
The Department of Political Science
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
CRITIQUE & CRISIS
Sabab | Volume 8, 2024

About the Cover

The cover design for Sabab's 8th volume "Critique & Crisis", is an amalgamation of diverse figures, each distinct in colour and texture, representing a multitude of voices and perspectives within the realm of political discourse. The use of collage as a technique is not merely an aesthetic choice but serves as a metaphor for the journal's approach to scholarship – piecing together diverse ideas and perspectives to create a comprehensive understanding of political phenomena.

Silhouettes of individuals are prominently displayed to symbolize the diversity of thought and the multiplicity of crises addressed in the journal. These figures are overlaid with significant historical and contemporary images, including protest scenes, iconic faces, and symbolic artefacts. Each narrates a unique story of resistance, resilience, and critique and serves to underscore the journal's focus on critical examination of both the roots and ramifications of political crises.

References to influential political theorists and activists, whose legacies continue to inspire critical thought and action, are incorporated into the design. Furthermore, by incorporating elements from various cultural contexts, the cover highlights the interconnectedness of global political issues and the importance of cross-cultural understanding in political science. The background of the illustration integrates historical documents, symbolizing the continuum of political critique from past to present. The layering of these elements creates a sense of historical depth and continuity, reinforcing the idea that current crises are deeply rooted in historical contexts.

The cover attempts to provide a compelling visual representation of "Critique & Crisis," striking a balance between the essence of political engagement and scholarly inquiry. It invites readers to delve into the rich content of the journal, promising a thought-provoking exploration of critical issues and transformative ideas.

SABAB

The Annual Academic Journal
Department of Political Science
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
2024

Sabab is the annual academic journal of the Department of Political Science, Lady Shri Ram College for Women. In Urdu, the word Sabab means reason or cause. It implies the quest for the grounding of the abstract, the grasping of the metaphysical. Sabab publishes a compilation of imaginative, ambitious papers each year with the aim of encouraging critical thinking and meaningful engagement with the political phenomena around us.

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Faculty Note

Dr. Nancy Pathak & Dr. Vagesh Pawaiya

When we sit to pen down the faculty note for this edition of the journal, we seek to delve into one of the most potent and pertinent questions of all times- whether critique has any positive role to play in politics or does it generate only unproductive crisis? Critique seems to have acquired a negative connotation in these times, or rather in all times of history when the ideas have come to collide and failed to reproduce novelty. This has given rise to the necessity to innovate, to break the norms and to think the unthinkable. The spirit of critique is an instinctive rebellion against the defunct or oppressive conditions of existence and the ideational designs supporting it. As foolishly mutinous as it is made to sound, the act of critique requires intense intellectual labour, thought and imaginative courage to break away from one's conditioning. This change is usually resisted and resented as only an anti-thetical phenomenon and a deconstructive process, both by those who have a vested interest in the existing structures and those who are simply comfortable with their conditions. Only if this evolution is studied from wider horizons, we understand that there is no scope for synthesis, construction and growth without the deconstruction brought by critique and the crisis. As Buddhism claims, change is the only universal constant. It has its intrinsic rhythm.

All ideas and materialities need a tipping point, a point of crisis that pushes them out of their comfort zones. From the dawn of rationality to the debate on the abandonment of morality, all of the above developments were a product of the ebbs and flows of critique and crisis. Those who tapped the currents of the crisis either enjoyed the fruits of change or professed it, those who resisted it withered away in irrelevance. Although there are many theories of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis that will convince you to believe that it is an absolute, linear process. However, history tells us otherwise, it is both linear, cyclical and even chaotic, shrouded by constant pushes and pulls of the contestations. What the intelligentsia really needs to ponder upon is whether the crisis posed by the irrelevance of power structures creates a flat structure or does it give rise to an alternate power structure.

Professor Koselleck in his work Kritik and Krise points out that for centuries the power structures kept the ideas and materialities compartmentalized. The Hobbesian paradigm clearly demarcated the public space into the space of authority, an attempt to prioritise law and order above the chaos of the war of all against all. It leaves us with an important enquiry- Does this strict compartmentalization, superimposed order and division of public spaces account for the

nature of power, which is to flow and not concentrate? The answer is, that it does not allow the innate change to go through, but the seeds of change continue to breathe and knock at the doors of these compartment gates. We witnessed the reclamation of power in the social, economic and moral spheres with the evolution of voluntary associations and social movements. This intermingling was allowed more readily by the advancements in the mediums of information exchange. The cycles of critique and crisis that were earlier restricted gained pace with the challenges posed by the strict state-society dichotomy, class assortments, and other forms of classifications. This change gained momentum caused by the cracks made in the compartments of authorities by critical ideas and post-modernist contestations. These dissonances gained a problematising, analytical as well as problem-solving character, all necessary pre-conditions for progress.

With the flattening of the mediums of exchange, the compartments appear to be falling into rubbles. The age of mass communication and more so social media has both enhanced democratic accountability and unfurled misinformation. On the one hand, the inter-flow between the compartments has provided a relatively horizontal platform for conciliation. On the other hand, the reluctance on the part of power structures to allow the information or rather correct, intelligible information in the common hands has further aggravated cataclysmic forces giving way to conflicts that favour those who control the information. The contestation today is to control the narrative, like it has always been but the technology at hand has completely changed the dynamics of this reat game. Althusser had warned us of the exclusionary character of the technology, and it is coming to haunt us now more than ever before. We are living in interesting times. Post-truth constructions are constantly manufacturing consent to prevent both critique and crisis but they are generating conflicts. As analytical discussants of critique and crisis, it becomes the duty of the intelligentsia to explore the necessity of the same and their micro-variants. At the same time, eyes need to be kept open for the agents of crisis prevention that are generating consent and stifling any voices of critique, by quickly passing judgements to stratify them into constructive and destructive.

On this note, in light of the journal's thematic focus and the diverse array of perspectives presented in the papers, we offer a stimulating dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries and stimulates intellectual curiosity. We extend our appreciation to the contributors whose insightful inquiries and scholarly endeavours enrich the academic landscape through this edition and propel us towards a more informed and deliberative engagement with the challenges of our time. We release this edition with the hope that the contributions will make an impact in their respective capacities.

Editors' Note

Editors-in- Chief
Saachi Singh & Shuchita Singh

Ideas and truths are never static. They change and evolve over time, a dynamism which is detrimental to the process of our being and becoming. It forms not just our realities but also our knowledge. Both 'critique' and 'crisis' have destabilising potential that ruptures the status quo, and often invoke each other– critique leads to crisis and vice versa. What leads to an act of critique? How do we arrive at new thresholds and foundations to ground the practice of critique? Moreover, what is the political end of the critical enterprise that functions in the current time and space? As students of Political Science, we delve into such questions not just academically but also in our political/personal lives.

Critique treads the line of possibilities. It is not just a method but also a practice, an approach, and a process. The act of critique produces vocabulary to find remedies and alternatives to an established norm. Thus, the main arena of contestation in the phenomenon of critique becomes morality. The realisation of inadequacy and insufficiency of an established moral order leads to its destabilisation. Contesting moralities thus emerge and power becomes central to the question of both critique and crisis. What prevails as a moral code (and by extension, social and legal code) depends largely on relations of power and agency.

In Western political history and thought, the nature of power transformed and became pervasivein the 16th and 17th centuries. The Enlightened thought led to the extension of the operations of governance from the Catholic Church to a larger social and political milieu through the establishment of rationality. Reason imposed a new moral order that also defined the categories of the mad, the deviant, and the irrational. Psychiatry, Science, Medicine, and various disciplines adopted these ideas and created the institutions that persist even today. On the other hand, critique as resistance emerged out of the crisis of subjugation and domination. It produced epistemological (i.e. the theory of knowledge) positions that challenged the dominant ideas of civilisation, rationality, power, rights and other political concepts.

Anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa were much more dynamic than what the dominant and often homogenising narratives of knowledge produced. The post-colonial theory produced an image of 'the global south' against that of 'the global north.' Is colonialism just a phenomenon of the global north? In the realm of international politics, we have to look at history and politics in their own contexts.

We have to place the agency of various groups vis-a-vis each other. The agency of groups marginalised on the basis of race, gender, caste, region, language, disability, ethnicity, and other socio-political markers. This further leads us to question the very idea of nation-states themselves. How did India emerge as a nation and what role did disciplinary institutions like that of the police and the army play in the production of a national imagination?

The critical enterprise of the 1970s and 80s saw the emergence of subaltern studies. Sumit Sarkar traced the genealogy of the subaltern within subaltern studies– a category often invoked uncritically. As illustrated by him, a move away from Marxist and Gramscian analysis of the subaltern condition was also a move away from structures and towards the realm of ambiguous politics and knowledge production. The voice and experiences of Dalit scholars and thinkers like B.R. Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, and Urmila Pawar, amongst others ended up being appropriated by a kind of identity politics that reduces itself to electoral politics. Similarly, a postmodern approach to politics often ignores the inter-subjectivity of our society and politics. In the absence of truth and meaning of any sort, where do we draw lines of good and bad? The tradition which, apart from all its vices, provides an important critical lens nevertheless dissolves into ambiguity. The uncertainty of the current political order is reflected in our anxieties produced in a hyper-consumerist and capitalist political economy, a degrading environment, and the pervasiveness of violence.

On a tangential note, we are living in an age of multiple ongoing political crises, some recognized by the international community, others not. Crises in countries like the Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Nigeria amongst others often go unacknowledged in the international community due to the historical subjugation to colonial and racist ideologies. Today, as Gaza suffers, we bear witness to violent complicity and inaction. This brings into question not just the inefficiency of international institutions placed within a certain global context but also the language of uniformity in universal laws. Recognition also comes through information. The normalization of brutality and violence in our modern disposition is highlighted by the representation of violence on our mobile screens.

If history has any lessons, it is that it moves in a myriad of directions. It changes the currents of normative paradigm and forces humankind to exist in its dynamism, making critique and crisis two important categories of change, hope, resistance, and everything in between. Critique puts things and the order of things in a state of crisis. The two often produce each other and have a symbiotic relationship. The eighth edition of Sabab explores the categories of ‘critique’ and ‘crises,’ and critically analyses the crisis of our present times. We explore thematic areas ranging from the politics of caste and identity to climate and diplomacy.

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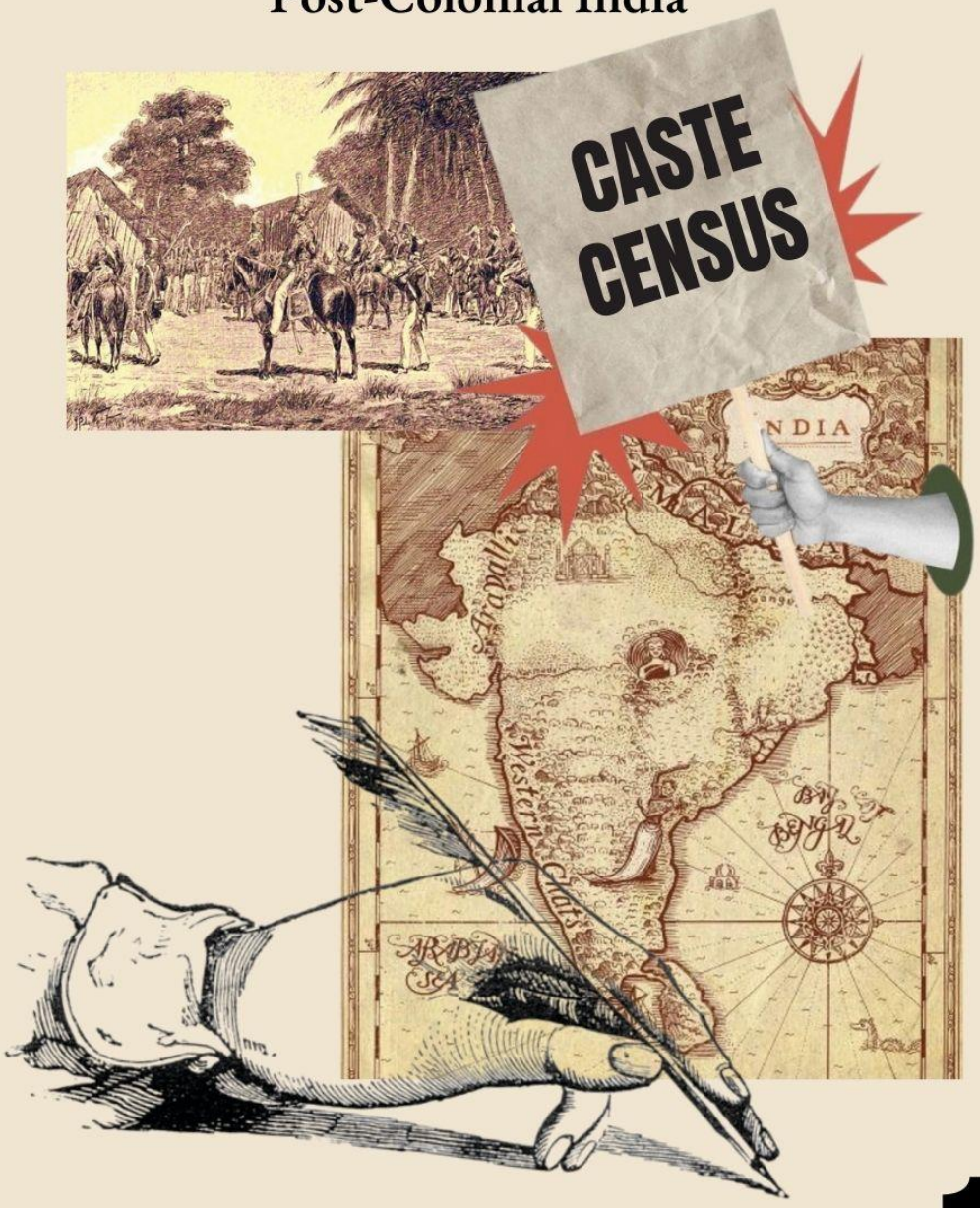

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From Census to Consciousness: A Holistic Inquiry into the Discourse of Caste Enumeration in Colonial and Post-Colonial India

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Abstract

The institution of caste, deeply ingrained in the social, political, and economic fabric of the country, has remained a contentious subject throughout India's post-colonial trajectory. Although the decennial census does not identify or enumerate caste data, except in reference to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the demand for a comprehensive nationwide caste enumeration exercise has persisted through the decades. Considering the pertinent public debate surrounding caste enumeration, this paper traces the historical lineage and evolution of the caste census discourse. Through a critical lens, it systematically evaluates the major positions of both the "opponents" and "proponents" of a caste census, analysing contesting claims about colonial legacies, nationalistic unity, electoral dynamics, policymaking, and the notion of caste blindness as a form of privilege. In doing so, it traverses formidable scholarship, particularly in the field of postcolonialism. It is argued that this scholarship represents a persistent "colonial hangover," whereby the understanding of colonial census practices as apparatuses of "divide and rule" continues to inform present-day discussions on the subject. The final section of this paper contextualises the findings in a case-study analysis of the Bihar Caste-Based Survey, 2022, and attempts to draw lessons for a nationwide caste census in light of the same. In a nutshell, the paper attempts to provide a holistic analysis of the caste census issue as a tangible site of contestation and exploration of competing discourses. It attempts to critically interrogate the implicit assumptions and biases of both sides, contributing to a more nuanced discussion of a controversial subject. Ultimately, it seeks to address the central question: Is a caste census essential or antithetical to the annihilation of caste?

Keywords: Caste Census, Postcolonialism, Caste Discourse, Caste Politics

Introduction

A census is a demographic inquiry that allows governments to collect relevant population data and ascertain key socio-economic indicators. Although the census is regarded as a scientific instrument in the discipline of demography, scholars of history, sociology, anthropology, and political science have problematised it as a scarcely neutral site of power (Bhagat 2006, pp 119). Following the Foucauldian inquiry into power and sites of knowledge production, the census, particularly its colonial variant, has been contested as a product of colonial governmentality. Beyond academia as well, the census' enumeration of caste and communal categories has emerged as a significant point of debate in public discourse.

On a fundamental level, this discourse corresponds to an ideological dichotomy concerning "the relation between systems of classification and the phenomena classified,". Broadly speaking, some contend that the census is an objective tool that reflects social realities, while others argue for the census' role in producing, distorting, and entrenching social classifications (Sundar 2000, 111-112). In that respect, the caste census debate also fundamentally relates to the genealogy or "nature" of caste as a social system. It thus transcends sociological analysis and political processes, recently becoming embroiled in electoral polemics through slogans like *Jitna Abadi Utna Haq* (Rights as per the Population).

Accordingly, this paper attempts to investigate a host of questions such as: How has the discourse on caste census evolved in India from colonial to post-colonial[1] times? Who are the major stakeholders and what are the contesting perspectives within this discourse? Are there any significant implications or insights that can be drawn in the light of this discourse to inform the contemporary debate on state-wise and nationwide caste censuses?

Methodology

A qualitative review and analysis of secondary sources, including scholarly papers, journal articles, books, and relevant government reports, has been undertaken to study the major positions in the discourse on caste census. These have been organised thematically; however, the delineated themes are not meant to be exhaustive. The exclusion of non-English language studies and publications posed one of the primary limitations to this review process. In the

final section of this paper, the discursive themes elucidated earlier have been used to provide a contextual framework for the case study analysis of the Bihar Caste-Based Survey, 2022.

Caste, Coloniality, and Census

The latter half of the 20th century witnessed a paradigm shift in the study of the formerly colonised world. With the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the emergence of the Subaltern school of historiography, and the establishment of "postcolonialism" as a formal field of critical inquiry, colonialism came to be understood as a cultural and epistemological project as much as a political and economic one. Questioning "the very sanctity of the corpus of knowledge based on reason and science, which (had) developed in Europe, primarily drawing on the legacy of (the) Enlightenment," postcolonialism sought to interrogate the racialised binary of the Orient-Occident, the positional superiority of Western forms of knowledge production, and the discursive practices that legitimised colonial rule as a civilising mission (Gupta 2007, pp 436).

While postcolonial theory has proliferated across multiple disciplines and avenues of inquiry over the past few decades, several scholars within the field have engaged with the nexus of colonial epistemic practices and socio-political identity formation. In the South Asian context, a decisive body of postcolonial literature has thus emerged, seeking to locate the formation and reification of modern caste identities in the colonial encounter (Appadurai 1993; Bandyopadhyay 1992; Cohn 1987; Das 2006; Dirks 2001; Inden 2000; Ganguly 2009; Kaviraj 1993).

The inception of this tradition can be traced back to the seminal and powerful essay *The Census, Social Structure, and Objectification in South Asia* (1987) by American anthropologist Bernard Cohn. Building upon the questions put forth by noted Indian sociologists, M.N. Srinivas and G.S. Ghurye, regarding "the effect of census operations on the consciousness of caste," he attributes the "objectification" of Indian culture and society to the colonial census exercise (Cohn 1987, 241). Through an examination of the official records and statistical works of British Census Commissioners W.C. Plowden, J.A. Bourdillon, and H.H. Risley, among others, Cohn argues persuasively for the role the colonial census played in necessitating a self-definition of communities in relation to each other, thus codifying the hitherto fluid boundaries of caste and *jati* as rigid,

hierarchical structures, often carrying racial undertones.

Arjun Appadurai (1993, 315) has critically expanded this argument to assert that "the classificatory logic of colonial regimes… the ways in which they employ quantification, in censuses as well as in various other instruments like maps, agrarian surveys, (and) racial studies" was not merely utilitarian but rather a decisive factor in shaping the colonial imagination of power and control over "numbers" of castes, communities, and races. He borrows Ian Hacking's terminology of "dynamic nominalism" to suggest that these "officially enforced labelling activities" rendered the diverse social landscape of India into specific categories (Appadurai 1993, 326-327).

A formidable authority on postcolonial and Subaltern studies, Sudipta Kaviraj has further developed this line of inquiry by proposing the framework of "fuzzy" and "enumerated communities" in his compelling essay *The Imaginary Institution of India* (1993). He argues that the boundaries of pre-modern and pre-colonial communities were "fuzzy" insofar as they were neither territorially based nor enumerated.

Perhaps the intellectual successor to Cohn's initial essay is found in Nicholas Dirks' *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (2001), a tour de force in the field of historical anthropology. Identifying the late colonial state in India as an "ethnographic state," Dirks has demonstrated powerfully how the statistical technology of the census systematised, reconstructed, and appropriated caste classifications. From a devastating critique of *Homo Hierarchicus*, Louis Dumount's treatise on the Indian caste system, to a careful examination of the imperial archive as a site of colonial knowledge, Dirks argues that caste transmuted into a distinctly religious, divisive, hierarchical, and entrenched social institution through "a peculiar symbiosis between the racial anxieties of imperial Britain and the ritual anxieties of Brahmans and other castes at the turn of the century" (Dirks 2001, pp 225).

This form of academic inquiry is not only pertinent to the larger project of epistemic decolonisation, but is frequently cited in the contemporary debate on caste census. Present-day apprehensions surrounding caste census as a potential driver of social stratification are justified and supported in light of the vast body of postcolonial literature, which argues for a similar role played by the anthropological and

ethnographic ventures of the colonial state (Bhagat 2007; Desai 2010; Samarendra 2011).

However, this thesis suffers from its own limitations and implicit assumptions that warrant critical scrutiny. The argumentation discussed so far can thus be problematised on the following grounds:

The Enumerative Tendencies of the Precolonial State

The foremost criticism of the postcolonial theory of caste draws on Maratha-Mughal enumerations, primarily undertaken during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to dispute the peculiarity of the colonial census. Norbert Peabody's (2001) study of the caste-wise enumeration of Marwar households from 1658 to 1664 reveals "precolonial antecedents" to the "enumerative habit" of the colonial state. Refuting Appadurai's and Kaviraj's assumption of precolonial censuses as largely administrative and apolitical, historian Sumit Guha (2003, 162) asserts that "the fuzzy continuum of pre-modern collective life was not suddenly and arbitrarily sliced up by colonial modernity. Local communities had long dealt with intrusive States that had penetrated along, and augmented, the fissures in local society."

Obscuring Indigenous Agency

With a tendency to "overemphasise the power of the colonial State to effect this degree of epistemological change," the postcolonial study of caste and communal identities has a proclivity towards obscuring the role of native informants and local enumerators in the census process (Balachandran and Pinto 2011, 57). Beyond the familiar archetype of the Brahmin-*pandit* informant, historian Dwaipayan Sen's (2018) study of the first decennial census of Bengal in 1872 makes the case for "the involvement of a somewhat broader cast of characters than we are accustomed to credit." He argues that the labour and assistance of *Mundus*, *putwarees*, and other non-elite castes were not only indispensable to the enumerative exercise but also stood to challenge the dominant perception of the Indigenous population as unwitting recipients of the census project.

Number in the Dalit Imagination: A Counter-Narrative

One of the most powerful and recent criticisms of the postcolonial and Subaltern studies project argues that the field has been co-opted by *Dwij-Savarna* scholars from historically privileged castes, whose work often invisibilises oppressed-caste narratives and ought to be interrogated through an epistemic lens itself (Bagade et

al. 2023; Chakraborty 2022; Hole and Kisana 2023).

Anthropologist Jayaseelan Raj (2022) extends this critique to the postcolonial understanding of caste by juxtaposing the works of Dirks, Cohn, Breckenridge, and van der Veer with the anti-caste critique developed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Advancing and advocating for "a Dalit-centric historical anthropology of caste," he deconstructs the postcolonial position for its pervasive focus on colonialism as a point of rupture, re-asserting that "decolonisation without de-brahmanisation is problematic in the South Asian context" (Raj 2022, 12).

Indeed, when one turns to the writings of Ambedkar, one encounters a markedly different perspective than the one present in the dominant postcolonial account. Ambedkar contended an emancipatory role for the colonial censuses, particularly the 1911 Census of British India, which identified and enumerated the "Depressed Classes" as a distinct social classification for the first time. These census figures not only demonstrated "the hegemony of the upper castes in the public and the education sector," but also allowed lower-caste groups to ascertain their marginalisation in statistical terms (Singh 2022, 64). Against the backdrop of the 1919 Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, the 1928 Simon Commission, and other colonial constitutional acts introducing limited self-governance, this recognition translated into unprecedented political bargaining power for the "Untouchable" population of colonial India. From Ambedkar citing the 1931 census data to advocate for separate electorates in the Second Round Table Conference to the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (Depressed Class Institute of Bombay) utilising the same figures to argue for lower-caste representation on education boards, the caste census was a means for Dalit power and agency in no small measure (Singh 2022, 65-66).

Moreover, the reactions this inquiry elicited in the Imperial Legislative Council, the Indian Franchise or Lothian Committee, and the Second Round Table Conference revealed enduring upper-caste anxieties that remain relevant even today. In his undated essay *From Millions to Fractions*, Ambedkar discusses at length how upper-caste members of the Provincial Franchise Committees resorted to problematising the accuracy of census figures or outright "deny(ing) the existence of the Untouchables," when confronted with demands for legislative representation. Similarly, a resolution tabled in the Imperial Legislative Council opposed the Census of 1921 on the following grounds:

> "(a) that it was undesirable to recognise and perpetuate by official action, the system of caste differentiation and (b) that in any case, the returns were inaccurate and worthless, since the lower castes took the opportunity of passing themselves as belonging to groups of higher status." (Ambedkar, n.d., 230-231)[2]

To the critical eye, these strike as discursive antecedents to the rhetoric adopted by postcolonial scholarship and its historiography of caste census. A more elaborate discussion of the upper-caste nationalist anxieties will be undertaken in the section discussing caste census and nationalism. However, Ambedkar's concluding reflections on the subject are deeply pertinent to contemporary discourse.

> "If the Untouchables make no noise, the Hindu feels no shame for their condition and is quite indifferent to their numbers. Whether there are thousands or millions of them, he does not care to bother. But if the Untouchables rise and ask for recognition, he is prepared to deny their existence, repudiate his responsibility, and refuse to share his power without feeling any compunction or remorse." (Ambedkar, n.d., 246)

The Post-Colonial Predicament

In *Castes of Mind*, Dirks (2001, 17) referred to caste as "a spectre that continues to haunt the body politic of post-colonial India." Indeed, caste, and more specifically its enumeration in the census, has emerged as a tangible site of contestation for competing discourses in independent India—from the drive for nationalistic unity to the exigencies of electoral politics and the demands for affirmative justice. The decennial census, as undertaken under the provisions of the Census of India Act, 1948, dropped the counting of castes from 1951 onwards, except in reference to the constitutional categories of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the demand for a caste census has persisted through the decades. The following section traces this discursive evolution across critical junctures in India's post-Independence history.

Fracturing Or Forging Nationalities: Locating Caste in the National Imaginaire

The colonial juncture was also crucially a nationalist one. The revised and expanded edition of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin*

and Spread of Nationalism (1991) cites the census as one of the three institutions of power—along with the map and the museum—that facilitated the germination of national identity among the colonised peoples of the world, situating this process within the global imperial context of the 18th to 20th centuries.

> "Map and census thus shaped the grammar…but the concretisation of these possibilities—concretisations which have a powerful life today, long after the colonial state has disappeared—owed much to the colonial state's peculiar imagining of history and power." (Anderson 1991, pp 185)

While Anderson's argument has been wholly deconstructed by Partha Chatterjee (1993, 4) for obscuring the cultural self-determination of colonised peoples in "the dilemma of choice between imitation and identity," the interplay of nationalism and the census has been underscored elsewhere as enabling the "self-description of nationalism" in terms of numbers, in terms of "we" as the collective strength of a mobilised political entity (Kaviraj 1993, 3-29). Kaviraj (1993) builds on the aforementioned framework of "fuzzy" and "enumerated communities" to suggest that the transition from anti-colonialism to modern nationalism must rely on the ability of the colonised people to numerically identify and demarcate their hitherto imagined community of the nation-state. This assertion resounds with that of Appadurai (1993, 317), where "in the long run, these enumerative strategies… in fact undermined colonial rule." He emphasises that the communitarian approach of enumeration was ultimately foundational to igniting nationalist identities and their subsequent resistance.

Indeed, a holistic analysis of the early 20th-century caste census discourse reveals that the enumerative gaze of the colonial state was far from the only force that this discourse had to reckon with. Nationalism, particularly among the stakeholders of the Indian National Congress (INC), was soon forging to be a primary consideration—one's nationalist identity being the *ne plus ultra* of all social and political categorisations. Under the Gandhian and Nehruvian paradigms, nationalist leaders and reformists endorsed a "casteless and egalitarian" vision for the Indian nation, vehemently denouncing the caste census and encouraging their followers "not to provide the Census enumerators with details of their *varna* and *jati*" (Bayly 1999, 244).

Historian Pritam Singh's (2022) study of the nationalist opposition faced by colonial census operations reveals the pervasive rhetoric that portrayed the caste census as an anti-national, imperial apparatus of "divide and rule." Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* that "untouchables are a human manufacture and that too by census enumerators," while upper-echelon Congress leaders like C. Rajagopalachari and V.K. Krishna Menon urged for non-cooperation with census officials (Singh 2022, 66). Hindu reformist groups like the Jat Pat Torak Mandal of the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha similarly discredited caste enumeration, declaring that "asking a person his or her caste amounted to forcing the category upon those who did not believe in it" (Sundar 2000, 115).

