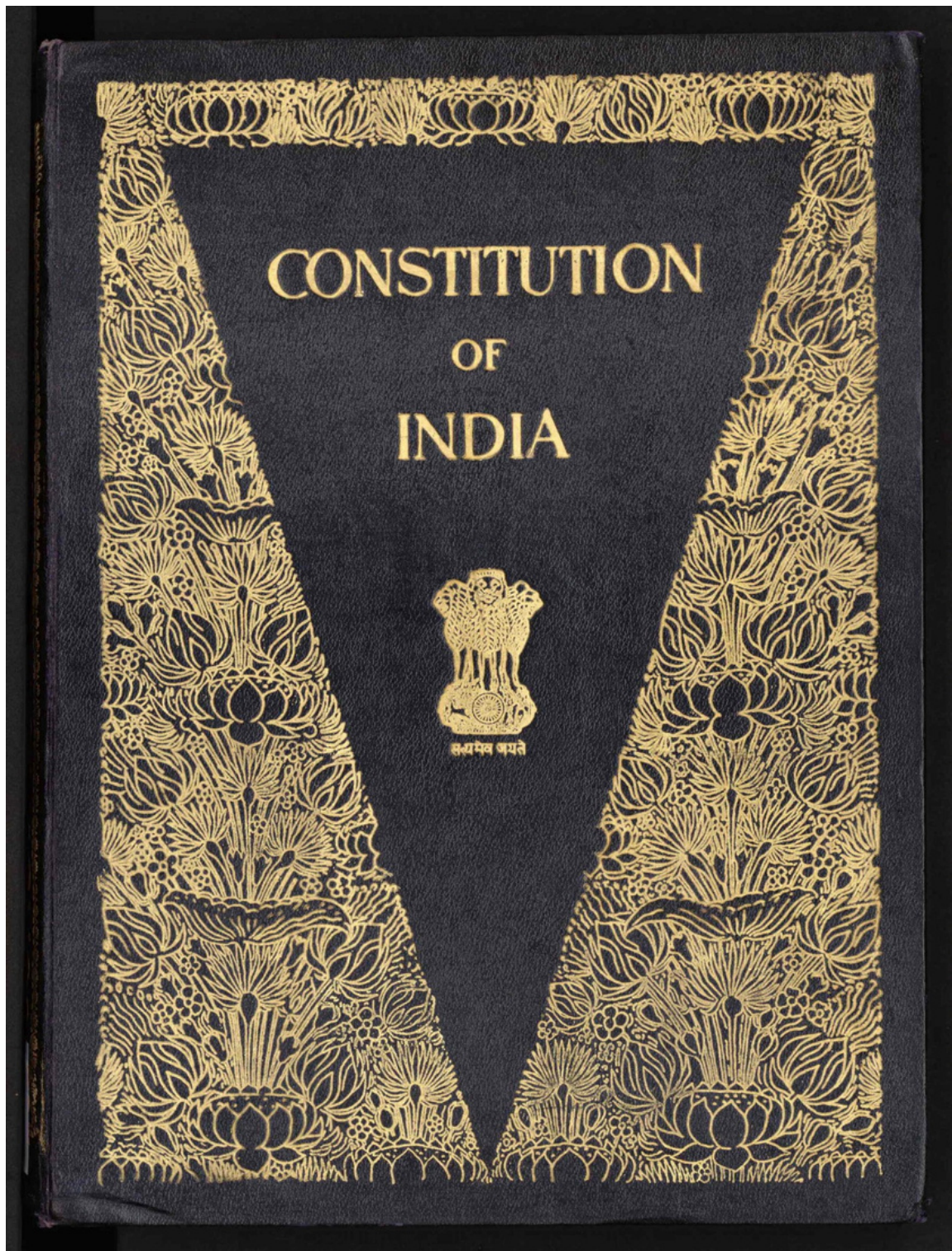
The notion of purity and pollution divided the masses. Endogamous societies with absolutely no freedom for females and untouchables is a right description of the period's social structure. The argument that the caste system was merely a form of division of labour, is far from reality. People were restrained by the clutches of the caste system which prevented them from participating in any activity against what was prescribed.

While the categories and goals of freedom and liberty had come to be a part of political discourse and practice in the West, in pre-colonial India they had been a part of spiritual and religious discourse and practice.

It was in the 19th century that thought about a freedom beyond its spiritual aspect evolved in India. In this period, an English-educated intellectual middle class emerged which discussed and debated on ideas

of freedom. The political arguments of Mill and Comte spread to the educated classes through English and later vernacular newspapers, books and pamphlets. The Hindu tradition of moksha with the complete abandonment of one's identity was diametrically opposed to the Western idea of freedom which stressed on individual freedom. Indian thinkers of the 19th century were in a dilemma whether to accept the Western discourse and reject Indic one or to build a bridge between the two. Finally, they formulated an idea of ethical freedom; ethics of service to society and ethics of resistance to state. Ethos allowed one to engage with the world without losing the telos of freedom. The way to do this was to let go of one's individual identity and interests by dedicating oneself to the service of society and greater good. These intellectuals married child wives whom they gave private education. These women became writers and poets. They formed organisations like the Brahmo Samaj. These organisations engaged in various deliberations. There was freedom of expression which helped these bodies to function effectively.

The emphasis on freedom of press rose as these bodies wrote and printed their ideas in the form of pamphlets, magazines and books. In his story 'Gora', Tagore explained that the true purpose of life was selfless service to India and to all of humanity. In Tagore's eyes this was the moment of real freedom. With the abolition of Sati and legalisation of widow



Freedom, today, stands as an ideal in the Constitution.

remarriage, Hindu males had achieved a small amount of moral autonomy.

Nationalism which emerged at the turn of the 20th century had several strands with their own ideas of freedom. Indian liberals espoused sentiments of both positive and negative liberty. They demanded freedom from despotic and racist colonial rule. C. A. Bayly in his essay on liberalism in India argued that the liberals 'Within their own society, they strove, with varying degrees of commitment, for liberty from oppressive religious hierarchy and the corruptions of polygamy and idolatry.'

