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FACULTY ADVISOR'S NOTE

DR SYED AREESH AHMAD

With great pride, I present Volume 2, Number 2, of Ramjas Political Review.

In an academic environment where undergraduate students are usually overcome by the dark ennui of exams, assignments, and tests—which smothers their creative instincts in the monotony of academic regimen—our journal, Ramjas Political Review, stands as a beacon of light. It offers them a unique opportunity, and a medium, to put into practice and infuse life into the theory they learn in their classrooms, by manifesting it in the adventure of words as they attempt to apply the abstract to the concrete, especially when they write for us with such purpose.

I dare say that our contributors to this edition are not unlike the young Machiavelli, grappling with the realities of power and statecraft, or a Rousseau, challenging the conventions of authority and freedom. Be it the erudite Prof Quentin Skinner, speaking of liberty and colonialism, or our other young scholars analysing global politics, debating theories of modernity, or reflecting on books, their work reflects a commitment to the same core question that animates political philosophy: Could there be a more appropriate way to live together? Ramjas Political Review, as the selection of contributions in the present edition will testify, is a marquee showcasing an assortment of educated opinions on the questions that need much debating in our contemporary world.

I am delighted to report that RPR has seen a remarkable surge in submissions, and an expanding global readership. Our very competent Editorial Board's incessant quest to satisfy every academic parameter that is required for a reputed journal reflects the intellectual energy and organisational excellence of the dedicated team members who never let their passion diminish in the face of despair and drudgery. I must make a special mention of the Editor-in-Chief, Prem Ansh Sinha, who has been at the vanguard of RPR's onward march to perfection, and nothing would have been possible without his selfless devotion to the cause. This journal is more than just a publication—it is a journey of accomplishment, of leadership, of unseen avenues of critical thinking, and of real-life editorial experiences. The skills gathered and honed, in working for the journal, would serve the members of RPR team well in academia, public service, and beyond.

I earnestly appeal to the college administration, our faculty members, alumni, and students to continue supporting this initiative, as contributors, readers, and mentors, because its vitality lies not just in the output, but in the vibrant community it is building in the Department of Political Science.

This remarkable publication is our labour of love. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Dr Syed Areesh Ahmad
Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
Ramjas College, University of Delhi

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S NOTE

PREM ANSH SINHA

With very rare constructive breakthroughs in contemporary days, the study of political science in India is slowly sliding into irrelevance. For those uninterested in joining the coveted civil services or taking some other route, the discipline has become a medium of polarisation; they sell their souls to the devil, for if not that, what else could be the route to instant fame?

An education in political science must be taken up as a public service to this newly reborn republic struggling to run her institutions effectively; and with the government inflicting a self-wound by implementing a flawed higher education policy, the burdens now falls on how much a student can do. For undergrads, this implies going beyond our classrooms, trashing the performative and flashy social media activism, and filtering out unnecessary noise, to understand the essence of relevant research by immersing ourselves in archives. On reading these contexts, it becomes abundantly clear on how important it is to cultivate and sustain this publication.

This issue has our interview with Prof Quentin Skinner, where he, very generously, imparts some fine words of wisdom—as a reader, I would not want to miss those pages. Apart from that finely edited interview, we have eight academically rigorous pieces. Despite coming from institutions and think tanks across the country, each following different academic calendars, our authors promptly coordinated with our team throughout our comprehensive editorial process—this requires our special thanks to their tireless efforts in helping us shape the journal.

In placing *The School of Athens* on our cover, just as Raphael gathered the foremost thinkers of the classical world into a shared space of inquiry and debate, so too does our journal endeavour to cultivate a living conversation among political scholars through this enduring image. And, much as the great teachers of politics, Socrates and Aristotle, guided their students not merely by instruction but also by timely counsel, I convey my enormous regards and thanks to our Faculty Advisor, Dr Syed Areesh Ahmad, whose wisdom and experiential guidance, always ensures that our journal does not forget the stream of flow. I must also acknowledge the alacrity of our Creatives Board and the consistent push for perfection by our sincere Editorial Board. To their efforts, our publication stands tall.

Sincerely,
Prem Ansh Sinha
Editor-in-Chief
Ramjas Political Review

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A CONVERSATION WITH PROF QUENTIN SKINNER

Interviewed by Prem Ansh Sinha (Editor-in-Chief)
Edited by Alankrita Singh (Associate Editor)

Prof Quentin Skinner, Emeritus Professor of Humanities at Queen Mary University of London, and former Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, is a founding figure of the Cambridge School of political thought. He is the author of various critically acclaimed books like *Liberty as Independence* (2025), *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978), and *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (1995), amongst others.

The interview, as taken on April 1, 2025, is as follows.

In your latest book, *Liberty as Independence*, you shed light on the history of the political ideal of liberty in terms of your seminal creation, which is, the *Third Concept of Liberty*, where you propose independence as a form of liberty. Can the anti-colonial and nationalist movements in South and Southeast Asia be a manifestation of this sentiment of liberty as independence? Additionally, can it be said that the historical quest for independence by marginalised groups across the globe to get rid of systemic injustices is an extrapolation of your book?

Firstly, the view in which I am interested is not that independence is a *form* of liberty; it is the more radical claim that what liberty *means* is

independence. The claim is—liberty is not just a matter of being able to act without restraint. It consists of independence from the possibility of restraint. Those who espouse this view are not denying that if there is someone who restrains or prevents you from acting at will, then in case you have lost some of your liberty of action. Though those who espouse my view of liberty, do not think that that is the question one needs to focus on if they wish to understand the concept of civil or political liberty, and that is because there is a logically prior question to be answered which is, "Is there anyone who could prevent you from acting according to your autonomous will, if they chose?" Then, "Are you living in subjection to and hence, in dependence on, the will and power of somebody else?" If you are, you are not a free person, as you do not have an autonomous will. You are never able to act entirely according to your own will, because everything that you do, is done with the implicit or explicit permission of the person who could prevent you from acting if they chose. If that is your predicament, you are never able to act freely. The earliest exponents of this view like to say, if you are in that predicament, you have a master, whereas freedom consists of being your own master. Freedom is self-government; freedom is not living in subjection to the arbitrary will of anyone else.

Now, considering this concept in the context of anti-colonial movements in South Asia—including India and Southeast Asia, I can certainly say that the first great example in my lifetime of rejecting colonial rule and describing that move as that of gaining independence, was that of India. What came into force in August 1947 was the *Independence Act*, and it was that Act by which the British agreed to transfer sovereignty to the Indian National Assembly. The other similar anti-colonial and post-colonial instances come from Africa, instead of Asia. The first ten

years later in 1957, when the Gold Coast, under Kwame Nkrumah, declared its independence, it did not quite negotiate as India did with Britain; it declared itself independent and renamed itself as Ghana, and three years later, Britain agreed to grant independence to Nigeria, which still celebrates 1 October 1960 as its Independence Day. So, are they taking up the view of liberty that I first talked about? I do not think that they are animated by the view that what liberty is, is not being subject to arbitrary power, but what they are doing is taking up the vocabulary of the very first group of colonies that declared themselves to be independent from British rule, and that was very much earlier than any of these cases. That was the Declaration of Independence that was issued by the thirteen British colonies in North America. When the Continental Congress of these colonies declared independence—and that is still celebrated in the United States as July 4, 1776. Now, all of these writers are fervently of the view that liberty is independence, and when they speak of breaking from the British rule, they all speak of independence from submission to the arbitrary power of the British state, and they see that as an arbitrary power because, although the colonies are taxed, they are not represented in the Parliament that has imposed the taxes on them. That means that the law of Britain faces them not as something to which they have consented so freely; instead, it confronts them as an arbitrary power. That is exactly the argument laid out in the earliest of all the tracts against the British government. As soon as taxation of the colonies was declared in 1764, James Otis—the first in the field attacking the alleged rights of the British colonists—was followed by Daniel Dulany and especially John Dickinson, in his famous *Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania*. The colonies, he says, are being taxed without consent. But to be taxed without consent is to live under arbitrary power. We are living under arbitrary power; we are living as slaves—that is what he wants to

say. Returning to the case of Asia, unquestionably one country in Southeast Asia, which, like India, declared its independence in the 1940s—but in which the people do not certainly enjoy independence but are still living in subjection to arbitrary power—is Myanmar, which became a military dictatorship in 1962. When the army seized power again in 2020, there were constant protests from the United Nations that this involved the suppression of human rights. This is the power in the states that confronts its citizens as an arbitrary power to which they are wholly subjected, and on my account, this is unfreedom.

Prof Skinner, thinking more into it, several commentators and I believe that the modern threat to liberty arises from surveillance capitalism and algorithmic governance, where the individuals are not necessarily under direct state control but are increasingly dominated by opaque corporate algorithms. Do you think your politico-legal framework provides an adequate response to this, or is there a limit to it when it comes to the digital age or the later half of the 21st century?

I absolutely think that the view of freedom you need in order to talk about the problem that you have raised is exactly the one that I have laid out. I do not think that the view I have put forward to you of liberty as independence would need any adaptations to meet the present conditions you talk about. The whole point in my book is that this is the view we now ought to adopt, and that is because it gets to the root of what it means to be a free person. Far more effective than the tendency of most current political theories—certainly in the Anglophone tradition—to argue that liberty is simply not being restrained from acting according to your will, that is to say, by some physical or coercive force. They are

talking about somebody having the power over you to exercise that force. Now, that silent power, which may or may not be exercised, is everywhere with us in the relationship between the richest parts of the world and the poorer parts of the world. A rich country that wishes to invest in a poor country will always be in a position to extract special conditions—not because it demands them, but because both sides know that it could demand them. So, there is going to be an almost slavish reaction, which will be absolutely impossible to get away from, because you find yourself in the poorer country confronting an arbitrary power, which has the power to act as it wills, or not to act.

Prof Skinner, in recent times, we have seen the rise of populism across the globe, which in turn has reignited the debate on the ideas of republicanism as espoused by Machiavelli and Rousseau. Do you believe that this trend indicates a positive slope of political participation, or is it the other way around? Furthermore, should this trend be taken as a contemporary political occurrence or a reinvention of the past?

The way I am thinking about liberty, (it) entails democracy. This is very important because the traditional Anglophone views of liberty—as not being hindered or interfered with by the exercises of power—take no position on what form of government best secures civil liberty. You could be equally free in various different forms of government, and, as Isaiah Berlin said in a famous passage in his *Two Concepts of Liberty*, that you might be freer or less interfered with in enlightened despotism as in a democracy. So, there is no connection in that liberal tradition between liberty and forms of government. In the account that I want to give, there is a very strong connection between liberty and democracy. If you agree

that to have liberty in a state is to have an independent will, then you are committing yourself to a democratic form of government. This is because you are agreeing that if the state faces you as an arbitrary will—as it does in Myanmar—then you do not have any civil liberty. The only way by which you could be free in a state is if the laws that govern you can be seen as an expression of your will, so that you remain free in obeying them because you have consented to them. The only way you could have consented to the laws is if you live in a democracy, where the actions of the government are controlled by the will of the people. This is so that the laws reflect, at the very least, the represented will of the people, or the majority. The nearest that a state can get to meeting the requirement of liberty that I am setting out, is to be itself a representative democracy. It would be even better if it could be a direct democracy like the republican city-states in Europe during the Renaissance period, but these are single cities. Once you try to rule a state consisting of a billion people, then all of those ways are thrown out the window, and what you are left with is some kind of representation. Now, it is not ideal for my view of freedom, because if I am saying that you are free only if the law reflects your will—that is to say, you have consented to it—then the minorities have not consented, so the law does not actually express their will. So, what is the answer to that? That is the really hard question that is left for anyone like me. The person who thought that he had answered that was Rousseau, because he wanted to say, well, there is just not your will and there is not just everyone's will—there is the possibility of a general will. I have never quite understood what that means. It might mean that, in coming to understand the majority will, what you come to understand is what is best—and that might make you think, well, I consent to that.

Eurocentrism can be put forth as a widely accepted critique for any theory, thesis, or domain in history and social sciences, Prof Skinner. Many scholars such as the likes of Samir Amin and Amitav Acharya have written at length about the need to diversify perspectives of all the disciplines within the social sciences. Is this a valid criticism, in your opinion?

I can answer this specifically from the fact that if a theory was articulated in a particular part of the world, in one particular language, it does not immediately follow that it cannot be translated to other languages. It can certainly be understood as a way of thinking that may be considered by a community whose values are very different from those of the person who has articulated the view. I have had the personal experience of giving lectures on this subject in China. The audience I was speaking to in China were hearing me in my language, but the discussions showed that they had no difficulty in following what I wanted to say about this very abstract question, and they had no difficulty in assessing it. What I think I want to say about the centrism of the major languages—or eurocentrism in relation to postcolonialism—is that that is a story which, as far as what I am talking about, is over. In the case of some of the most abstract concepts that are used across different cultures, you can have cross-cultural conversations, or at least that has been my very good experience of lecturing in China. It would not be so easy now, but I have lectured about this material during the period of détente in Russia, and there was no difficulty. It was not thought to be Eurocentric; it was thought to come from a common culture. The origins, which are contingent and, in this case, come from an English language source, of any of these abstract questions that we use to articulate or organise our political life, such as justice, fairness, freedom, and rights, do not matter,

so long as you sufficiently make it evident what you have in mind when you use these terms; then you can have a dialogue.

Professor, you have written widely on the elements of forensics in the works of William Shakespeare. How would you interpret the relationship between Prospero and Caliban from *The Tempest*, as a metaphor for the early modern states' justification for colonial rule? Does the notion of liberty in Renaissance republicanism apply only to the citizens of a polity, or can it be extended to those subjected to rule without consent?

No, it cannot. Caliban is viewed as a slave, and people writing in Shakespeare's time would have been intimately acquainted with the vocabulary which I am talking about, as it was received from classical sources. These classical sources, have been available certainly in the English language traditions of debate, by someone like Shakespeare or any Renaissance writer for a very long time. They come from classical Rome, and in classical Rome, you will find, in the moralists and especially in the historians, just the view of freedom and enslavement enacted in *The Tempest*. Caliban is enslaved because he is wholly subject to the power of those on the island. The source of this in Shakespeare is not completely clear, but what is clear is that he would have read some of the Latin texts, given his very good education he received that contain this view. This is the view of liberty articulated in the classical world, for instance, in Livy's *History of Rome*, because it centres on the deposition of an authoritarian monarchy and its replacement by a republic in which there are tribunes of the people. That is presented as the great watershed in ancient history by Livy, reflecting on the history of Rome. In the Renaissance, when Machiavelli writes his *Discourses on Livy*, they are

concerned with what in Latin is called *civitas libera*—a free state. Now, there is freedom at the end of *The Tempest*, because Prospero is leaving:

> Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have's mine own,
> Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true,
> I must be here confined by you,
> Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
> Since I have my dukedom got
> And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
> In this bare island by your spell;
> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands.

He is asking for freedom, and that is the classical account we are being given—he wants to be his own master; he wants to return home.

You are widely regarded as one of the founders of contextualisation in modern political thought. As a young student of social sciences, I find it very tempting to draw contemporary interpretations from primary historical texts. How can we avoid this temptation and strike a balance between scholarly rigour and creative exploration of ideas?

I think they are different undertakings, and if you are able to work on the historical texts with sufficient grasp on the culture and the context in which it was written, you would leave yourself with an account that is then open to your appraisal here and now. That is a tricky thing to do, but I am a profound believer, as a historian, in the possibility that what

historical excavation can show you is, as it were, a buried treasure: there are things there which you can appropriate, which you can apply. That is what I am saying in relation to the concept of liberty, or the concept of the state, justice, rights, or all of these abstract ideas about which you can get an account from the texts. Of course, there is always something that is going on in these texts, which is not simply what they say; these texts have often made an intervention in the society in which they were written. If you want to say that you have understood any one of these works, then it is not just that you have grasped what they say they mean about a certain concept—it would also be an account of what they thought they were doing in applying the concept in the way that they did. Otherwise, you cannot be said to understand them, but you can certainly make something of what they are doing.

Prof Skinner, our readers would certainly appreciate your experiential wisdom and suggestions to the young students aspiring to take the route to academia.

I think that the most important lesson that I have wanted to pass on to a young student who is embarking on an academic career is: Always make sure that what you are studying is what you really think matters the most. In other words, do not follow fashion. Fashions in academic life come and go, all of them. Sometimes, one particular kind of historical or philosophical study is foremost, and then ten years later, no one is doing it. So you better not get caught up in fashion, you would much rather get caught up in some subject that really interests you, because in that way, you are sure to make the best of what you possibly can of your career.

One thing that I would always say as a historian to someone who is beginning an academic career as a historian is to always ask yourself whether your topic has an archive. When I began my research career working on the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, there was indeed an archive—in the home of the family in whose service Hobbes had lived most of his life. It was in their library, but the Hobbes scholars had not noticed it. So there was a correspondence that no one had read, and I found a manuscript by Hobbes about monarchical succession—which nobody knew existed—simply by going to the archive and getting permission to publish it, and that was what set me on my path. Always ask yourself, about whatever the historical topic you are approaching: where is the archive, and what is it saying? And India is phenomenally rich in archives, as we have seen from people writing about the history of anticolonialism.

Something else that I would want to say to everyone who is becoming a scholar, is to not forget that you basically are a teacher. Anyone who earns their living in a university, of course, will be doing a scholarship nowadays, but we are all in universities as teachers. In the traditions I know well, in the countries where I have taught—which have mostly been European countries—but not altogether, I am always amazed by how little instruction younger scholars have had in how to design a lecture or a course, how to give a lecture, or how to present a paper. I really ought to be talking now not to you, but rather you talking to your teachers: Get them to help in this way, or watch them in action—especially the ones that you admire—because at the end, we are teachers, and we ought to learn how to teach.

Ends.

Academic Essays

"Daughter-of-Him and Wife-of-Him": Gender Analysis of Women's Representation in the 2024 Pakistan General Elections

Ritvik Singh Sabharwal

School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Abstract

In 'King of the Mountain: The Nature of Political Leadership,' author Arnold Ludwig used statistics to assert that leadership among humans was a gendered phenomenon. Even in contemporary politics, women's leadership is restricted and conditioned by gendered power relations. As the conservative nation of Pakistan elected its new parliament, asymmetrical dynamics of power between genders within democracies were reasserted. Pakistan's 2024 Parliamentary Elections offer a unique case study for providing insights into women's relationships with political power and elections, which are dictated by their relationships with male leaders and political dynasties. It also answers questions regarding the absence of women from decision-making processes.