Such was the effect of the Congress' boycott of the 1931 and 1941 censuses that caste data could only be partially enumerated in Ahmedabad, Bombay, Bengal, Mewar, and Rajputana, among other regions, ultimately leading to the omission of "caste, race, and tribe" data in the 1941 Census of India report[3]. However, the opposition to census operations largely originated among the upper castes, as corroborated by the remarks and observations of census enumerators, who noted that "the bulk of the labouring classes and all non-Hindu communities, responded to the census authorities to furnish data. Opposition was confined chiefly to the Hindu literate castes" (Singh 2022, 67).

While the culmination of these contentions, insofar as the apparent contradiction between caste and nationalism was concerned, would be found in the historic Poona Pact of 1932 and the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate that ensued in its wake, it came as no surprise that independent India's Congress-headed government decided to discontinue caste enumeration in the name of forging national unity. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, embraced a "secular vision of social modernity" and set the stage for an independent India that would be blind to caste numbers in a bid to eliminate caste consciousness (Bayly 1999, 265). Ambedkarite leaders and anti-caste scholars have continued to argue in hindsight that this move constituted an injustice to lower-caste groups and their demands for representation (Baxi 2010; Deshpande and John 2010; Singh 2022). Indeed, as Ambedkar poignantly remarked in his essay *Thoughts on Linguistic States* (1955),

Caste on the Electoral Agenda: A Numbers Game?

Even as the liberal-secular-modernist vision of nationalism ostensibly won the day in 1947, it was but one of the many imagined communities that survived into India's post-independence landscape. Among the several "detractors" of nationalism, as historian K.M. Pannikar (2016) terms them, the Dalit-OBC experience and imagination of the nation have continued to shape the contours of political discourse in post-colonial India. One arena where these imaginations and aspirations have come to be thoroughly contested is the domain of electoral democracy.

The intersection of caste and elections in the democratic history of India has been the subject of formidable scholarship (Alam 2010; Bayly 1999; Brass 1987; Jaffrelot 1998; Kumar 2014; Kumar and Pai 2023; Shah 2004). A comprehensive examination of the same exceeds the scope of this paper, however, insofar as the nexus of electoral dynamics and caste census discourse is concerned, the pertinent arguments have been outlined below.

In the electoral framework of Indian democracy, the politicisation of caste has manifested as fierce identity politics, caste antagonisms, and the widely documented phenomenon of "vote-bank" politics. While the trajectory of caste politics has necessarily undergone a qualitative change and fragmentation over the years—reckoning with the rise of the Bahujan movement in the 1980s and 90s, and the recent and ongoing caste-class dispersion of the Dalit-OBC bloc into the Hindutva fold (Kumar and Pai 2023)—few can argue against the fact that the discourse surrounding caste census has been fundamentally transformed by the "social ruptures caused by democratisation in India after 1950" (Sivaramakrishnan 2005, 146). This has led many to apprehend a fresh caste census, fueling further mobilisation and stratification along caste lines (Beteille 1998 and Srinivas 1998, as cited in Sundar 2000). The argument largely follows that of the nationalists, but vilifies political parties as the nemesis of "Indian unity and national harmony" rather than the erstwhile colonial state.

Conversely, the same fact of electoral democracy can be eloquently used to oppose and refute such apprehensions. As a 2010 editorial in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, titled *Why We Must Count Caste*, contends, "Not counting caste (as with the Other Backward Classes [OBCs]) has not forestalled caste identities, and counting it (as with the Scheduled Castes [SCs] and Scheduled Tribes [STs]) has not necessarily intensified them." With or without numbers attached, the electoral

modalities of India's mainstream polity have been anything but caste-blind. The proponents of caste census thus argue that caste is "embedded in the politics of everyday life" and can be scarcely turned into "something purely instrumental and volitional" that would not be true to the lived realities of the caste system (Deshpande and John 2010, 41).

Post-Mandal Era: Lifting the Veil off the Caste-Blind State

In the post-colonial trajectory of the discourse on caste census, the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendation of 27% reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) stands as a critical juncture, underscoring the complex interplay of caste politics and affirmative actions policies in shaping contemporary discourse on the subject. Indeed, following this juncture, the demand for caste enumeration has been most vociferously put forth in relation to and by the Other Backward Classes (Bhagat 2021; Desai 2010; Sundar 2000).

While the decennial censuses of post-independence India have continued to enumerate the scheduled categories of SCs and STs, the last definitive count of the Backward Classes (now, the OBCs) was undertaken in 1931 in undivided British India. In the absence of recent data, coupled with the refusal of the Home Ministry to undertake a fresh enumerative exercise, the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (or Mandal) Commission extrapolated the population of the OBCs as 52% of the total population based on the 1931 figures (Bhagat 2007, 1904). The argument that follows in favour of caste census cites this anachronistic misrepresentation as an injustice, asserting that accurate census data must be used to draw up fresh lists of OBCs and enable proportional representation in reserved quotas (Deshpande and Sundar 1998, 2158).

A more forceful argument intertwines the case for socio-economic justice with a demand for recognising systematic privileges. In a powerful essay titled *The Politics of Not Counting Caste* (2010), scholars Satish Deshpande and Mary E. John problematise the status quo of the caste-blind post-colonial Indian state. Indeed, as also argued elsewhere, "the refusal to count caste in the census has not helped in its disappearance" (Sundar 2000, 116). They follow this line of inquiry to interrogate the implicit assumptions of the caste census discourse.

Given that there is no dearth of literature to suggest that caste continues to be a critical

determinant of one's socio-economic position in society (Desai 2010; Deshpande 2011; Neuman and Thorat 2012), Deshpande and John (2010, 42) conclude that "there is no caste disprivilege without a corresponding privilege," and that a census—a holistic enumeration of all castes—represents an opportunity to break with caste blindness towards genuine caste annihilation.

However, there is more nuance to this discourse than is readily apparent on the surface. The flip side of the debate concerning the implications of caste census for social justice and economic equality regards development under a neo-liberal, market-led economy as a better landscape for the transcending of caste. Caste is thus transmogrified into class under the forces of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation. The economist V.K. Natraj (2010, 79) makes the case against enumeration as essential to policy formulation, suggesting that "the thrust towards privatisation" and good governance as the administrative ideal of the State contradicts "the claim that determining the numbers of the OBCs will help formulation of government policy." Moreover, it is argued that even if the requirement for caste data existed, it would be needed at the local level, implying that caste enumeration must be a decentralised exercise rather than a national one (Sudarshan 2010, 4). These arguments invariably also tie in with anti-reservation rhetoric since opposition to caste-based affirmative action must necessarily oppose the demand for a census arising out of it. A universalised and "secular anti-poverty public policy" framework is favoured under the paradigm of a merit-based, liberal, market economy (Bhambri 2005, 808).

> "The growth of caste consciousness has hurt the development of progressive social consciousness among the oppressed and exploited millions of the labouring classes because caste ideology has made workers casteists and not fighters for secular anti-poverty programmes." (Bhambri 2005, 806)

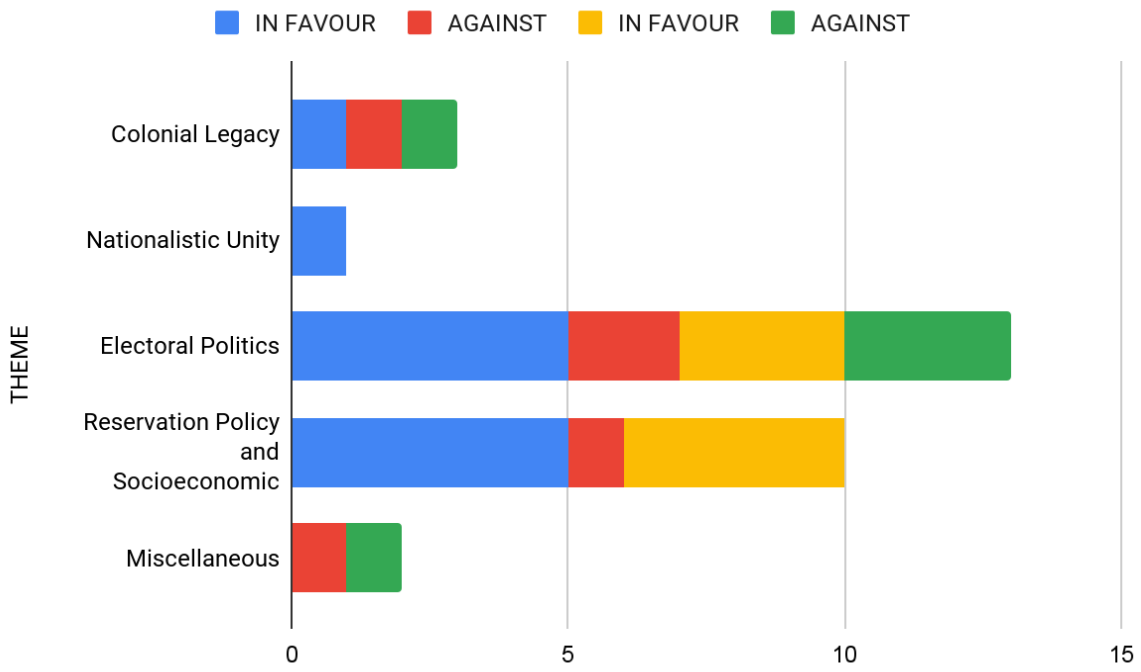
Contentious as it may have been, the discourse on caste census in the first two decades of the 21st century initially favoured the "opponents," resulting in the rejection of caste census demands in 2001, but later aligned with the "proponents" in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's firm to conduct a Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in 2011. A crucial difference, however, was that the enumerative exercise was carried out under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Housing

and Urban Poverty Alleviation, rather than the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (Bhagat 2021, 10). While the SECC 2011 was unequivocally a historic triumph for those advocating for a caste census, only its socio-economic data was ever made available to the public. Citing "inherent flaws" and "technical errors,"[4] the central government has since refused to release the caste portion of the census data. With the 2021 census exercise delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for caste census has proliferated in the states. The next and ultimate section of this paper shall examine these, undertaking a case-study analysis of the Bihar Caste-Based Survey, 2022.

Bihar Caste-Based Survey, 2022: A Microcosm of Indian Society

A discursive analysis was conducted of the opinion pieces pertaining to the Bihar Caste-Based Survey, 2022, sourced from the prominent independent digital news platforms, The Print and Scroll. in. The selection of these platforms was predicated on their digital accessibility as online news platforms. The analysis encompassed op-eds, editorials, and think pieces from October 2022 to March 2024. Any factual reportage from the survey was excluded from the analysis to focus attention on prominent narratives and points of discourse. Finally, the major findings and arguments from each article were identified and tabulated across major themes, as identified in the sections preceding the case study.

THEME	SCROLL.IN		THE PRINT	
	IN FAVOUR	AGAINST	IN FAVOUR	AGAINST
Colonial Legacy	1	1		1
Nationalistic Unity	1			
Electoral Politics	5	2	3	3
Reservation Policy and Socioeconomic Arguments	5	1	4	
Miscellaneous		1		1
TOTAL	12	5	7	5



Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has endeavoured to trace the evolution of the discourse on caste census from colonial to contemporary times, exploring competing paradigms that reject or endorse a caste census through the lens of coloniality, nationalism, electoral politics, and policymaking. In all considerations, the paper confined itself to the "why" of the caste census discourse, rather than delving into the much more logistical and technical question of "how." Arguments of the latter nature have been frequently cited in the responses of governments, political parties, and even academicians, who oppose the caste census on the grounds of practical difficulties in its implementation. Being a localised phenomenon with regional disparities, each caste's vernacular synonyms, sub-categorisations of *jati* and *gotra,* the anomalous status of children of inter-caste marriages, and alleged cases of false self-identification are among the many pragmatic considerations that cast a shadow of cumbersomeness on the future success of such an exercise.

However, a way forward—with the kind of digital infrastructure we have available to us in 2024—has the potential to mitigate technical roadblocks. The Bihar Jati

Adharit Ganana mobile application, developed by public-corporate partnership for the state's caste survey, offers an example of the innovative technological solutions that can help streamline this process.

More pertinent to the discussion, as hopefully demonstrated by this paper, should be the mandate of public will that will ultimately allow us to navigate the myriad challenges and contradictions of this discourse. The electoral modality of this mandate is an inevitable reality that popular democracy must reckon with, as exemplified if not epitomised by the oscillating positions adopted by major political parties on the subject of the census. Indeed, much will depend on the forces of political mobilisation and their interplay with social dynamics. It is imperative to ensure that the contesting stakeholders will be willing to engage in democratic dialogue that will determine the fate of numbers for posterity.

End Notes

1. Through the course of this paper, the unhyphenated "postcolonial" has been used to refer to the academic field of inquiry, while the hyphenated "post-colonial" corresponds to the temporal classification.

2. The resolution appears to have been paraphrased in Ambedkar's words, rather than a direct quotation or transcript.

3. It should be noted that the 1941 Census was also largely affected by the constraints and contingencies of the Second World War.

4. Mahapatra, Dhananjay. *No OBC information in 2021 census as 2011 caste data unusable.* Times of India. September 24, 2021.

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From Critique of Humour to Humour as Critique

2

From Critique of Humour to Humour as Critique

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Abstract

'Humour' is a socio-political invention unique to homosapiens. This research paper aims to analyse and understand how humour can be operated in society. This paper analyses various questions surrounding humour, its impacts and whether it is ethical to joke about certain topics like 'rape' and if yes, when and who is 'politically correct' to do it. We argue that humour is embedded in socio-political structures where it becomes a tool of 'disciplining' people to conform to the norms by the powerful where it acts not like the 'weapon of the weak' but like a 'weapon of the strong,' hence leading to critiquing the operation of humour. But the same humour can also serve as a tool to 'transgress or ridicule' the very structures, if used in slightly different, nuanced and conscious ways. In this case, humour is used as a tool of resistance, a tool of critique which can question the core presuppositions about the functioning of society. The paper is premised on postmodern and postmodern feminist understanding of humour and argues that incorporation of postmodernist practices in practising humour can critique the normalising forces where especially the oppressed can 'use humour to liberate' themselves and destabilise society's fundamental assumptions and acceptance of what constitutes "the normal".

Keywords: Humour, Normalisation, Political Correctness, Critique.

Introduction

Human beings have been suggested to be placed in a very eccentric position when it comes to humour[1]. As Cicero's Latin word for humour, *urbanitas* would suggest, it is a consequence of culture and civilisation. It could be viewed as one of the key elements of distinction between humans and animals. As Plessner puts it, human beings do not simply live their experiences rather they experience those experiences (*erlebet sein Erleben).* They have a reflective approach to their experiences and to themselves, which is precisely why humans have been said to occupy this eccentric position. Extending this line of argument, it can also be claimed that humour is a tool to explore the break between nature and culture.

With this research paper, we aim to explore how this break is experienced by looking at how the critique of humour i.e. the philosophy of humour, ethical questions involved about the nature of jokes and its contestations could have linkages to the political humour in correspondence to the ways in which it gets manifested in the political humour (weapon of the weak).

Three Theories of Humour

According to John Morreall, the philosophy of humour which deals with the explorations of the ideas about humour and laughter in an explanatory manner, could be categorised briefly into three theories of humour - a. Superiority theory, which was presented first by Plato, Aristotle, Quintillian and then later in the modern era by Hobbes arguing that laughter comes 'at the expense' of somebody where we laugh due to the feeling of superiority; b. Incongruity theory could be traced back to Francis Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* from 1750, which gets elaborated in distinct but related ways in Kant's work; c. Relief theory only emerged in the nineteenth century Herbert Spencer's work. He explains laughter as the release of pent-up energy due to nervousness. The most famous work associated with this particular theory where this is explained in great detail is Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to Unconscious* which was written in 1905.

Superiority theory

Superiority theory, which is one of the theories of humour, can be understood as "laughing at" theory, where the dominant is better placed in terms of power and 'laughs at' the powerless. This theory focuses on how laughter is placed in structures and how the dominant constructs and owns the joke. This laughter can be towards one single person or a section of people whose stereotyped perception, the majority holds or assigns [assigning can have multiplying

effect where the targeted section imagines itself along the lines of perception of the dominant].

Superiority theory can be understood by examining the jokes constructed by the Indian dominant against the Nepali men which are called 'Nepali Chutkule' [which means a humorous understanding or way of putting it].

"Joke 1"

'"A Nepali (man) once found a magic lantern on his way. He rubbed the lantern and a Genie came out of it.

Genie: "I am very happy today (to have come outside of the lantern). I shall grant you three wishes; your wish is my command, Master."

The delighted Nepali (man) says: "(I want) 1. a big bungalow, 2. with many wealthy residents in the house and finally, 3. make me the security guard of that house."' (Perera and Pathak 2022, pg. 142)

"Joke 2"

'The rich officer's wife to the Gurkha servant: "I am going to take some rest now. I have placed the pressure cooker on the gas (stove). Switch off the stove as soon as you hear three whistles."

Servant: "Okay, memsaab" (madame)! But... Officer's

Wife: What is it?

Servant: "Will you be the one to whistle or shaab (sir)?"' (Perera and Pathak 2022, pg. 142)

The first joke makes people laugh at 'the inability of the Nepali worker to imagine himself at a better position than his traditional job'. The second joke makes people laugh at the 'inability of the Nepali worker to understand the working of a pressure cooker and also at him not being able to imagine anything outside the traditional Gurkha job'. Both these jokes are directed towards Nepali men, stereotyping them for their 'inability'. It is interesting to observe how the Indian dominant cannot imagine Nepali men beyond a Gurkha or a servant. In both the jokes, the Nepali is a worker or wanting to be a worker and nothing more. The construction of these jokes is inherently classist and aims to reinstate the dominance of the 'Indian people'. The people who laugh at these jokes become part of the dominant 'conforming to the perception' built. Superiority theory argues that jokes are yet another form of oppression directed

towards the powerless, strengthening the dominant's perception that the dominant are the ones constructing jokes aimed at somebody who can be oppressed by the weaponization of humour. Hence, creating a contradiction in the general notion of political humour as a weapon of the weak.

Incongruity theory

The incongruity theory, said to be the most influential philosophical theory of humour has generated a consensus among the philosophers that humour is produced when there is incongruity of some sort i.e. when we perceive an incongruous element which is unexpected or simply different from one's experience. This approach of making jokes incongruous is only viable in the ecosystem where joke and societal structures are congruent to each other i.e. for humour to end in laughter, the joke structure must be congruent with the societal structure.

In the framework of this theory, humour is used as a rhetorical device to create dramatic (sometimes exaggerated) non-literal images with the use of language which counter-intuitively adds to the impression and further strengthens the truth in a discourse. This way humour could also serve a function of redefining the reality, 'co-agitate' disparate elements and creating semantic alienations which are very much dependent on the context, and how the reader accepts it.

One of the purposes that humour serves through this theory is to change the situation or what it is called as 'surrealization of the real'. This idea is reflected in Mary Douglas's claim that "A joke is a play upon form that affords an opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity". Therefore, incongruous humour has dual functions: it gets its message delivered to the audiences because of a massive congruence between joke and social structure while serving as a tool to speak against these very societal structures to question their validity and the reason for existence.

Relief theory

This theory comes third in the theoretical trend of humour studies. This theory follows the understanding of incongruity theory but with more focus on the 'laughing part' where laughter provides an emotional relief, a pleasant psychological shift in people away from incongruity towards comfortability. It emphasises the psychology of people, where humour leads to the reduction of physiological stress and

the release of tensions. This relief through laughter is seen as a benign feature but its ethical dimension is seldom questioned. Can you laugh off at a racist joke and release racial tension? Theorists like Freud argue that one's humour functions as an outlet through which subdued internal feelings are released.

Ethics in Humour

The category of humour in philosophy that this paper aims to address refers to the kind of jokes that are present in the day-to-day discourse, which may or may not lead to laughter which is primarily characterised by physiological response to anything found to be humorous. To engage and look into the ethical questions and considerations about the nature of the jokes and who should be able to joke about whom and if there are any boundaries which should be taken into account while assessing the joke through an ethical lens, one should get familiar to the different categories and distinctions that are present in the existing literature.

Sigmund Freud in his work has divided jokes into mainly two kinds - innocent jokes and tendentious jokes. Innocent jokes as the category refer to jokes which are merely a play of words, and puns and are relatively clean jokes, while tendentious jokes refer to jokes that are "dirty" in which sexuality, and ethnicity are often targeted at a particular community and are made the subject of the joke.

Now, the question that gets asked is 'Is it ethical to enjoy tendentious jokes?' To answer this question we turn to Aristotle and his view about ethics. He argues that ethical questions are about the nature of one's character which should be the mean between the two extremes of boor[2] (culturally sensitive) and Buffon (neo-shaftsburianism)[3], therefore one should fall under the category of wit (contextualism).

This implies that while tendentious jokes are being made, one should first take into consideration the identity of the person because the person from an oppressed group would not be a bigot and will not try to be superior. Secondly, humour as a sword of justice could be used when you are joking about people in power i.e. punch-up is allowed, making jokes about their privileges, and not punching down.

Therefore, the correct view says that one shouldn't make any group impervious to jokes and being joked about, but whenever

you make tendentious jokes, you are taking a moral risk and should be aware of that.

Humour as Critique

Humour has been one of the powerful tools to question power and expose the faults of the power. It's often referred to as the 'weapon of the weak' which is a tool facilitating 'speaking truth to power'. Truth can be spoken against any established power, be it persons, institutions, narratives, or any dominant forces. Humour is used by the marginalised or the minorities as a form of political resistance.

There are questions as to whether this form of politicisation of humour has 'real political impacts' or is it just another form of expressing frustration towards the majority. Sceptics doubt the real political impact of political humour and agree that it is just an expression of dissent and frustration. Whereas the impact of the politicisation of humour can be understood with the increasing curb on free speech especially in political stand-up comedies these days, in authoritarian and majoritarian regimes which recognise the threat of development of anti-discourses from the demands for free expression of dissent and criticism.

Here James Scott, who is a political scientist and anthropologist, becomes quintessential to understanding the impact of political humour. He argues that every open rebellion or public declaration of resistance is followed by hidden transcripts. Hidden transcripts are those beliefs and narratives which are against the dominant narratives discussed secretly behind the dominant. Political humour is one of the forms of discussing hidden transcripts which contributes to the open declaration of dissent and resistance which Majken Jul Sorensen calls *discursive guerilla warfare.*

Feminist Humour

To further the argument about humour being employed as a critique to the dominant while managing to create an impact both tangible and implicitly, we will turn to the feminist ideas about humour and analyse through their framework, the accessibility as well as the usage of this 'tool of humour'.

For feminists, the jokes are constitutive of and iterate a wider social context; and this context is structured by a system of social practices that organises men and women differently (in the context of a heteronormative society) and relies on the persistence of shared cultural beliefs

justifying men's greater powers and privileges (Cecilia Ridgeway 2011). Therefore, feminist humour theories have focused on either the repressive or empowering, subversive potentials of the comedic performances and they have been championed by postmodern feminists. They have criticised humour's demeaning and repressive qualities for they reproduce oppression through sexist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic jokes. Moreover, when feminist humour studies focus on female stand-up comics, they often tend to forget how stand-up performance requires commandment and control over the audience, therefore drawing attention to female comic's strong, confident personalities. In the article "The Seriously Erotic Politics of Feminist Laughter" written by Cynthia Willett, Julie Willett, and Yael D Sherman, such an understanding becomes manifest in their quoting of female comic Lilly Tomlin's remark; "That was an incredible frame of mind that society had—that a woman couldn't tell jokes because it was too powerful; that to make an audience laugh meant that you had control over them in some way" (Willett &Willett& Sherman, 2012, p.226).

Self-deprecating humour

"I have built a career out of self-deprecating humour. That's what I've built my career on. And… I don't want to do that anymore. Because, do you understand… [audience applauds] …do you understand what self-deprecation means when it comes from somebody who already exists in the margins? It's not humility. It's humiliation. I put myself down in order to speak, in order to seek permission… to speak. And I simply will not do that anymore. Not to myself or anybody who identifies with me. [audience cheers] And if that means that my comedy career is over, then so be it." - Hannah Gadsby.

Performance studies scholar Philip Auslander defines self-deprecatory humour as a strategy of female comics "to render herself apparently unthreatening to male dominance by making herself the object of her own comic derision" (Auslander, 1993, p.326). In that sense, Hannah, like many other women, lesbian, queer comics used self-deprecatory humour to negotiate the restrictions within the patriarchal terrain of comedy "that reflected the social stigma attached to aggressively funny women". As Krefting suggests, self-deprecatory humour has been a tactic for women comedians "for overcoming audience opposition to a funny lady commanding the stage and diminished

the threat of a female comic asking a diverse crowd to give her audience, to listen to her, to value what she says, her point of view" (Krefting, 2014, p.47).

At the same time, scholars claim that telling jokes that violate our psychological safety can be seen as risky, it can make people appear more confident and secure. They believe that self-deprecating humour, in life and art, can be highly endearing. On the comic stage, it is often an effective tool for connecting with audiences, because the expression of humility can help an audience better relate to a comedian. In a recent study conducted by Harvard Business Review, it was found that regardless of whether a joke was considered successful or inappropriate, participants viewed joke tellers as more confident just because they dared to attempt a joke at all. Projecting confidence in this way leads to higher status.

Sheila Lintott, a Professor of Philosophy at Bucknell University argues that comedians, including those on the margins, can and do effectively employ self-deprecation without humiliation or denigration of self, and one way comedians do this is as a ruse to expose the ignorance of the audience or comic targets not present, in this way one can reclaim power and assert authority.

Rape Jokes

Rape jokes needn't always involve justification of the abuser and trivialising of the abuse. Some stand-up comedians have utilized rape jokes in line with the discussions that claimed rape jokes to be helpful for survivors and for pointing out the pervasiveness of rape culture in a critical way. For example, Sick and Tired (2006), Wanda Sykes tackles the issue of rape and women's vulnerability to it in a humor-based comedy format. Sykes delivers a joke in which she imagines a world where women get detachable vaginas to protect themselves from a potential rape. The joke brings to public attention, the vulnerability women feel on an everyday basis and critiques the prevalent rape culture that advocates the humiliation of victims as well as their choices.

Similarly, in 2013, Adrienne Truscott, put up a controversial performance through her stand-up show, Asking For It: A One-Lady Rape About Comedy starring Her Pussy and Little Else! crafting her entire show on the theme of rape. She walked onto the stage with her semi-naked body, and a glass of beer, laughed and flirted with the audience at the same time loudly asserting that "she is asking for it" as defined in the popular rape culture but yet there is enough

room for choice! These comedians place other proponents of rape culture as the focal point of their jokes for their ignorance and deep-rooted sexism.

For Beth Montemurro (2003), building on MacKinnon (1979, 52), humour has been a key instrument that has been used to trivialise male sexual harassment of women. When the teller is male, making jokes about male sexual violence, we see institutions again reinforcing gendered power relations by enabling this distancing to occur. Heather Savigny and Sharon Lockyer in their work "Rape Jokes Are'nt Funny" have highlighted how mainstream media themselves report stories related to rape jokes and how this comes to normalise and legitimate the rape joke, and by extension, legitimate the act.

Media creates a site for the cultural circulation of discourses that have served to "normalise" or trivialise sexual violence towards women. News discourses also position women as provocateurs or suggest that rape is "just sex" (Helen Benedict 1992). The British drama series, Downtown Abbey (ITV), included a rape scene which for one critic was a "means to spice up a dull plot" (Bidisha in Cosslett and Bidisha, 2013).

The Gender Inequality in Indian Media report, published by The Media Rumble with UN Women, combed through the country's top newspapers, magazines and TV channels, and found that a dismal 8% of their output over a six-month period in 2018 dealt with gender-related matters. Rapes are reported and highlighted only when there occurs a gruesome crime and disappear from the mainstream once the chaos and outrage dissipate. Journalist Urvashi Sarkar says the media internalises the biases, prejudices and attitudes of the wider society. "Figuring in the points of view or experiences of women is usually an afterthought, tokenistic or missed out altogether by the media".

Increasingly mainstream media embed rape as part of our cultural landscape, insensitive language and victim shaming are absolutely not uncommon. The lack of gender-based representation in newsrooms and related institutions as well as agencies affects the language of reports on sexual violence. The biases are championed not just by the privileged who are aware of the narratives they spread but also by those who unknowingly participate and internalise the bandwagon.