Gandhi, who returned from South Africa in 1915, wrote *Hind Swaraj* or *Self-rule* in Gujarati. In the text, Gandhi condemned the Western civilisation. He argued that Indians had given India to the British rather than the British taking it from us. 'Swaraj or freedom would mean Indians learning to rule themselves in terms of civilisation: if Indians did not want Western civilisation, the cultural authority of the West, and consequently British rule, would become redundant.'

For Gandhi, political engagement had to be subordinated by renunciative freedom. He declared satyagraha to be a process of self-purification and the struggle for freedom to be a sacred fight. Gandhi said that Indian nationalism was not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive. It, according to him, was health-giving, religious and therefore humanitarian. He also fought against untouchability that was practiced by the upper-castes. Jyotirao Phule wrote 'Gulamgiri', in which he compared the caste system in India to slavery in America. For those advocating for social freedom, the political freedom movement was essentially upper-caste and class movement. These groups at times supported the British authorities against early nationalism. Meanwhile those who were part of the political freedom struggle thought that the fight against colonialism required complete unity among all sections of Indians.

The Bhakti movement and Buddhism were among the earliest schools which fought for freedom of women. In Buddhist sanghs, female and male monks were considered equals. In modern India, Savitri Bhai Phule and Tarabai Shinde were the

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earliest feminists who asserted for freedom of women. Tarabai Shinde wanted women to break away from the notion of 'stri dharma'

The 19th century was the period that saw a majority of women's issues which came under the spotlight and

reforms began to be made. Much of the early reforms for Indian women were conducted by men. In the 20th century, localised women's groups for working class women were formed. These brought them together, but the aim of these groups were to unite the female force to fight against the imperialist power. In the aftermath of the independent struggle, these groups faded out of importance.

Freedom is still about collective freedom from want and indignity. Indian society has reinforced the Western idea of private property and individual freedom and rights. Freedom has not been limited to the four articles in Part III of the Constitution. The Indian argument for freedom or moksha persists even today. India has been able to rightly find a balance between the Hindu and Western ideas of freedom and develop them. Hegel had predicted in 1821 that the Indic discourse if renunciative freedom 'becomes in the realm of politics and religion, the fanaticism of destruction, demolishing the whole existing social order, eliminating all individuals regarded as suspect by a given order ... only in destroying something does this negative will have a feeling of existence ... its actualisation can only be the fury of destruction.' India did not show any fury of destruction as argued by Hegel, but articulated a politics of non-violence. Freedom, today, stands as an ideal in the Constitution. It is a fundamental right. Social and political freedom is assured and granted by the Constitution. Yet, new strands of freedom are developing in the present. Communities like the LGBTQIA are still fighting for their freedom. Social freedom has not been fulfilled in the right sense, though it has been granted by the Constitution. If we are to achieve and maintain freedom, there must be toleration and respect for human reason. The path the process is unclear, but the movement toward broadening the dimensions of freedom is unstoppable.

THE CULTURE OF
SCAPEGOAT ARRESTS
*Rhea Chakraborty's Arbitrary Arrest &
Media Lynching*

BY AMITOJ SINGH KALSI



The nation was rightfully shocked when the news of Sushant S. Rajput's suicide flooded the internet on June 14. As some might argue, the shocking event made the Bollywood actor into an even bigger star than he was alive. Bureaucrats, politicians, and popular figures from all walks of life expressed their remorse by posting obituary messages in the actor's remembrance. However, the discussion about the suicide did not just end with the obituaries. What followed, apart from lopsided and uninformed discussions about mental health, was an obsessive conjecture about what might have possibly led to the suicide. "What could have caused the suicide of such a celebrated Bollywood actor?", the naive fans couldn't help but wonder.

Five days after the event, Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut took to Instagram and posted, as some might say, a frivolous video blaming the nepotism in the film industry for the actor's death. "He begged for roles, he wanted recognition but did not get it", said Ranaut in a video which went viral. What followed was a vast amount of speculation over who all were responsible for the suicide, if it was really a suicide and not a murder; and Rhea Chakraborty, Shushant's girlfriend was not spared. Soon, a video of Chakraborty went viral where the actress had made some controversial remarks about her partner, Shushant in an intoxicated state. Consequently, Rhea faced the brunt of extreme social media hatred, trolling and rape threats. The hedonistic vilification of the model cum actress was much apparent, especially when the targeted hatred for Rhea went beyond Instagram and Twitter, and reached the doors of our newsroom studios.

A lot can be assessed about the state of media when TV channels run debates like "Sushant par Rhea ka kala jadu" (AajTak), "Love Sex Dhoka" (CNN News18's) and when Arnab Goswami shouts "Mujhey Drug Do" during a 'news debate' on Rhea Chakraborty.

The media channels indeed spared no effort at increasing their TRPs by pandering to the fans' naivety. If getting your character assassinated on national television wasn't enough, Rhea was mobbed by the media who in turn reported her smallest of actions on national television, completely breaching her right to privacy. From being called a "manipulative woman" and a "gold-digger" to claims that she "drove him to suicide", the media channels had no shame in assassinating Rhea's dignity.

Rhea's vilification by the media is not just convenient and hypocritical, but is also unsubstantiated and gravely misogynistic. Firstly, the vilification is heavily convenient and unnecessary. During these unprecedented times where India's GDP's bore its worst contraction ever at 23.9% percent, where more than 200 migrant workers reportedly died during the lockdown, where jobs continue to disappear, and when the farmers are in grave distress, the media's focus on the Rhea's alleged involvement is immoral and grotesquely absurd.

Secondly, the speculation by the media is also uninformed, given the lack of evidence in the public domain. What does the media attempt to achieve by their dull-witted and shamefully hedonistic attempts at their so called investigative journalism when the relevant authorities are investigating the case?