Keywords: Gender, Pakistan, Dynasticism, Elections, Electoral patriarchy

Introduction

Power among humans is a product of asymmetrical beliefs as to what gives a person authority over the other. The disempowerment of one generates the currency of power for the other. For most of human history, social cleavage, which has served as the greatest axis of disempowerment in society, has been the gender divide. As the abstraction of gender has become increasingly reified, the space for women to acquire power in real terms has decreased. Psychologist Arnold Ludwig performed a long-term study of political leaders across the globe in the 20th century. In his reporting treatise, '*King of the Mountain: The Nature of Political Leadership*' (2002), he concluded firmly that "With notable exceptions, the one thing you cannot be as a ruler is a woman." He foresees that this statement that he posits will attract a barrage of counterarguments. Therefore, he backed his statement with the data, that out of all the nonceremonial leaders in the world in the 20th century, only one was a woman (Ludwig, 2002).

Ludwig provides an interesting classification of women leaders in the modern world. He broadly divides them into two groups. The first are those who earn their positions by virtue of their own popularity, and the second are those whose power in politics is predicated upon their connection to a popular male relative. These leaders are in no way less potent than their male counterparts and may be as charismatic, tough, and powerful as their masculine contemporaries, but they owe their political careers to their fathers, husbands, or brothers (Ludwig, 2002). Leaders in this category can emerge as powerful figures in their own right, yet their roots in politics are conditioned by the patriarchal idea of dynastic succession and carrying forward the legacy of their male relatives. There is no doubt that Indira Gandhi, Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina, and Isabel Peron are powerful and popular leaders. However, they still owe their political mileage, at least in part, to Jawaharlal Nehru, Zia-Ur-Rehman, Sheikh Mujib, and Juan Peron. For the second category

of women leaders, who rise to positions of power without familial connections to popular male leaders, the picture *vis-à-vis* patriarchy is not any better. Leaders such as Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, Jenny Shipley, and Julia Guillard were all perceived to be practitioners of masculinist politics (Ludwig, 2002).

Methodological Overview

The author of this paper uses the framework established by Arnold Ludwig to demarcate women leaders whose political position is a result of their familial ties to male leaders to analyse the results of the 2024 Pakistan general elections, and establish the impact of patriarchal gender relations on electoral politics in Pakistan. The author utilises historical analysis to situate these results within the history of gendered politics in Pakistan to present a larger picture of the case study. Qualitative interpretivism serves as a basis for investigating literature sources and news reports to understand how the social-gender divide translates into asymmetrical gendered power relations in Pakistan's politics.

Literature Review

In recent years, there has been a renaissance of studies on the politics of gender in Pakistan. There has been a proliferation of studies on femininities, masculinities, and patriarchal control of public spaces of media, politics, and academics. There has also been a steady growth of studies on the intersection of cleavages of class, ethnicity, caste, and religion with patriarchy in Pakistan. This new wave of research has been spearheaded by scholars such as Farzana Bari, Farida Shaheed, Ayesha Khan, Khalida Ghous, Beena Sarwar, Mariam Mufti, Khawar Mumtaz, Afiya Shehrbano Zia, Bina Shah, and Asma Barlas.

Two major areas of academic research have dominated the study of patriarchal influences in Pakistani society. The first type of research is case

studies, that look at macrocosmic cases of masculinist control and transgressions against women's rights. These include studies such as Muhammad Javed Akhtar and Shahla Gull on the representation of women in the local politics of Multan (Akhtar & Gull, 2021) and Asiya Jawed, Ayesha Khan and Komal Qidwai on women involved in protest movements across Pakistan (Jawed, Khan, & Qidwai, 2021). The other field of research on women's presence in Pakistan's polity is social analysis and ethnographic research, which includes works like Azeema Begum's piece on women's participation in Pakistani politics (Begum, 2023) and Farida Shaheed's work on the relationship between religion and gender in Pakistan (Shaheed, 2010).

The 2024 election became the next stage in the trajectory of women's presence in Pakistan's political space. By taking inspiration and reference from both categories of works mentioned above, this paper aims to trace and problematise how women's access to power in Pakistani society is shaped and conditioned by patriarchy.

History of Women's Presence in Pakistan's Politics

Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had envisioned gender equity in the new state he created (Akhtar & Gull, 2021). However, only two women held seats in Pakistan's constituent assembly – Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz and Begum Shaista Ikramullah. The impact, participation, and influence that women had in the movement to create Pakistan were not mirrored at all by the share of the decision-making process they were able to obtain in the new country (Bari, 2010). In the early part of Pakistan's history, only two women politicians held influential positions in politics. These were Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah (sister of Pakistan's first Governor-General, Mohammad Ali Jinnah) and Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan (wife of Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan). Fatima Jinnah ran for the President of Pakistan against the military ruler Ayub Khan in 1965. She lost the election in the

face of intense misogyny (Shaheed, 2010), but initiated a wave of popular participation by women in Pakistan's politics (Saiyid, 2001). Begum Ra'ana was instrumental in forming the most active gender equity advocacy group in Pakistan, the All-Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) in 1949, and later also served in many government roles, including as ambassador to various countries and Governor of Sindh province (Malik, 1997). During Field Marshal Ayub Khan's rule in Pakistan (1958 to 1969), women were put into educational institutions and became a crucial part of the workforce (Grünenfelder, 2013). In the 1970s, the People's Party under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto gained power and implemented the current Constitution of Pakistan in 1973, which ascribed full formal equality to women (Akhtar & Gull, 2021), at least in theory. In the same period, Pakistan also witnessed Ashraf Khatoon Abbasi become the first woman deputy speaker of the Pakistani parliament (Malik, 1997).

The 1977 coup by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, caused a major decline in women's status in all spheres of Pakistani society. Under Zia (1977-1988), women were completely removed from political participation, had their legal rights severely restricted, and became the target of a narrow-minded and bigoted islamisation programme. Zia's regime partnered with right-wing clergy to inhibit women's expression into the *chaddor* (veil) and *char-diwaari* (home). Through the use of dress codes, media censorship, *Hudood* (limitation) ordinances, and biased *Zina* (extramarital affair) laws, Zia attempted to kill any resistance to patriarchy by conflating it with Islam (Shaheed, 2010).

The post-Zia era saw two major developments that completely transformed the gender polity of Pakistan and destroyed the hopes of many misogynists that Zia's imposed religious patriarchy would be permanent. The first was *Mohtarma* Benazir Bhutto's election for the prime ministership in 1988. Not only did Benazir, daughter of the deposed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, shatter many patriarchal glass ceilings by

becoming the first female head of government in an Islamic country, but she also put women at the front and centre in her political campaigning and policy choices (Weiss, 1990). Although Benazir was not able to completely repeal Zia's regime of misogyny, she both symbolically and in a few concrete ways defanged it (Malik, 1997). The other seismic shift was the publication of the book *My Feudal Lord* by Tehmina Durrani in 1991. Durrani was the ex-wife of Ghulam Mustafa Khar, an extremely powerful landlord and influential politician who previously served as the Governor and Chief Minister of Punjab and was a federal minister as well. Durrani revealed in her book that Khar had repeatedly abused her in a myriad of ways, with impunity (Durrani et al., 1994). Durrani's act of revealing her story opened a proverbial can of worms. It revealed the rotten nexus between patriarchy, religion, feudalism, class, and politics that had subjugated women across Pakistan in all spheres. In particular, it highlighted how local notables such as landlords and tribal chieftains used traditionalism as a garb to hide the abuse they meted out on women (Malik, 1997). *My Feudal Lord* played a critical role in mainstreaming the conversation about the gendered nature of power in Pakistan.

It was under the rule of dictator Pervez Musharraf (1999-2007), that reserved seats for women in national, provincial, and local governments were permanently embedded in the government structure after a long history of temporary measures. However, these reserved seats are not sufficient to represent the total population of women (Khan & Naqvi, 2020). Despite all of these developments, women have largely been "missing women" in Pakistan's polity (Ali & Akhtar, 2012).

Pakistan's 2024 General Election & Ludwig's Framework

Pakistan's National Assembly has 336 seats, wherein, 266 seats are openly contested, while 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 for religious minorities. The number of women elected to the national assembly on unreserved seats rose in the elections of 2008 from 2002, and again in

2013 from 2008. However, in the 2018 National Assembly Election, the number of winning women candidates dropped for the first time in the 21st century (Khan & Naqvi, 2020).

In the 2024 elections, only 11 per cent of the total contesting candidates were women (Hasnain, 2023). Women faced immense barriers as they voted and participated in the electoral process, due to social pressures (AFP, 2024), unfulfilled quotas (Junaidi, 2024), socioeconomic structural problems (Ahmed, 2024), labour exploitation (Iqbal, 2024), and the repeated failure of mainstream political parties in fulfilling their promises to women (Irfan, 2024). The last condition in particular has signalled to women that political parties are either unable or unwilling to give women a slice of the pie of power. The transsexual community faced even more hurdles in becoming part of the democratic exercise (Baig, 2024). As a result, the turnout among women decreased significantly from 46.89 per cent in 2018 to 41.3 per cent in 2024 (Fazal, Khan, & Irfan, 2024). The decrease in women turnout represents a reversal of the gains made by women voters and candidates since the restoration of democracy in Pakistan in 2008. As Pakistan's political spectrum became more polarised into pro-Imran Khan and anti-Imran Khan factions, women's representation issues were not given space in mainstream discussions.

Despite this, several important positive developments have occurred. For the first time, a woman from a religious minority community was chosen by a mainstream party to run for an unreserved seat (Bacha, 2023). The number of registered women voters also rose (I. Khan, 2023), and the gender gap among voters fell further (U. Khan, 2024).

Pakistan Today reported on February 12, 2024 that, out of the 839 women candidates running for the National Assembly, only 12 managed to win in their respective constituencies (Staff Report, 2024). The winning candidates are listed in the appendix. Of the 12 winning

candidates, 10 are linked to powerful male politicians as daughters, wives, and nieces. Even among women candidates from the major parties who lost their elections, the most prominent names are those women who are linked to powerful male politicians through family, such as Mehrbano Qureshi (daughter of former Federal Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi), Samar Bilour (granddaughter of former President, Ghulam Ishaq Khan), Rehana Dar (mother of former member of National Assembly, Usman Dar), and Saira Afzal Tarar (daughter-in-law of former President, Muhammad Rafiq Tarar).

On the whole, Ludwig's thesis on the genesis of women leaders holds for Pakistan's politics in general and becomes even clearer if we analyse the 2024 Pakistani general election. From Fatima Jinnah and Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan to Benazir Bhutto to the current elected women parliamentarians, a majority of women leaders in Pakistan's politics are reliant on the name and fame of their male relatives. With the arguable exception of Benazir Bhutto (Jangbar, 2021), most of these "wife-of" and "daughter-of" women leaders in Pakistan's politics are unable to make a name for themselves independent of their husbands, fathers, or other male relatives. They lack any political power of their own and are either vehicles for a family legacy or proxy candidates for men who are unable to contest elections for some reason.

A Gender Analysis of Women's Electoral Performance in Elections

There are two critical questions that we must answer at this juncture. First, why do women remain on the peripheries in the halls of power? Multiple theorists answer this question in a myriad ways. However, it should be noted that the absence of women from decision-making tables is a deliberate ploy of patriarchy and not its unintended consequence. As Gail Omvedt points out, the exclusion of women from the spheres of political power is a result of a concerted effort to normalise practices that subjugate women in the political sphere (Omvedt, 2005). From a

structuralist perspective, the entire political machinery is made in such a way that women do not have the same ease of access as men do (Saiyid, 2001). They have to contend with a misogynist media (Khan & Naqvi, 2020), tokenism and relegation to lower ranks of leadership (Begum, 2023), and a society where religious identities have been weaponised to make women second-class citizens (Shaheed, 2010). The cards are stacked against women leaders from within the family itself, where they are treated inequitably, and are furthermore subjected to an interlaced web of multiple socio-economic restrictions (Javed, 2021). The absence of a single cause for the dearth of female leadership in Pakistan is what allows for the vacuum to perpetuate. The family, which acts as the primary instrument for preventing the rise of female leadership, is also the tool through which dynastic women leaders in Pakistan come to the fore. When the father, brother, or husband can no longer represent himself, then the daughter, sister, or wife is called by "family duty" to represent him. A female legislator in Pakistan, and in much of the world is not representing herself or women or even her constituents. She is, for all intents and purposes, a surrogate for a male politician. Her popularity, power, image, and constituencies are built upon the influence of her male relatives. In this way, a "wife-of" or "daughter-of" politician, no matter how powerful or popular, does not entirely own her agency and position. The very nature of her leadership is based on a relationship of dependency with a male politician. She is acting as a front for a masculine entity beyond herself and is hence an inadequate agent for solving the deep-rooted problems that women face in society.

The second question is whether the inclusion of women leaders in power structures enhances women's position in society in general. In the case of Pakistan, the veteran politician and parliamentarian, Dr Sherry Rehman vociferously argues that women politicians in Pakistan's legislatures give voice to the "real women" of Pakistan, and allow for a broader outlook in representation. This is further augmented by concrete changes made in favour of women, which are brought about by an ever-increasing number

of female legislators in the country (Rehman, 2021). However, this argument is not accepted by most researchers. Farzana Bari's research shows that a majority of the seats reserved for women in Pakistan are held by educated, urban, and affluent women, who are tied to political dynasties, upper-class professional communities, and landlord families. These women legislators do not represent the majority of rural, uneducated, and poor socio-economic strata of women in Pakistan. Women candidates are largely chosen by male leaders who dominate mainstream political parties (Bari, 2010). Mainstream political parties act as institutionalised bearers of patriarchy and do not extend financial, logistical, political, or moral support to create independent women leaders. The gates to the halls of power remain closed for women who are not a part of the elite clientelistic framework of patronage between local leaders and political parties (Mufti & Jalalzai, 2021).

Conclusion

Women leaders in Pakistan are, by and large, created and sustained by the power of male politicians, who expect them to act as their agents. Women politicians still rely on men for power, as political parties are dominated by men and because their political fame derives from male relatives. Arnold Ludwig's proposition that a critical mass of women leaders is constituted by women related to male politicians is certainly applicable in Pakistan in light of the 2024 general elections. These elections have proven that despite electoral processes being theoretically neutral, the people of Pakistan are more likely to elect women who carry forward the name of a male politician they support. As Maryam Nawaz, a "daughter-of" former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, took oath to become the Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab province on 26 February 2024, we can assume that "daughter-of" and "wife-of" culture for women leaders in Pakistan is here to stay.

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Appendix

Winning Candidates	Constituency	Party	Wife of- Or Daughter of-
Shandana Gulzar Khan	NA-30 Peshawar	PTI-I ND	Daughter of former MNA Gulzar Khan
Aneeqa Mehdi Bhatti	NA-67 Hafizabad	PTI-I ND	Daughter of former MNA Mehdi Hassan Bhatti & Sister of former MNA Shaukat Ali Bhatti
Ayesha Nazir Jutt	NA-156 Vehari	PTI-I ND	Daughter of former MNA Chaudhary Nazir Jutt
Anbar Majeed Niazi	NA-181 Layyah	PTI-I ND	Wife of former MNA Majeed Niazi
Zartaj Gul Wazir	NA-185 DG Khan	PTI-I ND	-
Syeda Nousheen Iftikhar	NA-73 Sialkot	PML-N	Daughter of former MNA Pir Zahray Shah & Wife of former MNA Syed Murtaza Amin
Maryam Nawaz	NA-119 Lahore	PML-N	Daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Niece of former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

Winning Candidates	Constituency	Party	Wife of- Or Daughter of-
Tehmina Daultana	NA-158 Vehari	PML-N	Niece of former Punjab Chief Minister Mumtaz Daulatana
Shezra Mansab Ali Khan Kharal	NA-112 Nankana Sahib	PML-N	Daughter of former MNA Rai Mansab Ali Khan
Shazia Marri	NA-209 Sanghar	PPP	Daughter of former MNA Atta Muhammad Marri
Nafisa Shah	NA-202 Khairpur	PPP	Daughter of former Sindh Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah
Aasia Ishaq Siddiqui	NA-232	MQM	-

Table Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (https://www.elections.gov.pk/national-assembly)

Between Heroes and Nations: Examining Globalisation through Captain America: Civil War

Ratish Mehta

Organisation for Research on China and Asia (ORCA)

Abstract

In a world increasingly shaped by globalisation, the ideological struggles between sovereignty and global governance, individual freedoms and collective security, are being debated across both the real and fictional worlds. Captain America: Civil War, in this sense, presents a compelling narrative that explores these tensions. The ideological divide between its protagonists transcends superhero fiction, depicting the tensions of modern globalised societies. Through their conflicting perspectives on authority, control, and responsibility, this article highlights how Civil War not only reflects upon the complexities of globalisation, but also engages with the fundamental debates surrounding the challenges presented by such forces.

Keywords: Globalisation, Sovereignty, Non-state actors, Captain America, Marvel Cinematic Universe

Introduction

"The Personal is Political" (Hanisch, 1970)

Watching a film is often considered a personal experience, yet it can also be a political act in itself. Our individual beliefs and ideologies shape how we connect with characters, interpret their actions, and relate to their struggles. This is the essence of the famous saying in political theory: The personal is political. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), a cinematic juggernaut of our time, offers a stage where various ideologies coexist within the confines of its stories—allowing viewers to see themselves in its characters. This paper engages with one such story, *Captain America: Civil War,* and attempts to explore the larger debate on globalisation that it brings to the fore through its central and peripheral conflicts.

The core conflict in *Captain America: Civil War* revolves around the ideological clash between two central characters, Steve Rogers and Tony Stark, over the signing of the Sokovia Accords. These accords, introduced by the United Nations in the movie and endorsed by 117 countries, aim to place the Avengers under the oversight of a UN panel, thus subjecting them to the authority of a group of sovereign states. The Avengers are accused of disregarding state sovereignty in their pursuit of justice, with their use of unregulated power becoming the very source of tension with national governments (Foundation for Economic Education, 2018). But what if, instead of the Avengers, we imagine powerful multinational corporations occupying their role in today's world? How would a world built on the principles of Westphalian sovereignty confront a post-Westphalian reality, where the actions of non-state actors, driven by globalisation, increasingly challenge the authority and autonomy of nation-states? The broader implications of such a reflection reveal to us how the evolving dynamics between global powers and transnational firms are reshaping the traditional understanding of state sovereignty in a globalised age.