Nanette and the limitations of humour

Hannah Gadsby in her comedy special Nanette uses the stand-up stage to speak up and out against the various forms of violence- psychological, physical, and

sexual that have been part and parcel of the heteronormative system that perpetuates misogyny and homophobia. Everything is funny and at the same time brutally critical of the patriarchal system, up until the point where she takes a turn and begins to disentangle the funny stories told previously and reveals the harsh realities that lay behind them while the laughs disappear. In this part, her performance gets darker, harsher, and angrier, and her voice changes and shakes revealing an array of emotions entangled in her statements. Nanette can be read through many perspectives, one can see Gadsby tearing down the foundations of the comedy forcing us to wonder whether one can joke about anything. She uses her own experiences and asserts that it is not always possible to convey emotion through jokes and convince the audience about its depth. Thus, Nanette allows us to reconceptualise our understanding of feminist humour theories and to rethink humour's possibilities and shortcomings.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is another school of thought which is against "the narrative". Postmodernists take every normalisation with a pinch of salt. Humour, they argue, can act as a tool of normalisation. People 'laugh at' 'those who are not fitting into the norms', be it crossdressers or homosexuals. Here laughing at them aims to ridicule their 'abnormal' behaviour, forcing them to conform to the norms. If the 'abnormal people' don't make their choices consciously, they can easily be carried away by shame and soon conform to the norms. Thus humour acts as a 'force' facilitating the survival and protection of structures whether it is gender, caste or race. But in addition to being a normalising tool, it could also be a 'tool of resistance' if it's moulded depending on the context. Not laughing when laughter is expected, laughing differently or laughing during a 'serious' thing is a way of challenging the norm and not agreeing with the discourse. For example, during the interview with Foucault by James O Higgins, Higgins asks Foucault, "whether lesbians desire relationships similar to the long-term stable heterosexual relationship, in contrast with gay men". Foucault 'responds by laughing' and then saying "All I can do is explode with laughter". Judith Butler in their book Gender Trouble, interprets Foucault's laughter as a way of rejecting the very binary that the question aims to be answered, which Foucault is against.

Postmodern Feminists derive from postmodernism and aim to utilise humour as a tool of resistance against the normalising forces of patriarchy.

Postmodern Feminists argue that laughter is gendered. The feminine bodies are expected to laugh at particular intervals for particular jokes and for particular times. Emily R. Douglas, a professor of Philosophy, argues that many sociological and psychological studies have noted laughter's gendered trends which say women laugh more often than men, and more often at men's jokes. There are also normalised ways of laughing, 'laughing like a girl' like other ways of behaving or 'performing like a girl'. Sara Ahmed, a feminist scholar, comes up with the term 'compulsory laughter' where she argues that women are held to a higher standard of performing laughter than their male counterparts. She also states that "happiness is not so much what the [happy housewife archetype] has but what she does," so that "any deviation from gender roles in terms of women being trained to make men happy is a deviation from the happiness of all." Douglas states that "a woman might be expected to laugh when someone with power over her makes a joke, to treat her own achievements as ridiculous, or to 'laugh off' street harassment. The ideal woman must laugh in order to facilitate the laughter and happiness of all those around her: refraining from laughter lets others down." This performance of laughter by women affects all their relationships, impacting their inclusion and exclusion based on their conforming or nonconforming performances. Thus, laughter can facilitate the strengthening of patriarchy and also heteronormativity by 'laughing at' the 'abnormal performances.

But laughter like that used by Foucault can invoke resistance. Douglas argues that this very tool of laughter which is a normalising tool can be used against the very attempt of normalising. She talks about inventing 'new ways of laughter' and 'unlaughter' when laughter is expected. The new way of laughter can be a 'warning laughter' as said by Susan (Douglas 2015)**.** Laughing differently involves laughing not for the joke[misogynist or patriarchal or casteist or racist] when expected but 'at the person' who views the thing 'as a joke'. 'Laughing at the person' is ridiculing the person for his/her/their perception of whatever is said and is an open opposition and disagreement. If there are enough feminists in the room, laughing at the person acts as a reverse normalising force [anti discourse], coming from the oppressed at the larger normalising powers of patriarchy. People can also choose to laugh at different pitches than expected as a form of resistance for example, women can adopt 'hysterical laughing' (Douglas 2015). 'Unlaughter' is also a form of resistance which states disagreement. But it comes with its own problems. Douglas argues that unlaughter

can imply conformity and hence it is important to 'verbalise opposition or *lack of laughter'.* 'Unlaughing interrupts what individuals might 'normally' see as funny, exposing the presuppositions behind laughter and showing that humour itself is contingent' (Douglas 2015, pg 150). When feminist laughter is practised and performed by people consciously, it liberates practitioners from normalising forces and develops a sense of self outside the narratives, argues the postmodernists.

Philosophy and the Political

The philosophy of humour, as it has been previously discussed, comprises the ethical questions and the purpose of humour. To get a more holistic understanding of this one must look into how it could be used as a weapon against the dominant tradition. But the question which we are yet to address is - is humour the weapon of the weak? And additionally what kind of ecosystem enables or disables people from making a certain kind of joke?

As we have already established political humour as a 'weapon of the weak' is not really the norm because when we consider superiority theory, it in no way serves the oppressed rather it could be perceived as the weapon of the oppressor. Till the 1950s mainstream comedy continued to be largely apolitical and benign but under the radar, a few comics began to experiment with socially relevant material. Comedy performances like that of Lucille Ball, star of 'I Love Lucy,', created the eponymous 'Lucy' who struggled with, and was frustrated by her role as a wife, mother and worker. It revealed the impossible demands being made upon women to maintain work/life balance alongside doing all the housework with a tinge of humour thus crafting the perfect camouflage for sedition in the conservative social fabric of America which could be a reason for the absence of any dissent against the program.

It was from the 1960s, with the rise of civil rights movements, that people like Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor aggressively reworked their jokes and made them outrightly racist and sexist.

The main argument underlying the desire for an off-limits comedy appears to imply that words or the language used in comedy do not have any power, because they are "just jokes" (Positive Humourist). In line with such understanding, the laughscape of comedy is viewed as a space where comedians can "say the unsayable, laugh at

the unlaughable, without actually openly doing anything that might be socially unacceptable (Chiaro & Balirano, 2016, pg.3). In other words, comedy, according to this discourse, should be a place where "serious discourse takes a break and goes on to holiday" which is to say it is a terrain where no modes of censorship can be allowed.

In recent times, the most visible discussion has been about whether there is any room for political correctness[4] in humour without being called out as a "killjoy". It is often argued that being politically correct is only a privilege available to the powerful who use this as a tool to censor any comedy or comic that deviates from the "normal". Does this fear of 'cancel culture' and censorship prevent comedians from creating jokes that question the status quo? In the case of comedy, the debates about political incorrectness hit on core questions about what we think is funny and what isn't, who can get away with certain jokes and who can't.

Dave Champel's 'politically incorrect,' 'unfiltered,' free speech in his Netflix special Sticks and Stones released, in which he gets to declare that Michael Jackson is not guilty of paedophilia and his accusers are liars, in which he gets to make comments on women's biology as weaker compared to men's as well as on abortion bans, overall, he speaks about others and makes judgments about others' experiences and bodies. The ethical dilemma of 'free speech,' once again, shows its hypocrisy in Chapelle's overpowering ability to make jokes on others, with an advantage to reach out to the world through 'Netflix'. If free speech or political incorrectness is used to suppress others' voices or to talk over their realities, then one cannot help but ask; is free speech a guise for being unethical to others? Such forms of comedy reproduce dominant ideologies under the guise of 'free speech.'

Conclusion

In the defence of making tendentious jokes and making humour on sexuality and ethnicity, it is almost always argued that if we stop making the joke it would not mean that the situation will stop existing. Thereby, one might as well create humour with it since it is apolitical in nature.

While in this paper we do not argue that certain kinds of jokes should be absolutely censored, on the contrary, we see how

postmodern feminists use the same categories of "dirty jokes" to challenge the existing discourses and to call out the all-so-pervious sexism in this patriarchal world. However, one thing that should not be glossed over is the conditions in which one jokes or is "allowed" to joke. As we have seen, as the notion of sexism is pre-existing, institutions like media are more likely to report the instances in a more 'gender blind' way i.e. giving white men a platform to defend their humour whereas conveniently labelling other oppressed groups as "abnormal" and in this process, the men and people from so-called 'upper race' will use the exaggeration of the joke in a more sexist way. As George Carlin, a popular comedian rightly points out, it does not matter what is the subject of the joke but it does matter where its exaggeration lies.

Endnotes

1. While talking about relationship between humour and human, we are characterising humour as something which is a part of normal day to day discourse, which could be either in the form of conversational quip or ideas that are prevalent in any society at a given point of time. Also, though humans are argued to be reflective in nature about their experiences but this is not to create an exclusionary category of people who might not possess the same capabilities due to any sort of disability. This is only done for the ease of argumentation.

2. tendentious jokes are always harmful, being butt of the joke is a harm, tendentious jokes entrench imbalances in social power and grant justification for discriminatory beliefs and practices, they are offensive and it is morally wrong to offend people, they are in a bad taste and bad taste is a moral category and not just question of etiquette.

3. They argue that laughter is a joy one ought to experience and say that ridicule is the test of the truth. Making fun of something which needs changing.

4. In her famous work, "The language war", Robin Tolmach Lackoff defines political correctness as a form of language devised by and to represent the world views of people formerly without the power to create language, make interpretations, or control meaning. The culture of using trigger warnings or politically correct language is claimed to align both with the liberal definition of feminist understanding of providing a 'safe space' for individuals to 'protect' them from any possible uncomfortable feelings at the same time such ideas are also accused of preventing any possible public discussion that those difficult feelings may open up. Exploring the ethics of comedy involves mapping humour in both of these aspects.

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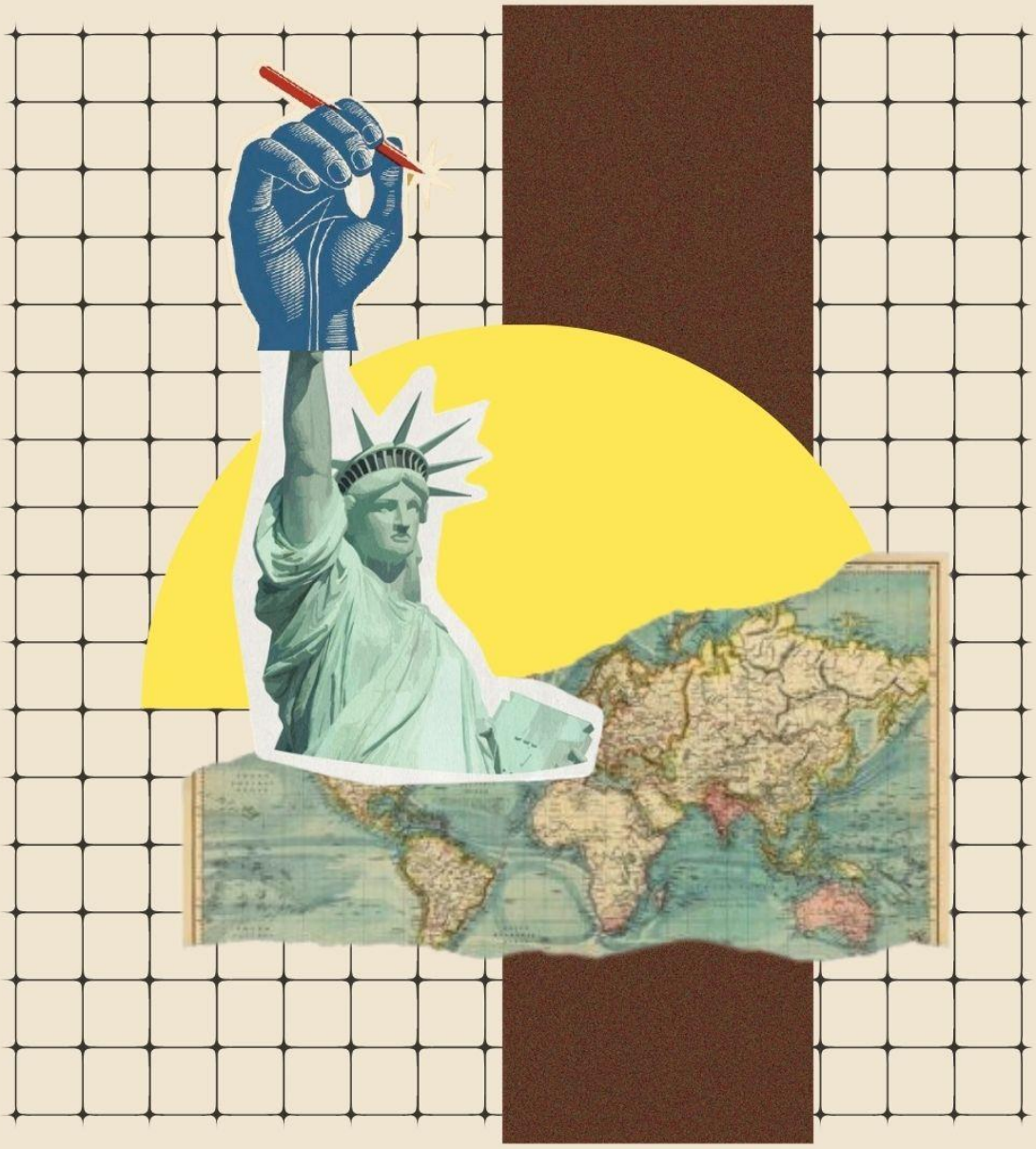
A Critique of Crises: Deconstructing the Eurocentric Discourse of Crises



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A Critique of Crises:
Deconstructing the Eurocentric Discourse of Crises

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Abstract

This research paper aims to question, criticise and debunk the existing Euro-centric epistemological narratives shaping the perception of 'crises' from the optics of postcolonialism. Drawing on the works of various scholars and the case of underreporting of the ongoing crisis in Congo, the research seeks to problematise the selective labelling of some particular events as 'crises' that cater to a certain set of historical, socio-political and economic prejudices rooted in an ethnocentric vision of epistemology as well as a parochial realist view of traditional security. We also attempt to analyse the regulation and tailoring of public effect by the media and the resulting indifference towards the contemporary and historical adversities situated in Congo which, in turn, contributes to the epistemological marginalisation of the region. Building on the framework endorsed by Butler (2004, 2009), the paper unmasks the underlying racial and regional biases infused in the sensationalist portrayal of some conflicts limited to select geo-political regions and the deliberate neglect of others which has been consistently denying personhood to the lives lost in the latter by denying them their due recognisability and acknowledgement of their suffering.

Keywords: Crisis, Euro-centrism, Epistemology, Suffering.

Introduction

Ukraine's deputy chief prosecutor, David Sakvarelidze, told BBC News that he was distraught because he saw "European people with blue eyes and blonde hair being killed every day." On *CBS News*, foreign correspondent Charlie D'Agata reported from Kyiv- "This is a relatively civilised, relatively European city where you wouldn't expect that or hope that it is going to happen." He also said this was not "Iraq or Afghanistan" – countries that are synonymous with conflict. These remarks by Sakvarelidze and D'Agata are not stand-alone statements; they in fact, capture a recurrent phenomenon in the production of crisis narratives: the selective prioritisation of crises in Euro-centric contexts while ignoring those occurring elsewhere which is often perpetuated in the way the crises are covered, reported, and disseminated amongst the common masses. If you open the "World News" tab on the website of Reuters, one of the largest news agencies in the world, a mere glimpse at the title of some of its 14 sub-tabs speaks volumes about the nature of geo-political crisis representation that the "global" media offers. There are 3 tabs solely dedicated to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis, the Israel-Palestine Crisis, and the US Elections, which, as per Reuters, appear to be the only "world" issues. This glaring disparity in coverage highlights the preference given to Western narratives and the realist perspective in the arenas of crisis construction, perpetuating a Euro-centric perspective that marginalises crises occurring outside of Euro-centric regions or involving non-Western actors. This sense of "othering" of certain crises not only leads to "disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region" (Said, 1978) but also inhibits the effective participation and engagement of Global South in the arena of international politics, thus diminishing its sense of regional and global autonomy. This makes it essential to understand and debunk this entire Western narrative of crisis construction.

The Complexities of Construction of Crisis

Unmasking the Euro-Centric and Realist Narratives

The understanding of crisis as a construct and a discourse in international relations is so nuanced, multi-layered and 'political' in itself that any attempt to capture its essence in a singular definition is practically and theoretically improbable. As Coombs (2012) notes, "There is no one universally accepted definition of crisis." However, the

one thread that weaves together the commonly accepted traditional notions of crisis in IR is the dominant undercurrent of realist and Euro-centric understanding of IR.

Unravelling Realism and Its Parochiality

Realism is one of the dominant theories of perceiving and interpreting international relations that largely deals with the "competitive and conflictual side of international relations."(Camisão and Isabel, 2018). In this regard, the realist view of IR deals with the construction of the crisis in a largely military sense and deals with the perennial role of power and self-interest in an anarchic global arena (see Carr, 1939; Morgenthau, 1948 and more). Emerging in the post-World War landscape of the mid-20th century, realism has dominated the academic study of IR since the end of the Second World War (Bell, 2023).

Sanjay Seth cites Anotoon De Baets' argument that both the realist and neorealist strands of scholarship usually pivot on modern state actors as units of analysis (see Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001 and more) while the "questions of culture and culturally derived notions of what counts as morality" are relegated to the background. The inherent structure of realism is such that it reproduces under-theorisation and marginalisation of crises that involve non-state actors or go beyond the realm of traditional military conflict.

Decoding Eurocentrism and Its Influence on Realist Conception of Crisis

Hobson (2012) rightly notes that the concept of Eurocentrism is a "polymorphous, multi-valent discourse that crystallises in a variety of forms" and this is evident from its influence on the entire discourse of the construction and dissemination of crisis. Eurocentrism can be defined as a phenomenon that "views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective." (Pokhrel, 2011) Eurocentrism is not only limited to one dimension but can also be interpreted ontologically, epistemologically, ethically, utilitarianly and didactically according to Baets.

The extent of Western epistemological domination in IR is evident from how the European Empires are seen as "the nursery, or mechanism, by which the political form of the modern state was *transposed* onto the rest of the world", as highlighted by Buzan and Little in their work cited by Sanjay Seth (2011), and since concept of a modern state is seen as a "quintessentially European phenomenon" it is therefore believed that looking into the "Europe's story" is

essential for explaining it. It can be noted here how Buzan and Little appear to have deliberately employed the term "transposed" rather than "imposed", thus distilling the chauvinist nature and impact of imperialism and colonialism in propagating and inflicting the Western concept of modern state across the globe in general and in its colonies in particular.

Hobson (2012) claims IR theory to be a "vehicle of various Eurocentric narratives" and realism doesn't seem to be an exception to the Hobsonian view of IR theories. As Ellen Stirling suggests, the roots of realism are generally grounded in Europe and the West, "whereby their desire to gain power drives the international system, often undermining the actions and events occurring outside powerful countries," thus highlighting how Eurocentrism forms the structural basis of the realist paradigm. Realism is claimed to be a "primarily and distinctively European, liberal, normative and critical tradition." (Rohde, 2020)

Even when contemporary realist writers like Brian C. Schmidt (2021) try to claim and connect the paradigm of realism to a theoretical past, their historical legacy revolves around certain limited "illustrious figures" of Europe such as Thucydides (c. 460–406 BC), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) and a variety of other Western thinkers and practitioners; neglecting the contribution of non-Western thinkers to the discipline.

This Eurocentric bias selectively privileges certain narratives over others which in turn naturally influences the prioritisation of humanitarian response to a handful of geo-political crises. As Darcy and Hofmann (2003) suggest, this entire discourse is not an 'academic' subject and millions of individuals are affected directly by the definition and prioritisation of requirements. As the system currently operates, they suggest that "need is largely interpreted, rather than defined and measured." An example of inequity of resource allocation can be seen in the discrepancy in humanitarian funding per capita in the former Yugoslavia ($166) and Eritrea ($2) in 1998 (Darcy and Hofmann, 2003). Events like these shed light on the deliberately skewed preference given in crisis construction and crisis response to cater to the Euro-centric world gaze.

Non-Traditional Threats to Security in Crisis Construction

However, this realist and largely Eurocentric view of security does not go unchallenged. Newer perceptions of security have emerged in the post-Cold War

era, challenging the neo-realist state-centric view of security that now comes under the larger umbrella of non-traditional security paradigms encompassing concepts of human security and comprehensive security. Non-traditional security issues refer to:

"challenges to the survival and wellbeing of peoples and states that arise out of non-military sources, such as climate change, resource scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, people smuggling, drug trafficking and transnational crime. These dangers are often transnational in scope, defying unilateral remedies and requiring comprehensive – political, economic, social – responses, as well as humanitarian use of military force" (Caballero-Anthony, 2016)

The development of this approach can be credited to the postcolonial approach and security thinking from the Third World, along with the feminist and poststructuralist schools of thought. The Cold War was about the intense rivalry between the US and the USSR, with the threat of an imminent war looming over the world, which is what drove the security agenda to be highly militarized. However, it was evident that in the post-Cold War era, with the disintegration of the Second World, economic, societal and environmental issues would dominate the international security agenda. (Buzan, 1991)

The 1994 Human Development Report prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), borrowing from the scholarship of Mahbub ul Haq, first laid the foundation for the recognition of the concept of human security by outlining its definition and elements namely: economic security, food security, health security, environment security, personal security, community security and political security. This is better understood in light of the newer security challenges brought before the United Nations in the late 1990s such as "refugee flows, conflicts based on resource scarcity, environmental degradation, underdevelopment (the so-called complex humanitarian emergencies) etc. In the last decade, the security agenda within the UN has been redefined to include not only the security of states and communities but also all aspects of the security of human beings." (Waisove, 2003)

The discourse on non-traditional security encompasses a large body of work and theorisation, most of which cannot be discussed in this paper. Even though non-traditional security threats such as poverty, environmental issues, food insecurity,

health insecurity etc. have garnered the attention of international agencies like the United Nations, World Health Organisation, and United Nations Development Programme among others to send prompt humanitarian assistance to conflict-ridden areas, there still appears to be an unsaid hierarchy in the states' perception of certain security threats as causes for alarm. Also apparent, is the disparity between the attention paid to threats in the Global North and the Global South with the former taking precedence in media coverage. This is evident from a report published by the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) titled 'Breaking the Silence', which highlighted that "For the second year in a row, all ten of the most under-reported crises are in Africa". The 10 countries undergoing serious humanitarian crises include Angola, Zambia, Burundi, Senegal, Mauritania, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. What is worth noting is that all the above-mentioned countries are facing crises that fall under the umbrella of non-traditional security threats such as climate crises, food insecurity, prolonged drought, internal displacement and water scarcity to name a few.

Case Study: The Silence on Congo

Introduction

On February 7th, 2024 during the Africa Cup semi-final, Congo's players and coach held their right hands in front of their mouths and two fingers to their temples like a gun, as the Congolese national anthem played in the stadium. It was a mark of protest to condemn and raise awareness about the violence erupting in East Congo. According to the coach's statement made later, this was motivated by the desire to "inform what is happening behind the scenes". Such demonstrations are not uncommon, however, in light of the recent events unfolding in the Democratic Republic of Congo with its tumultuous history only feebly garnering the attention of the international community and the presence of repercussions of such neglect on Congolese citizens, the actions of the players are a poignant statement on the apathy of the international community for the Congolese citizens.

Overview of the contemporary situation

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees describes the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo as "one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world." The origins of the war today can be traced back to the Rwandan Genocide and

the First and Second Congo Wars with Uganda, Rwanda and some neighbouring African countries playing key roles in the conflict. Peace agreements were signed but hostile sentiments prevailed especially between the FDLR, a Hutu rebel group using terror and violence on Tutsis. The latter were the victims of the Rwandan genocide and the former were the perpetrators who fled their country to escape the Tutsi counter-aggression and sought refuge at the Congo border. The players were protesting against the violence being carried out by the M23 rebels and their capture of Goma in Eastern DRC. The government of Congo accuses Rwanda of aiding the M23 rebels while Rwanda denies having any involvement. Amidst this conflict, 6 million people have been displaced within DRC and face terrible living conditions.

Western Apathy/ Western Gaze

Featured in the list of crises that need world attention in 2024 (Save the Children International, 2024), the ongoing conflict in Congo has received inadequate coverage in the international media. The said underreporting can be contextualised in a larger pattern of under-coverage of the conflicts in the African continent. Mediascapes "refer to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations)." They tend to be "narrative-based accounts of strips of reality" (Appadurai, 1997). For those situated at a distance from the events, media becomes the instrument for making sense of those events and bridging the gap between ignorance and information. It also, then, becomes a filter as to which narrative is forwarded via selective presentation of facts.

Mengara postulates that 'the Africa that we know or hear about today is, essentially, a European-made Africa' and news coverage is responsible for 'the systematic and systemic manufacturing of a continent' (Mengara, 2001 as cited in Bunce, 2014). Hawks (1992) and Fair (1992) observed that the Western media coverage of Africa was exclusively done by Western journalists themselves (Ezuru, 2022). The presentation of Africa as a homogenous country (Michira, 2002) and a "Dark Continent" (Stanley, 1878) still dominates in the Western media. News from countries such as those in the African continent do not often make the headlines and when they do, it is nearly always bad news relating to war, terrorism, famines, and catastrophes (Franks, 2005). From 1955 to 1995, 73 per cent of all articles about Africa in The New

York Times provided negative images of its politics and society (Schraeder and Endless, 1998).

Historical Neglect: Legacy of 'Othering'

It would be a mistake to consider the neglect of Congo today as the first case of public amnesia with respect to the region. The mineral and resource-rich region proved to be a bane rather than a boon for the people of Congo even before the colonial scramble for African territories began in the Berlin Conference of 1885 to partition Africa (Warfa, Ahmed & Mwetu, Lester, 2023). Stapleton (2017) elaborates how, in the 19th century, the Belgian King Leopold II built a private empire of his own in the Congo River basin, euphemistically named the "Congo Free State". The seemingly benign goal of scientific exploration and abolition of slavery was a masquerade for extracting and exploiting natural resources.

The Congolese population was engaged in supplying ivory for piano keys and other goods along with wild rubber. The former led to the killing of elephants on a massive scale and the latter resulted in the depopulation of numerous villages. Communities that failed to meet the daily quotas of production were subjected to atrocities like rape, arson, bodily mutilation and murder. The heinous crimes the Congolese endured evaded the label of "genocide" which was defined as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group' (UN, 1948). However, the death toll was estimated to be of holocaust proportions, driving down a population of 20-30 million people at the beginning of the colonial era to 10 million in 1924. Adam Hochschild argued that this death toll was caused by three interconnected causes: (1) murder, (2) starvation, exhaustion, and exposure and (3) disease (Nzongola, 2002).

Despite the efforts of scholars like Hannah Ardendt and Nadine Gordimer, it was not until 1998 when Hoschild's King Leopold's Ghost was first published, that the term "forgotten Holocaust" was widely acknowledged and parallels were drawn with the Jewish Holocaust (De Mul, 2011). The former was forgotten as a colonial atrocity, while the latter took place in Europe and thus, was remembered. The colonial buildings and the statue of Leopold II are the only reminders of "the blood spilt in the stolen land, the severed hands, the shattered families and orphaned children [that] underlie much that meets the eye" (Hoschild, 1998 as cited in De Mul, 2011).

Long-Lasting Impact on People

The tumultuous political history of the Democratic Republic of Congo with decades of conflict and war has produced undesirable consequences for the people of the nation. The conflict in DRC has seen rape being used as a weapon of war. In 2020, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) documented 1,053 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, affecting 675 women, 370 girls, 3 men and 5 boys. Of these cases, 177 dated back to previous years. Another UN Report observes that DRC was among the few countries that witnessed the highest number of grave violations and conflict-related sexual violence against children.

Musisi and Kinyanda (2002, cited by Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974) explain the frequent occurrence of 'Rape trauma syndrome', associated with other psychiatric disorders, among the victims of gang rapes and sexual slavery in DRC. The World Bank elucidates the impact of development and finds that the decades-long conflict manifests itself in the form of low child survival rates under age five, high child stunting, and low quality of education. It finds that the DRC's health care systems have been greatly impacted by its protracted conflict, as well as by the continued long-standing complex humanitarian crises in the world. This has been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and by recurrent disease outbreaks such as cholera, measles, and Ebola. The conflict in DRC coupled with other factors including economic shocks and weather extremes has also been driving acute food insecurity in the region since 2016 making it the most food insecure country according to a study conducted by Global Network Against Food Crises in 2023 (Global Report on Food Crises, 2023).

This paper doesn't question the efforts United Nations and its several branches in deploying peacekeeping operations (MONUSCO), analysing the situation in Congo, producing reports and suggestions to increase humanitarian aid and bring peace to the region and condemning both the violence perpetrated by M23 as well as the Rwandan government's aid to the rebel group. However, as Lilie Chouliaraki puts it, "Even if the institutionalisation of empathy in the UN offers a new legitimacy to citizen's voice, it is the rise of new media that amplifies and echoes this voice in the global media landscape". It is precisely the insufficient media coverage that is reflective of the underlying hierarchy of

crises and the larger international indifference to Congo

Media and Grievability of life: A Butlerian perspective

Crisis and conflict are furthered from the frontlines to the headlines into the psyche of the people. Judith Butler has illustrated in her works 'Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?' (2009) and 'Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence' (2004) how certain lives are deemed 'grievable' in a conflict while others are not. The underrepresentation in media of African conflicts in general, and the Congo crisis in particular, allude to a discriminatory framework of reporting fuelled by racial and regional biases.

Butler (2009) argues that by restricting the exposure to some casualties and sensationalising others, the sensory perception of civilians allows them to mourn the loss of some while being oblivious to the others. Though perception and policy are the instruments that can confer or compromise the existential status of a group, the most general level of such manipulation is the media which filters the facts to create a narrative compatible with and favouring the policies of those in charge. Terms like "acts of terror" are monopolised to refer to the lives lost in the "First World" United States whereas the violence committed by the state itself is seen as legitimate and even justified as "self-defence" (Butler, 2004). Thus, when George Bush H.W. claims that the dropping of the bombs "was right… because it spared millions of American lives.", there is an obvious precedence and worth given to American lives as compared to the ones lost because of Little Boy and Fat Man in Hiroshima-Nagasaki.