Furthermore, the vilification reeks of our society's misogyny. Even after considering the spooky circumstantial evidence available hinting towards Rhea's alleged involvement, the gross amount of hatred and the nature of trolling she has been slapped with brings out the misogyny in our society. Blaming the female romantic partner for a man's suicide is by no means a new phenomenon. Rekha faced a similar media backlash and public fury following her husband Mukesh Agarwal's suicide back in October 1990, wherein she was blamed for abetting the actor to suicide.

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STATES IN THE USA.

Be it Rekha or Rhea, the fact that their partners' suicides immediately led the media to question their character though uninformed media trials, makes the media's misogyny worryingly conspicuous.

Thanks to our media houses and Kangana Ranaut, it seemed as if every household in the country needed to know who was responsible for Sushant's death. Almost as if everyone had been looking for someone to put the blame on, perhaps an easy target. Soon after, the Narcotics Control Bureau opened an investigation into Sushant's alleged drug consumption to probe a possible linkage between his drug usage and his death. The NCB commissioned Rhea on 5th September for questioning regarding the case, and interrogated her again to investigate allegations against her for procuring cannabis for Sushant.

The successive interrogations resulted in Rhea's arrest on 8th September, 2020 under Section 20B, Section 27, Section 28 and Section 29 of NDPC. If Rhea is found to be guilty in all these sections, she would have to serve from 10 to 20 years in prison.



As explained by The Logical Indian, "The Section 20(B) of the NDPS Act is applicable to those who produces, manufactures, possesses, sells, purchases, transports, imports inter-State, exports inter-State or uses cannabis, shall be punishable. Under this section, the accused can be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years. Section 28 of the NDPS Act includes punishment for any offender slapped with the NDPS Act. Section 29 of the NDPS Act mentions the Punishment for abetment and criminal conspiracy."

However, the question over legitimacy lies over the arbitrariness of the arrest. These sections whenever applied are levelled against drug kingpins who manufacture and supply drugs inter-state. In the history of NCB, these sections have never been slapped in a case of this level. Furthermore, the NCB has not retrieved the contraband in question, and the only evidence backing the arrest are Rhea's WhatsApp chats.

Even after taking the WhatsApp messages into consideration, Rhea by no means is proved to be a consumer of the said drug. Also, being Sushant's partner, if she pays to retrieve some grams of cannabis for Sushant, does that by any means imply that she's a part of a drug syndicate? The provided evidence and the sections slapped don't match. There is no denying that Rhea could possibly have something to do with Sushant's death which is exactly why she is a part of the investigation. However, the charges levelled against her were in no way related to Shushant's death, they were instead related to drug procurement.

Some Bollywood celebrities did not shy away from commencing the arrest. Tapsee Pannu in a tweet said, "These people have lynched a human being of her right to live even before being proven guilty." Vidya Balan too criticised how Sushant's death had been made into a "media circus". "My heart breaks at the vilification of Rhea Chakraborty," she said. "Isn't it supposed to be innocent until proven guilty, or is it now guilty until proven innocent?" Why aren't the elite socialites of Delhi and Mumbai being arrested? Why haven't these sections been slapped at the Saadhus in Kumbh Mela

who proudly consume bhaang? Why do these Saadhus get to have the privilege of receiving protection by the government when in reality they need to be arrested for cannabis consumption just like Rhea? The only answer is that these arbitrary laws will be slapped at whosoever the state deems fit. Rhea was meant to be used as a scapegoat to diffuse the energies of the uninformed Indian masses. As a result, she was arrested for procuring cannabis which in today's time can be bought over the counter in countries like Canada, Uruguay, and many states in the USA.

Over 2500 signatories and 60 organisations have signed an open letter published on Feminist Voices, condemning the media's coverage of the Sushant Singh Rajput death case and particularly, there vilification of Rhea Chakraborty.

The letter addressed to the media has been signed by celebrities like Anurag Kashyap, Gauri Shinde and Zoya Akhtar, actor Sonam Kapoor. "Hunt news, not women. We write to ask you, the news media, to stop this unfair witch hunt of Rhea Chakraborty and to stop fuelling moral polarities of good women to be deified and bad women to be crucified which endangers all women."

Furthermore, the letter pointed out how the media had given a clean to Sanjay Dutt and Salman Khan, two actors with a detailed criminal history. The letter read: "We know you can be different — because we have seen you be kind and respectful to the Salman Khans and Sanjay Dutts of this world, urging us to think of their families, fans and careers. But, when it comes to a young woman who has not even been proven to commit any crime, you have assassinated her character, egged an online mob to demonise her and her family, fuelled wrongful demands and called her arrest your victory. Victory over what? Young women daring to make their own lives in a society that grudges them their freedoms?"

What lies ahead for Rhea and her troubled family? How many more Bollywood stars would be detained in this probe? Will our media houses realise the grossness of their journalistic practices and wake up to their responsibilities? Only time will unravel.



COMPLICITIES OF THE EVERYDAY

Assessing the Cultural Responses to Suicide

BY ABHINAV BHARDWAJ

The suicide of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput met with wide-ranging responses on social and mainstream media. From lists of helplines and reassurances of companionship in times of crises being shared to acknowledgements over how one should say that a person did not commit but die of suicide, a massive public conversation over suicide was stirred. Several weeks later, it might be a decent idea to assess how we grapple with events like these, and how societal normalcy itself might need to be implicated.

Most aforementioned responses, arguably, invested in the go-to closed narratives on a phenomenon that requires an open-ended and self-critical conversation. The reportage by mainstream media received acknowledgement for its insensitivity. But other relatively uncriticised responses to suicides and suicidality might also be worth addressing in light of their reinstatement of not just an elitist, exclusionary imagination of mental health but also a disregard for particularity while imposing ready biomedical explanations on phenomena that have both sociopolitical causality and personal specificity. In other words, most responses to a phenomenon that shakes the social order up, obfuscate how someone taking their life might stem from the same order and its vocabularies of medical and communitarian care.