Contesting Claims of Globalisation

To begin with, it is important that the claim of globalisation at the forefront of the film be critically examined. Globalisation, and the agencies driving it, assert that national and geographical boundaries are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the face of interconnectedness, suggesting that the distinctions between territories are of diminishing importance in the broader context (Lerche, 1998). This claim, while compelling, holds merit only to a certain extent. To truly understand its implications, however, requires a deeper assessment of the conceptual framework that globalisation threatens to render obsolete.

At the heart of modernity lies a political concept that has been fundamental to the structure of the international order—sovereignty. The idea of sovereignty, as we understand it today, emerged from The Westphalian Treaty, which established that legitimate state power is defined by its control over a defined territory and its authority over the people within it (Croxton, 1999). This principle of territorial jurisdiction has shaped the very fabric of modern statehood, positioning the principle of sovereignty as a fundamental source of state authority. However, this notion has also been historically contested, particularly in cases where non-state actors, such as the East India Company, exercised *de facto* sovereignty despite lacking traditional statehood. The Company's rule in India exemplified how economic entities could control vast territories, collect taxes, and administer laws, effectively blurring the lines between state and non-state authority (Stern, 2011). Even in contemporary times, multinational corporations and international organisations challenge the exclusivity of state sovereignty, as seen in cases where private entities influence regulatory policies (Strange, 1996).

As Josef Joffe highlights in his essay 'Rethinking the Nation State: The Many Meanings of Sovereignty' (Joffe, 1999), Stephen Krasner's conception of sovereignty rests on two fundamental principles: territoriality and the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority

structures. In simpler terms, this is the principle of non-intervention, where the state's authority is sacrosanct and free from external interference. This principle has for long defined the relationship between nation-states, serving as a cornerstone of the Westphalian system.

The point of exploration then begins by asking how these principles of sovereignty, as articulated in the real world, are reflected in the fictionalised world of the MCU. The conflicts that drive *Captain America: Civil War*, particularly the ideological battle between Steve Rogers and Tony Stark over the Sokovia Accords, bring these age-old concepts to life, showcasing the tension between state sovereignty and the growing influence of non-state actors (here, superheroes) in a globalised world. However, beyond simply mirroring real-world debates on globalisation, the MCU explores the limitations of traditional sovereignty in the face of transnational threats. Just as global challenges like climate change, cybersecurity, and pandemics demand governance beyond national borders, the concerns emerging from the Sokovia Accords question whether rigid notions of sovereignty can withstand the realities of a world where power is no longer solely vested in states. These parallels invite a deeper inquiry into how international institutions and legal frameworks adapt, or even struggle to adapt, to the erosion of well-defined sovereignty in a globalised era.

Captain America: Civil War - An Epitome of the Globalisation Debate

"The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph." (Paine, 1776)

In a specific scene from *Captain America: Civil War*, the Secretary of State of the United States of America (USA) arrives at the Avengers' headquarters and begins by acknowledging their immense contributions, stating, "The world owes the Avengers an unpayable debt" (Russo & Russo, 2016). This sentiment follows the devastation wrought in Sokovia, where the Avengers were forced into a deadly battle with Ultron,

an anti-hero bent on saving the world by annihilating it. Yet, as the Avengers fought to prevent a global catastrophe, the core question that lingers in the shadows of the film is sovereignty. Sokovia, a sovereign state, had its borders violated by the Avengers, who had no legal jurisdiction to act within its territory. This recognition of sovereignty is keenly addressed by the Secretary of State, who later frames the Avengers' unchecked actions as problematic in the eyes of the global community. He raises several questions that challenge the Avengers' autonomy and their disregard for national borders. He questions the legitimacy of a group of 'US-based enhanced individuals' who constantly operate outside the bounds of sovereign borders, imposing their wills whenever they choose. He also challenges their unprecedented powers, asserting that governments around the world could no longer accept such a proposition (MCUExchange, 2016).

Following these statements, the Secretary of State proposes the Sokovia Accords: a solution to bring the Avengers under international supervision, with a panel of nation-states holding them accountable for their actions. The accords, signed by 117 countries, would impose a regulatory framework on all superhumans, binding the Avengers to the authority of a global governance system (Marvel Cinematic Universe Fandom, n.d.).

The primary concern from the perspective of the globalisation debate here is not simply the limits to the unchecked power of non-state actors, but the larger complexities that arise from the Sokovia Accords themselves. The debate in the film with respect to globalisation, unfolds in two key dimensions. First, it examines how transnational forces transcend territorial boundaries, often challenging the very foundations of the Westphalian nation-state. Second, it raises the question of governance and accountability; should power be regulated by international institutions, or is autonomy, even at the risk of disorder, the more justifiable course? In this sense and within the larger understanding of globalisation, the Avengers serve as a metaphor for the forces that

challenge the traditional authority of the nation-state, highlighting how even non-state actors, regardless of their moral imperatives, can destabilise established notions of sovereignty and governance.

If we were to momentarily set aside the Avengers as individuals and instead consider them as a transnational entity, one that operates beyond the constraints of any singular jurisdiction, the parallels to multinational corporations (MNCs) and other global actors become evident. Like MNCs, the Avengers possess immense resources, operate across sovereign borders, and intervene in state affairs with limited accountability.

From a theoretical standpoint, this dilemma reflects the broader transformation of global governance, where traditional hierarchies of power have become increasingly fluid. The very forces, such as MNCs, that states have leveraged to advance their own economic and strategic interests, global supply chains, technological networks, and international institutions, have also alternatively presented them the opportunities, akin to the Avengers, to exert influence outside conventional state oversight. In this sense, *Civil War* presents a cautionary narrative; as global actors continue to challenge national sovereignty, what mechanisms, if any, can be implemented to reconcile transnational intervention with the principles of self-determination and non-interference? The answer to this question lies in the second major debate within the film, where the question of oversight and governance moves from being a peripheral to a central debate in the latter half of the film. But before examining this dimension, it is essential to contextualise the broader implications of global governance.

Susan Strange (1996) provides a compelling framework for understanding the shifting nature of state authority in an era of globalisation. Her critical insights into the issue highlight the historical evolution of state accountability, stating that the struggle for liberty and rights led to states being more responsive to their citizens. However, globalisation has fundamentally altered this dynamic by redistributing

power from states to multinational corporations. As Strange argues, this shift has eroded the state's ability to govern effectively, particularly as international bureaucracies, which operate beyond the reach of national authorities, diminish state accountability. This loss of control to non-state actors, who often lack transparency and are unaccountable to the public, deepens the sovereignty crisis faced by nation-states. Her reflection brings to focus the growing tensions between the increasing autonomy of non-state actors and the weakening of state sovereignty. Both Strange's analysis and the film illustrate the dangers of unchecked powers, where the erosion of sovereignty, whether through corporate dominance or superhero intervention, not only undermines state authority but also threatens the very framework of global governance.

Furthermore, the growing power of non-state actors poses a critical challenge to the traditional notions of state sovereignty. Strange (1996) argues that while Transnational Corporations (TNCs) do not replace state governments, they have increasingly encroached upon state sovereignty by sharing authority with governments in areas such as economic management, technological innovations, labour relations, and so on.

Governance versus Autonomy: The Sokovia Accords and the Debate on Global Oversight

At the heart of *Captain America: Civil War* lies a fundamental debate on governance and autonomy, framed specifically through the ideological conflict between Tony Stark and Steve Rogers. The Sokovia Accords serve as a mechanism for state-imposed oversight, raising whether powerful non-state actors, such as the Avengers, should be subject to international regulation or retain their autonomy (MCUExchange, 2016). Tony Stark, advocating for greater oversight through the Sokovia Accords, aligns with the perspective that non-state actors, including the Avengers, should be held accountable by state institutions. In contrast, Steve Rogers, representing a more libertarian view, argues that

surrendering autonomy to global institutions compromises personal freedom (Langley, 2016). This disagreement is not just about how the Avengers should operate but stretches into a much deeper ideological conflict that reflects the struggles faced by contemporary globalising forces. For Rogers, as with many who oppose the rise of global governance, the danger lies in ceding too much power to institutions that are not directly accountable to the people. As he puts it, even if these superheroes are imperfect, "the safest hands are still our own" (Russo & Russo, 2016). Yet, from the perspective of the nation-state, the Avengers' refusal to submit to the Sokovia Accords represents an infringement upon the very principle of non-intervention and sovereignty that has long defined international relations (MCUExchange, 2016). The resulting tension embodies the central conflict of our time: How do we balance state sovereignty with the growing influence of non-state global actors?

In addressing the tension between state sovereignty and the growing influence of non-state global actors, a viable approach is found in the work of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1977), who propose the model of complex interdependence. This model, developed in their seminal work *Power and Interdependence* (Keohane & Nye, 1977), emphasises the intricate web of relationships between states, international institutions, and non-state actors in an increasingly globalised world. According to Keohane and Nye, states no longer operate in isolation but are deeply embedded in networks of economic, social, and environmental interconnections. These networks, while often transcending national borders, require collaborative governance that goes beyond the traditional notions of sovereignty.

The model of complex interdependence suggests that global governance should not be viewed through a zero-sum lens where one actor's gain comes at the expense of another's sovereignty. Instead, it recognises that states, while still crucial actors, must work in tandem with international institutions and non-state actors, such as MNCs, to address shared global

challenges. This cooperative approach does not negate the importance of sovereignty but seeks to balance it with the need for effective governance in a world where global issues, such as climate change, economic inequality, and security threats, transcend national borders.

Conclusion: Superheroes, Sovereignty, and the Struggles of a Globalised World

The Sokovia Accords, as represented in *Civil War*, thus serve as a metaphor for the challenges inherent in such a system of governance moving towards a highly globalised world. Stark's support for the Accords reflects an endorsement of this kind of interdependent global governance, where state sovereignty is tempered by the need for international cooperation. On the other hand, Rogers' opposition embodies the libertarian concern about the potential for overreach by external institutions, which could undermine personal and national freedoms. Ultimately, the debate between Rogers and Stark brings to focus the broader debate in political theory and international relations on the need to reconcile sovereignty with the demands of an interconnected and globalised world.

Keohane and Nye's (1977) model of complex interdependence provides a way forward, suggesting that the solution to the tensions between sovereignty and global governance lies not in the absolute rejection of one for the other, but in the creation of flexible frameworks that allow for cooperation without undermining core principles of self-determination and accountability.

In this regard, *Civil War* serves as a reflection on the challenges that globalisation poses to traditional notions of state sovereignty, yet it also provokes deeper reflection on the evolving dynamics of global governance. The film challenges us to think critically about the engagement with the intersection between state authority and the growing influence of non-state actors, such as multinational

corporations, within an increasingly interconnected world. It compels us to question whether these governance models can be made more accountable, equitable, and responsive to the concerns of the people they serve. Thus, *Captain America: Civil War* functions not only as a narrative about superhero dynamics and their ability to lead as larger-than-life characters, but also as a metaphor for the broader ideological and practical challenges of balancing state autonomy with the demands of a globalised world. In this way, these stories offer more than just entertainment; they become a means of understanding the deeper, often invisible forces shaping our world, while also offering a sharper perspective on the potential consequences of globalisation on sovereignty; a question that remains unresolved but crucial for understanding the future of governance.

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The Grammar of Everyday Practice: Tactics and Strategy in the Everyday

Adithi Vijayan (University of Kerala)

&

Adwaith PB (University of Delhi, 2023)

Abstract

Challenging the Neo-Marxist and Situationist construction of the 'everyday', where consumer is a one-dimensional persona – a passive recipient (consumer) of 'high culture' produced by the power elites – Michel de Certeau, through his theory of 'tactics' and 'strategies', flips the production-consumption rhetoric to interpret consumption as a creative act of production. Through 'tactics' of subversion, the hoi polloi unconsciously resists institutionalised power (a school-going student customising her uniform, for instance), producing little cultures of dissent. Reading it with Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian archetypes reveals a universal pattern of unconscious human behaviour – a collective subconscious archetypical phenomenon – where everyday acts of subversion become manifestations of a timeless human tendency to resist authority. Such a view, therefore, reconceptualises everyday as a site of creative unconscious resistance, outmanoeuvring traditional conceptions of power and passivity.

Keywords: Tactics, Strategies, Archetypes, Production, Power

Introduction

A strand in the critical school of Neo-Marxists attributes the apparent 'delay' in the Marxian dialectical path to communism to the existence of 'consumerism' as a 'mass culture' plaguing the 'everyday', which is so pervasive and ubiquitous that some of them go to the extent of revising the fundamentals of Marxian structuralism, 'swapping' the 'economic base' with the consumerist 'culture'. This strand of thought, therefore, associates the 'everyday' – something mundane, "repetit[ive], the ordinary, the slow rhythms of work", which Anna Schober (2016) proposes to be in dialectic opposition to the "exceptional situation such as the celebration, the holiday, or the revolution" – with enfeeblement, debilitation, and powerlessness, where the once splendorous (hu)man, whom Hamlet referred to as "the beauty of the world... the paragon of animals...", is reduced to a hapless "one-dimensional" persona (Marcuse, 1964) – the mindless consumer, ensnared in an ideological smokescreen mediated by the advertisement industry, walking backwards – exhibiting a "reverse dialectics" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2007) – towards slavery.

It is in this pretext that Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists (SI), who felt that daily life under 'modernity' was thoroughly routinised and degraded, fashioned the 'theory of everyday life', arguing that 'masses' were passive receptors of commodity culture, lacking any form of 'agency' (Lefebvre, 2008). The market dominates their choice, thus, they are consequently alienated from their 'everyday' life. Similarly, Guy Debord, who was a member of *Situationist International*, developed the concept of the 'Society of the Spectacle', in which he visualised modern society as one characterised by extreme alienation and fragmentation ensuing from capitalism and commodity production, where real life gets washed away by a deluge of spectacles and representations (Debord, 2014).

In other words, these theorists believed that people were passive and manipulated by consumption of everyday signs and images. It is at this

juncture that Michel de Certeau (1988), a Jesuit priest and scholar, presents an outlandish take on the 'everyday' through his theory of 'tactics' and 'strategies'. His propinquity towards psychoanalysis and poststructuralism has a bearing on his idea of the 'everyday'. For Certeau (1988), humans are no longer passive recipients, but active agents who silently subvert elitist producer 'strategies' in their everyday lives through various undercutting 'tactics'. Therefore, rather than lamenting about the monotonously charred daily existence, he sought to locate subtle moments of creativity (or acts of production) in daily life, including the mundane acts of consumption people undertake daily. For this purpose, he analyses concrete daily practices like reading and walking and excavates practices of silent subversion skilfully hidden within these acts.

Consumption as Production in Disguise

The 'production-consumption rhetoric' of the neo-Marxists is biassed towards production. Production is, therefore, the nucleus around which acts of consumption are structured. Certeau (1988), in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, shifts this discourse as he theorises that consumers also produce, thus creating a production-consumption continuum. He refutes the idea that masses passively consume and unquestioningly internalise the symbolic values attached to a commodity – instead, they creatively appropriate what they consume. Certeau (1988), thence, focuses on human beings whom he calls 'users' and studies the ways they operate and consume, trying to discern how 'users' tend to be silently subversive of the rules under which they operate in their daily lives. He argues how they resist and, in small ways, metamorphose the dominant order while remaining within the system.

To illustrate, consider a school which has a dress code – often manifested in the form of uniforms, to promote a sense of 'equality' and 'discipline' (it is pertinent to consider Foucault (1977) here, who considers school and prison on par, as enclaves of surveillance and factories of 'governmentality' or 'discipline'. He asks, 'Is it surprising that prisons

resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?'). Here, the systems of authority (id est, the school or the teachers who enforce the code) impose a value on the 'uniform' with a specific intent and assume that the children would unquestioningly oblige. However, students often find ways to slightly alter their uniforms, for instance, by supplementing it with different accessories like wrist watches or jewellery, specific hairstyles or makeup, a different shade or style of the uniform prescribed. While doing so, students scoop out a space for themselves and sign their existence as an author (or producer) on it. Therefore, consumption becomes a hidden form of production, where the act of consumption itself manifests as an act of production, where 'little cultures' are produced within the frontiers of the 'great culture', as none of the additions subverts the technical aspects of the latter, yet topples the very intent of the manufacturers of the 'great culture'.

Tactics and Strategy in the Everyday

Certeau (1988), therefore, is interested in 'anti-discipline' over overarching power structures (or Foucault's panopticon). He differentiates the two with the theory of 'tactics' and 'strategies', respectively.

For Certeau (1988), 'strategies' represent the power structures that enforce discipline, and are, therefore, hallmarks of institutionalised power (for instance, school). They occupy an identifiable space where they produce, tabulate, and enforce ideas on 'users' (for instance, uniforms on students). On the other hand, 'tactics' refer to the tactical and creative manoeuvres 'users' employ to manipulate and divert the network of discipline (for instance, supplementing uniforms with accessories). They operate without a locus (base of operation) but also do not obey the law of the space. The students, in a sense, resist the system through the creative act of supplementing their uniforms with accessories, and thus undermine the network of discipline, yet interestingly, according to

Certeau (1988), 'unconsciously' – unconscious not in the sense that they do not know "why they do what they do", but they do not know "what they do does" – ie, they operate without a 'locus', not with an intent to challenge the system. In other words, the students who subvert the intent of the authority do so not with an intent to challenge the rationale of the institution (as they, in the first place, might not even be aware of the intent of the authority, here, to inculcate 'discipline' and promote 'equality'), but for other reasons which might include creatively expressing themselves, flaunting their personal style, expressing their cultural backgrounds, or to stay up-to-date with the new fashion trends.

In this line of thought, Certeau (1988) introduces the idea of *La Perruque*. *La Perruque*, which comes from the peculiar French saying "*de porter la perruque*" or "to wear a wig", is a 'tactic' or a practice by which the subaltern ('subaltern' in the sense as opposed to 'authority') subverts the power of the authority. To explain *La Perruque*, Certeau gives the example of an office worker writing a love letter in office time. The worker in consideration appears to be working under the system, but is in fact subtly defying it, by using the space for a purpose not prescribed by the system, ie, the 'user' pretends to do something as prescribed by the system, but is, *en réalité*, fooling it, however, not with an intention to subvert the authority, but to, in this case, express the user's profound admiration towards their partner.