The apparatus formulated by Butler can very well be applied to the underreporting of the Congolese crisis. The skewed media accounts of conflicts are both a cause and a consequence of the denial of personhood to certain sections of society. The amount of coverage given to conflicts pertaining to these communities as well as the language used to describe them are discriminatory. The international media, catering to the interests of those at the highest tier of the hierarchy, provides coverage to only those issues relevant to the hegemonic powers and portrays them in a manner beneficial to their interests. The precedence of some lives over others is set by the norm entrepreneurs and so also reflected in the media coverage. At the same time, partial depictions are also an instrument to

perpetuate the hierarchy by erasing the voices of those pushed to the bottom.

The oblivion of the sufferings of the Congolese people fits into the larger narrative of the crisis of the West taking precedence over those of the non-West. In addition to the regional disparity, a racial hierarchy also seems operative in the process which deems white subjects as 'grievable lives' as compared to non-white subjects.

The demarcation of what is a grievable death from one that does not go beyond the presentation of the subject in question. It is because the subject itself is constituted through norms. As norms get reproduced and change, the standards by which a subject will qualify as a 'life' or not also get altered. Butler remarks:

"Subjects are constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognized. These normative conditions for the production of the subject produce a historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the "being" of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition." (Butler, 2009)

It implies that there is always, though changing, a dominant conception of personhood that confers recognisability to some and simultaneously denies it to others. Personhood is thus, socially constructed rather than an inherent quality of the individual.

Butler (2009) argues that 'life' itself is precarious, that is, one's life is always, in some sense, determined by others socially. As Lewin (1948) noted,

"The essence of a group is …. their interdependence. . . .Every move of one member will, relatively speaking, deeply affect the other members, and the state of the group." (Lewis, 1948: 84–88)

The exercise of the normative power for exclusion manifests itself in two ways. The first is the "symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman" when the subject is portrayed and the other is the "radical effacement": denying that there was any 'human' in the first place and therefore, there is no one to be mourned. In other words, the latter is based on the absence of the portrayal of the subject itself (Butler, 2004, p.147). The absence of adequate circulation of news relating to Congo falls into the latter category of radical effacement or erasure. The obliteration of

Congolese lives in what constitutes a 'grievable life' becomes both the cause and consequence of underreporting.

The power of mourning the loss of lives is illustrated by Butler through the reference made to Plato wanting to ban poets from the Republic so that mourning by the citizens would not "disrupt the order and hierarchy of political authority". She also opined, in the context of the US invasion of Iraq, "that those who sought to limit the power of the image in this instance also sought to limit the power of effect, of outrage, knowing full well that it could and would turn public opinion against the war in Iraq" (Butler, 2009). "Frankly, our job is to win the war. Part of that is information warfare. So we are going to attempt to dominate the information environment." said the former head of media relations for the U.S. Marine Corps on Iraq war media coverage.

Our emotional responses, therefore, are never truly our own. They are delivered to us in the form of selective portrayals, narratives, and a framework of interpretation we have been socialised into. The leak in the wall of information regulation is precisely what changed the US public opinion on the Vietnam War. The pictures of children burning and dying disrupted the hegemonic field of visual stimulus that was being fed to the people so much so that a consensus against the war emerged. An ethical outrage and recognition of 'lives lost' were cardinal to it. Had the simulation persisted, there would not have been a recognition of the 'Other' and the precariousness of life. (Butler, 2004:150)

The regulation of media regarding the crisis in Congo also then, regulates the moral obligation and empathy the public feels towards the lives lost in the conflict. By failing to sufficiently acknowledge the suffering of the Congolese people, we also fail to provide them with their personhood. Subsequently, we also falter at appreciating the precariousness of life itself.

Conclusion

The process of shifting lives not recognised as 'life' to ones that are grievable does not entail knowing every single person in danger or every single life lost, rather it demands us to acknowledge how 'life' is induced by a shared network and that the network does not treat all its members on an equal footing. Moreover, an epistemological counter must be prepared against the forces that seek to regulate knowledge and affect (Butler, 2009). It requires creating alternative forums of

dissemination of information that are more inclusive of what is a 'grievable life', cognizant of the precarity of life and amplifying human cries authentically (Butler, 2004).

Since the hierarchy of lives and even what can or cannot be termed as 'life' is a manifestation of the Eurocentric undertones that have plagued the plane of information for well over centuries, it is an arduous yet indispensable task to understand and appraise, rather than 'correct' the past. (Hays, 2019). As Edward Said (1978) rightly suggests, "Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority." Historiography directed at amassing and voicing the crises of the 'othered" (Said, 1978), hitherto silenced and marginalised, can be effective in diluting the dominance of the West by creating alternative narratives of crisis, transcending the Euro-centric and realist paradigms of crisis construction. By disrupting the hegemonic tapestry, it can create a discourse that is more diverse and humane.

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4

Manufacturing Conflict: Unraveling the Nexus of Development and Insurgency in Assam

Manufacturing Conflict:
Unravelling the Nexus of Development and Insurgency in Assam

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Abstract

Northeast India has long been imagined as either a volatile region marked by periodic insurgencies posing a threat to the security of the Indian State or as an entity struggling to integrate itself into the overarching 'Indian mainstream.' The omnipresence of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the region to pacify groups like ULFA and the establishment of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) to ensure the development of Northeast India stands proof of this. These prevailing conceptualisations stem from two overarching discourses surrounding the region which have been operative since the colonial era: the developmental discourse and military metaphysics. Drawing from the works of Sanjib Baruah who interprets the presence of AFSPA in the region as reflective of the military definition of reality, and Dolly Kikon who traces such militarism as a reaction to the intensification of oil-based capitalism in the region, the paper aims to establish a correlation among insurgency, development, and state-building in Northeast India.

Through a focus on the Oil Industry and the ULFA question in Assam, the paper thus aims to highlight: (a) the relationship between issues of development and issues of insurgency in Northeast India (b) the continuities between the colonial and post-colonial policies regarding Northeast India in terms of perpetuating the military and developmental discourse and (c) the potential for re-reading the deployment of capitalist development projects and the AFSPA in the region as the State's responses to the shortcomings in the Indian State-building project. The paper contends that the independent Indian State's policies towards the Northeast echo stark parallels with colonial spatial organisation, indicative of the perpetuation of identical discourses. These discourses are but reflective of the inability of both the colonial and post-colonial States to effectively resolve the North-East Indian problem.

Keywords: Northeast, ULFA, AFSPA, Oil Industry, Capitalist Development

Introduction

The image of Northeast India has long been synonymous with underdevelopment and insurgency. Viewed as a 'durable disorder' or a 'troubled periphery' of India, the Northeast carries the name of being a constant irritant located at the frontier of the Indian state[1.] For the longest time, mainstream economic discourse viewed the region as a hub of underdevelopment caused by what is sarcastically dubbed the 'neglect theory.' Advocates of this theory, such as Guruswamy and Abraham, assert that the economic backwardness of the Northeast is a consequence of persistent neglect by the Central Government since Independence[2]. On the other hand, the problem of insurgency is also viewed as a contributor to the failure in the development of the region- the presence of groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) acts as a persistent threat to both regional stability and national security. However, critical scholarship from the region has turned such simplistic narratives on their heads and highlighted the root causes behind the problems of the region. Critics of the neglect theory point out that the Central Government's per capita expenditure in the Northeast ranks among the highest in India. As such, the real issue of 'underdevelopment' in the region lies not in the neglect or absence of the Indian State in the region but in the fact that despite special assistance to bridge economic disparities, there is a severe limitation in effective fund absorption into the region. Northeast India is already heavily reliant on central funding given their limited revenue-generating capacity. Adding to the problem are the major inefficiencies in fund utilisation that contribute to fiscal indiscipline, corruption, and insurgency in the region. Additionally, the Indian State's response to the insurgency problem has predominantly relied on draconian measures such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) of 1958 and counter-insurgency operations. However, these measures have often exacerbated the situation than improving it, leading to heightened violence and widespread human rights violations in the name of maintaining law and order. While the Indian government's approach aims to suppress insurgent activities, it has failed to address the root causes that have fueled the emergence and growth of insurgents in the region. Scholars like Hiren Gohain for instance argue that the ULFA's rise can be attributed to underlying issues such as unemployment and socio-economic deprivation. Sanjib Baruah further adds that ULFA's grievances stem from perceived injustices inflicted upon the Assamese populace during the process of Indian state formation and continued

underrepresentation and unfair policies by the central government towards the region. Rather than acknowledging these grievances and addressing them through inclusive policies and dialogue, the Indian state's heavy-handed tactics have deepened resentment and fueled further violence. Counter-insurgency operations lead to arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and other human rights abuses, further alienating the local population and pushing more individuals towards insurgent groups. Moreover, ULFA's demands have evolved beyond separatism to encompass a broader range of issues, including contentious politics, citizenship issues, and sub-nationalism. This complexity underscores the inadequacy of a purely militaristic approach to resolving the region's issues and the Indian state's failure to recognize and address the root causes of insurgency, perpetuating a cycle of violence and instability in the region.

Keeping these issues as the central concern, this paper aims to provide a critical examination of the Northeast region of India, challenging prevailing discourses of military metaphysics and developmental rhetorics that often oversimplify its complexities. Focusing on Assam as a primary area of study, the paper begins with a study of the pervasive influence of these dominant discourses in shaping the Indian state's approach towards the Northeast. Through an analysis of the establishment of the Assam oil industry and the implementation of AFSPA and counter-insurgency operations, the paper highlights the limitations of these narratives. Subsequently, the paper investigates the intertwined concepts of 'development' and 'insurgency,' scrutinizing the underlying motivations and forces driving them. It argues that there exists a close correlation between development initiatives and insurgent movements in the region and traces their historical evolution from the colonial period to the post-colonial Indian state-building projects. Recognizing that many present-day issues and attitudes towards the region are deeply rooted in history, the paper underscores the historical continuity of these narratives. The paper also highlights the close relationship between oil capitalism in Assam and the rise of organizations like ULFA- ULFA's presence in the state represents a nexus between capitalist exploitation, citizenship concerns, and insurgency threats. By drawing connections between seemingly disparate issues, the paper presents a newer perspective that transcends military-centric interpretations, viewing the region's problems as stemming from fundamental issues of rights, justice, and democracy.

Finally, the paper contends that the real question at hand revolves around issues of identity and access to resources. As capitalist projects lead to disproportionate sharing of benefits and the marginalisation of the region, developmental projects often serve as mere attempts to pacify grievances. As such, the paper proposes a re-evaluation of the problems faced by Assam and Northeast India, advocating for more substantive solutions that address the region's underlying concerns comprehensively. Through this nuanced approach, the paper seeks to pave the way for meaningful progress and resolution of the region's long-standing issues.

Two Discourses on Northeast India

There are multiple ways of viewing a region- it may either be seen as a territorial and political unit emerging out of deeply historical contexts of ethnonationalism wherein people assert their identity as being distinct from the rest, or it may result from administrative decision-making and economic planning, in which case its existence could be attributed to an arbitrary construction. Until recently, a major proportion of works on Northeast India have portrayed it as a region unto itself, distinct from the rest of the 'mainland of India', both in terms of the socio-political arrangements in place and the phenotypic characteristics of the people. While stereotypical images of Northeast India as a homogenous unit have been largely discredited as mere generalisations, much of the existing discourse on the region still centres around two major catchphrases- insurgency and under-development. The former perspective frames the region as a volatile terrain challenging the security apparatus of the Indian State. Government records[3] reveal the presence of multiple insurgent groups in the Northeast actively engaging in violence, extortion and the systematic creation of terror among the people. Among the listed entities categorized as 'insurgent,' 'terrorist,' or 'unlawful' under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967, prominent groups include the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K), and recently proscribed associations such as the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF).[4] From the view of the State, these recurrent insurgent movements have their roots in historical grievances, tribal rivalries, ethnic complexities, migration across porous international borders and demands for autonomy- all contributing to instability and conflict in the region.

The latter image of Northeast India presents the region as an entity still grappling with the complex process of assimilation into the overarching 'Indian mainstream.' The region's cultural diversity, distinct ethnic identities, and unique historical trajectories have led to a complex and sometimes difficult relationship with the larger subcontinent to the west of the chicken-neck corridor. The State, particularly since 2004 with the establishment of the DONER Ministry, had promised its commitment to the all-round development of the Northeast region, with the incumbent government declaring its efforts at making it an economic hub connecting Southeast Asia under the Act East Policy[5]. The core philosophy driving these initiatives is to unlock the hitherto untapped potential of the region through improved connectivity, infrastructural projects, and welfare schemes. With these numerous policies and developmental projects introduced by the Centre, there emerges a greater hope amongst the Government to accelerate the pace of socioeconomic development of the region, reducing poverty, improving the educational status and eliminating the exploitation of the tribal families. But while such policies geared towards the development of Northeast India appear to reflect a positive relationship between the State and the region on one hand, they are balanced out by the equally relentless resource extraction under oil capitalism in the region and the atrocities committed under the aegis of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) on the other. Thus, the Indian State's approach to Northeast India functions along a spectrum with oil-based capitalism on one extreme and military operations on the other.

Indeed, a major entry point for the independent Indian State into the Northeast occurred in the late 1950s when the Nahorkatia and Moran projects under the oil industry in Assam were brought under the Oil India Private Limited, 1/3rd of which was owned by the Government of India at the time. Later, as the government attained full control of the company in 1981, a significant portion of oil industry in Assam came under the control of the State with Duliajan serving as the field headquarters of OIL. Ever since the 1990s, liberalisation of the economy has further caused privatisation of hundreds of oil fields leading to a steady erosion of community rights over natural resources. As such, oil exploration has been at the heart of numerous debates and protests in the region with popular concerns about the exploitative nature of the industry (Baruah, 2011). It has also garnered much criticism from scholars like Arupjyoti Saikia who view the oil industry as a form of internal

colonialism, standing as the epitome of the capitalist developmental discourse, one that essentialises development planning for encouraging capital formation and expansion of the modern industry (Saikia, 2011).

On the other end of the aforementioned spectrum lies the human rights violations by security forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations that have become a depressing reality of Northeast India- beatings, torture, electric shocks, and simulated drowning are unfortunately common occurrences[6]. According to a 2008 report by Human Rights Watch, the AFSPA has led to many soldiers getting away with causing rape, torture, disappearance and even murder of Indian citizens for decades without any fear of being held accountable. In fact, as recently as December 2021, 14 civilians from Nagaland were killed by the Armed Forces in the name of "mistaken identity"[7]. Indeed, insurgency and development in Northeast India have a close connection. The persistent insurgency in the Brahmaputra Valley and the adjacent hills has arguably hindered economic activities and social stability, with the region's vulnerability stemming from its reliance on the Siliguri corridor for all surface routes to and from the region. Its economic impact is evident in the weakened infrastructure, particularly the transport system, as insurgent activities damage railways, cause accidents, and disrupt the flow of goods and passengers (Nayak and Bhattacharjee, 2013). These groups have also been reported to target resource-based industries such as petroleum and tea, affecting the organized sector. Oil pipelines are frequently sabotaged, and tea gardens become targets for extortion and violence, further deterring prospective investors[8]. As such, the activites of insurgents have led to increased insecurity of the Indian State which in turn views these organisations not merely as a hindrance to its capitalist adventures but also a threat to India's sovereignty, prompting the launch of multiple counter-insurgency operations against them. This has led to a never-ending cycle of insurgency and counter-insurgency in the region that has impacted the lives of the people in Northeast India severely. Today, in terms of military strength, the armed insurgent groups have been considerably weakened by the State's operations. Even their previously enjoyed ideological grip over the populace has been fast declining as the people have either become increasingly uncomfortable with the violence perpetrated by them or are no longer keen on issues of succession and independence (Gohain, 2007). Yet the logic on which these groups function still proves resilient.

Despite the many efforts on the part of the State to limit their military activities, the unresolved tensions between regional patriotism and pan-Indianism continue to feed the insurgent activities and underlying issues stemming from the capitalist developmental projects remain largely unaddressed. This is precisely what academician Rakhee Kalita highlights when she states that the counter-insurgency operation of the Centre is simply "plucking out terrorists without weeding away the soil that germinates these rebels" (Kalita, 2009).[9]

Thus, it becomes clear how the two discourses of insurgency and development have a close connection with each other, contributing to the image of Northeast as 'Indias's troubled periphery' (Bhaumik, 2009) and a 'durable disorder' (Baruah, 2005) plagued by underdevelopment and numerous law and order problems. A closer investigation into the sources of these issues however reveals an interesting reality- both insurgency and development are intricately linked with the Indian state-building project and its shortcomings.

The Statebuilding Project: Colonial Histories, Postcolonial Realities

The current administrative and territorial configuration of Northeast India can be attributed to the numerous policies introduced during the colonial period. Sanjib Baruah even states that while the peculiar governance structure of Northeast India could be seen as a 1970s invention, this directional term was not at all unfamiliar in British colonial practice. Northeast India's present reality has been so closely shaped by its colonial history that Andrew May argues for the possibility of a clear understanding of the complexities of the region only if one began with the study of the imperial practices and ideologies of the colonial period (May, 2016). The earliest recorded instance of expeditions by the East India Company to the land beyond Bengal and its subsequent annexation to the British Empire date back to the 19th century. A major factor encouraging the entry of colonial forces into the region was the weakening rule of the Ahom Kingdom caused by the Maomoria rebellions on one hand, and the frequent Burmese invasions on the other; it was a two-fold attack against the Ahom Kingdom that cleared the grounds for the British to exploit the situation and establish its rule.[10] Though raids and forcible extractions were common tactics used for colonial expansion, they were also supplemented by signed agreements between the local leaders and the colonisers- once the language of

'consent' was used, it became more difficult to resist colonial rule.

The colonial control soon took root in the region through the policy of the 'Inner Line' under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 which demarcated the settled and unsettled areas of the British administration. Although the policy initially appeared to have acted as a form of protection for the indigenous population and their cultural rights, it had clearly been subject to the interests of the British. Whenever the colonial powers perceived a threat to their economic interests by tribal exactions or simply wanted more resources to accommodate their expanding capital production, the Inner Lines were repeatedly redrawn, rendering the policy a mere tool in the hands of the British to solidify their presence. Colonial policies towards the Northeast also reflected a dichotomy drawn between the inhabitants of the plains and those of the hills- despite geographical proximity and historical ties between the inhabitants of the hills and the plains, the British deliberately forbade any unity between the two.[11] Such separation was made possible through the policies of exclusion undertaken by the British administration- the Government of India Act 1935 divided the hill areas of the province as 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas' following the Simon Commission's recommendations.[12] This birth of the Northeast as an administrative area during the colonial period was accompanied by its simultaneous creation as a frontier region- as British rule penetrated the region, the British frontier also shifted. No longer Bengal, the new British frontier now found a place in the North-East Frontier Tract (NEFT) established in 1914, later known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA).[13] Evidently, such policies had far-reaching consequences for the Northeast, the repercussions of which are still felt today. The region not only bears the burden of the colonial narrative of backwardness and mysticism but because the Northeast remained cut off from the rest of India due to these policies, people's access to education, healthcare, and other essential services were severely limited. This exacerbated the sense of alienation and separatism in the region, further reinforcing the stereotypes and continuing the racial discrimination and marginalisation of its people.

The colonial image of the region thus continued on in the post-colonial context. Partly due to geographical factors, such as the presence of mountain ranges and rivers that act as natural boundaries, and partly due to the establishment of post-colonial political borders, the region saw itself

turning into a borderland whilst retaining its frontier status. The region acts as a crucial strategic, military frontier for the Indian State given its shared boundaries with one of the major powers of the world, China- a fact that was reiterated during the Sino-Indian war of 1962 when the lack of preparedness on the eastern front enabled the Chinese forces to advance beyond the NEFA. Additionally, the violent aftermath of the 1947 partition and the subsequent emergence of Bangladesh as an unstable neighbour, from where issues of illegal immigration and citizenship worries continue to persist, have rendered the region even more sensitive to security problems, highlighting its position as a borderland in need of constant vigilance. To top this, the close trans-border nexus between the militant groups of Northeast India and its neighbours, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan have added to the vulnerability of the region, making it not only a victim of geopolitics but also of the military actions of the State in the name of counter-insurgency operations. Consequently, national interest and national security acquire precedence over the region's interest. This conversion of Northeast Indian states from a frontier region during the colonial period to an internal periphery post-independence has precisely led to what Saikia calls 'Indian internal colonialism'. The model of unequal power dynamics between the core and the periphery wherein the development of the core region results out of the underdevelopment and exploitation of the periphery adequately fits the context of Northeast India where relentless resource extraction by the State and private players has turned the region into an internal colony. Such traces of internal colonisation can even be found in popular media representations of the region and the racial discrimination faced by its people. As the borderland-frontier status of the region continued, so did the old colonial notions about civilizational hierarchies and racialized paternalism.

The world's modern-day frontiers, either economic or political, are generally viewed as hostile and violent spaces. Such a narrative also colours the State's attitude towards its frontiers- most popular media narratives portray the Northeast as spaces of violence, anarchy, lawlessness and savagery, as opposed to the peaceful, civilised order of the 'mainland'. Along similar lines, Andrew May highlights how borderlands are more than just spatial metaphors- they are a condition of the perceived difference between the people who are 'ordinary' and those who hold contested points of view (May, 2016). These narratives thus contribute to the

justification of the perennial military presence in the region, be it in the form of AFSPA for running counterinsurgency operations or the language adopted by the Central Industrial Security Force for profiling of citizens around oil townships.

In addition to the administrative control over the region, the colonial period also brought in major economic changes and trends which persisted post-independence. Since the formation of Assam as a separate province in 1874, the British government undertook numerous projects into the region including the creation of a dedicated forest department for overseeing the province's forest resources, managing successful tea plantations as well as actively exploring other mineral resources like oil and coal.[14] Advances in the oil industry were made possible through key policy initiatives and numerous commercial ventures. On the policy front, the Assam Land Revenue Regulation of 1886 helped clarify land rights, permitting land leases for oil spectators. On the commercial front, initiatives by the Assam Railways and Trading Company (ARTC) and the Assam Oil Syndicate (AOS) in the 1880s, which later on went to form the Assam Oil Company (AOC), marked the formal initiation of the oil industry in the region. Since then, oil extraction in Northeast, particularly Assam, had witnessed a substantial increase, with global events like the First World War heightening the demands for oil and petroleum production. Soon with the concurrent growth of the tea industry, the development of railways and the solidification of the oil business by the early 20th century, Assam witnessed significant economic development. However, scholars like Amalendu Guha characterized this as "a big push without take-off" suggesting that challenges still remained in the equitable distribution of benefits as there was neither growth in the indigenous sector of the economy nor proper absorption of these benefits into the agrarian society (Guha, 1990).

Notably, such uneven distribution of revenues from the oil industry continued on in the post-colonial period despite narratives of development and prosperity being deployed by the independent Indian State to justify its economic ventures in the region. From outside, such in-roads made into Northeast India appear as important steps undertaken by the Indian statebuilding project to integrate local economies with the larger Indian market. Yet a closer look into the local perceptions of the Indian State highlight a different postcolonial reality- most communities of the foothills either see the State as a forceful entity in their lands,

its most visible face being the Indian security forces stationed near the oil fields, or alternatively, as a face of exploitative economic ventures undermining community control over resources and sparking strong local movements like the Refinery Movements of the 1950s. Adding to such local perceptions is the enforcement of extraconstitutional regulations like the Disturbed Areas Act (1955) and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958) which establish a militaristic governance system. Consequently, military rule becomes synonymous with the 'Indian Law' for local communities and everyday militarization gets reproduced through security camps, townships, watchtowers, checkpoints, and surveillance spread across the landscape. The deliberate separation of security and oil townships from civilian villages and towns is reflective of the contradictory understanding of militarization in the region. For oil technicians and security forces stationed in these areas, these barricades are perceived as necessary safeguards against the surrounding villages and towns which are viewed as violent or dangerous places. Conversely, local communities residing within these villages and towns perceive these barricades as structures of violence, as representative of the Indian State (Kikon, 2019).

A major ethnographic study by Dolly Kikon draws attention to this complex relationship between oil capitalism and militarism in the Northeast. Given that insurgent groups like ULFA are notorious for sabotaging oil pipelines, the Indian State approaches this region with a heightened sense of suspicion and surveillance. Oil exploratory operations and counterinsurgency in the region are mutually influential- oil sites are often protected by Indian security forces like the CISF who employ the same militarised profiling system as they do for dealing with suspicions of insurgency. Both the central forces and the oil officials perceive the region as 'unsafe' or 'dangerous' places with rampant extremism and terrorism. As such, the framework for the identification of people in the region tends to centre around the notion of *'bhaal manuh'* or 'good persons' giving rise to the system of what Kikon calls 'carbon citizenship'. Such profiling of people done around the oil fields can take violent forms ranging from subjection of youth to relentless scrutiny, mistreatment of healthcare professionals, and even resorting to lethal force. Carbon citizenship tests are influenced by ethnic and political dispositions in the foothills and aim to distinguish between the trustworthy and the troublemakers, a distinction often rooted in the larger idea of a 'good Indian citizen'. This distinction,

mirroring the categorization of insurgents and civilians by Indian security forces, is reinforced by laws like AFSPA and the Disturbed Areas Act wherein there is a reinforcement of the notion of 'disturbed area' as both a geographical location as well as a social category. Those residing in disturbed areas become suspicious people and the areas where the suspicious people reside become disturbed areas. Interestingly, while almost all the Assamese residents like the Ahoms and Kachari are treated as suspicious and disloyal people, the Marwari community are often appreciated as good citizens. At an initial glance, such a system of pofiling could appear immensely racialised. Yet a closer look into the system would reveal that the enjoyment of protection by the Marwari community from the Indian security forces stems from the fact that Marwari people comprise one of the biggest economic beneficiaries of the conflict economy in the foothills with almost all the major shops and supply chains in the region being controlled by them. Today, as increasing number of people across communities are attempting to establish contracts with the government, the fact becomes clear that only those trading communities enjoy the protection of the Indian security forces who serve the interests of the extractive resource regime. As such, there is a blurring of lines between the protection of resource extraction sites, profiling of model citizens, and securing boundaries around oil rigs, all of which underscores the complex interplay of militarized frameworks in the region.

As such, it becomes evident that the Indian Statebuilding project in the Northeast, both in terms of administration and the economy, is a highly militarised one where military definitions of reality take precedence over other ways of perceiving and dealing with the region. And these postcolonial perspectives display an unmistakable continuity with colonial definitions and hierarchies (Baruah, 2020).

Tez Dim, Tel Nidiu[15]**: From Oil Capitalism to ULFA**

The intersection of capitalist development projects and militarism perhaps appears in the most acute form in Assam. Oil, as a crucial mineral resource in Assam, played a significant role in shaping its politics and influencing relations between the Central government and the state. In the post-independence era, the oil industry in Assam, along with other natural resources, stood at a nexus between a developmental discourse centred on capital accumulation on one hand and the rising forces of

regionalism on the other. While many Assamese leaders expressed concerns about Assam remaining as one of the most backward provinces in India and called for its economic development, there was also a growing concern about its potentially exploitative nature. According to historian Ditee Moni Baruah, regionalism had close connections with the oil industry wherein the emergence of a regional identity could not be separated from questions of control over natural resources. This is best displayed by the simultaneous emergence of popular movements highlighting livelihood issues on one end and the calls for sovereignty by groups like ULFA on the other (Baruah, 2011).

One significant event highlighting Assamese apprehensions regarding the petroleum industry revolves around the movement to establish an oil refinery in the state. The Refinery Movement (1956–57) was triggered by the Government of India's proposal to construct a refinery outside Assam, in Barauni, Bihar. Statewide protests followed thereafter with concerns that the central government was depriving Assam of its natural resources aand hindering the state's development. However, despite the belief among participants in the movement that a refinery would create job opportunities and foster industrial growth, geologist Sarat Phukan notes that these expectations remained unmet. Even with the establishment of the Noonmati refinery in 1962 at Guwahati, backwardness and poverty in the region was at an all-time high, indicating the transformation of the state into an enclave economy (Kikon, 2019). While there was some advancement in terms of the development of technical training and education in the region which led to a number of people securing employment in oil and gas sectors, the benefits of such technical and knowledge infrastructure were enjoyed by only a small segment of professionals within the petroleum industry; the broader section of society experienced growing disappointment and discontent. This popular resentment stemmed from a sense of exclusion from the advantages of oil and gas extractions in the region and often found echoes in subnational claims that sought not only cultural autonomy but also community rights to natural resources.