Declarations by individuals on social media about reaching out to them during a crisis might be well-intentioned but they tide over the fact that these consistent reiterations have not amounted to anything more than platitudes. In the availability of these options, they remain inaccessible, even to the most privileged, thanks to the lack of an everyday applicability of such generosity. Such acts tend to be reduced to ritualistic exercises because care, in the conventional sense of the term, remains socially unfair to the suffering.

Purported 'safe' spaces remain elusive because when one invests in a binary of the suffering and the non-suffering and creates an impossible stairway to 'normalcy', a struggling person is less likely to feel safe in the company of a privileged 'normal' person.

Suicide has social causality and so do mental health issues, but every instance of the two also has specificity. Thus, it is necessary to not compulsorily medicalise suicide, and acknowledge that life is an unhoming experience for several individuals due to their particular social and political locations, as well as private histories.

The consistent insistence on wanting to live and not die heedlessly glorifies the everyday order of life and posits the desire to die as 'abnormal', which appropriates and imposes a convenient template on a personal narrative, reductively conflating mental illness with suicidality. Thus, even saying that someone "died of suicide" might be problematized because it makes the desire to die seem like a compulsory outcome of mental health problems and takes attention away from what might make someone end their life in the absence of medically diagnosable conditions.

Jesse Bering, a psychologist, critiques a strict biomedical reading of suicide as well as the cultural responses to it in a 2019 article in the American online magazine Slate: "This tends to be the prevailing narrative around suicide and suicidality—a message cloaked in a constant admonishment to 'just reach out for help' if you are feeling this way, and someone will try to see you through to the other side. The problem with this, though, is the obvious reality that some problems really are permanent, thank you very much.

We may, with the right therapy or psychopharmacological help, change our perspective of such problems so that they don't cause us so much ongoing distress

. But not all problems fade with time; some actually do get worse. It should not be irrational to acknowledge this existential fact, and yet it remains stubbornly difficult to talk about."

In addition to this, discussions around mental health universalize a privileged caste-class location as the public sphere continues to invisibilize and exclude insecure social existences. While some instances of suicide are made spectacular and problematically attributed only to biomedical causality, instances of farmers' suicides, the mental health of persecuted communities and the institutional murders of people who die of suicide at the hands of a fundamentally exclusionary, marginalising and sadistic socio-political normalcy remain unacknowledged even when conversations around suicide and mental health proliferate.

Lastly, reductive and performative social media gestures do not suffice when the available channels of help are kept outside consistent appraisal and criticism. Apart from behavioural changes in the everyday one inhabits to make the 'safe' space safe enough for people to be vulnerable, suicide prevention helplines need to be assessed and their efficacy and working has to be ensured through a public conversation on the same. Similarly, the capitalist appropriation of mental healthcare and the quality and 'safe'-ness of therapy merit discussions and assessments as well.

On the whole, one arguably needs to move beyond the status-quoist, limited, oversimplified conversations on the human condition and what threatens its stability. Human life should not acquire a short-lived, superficial public significance in the face of a spectacle of its disruption, and responding to it might need substantial discussions that let one's understanding of the same not stagnate but factor in the heterogeneity of human experience under the upheld order of life.



BY ISHITA SINGH

BEYOND SEC. 377: Let's March Away From 'Privacy!'

With the decriminalization of Section 377 two years back there was a wave of joy and enthusiastic celebration within the LGBTQIA+ community and outside. The day was hailed as that of liberation for the community, a day when the dark shadows were bid adieu to in order to move towards a colourful path of 'Pride'. Two years down the line, we see the situation improving but at what cost becomes an imperative question that requires answers. This article is to carry forward that conversation, with a focus on the reasoning used by the courts to read down Section 377.



Photo by Diana Davies

The case against Section 377 carried forward by the Naz Foundation relied heavily on the issue of 'privacy'. Justice AP Shah while reading down Section 377 commented that post-Supreme Court's judgement defending the Right to Privacy in the Aadhaar case, it was inevitable to make Section 377 void in the country. The recurring emphasis on privacy was made in the statements of judges and the judgment.

Decriminalization of homosexuality all over the world has been based on this very argument of privacy, which states that individuals are autonomous and the state or any other external body has a very limited role to play in what goes on in their private lives. The coincidence that the decriminalization of homosexuality across the globe was based on the argument of privacy and not on other well-established arguments, like that of equality, compels us to delve deeper and evaluate the privacy hypothesis. While the sphere of privacy is indispensable to develop oneself and to reach one's full potential, it is imperative to ask: who exactly can exercise this privacy?

The initial appeal against Section 377 was made by AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) and had asked for a complete repeal but not on the ground of

privacy. The ABVA appeal has largely been erased from the common history of the queer movement in India. Most members of the LGBT community who have faced police harassment and intimidation have faced it in the public sphere, and often also under other sections of the Indian Penal Code apart from Section 377. This was why ABVA asked that while oppression and humiliation of sexual minorities happens mostly in the public sphere where they are morally policed by authorities or even other members of society, is it enough to defend privacy?

What are the perils of privacy in the context of the larger, budding queer movement in the country? To answer this, one must take into account the existing socio-economic hierarchies in place. While the Right to Privacy works wonders for those who have the means to exercise it, that is for those who own private property, it leaves the vulnerable members of the very same community who lack access to innocuous private spots at the disposal of tyrannous patrolling. The majority of hijra, kinnar, and working lesbian, gay, and queer people do not have the protection of their 'own bedroom'. Thus, to some extent, the eulogization of the private realm comes at the expense of the degradation of the public sphere.



Public Domain Dedication

Protesters took to the streets in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots in lower Manhattan in the summer of 1969. Stonewall marked a turning point in the gay rights movement.