The Grammar of Everyday Practice

'Strategies' and 'tactics' are, therefore, complex sets of practices that constitute our 'everyday'. Although there is a way in which 'users' subvert the elitist structures of power, there is no single logic that can properly locate it – the sheer 'non-deliberate' nature of subversion makes it all the more difficult to come to terms with. In this pretext, we believe that Certeau, in a sense, outlines the "grammar" of users' everyday practices through his observation of the 'strategies' that govern everyday life and the 'tactics' through which users subvert this in the everyday. To this

effect, Ben Highmore (2002) in his "Introduction" to the *The Everyday Life Reader* notes:

> "Thus, one way of describing Certeau's approach to the everyday is to see it as attempting to outline a grammar of everyday practices that will attempt to keep alive the specificity of operations while recognising formally similar modes of practice."

Locating the subtle yet unintentional acts of subversion in what Highmore (2002) calls the 'grammar of everyday practice', however, opens at least two avenues to approach Certeau.

First, we may consider this idea in the context of language. Language itself is to be seen as a system produced by the elite grammarians who defined what language should and should not be. A certain variety of language may be considered 'pure' and 'superior'. This language has a vocabulary produced within the framework of the language, which is in turn used by 'users' to frame sentences. The language is also governed by syntaxes, which act as rules that govern the usage of language in order to frame 'meaningful' sentences. But 'users' do not generally stay within these syntactic boundaries. Chomsky's "colourless green ideas sleep furiously" does not make sense within the context of the language, but such a syntactic distortion may be possible while composing poetry (Erard, 2010). This would imply a subversion of the traditional grammar structure.

Furthermore, this idea of language as a system gains more prominence if one considers the power of language. Language is that which defines the 'I' (refer to Nandy's (1995) 'power to define'), and therefore, it is the one with the "superior" command of language that defines the 'sign' – ie, the "arbitrary link" between the 'signifier' (for instance, the spoken word 'tree' or the written word 'tree') and the 'signified' (the mental image of a tree when we speak or write 'tree') – within the system of deferred meanings (Saussure, 1959). For instance, heteronormative narrative being the dominant order, the language that defined the "I" possessed only the

binaries of 'male' and 'female'. Yet this discourse has had subtle resistances for ages – terms tangential to the dominant narrative, like 'sodomite' and 'eunuch' have dwelled in the linguistic cityscape for quite a long time (despite their derogatory nature), demonstrating "that [the binaries imposed by] language...cannot quite constrain the variety of human desires and practices" (Sedgwick, 1990). This proves that people do not merely passively consume ideas, but also resist these ideas. However, delving into this leads to a complex web of deferred ideas and dialectics.

In spoken language too this resistance takes place. When one does not know a language, one appropriates it in subtle ways. For instance, consider Indian-English, which came into existence, thanks to the "phonological difficulties that English presented to Indian speakers" (Kachru, 1983). Some two hundred years ago, such an appropriation took place, where the Indian English speakers modified British pronunciation based on "phonological structures specific to Indian languages...resulting in an intelligible yet distinctly Indian variety of English" (Sailaja, 2012), making it a subversive activity, a 'tactic' frowned upon by the system, as it fails to follow the system established. Similarly, code-mixing and switching takes place when two different language communities interact. None of these actions are intentional or even conscious acts of subversion. Nonetheless, they have slowly changed the system to their favour. Same happens with cultural appropriations (for instance, post-modernists like Butler (2021) consider culture as manifestation of language, where linguistics not only constitutes but actively constructs culture), hence, would justify Highmore's (2002) interpretation of Certeau's 'tactics' as "grammar of everyday practice".

A Speculative Leap

If we go beyond Chomsky's 'colourless green ideas' to look at grammar in a broader sense as something constitutive of a language – or for matter, the 'thematic' of a language – we can make some different observations

by interpreting 'grammar' as some sort of a 'meta-pattern' in subversion than the 'high culture' that is to be subverted through 'tactics'. A language is, thus, a language, and not a collection of some random signs, because it follows a pattern (grammar). That is, the answer to what follows 'qu…" could be "a", "i", or "u", but certainly not "b", "c", or "d" – or in other words, it follows a specific wavelength of entropy – an orchestral combination of elements – where individual elements come together to create meaningful phrases. Thus, could Highmore (2002) be hinting towards a pertinent 'pattern' in subversiveness when he refers to 'tactics' as "grammar of everyday practice"? To this effect, Certeau (1988) notes:

> "It may be noted that these operations – multiform and fragmentary, relative to situations and details, insinuated into and concealed within devices whose mode of use they constitute, and their own ideologies or institutions – conform to certain rules. In other words, there must be a logic of these practices."

Thus, the unconscious yet subtle acts of subversion — "an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolised" (Certeau, 1988) – must have an overriding yet enigmatic logic. Enigmatic because the 'users', unaware of the subverting effects of their acts, eventually manage to subvert the intentions of the producers of 'great culture', and such acts, according to Certeau (1988), are "massive and pervasive" to such a degree that they are universal – performed by "all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself" – yet these acts are unintentional and uncoordinated, making the majority consumers of great culture a "silent and marginal majority". Is this the 'grammar' – etched into the very structure of cultural production – that Highmore (2002) talks about? Are 'users' designed, by nature, or simulated, by a programme, to act in a subversive manner? If not, then how come a 'silent majority' – disunited by a conscious subversive intention yet united by the subversive effects of 'tactics' – exists in the first place? So, is the 'grammar of everyday practice', a subconscious

cultural phenomenon exhibited by every 'user'? If yes, the entire episode breaks into a philosophical disposition on 'free will' – does a student's decision to supplement their uniform with a bracelet constitute their free will, or is it part of a greater ploy etched into the structure of 'cultural production-consumption continuum', where 'users' are programmed to act in subversive ways, following a particular 'pattern', a pertinent 'logic' as in 'grammar of everyday practice'?

A recent study by Roger Koenig-Robert and Joel Pearson (2020), of the University of New South Wales, concludes that 'free choices', like choosing an answer out of four alternatives, can be accurately predicted by analysing brain patterns at least eleven seconds even before one consciously thinks of choosing a particular answer, rendering the particular 'free choice' one makes nothing but an illusion, something pre-programmed into one's brain. Though this study does not delve into the philosophical implications of the same, nor does it identify a particular behavioural 'pattern', it may be read along with a study by Dennis Shaffer *et. al.* (2004) of the Ohio State University, who identified a particular pattern in the navigational heuristics employed by dogs and human baseball players while catching frisbees – id est, the 'unconscious' heuristic reflexes follow a 'pattern', a pattern not just limited to humans but extends to dogs (or even other species). Reading the results of these studies together with Highmore's (2002) choice of the word 'grammar' to describe 'unconscious' acts of subversion would prescribe a speculative jump, where Freud might have to come to one's rescue.

Langston Hughes (2024) asks, in *Harlem*, 'what happens to a dream deferred'? Freud has answers, hidden in the dimension of the unconscious. For him, the unconscious is "like a vast well of forces, deep and dark, filled with repressed emotions and wishes" (Jones, 1953) that subtly influences human actions, and these unconscious motives might never fully surface in the conscious awareness. Freud (1915) says, in *The Unconscious*:

> "We obtain our concept of the unconscious from the theory of repression. The repressed is the prototype of the unconscious for us."

Sukra, the preceptor of *asuras* in Hindu scriptures, says, 'There is no greater happiness than that [derived] from self-rule' (Sukra-Neeti, 3.646, quoted in Sarkar (1919)) – and subversions, being an unintentional human act, can be interpreted, in the Freudian framework, as the resurfacing of repressed human desires for autonomy within the systems of 'knowledge-power', surveillance, and control. However, a post-Freudian reading would be of a better utility here – as Highmore (2002) is talking about 'grammar' – a brood of system-subverting tactics, employed by a "marginal majority", divided in the consciousness, united in the unconsciousness. It is no longer about what an individual does; it is now about humanity itself – or at least, the 'marginal majority' – the *hoi polloi* – the silent producers. What, then, explains a collective unconscious human activity?

For Carl Jung, the answer lies in our myths, dreams, and symbols across cultures – the images of 'the hero', 'the shadow', 'the wise old man', 'the mother', et cetera., find unique expressions in different cultures. Jung (1969) calls them 'archetypes', which:

> "... is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, [which] indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere..."

These archetypes or primordial images, says Jung (1964), are:

> "... impressed upon our unconscious minds, and through them, unconscious factors find expression in symbolic images or narratives. Mythological figures or narratives repeat themselves throughout human history because they represent universal human experiences or concerns."

Thus, Jung's archetypes present us with a framework which helps discern the universal patterns of unconscious thought and behaviour that humanity shares as a whole – something that transcends individual experiences and cultural settings, forming the building blocks of a collective human psyche. What is pertinent to our inquiry is specific archetypes like 'the hero', 'rebel', 'trickster', or even 'outlaw', that can be seen as primordial manifestations of that part of human nature which resists control or repression, to an extent humanity's collective acts of subversion become a universally inherited tendency to resist power structures and assert individuality. As Green (1884) declared – 'human consciousness postulates liberty'.

Thus, archetypes form the structure of unconscious subversion tactics, employed by the marginal majority, to respond to authority – these archetypes constitute the 'logic' or grammar that Highmore (2002) highlights. In essence, tactics manifest as archetypical expressions of collective resistance, transcending time and space.

Challenging the Fixity of 'Text'

Michel de Certeau (1988) places a lot of importance on the subversiveness of the practice of 'reading' in his work *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Reading, here, becomes particularly interesting, as poststructuralism assumes everything to be a text that can be read. To this effect, Terrence Ball (2004) writes:

> "According to Derrida, all attempts to 'represent' reality produce, not knowledge or truth, but only different 'representations', none of which can be proven to be better or truer than any other. All social phenomena and forms of human experience – wars, revolutions, relations between the sexes, and so on – exist only through their representations or 'texts'."

Certeau (1988) sets up 'reading' against the binary of 'writing' – writing here is probably not the act of writing *per se* but the written text. He

compares writing to 'production' and places reading as 'consumption'. For Certeau (1988), writing is an activity that binds itself to a space and escapes the reaches of time. Like farmers who have settled on a piece of land, there is fixity in text. However, reading is different, as he compares readers to nomads who poach on the fixed space within the written text. While writing has fixity, reading has none. The reader who reads the text interprets and takes away what they feel is essential for them and not what is written in the text. Further, the reader is bound by time, doomed to forget after a point of time, and so are they likely to forget the initial interpretation after a point of time. Thus, the reader borrows the written work, encroaches on it, and creates their space in it, which may be radically different from the original space. Readers thus introduce and create art within the confined and fixed space of the text. Ball (2004) says:

> "Ambiguities within the text only increase with the passage of time and multiple and varied readings, until the text's signifiers float freely and playfully apart, so that the reader – not the author – constructs whatever meaning the text may be said to have. Thus 'the death of the author' refers not to a physical fact but to an artifact of postmodernist interpretation."

Individuals are, therefore, 'readers', who, like nomads, poach on the space fenced by the authority, skilfully yet unconsciously subverting the authority's original mandate. For instance, in the workplace, one might use office equipment, say printers, for personal use, which does not really align with the system's mandate. In educational institutions, students are provided with free internet access to obtain study materials which may not be used for education *per se*. And while listening to a class, one may be writing poems distractedly, defying the authority of the teacher teaching. In a sense, 'tactics' and 'strategies' form an intrinsic part of our everyday realities.

Conclusion

Users add and contribute often unpredictable elements in the system in which they negotiate, unconsciously making changes in these overarching systems with microscopic fissures. Certeau's (1988) theorisation of 'the everyday' through his framework of 'strategies' and 'tactics', therefore, demonstrates that amidst rigid structures of power, authority, control, and domination, there exist fissures where individuality and creativity thrive. People bend the system passively to their advantage, ever so slightly in their daily lives – this is the grammar of everyday practice. This grammar is, however, not a conscious act of production – but an unconscious act of subversion that follows a logic, a pattern, or a law, even when operating without a conscious locus. One way to look at it is through Jung's archetypes, which provide a framework that explains these universal collective acts of unconscious subversion as part of a shared human psyche – a universally inherited tendency in every human being to resist authority and assert individuality.

As Ben Highmore (2006) rightly notes in *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*:

> "The everyday world echoes with a clatter of footsteps: footsteps that are out of step with the rhythms of urban modernity. Everydayness is the movement that drags, that takes detours or constantly leaps, or skips like a child, hopping on one foot."

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The Great Identity Tussle: Bangladeshi or Bengali Nationalism

Allen David Simon

St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), University of Calcutta

Abstract

The 2024 Bangladesh crisis has marked a reconfiguration of the idea of Bangladesh, breaking away from decades of partisan and ideological conflict between two contesting national identities, Bengali nationalism and Bangladeshi nationalism. The essay utilises qualitative analysis using secondary data to track the historic makings and trajectory of Bangladesh's national identity and the underlying tensions that explain the 2024 crisis. The year marked not only a swift regime turnover, but also a reimagining of Bangladesh and recasting dominant narratives to suit a narrower form of national identity, unfolding challenges to Bangladesh's secularism, democracy and diplomacy, with a rise in Indo-Bangladesh tensions.

Keywords: Bengali nationalism, Bangladeshi nationalism, Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Islamisation

Post-Hasina Bangladesh: Introduction

In August 2024, the '*Bangabandhu*' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statue was toppled in Dhaka (PTI, 2024). The destruction of Mujibur iconography during the Bangladesh students' uprising is symptomatic of the underlying shift in identity discourses from Bengali nationalism to Bangladeshi nationalism. Mujibur iconography bore the ire of this churn against the failings of his daughter, but also the rejection of his legacy of Bengali nationalism. While until recently the Hasina hegemony felt consolidated, the deepening legitimacy crisis, especially following the violence-marred 2024 general elections (ACLED, 2024), mass resistance became proof of bottom-up democratisation, beyond institutional means. Even as the Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus, leads the nation following Hasina's resignation and flight, Bangladesh's interim government has moved to lift the ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami party (Al Jazeera, 2024) that had been imposed under anti-terrorism laws. A free hand to religious forces has co-opted narratives in the public discourse of Bangladesh, outgrowing its longstanding duopoly in national imaginations.

Increasing intolerance towards minorities and flaring ethnic tensions, have come to characterise post-Hasina Bangladesh. Three Hindu temples were set on fire (Times of India, 2024), with 24 people burnt alive (Business Standard, 2024); Chinmoy Das, an ISKON Hindu priest arrested, resulting in protests by Bengali Hindus (The Hindu, 2024), and exclusion of tribal populations as '*alibashi*' (separatists) and outsiders (Zahid & Srivastava, 2024). Further, the bizarre commemoration of Mohammad Ali Jinnah by the National Press Club in Dhaka, marked with Urdu poetry and songs, signals a nod to more Islamic interpretations of nationhood (Mukul, 2024).

The nation with two nationalisms has responded to both domestic politics as well as regional strains, and now appears to have picked its favourite.

Who is a Bangladeshi?

The Bangladeshi national identity is an outgrowth of its independence movement and post-independence domestic and international responses. The 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War was a fallout of the expropriation of East Pakistan into an agrarian colony under the postcolonial Pakistani state. Pakistan's geographic anomaly, being divided into two by the vast Indian territory, was a cause of insecurities for the Jinnah government, which emphasised centralised administration, with Urdu as the uniting (homogenising) language for the diverse ethnicities that composed East and West Pakistan. The early death of Jinnah left a power vacuum, which the Pakistani military filled. These tendencies of centralisation and militarisation were reflected in the preeminence of the Punjabi-Pathans in both the government and the military. Despite East Pakistan being more populous, West Pakistan got the lion's share in terms of economic capital, political dominance, and cultural disposition (Batabyal, 2021).

Schendel (2009) puts forth that the Resistance against the marginalisation of the Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan came to the forefront through the *Bangla Bhasha* Movement (Bengali language movement) of 1950-60s against Urdu imposition. The homogenisation efforts exploded under an anti-climactic political miscalculation. The denial of the premiership to the populist Sheikh Mujibur Rahman despite Awami League's landslide victory in the 1970 Pakistan general election gave fire to the East Pakistanis who were on edge after the 1970 cyclone, famine and the ethnic genocide conducted by the Pakistani military.

The 1971 war, that would separate East from West Pakistan, creating Bangladesh, also left open the question of: 'Who is a Bangladeshi?'

Are they Bengalis? Or, are they Muslims? If they are Bengalis, then what was the need for the 1947 partition? And, if they are Muslims, then what is the need for 1971?

One Nation, Two Nationalisms

Mujibur became *Deshobondhu* (friend of the country), becoming the symbol against post-1947 injustices, the denial of representation and the linguistic autonomy of the state. He defined the newborn nation in terms of Bengali nationalism, a secular construct premised on the Bengali ethnic identity and language conscience. Mujibur's definition was consciously light on novelty, indistinguishable from the Indian Bengalee sub-nationalism (about Bengalees inhabiting West Bengal, India). The *Mukti Bahini* (pre-independence Bangladesh liberation militia) having fought the Pakistani Army with the sentiments of "*Joy Bangla*" (hail Bengal), "*Tomar desh, amar desh, Bangladesh*" (your country, my country, Bangladesh) and "*Jago, jago, Bangalee jago*" (awaken, awaken, Bengalees, awaken) gave precedence to ethnolinguistic and territorial affiliations over religious ones (which they had in common with their West Pakistani opponents), responding also to the need for India's aid in securing Bangladeshi independence and rehabilitation of its citizens (Deb, 2021; Khan, 1974).

'Mujibism' rested on the four pillars of nationalism, democracy, socialism, and secularism, firm to his need to parallelly delegitimise the "two-nation theory" or political Islam of 1947, and legitimise the 1971 independence movement against Islamabad's autocratic rule. Secularism was a centrepiece, and became enshrined in the constitution of 1972, with Islamic parties propagating a theocratic rules-based order, which

were declared as banned, as they were perceived to have pro-Pakistan leanings (Khan, 1974).

It was post-war domestic politics that sprang an antithetical counterpart in the form of Bangladeshi nationalism, by General Zia-ur Rahman, who took power following the assassination of Mujibur in 1975. Zia-ur found himself in a complacent position, lacking Mujibur's popular support, and having an urgency to rehabilitate the East Bengal divisions of the Pakistan Army and disengage the Awami League's *Rakha Bahini* (Bangladeshi para-military), in order to secure his position. At the same time, he needed to step out of Mujibur's shadow and India's looming influence over the newly independent country (Sheikh & Ahmed, 2020).