Sanjib Baruah highlights the role of civil societies with organizational capacities, such as the Assam Sahitya Sabha and the All Assam Students Union (AASU), in sustaining Assamese sub-nationalism. The mobilizations focused on cultural and ethnic demands, like the promotion of the

Assamese language, and highlighted regional pride, but also went beyond, extending to claims over territory, resources, and livelihoods. Mainstream Assamese discourse, along with insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), consistently referenced the abundance of natural resources in Assam and criticized the central government for reaping benefits at the cost of local development. Assamese nationalist leaders argued that Assam, while rich in resources, remained economically poor due to the perceived inequity of the central government. Conversely, the ULFA contended that not only did the large-scale exploitation of Assam's resources have led to its backwardness but the nature of the relationship between the state and the centre itself was colonial. This shift in the narrative from regional prosperity through oil-led development to internal colonialism by the Centre coincided with the rising xenophobia in the Assam Movement against the 'outsiders' of the land.[16]

With the increasing unchecked infiltration of Bengali-speaking populations into the region, heightened during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, there was a growing concern among the people, particularly the political elites of the land, about the demographic, economic and political repercussions of such. While the political elites feared loss of political influence to a numerically dominant Bengali-speaking community, the larger Assamese population, in particular the indigenous communities, feared turning into a minority within their own lands. Economically, they viewed the Bangladeshi immigrants as a threat to their livelihoods and lands- concerns such as the Bangladeshi immigrants taking away the jobs of the Assamese populace were common throughout conversations across the region. These larger ongoing concerns finally blossomed into a full drawn-out movement in 1979 when students in Assam, supported by various political and social organizations, launched a civil disobedience movement demanding the expulsion of "foreigners," primarily Bengali-speaking Muslims, from the state. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) spearheaded the movement, directing their demands to the central government in India. As these regional assertions started to take a violent turn - epitomised by the 1983 Nellie Massacre, one of the worst forms of violence Assam has borne witness to - the Indian government was faced with a dilemma. On one hand, conceding to the movement's demands to treat all Bengali-speaking individuals as illegal immigrants would not only mean a denial of refuge to Bengali Hindus fleeing religious persecution in

former East Pakistan but also a potential risk of diplomatic conflicts with the newly formed Bangladesh government. On the other hand, Finally, in 1985, a settlement was reached between the leaders at the forefront of the Assam Movement and the Indian Prime Minister which came to be known as the Assam Accord. While a relatively democratic solution was reached for addressing the dilemma, albeit with some loopholes, not all expressions of the movement against immigrants took place under the ambit of parliamentary politics. Some others took recourse to armed rebellion and separatist organisations which had started to spring up under figures such as Paresh Baruah, Arabinda Rajkhowa and Anup Chetia. Its most popular manifestation was the joining of a large number of Assamese youth into the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) as a way of expressing their grievances (Hazarika 1994).

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is a militant separatist organisation in Assam which aims for the region's secession from the Indian State and the restoration of Assam's "lost" sovereignty. Though founded in 1979, its support base saw a dramatic increase only during the peak of the Assam Movement in the early 1980s, even though issues of citizenship were not a part of the larger agenda guiding ULFA. At the foundation of ULFA's agenda lies the demand for Assam's sovereignty that had allegedly been 'lost' during the signing of the 1826 Yandaboo Treaty when it became a part of British India and consequently, of Independent India after 1947. Claiming the treaty to be a result of fraud and the postcolonial Indian State's treatment of the region as "nothing short of colonialism", the organisation has consistently pushed for the separation of Assam from India. Interestingly, much contrary to its present image as a "violent group of rebels", the ULFA was once welcomed by the people as harbingers of development to the region. For example, scholars such as Hiren Gohain attribute the emergence of ULFA to the deep-seated discontent among the unemployed Assamese youth, exacerbated by an economy that showed little signs of growth, misguided government policies, and unfulfilled pledges from newly elected AGP leaders. Additionally, the broader narrative of the Assam Movement, crafted primarily by upper-caste elites, framed Bangladeshi immigration as a menacing challenge to Assamese identity. Writer Nani Gopal Mahanta even mentions how the foundations of ULFA's assertion for an independent Assam were already laid during the Assam Movement. In a context when neither of the major political parties

in the state was willing to address the growing disillusionment of the unemployed youth, the ULFA found a major opportunity to grow into a large association by promising a better future and by filling this political and ideological vacuum. To top this was the perceived unresponsiveness to and dismissal of the problem of Bangladeshi immigration into Assam by the central government which further tainted the image of the ruling Congress in the eyes of the people, providing fertile grounds for ULFA to assert its presence. Sanjib Baruah writes that ULFA's rise could be explained by the perceived injustice on the populace inflicted first by the process of Indian State formation and then sustained by issues of underrepresentation and unfair policies of the Centre towards the region. The close relationship between the AGP leaders and ULFA members also led to great worry among the Centre, in addition to the concerns caused by the ULFA's extortive practices and violence inflicted on their prime targets- the Hindi-speaking non-Assamese managers and superintendents of tea estates and the oil industry. For ULFA, all "Indians" were foreigners who were to leave the region. After the signing of the Assam Accord which temporarily helped cool down the citizenship issue but left the issues of Assam's sovereignty unaddressed, the ULFA took to violent measures and killings that left not only the AGP leaders but even its past supporters queasy. Thus the formation of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in 1979, along with its subsequent growth, plunged Assam into a period of violence and instability.[17]

ULFA views the Indian State as a symbol of exploitation- not only did it fail to adequately cater to the needs of the region in terms of fulfilling its promises of employment generation in the region, but it also afforded no definitive solution to the immigration issue. Such is evident even today with the Anti-CAA protests erupting in 2019 in Assam which brought attention to the ability of the Indian State to neither comprehend nor address the real issue at play- while the national-level protests against the Act focused on religion as a decisive factor, the movement in Assam focused primarily, if not exclusively, on the issue of identity and immigration. AASU leaders went on to even claim that CAA-NRC is a 'direct violation' of the Assam Accord of 1985. Against this backdrop of the Indian State's oversight of the region's concerns, lies the extractive nature of the oil industry in Assam. For instance, in 2016 when the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas announced the opening of twelve oil fields in Assam to international bidders, a series of protests erupted across the state with slogans of the past such as

"Tez dim, tel nidiu" (We shall give blood but not oil) resurfacing. Popular leader and Member of the Assam Legislative Assembly, Akhil Gogoi even denounced the move as an act of "selling out our natural resources to multinationals." Against this backdrop of the complexities between Oil Capitalism and Immigration concerns, ULFA has found a fertile ground to grow. Thus it is of no surprise that the primary areas targetted by ULFA include oil pipelines and stations. But given ULFA's separatist goals and its infliction of violence, the Indian State views it as a threat to its security and existence. As such, the entire organisation is brought under the ambit of insurgency and terrorism while the actual structural issues and the diverse claims, concerns and assertions made under ULFA are overlooked. Thus ULFA is almost always seen as an exclusively security problem rather than a by-product, albeit a violent one, of structural inadequacies of the Indian Statebuilding project.

This convergence of hydrocarbon extraction, protests, insurgency, and public demands for greater control over oil and natural gas reserves significantly influences the vision of a carbon future in Assam. The prolonged decades of insurgency in Assam have deeply influenced political and social relations among its citizens, while the oil industry's politics of exploration and extraction has intricately restructured the militarized landscape. Everyday life in the foothills of Assam, akin to other parts of Northeast India, is regulated by Indian security forces stationed there wherein the AFSPA's presence contributes to heightened anxieties among the people of the region.

Re-reading History: Northeast through a New Lens

Hiren Gohain's perspective, which views ULFA as a product of unmet societal demands, and Sanjib Baruah's assertion regarding the predominantly militarized approach of the Indian state towards the region, collectively underscore a shrinking space for democratic dialogue and resolution of issues. Counter-insurgency measures and developmental endeavours represent surface-level remedies to much deeper concerns regarding the economic and identity aspirations of the Assamese populace. Just as counter-insurgency operations fail to acknowledge the underlying grievance of ULFA, rooted in the Indian State's exploitative capitalist ventures, similarly, State-led development initiatives, however beneficial they may appear, overlook the fundamental issue of

equitable distribution of the benefits arising from the Indian government's economic projects in the region.

For the former case, the militaristic approach of the Indian State towards ULFA had been criticised by many scholars on the grounds that it merely attempts to clamp down on the armed activities of these separatist groups by declaring it as a law and order problem, without addressing the very structural causes at play. For instance, Baruah highlights how the resort to military metaphysics to assess the circumstances of the region and implementation of the AFSPA is symptomatic of the inability of the Indian State to employ democratic means such as public debates or a criminal justice system to deal with armed groups. An example of this can be found in the Central Government's collaboration with the Congress state government of Hiteswar Saikia in Assam to launch a number of counter-insurgency operations against ULFA, with Operations 'Bajrang' (1990-91) and Operation 'Rhino' (1991-92) being a few. This overly militaristic approach of the government for resolving the "ULFA problem" was a major hindrance in the path towards peace talks, such that even when they occurred, they were never successful. On the part of the ULFA as well, it was not as though they were unwilling to negotiate with the established government. In fact, the People's Consultative Group (PCG), which consisted of 11 members, including the renowned author Mamoni Raisom Goswami, human rights activists, businessmen, newspaper editors, and lawyers, was appointed specifically for the purpose of holding peace negotiations with the State.[18] The PCG put out six major demands in turn for maintaining peace in the region and giving up its violence- these included the demand for the suspension of all army operations against its cadres, the release of its top leaders from prison, taking the peace talks to world forums like the United Nations (UN) and most finally, the most controversial of the lot, the demand for a sovereign and independent Assam. Though the Union government was willing to grant most of its conditions, it was adamant on the issue of sovereignty and deemed such independence of Assam unconstitutional. Despite two full rounds of talks between the government and the ULFA, the mistrust between the two only grew as neither party was willing to compromise its stand on the issue of sovereignty. While ULFA threatened to continue the violence unless its demand for sovereignty was met, the Central government, on the other hand, used this threat as a way of furthering its military actions in the region. Thus, the violent

pattern of insurgency and counter-insurgency operations continued for decades without any real solution. A ceasefire between both parties lasted for six weeks till August 2006, only to be resumed shortly after the government accused ULFA of not only continuing but further intensifying its extortion operations and violence. Given the dead-end on the question of sovereignty and the continued counter-insurgency operations in retaliation to ULFA's threat of violence, the PCG withdrew from the talks, accusing the government of attempting to "solve the conflict in Assam militarily instead of through negotiations."[19]

Currently, the ULFA "problem" still persists in Assam. The AFSPA is still present in the region with routine extensions. ULFA too continues inflicting violence in certain pockets of the region; however, its scale today is nowhere near what it was during the 1980s. Indeed if one considers the mortality rate as an indicator of the gravity of the situation, then there is a definite decline in the strength of the ULFA. Yet ULFA is neither a mere separatist group functioning on the peripheries of the Indian State nor is its primary enemy the Indian State. As both Gohain and Baruah highlight, ULFA is a product of the history of modern Assam- its ideology is of an independent Assam but its concerns are of the political economy. The very fact of the primary targets of ULFA's atrocities being the Hindi-speaking urban localities points to the fact that at the core of its ideology lies the perception of an unfair, colonial relationship between Assam and the rest of India wherein the natural resources of the region are being sucked out to provide for the rest of the country. As such, merely targeting the militant capacity of the organisation does not provide a solution to a problem that needs to be dealt with at a structural level as well.

In terms of the development discourse surrounding the region, development appears to serve two purposes- firstly, it provides a veneer of progress, portraying resource extraction as a necessary step for economic growth and prosperity. Second, it functions as a mechanism to pacify the discontent and frustrations of the local population. Unmet demands of the people, whether related to economic disparities, ethnic concerns, cultural autonomy or political representation, have often led to social unrest in Assam, which in extreme cases have fuelled the emergence of insurgent groups seeking redressal for perceived injustices. In response to these issues, the rhetoric of development is thus,

strategically employed to mitigate the potential for violence and insurgency. By presenting resource extraction as a pathway to economic advancement and improved living standards, authorities aim to redirect the grievances of the local populace towards the promise of a better future. In doing so, they seek to channel dissent into more acceptable and non-violent avenues, fostering an environment where economic development becomes a panacea for all existing challenges. Development thus promises the people a future of growth and progress and aims at generating support for capitalist projects in the region. However, such an approach is not without its complexities- while economic development is portrayed as a solution to the grievances of the people, the actual implementation of these projects often exacerbates tensions and inequalities. Local communities bear the brunt of environmental degradation, displacement, and loss of livelihoods due to resource extraction projects. Therefore, such a contradiction between the promises made by the development rhetoric and its actual manifestation on the ground have only further led to disillusionment among the people in Assam, fueling more dissent and at times, providing ripe grounds for insurgent groups to exploit and push their agendas. In essence, the rhetoric of development in Northeast India is a double-edged sword – on one hand it acts as a tool used to justify resource extraction under the guise of progress and attempts at preventing the escalation of popular discontent into violence and insurgency. On the other hand, the clear disparity between the promises of the developmental project and ground realities only further exacerbates dissent and insurgency. Thus the real challenge lies in reconciling the promises of development with the actual experiences of the affected communities, navigating the delicate balance between economic interests and the socio-political aspirations of the region.

Conclusion

Northeast India demands a fresh perspective to fully comprehend its multifaceted challenges. While narratives surrounding underdevelopment and insurgency do capture some aspects of the region's reality, they fail to encapsulate the crux of the issue. Presently where the issue stands, a dichotomy appears to have been created where there is an inevitable pitting of regional interests for identity and resource protection against national interests for development and security. While transitioning from this polarized outlook to one of mutual coexistence is both possible and imperative, it cannot be achieved solely through the application of force. Merely resorting to measures like

deploying AFSPA to tackle insurgent groups like ULFA, employing militarized profiling and security apparatuses around oil fields, and implementing surface-level development initiatives aimed at pacifying specific regional concerns will not effectively address the underlying issues. It would require efforts at going beyond the militarised definitions of reality to utilise democratic mechanisms of addressing grievances and coming up with answers. The crux of the matter lies in questions of rights, justice, and democracy, rather than merely focusing on insurgency and underdevelopment. To characterize the region solely as plagued by underdevelopment and insurgency would be to overlook the root cause of the problem entirely. And if the real issues are obscured by a militarised lens of looking at the region, a substantial solution will always remain elusive.

The true problem lies in the disillusionment of the region's populace with state-led development projects and oil capitalism, which have often resulted in displacement, land expropriation, and the siphoning of resources away from the local communities. This has led scholars and insurgent groups alike to decry these practices as forms of internal colonialism. Furthermore, the presence of groups like ULFA has intensified the Indian state's inclination to resort to force in addressing regional unrest. Despite attempts at peace talks, the state's return to militaristic strategies has been recurrent, particularly in response to ULFA's escalating violence and perceived threat to India's sovereignty. The challenges faced by Northeast India, particularly Assam, revolve around questions of identity, resource control, and survival. The influx of Bangladeshi immigrants and non-Assamese populations benefiting from the oil industry exacerbates the sense of unrest among the Assamese population, often resulting in violent expressions. As such, it is crucial for the state to recognize that the issue transcends mere underdevelopment and insurgency; it pertains to the very identity and survival of the region. It underscores the imperative for rights over land and resources, justice in resource distribution, and a democratic approach to addressing regional grievances. These structural issues trace their origins back to the colonial era, when the Northeast was organized as a frontier land, and continue through the post-colonial state's integration projects driven by capitalist ventures and heavy industry initiatives.

Resolving the issues of Northeast India necessitates a holistic understanding of its historical context, structural challenges,

and the imperative for inclusive, democratic solutions that prioritize the rights and aspirations of its diverse populace. Only through such comprehensive measures can the region move towards sustainable peace and prosperity.

End Notes

1. The phrases "troubled periphery" and "durable disorder" are borrowed from the works of Subir Bhaumik and Sanjib Baruah, respectively. Bhaumik's book, Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India's North East (SAGE Publications, 2014), and Baruah's work, Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India (Oxford University Press, 2005), explore the socio-political complexities of the region.

2. From Das, Samir K. 2013. "Production of the Insurgent Subject." In *Governing India's Northeast: Essays on Insurgency, Development and the Culture of Peace*, 36. N.p.: Springer India.

3. From "List of Extremist/Insurgent Organizations of North East Region declared as "Unlawful Associations" and/or

4. "Terrorist Organizations" under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967" posted by the Ministry of Home Affairs, dated 25th February 2022. Available at: https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-08/NE_Insurgency_North_East_25022022%5B1%5D.PDF)

5. From Notification issued by the Central Government: "Declaration of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) & All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) as unlawful association under sub-section (1) of section 3 of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, dated 30th November 2018. Available at: www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-09/DeclarationoftheNationalLiberation_30112018%5B1%5D_0

6. From 'A New Era of Peace and Prosperity in the North East' under Ministry of Home Affairs, posted by the Press Bureau of India, Government of India, dated 13th November 2022. Available at: https://pib.gov.in/FeaturesDeatils.aspx?NoteId=151186&ModuleId%20=%202

7. Months following the Manipur ethnic conflict that initially erupted in May 2023, the entire state of Manipur was brought under AFSPA and declared as a 'disturbed area'. Source: Roy, Snehashish. 2023. "Manipur Govt Declares Entire State 'Disturbed Area' Under AFSPA Amid

Unrest." *Hindustan Times*, September 27, 2023. Available at: https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/manipur-violence-latest-news-govt-declares-entire-state-disturbed-area-under-afspa-amid-unrest-101695809659080.html.

8. Source: Staff, Scroll. 2022. "Army Concludes Investigation Into Killing of 14 Civilians in Nagaland's Mon District." Scroll.In, May 17, 2022.

9. On March 2018, arrested ULFA (Independent) linkman, Deepjyoti Gogoi, revealed that the Paresh Baruah-led ULFA faction carried out the attack on Borhat tea estate in Upper Assam's Charaideo district in the first week of February. Source: "Ulfa-I hand in tea attack." *The Telegraph India*, March 14, 2018. Available at: https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/ulfa-i-hand-in-tea-attack/cid/1444224

10. Kalita implies a cycle where individuals deemed as terrorists are removed or neutralized, but the root issues that fuel insurgency remain unaddressed. This militaristic approach, while necessary in the short term for security reasons, is insufficient for achieving long-term stability and peace. Source: Kalita, Rakhee. 2011. "Writing Terror: Men of Rebellion and Contemporary Assamese Literature." In *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, edited by Sanjib Baruah. N.p.: OUP India.

11. Given its own vested interests in exploiting the resources of the hitherto inaccessible region and the external threat from the Burmese invasions that rendered the British-Bengal frontier vulnerable, the colonial government rushed to intervene in the situation and successfully drove out the Burmese from the Brahmaputra Valley, occupying Guwahati with ease in 1825. Consequently, the Treaty of Yandabo was signed on 24 February 1826 which gave legitimacy to the East India Company to enter the region. The last Ahom King Purandar Singha was removed by the Company in 1838 on the ground of his incompetence and failure to pay tribute and the six hundred years of Ahom rule in Upper Assam came to an end. The area was now officially under British India.

12. Scholars like Dilip Gogoi and Jangkhongam Doungel argue that the policy of exclusion was partly a way of facilitating easy administration of the region and partly a preventive measure against any potential land conflicts between communities (Gogoi, 2020 and Doungel, 2021).

13. While the Excluded Areas were directly administered by the British, the partially excluded areas had representatives in the Legislative Assembly, though very few in numbers. Contrary to the plains where reforms in policies were routine, the policies related to the hills never saw any successful reforms during the British Era. In fact, Dilip Gogoi notes how the government at that time was specifically advised by the Simon Commission to exclude the hills of Assam from any constitutional reforms (Gogoi, 2020).

14. The NEFT was initially divided into two sections: (i) the Central and Eastern Section (made up of the former Dibrugarh Frontier Tract (created in 1884) and (ii) the Western Section (Balipara Frontier Tract). Later, in 1954, the Western Section was further divided into (1) Kameng Frontier Division, (2) Subansiri Frontier Division; (3) Tirap Frontier Tract (4) Abor Hill's District and (5) Mishmi Hills District. Finally, post-1972, the NEFA was turned into a union territory and later into the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

15. It is worth noting that for the larger part of the 19th century, the British were mostly preoccupied with coal production in India. The petroleum industry experienced a much slower development, making significant strides in places like Assam only in the late 19th century.

16. A popular slogan during the Assam Movement which literally translates to "We shall give blood but not oil."

17. The Assam Movement, starting to gain pace in the late 1970s, was a response to the perceived threat to cultural and linguistic identity and economic security of the Assamese people caused by the large influx of Bengali-speaking migrants into the region, particularly during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. Although migration into the present territories of Assam began as early as the nineteenth century, the anti-immigration sentiments reached its peak when the Assamese populace found themselves outnumbered by the Bengali speaking communities, as indicated by the 1961 census. (Baruah 2001).

18. By the late 1980s, radical youth from various indigenous communities, including the Bodos, Karbis, Dimasas, and Adivasis, either joined ULFA or formed their independent armed groups to assert their rights over land and natural resources. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, these groups, along with ULFA, disrupted political and economic life in the state. The government responded with a combination of force and economic incentives, enticing many armed groups to engage in talks by offering them opportunities to participate in

India's economic growth and development. (Barbora 2005).

19. The ULFA had its own reasons for agreeing to engage in the peace talks- apart from its declining popularity in the region due to its routine acts of violence, scholars and analysts point out two other major factors, namely the after-effects of "Operation Flush Out" initiated by the Royal Bhutan Army which left the ULFA without a stable base, and the division within the ULFA with many of its previous cadres surrendering to the army (Surrendered-ULFA), thereby weakening its strength. Apart from such efforts of the Union government at handling the ULFA, the state government too initiated some measures for promoting negotiation with the organisation- for instance, it created safe passages for the ULFA cadres to meet their families. However, even such acts were dismissed by the ULFA leaders as a "mere political gimmick".

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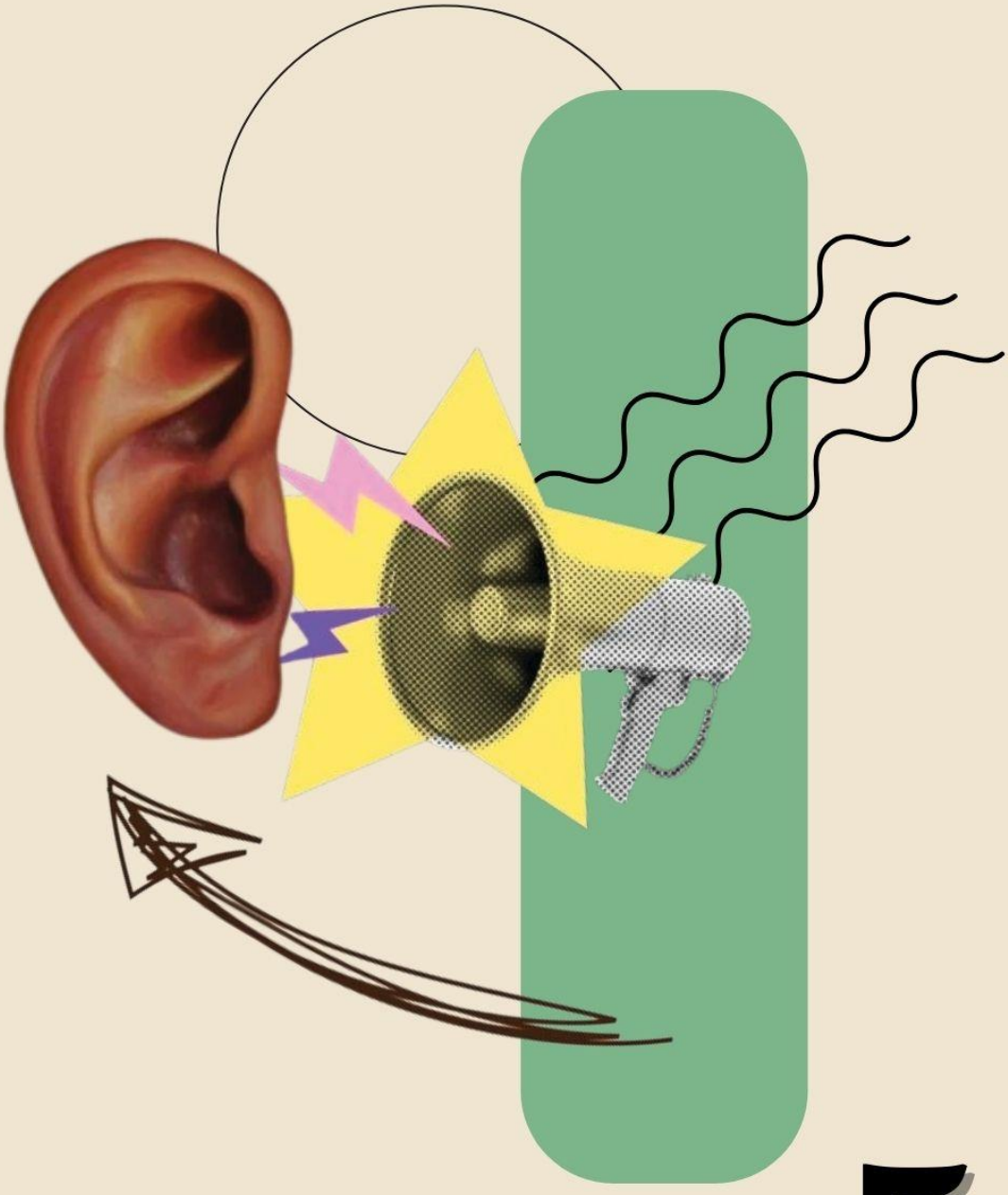
Averting Crisis: Critique as a Feedback Mechanism



5

Averting Crisis: Critique as a Feedback Mechanism

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Abstract

In the political arena, critique as a stand-alone term carries a negative connotation and is perceived to be solely about "fault finding" and value judgment of ideas. Hence, critiquing is viewed as a disruptive activity that eventually brews crisis by destabilising the political order. However, according to Michel Foucault, critical discourses serve as a sustained and constructive source of input to the process of evolution of the dynamic ideas underpinning a political community. Thus, critique does not necessarily lead to crisis, as is often thought. To the contrary, it serves as an important input as well as a feedback mechanism into democratic political systems (David Easton's Systems Approach) through which crisis can be averted. As Amartya Sen has pointed out: no famine has ever taken place in a functioning democracy in the history of the world. A major reason that has been attributed to this achievement is the existence of public criticism that is meant to exist in democratic countries, acting as a deterrent to government inaction or misaction.

In this sense, dissent and freedom of speech & expression are not detrimental to the stability of a political regime or the stability of a nation. This fact, however, is often disregarded, or even overlooked, by political leaders in their frenzy over curbing criticism to protect their image and for short-term re-election gains. Through two parallel case studies of the Nirbhaya rape case protests and the CAA-NRC protests, this paper seeks to analyse this positive role of critique in evading crisis- whether it is preventing the subversion of democratic institutions by questioning power or the deterioration of public service delivery by creating a feedback mechanism.

Keywords: Dissent, Feedback Mechanism, Crisis-aversion, Democratic Safeguard

Introduction

Critiquing is viewed as a disruptive activity that eventually destabilises the political order. However, contrary to this popular belief, critique does not lead to a crisis; rather, it helps avert it by acting as a means of relaying and incorporating feedback. In a democracy, the opinions and demands of the citizens are voiced through critique, with the government making the decision on whether to take it into account. Being receptive to such demands, if not accommodating them, is crucial to understanding the grievances and issues faced by the people- paving the way for appropriate action. In cases where dissent is repressed by the State, a crisis is likely to emerge- stemming from public discontent and loss of faith in the political system or from faulty/failing institutions.

Scholars from different schools of thought have asserted this importance of critique either explicitly or implicitly, with some emphasising freedom of speech as a right that all individuals should enjoy in a democracy. Ranging from John Stuart Mill's liberal defence of free speech to Michel Foucault's post-modern discussion on discourse, intellectual thought is replete with arguments supporting critique as beneficial.

While critique is possible in a wide variety of settings and against a wide variety of authorities, this research paper will focus mainly on dissent in the political system. The findings, though, are broadly applicable beyond the political context, with some changes to take into account specificities.

Critique and crisis are terms with wide-ranging and subjective meanings. For this paper, critique is defined in easily perceivable terms as opposition to the State's actions or policies, popular movements, and mass protests (provided that these are non-violent). Crisis is defined as violent outbursts of citizen discontent such as armed rebellion, civil war, secessionist movements, insurgency or militancy, and riot- leading to loss of human life or significant damage to public property.

This paper is divided into four main sections, the introduction being the first. The second section employs the Foucauldian discourse analysis to establish a link between critique and the concept of anti-discourse. The third section uses David Easton's Input-Output model to construct a framework wherein the anti-discourse's role as an input and feedback mechanism can be understood. This is accompanied by

two parallel case studies: the Nirbhaya rape case protests where critique and its acceptance averted crisis, and the CAA-NRC protests where critique's suppression resulted in a crisis. The fourth section is the conclusion.

Critique as Anti-Discourse

French philosopher Michel Foucault was among the first to focus on and analyse in depth the concept of discourse. According to him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, discourse refers to "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements."

This regulation is through a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements. The notion of exclusion plays a very important role- it leads to the production of certain discourses rather than others. Rather than seeing it simply as a set of statements which have some coherence, discourse should be thought of as existing because of a complex set of practices which attempt to keep them in circulation and other practices which try to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation.

Foucault sheds light on the way discourse is regulated: *"*In every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality."