This systemic invisibilization of the queer community is in itself a form of oppression. A politics of 'visibility'—making certain kinds of marginalized sexual identities more familiar—that works in congruence with the erasure of identity needs to be challenged.

LESSONS FROM PRIDE HISTORY

Another blatant contradiction that appears is that of the lessons learnt by the feminist struggle that has been supported by the LGBTQIA+ community since its inception. Feminist movements all over the globe have been trying to pierce this 'private sphere'—ghar ke andar jo hota hai use ghar mei hee rehne do—from that of the public to make their oppression visible, such as in the case of domestic violence or sexual abuse. In using the argument of privacy for the LGBTQIA+ community, are we not submitting to the same oppressive and exploitative dictates?

A phenomenal instance from which progressive insights can be drawn is that of the UK Mineworkers Strike of 1984-85, which was supported by a group named Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM). At a time when the neoliberal Thatcher government sequestered funds to the National Union of Mineworkers in the move to destroy trade unions, the LGSM group came to the forefront building solidarity for the mineworkers' strike and carrying the movement forward. What was remarkable in this struggle was the forthright assertion and reclaiming of public spaces that very much belongs to people irrespective of their sexual orientation, class or any other parameter. It was an awakening that queer people will not be liberated when forces of privatization demolish public spaces and democratic

accountability. Building solidarity between the two oppressed communities, that is, the LGBTQIA+ community and the toiling sections of society challenged the monopoly over public spaces by the powerful elite.

Even the very origin of 'Pride' goes back to the Stonewall, a predominantly working-class gay bar in New York, which was attacked by the police on June 28, 1969. Militant protests against police brutality were led by Marsha P Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and other revolutionaries who were black, homeless and queer. They emphasized that sexual liberation would never be possible as long as queer people were kept without homes, illiterate and unemployed, without social welfare protections, and defenseless in front of police brutality. Organizations of that era such as the Gay Liberation Front, the Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries (STAR) and others saw solidarity with movements against the imperialist war in Vietnam, anti-racist struggles, and struggles for socialism by labour, tenant and farmworkers' unions as a part of the struggle against patriarchy, heteronormativity and homophobia.

Hence, it becomes clear that sexual liberation centred on privacy has emerged only recently and its limitations are in front of us all. The people's movement against Transgender Persons' (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019 is an example of how the biggest section of the LGBTQIA+ community is demanding safer and more accommodating public spaces open for navigation by all, not private property for the few. A true recognition of oppressed sexual and gender identities requires more such broad-based anti-patriarchal struggles in relation to other struggles in society.



LSGM Group during one of the strike demonstrations. (Source: People's History Museum)



PERIOD LEAVES CONUNDRUM

*Ghettoisation of women or a move towards
workspace equality?*

The global food-delivery unicorn Zomato recently introduced the provision of upto 10 paid leaves for female and trans workers. The provision, which has recieved widespread appreciation has also solicited scritiny by people who questioned the very premise of the provision, invariably triggering a frisky debate over the same.

MS. RUCHIKASHARMA

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Workplaces so far have been largely designed to adopt the masculine worldview which advocates "toughening up". I believe it is in this context only that Ms. Dutt's views are placed, where reporting war, flying jets are also supposed to be jobs that "tough" people do. Women on painful periods do not accordingly qualify to do any of these until they can swallow their pain and not complain about it. The idea is extended to mean that if women want equality then they need to "toughen up" and not complain about biological pains. Period pains which many women suffer from is seen as a sign of "weakness". Needless to say this is highly insensitive.

Additionally, it also defeats the whole purpose of ushering in a world which is more accommodative of women's needs. Acknowledging a different biological setup is hardly being weak, and I for one am glad women are more aware of their problems and are vocal about it. For those women who suffer crippling pains during menstruation, period leave is much needed. Workplaces should not have its employees adjust to it. Workplaces should instead be sensitive to their employees needs and change accordingly.

Lastly, if the worry is about productivity taking a hit due to period leave thereby making women less desirable candidates for recruitment, then this would not be the first time that women would have been asked to take a backseat for just being women. The idea is to battle that and not to acquiesce.

CHAHAT SUSAWAT

Bachelors Student, Hindu College

When we talk about gender equality, our focus must lie upon treating women equally and not identical to men. It is not about erasing or hiding biological differences, rather about taking them into account. And this is exactly why period leaves are required. Zomato's decision to offer period leaves is a small, but much-needed step towards normalising the talk around periods; which still remains a taboo.

MS. ADITI JAIN

Research Scholar, University of Delhi

I strongly believe that provisions such as Period Leave should be provided to the female employees. This does not ghettoize women and does not make them an inferior one. In fact it is a recognition of a biological process which is uncomfortable and painful and therefore making it difficult for women employees to work in the same way as they do on other days. Moreover the leave is not mandatory and can be utilized as per the discretion of the women.

SHEFALI VERMA

Bachelors Student, Hindu College

When we talk of period leaves, it's something that comes out more like a positive development in women's health and employment rights. It gives them a right to think freely for their mind and body and therefore stay-in without bothering about a pay cut. It empowers them to speak openly about their bodies and to gain social recognition for their role as workers. It also doesn't cut out your chances of achieving other basic rights or places them in a lower rung to this. Rights cannot be ranked but equally strived for, on multiple fronts.

AKSHITA RAMOLA

Bachelors Student, Hindu College

When women with so much power and stature to challenge the patriarchal notions of the society complain about granting period leaves in work space, it sadly reflects the elitist mindset and internalised misogyny which still continues to be embedded in our society. Barkha Dutt's tweets are problematic because not only is she generalising period pain and downplaying them but also went on to say that she would participate in 'hiring discrimination' in her organisation. She needs to understand that periods are natural and different individuals have different needs. And no, it would not lead to further 'gendering' but rather initiate a conversation around normalising periods in Indian society and a step towards laying down fair conditions for all. Also, while we are talking about period leaves, let's also initiate a discourse around granting the same to women working in unorganized sector

SHEETAL

Bachelors Student, Hindu College

What needs to end is the constant denial of the fact that how excruciating menstrual cramps are for a lot of women. The stigma around menstruation isn't advancing anywhere near its eradication by women denying the need for rest, exerting themselves for the sake of preventing the 'gendering of workplace' and the constant advices of 'embracing their cramps' instead of making themselves comfortable and try assuaging them. Instead the stigma will end by the universal acceptance of the existence of inconveniences caused by menstruation, and by ending the habit of blowing off the sufferings of menstruating women as 'exaggeration'.