Zia-ur addressed these by re-interpreting 'Bengali' nationalism into 'Bangladeshi' nationalism, making a clear-cut distinction between "our" (Bangladeshi) Bengali and "theirs" (Indian Bengalis in West Bengal). Bangladeshis were Bengalis plus Muslim–an ethno-religious identity. In line with this though, in 1977, secularism was removed from the constitution, and in 1988, Islam was made the state religion. However, Bangladesh as a country of Bengali Muslims leaves out a considerable number of minority groups. This includes the Buddhist hill tribes of Chittagong (Chakmas, Hojongs, et cetera), and even the non-Bengali Muslims from post-partition Assam and Bihar, who having aligned themselves with the Pakistani regime during the Liberation War were retributively marginalised from Bangladeshi society (World Bank, 2008).

Secularism: Between Irony and Paradox

The conflict between these two distinct strands of nationalism (Hossain, 2015) has been a durable feature of Bangladeshi national identity, and has been reflected in the decades-long two-party system. These competing values over time became personified by the two major parties, Awami League (AL), led by Sheikh Hasina, Mujibur's daughter, and the

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Begum Khaleda Zia, Zia-ur's widow. From 1991 till 2008, Bangladeshi politics had been defined by the intense competition between AL and BNP, with the country's mostly homogenous ethnic composition (Minority Rights Group International, n.d.) and economic growth (Mahmood, 2021), enabling democracy's survival.

While for the past five decades, Bangladeshi national identity was beset by two contesting conceptions of nationalism, the 2024 popular uprisings (Nagpal, 2024) and consequent removal of the Sheikh Hasina government have marked a paradigmatic shift. The initial protests by university students (Uddin, 2024) were against the reservation for the descendants of the freedom fighters during the 1971 war. These protests soon became an all-out mass uprising as attention expanded to the anti-democratic practices of the Hasina government due to the heavy-handed military responses to peaceful civilian protests and the participation of religious forces. Bangladeshi society mobilised against electoral malpractice, judicial harassment, extrajudicial killings, intimidation of media and civil society organisations, punitive practices against opposition voices, null cases against Khaleda Zia and activist Muhammad Yunus, packing courts with loyalists and corruption that had become the staples of the Hasina regime (Hasan, 2024; Maîtrot & Jackman, 2023).

It is ironic how autocratic exclusion had resulted in the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, and now political marginalisation and democratic backsliding again have rebirthed a more defined sense of Bangladeshi identity. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy has lost out on its argument for inclusivity and a secular republic (Zaheer, 2024). The father's legacy has been hampered by the daughter's blunders; while secularism had long been a contested attribute of the Bangladeshi nation (Ahmad, 2020), the founding ideals had held fast against a seamless Islamic interpretation of

the national identity; yet, constitutional paradoxes have weakened secular structures over time.

While Zia-ur had removed secularism from the Constitution of Bangladesh in 1977 and replaced it with "Absolute Trust and Faith in the Almighty Allah," and revoked the ban on Islamic parties, the AL restored the secularism provision in 2011, though Islam continued to remain the state religion of Bangladesh (Habib, 2011). In contestations, secularism lies in a constitutional paradox (Ahmed, 2024). While Article 2A of the Constitution of Bangladesh reads that "Islam is the state religion, but the state must ensure equal rights and status to other religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity," Article 12 of the same Constitution establishes Bangladesh as a 'secular' nation, imposing an obligation upon the State to ensure that religious authorities of no particular religion can dominate over the State itself.

Islamisation of Bangladeshi Society

An erstwhile general in the Pakistan military during the 1965 war, Zia-ur had adopted the Pakistani handbook, entering a *mullah*-military nexus (Chakravarty, 2017). Unlike Mujibur, Zia-ur lacked charm, a populist image, and freedom fighter status to secure his position, thereby depending heavily on the coercive institutions of the state to enforce and religious agents of the society to sanction his regime. This led to a parallel Islamisation of Bangladesh through the conservative *ulama* (Islamic clergy), who gained prominence and alleviated their role in directing state policy, in turn serving as a regime institution (Hossain, 2012). This has subsequently eroded the heterodox, pluralist and more tolerant variants of Islam that had historically existed in the Indian subcontinent, substituting them, over time, with more hardliner religious narratives (Mostofa, 2021a). This has been reinforced by the recent import of the *Farazi* and *Wahabi* movements by Bangladeshi migrant labourers returning home from the Middle East (Mohsina, 2021), as well as by the

active presence of radical actors like Hefazat-e-Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) in politics (Mahjabin, 2024). These fundamentalist forces have been further emboldened by narratives and upheaval in post-Hasina Bangladesh (Upadhyay, 2024; Mostofa, 2021b).

The Zia-ur definition of Bangladeshi nationalism has not just become the domestic consensus, but also one that will result in the restructuring of relations vis-à-vis India. While Sheikh Hasina's ousting has incapacitated proponents of Bengali nationalism, Mujibur's legacy of the secular imagination of the Bangladeshi nation has been eroding over time (P. Sharma, 2024), parallel to the increasing Islamisation of Bangladesh; and in response to unique identity challenges in the subcontinent. Having a national destiny exclusive of India has been an exclusively subcontinental aspiration, where the "big brother" India has been seen to loom large in the backyard and intervene much in the affairs of other neighbouring states. For the caretaker government, India has become a scapegoat to abstain from deeper introspection of Bangladesh's political faults; primarily, because of India's uncritical support of the Hasina government (Bhushan, 2024). Taslima Nasrin, author and activist, expressed deep concern over the seeping Islamic radicalism that threatens to brainwash and indoctrinate the Bangladeshi youths to make them "anti-India, anti-Hindu, and pro-Pakistan," turning Bangladesh the Afghanistan way (Nasrin, 2024).

Bangladesh in Subcontinental Insecurities

Bangladesh, one of the world's most densely populated states, lies at the crucial geostrategic juncture between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, being vital to security in the Bay of Bengal. While there was an undeniable trajectory of democratic backsliding under the Hasina regime, Bangladesh has simultaneously achieved impressive economic growth, especially from its booming textile industry. Restoring political stability is a regional necessity.

On the obverse side, the turnaround in Bangladesh has caused intensifying friction with India. Where domestic politics had already created a strong rhetoric against 'Bangladeshi' migration as infiltrators–a shorthand for electoral fearmongering by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dispensation (R. Sharma, 2024; Shamshad, 2018). And, there was already an ever-growing fear that Bangladeshi migrants encroach on physical and political spaces, jobs, land, and corner welfare resources meted out by the state, and place undue pressures on infrastructure. The fear has turned to outright hostility following violence against Hindu minorities in Bangladesh and irredentist rhetorics by Bangladeshi politicians seeking to merge erstwhile colonial Bengal (a territory spanning Bangladesh, as well as West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha in India) (Singh, 2024); and Indian doctors going as far as to refuse medical attention to Bangladeshi patients (Deb & Mittal, 2024). Protest marches in Kolkata surrounded the Bangladesh consulate (Bhattacharya, 2024), showing counter-mobilisation of Indians against Bangladesh, with mass hysteria often threatening retributive actions against Bangladeshis in India, even as migrants remain a universally vulnerable category in host countries. While Indians react against religious intolerance, the reaction itself can play into the hands of Islamist forces to reinforce negative rhetoric against India and further deepen divides in Bangladesh on religious lines. This turn towards religious nationalism (Mehta, 2024) has led to minorities, especially Hindus, finding themselves increasingly under siege, simultaneous to the increased visibility of radical Islamist groups in socio-political spaces. Moreover, Bangladeshi elites, instead of acknowledging and addressing the genuine concern for the safety and security of minorities, have been denying these challenges as mere Indian disinformation and Indian media's propaganda to discredit the authenticity of the student-led protests and the newly formed interim government, which has been critical towards the country (Sen, 2024).

Reclaiming Whose Democracy(?): Conclusion

Realignment of the idea of 'Bangladesh' has broken free from decades of bipartisanship and ideological conflict between Bengali nationalism and Bangladeshi nationalism. While the return of the AL is extremely unlikely, with the party suffering from the unpopularity of Hasina, concerns have been raised over the 'neutrality' and 'intents' of the non-partisan caretaker government led by Yunus, and its commitment to multi-party electoral competition due to the delay in holding elections. As elections are set to get slotted for late 2025 or early 2026, a strong appetite for democracy amongst Bangladeshis must prevail. There is a need for a constant civil society and government dialogue, with genuine bids to deepen mutual trust in democracy and democratic means of dissent.

The end of a fifteen-year regime (Mahmud, 2024) has destabilised the very fabric of society and deepened the social and economic crisis. There lies a great deal of anxiety over the possibility of deep-seated polarisation in the upcoming election (Gupta, 2024). While Hasina has fled, her party, the AL, is still a contestant in the next democratic polls. Whether it will be a head-on contest between the AL and the BNP with Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) (a time-tested electoral alliance) or a military-blessed "King's Party" (Das, 2024), is yet to be seen. Uncertain times push people to seek sanctity and shelter in established spaces. Religion can be a source of continuity, hope and community in such times of flux. With 91 per cent (US Department of State, 2022) of the country identifying as Sunni Muslim, and a sustained Islamisation of Bangladeshi society, the place of religion in society, nation and identity will be further strengthened in such times of crisis, increasing religious fervour and role of religious forces even in democratic processes.

Moreover, the BNP-JI duo are well poised to win an upcoming election, with both having had a long and antagonistic history against secular

interpretations of Bangladesh. Having a capable organisation, the BNP has held the status of the country's largest opposition party for a long time. Coupled with anti-India tensions, majoritarian fervour, and dampening of minority security may consolidate Bangladeshi society upon a more fundamentalist version of Islamic identity. Fringe forces, like the JI, are fringe no more. Radical Islam has been mainstreamed, with an apparent culture of violent hostilities against minorities being normalised. While global discourses clamour over the future of democracy in Bangladesh, the underlying shift in national identity has motivated the transition; with the BNP and JI well positioned to gain the most. This leaves whether the reconstituted democracy will be democratic for all, especially the tribals and Hindus. While it has been civil society activism that brought the fall of the Hasina-led AL government for its excesses, there is cause to reason that civil society too would not be untouched by the shift in national identity, is prone to co-option and may be driven by mass sentiments that show a decisive turn, tossing a challenge to democratic reforms going ahead.

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Interrogating Modernity: India's Path of Alternative Political Evolution

Laavanya Tewari

National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru

Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of democracy in India through the lens of alternative modernities, arguing that modernisation is not a uniform, linear process but is shaped by cultural and historical contexts. It situates the existence of multiple acceptable forms of democratic structures by contextualising India's democratic structure within a broader comparative framework, analysing how its electoral processes and secularism diverge from dominant Western models, and explores how subaltern thought affects the reinterpretation of modernity in India.

Keywords: Secularism, Voting, Modernity, Eurocentrism, Western framework

Introduction

Modernity is a concept that first emerged in the West and has since spread across the world through various practices, institutional frameworks, and, most significantly, as a discourse which critically examines the present (Gaonkar, 1999). The Western discourse on modernity does not emerge as a single, coherent framework; instead, it takes the form of a hybrid configuration consisting of different and conflicting theories, norms, and ideologies—every scholar on this subject has their version of that narrative, and each version casts a different light on modernity, wherein the contours shift depending on the angle of interrogation. To think in terms of alternative modernities is also the study of a particular angle of exploration. Alternative modernities can be said to be culture-specific and site-based readings of the Western mode of modernity (Gaonkar, 1999). Bhargava (2001), on the other hand, defines alternative modernity as the interaction of Western modernity with local cultural systems that lead to the emergence of a new phenomenon for which an analogue can be found in neither Western nor indigenous tradition. Various contemporary non-western societies retain resilient non-modern practices in addition to some thoroughly westernised modern variations, with alternative modernities co-existing in addition to these elements (Bhargava, 2001).

In the Indian context, the rise of modernity has often been linked to colonial rule since industrialisation took place in that period, but it was after independence that "India's modern nationhood" was conceived and implemented by Jawaharlal Nehru (Aiyar, 2014). The four key dimensions of this concept were democracy, secularism, socialism, and non-alignment; all of these concepts emerged from the West, except for non-alignment (Aiyar, 2014). However, on closer examination, it appears that these concepts have evolved from their original forms and have acclimatised to the Indian ethos (Blaser, 2009). This paper analyses how the Western concept of democracy has evolved through processes of

alternative modernisation on being introduced to a non-Western country, India, and the deviation from its original form, as well as what implications this transformation holds for contemporary political systems and societal structures. *First*, it is proved with the help of an analysis of the democratic structure in the United States of America and India that while both countries are democracies, there is a certain divergence in practice, which emerges as a natural response to the cultural context that they are located in. *Second,* it is argued that much may be learnt by drawing parallels between the Western subjugation and "Westernisation as modernisation" school of thought by looking at subaltern thought, which is specific to the Indian context. *Lastly*, it is proposed that non-Western alternatives should also be taken into account by Western scholars for a more holistic view of political ideas.

A Non-Linear Approach to Democracy

Democracy, originally a Western method of collective decision-making, has evolved into a universal value, taking on distinct meanings in different contexts. While liberal democracy remains the ideal form, its manifestation varies across societies (Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021). Numerous "hybrid" models have emerged, that blend liberal democracy with other political genres in response to specific political conditions; this has further led to the parturition of terms existing as a response to their political contexts, such as "people's democracies," "guided democracies," "illiberal democracies," or even "authoritarian democracies" (Jaffrelot & Schoch, 2021). India, one of the world's largest democracies, is a representative democracy.

Democracy, in the form it came to India, comprised certain structures, processes, and ideals that further developed on interaction with the polity. On a comparative analysis with a Western nation, the United States of America (USA), the Indian polity differs on several counts, two of which are discussed here. Firstly, both nations have a robust voting system in place; however, the USA system is relatively more flexible than

India's. For instance, the USA offers plenty of methods to cast a vote, such as voting at poll booths on poll day, absentee voting through mail, and early voting in person (USAGov, 2024). In India, on the other hand, the only way to vote is by the traditional method of furnishing a valid voter identity card, choosing a candidate on the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), and getting inked. While the multiple options do work to make voting more accessible in the USA, it must be noted that it also considerably prolongs the vote-counting process. While counting begins immediately after polls close, final results are seldom available on election night–in the 2020 presidential elections, over 101 million early or mail-in ballots were cast, compared to the 33 million in 2016, which overwhelmed the system (Ramani, 2024). India, on the other hand, while dealing with the number of voters being four times larger, declares the results on the same day due to the EVMs (Ramani, 2024). This contrast thus highlights the trade-off between accessibility and efficiency in electoral systems.

Secondly, India and the USA differ on the grounds of how the state interacts with religion. While both nations do not have an official state religion, their approaches to secularism diverge. In the USA, the state does not intervene in the religious affairs of the people; a strict separation between the state and religion is maintained, as upheld by the American courts in landmark cases such as *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) and *Engel v. Vitale* (1962). However, this view has grown into a contested topic in recent years. Recently, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order establishing a task force to end the "anti-Christian weaponisation of government" and "unlawful conduct targeting Christians" (The White House, 2025). While this does not outright declare Christianity as the State religion, it reorients the federal government's stance on religious neutrality; if pursued aggressively, such policies could challenge the USA's long-standing secular framework.

In contrast, the Indian model of secularism is characterised by what Bhargava (1998) terms "principled distance", a model that does not

strictly separate religion from the state but allows necessary state intervention to ensure the protection of basic fundamental rights. Unlike Western secularism, which evolved in response to conflicts between the church and the state, Indian secularism emerged in a society marked by deep religious diversity. India has thus developed a distinctively Indian and differently modern variant of secularism by balancing the claims of individuals and religious communities, since a strictly non-interference approach may not be feasible in a country where historical and social realities require a more engaged role for the state in mediating religious affairs (Bhargava, 1998). Therefore, it may be observed that democracy, though universally valued, takes different forms based on historical and political contexts, with India developing an alternative model.

India's ongoing discussions on the adoption of the "One Nation, One Election" module for conducting elections also provide a compelling illustration of the country's approach to modernisation, which is neither linear nor homogenising (Das, 2023). Inspired by Western models from countries like Belgium, Sweden, and South Africa, this proposal reflects India's search for more efficient governance solutions in the face of its complex democratic landscape (Das, 2023). While holding the national and state elections simultaneously could potentially streamline the electoral process, reduce costs, and address voter fatigue, it could also present challenges regarding federalism, regional autonomy, and the diversity of interests across India's various states. Thus, this proposal is a clear manifestation of India's alternative modernisation; it does not simply adopt Western models of governance but adapts them according to its domestic realities and needs.

This section, therefore, reflects India's broader approach to modernisation—not as a linear adoption of Western ideals but as a process of creative adaptation that accounts for its unique political, social, and historical realities. The notion of alternative modernities, however, is not just about reinterpreting Western models but also about challenging and redefining those models in the context of the country's

history of colonialism and social hierarchies. The next section thus deals with a more specific example of alternative modernity—the subaltern thought, which illustrates how India's democratic evolution, like other forms of modernisation, reimagines Western ideas by taking inspiration from the experiences and struggles of marginalised groups.

Contributions of the Subaltern Thought

The modernist elite of Shanghai, including writers, artists, and political activists, actively engaged with and appropriated Western offerings such as modern education, cinema, fashion, and consumer culture. (Gaonkar, 1999). However, this engagement was not characterised by "colonial mimicry"; rather, it took place in a cosmopolitan exchange and dialogue (Gaonkar, 1999). Even as they traversed the cityscapes, dazzled by and hungry for Western ideas, experiences, and cultural forms, they always remained certain of their identity as "Chinese". Thus, in the face of modernity, one does not turn inward but moves forward, giving rise to what Gaonkar (1999) terms as *creative adaptation*. Non-Western people, the latecomers to modernity, have been engaged in these manoeuvres now for nearly a century (Gaonkar, 1999). In the Indian context, a new outlook was developed, called the *subaltern thought*, which was a response to the forces which claimed that modernity is a universally liberating force and highlighted how it may be exclusionary for certain groups like peasants, workers, women, and other subordinated groups who have been silenced or ignored in traditional historical accounts that prioritise the voices of the powerful and dominant groups (Chakrabarty, 1992).

A parallel can be drawn between the subaltern groups and their subjugation by the dominant groups in Indian society and the Eurocentric subjugation of indigenous structures (Chakrabarty, 1992). Chakrabarty (1992) highlights how, by centring the voices and experiences of subaltern groups, subaltern thought provides a counter-narrative to dominant historical accounts that have historically

marginalised or silenced these groups; subaltern thought thus plays a crucial role in challenging traditional historical accounts, and brings attention to the experiences, agency, and perspectives of subaltern groups. He further elaborates on how these groups, in the process of creating a niche for themselves, also partake in the creation of their alternative modernity. While it is true that many Western institutional frameworks were integrated into Indian governance by postcolonial elites to maintain stability, it is also important to recognise that colonial rule fundamentally reshaped indigenous structures, often forcing local institutions to adapt to external frameworks rather than evolve on their own terms. For example, the Dalit movement in India has reinterpreted democratic and constitutional principles to challenge caste oppression, demonstrating how marginalised communities engage with modernity on their terms. Similarly, feminist movements in India have also engaged with both colonial and Indigenous patriarchal structures, carving out enclaves for agency and rights within and beyond Western feminist paradigms.