As per Foucauldian discourse analysis, discourse (that is, the statements themselves and their regulation) is closely associated with the relations of power. This linkage can be seen in the coinage of the term 'power/knowledge' by him- power and knowledge generation are so interrelated that one cannot and should not be invoked without the other. While numerous discourses may exist simultaneously, which one is the dominant (or the mainstream) in a particular society is decided by those in power. Anti-discourse, or counter-discourse, refers to the discourses other than the dominant one that exist. These emerge as alternative narratives that have the potential to undermine the dominant discourse.

In *the History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, Foucault points out:

"Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and

unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."

In the context of the political system, it can be inferred that the dominant discourse is the narrative of the State. The anti-discourse, that is the discourse that questions and challenges the State, is critique. Henceforth, this paper will use critique and anti-discourse interchangeably.

The above quotation from *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* also highlight the positive role that the anti-discourse can play according to Foucault- it can expose those in power and act as a means of resistance. It also provides a medium for the people's demands and feedback on State policies and actions to be relayed to the government. Thus, by suggesting changes based on the needs and beliefs of the citizens, it has the potential to reform the political system for the better.

In his lecture *What is Critique?* Foucault mentions that critique is a virtue whose utility goes beyond fault-finding:

"Whatever the pleasures or compensations accompanying this curious activity of critique, it seems that it rather regularly, almost always, brings not only some stiff bit of utility it claims to have but also that it is supported by some kind of more general imperative- more general still than that of eradicating errors. There is something in critique which is akin to virtue."

He goes on to say that critique is about voicing one's preferred ways of governance, including how not to be governed. Thus, dissent serves a legitimate purpose: helping evolve the dominant discourse and improve governance structures and processes. The anti-discourse is an input into the political system which has real benefits- and serious negative implications/repercussions if prevented from entering through State suppression.

David Easton's System Approach: Anti-discourse and the Feedback Mechanism

From the discussion above it can be concluded that critique does not necessarily lead to crisis, as is often thought. On the contrary, it provides a monitoring as well as a feedback mechanism in democracies through which crises can be averted. As Amartya Sen has pointed out: no famine has ever taken place in a functioning democracy in the history of the world. A

major reason that has been attributed to this achievement is the existence of public criticism that is meant to exist in democratic countries, acting as a deterrent to government inaction.

Hence, the process of political decision-making cannot be completed within high-ranking offices of the state while maintaining complete isolation from the will of the people. Coercive imposition of such unpopular decisions on a political community leads to the breakdown of societal stability as violent outbursts of public disapproval occur to safeguard civil liberties against excesses of the state. The precipitation of such a crisis can be averted by keeping the channel of public criticism open. This ensures the state policies are adjusted according to the demands of the people who live with its consequences.

In this context, the Systems Approach of David Easton provides a useful analytical framework to understand how political systems operate to produce decisions aligned with the demands of the people to reduce the chances of violent public discontent. The system is kept going due to the inputs and support provided by the environment, and the outputs in return are the policies formulated. The enactment of the Nirbhaya Act, 2013 is one of the instances of the working of this input-output feedback loop. Whereas the violent CAA-NRC protests that rocked North-East Delhi in 2020 showcase how disruption in this feedback loop by disregarding the vitality of public criticism as input can escalate into a full-blown crisis.

The Input-Output framework

Political activity emanates from the demands that are constantly raised in societies and the fact that not all of them are satisfied fully. Political systems require these inputs to keep going and outputs to discern the work done. Such structured systems require cooperation and integration amongst members to produce concrete decisions. Hence, what happens in a system is a consequence of efforts made by the members to cope with changes in their environment. This environment provides raw material as information and support as energy to set the system into motion. For instance, in the context of caste politics in India, due to dissatisfaction with the current reservation policies- a new group politically consolidated itself and critiqued the reservation policies- being based on the sole criteria of caste. They demanded the inclusion of an income criterion. As a result of this, a new EWS quota was inserted in the constitution in 2019- the output produced.

The demands emerge from the environment which consists of ecology, economy,

culture, personality, social structure and demography. All cultures are unique as they have different value standards and corresponding areas of conflict. The demands that become a part of the political process are the ones labelled important by the culture as the occurrence of a demand does not automatically convert into a political issue. Several demands die at birth and never reach the stage of political decision-making. For instance, the gruesome Nirbhaya rape case in 2012 stoked unprecedented emotions in the National capital. Vociferous cries of "Hang the Rapists" were the only sounds of those protesting at various sites like Jantar Mantar, and Raisina Hills among others. This prompt response of the populace can be situated in the Indian society's growing indifference to crimes perpetrated against women, the way post-crime discourse was always centred around what the woman was wearing, why was she out so late at night and the insensitivity of political stalwarts like Mulayam Singh Yadav - who said "boys will be boys" only fuelled the outrage.

Such demands are the source of change in political systems, as fluctuations in the environment it produces new inputs for the system. Moreover, these inputs are just the raw material to manufacture a decision. Energy in the form of orientation and actions promoting or resisting a political system is infused into the system to keep it functional. Such orientation is the readiness to act on behalf of others and to pursue actions in proportion with these predispositions. This support is fed into three spheres: the political community, regime, and government. The political community requires sufficient cohesion and collective energy for Pacific settlement of these demands. To settle such demands, a set of constitutional rules are required to be agreed upon collectively. Members of the system should also be prepared to support the government while it negotiates such bargains as the government tries to elicit this support by persuasion, consent or manipulation.

Similarly, in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya protests the public discontent ensured swift action in the political sphere. Also, the conversation surrounding rape placed a burden on the offender and not the victim. Indian law requires anonymity for rape victims and their families, but Asha Devi, Nirbhaya's mother decided to make her daughter's name public in 2015, saying "Those who commit heinous crimes should be ashamed, not the families of victims". The administration also worked at breakneck speed and nabbed the suspects within 24 hours. One week after the crime two Commissions of Inquiry, the Justice

Verma Committee, and the Usha Mehra Committee, were constituted as a direct consequence of wrath over the incident, their purpose being to seek public opinion as to how the anti-rape laws could be amended. The Verma committee submitted a report in 29 days after it received 80,000 suggestions for amendments to rape laws from many citizens including jurists, lawyers, NGOs and women's groups. Several amendments were suggested for different laws, including the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Indian Evidence Act. These changes were embodied in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. It widened the definition of rape, defined consent and changed the phrasing of the law that lifted the burden from the woman. The convicts were hanged seven years after the crime was committed.

On the output side of the loop, the decisions that satisfy the day-to-day needs of the members are required to strengthen their ties to the system. As it is said, "one can fool some of the people some of the time but not all of them all of the time". The government is responsible for balancing inputs and outputs. A government cannot meet all the demands raised however it needs to walk a tightrope as persistent inability to produce satisfactory outputs for the members leads to withdrawal of support from the government. It is for this reason that the input-output balance is a vital mechanism in the life of a political system. This feedback loop can be maintained by allowing critique of the populace on the status quo to be voiced openly so that laws can be prevented from reaching a stage of redundancy. As has been reported, Rape continues to be one of the most common crimes in India, with the 2018 statistics showing that there were 89 rapes each day of the year- indicating the anti-rape laws in India require further reform.

When critique is subdued and public criticism is not paid heed to it often precipitates into a crisis- where the populace turns violent, human lives are lost and severe damage to public property occurs. The CAA-NRC protests in December 2019 is an appropriate example of how ignoring inputs from the society ruptures the feedback loop. The Hindu reported that 69 people died in the 79 days since CAA was passed by the Parliament. The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAA Bill) was first introduced in 2016 in Lok Sabha by amending the Citizenship Act of 1955. The Bill after being discussed in the Lok Sabha, was referred to a joint select committee in August 2016. The members of the Parliamentary Committee visited Barak Valley, the Bengali-majority area of Assam, and Meghalaya to discuss it with

various organisations. They reportedly spoke to about 200 organisations. The Bill was termed "Anti-Assam" by BJP's ally Asom Gana Parishad. When the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Bill visited Assam and Meghalaya to hear from the locals, it did so amid protest voices which said the move would make Assam a "dumping ground for Hindu Bangladeshis".

The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government, also an ally of the BJP, has opposed the Bill. Calling the bill "dangerous," the Meghalaya government said that they don't agree with the idea of non-Muslims acquiring citizenship after six years of living in the country. Despite such criticism, these valuable inputs were ignored and the bill was passed on 10 December 2019.

Conclusion

Populism, both right and left-wing, is on the rise worldwide. In such regimes, dissent is dismissed as a destabilising force that foments crisis in the societal order. In this context, freedom of speech and expression has been faced with a heightened threat. Repressing dissent yields short-term results for prolonging the rule of populist leaders; however, the society expresses itself through violent outbursts of the real crisis as has been posited in this paper.

Foucauldian discourse analysis shows that critique can be equated with anti-discourse. As per the power relations, critique is an alternative narrative that questions and exposes the dominant discourse created by those in power (the State, in the case of the political system). In doing so, critique serves a crucial function of not only error fixing but also evolving the dominant discourse and improving the ways of governance.

The paper has employed David Easton's systems approach to show that critique is an indispensable input or feedback mechanism through which the political system arrives at popularly demanded outputs. The anti-discourse informs the government about the needs and desires of the populace. That can be taken into account while arriving at policy decisions. This not only ensures better-informed policies but also prevents public discontent from mutating into violent outbursts. By stalling the loss of citizens' faith in the political system, the existence of critique helps avert a crisis.

As can be seen in the Nirbhaya rape case protest, allowing, and incorporating anti-discourse helped the system in making required modifications to anti-rape law to combat the rise in violent crimes against women. It prevented the mass protests from turning violent. On the contrary, in the CAA-NRC protests, the repression of

dissent resulted in rioting as people had lost faith in legitimate routes and resorted to violence to voice their demands.

The anti-discourse serves as a crucial input and feedback mechanism; allowing it to be beneficial for any political system. Therefore, it is important that democracies provide space for critique, rather than repressing it.

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Green Revolution and the Khalistan Enigma: Harvesting Prosperity or Sowing Discord?

6

Green Revolution and the Khalistan Enigma: Harvesting Prosperity or Sowing Discord?

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Abstract

The Green Revolution in India is often hailed as a triumph of agricultural innovation concealed within its layers of ecological repercussions and socio-political complexities. This paper embarks on a journey to unearth the hidden dynamics behind India's agrarian transformation. The paper navigates through the historical currents, trying to bring out the paradox where prosperity birthed grievances, as instanced by the alarming rise in inequalities, haunting diseases, dearth of resources and a political tussle. Delving deep, we explore the nexus between agricultural prosperity, the forging of a distinct Sikh identity and the genesis of Khalistan, revealing how economic gains intertwined with political upheavals. As the paper delves into the contemporary landscape, it tries to offer insights into navigating the path forward amidst these intertwined challenges.

Keywords: Green Revolution, Ecology, Commercialisation, Identity, Nationalism

Introduction

Indian agriculture, a blend of tradition and innovation, is a captivating tapestry woven into the rich history of the subcontinent. From Punjab's fertile plains to the terraced fields of the Western Ghats, it represents a harmonious interplay of ancient practices and modern advancements. Three critical facts that demand attention are: Firstly, over 17,000 farmers across India committed suicide between 2018 and 2020.[1] Secondly, an infamous "cancer train" runs from Malwa, Punjab to Bikaner, Rajasthan, carrying more than 60% of its passengers as cancer patients.[2] Lastly, the *Global Hunger Index 2023* shows that India is under 'serious' levels of hunger. All three of these issues appear different but have their roots in the 1960s and 70s when the "Green Revolution" started in India. The Green Revolution stands as a transformative milestone, pulling India from the edge of starvation to a breadbasket status. This agricultural revolution boosted rice and wheat yields, curbing food imports and elevating per capita food production.

Yet, this remarkable feat did not come without its sacrifices, for the Green Revolution bore an ecological and socio-political cost. Therefore, this paper will seek to explore what were the ecological consequences of the green revolution while uncovering the socio-political insecurities generated by it. *The paper will try to investigate how 'prosperity' of the green revolution culminates into 'infamous Khalistan'. The paper seeks to dissect the roots of Operation Blue Star and the creation of a distinct Sikh identity, linking these historical events to the 'greenness' of the Green Revolution*.

The paper will unfold in three distinct sections. The first section establishes the background, immersing readers in the socio-political climate and decoding the multifaceted dimensions of the Green Revolution. In the second part, the paper will delve deep into the intricate connection between the Green Revolution and the emergence of Khalistan connecting the dots between prosperity and political unrest focusing on 'commercialisation' of the value system. Finally in conclusion the paper turns its gaze towards the contemporary landscape, offering insights into potential pathways forward.

Decoding Green Revolution

From a 'Ship to Mouth' to 'Bread Basket'

At India's independence, agriculture faced despair with famine threats and plummeting crop yields due to outdated techniques, poor infrastructure, and colonial land system changes and moreover, the upheaval caused by the

British colonial administration's transition from a land-revenue system to a land-use system. Even if a pivotal shift towards scientific agriculture took shape during the Nehruvian era. Investments poured into vital infrastructure such as irrigation projects like the Bhakra Nangal Dam and the establishment of agricultural universities and research institutes. Despite these strides, food production struggled to keep pace with the burgeoning population, necessitating food imports.

During the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict, amidst economic turmoil, Lal Bahadur Shastri rallied the nation with "Sacrifice one meal at least a week!" His tenure prioritised food security as the 1966-67 drought exacerbated India's vulnerability to disruptions in grain imports due to political alliances.

In response, Shastri's government embarked on ambitious agricultural reforms under the leadership of C. Subramaniam, teaming up with agriculturalist scientist M.S. Swaminathan and bureaucrat Sivaraman. The Green Revolution was catalysed, with a focus on incentivizing farmers and embracing modern science and technology. Indira Gandhi, succeeding Shastri, bolstered these efforts by elevating agricultural funding and supporting initiatives such as the Indian Agricultural Research Institute. Meanwhile, geopolitical rivalries, notably with the USA advocating for agricultural commercialization, as part of an ideological war against the Chinese communist model, added complexity to India's agricultural landscape.

The Green Revolution focused on Punjab, providing HYV seeds through Punjab Agriculture University. Farmers received comprehensive support, including access to fertilisers, pesticides, credit, and subsidies. The government, via the Food Corporation of India, ensured minimum support prices, mitigating risks, reducing costs, boosting output, and empowering farmers to clear debts and reinvest profits.

In the rabi harvest of 1968, India produced 16.5 million tonnes of wheat. Within two years, wheat production doubled compared to the 1960-65 average, indicating the successful launch of the Green Revolution. It was called a revolution as it transformed subsistence agriculture into commercialised agriculture.[3] Within a decade India became self-sufficient and started exporting to other countries.

The Dark Side of The Green Revolution

The Green Revolution prioritised short-term crop yield gains, overlooking long-term consequences. In India, it reveals how science is politically and socially influenced and yet is immune to social

evaluation. In her book titled *'Violence of Green Revolution'* Vandana Shiva argues that how Green Revolution replaced what Robert Naess called the 'intrinsic value of nature,' which is caring for land without thinking of its benefit, with the 'instrumental value of nature,' where the land is treated as a commodity.

Intensive agriculture favoured resource-rich regions, exacerbating inequalities, excluding areas with limited resources, leading to rural depeasantization. Class conflicts arose, with urban elites exploiting cheap food surplus from polarised rural areas. However, The Green Revolution's artificial profitability waned, leading to debt crises and reduced returns, impacting societal relations even in resource-rich regions.

> *The Green Revolution altered the evolutionary history of crops, which had spanned 10,000 years, by fundamentally transforming the nature of seeds.*[4]

With the above lines, Vandana Shiva explains how the common genetic heritage of peasants was commodified into the private property of seed corporations and international agricultural research centres. This transformation prompted the establishment of the National Seed Project, funded by a World Bank loan, with the objective of involving multinational corporations in seed production. Consequently, there was a push for increased commercialization, larger loans, and enhanced incentives for corporate producers and suppliers.

To add a feather to the miracle seeds' cap, the Green Revolution, focused on marketable crop parts, neglecting traditional Indian practices of cultivating crops for multiple uses, including fodder and organic soil enrichment. As a result, it brought a harvest index more favourable to the man at the cost of ecosystem productivity. It supplanted the intricate symbiotic balance of indigenous agriculture, shifting from a holistic traditional knowledge system to a reductionist, monoculture-centred system, undermining the sustainability that had characterised indigenous agricultural practices for generations.

The estimated production of major crops in million tonnes during 2021-22 is as follows:

RICE	WHEAT	NUTRI/ CONARSE CEREALS	MAIZE	PULSES	OILSEEDS
130.29	106.84	50.90	33.62	27.69	37.70

Upon closer examination, Wheat and rice dominate India's foodgrain production evidently, overshadowing the traditional, locally adapted crop varieties such as coarse grains like kutki, jawar, bajra, amaranth, pulses like moth-safaid, lobiya, and oilseeds like sesame and linseed. This shift to a limited genetic pool of miracle seeds has led to a loss of biodiversity, affecting not only seed variety but also broader ecosystem species. The transition reflects monocropping, diminishing the rich tapestry of indigenous agriculture.[5] This impacts soil fertility and has repercussions on individual health, leading to 'hidden hunger' due to micronutrient deficiencies like anaemia and contributing to lifestyle diseases like diabetes. The rate of undernourishment in India is 16.6% as per Global Health Index 2023.

Vandana Shiva says- *"This intensified agriculture strategy was, in effect, a robbery of the soil's fertility."*[6] The HYV seeds relied heavily on input fertilisers, creating new markets for chemical fertilisers, often promoted by the World Bank and the USA through subsidies via Rockefeller and Ford Foundation. High input of these fertilisers leads to biotic environment contamination and soil degradation. Even when farmers applied more NPK fertilisers, crop failures were reported due to deficiencies in micronutrients like zinc, iron, and boron, etc.

The increasing nitrogen dosages elevates humidity levels within the crop canopy and succulence in plant tissues, resulting in a higher susceptibility to disease outbreaks. Further, the homogenised crop variety reduces the genetic pull making crops susceptible to frequent pest attacks and endemics. Therefore, comes into picture the use of pesticides. However, reducing pest management to the use of poison fails to realise the threat latter is for natural enemies of pests, disturbing the balance. Continuous use of pesticides further led to

the emergence of new biotypes of pests which then became endemic causing severe damage.

Organochlorine and organophosphate pesticides also affect humans as they accumulate in body fats and blood lipids. The Centre for Science and Environment in India, in its report, discovered 15 different pesticides in 20 blood samples from four villages in Punjab. What is even more alarming is that the levels of DDT were 188 times higher than the samples collected by the US-based Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Malwa, often referred to as the 'cancer capital' of Punjab, is grappling with an alarmingly high incidence of cancer patients, along with a rising prevalence of reproductive disorders and intellectual disabilities. This distressing trend is closely linked to the fact that the region accounts for a staggering 75% of the total pesticide usage in Punjab.[7]

The Green Revolution has reduced a region to a factory-like agrarian state resulting in the pollution of its air, soil, and water. The issue extends beyond fertiliser seepage, as groundwater levels are also depleting. Rice, which requires approximately five times more water per kilogram than millets, relies on intensive irrigation, destabilising the water cycle and leading to desertification through waterlogging and land salinization. In one of her interviews Shiva says- *"Living Rivers don't generate returns for the World Bank but Dams do. So, we were step by step pushed towards a material culture of excessive use of resources"*[8]

Land and water scarcity give rise to conflicts. For instance, waterlogging knows no boundaries and necessitates community management, which conflicts with the privatisation thrust of the Green Revolution. Consider the example of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal, where limited resources require water control technologies and new projects, fostering a sense of deprivation in society and leading to new demands and river conflicts between the central and state governments, as well as among different states.[9]

Intensive agriculture in Punjab heavily relies on tubewells powered by electricity. Combined with the use of chemical fertilisers and other agricultural practices, the agricultural sector contributed to ~15% of greenhouse gas emissions in Punjab in 2018. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the government had to enact the Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act in 2009. Under this legislation, farmers were required to transplant paddy in mid-June to optimise the utilisation of rainwater. Paddy, a crop that can only be harvested in mid-October, leaves a narrow 15-day

window for both harvesting and preparing the fields for Rabi cultivation. Consequently, this led to an increased reliance on combined harvesters, which replaced manual labour. However, these combined harvesters typically leave stubble on the ground, which farmers then burn to clear the land, resulting in significant air pollution.[10]

In the 1990s, the Green Revolution's input-intensive approach began eroding farmers' incomes due to escalating off-farm expenses. Diminishing subsidies following economic reforms (LPG) combined with rising input costs resulted in meagre profits. The National Commission on Farmers (2006) recommended Minimum Support Prices (MSP) should be at least 50% above average production costs, including labour and capital rental.[11] Nevertheless, MSP occasionally falls short. According to the NSS Report on Agricultural Households in Rural India (2019),[12] The average monthly income was Rs. 8,337, while the average debt amounted to Rs. 74,121, subjecting farmers to Arthiyas. This cycle of crony capitalism, income stagnation, and debt drives some to tragic ends or protests for their rights.

Peace or Discord: Interplay of Ecology, Politics and Society

In complex societies like India, where certain castes are linked to specific professions and identities, ethnic bonds often overshadow other forms of solidarity, such as class. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the fact that only groups are entitled to certain collective goods, leading to winners and losers in the distribution of state rewards. Consequently, minority leaderships within these groups tend to dominate the political discourse, amplifying perceptions of discrimination and fostering ethnic tensions. This dynamic serves as a background theory for understanding the Punjab case study of Khalistan, where the Jat Sikh community's sense of collective identity and perceived discrimination fuelled separatist sentiments, as their political voice became amplified in the face of perceived injustices and denied entitlements.

As Francine Frankel, in *"The Political Challenge of the Green Revolution"* (1972) says-

> The green revolution is accompanied by an accelerated disruption in traditional societies. Traditional hierarchical arrangements rooted in norms of mutual interdependence and obligations give way to

> adversary relations based on new notions of economic interest...

The agrarian boom fuelled by increased productivity and high incomes reshaped the social fabric, drawing many into the lucrative embrace of farming. However, this prosperity was unevenly distributed, leaving swathes of the population marginalised and disenchanted.

Urbanisation and the breakdown of traditional village ties, along with rising consumerism, widespread literacy, and the emergence of mass society, heightened expectations and fueled discontent among those left behind by the benefits of the green revolution.

Robin Jeffrey's 'Punjab Case', identifies uncontrolled modernization as the catalyst for discontent. For those left behind by the green revolution's bountiful harvest, feelings of alienation and rootlessness festered, laying fertile ground for the rise of discontent. Thus, the tale of Khalistan is not merely a saga of separatism but a narrative woven from the threads of prosperity, disparity, and the tumultuous winds of change.

The Green Revolution unequally benefited average Punjabi farmers, the rapid rural capital growth, and the rise of capitalist farmers, primarily Jat Sikhs, led to conflict with urban bourgeoisie Hindu Khatris on one hand and marginalised poor peasantry and agricultural labour groups like the Mazbi Sikhs and RamGarhia on the other.

The Akali Dal, primarily representing Jat Sikh farmers, manipulated these antagonistic sentiments to maintain dominance over the Sikh community. Using religious language to overlook the class divides within the Sikh community resulted in the rise of religious fundamentalism. Sikh ethno-nationalism emerged as a response to Hindu majoritarianism. It is argued that the brand of ethno-nationalism that surfaced in the 1980s is inherently tied to capitalist growth within the state, as well as the influences of both domestic and global capital. Sikh ethno-nationalism is fundamentally shaped by the contest for dominance between agricultural and industrial capital. Discontented farmers, seeking justice for their labour, felt colonised by the central government to feed India, perceiving their lack of control over what to grow and how to grow it, as well as the selling price, as a form of slavery. The farmer survival issue turned communal and militarised by political forces, transitioning from Sikh farmers' demands to a call for a separate Sikh state, 'KHALISTAN' leading to conflicts over economic and political power-sharing between the centre and state.

The central government dismissed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution as secessionist, while in 1984, the Bharatiya Kisan Union and the Akali Dal initiated actions like 'karja roke' and a food grain blockade, aimed at halting the sale of food grain to the Food Corporation of India (FCI). A successful blockade would have given Punjab significant leverage in demanding greater state autonomy, potentially leading to a national crisis. However, in response, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi deployed the army in Punjab on June 3rd, followed by the attack on the Golden Temple on June 5th, which deeply wounded Sikh faith and honour.

Following Operation Bluestar, the focus shifted away from Punjab's farming community, with only the religious aspect of Sikh identity remaining in the national consciousness. The crisis, rooted in the economic and political dynamics of the Green Revolution, took on communal overtones due to the overlap between Punjab's farming community and its Jat Sikh identity. Thus, discontent in the 1980s stemmed from centralised agricultural production, exacerbating economic and political crises, intertwined with centre-state politics and the political economy of the Green Revolution.

Through the lenses of the world system model, the elites' networking in the current times is making the situation worse. Wealthy farmers benefited greatly from the green revolution, to the point that they were able to relocate and send their children overseas. These 'Lumpenbourgeoisie,' with their growing wealth, evolving worldview, sense of Sikh pride, and, ultimately led to self-imagined nation of 'Khalistan,' which recon well with the recently developed 'separate Sikh identity' who found themselves as slave of centre and whole India. Development of a parallel identity to the Hindu identity, with an idea of 'being self-sufficient nation' was credited well by the network of elites in electoral politics, in India and abroad like UK or Canada, Furthermore, the history of the Ghadar Party, which was founded in the twentieth century as an international political movement with the intention of overthrowing British authority by smuggling weaponry and inspiring people to revolt, also provides a similar narrative. Similar dynamics may be observed in the Khalistan movement, which is mostly supported by urban elites with their own self-imagined narratives, which are exacerbated by party politics between the state and the centre for power.

Simultaneously, the erosion of values due to the culture of cash and profitability caused Sikh youth to lose their sense of justice and values, leading to alcoholism,

drug abuse, smoking, violence against women, and a narrowing of political identity, redefining it as Khalistan. Thus, the Green Revolution led to no peace in Punjab but rather generated violence and bloodshed.

Navigating the Agricultural Sustainability Conundrum

Amid the growing ecological concerns, there is a palpable surge in interest in embracing sustainable and agroecological farming practices. These approaches seek to balance heightened food production with the critical imperatives of environmental conservation and resilience. In this context, the influential contributions of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan in the realm of Indian agriculture and Dr. Vandana Shiva's dedicated advocacy for biodiversity preservation assume pivotal roles in shaping the landscape of sustainable farming.

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, recognizing the demographic and ecological imperatives, underscores the necessity of increasing production within finite resources through environmentally sustainable technologies. He advocates the 'Evergreen revolution', diversifying the agricultural sector, fostering income diversification, and seizing opportunities for value addition. This underscores the importance of an Integrated Intensive Farming System firmly grounded in the principles of ecology, equity, economics, and traditional wisdom.

Conversely to the above, Vandana Shiva champions agroecology,[13] deeply rooted in India's ancient agricultural wisdom. Historically, these sustainable practices flourished, adeptly meeting local needs. They incorporated organic material recycling, native crop cultivation, crop rotation, legume intercropping, biological pest control, and livestock integration. Agroecology revolves around an agroecosystem, involving plants, animals, and microorganisms. Navdanya's research in India demonstrates the benefits of organic farming, from increased carbon absorption to a 63% boost in soil microbial activity, supporting small farmers in achieving greater production and income while moving towards food sovereignty.

Since 2015-16, the government has actively promoted organic farming through initiatives like the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana and Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region offering comprehensive support to organic farmers, covering production, processing, certification, marketing, and post-harvest management.[14] Additionally, initiatives like the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture, the promotion of scientific warehousing, the adoption of

drone technologies have been undertaken by setting up an Agri-Tech Infrastructure Fund.[15] Sikkim's transformation into a 100% organic farming state stands as a shining example of the promotion of ecologically conscious agriculture in India. Further, Dalwai panel on doubling the farmers' income recommends to see farmers as Agripreneur therefore, govt.'s focus should be on reducing input cost, enhancing productivity, and ensuring high returns.

The advent of genetically modified crops through biotechnology sparks debates on addressing the fatigue of the Green Revolution. Dr. Swaminathan advocates for enhancing agriculture through genomics, information technology, and improved agronomic management, exemplified by GM mustard, RNAi-based biopesticides, nano fertilizers, precision farming, etc. to bolster productivity and profitability for small-scale farmers. Conversely, Dr. Shiva vehemently opposes GMO crops, expressing concerns about their potential impact on biodiversity. She contends that GMOs, by introducing genes foreign to plants, appropriates life. According to her, GMOs primarily serve the interests of seed monopolies like Monsanto, leading to the appropriation of rights and royalties.[16]

Vandana Shiva asserts that patents on life and new biotechnologies function as contemporary tools of imperialism which implies that a farmer saving seeds is an "intellectual property thief."[17] Dr. Shiva advocates for "Seed Freedom", endorsing seed sovereignty, and played a pivotal role in the formulation of The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act in 2001. This legislation acknowledges farmers' rights to conserve locally available seeds, exchange them, and sow them. To date, Navdanya has established 150 community seed banks in 22 Indian states over the past 30 years.[18] Given the rising frequency of climate disasters, she encourages farmers to cultivate and propagate native climate-resilient varieties and has initiated the 'Seeds of Hope' program to aid disaster-affected farmers with climate-resilient seeds.[19]

Recognizing the immense potential of millets, aligning with multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Government of India has prioritised their resurgence. In April 2018, millets were rebranded as 'Nutri Cereals,' and 2018 was declared the National Year of Millets to boost promotion and demand. Furthermore, 2023 has been designated as the International Year of Millet, with India organising a Millet Fair-cum-exhibition, featuring engagement with sports figures, nutritionists, and fitness experts via video

messages, as well as hosting webinars on millets with prominent nutritionists.[20]

While both personalities agree on the importance of community-driven efforts for sustainability, Dr. Shiva advocates for a more democratic, grassroots approach to conservation, as exemplified by the Navdanya movement. It is an Earth-centric, women-centric, farmer-led initiative promoting sustainable agriculture with a traditional knowledge system. On the other hand, Dr. Swaminathan argues for 'Gyan Chaupal,' a village knowledge centre developed by Panchayati Raj Institutions to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and its practical field application.