AMISHA BUDHRAJA

Bachelors Student, Hindu College

Menstruation has always been a taboo in India. We still use paper bags to cover up the sanitary pads that we purchase from the general store. Nevertheless it is a biological fact that women have their periods every month accompanied by cramps, mood swings and other biological complexities depending on one's body. Thus to provide with 'period leave' is in no sense a privilege that a woman should get, rather it's the first step to normalise and initiate discussions on menstruation. In today's world, the idea of gender equality has diverged the road between sex and gender in such a manner that women have started to ignore their biological differences and prefer to suffer through the period pain silently in order to show their empowerment. In my opinion, the real empowerment comes from owning yourself, accepting the fact that all bodies are different wherein some may have to go through period pain while some may not, some may be fine with popping a few painkillers and going to work while some may actually need that paid leave. It is a choice which should be offered to women. Hence, I highly appreciate the efforts made by Zomato by providing a ten day paid period leave. It is a step which may reinstate the discussion on 'menstruation benefit bill' making periods absolutely a normal reason for taking leaves.

CORPORATE HIJACKING & CO-OPTATION OF *SOCIAL MOVEMENTS*

BY AMIRAH SAJAD



The world has experienced a sharp rise in social movements in the past few decades.

We have seen numerous instances of mass mobilisation and dissenting voices resulting in the emergence of prominent movements such as Black Lives Matter, against systemic racism and police brutality, Time's Up and Me Too against sexual harassment and violence, and the Shaheen Bagh sitin against the discriminatory CAA-NRC laws. These revolutionary movements have received worldwide support.

The Black Lives Matter movement emerged back in 2013, and started gaining momentum in 2016. The movement was reignited with the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. As the protests started gaining momentum and spread from America to other parts of the world, raising concerns about institutionalised racism in society, big names started coming out in support of the struggle. Nike, Adidas, Netflix and P&G, among other industry giants publicly came out to pledge support to the movement. Some ran social media campaign ads while others provided monetary support to the cause. However, questions arise with regards to the intentions and genuineness behind this support.

Nike, a US-based brand, has been at the forefront of lending support to the BLM movement. In 2018, the athletic wear giant made NFL-star Colin Kaepernick the face of their ad campaign after his controversial decision to kneel for the US national anthem in protest against police brutality in the country. Kaepernick also featured in their ad, titled "Dream Crazy", alongside other inspiring athletes. In May this year, Nike released a powerful ad, urging people to not look away and acknowledge and stand up against racism in the country.

On the surface, it seems like Nike is a brand committed to social justice and equality. But there are worrying allegations of racial discrimination and lack of representation against the company. After Nike released its anti-

racism ad in May, it faced backlash for not having a single black person in a senior leadership position.

Soon after, an Instagram page called "Black at Nike" was formed. The purpose of the page was "amplifying Black voices from current and former Nike employees." The page posted anonymous accounts of people of colour who allegedly faced racial discrimination while working for the company. Their sportswear brand has also been accused of promoting racial stereotyping. With a history like this, their pro-black stand seems hypocritical.

A pattern can be observed here with a lot of companies' actions contradicting with their public stands on issues. Recently, a post featuring an elderly couple who runs a roadside food stall in Delhi struggling to make ends meet went viral on the internet. Food delivery giant Zomato immediately jumped on the bandwagon and made arrangements to get them on board with the app. What seemed like a genuine gesture of goodwill doesn't seem so genuine when we direct our attention to Zomato's history of underpaying their employees and coercing small business owners into selling their food-items for less than cost price. The owner of Coachella, a popular US entertainment festival that almost always features an LGBTQ-inclusive lineup, has donated regularly to anti-LGBTQ and homophobic organisations. Fast fashion brands such as H&M and Forever 21 release "rainbow" merchandise during Pride month, but contribute in no substantial way to LGBTQ emancipation. And therefore, a question arises: Why do brands publicly support causes they don't principally commit to?

The fact is that these companies have an incentive in partaking in this kind of brand activism. In fact, research shows that 64% of consumers prefer brands that engage in social activism. The case with Nike was no different, and they saw a 31% increase in their sales after the Kaepernick ad. It wouldn't be an overstatement to say that

in case any of these brands felt like taking a particular stand on a social issue was proving to be harmful to their profits, they would immediately withdraw support, just as recently observed in the case of the Tanishq ad. The Indian jewellery brand released an ad depicting an interfaith marriage, which received a lot of backlash from the Indian rightwing, following which the company's stock prices dropped, and they decided to withdraw the ad. This sparks discourse on how ethical this cooption and social profiteering actually is. Should brands be allowed to exploit social causes for personal gains, and should this trend be promoted?

This trend has received criticism from people from within the LGBTQ community, who find the culture of 'pinkwashing' and 'queerbaiting' quite offensive and believe that brands should provide practical and substantial help to the community all year round, instead of exploiting the movement with tokenistic gestures during Pride month. The black community has accused the privileged elites of always viewing them through the lens of value and profit, first by enslaving them for centuries, and now using their identity to earn race-based capital. The radical left believes that these giant corporations, along with other capitalistic structures, are responsible for the exploitation and oppression of the masses, and later for the appropriation and commodification of their struggles, through co-option of their movements.