While gradual conversion does seem to take place, institutions where this happened on a larger scale, such as education, have still not recovered from the colonial imposition—this highlights the ongoing struggle between imposed structures and the efforts of subaltern groups to reclaim intellectual and cultural autonomy. Ultimately, subaltern thought reminds us that modernity has never been a uniform or singular experience. It has been contested, redefined, and appropriated in multiple ways by those in historically weaker positions. Recognising these alternative modernities is essential not just for historical accuracy but for envisioning a future where diverse experiences of modernity are acknowledged and valued.

Recognition of the Alternative

We have established in this paper that non-Western societies inherited from their Western counterparts specific versions of various political concepts, but they did not always preserve them in their original form;

they often added something of enduring value to them and developed the idea further. However, Western theorists do not always recognise non-Western contributions. While Western scholars may have once justified focusing solely on history shaped by and within the West, it would be a grave mistake to conflate Western interpretations of these ideas with the entire doctrine; after all, a part cannot be mistaken for the whole. For a rich, complex, and complete understanding of political ideologies, one must examine how the secular idea has developed over time transnationally (Bhargava, 1998).

We may take the example of the local governance system endemic to India, Panchayats, to elaborate on the same. The concept of Panchayats has been incorporated into Indian polity in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which are formalised local self-government bodies established by the government to promote democratic governance at the grassroots level (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025). Panchayati Raj Institutions have defined functions and powers related to local governance, development planning, and implementation of various schemes at the grassroots level. They play a role in rural development, resource allocation, and decision-making (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025). Western political thought and institutions seldom engage with such governance structures, and non-Western contributions to democratic governance and alternative modernities remain largely absent from mainstream Western discourse (Getachew and Mantena, 2021).

The reluctance to engage with alternative modernities stems, in part, from entrenched Eurocentrism, which continues to frame Western institutions as the universal standard against which all others are measured. This perspective overlooks the reality that democratic ideals have been shaped and expressed in varied ways across different historical and cultural contexts. For instance, while Western democracy is often associated with liberal constitutionalism and representative governance, many non-Western societies, including India, have incorporated participatory and deliberative elements that predate colonial encounters.

At the same time, it is important to note that most postcolonial democracies have integrated Western institutional frameworks, which makes it essential to analyse exactly what these participatory and deliberative elements entail and whether they exist independently of or merely in response to the Western models of political participation.

Recognising these alternative modernities is crucial not just for historical accuracy but for ensuring a truly global discourse on democracy and governance. The failure to do so risks perpetuating a narrow and incomplete understanding of governance, in which only Western models are seen as legitimate or fully developed. A more inclusive approach, one that embraces the plurality of democratic experiences, is essential for constructing a richer and more dynamic global political discourse. Appreciating the various methods to practice democratic ideals is essential for a truly comprehensive understanding of these concepts on a global scale.

Conclusion

This paper builds a case to recognise alternative modernities practised in non-Western countries. In the first section, Indian democracy is specifically analysed within a broader international comparative framework on two counts: elections and secularism. It is observed that India espouses an alternative modernity—a system that has evolved from its original form but is no less authoritative or functional than the Western ideal; rather, this alternative version may be a better fit since it is customised to the country's socio-political atmosphere. This demonstrates that modernisation is not a singular, Western-led process but rather a diverse, context-driven phenomenon. The rigid ideals of Western modernity may be downright exclusionary for certain groups. The next section talks about the rise of subaltern thought and how alternative modernities are purposive and deliberative processes which redefine such institutions in the context of the country's history; entrenched in colonialism, casteism, and patriarchy, it works to make the

political process more inclusionary for marginalised communities. The last section is a plea to recognise alternative modernities. It is by embracing the plurality of modernities that we move toward a more nuanced and inclusive discourse on democracy—one that acknowledges the legitimacy of diverse political evolutions rather than measuring them against a singular Western ideal.

Therefore, in the global discourse, India stands as evidence that democracy can thrive in a deeply diverse, postcolonial society without absolutely conforming to Western standards. It demonstrates that modernisation is adaptable—it does not require cultural homogenisation or a break from indigenous traditions. More broadly, India's experience suggests that alternative modernities are not mere exceptions but part of a broader gamut of democratic evolution, shaped by distinct historical and cultural contexts. This has implications for other developing nations, showing that political and social modernisation need not imitate the West but can be rooted in local values and historical experiences. The narrative of alternative modernities serves as a reminder that the richness of human experiences and aspirations transcends any singular, Western-centric understanding of modernity.

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Reviving The City of Joy: Unpacking Urban Governance Challenges Through The Lens of Kolkata

Parth Piyush Prasad

FLAME University

Abstract

Political thought seeps into the governance of the city through the institutionalised focus on neoliberalism. The Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program (KEIIP) exemplifies sustainability-focussed, neoliberal urban governance, addressing water supply, sewerage, drainage, and waste management in a post-colonial city. This essay critically examines KEIIP's policy context and outcomes. Despite achievements, challenges persist, including inequitable resource allocation and socio-economic displacement. The program's hierarchical management structure, reliance on external agencies, and limited capacity-building efforts reveal systemic inefficiencies. Insights from resettlement, flood management, and stakeholder dynamics underscore the complexity of sustainable urban development. By evaluating KEIIP's opportunities and paradoxes, this study advances theoretical discussions on urban governance and sustainability in rapidly urbanising cities.

Keywords: Urban governance, Neoliberal, Waste management, Sustainability, Displacement

Introduction

As the relentless march of urbanisation reshapes India's metropolitan landscapes, scholars of urban governance arrive at the question of retrofitting sustainability in post-colonial cities developed upon outdated infrastructure. The Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program (KEIIP) stands as a bold testament to the promises and paradoxes of sustainability-driven urban governance. Positioned at the crossroads of ecological imperatives and neoliberal infrastructure aspirations, KEIIP offers a compelling narrative of how modern cities grapple with critical challenges of water supply, sewerage, drainage, and waste management. By dissecting its intricate layers, this paper illuminates the delicate interplay between local accountability and global funding paradigms, inviting a profound critique of what it truly means to build resilient and inclusive urban futures.

This paper aims to holistically analyse the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program (KEIIP), discussing the context and content of the policy, key decisions, and their opportunity costs, as well as the results of the policy. The KEIIP, as proven further, is primarily a sustainability-focussed, neoliberal urban infrastructure project. This paper uses the policy as a case study to develop insights into critical issues of urban development addressed by the aforementioned, notably questions of urban water supply, sewerage, drainage, and waste management. Using concepts of sustainability and theories of urban governance, this paper further develops theoretical insights into the management structure and classification of this project. Through insights across different paths of analysis for the paper, this paper challenges the results and efficiencies of the policies to create a strong critique of the policy.

The rationale behind selecting the KEIIP for our analysis is twofold. The KEIIP is an ongoing project, but is an extension of the previous Kolkata Environmental Improvement Program (KEIP) with similar outcomes

but with sophisticated multi-tranche financial facilities (MFF). This means that analysing the KEIIP not only aids us in analysing the KEIP programme and results but also allows us to dive into the workings of inter-agency financial collaborations. Furthermore, the public domain reports on the due diligence and project outcomes, curated by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), reveal crucial factors relevant to urban governance, specifically focussing on the sustainability of the project, land acquisition, and resettlement impacts as well as the key stakeholders. This set of reliable information establishes that the social responsibility of the work conducted is placed upon all funding parties and not just the local stakeholders, thus proving that sustainable projects require in-depth life cycle assessments from all stakeholders (Koc et al., 2023).

A Brief History of Sewage in Kolkata & Recounting the Tale of the KEIIP

Kolkata, situated in eastern India, serves as the capital of West Bengal and is positioned along the eastern bank of the Hooghly River, near the Bay of Bengal. Encompassed by a combination of wetlands, riverine systems, and fertile Gangetic plains, it possesses a complicated terrain that affects its drainage and infrastructural requirements.

The city is characterised by colonial-era architecture, a high population density, and deteriorating infrastructure (Dey and Downey, 2020). As the seventh-largest agglomeration in India, with a floating and resident population of over 14 million people (Census of India, 2011), Kolkata faces extensive challenges in governing urban water and sewage, related to potable waters, rain or storm water, and sewerage systems.

Efforts to resolve the urban water and sewage problems arising from rapid urbanisation were formulated in Kolkata since 1966, manifesting as the Master Plan Proposals for Sewage and Drainage. However, due to a substantial influx of refugees from the conflict-ridden East Pakistan (now, Bangladesh), the sudden surge in migration during and after the 1971 War, and the steady movement through the post-war porous borders, the

population of West Bengal grew exponentially in the 1960s and 1970s (Chakrabarti et al., 2021). Kolkata became a popular spot for in-state migration, as a large economic hub with cheap urban housing in the suburban areas as well as lucrative employment opportunities requiring low to unskilled labour (Chakrabarti et al., 2021). Indeed, this was noticeable in the increase in the city boundaries, leading to the assimilation of suburban areas into the municipality (Figure 1). These areas were largely unplanned, and had little to no development of sewage and drainage facilities over the years (Chakrabarti et al., 2021).

In order to address these issues and cater to the "newly urban", the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Program (KEIP) and the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program (KEIIP) were set up to improve water supply, drainage, and environmental sustainability. From 2000, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the leading regional institution catering to the economic and social development programmes in the Indo-Pacific with significant stakeholders from South and Southeast Asia (Wesley, 2003), had extended loans and technical support to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) for sewage improvement projects. Between 2000 and 2006, the KMC received two loans from the ADB, amounting to $257.77 million, in order to revamp and upgrade the sewerage and drainage system while also creating sustainable sources of water supply by restoring canals and raising the standards of the water supply in the city. This policy, titled the Kolkata Environment Improvement Program (or KEIP), was largely successful, laying and renovating 564 kilometres of sewers and drains across Kolkata and improving sewer coverage from 31 per cent of the population in 2001 to 43 per cent in 2011. The loans matured in 2013, formally ending the KEIP project.

However, to build upon the successes of the project, as well as continue to improve the water and sewage systems in Kolkata while catering to a majority of the urban population with no access to the current sewage systems, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and ADB opened

discussions to continue the KEIP projects. In 2014, the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program (KEIIP) was announced as a multi-tranche financing facility (MFF) loan offered by the ADB, with a total contribution of $400 million over three tranches. In total, the project would cost $566 million over the three tranches, the rest of which would be covered by the Government of West Bengal and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. Tranche-1 was implemented from 2014 to 2019, while Tranche-II and III are under process, extending till 2025 (Millennium Post Editors, 2024).

Insights into Issues of Urban Development Addressed by the KEIIP

The KEIIP, through the three tranches, aims to address three major aspects of urban governance: urban water supply and management, sewerage and drainage, and flood management systems.

Urban Water Supply and Management

Covered as subprojects under Tranche-I and II, the KEIIP focused on installing pumping infrastructure to reach out to the areas populated by the urban poor and disadvantaged women (Asian Development Bank, 2023), establishing district metering areas (Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program, n.d.b), and establishing water service reservoirs across the city (Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program, n.d.b). With major investments going into the project, the ADB rated the projects as "satisfactory" in the development criteria but "less than likely" in the sustainability criteria (Asian Development Bank, 2023, pp. 12-13). Their rationale behind the low score on sustainability revolves around the fact that, at the time of the project report, the KMC had not introduced tariffs for domestic water supply, leading to delays in incurring operating and management costs as well as recovering capital costs. Here, it is important to note that the people availing the benefits of the projects are often the urban poor, thus revealing the inequitable and neoliberal nature of the project. Neoliberal

urban planning, as theorised by Gideon Baffoe (2023), protects elite interests, reducing socially impactful planning exercises to mere exercises of facilitation, which is evident here.

The draft resettlement plan (Kolkata Municipal Corporation & Asian Development Bank, 2012) denotes a deeply optimistic view on the impact of the policy, denoting numerous times that the resettlement or rehabilitation impact due to the water supply subproject will be minimal and temporary. It identifies 350 structures in Ward 80, 10 structures around the Garden Reach Sludge Pond and the entirety of Ward 132 as public stakeholders with the potential to face temporary to short-term impacts (Kolkata Municipal Corporation & Asian Development Bank, 2012, p. 31). To the afflicted, the plan offers temporary resettlement and jobs with the relevant contractors, and establishes a comprehensive 'Grievance Redressal Mechanism' (Kolkata Municipal Corporation & Asian Development Bank, 2012) to resolve concerns for the same.

However, it is not only difficult for the urban poor to file claims against large private corporations, that too with institutions benefitting from efficient resolution of the project, but also to claim better working conditions and employment status in the temporary jobs offered. Beyond the institutional influence wielded by these large corporations, the legal discourse on the urban poor has been elitist at all levels of jurisprudence, as argued by Ramanathan (2006). Importantly, many of these projects were extended for long periods of time, increasing the time spent for the displaced urban poor as well as detaching them from their sources of livelihood for extended periods of time. Since there is neither a quality standard for these resettlements, nor a guarantee to provide their previous housing intact, it becomes difficult for the displaced to resettle in their old environments (Shaw & Saharan, 2018).

Furthermore, the initial environmental examination (IEE) denotes certain environmental concerns, but "is unlikely to cause significant adverse impacts" and notes that there is no need for further

environmental impact assessment (EIA). However, as a project classified under Category B, working with basic necessities and around environmentally sensitive zones (river banks and near the coast), it seems difficult to claim that there is no requirement for further EIAs.

Sewerage and Drainage

Covered under all three tranches, the projects for sewerage and drainage were focused on extending the successes of the KEIP to peripheral areas by laying new sewer drainage pipes, providing direct housing connections to the sewage system (Sewerage and Drainage Works, n.d.), and establishing new pumping stations (Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program, n.d.b). The draft resettlement plan for these projects adequately identifies private land acquisition and the identities of the landowners, and also acknowledges the structures built upon this land. It also identifies roughly 1,400 structures, including nearly 800 residential settlements, which require demolition for the projects to continue. The critique of the resettlement plan follows a similar path, noting that contractors providing employment opportunities is unsustainable for the urban poor, while there is no protective social safety net for those losing their settlements and livelihoods (Kuiper & Van Der Ree, 2006).

Importantly, this document mentions that a week's notice would be provided to the afflicted people to vacate their land before demolition. The time period, which is noted as "adequate" by the plan, is predatory, due to the threat of physical demolition after a week. It is also infeasible for the urban poor to uproot their lives and livelihood from their land, find gainful employment elsewhere and maintain their social status in a new community within a period of one week.

Beyond this, humanitarian concerns about the working conditions of unskilled workers in the sewage and drainage projects are equally important critiques of the programme. The death of four sanitation workers in Kudghat in February 2021, sent into a manhole with

inadequate training and no safety belts to work on the sewage connections under the KEIIP, not only violates the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act of 2013, but also raises concerns about the humanitarian cost of the project (Akhilesh, 2021).

Flood Management Systems

Under the KEIIP, the KMC established the first Flood Forecasting and Early Warning System (FFEWS) in Kolkata in order to navigate extensive urban flooding due to the weak drainage system and severe lack of stormwater drainage systems. It uses sensor nodes in critical city locations (Figure 3) to deliver predictions and real-time updates. The system includes weather forecasts, flood models for various rainfall intensities, real-time information on key pump status, sump and canal water levels, actual rainfall, inundation levels, and a messaging system to warn city officials and citizens (Asian Development Bank, 2018).

Although an excellent policy initiative, from the image, there is a noticeable focus on sensor placement, with a majority of sensors present in and around residential and commercial buildings, and a notable lack of coverage for peripheral slum areas. These slums, often without stormwater drain coverage, are most susceptible to socio-economic repercussions from urban flooding (Yadav et al., 2018) and thus require more attention.

Stakeholder Analysis

There are three sets of stakeholders in the planning and implementation process of this policy, relevant to our analysis due to the variety of roles played. The core stakeholders are the regional-level authorities, with the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) playing a key role. In order to ease the process of implementation and continue with the ideals of decentralisation of planning and implementation, the KMC established an arm dedicated to the KEIIP, headed by the Mayor, Commissioner, and

an Indian Administrative Service (IAS)-level bureaucrat appointed as the project director. The following organogram clearly defines the organisational structure for the arm.

Certain critical insights about the policy are evident from the organogram itself. The hierarchical structure in the KEIIP places the decision-making authority in the hands of the top authorities of the city, while the technical and social units perform logistical and operational roles, leading to inequitable power distribution and creating inefficiencies by mandating excessive communication between entities with separate priorities. This fragmented structure not only slows down decision-making but also weakens the ability of technical and social units to address localised challenges effectively, as their insights are filtered through multiple bureaucratic layers before reaching policymakers.

Furthermore, the presence of external consultants shows the dependence on external entities, endemic to contemporary policy implementation (Howlett & Migone, 2013). Although it does add non-governmental perspectives to the implementation organisation, it arguably limits capacity-building activities within governmental institutions for future projects. This reliance on external consultants can also lead to a lack of institutional memory, where expertise and decision-making knowledge remain with private entities rather than being internalised by government bodies, potentially reducing long-term self-sufficiency in policy execution.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) remains a key stakeholder due to their investments in the project and extensive due diligence reports. An insight here is that the multi-tranche system benefits the project and ADB by avoiding incessant use of budgets and unnecessary wastage of resources. However, it is equally possible that failures during the first two tranches could lead to delays in subsequent tranches, creating uncertainty in the project (ADB, 2022).

The third set of stakeholders are the private institutions taking up the tenders for KEIIP projects. The Press Trust of India (2016) reported that the French utility company SUEZ Group won a recently-concluded contract to implement water services management in the Cossipore area under the KEIIP. Foreign and Indian companies are key to the process of revamping the supply system. However, it must be noted that allowing private entities to involve themselves with basic services such as the provision of water can be detrimental to the idea of equitable development, as professional service delivery will prioritise profit-driven approaches and have the position to refute any grassroots-level complaints (Prasad, 2007).

Theoretical Analysis

Governance Structure

The KEIIP follows a hybrid governance framework, with theoretical grounding in neoliberal urbanism and network governance.