Two of the most pressing global challenges are climate change and the deterioration of limited resources. Agricultural approaches and practices have a profound impact on addressing these issues. Consequently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the future of the agricultural sector. Thus, Indian agriculture is poised to play a pivotal role in realising the aspirations of 'Viksit Bharat,' which encompasses inclusive development, sustainable growth, and the creation of meaningful employment opportunities during the era of 'Amrit Kaal.'[21]

Conclusion

In retrospect, the Green Revolution in India stands as a remarkable chapter in India's voyage from being a food-import-dependent nation to becoming a flourishing food exporter that has traversed a labyrinth of dilemmas. Nevertheless, this historic transformation was not without its ecological and socio-political trade-offs. The Fallacious tale of green revolution cast a shadow on the long-term consequences with simultaneous climate change impacting the welfare of both farmers and consumers, exacerbated resource-related disputes, sowed seeds of social inequality and discord, triggered class conflicts, ethnic tensions, and even the spectre of communal violence.

The proposition surrounding the 'Khalistan,' becomes evident that various dimensions contribute to its complexity like contradictions stemming from the Green Revolution, political manoeuvring by parties to maintain power, economic clashes between occupational communities, religious rhetoric masking intra-community tensions, and minority apprehensions of assimilation. It is important to capture the holistic 'big picture' of how states shape political opportunities, how groups contest for state resources, and how identities solidify in response. To wrap it up, in this era of "Amrit Kaal," where the aspirations encompass inclusive development and

sustainable prosperity, the journey is challenging, but it should hold the promise of a more balanced and resilient India.

The paper primarily delves into the link between the green revolution and Khalistan movement. Due to constraints such as time, space, and resource availability, the study relies on a limited set of secondary sources to unravel the intricate interplay of social, political, and ecological factors. Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognize the evolving dynamics surrounding diverse pathways to sustainability, particularly when catering to the needs of small and marginal farmers, promises to be a lucrative area for exploration, especially with the debates on emerging 'agro-technologies' vs traditional wisdom. Furthermore, the controversies over GMO crops, their applications, and their potential future implications, provide an intriguing avenue for contemplation. Thus, the domain underscores the vast scope for further research.

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Finding Self in the Age of AI

7

Critique & Crisis

Finding *Self* in the Age of AI

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Abstract

The notion of self has been a central theme across philosophical, psychological, and interdisciplinary realms. With its roots lying in the primal instinct of the earliest humans to inquire into the nature of threats to life and the fear caused by ignorance of phenomena that surrounded them, leading to supernatural conjectures, there emerged an inquiry of self-knowledge as humans evolved the capacity for reflection. The exploration of self is constant in our cosmic reality, as we chase after the ever-fleeting concept of identity while adapting to variables introduced by technological advancements. Drawing from diverse philosophical traditions, with emphasis on the Katha Upanishad and Socratic dialogues, this study addresses the fundamental question of human existence and identity and seeks to unravel the multifaceted nature of self, examining its philosophical foundations, identity formation, and the evolving implications in the era of AI.

Keywords: Transcendental Self, Artificial Intelligence, Consciousness, Crisis, Philosophical

Introduction

“The only true voyage of self-discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”

\- Marcel Proust

The idea of the Self has long been central to the debate over whether humans exist and where they fit in this world. Considering the current environment, the need to comprehend the elusive nature of the self has grown in both the East and the West as people progress and acquire intellectual capacities. Humans are so dependent on technology (the modern idea of self) that it is impossible to overestimate, and it takes on greater significance when contrasted with the transcendent aspects of self-examination (the antiquated idea) since it seems people have long forgotten the essence of their very being.

The Upanishads being regarded as the philosophical counterpart of Vedic thought, are the original birth givers of Indian Philosophy. These sacred texts explore diverse realms (metaphysical, spiritual, epistemological, etc.), which all relate to the nature of reality, the self, and the ultimate. The aspects of nature of consciousness and individuality are so inseparable from the universal consciousness, as mentioned implicitly in these scriptures, that it is imperative to induce an individual to take a leap beyond the constraints posed by one's own physical body and self-identity of “I” (ahamkara). This constructs the concept of the self as a timeless identity, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the search for self-realization as a path to diminishing the illusion of “other” being distinct from “me.”

Inquiring into what the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) means is a prerequisite in today's world since there is no field where human beings are not using AI in their daily lives. Consequently, this makes questions related to Self and AI apparent, the answers to which will contribute to a careful resynthesized construction of who I am.

Many scholars have undertaken the inquiry into how the emergence of AI impacts various aspects of human life. In this context, Susan Schneider in her book "Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind”, states, "We are at a pivotal moment in the development of AI, one that poses profound questions about the nature of mind, consciousness, and identity." Similarly, renowned computer scientist Marvin Minsky also said, "In the end, we will shape our tools, and thereafter our tools will shape us." This line becomes the heart of the relationship between AI and human

beings as the digital age progresses so rapidly and brings significant changes.

However, with this progression, it is imperative to find oneself amidst skepticism about what it means to be myself, who I am, and what place I hold in society. The very advancements that enabled us to take on this existential journey have also presented us with the challenges of what is more important: AI or Me. The dynamic variables and other writings provide a complex backdrop for the investigation of this crisis, the core of which can be said to lie essentially in finding a balance between the changing denotation of selfhood and the constant pursuit of transcendental consciousness.

Objectives

The aim of this research paper is threefold. Firstly, it is to examine the relevance of the idea of self in Upanishads and Socrates in the backdrop of AI. Secondly, it undertakes a comparative analysis and critically investigates the relationship between Virtue and Being. Lastly, this paper also explores the concept of transcendental self and possibility of its integration to replace the turmoil of modern life. Our consciousness has given us an edge over all other species for millennia and so in the age of AI, the understanding of who we are and our aim as a collective whole becomes crucial. By using analytical methods, this research gives a comprehensive review of age old texts, integrating them with the contemporary vocabulary. Additionally, employing the lens of philosophy on selfhood, multidisciplinary views are integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the evolving nature of self.

Historical Perspective on Changing Ideas of Self

Upanishads and Indian Philosophy on Self

India is one of the oldest civilizations, and the Rigveda is one of the oldest documented textual sources in the world. For centuries, scholars of Vedic philosophy have contemplated the idea of the self. Through the eyes of the Rishi's of Upanishad, our perception of the world becomes clearer. The Upanishads commence with a peace chant, invoking the supreme to oversee the seeker and their master as they pursue knowledge of existence. They beckon our spirit of inquiry, urging us to delve deeper into our understanding of the self, thereby aiding us in comprehending the Brahman or the supreme. Lord Ram Says to Hanuman, "Mandukyam Ekam Evaalam Mumukshunam Vimuktaye," meaning that for the liberation of the seeker, the

Mandukya alone suffices. He proceeds to enumerate a list of 108 Upanishads, among which the most significant are the Katha, Chandogya, and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads. The Mandukya, comprising only 12 verses, enhances our understanding of the underlying self which pervades all existent entities. While we may perceive ourselves as humans on a spiritual quest, Pierre Teilhard aptly expresses that "We are simply spiritual beings having a human experience." Life unfolds on the stage of our consciousness, characterized by pure awareness. Beyond this, everything is contingent on what we choose to perceive.

The Upanishads express that, unknowing of our true nature as "Sat," we falsely identify with our bodies, "Jijivisha," as they call it., ignorance of "Chitta" creates the desire to explore the universe externally, leading to a futile endeavor "Jigyasa." Further, not knowing "Ananda" or pure bliss, leads us to pursue fleeting material happiness, resulting in suffering or "Bubhuksha." To prevent ourselves from afflictions we mentioned, one must embrace "Mumuksha," the earnest desire to be liberated from the miseries of "Shad Vikara" which encompass: Existence (Asti), Birth (Jayate), Growth (Vardhate), Change (Viparinamate), Decay (Apaksheeyate) and Death (Vinashyate).

Existence relies on knowledge and is intrinsic to consciousness. Hence, knower and known duality manifests in consciousness only. Knowledge is composed of four major components: Pramata (knower), Pramana (an instrument for knowledge), Prameya (object of Knowledge), and Prama (valid knowledge). Let's understand with an example: suppose there is a substance S somewhere, If S cannot be an object of our knowledge, it must not exist, for a substance that truly exists must be experienced by someone. If nothing experiences S, its existence is void. Everything is experienced solely through our awareness. An object's existence cannot be substantiated independently of the knowledge of that object. Knowledge relies on a knower, contingent upon consciousness.

Consciousness upholds our grasp of reality, while "Mithya," as Shankar claims, denotes phenomena lacking independent existence. Take the example of boiling water; its heat is actually attributed to the fire element, hence lacking any real essence. Even fire is contingent upon Brahman or consciousness, rendering the "Panchamahabhutas" (five elements) as relative realities or "Vyavaharic Satya." Mithya is neither true nor false, akin to objects in a dream devised by the mind.

The Upanishads categorize identities as 4 components. All this world is the Brahman; this self is eternal and has four components. Walking state, where the universe and its creation unfold before us through our senses. Dreaming, where the mind dominates the sphere of existence. Deep sleep state, where the mind and the existent world culminate into one offering profound tranquillity. Lastly, Turya or Pure Consciousness is the underlying reality that upholds all three states of existence being of the ultimate.

Regarding the fourth stage, also known as the true state, the Upanishad states:
"*He who is neither inward wise, nor outward wise, nor both inward and outward wise, nor wisdom self-gathered, nor possessed of wisdom, nor unpossessed of wisdom, He Who is unseen and incommunicable, unseizable, featureless, unthinkable, and unnameable, Whose essentiality is awareness of the Self in its single existence, in Whom all phenomena dissolve, Who is Calm, Who is Good, Who is the One than Whom there is no other, Him they deem the fourth; He is the Self, He is the object of Knowledge."*

The Chandogya Upanishad mentions "Tat tvam asi" (thou art that), speaking of 'Turya', and the Katha Upanishad, which elaborates in verse 48 on account of that which never dies nor is born, is the fourth component. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad proclaims, "Aham brahmasmi" (I am Brahman). Our identity of self is a finite part of the infinite though we have one universal self.

Indian philosophy has always been profoundly spiritual and has emphasized the importance of the practical realization of truth. The word "darshana" implies both "vision" and "instrument of vision." It stands for the real experience of Truth, the immediate, direct, and intuitive understanding of Reality, and the processes resulting in this understanding.

The most important school is Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracarya, which follows in the footsteps of Upanishads (the end of Vedas). The self in this case is the same as and inseparable from the ultimate self or Brahman, Sat-Citta-Ananda. The diversity we experience in this world is an illusion, or Maya, and the ultimate reality is the only unqualified reality. The Self is self-luminous and transcends all intellectual categories as well as the subject-object duality and the trinity of knower, known, and knowing.

One system of thought within Vedanta philosophy is Visistadvaita, propounded by Rāmānuja, who claimed that the self is a

constant unitary entity underlying its conscious states. For him, states like joy and grief persist for a time and then diminish as attributes. The jiva and ajiva are both part of that one ultimate reality, Brahman.

Another influential school of thought is Yoga, whose roots may be traced back to ancient India but whose practical aspects are practiced by more than half of the world in present times. In Yoga philosophy, the true self, known as the Purusha, is regarded as eternal and immutable, while the individual self, or jiva, fluctuates as per the mind and body. Through yogic practice, individuals aim to achieve peace, calm, a new sense of living, self-realization, and also liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Some schools believe in the world or reality being dual i.e. Samkhya and Nyaya school. While Samkhya views reality as twofold, Prakrti and Purusha, and distinguish between active but unconscious matter and passive but conscious self, and Nyaya philosophy focuses on logic and epistemology (means of investigation). This school views self, or Atman, as being distinct both from the body and the mind. Furthermore, orthodox philosophical perspectives that do not believe in scriptures like Jainism view the self, or jiva, as eternal, identified with consciousness, and able to attain moksha.

Socrates on Self

Socrates was one of the greatest philosophers of his time. Inquiry of Self and immortality of the soul were central themes in his inquiries. The philosophy of Socrates, as conveyed in Plato's dialogues and others, offers profound insights into these phenomena which puzzle us even today, giving us the right outlook on what measures to take to align our resources for a better understanding of these elusive phenomena that dictate the course of core metaphysical questions.

Socrates worked particularly on the idea of self in his probing dialogue with Meno; he challenged conventional notions of self-knowledge and suggested that true understanding is derived from recollection rather than mere instruction. This notion of innate knowledge, buried within the soul, lays the groundwork for his idea of an immortal soul:

"Since the soul is immortal, then, and has been born many times, and has seen both the things here and the ones in Hades—in fact, all things—there is nothing it has not learned. This exhibits the fact that it is no surprise that recollection of knowledge takes place."

He believes that the soul holds our deepest convictions and intuitions, which transcend our moral capacity; this shows its presence beyond the existential realm. His understanding of immortality critiques conventional beliefs, which helps us understand the nature of human existence.

"The first step towards knowledge is to know that we are ignorant," is what he says in “Theaetetus.” He explains that ignorance is at the root of all problems. When one assumes that he has amassed knowledge without actually questioning the foundation of his beliefs, he gets stuck in an outlook that leads nowhere. "I am wiser than this man, for neither of us appears to know anything great and good; but he fancies he knows something, although he knows nothing; whereas I, as I do not know anything, so I do not fancy I do. In this trifling particular, then, I appear to be wiser than he, because I do not fancy, I know what I do not know," he states in “Phaedrus.”

He also enquires about the nature of virtue and knowledge; he believes that the recollection of all knowledge is possible by following the method of inquiry and figuring out the right questions to ask. The allegory of the divided line and the Sun, which provide representations of the good as the dominating factor of all phenomena present, are good examples of his quest. In the "Symposium," Socrates discusses the relationship between knowledge and virtue: "And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is."

Here, as in many other places as well, the Socratic dialogue shows its resemblance to the foundational teaching of the Upanishads, which state that the root of all misery is “Avidya” or ignorance, and the loose conception of self that limits itself to the view of the manifested world or the world of thought. The deeper one tries to understand things, the more one can discover about his own true knowledge and for this one can start with what is apparent but should always strive for what is underlying. The major difference here is that the Upanishads move on to visualize the idea of pure consciousness or the experiencer itself, which has manifested itself into various forms. A very simple description of this is given in “The Book” by Alan Watts:

"God likes to play hide-and-seek, but because there is nothing outside of God, he has no one but himself to play with! But he gets over this difficulty by pretending that he is not himself. This is his way of hiding from himself. He pretends that he is you and I and all the people in the world, all the animals, plants, all the rocks, and all the stars. In this way, he has strange and wonderful adventures, some of which are terrible and frightening. But these are just like bad dreams, for when he wakes up, they will disappear. Now because he is god, he is so good at pretending to be not god that he completely forgets about his true nature for a while. But when he realizes that these were all just projections on him, he gets back to his true nature. Socrates sees the essence of everything as the absolute good (republic) and everything else as projections of it."

As we grapple with contemporary crises and engage in critical reflection, Socratic philosophy beckons us to reexamine our fundamental beliefs and assumptions. By reflecting on the ancient Greek wisdom, one can acquire a deeper understanding and acknowledgement for everlasting questions that continue to trouble some people.

Comparative Analysis

Upanishadic and Socratic Ideas

The philosophies of Socrates and the Upanishads have many similarities when looked upon with insight; they cover distinct ideas and yet reconcile on various important aspects such as the immortality of the soul, reiteration of knowledge, existential concerns, and conceptions of the good life. Upanishads often concern themselves with the non-dualistic understanding of reality, emphasizing intuitive wisdom for knowledge of immediate surroundings with the help of sense experience. Recognizing one's true essence is still the primary aim, which is reached by transcending the evident enchantment of Maya and moving towards the brahman. The philosophy of Socrates distinguishes between the realm of form and the material world; knowledge is acquired by inquiry and dialectical reasoning. Virtue is the central tenet for self-realization and ethical development; a virtuous character and moral integrity are a must for him to constitute a good life. Both traditions diverge a bit in their epistemological approach, existential concerns, and proponents that lead to a good life. By integrating these approaches, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of human consciousness. Direct experiential knowledge and Socratic commitment to reason and inquiry complement each other and yield a holistic framework. This framework gives us

essential results by ensuring that reality can be rationalized and realized in its ultimate form if we become perceptive.

The multifaceted nature of human experience is revealed by integrating these two approaches. The pursuit of liberation and virtue also go hand in hand with each other and often complement each other. By understanding oneself, one can lay the groundwork for morality, as only those who truly understand themselves can resolve the complexities of existence and its inhabitants. The ideas of both Socrates and Upanishads inspired a generation of philosophers to go looking for the right means of existing in this world. While Upanishads remained mostly mystical, Socratic ideals were grounded in inquiry of the knowable.

Natural Self vs. Perceived Artificiality in the Age of AI

The contrast of the natural self and perceived artificiality in this age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) raises some deep philosophical inquiries into the essence of human self and the impact of technological advancement.

The notion of natural self is an intrinsic essence characterized by consciousness, experiences, and a sense of self identity which goes beyond external influences, as rooted in texts of ancient Indian philosophy. But Parallel to and in exact opposition to this is the concept of AI which empowers artificial, human created units without consciousness, who works on models of association that can mimic or imitate aspects of human cognition but never have the power of thinking, computation etc. It is the tension between these two notions that has led to another set of existential concerns and ethical considerations.

The human-technology interface becomes a focal point, which requires a sensitive balance to preserve one's own identity. As individuals try to fit AI in their lives, they need to question AI's impact on human identity and how it comes to shape a fractured sense of oneself under the disguise of natural self. There are some who try to reconcile both half-heartedly, others view artificial self as the only sense devoid of subjectivity. Thus, making sense of this intricate interplay between the natural self and perceived artificiality in the age of AI necessitates a nuanced engagement with ethical, cultural, and existential dimensions, fostering ongoing dialogue to address challenges and realize the potential benefits while upholding the integrity of the human experience.

Findings

The development of upgraded and better systems of artificial intelligence has greatly

influenced all of our lives, from writing essays to creating codes to producing deep fakes. AI can mimic human intelligence to a great extent and can also accommodate our biases within its database. Yet, as we proceed with the idea of creating a metaverse and developing our virtual lives, we are constantly under the threat of being monitored and controlled by our own creation.

AI is not as new as we conceive it to be; there have been references to robots in Greek mythology dating back to around 700 B.C. The story of Talos, first mentioned by Hesiod, gives the earliest conceptions of a robot. This is a myth that describes Talos as a giant bronze man built by Hephaestus, the Greek god of invention and blacksmithing. Talos was commissioned by Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, to protect the island of Crete from invaders. He marched around the island three times every day and hurled boulders at approaching enemy ships.

At his core, the giant had a tube running from his head to one of his feet that carried a mysterious life source of the gods the Greeks called ichor. Another ancient text, Argonautica, which dates to the third century B.C., describes how sorceress Medea defeated Talos by removing a bolt at his ankle and letting the ichor fluid flow out. The first, a steam-powered "pigeon," was created around 400 to 350 BCE by the ancient Greek mathematician Archytas. Archytas constructed his robot-bird out of wood and used steam to power its movements. The bird, suspended from a pivot bar, was at one point able to fly about 200 meters before it ran out of steam, making Archytas' experiment not just the first known robot, but also one of the first recorded instances of a scientist researching how birds fly.

The widespread and apparent presence of AI today has become one with our routine life and our lives are going to be based in the metaverse soon enough yet the ideas of Socrates and the Upanishads are still relevant because we still haven't been able to solve either the mystery of life or the quest for growth of which all the modules of AI development are an offshoot, it is important to recognize that AI plays a supportive role in our pursuit of understanding self for technology was there back in times yet it in no way degrades the value of timeless principles presented to us in the ideas of some of the brightest beings this world has ever

Virtues are consistent with being, for virtues emanate from being. In the Jaina and Buddhist traditions, one who becomes an Arihant, or Arihat (the conqueror of one's enemy), can realize and comprehend a situation in its entirety. It is only when one takes into account the holistic sketch, that he can adjudicate the right course of action

that aligns with his spirit. Even in Socrates it can be seen that a virtuous man may struggle to impart his good virtues to his son(Meno). This is a challenge for which neither teachers nor students are readily available. The Upanishads assert that the supreme consciousness resides within oneself and is in the form of Satchitanand. This intrinsic virtue fulfils all essentialities, as only by realizing that state one can attain all the great qualities deemed virtuous.

The current worldview hinges upon the idea that the creation of virtual reality aligns with one's self-image. The use of social media handles and AI interfaces to present oneself has become so significant that it is now nearly impossible to escape the influence of the global database. Economies are interconnected, markets and services are globalized, and even communication interfaces are largely depersonalized (virtual). In this quest to broaden our imagination and manifest creations that make us feel in control of our world, the concept of self-inquiry often gets lost.

Going through daily activities without giving them a second thought or reflecting upon it does not constitute an experience that one has or a life that one lives. A dog also goes through daily motion if life activities without a care; there is a difference because human beings being placed on the topmost level of hierarchy have a rich and variety of experiences.

Aristotle has said that man is a rational animal and that is true but in the strive for this rationality, man has forgotten to understand one's own self first before venturing into novel things. In this quest and competition to succeed, one has put limits and constraints upon one's own perceptions, experiences, ideas becoming a tool for what was initially made to be a tool. Instead of using AI to merely cater needs and work on the commands, it has somehow reversed the situation to human beings catering to the needs of AI leaving behind their own self, forgetting about exploring our existence.

This has led to the cessation of Dharma or what is called one's own duty. The priority of a person should be to first cater to one's own self and then inquire about things made by man and for man. Upanisads and Socratic Inquiry provided the framework with explicit details on how to take this journey of self-realization but in craving the joys provided by materialistic things which provides a false sense of security and illusion of contentment, man seems to have forgotten about his initial and most fundamental task of exploring his own self. The present scenario of AI has threatened the very meaning of self by performing a materialistic reduction which

favors mechanical human capacities of cognition, rather than reflecting, thinking, creativity, innovation, imagination and uniqueness.

The AI Index Report of Stanford University HAI mentions -

"According to the AIAAIC database, which tracks incidents related to the ethical misuse of AI, the number of AI incidents and controversies has increased 26 times since 2012. Some notable incidents in 2022 included a deep fake video of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy surrendering and U.S. prisons using call-monitoring technology on their inmates."

It clearly shows that the technical barriers to entry for creating and deploying generative AI systems have lowered dramatically, and the ethical issues around AI have become more apparent to the public. Not only this but the Generative models that have arrived have ethical issues and the number of incidents concerning the misuse of AI is rapidly rising where models that seem fairer may not be less biased. Additionally, the outgrowth of digital identities brought about by using AI precedes existential, social, personal and political complexities that diminishes authenticity and the original ideas of transcendental self-preached in the Upanishads.

A number of ethical concerns surround this changing notion of self, including fragmented identities, fractured self, privacy breaches, harassment etc. The most significant impact has been on the authenticity of human beings and to their status quo among the hierarchy of beings since it proceeds towards a society where ethics diminishes from life (do robots care for ethics? It is human controlled and if humans themselves become robots or become a mere tool, will there be ethics?). Speaking philosophically, this also hampers the stand of existentialists and phenomenologists who have been arguing about the essence of human beings,inquiring into their origin, existence and purpose of life. AI sidelines all the concerns related to human beings and presents a new and not so improved version of self that is a long way from what Upanisads envisaged. In the long run, the technical and mechanistic class of AI poses a threat not only for all the other disciplines, undermining their value and the place they hold independent of science in the world but also raises concerns about dehumanizing beings by making them a robot, sans consciousness, feelings and emotions, portraying them as someone who can be controlled by others, cloned as others, making the concept if uniqueness and individuality redundant.

Conclusion

The development of human civilization has progressed towards the journey of the unknown, where we have been great at making use of the resources at hand and have always worked out things for ourselves, our skills have grown rapidly in the past few decades, yet everywhere we look we see chaos surrounding us, life even though magnified greatly in all its glory cannot mask the inevitable death lurking around the corner. No matter how far one tries to push the chaos towards the chaos, it will make a comeback sooner or later. We need to have a deep talk with ourselves and need to understand ourselves first before going on to explore the world. The Upanishads sought to seek and go beyond this initial phase of pain and suffering of the human predicament to seek ourselves in our highest form, that of Brahman, Socrates too inquires and lives by his statement that an unexamined life is not worth living, all schools of Indian philosophy even though divided into heterodox and orthodox are still in lieu aspiring to give way to the understanding of how one ought to go on with the creation manifest. It is true that AI has revolutionized our understanding of many things, but the fact still remains that it has also raised many challenges and uncertainties which mandates the regulation of its impact in accordance with varying situations. The European Union has implemented the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), addressing AI-related privacy concerns. The United States has guidelines and bills are emerging at the state level while China aims to be a global AI leader with a focus on ethical principles, while also emphasizing state security. Canada emphasizes transparency and accountability in AI development through its Algorithmic Impact Assessment framework and Japan promotes responsible AI use with guidelines and principles. India is in the early stages of developing AI policies, focusing on data privacy and ethical considerations. Different countries are dealing with the need for AI regulations to balance innovation, ethical considerations, and societal impact. All this is due to the perceivable impacts of AI on the upcoming generations where life will be experienced through an artificial interface consistent with the idea of setting up a dream state. The breaking point of all conventional identities is evident with the advent of digital gadgets which empower us to stimulate our senses to their maximum potential. But once we do attain this state, we will understand that there is much more to our life than just existing for the sake of our body or mind. This research aims to highlight this issue which has lost ground over the millennia.

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Global Climate Dynamics: Navigating Political Strategies and Diplomacy in the Era of Climate Change

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Global Climate Dynamics: Navigating Political Strategies and Diplomacy in the Era of Climate Change

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Abstract

Climate change is the most pressing challenge of the 21st century, impacting human society and natural ecosystems with severe environmental, economic, and social implications. Global politics is an intricate terrain with multiple actors from states and countries to international organisations, corporations, and civil society groups. Nation-states and their interests are shaped by national security, domestic politics, and economic development, which can lead to discord and competing individual interests in international negotiations, thus frustrating efforts to address climate change. Nonetheless, governance is sought in global politics and offers opportunities to resolve one of the most complex problems the world has ever faced. There are also reasons for optimism, such as the increasing global public profile of climate activists and the rising recognition of the climate crisis as a global priority. This research has tested the complex ways in which global political dynamics, climate justice, psychological effects, and international law are tied to tackle the multilateral challenge of climate change. While research into the mechanisms of climate justice is ongoing and concentrates on the historical and structural factors that result in generational and socio-economic discrimination, this research has shown the effects of increasing climate concern psychologically at the level of the individual and the community, has highlighted the need for political solutions to the climate crisis and has sought to promote a concrete hope. Furthermore, the role of international law in facilitating global cooperation and climate change policy is examined, and challenges and opportunities for effective governance are considered.

Keywords- Climate Change, Governance, International Law, Environment.

Introduction

Climate change is the most significant and most widespread challenge of the 21st century. It is a challenge that affects every aspect of human life and the natural environment. Climate change is no longer a distant warning. It is an ongoing catastrophe affecting people and ecosystems worldwide. However, the impact of climate change is not only physical and scientific. It is also intertwined with the fabric of our societies, politics, laws, international relations and mental health. It is a complex challenge that requires responses at every level of government and from professionals and stakeholders in every sector. However, global politics addressing climate change is also replete with tension, conflict, and inequalities. This paper critically engages with global political developments in their effort to address climate change. It investigates the burdens and benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation to various historically-determined political, social, and economic inequalities.

The paper raises questions that dig into familiar and essential themes pertaining to climate justice, human rights and global responsibility, as well as the myriad ways in which climate change forces an emotional struggle. Climate change wreaks anxiety, sadness, and feelings of grief in those impacted by it. The notion of climate justice has risen to prominence and argues for the equitable distribution of the burdens and benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation, which asks us to confront issues like the differential impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, intergenerational equity, and the responsibilities of historical emitters versus current and future emitters. A prompt rise in greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, namely the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation has led to an unprecedented warming of the Earth's atmosphere. There are numerous reasons as to why climate change needs our immediate attention. The rise in temperature leads to vast and frequent scorchers, intense winds, and flash floods, causing food insecurity. Rise in temperature threatens offshore communities by increasing sea levels, which, in turn, undermine economic and social human rights. We face water insufficiency as the sea levels increase and contaminate ground and surface water reserves. Public health in urban, suburban, and rural environments is plagued by disease and damage to healthy soil.