This phenomenon has real life implications, both positive and negative. On one hand, this kind of brand activism results in the concerned movement gaining exposure and outreach, and might encourage sections of the population who are unaware or uninformed about a particular issue, to educate themselves, thereby benefiting the movement and bringing about promising social change. Proponents of this culture also argue that in case of social movements bringing about changes that are in contrast to the status quo of societal norms and accep-

tability, brands and companies publicly supporting the causes may help in normalisation and standardisation of that particular concept or practice.

But the practice has valid criticism attached to it as well. Corporate giants are notoriously famous for extending tokenistic support to these social movements on social media or via advertisements for "brownie wokeness point", while they take no substantial action to bring about positive change. Sometimes, this kind of activism may also be perceived as appropriation of a struggle. In some cases, the concerned brands may even be seen engaging in behaviour that stands in direct conflict with their supposed stand on the issue. Consumers often take this brand activism at face-value, and it isn't feasible for them to research every brand to make sure their claims are backed by substance, so this kind of activism may be considered as deceiving and misleading to the general public. Not to mention, it is extremely unjust to co-opt a movement merely for profits while giving nothing back to the community. This practice makes it acceptable for these companies to lend bare-minimum support to social justice struggles also absolves them of their obligation to contribute to society.

At this point, it is imperative to note that social movements are hijacked not only by corporations, but in some cases, also by people who partake in these movements as allies. The recent Hathras rape and murder case sparked nationwide protests against systematic discrimination and violence against Dalits.

In one such protest, Swara

CORPORATE
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Bhaskar, who is an upper-caste Bollywood actress, was seen sharing the stage with Dalit leader Chandrashekhar Azad. The scene sparked outrage, with members of the Dalit community accusing Swara of taking up space meant for Dalits and hijacking the movement. She was called a parasite and accused of jumping on stage un-invited for visibility.

This incident isn't the first of allies taking up space meant for marginalised communities. Although allies must use their privilege to highlight and amplify these movements, does this give them the right to hog spaces that should be reserved for the oppressed? This behaviour indicates the presence of some sort of internalised superiority and saviour complex, that must be recognised and condemned at all costs.

So, how do we tread the fine line between support/allyship of a movement and its co-option? We need to hold corporations and brands accountable and ensure that their vocal support is backed by tangible contributions, and that their core ideologies align with their public statements. We must, collectively ensure that brands that exploit social movements for social profiteering are being called out and facing substantial consequences for their pseudo-activism, be it in the form of boycotts or pressure by the public. As allies, we must learn to step aside, pass the mic to communities that face injustice and focus on amplifying their voices, instead of trying to take up the role of their saviours. Supporters of a moment must stand back, and let the oppressed and the disenfranchised be the leaders of their own struggles.



A protester carries the carries a U.S. flag upside, a sign of distress, next to a burning building Thursday, May 28, 2020, in Minneapolis. Protests over the death of George Floyd, a black man who died in police custody Monday, broke out in Minneapolis for a third straight night. Julio Cortez/AP

HOW THE PANDEMIC CHANGED OUR DAILY LIVES

Photo Essay



Fist bumps replace handshakes.



A man and a woman are seen dining under a plastic shield Wednesday, May 27, 2020 in a restaurant of Paris. As restaurants in food-loving France prepare to reopen, some are investing in lampshade-like plastic shields to protect diners from the virus. The strange-looking contraptions are among experiments restaurants are trying around the world as they try to lure back clientele while keeping them virus-free. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus) Associated Press (INSIDER)





Welcoming Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar to the White House, Trump avoided the customary handshake. The two men bowed with Namaste to each other instead.



The Prince of Wales using a Namaste gesture to greet Rolling Stone Ronnie Wood at the Prince's Trust Awards 2020 at the London Palladium on March 11.



A woman wearing a face mask and a plastic bag pulls a cart loaded with bags of recyclables through the streets of Lower Manhattan in April. (CNN)



US President Donald Trump participates in a tour of a Honeywell International plant that manufactures personal protective equipment in Phoenix, Arizona on May 5. (Brendan Smialowski / AFP)



Anti-government protesters walk through the streets of Hong Kong. (Tyrone Siu/Reuters)



(Vox.com)



Dayaram Kushwaha carries his 5-year-old son, Shivam, as he and members of his extended family make their way back to his home village from New Delhi during the pandemic. (Reuters)