Neoliberalism in urban governance entails market-orientated restructuring that emphasises privatisation, deregulation, and competition. Neoliberal scholars often argue in favour of removing paternalist policies and forgoing extensive government institutionalism, focussing on free-market procedures to create policies on the basis of the policy recipients' direct demands (Bally, 2002). In this case, neoliberal scholars would laud the investments from the ADB and the presence of consultants in the governance structure, as well as the public-private partnership sought after to fulfil the tenders and conduct the projects. However, it must be noted that the presence of a hierarchical structure of governmental stakeholders would be critiqued by neoliberal scholars, with a similar argument as this paper suggests, claiming that excessive authority to high stakeholders will inevitably create implementation bottlenecks (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

Network governance, as a theory, describes a collaborative method of policymaking, combining the governance strength of interconnected stakeholders in various ways, as opposed to hierarchical or market-based structures (Provan and Kenis, 2007). Provan and Kenis (2007) describe three types of network governance frameworks: participant-governed, lead organisation-governed, and network administrative organisation (NAO). The NAO method perfectly describes the model of governance opted by the KMC for the KEIIP, establishing an arm of qualified technical staff members to specifically govern the network of stakeholders, creating rules of procedure and reports, and monitoring the functioning of the others.

Insights from Key Terms

To examine governance challenges in KEIIP, it is crucial to elucidate important concepts such as sustainability, "environmental improvement programmes", and inter-governmental funding facilities. These ideas provide the theoretical foundation of this subject and affect the actual results of such undertakings.

Under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, urban sustainability is realised when a city grows equitably while reducing emissions (Thomas et al., 2020). Although indicators fail to adequately contextualise or even characterise sustainable growth (Thomas et al., 2020), it is necessary for urban growth to reduce emissions while increasing participatory governance. Sustainability, in the context of urban sewage development programmes, has evolved beyond robust sewage connections. Sustainable wastewater and sewage management in urban centres is inherently linked to effective wastewater treatment, thus promoting resource recovery through principles of circular economics and reducing the environmental impact of wastewater discharges (Ansari et al., 2024; Derco et al., 2024). Within the project goals of both the KEIP and the KEIIP, it is clear that the literal application of SDG 11 may be kept in mind, but the project objectives often ignore or fail to prioritise the disposal or equitable side of

the sustainability goal, which is, creating an impressive framework of sewers but with limited treatment plants.

Environmental improvement programmes follow an intriguing system of "facilitative regulation", that is, decentralising environmental programmes and social infrastructure to non-hierarchical and more inclusive programmes (Holley & Gunningham, 2006). EIPs, according to popular research coming from Australia, aim to engage with popular stakeholders as well as the affected citizens to generate meaningful policy and mould government authorities to act as facilitators rather than paternalist enforcers (Shearing, Gunningham & Holley, 2007). Although the KEIIP is a much larger project as opposed to the Victoria Environment Protection Authority (VEPA)'s Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) discussed by Holley and Gunningham (2006), aspects of decentralisation are visible, with industrial stakeholders taking up tenders playing a key role in policymaking, exemplified by the contract picked up by SUEZ. Effective decentralisation of the project will bring the KMC-led KEIIP closer to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11, but requires considerable administrative dissolution, which seems highly unlikely at the time. This would require more participatory mechanisms built into the institutional and implementation system of such projects and embrace the collaborative approach to decision-making that the VEPA was able to. These measures to decentralise power are necessary to take into account the aforementioned adverse and overlooked consequences of these programmes on local communities during the policymaking phase.

Conclusion

By 2023, the KEIIP has faced significant challenges related to delays in project completion, particularly concerning road conditions and waterlogging following pipeline work, with delays in the pipe laying work around Diamond Harbour Road and Ward 125 leading to inaccessible

roads (Millennium Post Editors, 2023). Delays in Tranche-II projects seem unending, often caused by inefficient contractors.

Having denoted several critical insights, the KEIIP stands as an excellent programme with numerous implementation and theoretical issues. The successes of the KEIP and KEIIP combined have promised the creation of 1000 kilometres of water supply and drainage systems in Kolkata, and have generated skilled and unskilled labour. Just as with most urban policies, the intentions behind the KEIIP often outweigh the unintended consequences of the program, but it is necessary to identify the affected citizens and create safety nets for their livelihood.

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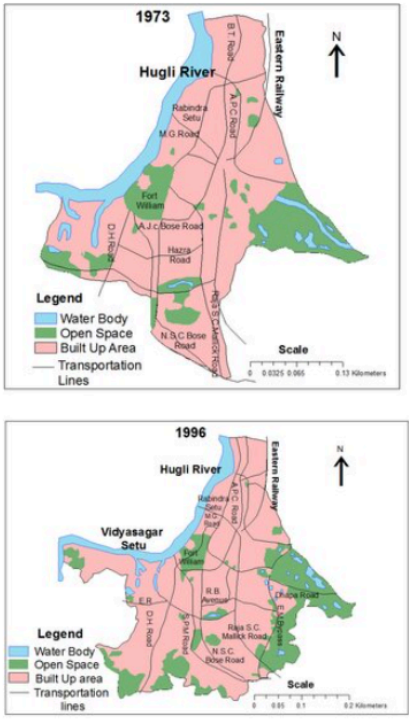
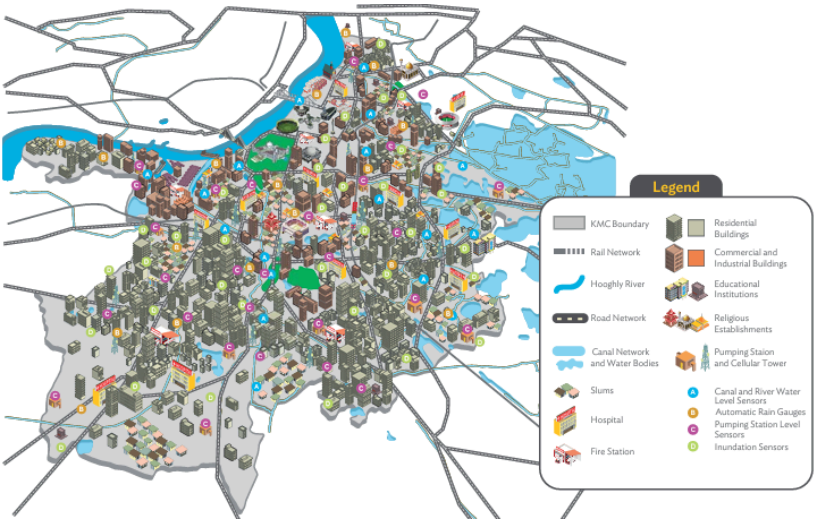
Appendix

Figure 1:



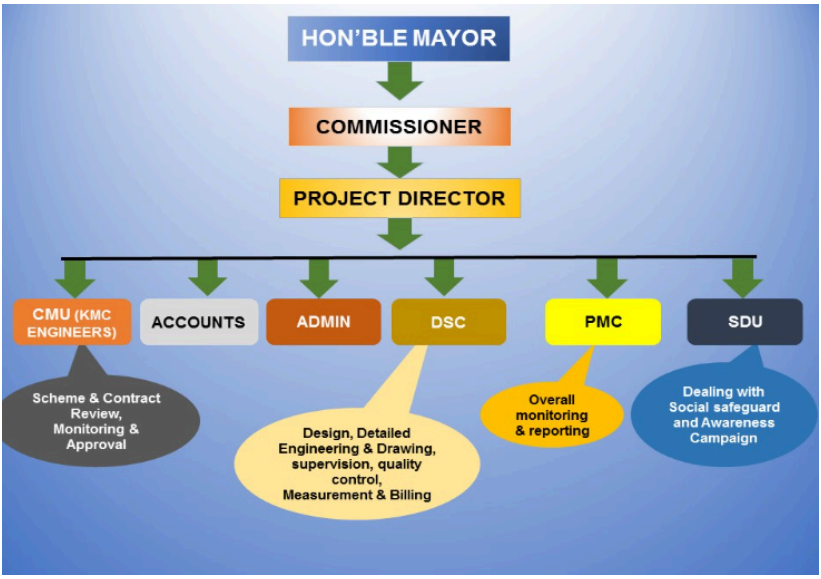
Note: Change in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) boundaries between 1973 (above) and 1996 (below). From "Assessment of land-use change and its impact on the environment using GIS techniques: a case of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, West Bengal, India" by M.T. Parveen and R.A. Ilahi, 2018, *Geojournal,* 87(S4) (https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-022-10581-z).

Figure 2:



Note: Locations of Sensors, mapped as the letters A, B, C and D. From "Toward Resilient Kolkata: Introducing India's First Comprehensive City-Level Flood Forecasting and Early Warning System" by Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2018.
(https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/452576/toward-resilient-kolkata.pdf)

Figure 3:



Note: Organogram of the KEIIP Implementation Arm of the KMC. From "About Us", Kolkata Environmental Improvement Investment Program (KEIIP), n.d.a (https://www.keiip.in/about-us.html)

Stateless Geographies and Modalities of Refusal: The Primitive and The Modern

Madiha Tariq

Ashoka University

Abstract

The state's dominance as a political form obscures alternatives that reject centralised authority. Addressing that assumption, this paper examines stateless societies as distinct modes of governance which resist the rationality of modern states. Contrary to Eurocentric assumptions that render them primitive or transitory, these societies cultivate egalitarian, non-coercive structures that decentralise power through collective decision-making. These systems are not relics of history but demonstrate how governance without domination is not only possible but also practical in cultivating social justice and participatory political systems. Thus, its theoretical implications extend beyond academic discourse, urging a rethinking of governance models.

Keywords: Stateless societies, Coercion, Decentralisation, Governance models, Participatory politics

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century witnessed the culmination of various schools of thought, all centralising the role of the state as the principal locus in comparative social science research, but especially as the protagonist, the prime actor in political praxis. Almost eight decades past the Second World War and the consequent reorganisation of the world order, states continue to occupy a central position in all political discourses. Such centrality lubricates not only a theoretical global framework but extends equally to governance and judicial models in different parts of the world. The state as a centralised institution exists almost invariably and decidedly as an omnipotent regulator of political and personal experiences of modern life. In analysing the present, past, and future of such centrality, one begins to seek alternative methods of organising people and wonder whether they exist, in the world as it stands today. To that end, an inquiry into the nature of governance model(s) of stateless societies and how they are distinguished from the state offers a holistic perspective on the ostensible timelessness, and rational location of the state, apart from providing a comparative analysis of the two systems of organisation.

This paper builds on such antagonism between the state and stateless societies to situate their points of differentiation by placing 'power'—its location, distribution, and intensity as the vantage point of this enquiry. I argue that power is the abstraction where the conceptions of both state and statelessness emanate from, and it is precisely this power that the form of organisation thus established manifests. Power, then, is the motivator of the state and also the logic of statelessness. Accordingly, I will split the paper, after the introduction, into three sections, mapping power as dominative, centralised, and coercive, respectively. I will explore what it is in the nature of power, or in its various conceptions, that allow for, on one hand, a didactic duality in the two forms of organising people, and on the other hand, its indispensability in both of them. In

doing so, I shall be able to reflect on alternative governance model(s) which, although existing in a stateless framework, provide promising lessons for advancing social justice and decentralised governance systems in the present world. In a world increasingly shaped by crises of governance, the theoretical examination of stateless societies challenges entrenched assumptions about the political indispensability of the modern state and ideas of its inevitability, inaugurated by Eurocentric modernity. By contributing to the broader debates within political anthropology, I intend to create space for the exploration of governance models that transcend hierarchical and centralised paradigms.

On Dominance

To begin with, most evolutionary and functional analyses agree with, if not end at, one common characteristic of the state—that out of all other social groups, it is the one that rises above and exercises dominance. Weber (1919/2004) invokes the idea of politics as the leadership of one over the other reflected in the relations of people with the state. To him, an asymmetric dynamic created by *Herrschaft*[2]—power that one exercises over the other—bridges the state and the people (Weber, 1919/2004). The state, therefore, is a project of domination that creates a relationship between the governed and the governing bodies.[3] An idea of this sort is best read in continuum with the Lockean tradition of the social contract in which the original equality and mutually experienced freedom of the state of nature is morphed into a consensual concentration of power in a few pockets that exist to limit people's executive equality in relation to one another (Locke, 1690/1823, p. 106). Such concentration begins at the emergence of civil societies and is crystallised in the formation of a state.

Such domination can further be conceptualised in two ways: as power organised by diverting it to selected bodies of people and secondly, as an abstract system of rules that is above any individual or social group. In

both cases, a power-yielding faculty exercises control over the general masses. In the former, the faculty is an institution comprising certain individuals, whereas the latter features a socially sanctioned body of rules, not represented by specific people. Following both Weber's theoretical association of politics, and leadership with parties and politicians as well as our empirical observations, modern states underscore the former logic. It is this point of differentiation, of the state organising 'domination' by offering it to a distinct few who are the *bearers* of such power, that at once, distinguishes a state from a stateless society. Moreover, it is this very concentration of power that limits the scope of inclusive, grassroots, and participatory governance as policy increasingly becomes the subject matter of the power elite.

In all definitions and contestations of the state, this central idea experiences permanency—Hobbes' Leviathan (1651), Marx and Engels' committee for Bourgeoises (1848), Weber's force monopoly (1919/2004) Tilly's protection racket (1990) and Olson's stationary bandit (2000), all show the existence of a supreme body that rises above the ordinary individual. In stateless societies, however, the domination exercised is abstract. That is to say, that while a body of rules is supreme to any single individual, there is no group of people which embodies that supremacy. Rules and by extension, domination, are mutually reinforced by one over the other through a sense of collective personhood established in social acts. Hence, while power in the modern state is manifested physically in the government and there exist governors against the governed, stateless societies refuse such concentration of power. Instead, the governors in a stateless society are the abstract rules of collectivity, codes of membership, and belonging, materially reinforced by everyone over everyone. In such societies, no one is governed by another and no one governs the other, yet they all mutually reinforce the governance of their collective rules over one another.

Here, it becomes crucial to exemplify such abstract and diffused governance that I have thus far explained in theory. Clastres (1974/1989) provides a detailed account of primitive societies,[4] which exist in their very resistance to modern statecraft and practices of state formation. Such societies, he explains, are anchored in rites of passage—ceremonies of initiation into the social framework—undertaken by committing law to writing on the bodies of young people. These acts of writing the law include piercings, tattoos, and other rigorous forms of what may colloquially be called "torture". Such acts of torture serve several ideological functions: first, as the measurement of an individual's "stoicism" and "mettle" (p. 142). It also exists as an instrument of memory (p. 143), a constant reminder of the overarching collective which "marks" the individual and exists in them as much as their personal identities. The rituals of initiation gradually transform the body as a carrier of these memories to the body becoming the memory itself (p. 143). Both ideological functions indicate a greater, more fundamental reasoning—that of society being universal, transcendental, and above the individual. "You are one of us and you will not forget it," as quoted by a Guayaki man captures the essence of this sport (p. 143). Hence, these rituals serve as mechanisms for embedding social norms within individuals, making adherence to these norms a deeply internalised practice rather than one imposed through force. Here, governance exists as a diffused and participatory process rather than reliant on coercive structures.

This is where the differentiation becomes strikingly visible—when the constant reminder of society being greater than the self is pushed by one's own body, it is an obvious declaration that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is the 'total' nature of such stateless societies that defines them as opposed to the potential of totalitarian tendencies that modern states often exhibit. What is higher than the self exists in the community of all individuals together and must be preserved against each individual by all others. Unsurprisingly, then, in societies with a state,

what is higher than the self exists not in the community of all but a chosen few who represent the community.[5] An organisation of this sort delivers two important implications: one that such societies, in the absence of designated bearers of power, work as impressive models of local, participatory governance. Secondly, by virtue of being antithetical to the concentration of vested interests, they birth possibilities of a culture of social justice that can stand the challenges of time and age.

On Centralisation and Resource Distribution

Accordingly, this conceptual difference also translates to routine practices of exercising power. In that, all activities concerning the people follow a top-down sequence in a state; the ownership and management of tangible and intangible public resources is imperative to the state. All provisions to the public, of resources and even rights, trickle down from this powerful centre. In contrast, because there is no greater entity 'separate' from the people[6] in stateless societies, power and provision are diffused as opposed to centralised. An example is the contrast between the distribution of public goods in states and gift economies in stateless societies.

It is in this vein that Weber (1919/2004) discusses the installation and sustenance of order as the hallmark of states, aimed at promoting law and order on one hand and upholding the supremacy of the state, on another (p. 82). Slater (2010) who traces the development of authoritarian regimes, also established a general relationship between a state's sustenance and its provision of resources. As per him, it is the existence of a "provision pact" between the citizens and the state from which general consensus flows, and the state continues to exist. The idea of a provision pact implies that the state and the citizens share a relationship that is cultivated vis-à-vis resources. It also demonstrates how the resources are centrally owned and allocated to the periphery as and when the state deems it necessary.

In contrast, stateless societies are often marked by gift economies in which elaborate public rituals are held to exchange an enormous range of goods within and between social groups.[7] A failure to give depreciates a person's social and moral value, and the inability to reciprocate, in turn, may invite catastrophic harm (Mauss, 1925). The obligatory exchange of resources as gifts to the extent that such giving establishes and reinforces one's social status allows resources to not settle at one centre, and continuously move around people, thereby defying possibilities of centralised ownership or singular claims. Unlike the state, where governance often becomes a tool of domination, stateless systems rely on moral obligations and symbolic authority to sustain social cohesion.

Mauss (1925, p. 193) refers to this phenomenon as a "total social fact[s]" since economies of this kind are motivated by various kinds of social forces which operate together, in tandem with one another. Such economies are dictated by religious and cultural factors as much as political ones. As such, that renders it impossible to separate one social force from the other or rank them based on their relative significance. Unlike the state, life in stateless societies[8] cannot have a separate and centralised institution which performs the function of allocating resources. Stateless societies breed and support various forms of sociality and institutions which often intersect and overlap. For example, Mauss (1925) refers to the Northwest American Potlatch, as a juridical, religious, mythological, shamanistic, military, economic, and legal practice for the things offered are often elements in the "traffic of souls and things blended together with one another" (p. 147). Conversely, where a normative modern state exists, it is the sole dictator of how resources are distributed in the society and other ways of organising social life are discouraged as either primitive or futile.