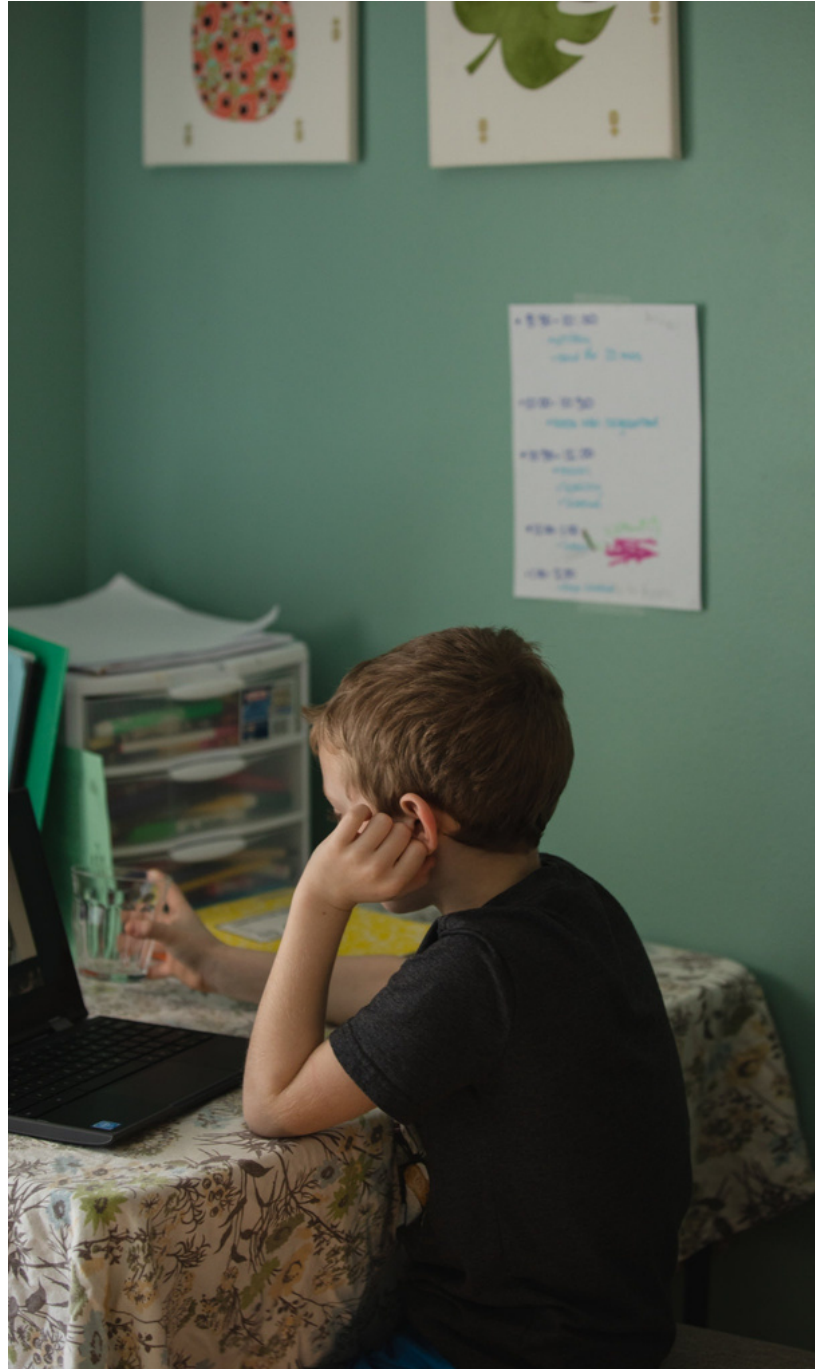
As fear stricken governments across borders lock citizens down into their homes, women suffer a greater deal at the hands of domestic violence. (Reuters)



The demand for cycles has risen during the pandemic as people shift to cycling for physical fitness. Picture Credits: Economic Times



Staff members meeting to discuss I.C.U. patients at Brooklyn Hospital Center last week. (Victor J. Blue for The New York Times)



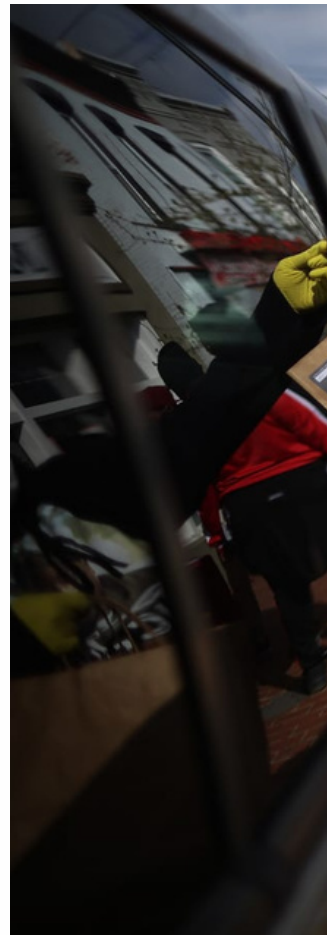
Anders Peistrup, a second-grader in the Seattle area, learning online at home. School officials and researchers are split on whether the potential benefits of school closings are worth the strain on families and communities. Most educational activities have moved online amidst the pandemic. (Christian Sorensen Hansen for The New York Times)



Clear water is seen in the canals of Venice due to fewer tourists and motorboats and less pollution, as the spread of the Covid-19 continues. (Manuel Silvestri/Reuters)



Refugees take shelter in a gas station in the Turkish country side, saying they want to cross the closed Greek border and do not want to be taken to Istanbul, were they could be homeless and potentially exposed to coronavirus, March 18, 2020.





Refugees displaced from Afrin line up to receive bread from the Syrian Red Crescent in Ahras, Syria, on March 25, 2018. (AFSHIN ISMAELI/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES)



Martha's Table volunteer Poet Taylor helps distribute hundreds of free hot meals donated by the Clyde's Restaurant Group to people in need during the novel coronavirus pandemic. (Chip Somodevilla)



COLLOQUIUM

Discussions for engineering Social Change

www.hinducollegegazette.com/colloquium

The Symposium Society, since its inception, has worked towards creating a healthy environment within the campus space for socio-political and intellectual discourse. In continuation to this endeavour, and in an attempt to encourage insightful discussions amidst the pandemic, the society launched its webinar series called 'Colloquium'. The society regularly calls in specialists in the fields of public policy, research, education, civil society activism, international affairs and social leadership for a webinar which is open to students and young professionals from across the country.

SESSION 1: ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY, CIRCULAR ECONOMY & THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Date: 8th October 2020

Resource Person: Ms. Gurmehr Marwah, UNEP (Top Left)

[Watch Here](#)

SESSION 2: PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Date: 18th October 2020

Resource Person: Ms. Shazia A.F. Rehman, Government of Delhi (Top Middle)

[Watch Here](#)

SESSION 3: PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES & POLICY INTERVENTIONS IN INDIA, COVID 19 AND BEYOND

Date: 18th October 2020

Resource Person: Ms. Urvashi Prasad, Niti Aayog (Top Right)

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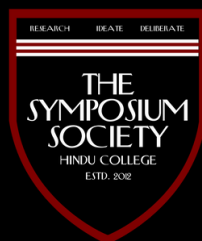
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ISSUING BODY: THE SYMPOSIUM SOCIETY HINDU COLLEGE

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symposium.amitoj@gmail.com

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

symposium.prateek@gmail.com

CONTACT US

The Symposium Society, Hindu College

+7814980528 | hinducollegegazette@gmail.com

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