However, any analysis of gift economies in the context of their totality is situated on a sloppy slope, susceptible to false moralist conclusions. To that, the explanation is that while gift economies indeed insist on a

diffused allocation of resources, they are not necessarily at a moral pinnacle. Gift economies, in fact, are often based on agonism, destruction,[9] and large-scale threats against the fulfilment of obligations. It is not the moral high ground but the logistical lack of a centralised, separate entity to perform functions, one of which is resource allocation, that distinguishes a state from a stateless society. Therefore, the inference must not be mistaken as necessarily a call to fall into the anarchist prism of statelessness, but rather, to take appropriate lessons from such societies and integrate them into our practices of statecraft in the direction of empowered local governance, and stronger codes of social justice.

Furthermore, outside the purview of gift economies, another interesting demonstration of this decentralisation of power is Clastres' (1974/1989) account of the relationship between power and speech in primitive societies. The power of speech underscores a certain kind of discursive function that is accorded to the figure of the leader. In such societies, while the highest form of power—the power of speech—is accorded to the chief, it is not capable of imposing commands over the people but is only a manifestation of a ritual obligation. The obligation, ironically, is enforced on the chief and not the people. In fact, people do not pay any attention to the chief's discourse and render it insignificant. Even the inattentiveness is ritualised. The goal is to give the chief a sense of power only to underscore the lack of it. The caricature of the chief as a speaking body who no one listens to permits the society to resist a separate "repository of power invested in the chief" (p. 157).

On Coercion and Violence

Finally, in following the state's dominating and centralising tendencies as an institution separate from the general public, the modern state often employs coercion as a tool to secure this position. This coercion is regulated through law, both complementing and reinforcing one another. In describing a state, Weber (1919/2004) isolates coercion or the

monopoly to legitimate violence that the state exercises with respect to other institutions as the distinguishing factor from other organisations. That is not to say that violence does not originate in bodies other than the state or that violence is necessary to the working of a state at all times, but that only the state has an exclusive right to violence, and this right is protected and fundamentally legitimised by the social design. Weber (1919/2004) delineates three such forms of legitimation—charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal. A modern state, while not necessarily pure in this distinction, is an emblem of rational-legal domination, and thus, its coercive powers are embedded in provisions of legality, id est, coded in law (p. 34). Coercion, as an instrument of domination, facilitates a state's perpetual domination in a society.

On Statelessness and Conclusion

However, any study concerning the differences between the two forms of organising society—with the state and without it—is incomplete without filtering out what may be called "Conceptual Poverty" (Clastres, 1974/1989, p. 16) of associating an evolutionary trajectory to stateless societies by predicting their eventual transition into societies with states, as and when they develop in space and time. Not only are they far from reality, but such assumptions cause significant skewness in both the method and outcomes of approaching stateless societies. Such ideas of an inevitable progression of society from stateless geographies to modern states with delimited territories is a result of Eurocentric systems of thought, birthed by the caricature of modernity. Such cognitive faculties make at least two basic assumptions: One that the stateless societies are governed by apolitical, primitive, and irrational beliefs, and secondly, that real political power, as in modern states, will inevitably lead to coercion. However, while stateless societies do not operate under a framework of coercion and physical force, they are not necessarily apolitical. Politics and power are inherent to stateless societies—from wars to exogamic matrimonial alliances, power dynamics are continuously at play (Clastres,

1974/1989, p. 65-74). Yet, what is different is that this power is diffused and offered to everyone, and thus, negated in this very act of offering.

This balance of extending power without the resultant domination may be unknown to the West-dominated New World Order but exists nevertheless, not only, in a passive capacity to prevent a coercive, centralised state, but especially in actively refusing to have one. One can give several examples of which the most famous continues to be that of Trobriands, a set of islands to the east of New Guinea. Malinowski (1922), considered to be the pioneer of anthropological studies involved with stateless societies, wrote extensive ethnographic accounts of the Melanesian society. Then began a tradition of scholarly attention towards such groups in Oceania, Africa, and Eastern India among others. Refusal, to them, is not only an act of denial but a collaborative approach of the public, and the systems they create, to oppose a potential centralised state. These societies may never have witnessed a state, and so, may not be able to refuse the state in its empirical understanding. Yet, their existence is inherently a call against coercive and centralised power which are the distinguishing characteristics of a state. The refusal is a reflection of their political acumen, and is politically "generative" and "strategic" (McGranahan, 2016).[10] It creates a form of social organisation and cultural vocabulary that rigid states with fixed centers can not cultivate. Put simply, the function of social refusal is not inert; it produces a new social formation. In that, stateless societies are not necessarily historical objects or primitive frameworks subject to compulsory evolution, which have exhausted their relevance. James C Scott's work on state avoidance, too, provides a useful counterpoint to the inevitability of state formation. Scott (2009) theorises that many stateless societies, particularly in Southeast Asia, are not merely primitive relics but are intentionally organised to evade state domination. Hence, the absence of a state is not always a product of underdevelopment but a deliberate political strategy to maintain autonomy.

Therefore, if it is the separation of the society and the governing bodies, incentivised by the right to coercive domination that differentiates states from stateless societies, the logical limit of such coercive domination is the inability of people to participate in the process of governance. It ultimately also translates to the impossibility of a language of local governance and social justice. That is why the social design and political organisation of stateless societies offer many lessons for modern states to, at the least, improve their local governance and social justice gradients. Hence, the theoretical implications of such models extend beyond academic discourse; they urge a rethinking of participatory governance practices and social justice initiatives in contemporary contexts. In the long term, it makes a case for ideas like anarchism—often used pejoratively—as the projected rationality and orderliness of the modern state begin to crumble.

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Endnotes

1. Political scientist Peter Evans coined the phrase "Bringing the State Back In" in 1985, emphasising the state's existence as an active agent in determining organisation within and outside itself, and having its own dynamics. Various ideological strands including the Marxists, and then Marxist feminists, have stressed the cruciality of the state in modern political discourses.

2. It is used in German to indicate God's lordship and dominion.

3. For a detailed analysis, Foucault's 'governmentality' concept may be perused.

4. It is imperative to note that "primitive" in this context is not chronological but conceptual. Primitive does not stand as a synonym for archaic for reasons the essay discusses later.

5. This discussion assumes merit not on a normative basis but especially for logistical reasons. Many would claim that since democracy—the pinnacle of Weber's Modern state—involves the mass election of the chosen few, they do not entirely oppose the communal sense of stateless societies. To that, a statistical and mostly procedural explanation is required. Since electoral procedures are fraught with difficulties of social choice theory, no election will ever manifest in a pure execution of the general will. Hence representation in democracies is close to, but not the same as collective personhood in stateless societies.

6. The moral codes are embodied by people collectively and are, therefore, internal to them and their civilisation.

7. From what Malinowski calls 'worthless trinkets' to valuable things like precious stones, armshells, and even other social resources.

8. And by extension, in those with gift economies.

9. As in the case of Kula.

10. To explore "refusal" in cultural anthropology, see McGranahan (2016).

Book Review

OF SHOURIE, ESTABLISHMENT, AND LEAR

Prem Ansh Sinha

Ramjas College, University of Delhi

Book: The Commissioner for Lost Causes
Author: Dr Arun Shourie
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Price: INR 999

> See better, Lear; and let me still remain,
> The true blank of thine eye.
> (Shakespeare, 1970, p.13)

With an old Ramnath Goenka gradually losing his authority[1], and Arun Shourie helplessly watching the drunken dance of a falling empire, *The Commissioner for Lost Causes* seems no different than *King Lear*, where the old King struggles with the taste of trust in his quest to uphold his past authority and a rightful successor, at the same time (Shakespeare, 1970). This 2022 book, requires a closer examination for its commentaries on press, power, and judiciary; and whilst, the national dailies like The Telegraph might strike it off as a lengthy read and dismiss the nuances expanded in the book (Nayar, 2022), I argue, there is no

better time to read the flight of newspapers post Pandit Nehru and before the economic liberalisation in 1991.

Adorned with a contradictory and mercurial personality and an autocratic method of working (Rahman, 2013), the Darbhanga born titan and perhaps, the finest crusader of press in India, Ramnath Goenka appears to be a manifestation of what Jesse Armstrong must have thought of while scribbling down the character of Logan Roy (Armstrong, 2018-2023). "...Ramnath-*ji* could abuse fluently in thirteen languages," (Shourie, p. XIV) and just like this, we see how Logan Roy could have found his patron saint, with his fair share of love for colourful languages too. Goenka through the words of Shourie comes across as cold, calculative, and shrewd in his decision-making, in order to make the best decisions for the larger benefit of the Express, one of them, which Shourie often lightly remarks in his public lectures, that he is the only Editor in the country who has been sacked not once, but twice–courtesy, Ramnath Goenka (Kapoor, 2022).

Is it the good old Shourie?

Written in the signature Shourie style, which is production of primary facts like an avalanche and sharp coruscating remarks, this, is the first volume of a series of memoirs, and covers the various pivotal incidents and people who shaped his illustrious journalistic career, and stops with his shift to active politics as a minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-*ji*'s government[2]. It dedicates a significant number of pages to revisiting the author's dynamic with Ramnath Goenka, touches on the Bhagalpur Blindings[3], and takes us to the plight of the judiciary[4] in the Emergency, amongst other topics that underscore why saving the institutions that cement the structure of the republic is more important today than ever. Another important point that I wish to investigate in this review is if the book misses its mark on certain subjects due to the evolutionary biasses of the author, the cause of which could often be traced back to the abuses

thrown at his specially abled son, who has cerebral palsy, by the social media accounts followed even by Prime Minister Narendra Modi (NDTV, 2015). And thinking of it, a reader could see how Arun Shourie, whensoever he speaks of his close association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, subsequently follows are words that often show a sentiment of regret or sarcastic remarks[5]. Yet he does not separate himself from his past writings that created the foundations of an intellectual conservative movement in India, which, in its current form, is dying, with most of the scholars of conservatism confusing it with the Bharatiya Janata Party[6].

We can find the good old Arun Shourie writing against Mandal and reservations, quoting, "merit has become a dirty word," and he further writes (p. 565), “standards were dubbed as elitist, as a conspiracy of the upper castes to keep the lower castes down. Vulgarity as becoming a mark of 'authenticity', a right. Intimidation, the argument of choice. And assault, proof." Shourie is scathing in his remarks against the reservations, and goes on to write, that this policy was being extended not to the castes that were weak, but the qualification was being made on the grounds of their organisational strength to fight for it from the politicians (pp. 555-566). When the discourses on social media on an emotionally charged topic like reservations leave you nowhere, Shourie's long-form pieces are a refreshing sight to behold. The reader is reminded of Shourie's excellent erudition in *Falling over Backwards* (2006), where he produced hundreds of pages of judicial discussions on merit and asks (p. 329): "Does the Constitution aim at equality of opportunity or of results? Is the 'equality of results' not another will-o'-the-wisp? One in pursuit of which anything, everything can be justified, justified to any extent, and for any length of time?"; and goes on to investigate the very historical roots of caste, and asks (p. 329), "Was India ever what stray verses in Manu suggest it ought to have been?" Clearly, despite all his disillusionment with the BJP and Narendra Modi, in particular, we do not find any intellectual bias caused by that.

The Angry Crusader

Arun Shourie fought bloodless wars—investigating thousands of pages of data and taking down governments. The Sultan of Bombay, Abdul Rehman Antulay[7], was at the peak of his political career in 1980, when he was elected as the next Chief Minister of Maharashtra in June 1980, and Ramnath Goenka's resourcefulness led to the Express taking down a strongman on charges of corruption. The book details this event in the most nuanced way possible, and no other recount could be a parallel to this world of Shourie. Labour Unions were a big thing before the 1991 economic reforms, and they were very often politicised with intentions to score political goals, and we could find the organisational spirit of press in those days when all rose together in one voice, when a violent strike that hampered the circulation of the Express took place, unlike today, when the news media which is run for, of, and by advertisements and the government, the erstwhile years had journalists who knew the weight of their profession. Shourie very comprehensively provides his readers with the background to these events. Similarly, we find effective protests by the press when the Rajiv Gandhi Government brought up the Defamation Bill of 1988, which could potentially curb the power of the press, and was a response to the newspaper reporting on the Bofors Scam.

Later, he talks of thirty-nine rules of thumb post his experience in such circumstances, where he provides the framework to speak truth to power. He writes that the first blow must be devastating, but that a third of the ammunition must be reserved because the subject will very often retaliate (pp. 494-501). As dramatic as it may sound for an average reader, all of it is relevant even for today, when we saw a repeat of the 1988 Defamation Bill with the government putting out a notice to blacklist journalists for spreading fake news in 2018 (Bengali & Parth, 2018), and retracting it within hours post the backlash by senior journalists and opposition leaders. It is very much possible for any politician or powerful associate of

the establishment to use the phraseology of "fake news" to their benefit. It is, of course, a very natural tendency of any powerful state to curb a news line that goes against their interests, in order to maintain public goodwill, but a strong press that can overcome those tendencies and resist the forces is a must for any stable society as well. For what it is worth, I believe, every society must strive to reach this equilibrium of the force of the state and resistance by the press. There is another view that could be accepted, that inherently, the state must be confident enough not to feel threatened by a piece of criticism. On these lines, Shourie's emphasis on reading incessantly, pursuing Mohandas Gandhi's formula of pursuing one topic until the goal is not reached before moving to another, not giving up to the ease of journalism, and knowing the law well are pointers that should be taught comprehensively to not only the students of humanities, but to tenth graders in school[8].

Conclusion: Where are the Commissioners Today?

Shourie's book is not only a biographical account of his illustrious career, but a confessional and personal address to the readers of political history and contemporary politics. What separates this book from other similar accounts is how the author is not detached from the historical events, and provides his ground-zero lens to them. Where this book misses its mark, despite calling for demolishing governmental propaganda with avalanches of facts, is, that the author's provocative binary conclusions apropos the Narendra Modi-led BJP government are devoid of any nuanced takes and context, unlike his other writings. Arun Shourie being unlike Arun Shourie in this case is strange. Although a regular reader of Shourie knows that he can produce pieces of evidence to uphold his case here too, his personal bias might be a limit to the readers seeking his signature writing style around every argument, but this does not diminish the weight this book holds.

On meeting the author last year at an event, I could not refrain from asking: If after every political party offering freebies, reservations breaching the mark, institutions falling, and even his former political party not paying any heed to what he wrote in *Worshipping False Gods*, *Falling Over Backwards*, *Indian Controversies*—what does it hold for India? And he said, and I paraphrase, only a miracle can save us. In the end, Shourie appears to be the Lear looking for his rightful successor, which compels us to ask: In today's age, when we need a Shourie and a backer like Ramnath Goenka more than ever, have the "lost causes" been lost forever, or are they merely waiting for their commissioners?

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Endnotes

1. Shourie writes in his book (pp. 568-570) that his second removal by Ramnath Goenka around the peak of the Mandal Commission uproar was done when "Ramnath-*ji* was not even in the shadow of himself." He and his colleagues deduce from the health condition of Ramnath Goenka and the writing style of the letter, that the paper had gone out of his hands. It was also later evident when there was a sharp division of The Express Group between his heirs—The Indian Express, with the northern editions under the control of Vivek Goenka; and The New Indian Express under the control of Manoj Kumar Sonthalia.

2. Arun Shourie had a decade-long political career in the BJP, as a Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh, where he held several ministerial positions in Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee-*ji*'s cabinet.

3. Bhagalpur Blindings Case of 1979-80, is one of the most infamous and dark chapters in the country, wherein, the police pierced the eyes of the criminals, with some having petty offences with the spokes of a bicycle or any other thin needle, and then, poured sulphuric acid into the mutilated eye sockets. It was arguably the first time in the history of law that the Supreme Court ordered compensation for the violation of the basic human rights and dignity of the victims. Justice never arrived because the fifteen suspended officers were later promoted or shifted to better positions, and those who decided to speak up against the act remained suspended. Further reading could be done by referring to *Khatri and Others vs State of Bihar & ORS*.

4. One instance, that could be taken up here is the *ADM Jabalpur vs Shivkant Shukla*, famously known as the *Habeas Corpus Case*, where the Supreme Court of India had ruled in favour of Indira Gandhi, with Justice Hans Raj Khanna, being the lone dissenter—it becomes interesting to note, of this five-judge bench, Justice PN Bhagwati, Justice YV Chandrachud, Justice MH Baig; all except Justice Hans Raj Khanna rose to be the Chief Justice of India (and of course, Chief Justice AN Ray, who was on the bench, also ruled in favour of Indira Gandhi). One interesting case, where Shourie is personally involved is concerning Justice PN Bhagwati, where the latter is

consistent with his efforts to appease the governments, to an extent, when Indira Gandhi got re-elected to the office of the prime minister, he wrote her a letter concluding with: "Today the reddish glow of the rising sun is holding out the promise of a bright sunshine."

5. For instance, (pp. 49-50), we come across this, when after meeting Bhaurao Deoras of the RSS, he informed Ramnath Goenka of it, to which he remarked how "all these fellows are monks primarily because they did not land a girl," and that, once they get the power, one will learn "how much of monk is in them". To which, Shourie later remarks, he got to learn of it very early on. But this also forces the reader to think, would he have written that remark, had he still been a part of the BJP?

6. While conservatism is a broad idea, what the BJP believes is another stream of thought associated with it. BJP believes in parts of Hindutva combined with idolising Maharashtrian heroes and turning them into national heroes to unite voters under the umbrella of nationalism, which helps it further its electoral gains as a political party, and there is nothing wrong with that, either—it is a political party, not a theoretical academic or a saint, but it becomes necessary to distinguish between conservatism and the politics of the BJP.

7. It should be worth noting, despite everything, AR Antulay did not seem to hold any grudge against Shourie, as much as we can infer from the author's experience. At the airports and other places, Shourie says, "he was always most pleasant and spoke politely." Antulay knew that Shourie did what he was supposed to be doing as a journalist, a fine gentlemanliness that can no longer be found today.

8. But this, is something theoretical and ideal, something that the state would never do, something that is not pragmatic for it to be doing. For what it is worth, in India, the humanities are a long, forlorn sibling. In this sorry state of affairs, expecting an educational revolution like this is to walk into Alice's Wonderland. It is only a line highlighting the relative importance of Shourie's book.

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Prem is pursuing his undergraduate studies in political science. He likes to write on foreign affairs and security, while reading of the past, and making sense of contemporary Indian politics. While he is done with his daily quota of rambling about archives, he spends his evenings listening to ghazal and classical music.

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‘See better, Lear; and let me still remain,
The true blank of thine eye.’
(Shakespeare, 1970, p. 13)