The fundamental question in this research is how global political dynamics are shaping and are being shaped by climate change and climate justice, the psychological impact of climate crises, and the role of international law in this mix of complex human and environmental rights challenges. It is essential in this research to delve into how these productions interact with one another. In the strategic pursuit of their national interests, the priorities of the world's great powers may shape the battle for climate justice — potentially imposing disproportionate burdens on the countries of the South. In this way, circumstances rule out any "recipe for success." Domestic politics can be a spoiler. And so can the direction of national climate policies and public opinion, which all conspire to complicate international cooperation. On the contrary, political openings can be tools of development. This is the case in the political action required to ensure equitable burden sharing for the world's antinomies. An acknowledgement and response to the psychological episode of climate anxiety require the political steps necessary to raise awareness, support mental health, and display hope through action — as well as mechanisms to enforce compliance and expedite international law to global integration, as this takes place.

Section I of the article discusses the status of the climate crisis: its causes, its disastrous consequences, and the potential solutions necessary to mitigate it. Section II considers the concept of climate justice and the history of disparate responsibilities, structural inequalities, and socioeconomic differences between generations. The third section details why it is critical to address inequality and unpack the psychological ramifications of climate fears for communities and individuals — as well as how it impacts their well-being, decision making and sense of self-efficacy in weather action. The fourth section addresses international law, its role in catalysing and strengthening global cooperation and climate change policy, and the challenges and opportunities it presents. It is not just crucial that international law tackles these challenges; the need to do so collectively cannot be overstated. However, agreements such as The Paris Agreement of Dec. 12, 2015, develop the frameworks that make it possible. The fifth section presents the main findings of the paper as well as implications and suggestions for future research. In discussing the interplay of global politics, climate justice, psychological impacts, and international law, this paper seeks to shed light on promises and perils of effective

governance, policy interventions, and social responsiveness.

Literature Review

In contemporary times, climate change has been perceived as a global challenge significantly influencing societies, economies, and ecosystems worldwide. The literature on climate change highlights its multi-dimensionality and the interrelatedness of its social, political, economic, and environmental dimensions (IPCC, 2021; Stern, 2007). It is not just an environmental issue but a complex socio-political phenomenon that needs comprehensive responses from many actors (Adger et al., 2009; Biermann et al., 2009).

Climate justice has emerged as a central concept in the discussions of climate change mitigation and adaptation (Preston, 2013). It addresses the uneven distribution of climate change impacts and the benefits of climate action (Roberts & Parks, 2007). Striking in the literature is the poignant argument that climate change affects people, not simply ecosystems (Norgaard, 2011). There is growing evidence that people are affected psychologically by the reality that life as we know it is rapidly changing, including anxiety (Clayton et al., 2017), grief (Mars, 2017), and despair (Pidgeon, 2014). This highlights the importance of understanding the psychological dimensions of climate change for the development of effective communication strategies (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009), community resilience-building initiatives (Macchi et al., 2019) and mental health interventions (Stain et al., 2011).

International law has played a crucial role in shaping the global response to climate change and promoting cooperation among nations in tackling the problem (Bodansky, 2016). International treaties, such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, put forward a framework of international collaboration, emission reduction targets, and provision of financial assistance from developed to vulnerable countries (Bodansky, 2016; Rajamani, 2010). However, the effectiveness of international climate agreements will depend on political will, enforcement mechanisms, and equitable distribution of responsibilities and resources (Gupta, 2018; Keohane & Victor, 2016).

Climate Crisis

The issue of climate change, a significant challenge we face in the century, poses threats to both human societies and the natural world. This section delves into an examination of the state of climate change, exploring its underlying causes, its far-reaching impacts, and potential solutions emerging in the battle against this complex problem. Human actions, burning fossil fuels for energy generation, deforestation and industrial activities are leading to a rapid rise in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), and nitrous oxide (N2O) are the culprits for trapping heat in our atmosphere and disrupting Earth's energy equilibrium (IPCC, 2021). Global CO2 levels have now surpassed 420 parts per million (ppm), exceeding industrial levels by more than 50% (NOAA, 2023).

The average global temperature has increased by around one degree Celsius since industrial times, with the past decade being noted as the warmest on record (NASA, 2023). As temperatures continue to rise, heat waves, droughts, floods, and wildfires are getting worse, causing disruptions to nature and people's ways of life. Experts predict these extreme events will become more frequent and severe (IPCC, 2021). Additionally, ice caps and glaciers are causing sea levels to rise significantly. Studies suggest that by the year 2100, sea levels could increase by meters, posing a threat to areas and ecosystems (IPCC, 2021). Moreover, ocean acidification due to increased CO2 absorption by oceans adds to life challenges (Royal Society, 2015). Food and water security issues are rising due to changing weather patterns and extreme events that threaten productivity. This threatens food security for millions of people in regions (FAO, 2023). At the time, droughts and unpredictable rainfall worsened water scarcity issues, affecting water availability, sanitation facilities and agricultural irrigation (World Resources Institute, 2023).

Health risks are becoming more prevalent, with heatwaves directly impacting individual’s well-being by causing heat-related illnesses like heat stroke and respiratory problems that can lead to increased mortality rates (WHO, 2021). Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns also expand the habitats of disease-carrying insects, which raises concerns about spreading vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever (WHO, 2021). Addressing these challenges ahead of us requires implementing solutions like transitioning to renewable energy sources, enhancing

energy efficiency practices, and reducing deforestation activities. These measures play a role in stabilising temperatures and curbing greenhouse gas emissions, as highlighted by the IPCC report in 2022.

Climate Justice

The climate crisis affects everyone. Its impact varies, revealing disparities in responsibility, vulnerability and resource access among different communities and generations. Viewing the issue through the lens of climate justice is crucial to addressing these inequalities, emphasising the need for fairness and equal consideration in dealing with climate change. In Developed countries, polluters carry a large share of responsibility for the current crisis. However, developing nations often bear a burden despite contributing less, facing consequences such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events and crop failures. Structural imbalances, poverty, limited resource access, and inadequate infrastructure make specific communities more susceptible to climate impacts. Indigenous groups, minorities and island nations frequently experience compounded vulnerabilities. Climate change worsens existing inequities by affecting livelihoods, health and overall well-being in marginalised communities. The disruptions caused by climate change make it even harder for these communities to access water, sanitation facilities and healthcare services.

Lieng island nations, coastal areas, and arid regions face rising sea levels, floods, and droughts. Climate-induced displacement adds another layer of complexity to their struggles. The choices made today will significantly impact the well-being of generations who will inherit a world altered by climate change, facing constraints on resources and adaptation capabilities. Upholding climate justice involves prioritising initiatives that secure an equitable future for all generations. The financial and technical aid that the developed countries were historically obligated to provide should be used for developing countries' mitigation and adaptation efforts. Climate change-affected communities that sustain irreparable damage deserve compensation, to enforce respect for equity and the community. Locally-led initiatives, community adaptation approaches, and inclusive decision-making are imperative in helping marginalised communities build resilience and claim their right to a similar future to others.

Psychological Impact

Climate change is incessant, and the siren of its physical landscape affects waves of thoughts in our minds. This part covers the mental effects of climate change by describing the anxiety, despair, and sometimes behavioural change. It underlines the need for political engagement and mental health guidance. The rate of climate change is getting faster, and its destructive effects are deepening the mighty anxiety that people cannot do anything to stop it but feel discouraged, troubled, and scared of the uncertain future (American Psychological Association, 2021)

Removing the lands familiar to us, biodiversity, and the basic building blocks of our home world causes deep sadness and affects people in tangible ways. (Swim et al., 2019) Trusting in the inactivity of others and the overall perception of the crisis as too overwhelming can bring out feelings of helplessness and make one lose interest in the actions. (Verplanke et al., 2020)

Anxiety regarding climate and the psychological problems associated with it may negatively affect mental health and also daily activities and disrupt sleeping patterns. (Clayton et al., 2017). The concerns about climate change can increase the levels of relationship strain and conflict and may prove to be extremely destructive to community cohesion. Being overloaded by the challenges that the problem presents can decrease one's certainty in the ability to achieve the change, thus impeding pro-environmental activities (Swim et al., 2019).

Global Politics and International Law

Global unity and cooperation have been strongly awakened by the fact that the climate crisis is a phenomenon that is beyond the basis of national sovereigns. International law theory stresses an interactive action that involves several actors and creates a complexity of the problem situation. Treaties (such as the Paris Climate Agreement) represent the countries that participate in them as the complete observance of the unified principles and the same goals that the active parties commonly follow. These bring about transparency, ease of sharing information among the community, and faster decision-making. Such an approach to negotiations can result in the creation of sustainable agreements that will involve a legal process that resolves the conflict, finding the root of the problem as a way to

improve the relations between the governments of the states. (Kyoto Protocol, 1997) Reinforcing international law is the measure used to put pressure on countries to follow through on their international commitments, such as through their mitigation target fulfilment as well as their compliance with other legal obligations by applying mechanisms like reporting requirements and peer reviews (UNFCCC, 2015).

In some cases, compliance with certain agreements is offered as a foundation for better observance which is our ultimate aim. This reins in the breakthroughs of compliance (Okpor, 2016) It is a fact that historical responsibility, differences in ability, and burden-sharing are the issues that impede the participation of developing countries in the process of cooperation and collaboration. (Gupta & Grubb, 2000). The necessity for peace and conflict transformation must be considered. The political spectrum is always riddled with contradictions and tensions that are ultimately bound to subsume the system of law enacted to address the crisis. (Falkner et al., 2017)

Investigating new mechanisms like carbon tariffs, trade sanctions, and international courts equipped with climate jurisdiction would help in compliance. (Lee & Weintraub, 2020) Developmental assistance, which includes fair and transparent funding and technology for developing countries and burden-sharing based on equity, is the significant pillar of inclusive cooperation. (Najam, 2005). Involving the citizens, the private sector, and local governments can persuade the state entities and form original ideas. (Abbott et al., 2016)

Intersections of Global Politics and Climate Change

The climate crisis is an existential threat of our time, and overcoming it needs an artful mix of political diplomacy and sometimes even a rough sea of global politics. This part looks into the dynamics of the relationship between the political sphere and the climate change responses, revealing how international and national political dynamics affect the response, and outlines the areas of tension, conflict, and inequality that make the collective efforts more challenging. States often assume the shortsighted economic interests they decide in favour of the global climate targets, thus conflicts with the national development strategy. (Falkner et al., 2017). Internal political factors and state public opinion substantially affect national climate policies. The lack of political will, changing

public views and self-interest may prevent decisive actions and international cooperation. (Ockwell et al., 2020). The Paris Agreement and other treaties provide a minimum level of coordination that the political will must support, ensuring effective mechanisms for implementation, and agreement on allocating responsibilities. (UNFCCC, 2015)

Political counterpoints and strategic competition may prevent collaboration and redirect resources away from climate action. Disparities in access to resources and their historical responsibility for emissions lead to negotiation tensions, where developing nations ask for fair compensation and assistance for adaptation. (Gupta & Grubb, 2000). The power game among nations is often a vital determinant of negotiations and policymaking to avoid possible dominance and exclusion. (Ostrom, 2009). Working across the board to cooperate, create alliances and boost progressive partnerships beyond the conventional state-oriented practices is very important for eliminating geopolitical constraints. (Abbott et al., 2016) Principles of responsibility of history and differentiated responsibilities applied, financial and technological assistance to the developing countries delivered, and equal role sharing are essential steps towards the reach of all-inclusive cooperation. Its members should build upon civil engagement at the local and community level, including businesses and the private sector, national governments, and the global community. (Jahn et al., 2019)

Finding and Analysis

Through the exploration of the various facets of climate change and its entanglement with global politics, several key findings emerge:

1. Unequal Burdens and Responsibilities: Developed countries, on account of their start as significant polluting actors carry a heavy responsibility for the current critical situation. On the other hand, the burden is unevenly distributed among the developing countries. However, they contribute less but highly incur the impact of climate change among the many victims who require more resources for adaptation. This emphasises the point of historical responsibility and equitable terms concerning the efforts of mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

2. Complex Global Dynamics: Narrow goals, domestic politics and geopolitical tensions among the participants significantly undermine the outcome of the climate action, thus slowing down the collaboration process and the progress made. Establishing trust, creation of alliances and innovative cooperation beyond a state-centric model is necessary for a successful political fight against these obstacles.
3. Psychological Impacts and the Urgency of Action: Climate change brings with it, not just extreme weather conditions but also psychological anguish as it affects people in a profound manner by triggering anxiety, despair, and grief; this psychological state limits the community's ability to engage in any solutions. Efficient and sustainable climate action can address all the environmental damage to these psychological problems and stimulate hope for a bright future.
4. International Law: International platforms such as the Paris Agreement serve as Collaboration bases and establish joint objectives. Even with the problem of an enforcement mechanism, the issue of inconsistency in fairness and equity, and the complexity of going around geopolitical rivalry within the legal system, it is essential to continuously adapt and strengthen international law to make it more effective.
5. The Power of Diverse Stakeholders: Local communities, businesses, and subnational governments can become a pressing force that calls for high ambitions and innovations beyond the national scope. This active interaction constitutes the multi-stakeholder process, which, in turn, promotes universality and gives rise to non-state-centred governance.
6. The analysis displays the complexity of the relationships linking climate change and world politics. Effective resolution of the climate crisis implies navigating this complex range of dynamics, ensuring fairness and equity and utilising all the stakeholders to climb the chain.

Conclusion

The relationship of Global politics with climate change is very complex. There are many different perspectives on the subject, having prescriptions and some solutions to the problem. Through a synthesis of findings across various dimensions, several vital conclusions emerge. The analysis reveals that climate change is a complicated issue rather than just an environmental one.

It also has immense critical political dimensions since it affects its social, economic, and international dimensions. The dynamics of politics are the most important forces that influence how countries, locally and internationally, deal with climate change issues, determine policy issues, allocate resources, and cooperate. There are certain persistent issues pertaining to stability and prevailing inequalities. Nevertheless, what is much more necessitated is increasing awareness and consistent actions towards global environmental governance in lieu of severe governance conflicts and inequalities. Although the common interests and understanding are now viewed in a more constructive light, the challenges of the incipient North-South division, the geopolitical conflicts, and the economic interests are still the key barriers that prevent any progress in this field, resulting in the fact that there is a further increase of the security gaps and the enhancements of disparities.

It emerges amid much adversity that collaboration and social concrete confront political processes, which may sometimes be uncooperative, but they provide other avenues for dialogue, mediation, and coalition processes. The novel approaches, such as the integration of the participation of the people and the inclusion of multi-stakeholder activities, are the pathways to the achievement of more effective climate governance.

Highly developed countries should be aware of their responsibility and act in favour of fair mitigation and adaptation to address the devastating consequences facing developing countries with a low history of emissions. Civil society, businesses, and sub-national governments have immense potential to scale up climate advocacy by generating solutions to the climate challenge from the ordinary people. Acknowledging the psychological implications of climate change and the availability of mental health services for all are the key priority areas for engendering hope and individual well-being in this colossal task.

Prospects of Future Research

Numerous avenues for future research can further enrich our understanding and inform more effective strategies for addressing the pressing global challenge. One of the research directions might be conducting longitudinal research to see how various countries' policies address the climate crisis if the policies were strategically implemented over time. By following policy outcomes and assessing

the impacts of emissions reduction, adaptation measures, and socioeconomic indicators, researchers can identify and share the successful practices that can drive improvements in climate governance nationally and internationally.

Comparative studies by country and region could be an essential source for identifying the determining factors that influence the choice and efficiency of the policy results in climate management. Researchers can pinpoint the institutions and mechanisms of policy that work better in boosting sustainable and fair climate action taken by countries through empirical analyses of the pros and cons of different governance models.

While more studies should be conducted around this intersection of climate justice and its dominant dimensions, race, gender, socioeconomic status and other inequalities are among the many topics that should be investigated in detail. By scrutinising how a multi-dimensional system of oppression combines with climate risks and hazards, researchers can create more inclusive and just climate policies and adaptive measures that cater to the needs of the deprived.

Research dedicated to investigating advanced governance mechanisms, such as transnational networks, multi-stakeholder agreements, and bottom-up initiatives, may allow researchers to compare such mechanisms to the traditional state-centric models of climate governance. By examining the ability of these mechanisms to create collaboration, deploy resources, and activate climate action, the researchers can inform the development of a more efficient and inclusive governance format. The prospects for future research in climate change and global politics are vast and multifaceted.

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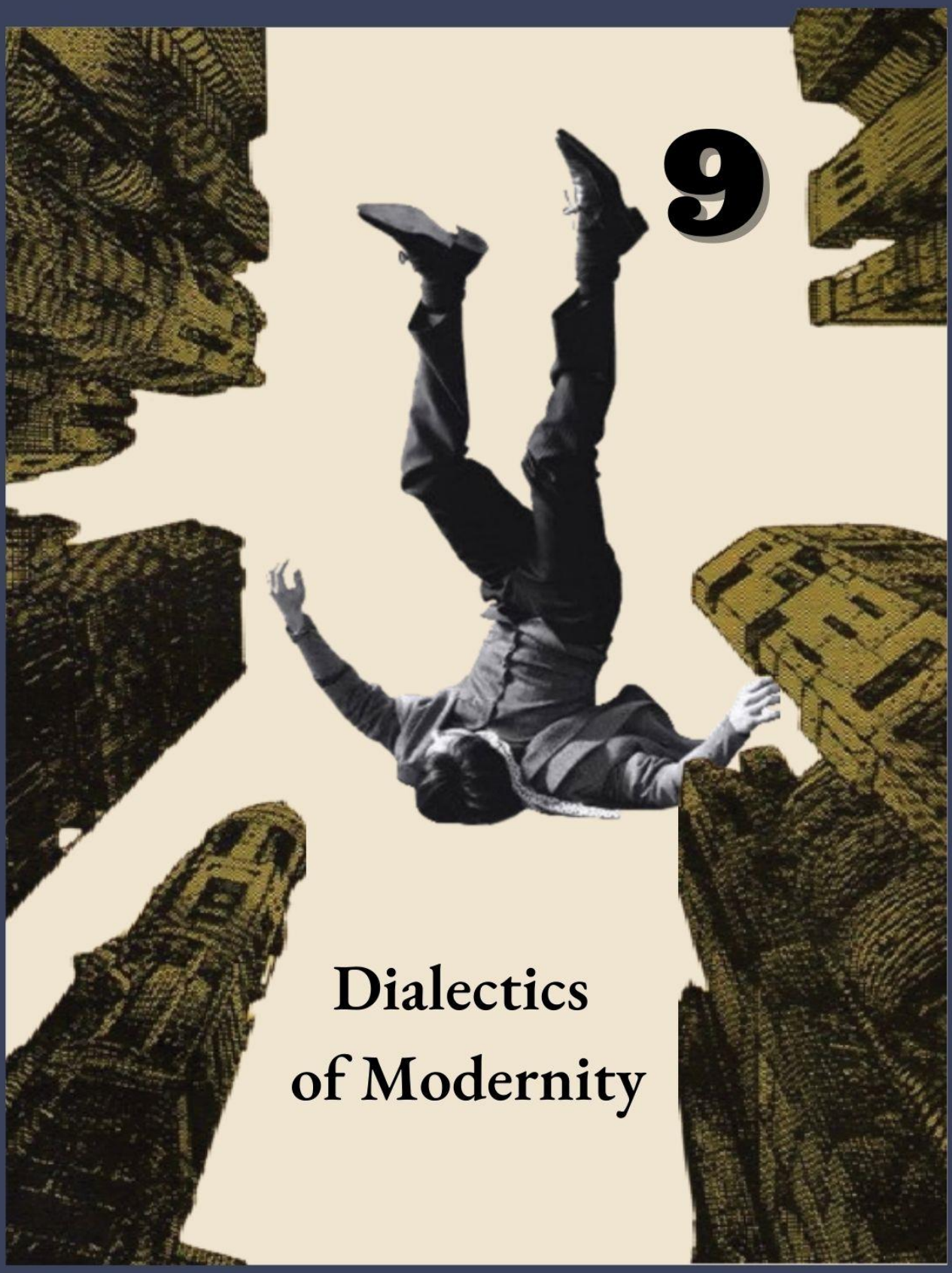
9
Dialectics
of Modernity

Dialectic Of Modernity: The Exigency of Dialectical Envisioning

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The transition from Modernity to postmodernity can also be seen as a leap forward from the age of Prometheus to the age of sterility, whereby the modern impulse of avant-gardism has exhausted itself, thus the visible dialectical struggle of the modern era between socialism and liberalism has now seen to be ossified into a kind of stasis that avows itself to be the emissary of Modern project of enlightenment. Yet, the appearance of the world situation extirpates the smokescreen of the vistas which is a development out of a vacuous kind of sensibility forgetful of the evocative that the events of our age themselves are the underlining of. The Russia – Ukraine war, and the Israel – Gaza conflict are the singularities that foment out of the deep structural antagonisms of the system itself; ecological crises, growing global inequality, effacement of the alternative conceptualisation to the neo-liberal capitalist regime which gracefully vaunts disconcerting its vanity that nevertheless is the conduit to the current predicament. Sloterdijk refers to this age as the carrier of cynical reason, which, seeing itself as what it actually is, the age of strangulation whereby disruption ensnarled the dialectical movement that socialist thinking and praxis were driving through during the 20th century.

Jameson's dismay concerning the inability of our age to conceptualise vistas beyond the postmodern horizon performs an inveterate task of irradiating the need to lay our hands upon a different set of thinking mechanisms as the age experiences the effects of the acts done out of modernist stimulation. Zygmunt Bauman marks the post-modern age with a characteristic kind of fluidity that engenders a spectacle of realisation of modern projects; the apparition of equality, the death of subject in contemporary theory, financial capital masking itself as financial freedom, society's turning into a society of individuals thus the ineluctable fidelity of our age with uncertainty; absence of any visible form of class division rendering attempts of economic and political theorising toward praxis distressed at their very exordium. Post-structuralist thought becomes impertinent as it stresses its nonchalance over conceptualisation as

such, which is seen as a kind of modern dogmatic messianism of metaphysical truncation that defines the post-structuralist impulse to long for pure singularity which constitutes the conceptual conjuration. Whether it is Lyotard's libidinal economising, Althuser's materialism of encounter or Derrida's messianicity without messianism, the attempt to ramshackle the Hegelian syntax of Marxist thinking will ultimately end up reducing Marxism either to enlightenment thought which often comes under Marx's gamut of critical philosophizing or terminate Marxism of its plastic potential and thus swerve Marxian thought into a kind of intellectual hebetude. So arises the need to reflect upon the dialectical legacy of Marx and to act while aiming at theorisation concerning our age which distances itself from ignoble cerebration and on the other hand evades itself from being reified into an abstraction of a kind.

The hope to change is itself marked by a certain necessity to refurbish socialist projects so as to conceptualise the historical movement throughout the 20th century. The so-called Hegel revival after the post-structuralist onslaught carries the voice of identity thinking on the left's part, thus iridescent of theorising potential when temporality speaks in fragments.

A face to be defused?

Commodification as such has been disseminated throughout the cultural enclaves which were purported to herald the malediction of capital as its syntax was not that of profit-driven throughout the modern age, thus disabling any serious ability of art to decrepit capitalist edifice. The Marxist distinction between base and superstructure, however invocative it now seems to be, is crucial here to be reconsidered and to think of this duality in a way where the dialectical inter-relationship is catalogued. Consciousness speaks of it being its very own as it avows the form that it already has taken. Postmodern theory imprecates all possibilities to systematise heterogeneity. Yet, the dominant force of the movement itself is not to anathemise the possibility of a certain kind of messianicity.

The dilemma that defines any attempt to come out of the crisis is that of theorising without being ordained to the path of reducibility. Lyotard conceives a total abandonment of critique and thus execrates impulse to totalise over differences that are never to be matched up in a kind of theoretical web of dependabilities. He saw Marxism as constituted through the libidinal lexicon, thus consideration of desire flashes throughout his later thinking.

He never tried to recover Marx through a different reading of it; aimed at dilapidation of the nostalgic impulse itself that he sees to be the driving force of classical Marxism. How much pertinence the criticism of Lyotard demands, it remains crucial to be redolent towards the spirit of Marxist thought and point to the intention that drives his theory. It is not that Marx has distinguished between capitalist and pre-capitalist societies in the sense that there was no exploitation of a mediated kind during the latter, it was the changed form of mediation itself that defines capitalist age being the age of commodification. It will be an exasperated move to think of Marxism as if it is nostalgia for the feudal past or pre-civilization human natural inter-relationship. Inveterate movement of history is a profound underlining of Marxism, which defiles any conception of non-dialectical theorising of history and sociality, as it is one of the main theses of Marxism emphasizes upon our natural relationship with labour which is a unifying knot of humans with nature where the labouring itself is the essence of human unification with nature; labour itself is always to be continued as the identity with our other (nature) is not to be seen as a matter of a stage within the process but stage as process itself. It is always in the process of labour that our real nature is to be defined. Derrida writes,

"Now, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical idea or questioning stance (a consistent deconstruction must insist on them even as it also learns that this is not the last or first word). It is rather a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysical-religious determination, from any messianism."

The spirit of deconstruction is to show the essential materiality of all the idealistic enclaves; their constitutions are rooted at their margins which are often reduced to the status of an abject reviling the conceptual towers. The movement of deconstruction is itself dialectical yet its impulse is to disrupt the Dialectic. Coming all the way through dialectical movement deconstruction gets itself deposited upon the fragments and effectuates a heterogeneous environ of singularities consternating possibilities of revindication of thought construction. This is the Nietzschean legacy of postmodern theory, which refutes reconciliation. However, the messianicity that Derrida extols shows an implicit Kantian element in Derrida's thinking; that of longing for the pure event. Derrida's idea of undeconstructable justice avows the Kantian noumenal kind of ontology. Thus, in the end, Derrida retains the form of

enlightenment-kind of thinking of being too prehensile. Even though he took it to be the outcome of necessity that the current flow of temporary would be radically disrupted; that's why in his statement of messianic without messianism, he did not look upon the possibility of turning the valences, where the present is itself full of hopefulness concerning the future that it is wool-gathering to try to imagine future as some substantial state of affairs other than the present state of things.

Derrida's utopia is kind of an event that comes as a disruption to the present which he saw as other to the present – future which avows his other major point to develop the conception that would be different from the "logic of spectrality", which is the logic of dualities. The impulse to do away with knots between oppositionalities is itself the mark of latent contradiction that rules over our own thinking and which is itself in the background virgin to our speculative gaze. The desire to screen out contradictions is itself contradictory thus emanating that our own thinking itself is free from contradiction only in its appearance. Nietzschean destructive gazing brings each signification to stasis, where the materiality of the language stands as an opaque sterility, enrapturing our signification process is, in its own materiality, just another enchantment, the play of language where it succeeds in making us believe a certain reification as meaning whereas meaning is essentially meaning, that is to mean. This is what is the intent behind Nancy's phrase, "We are meaning", the impulse to mean; to mean itself is itself meaning. However, this should not be seen as a principle but a performative kind. This is a guide, not a description of reality. Yet, this should not be conflated with the famous later Wittgenstein's view that meaning is use, it is use but what the dialectical step ahead is that this use is still meaning.

The step that history took as it leapt forward from the modern to the postmodern age is that of a similar kind. The modernist impulse to break the stasis of reducibility itself turned into a kind of reducibility where fragmentariness is a new structure. Bauman rightfully points out this characteristic when he points out the individualisation of social structures, the predicament is always a matter of form which in itself is negativity.

Aiming Novelty Through Philosophical Imperative

Anderson's criticism of the pedantic philosophical character of Western Marxism is valid in itself, yet it needs to be emphatically emphasised that the impulse of philosophising can itself be used as a

social praxis. The categorical execution of philosophy misses the spirit of dialectical materialism of exploiting the performative potential of intellectualising. As Therborn characterises Marxism as being inherently dialectical at its origins it seems not very fruitful to argue for or against modernity. The Habermasian idea of modernity being an unfinished project can very conveniently be synchronised with Jameson's ideal of viewing the postmodern age as a break from modernity. It can be viewed as an age of " liquid modernity" or as an age that marks the fulfilment of modern projects. The point is that humanity is still not out of crises, which always returns with a different lexicon. Marxian apparatus to thinking the way out of the current crises should necessarily need Hegelian manoeuvring, so as not to be itself reduced to a kind of reification which is either totalitarian aggressiveness of fascists or Stalinist kind or cynical sensitivity which is all too visible in the era of profound commodification.

This is a time for deep thinking and a more profound kind of philosophising, swerving the political handle of philosophy, which Luc Nancy anticipated in his time. It would be vacuous to say that any political attempt to revolutionise what is intellectually malnourished would amount to a profound extirpation of humanity at large. The profundity of post-structuralist thinking is in its showing the material nature of language and thought, the next dialectical step would be to perform the language, when culture and material reality are all too close it is precisely an opportunity to change the valences and to tie the knot of synonymity. It is necessary to search for the alternatives which are enclaves for the other that is inherent within the present. The future that Ernst Bloch characterises as being all too present in the form of hope in the present itself is Nancy's another now which he saw not as a stage in the temporal series but as the moment of its own recognition of itself as the future. The difference between genesis and epigenesis needs a revision as Malabou has pointed out. What society needs is precisely a step towards epigenesis, which would be a moment of self-reflection. As Hegel maintained the change in object is a change in consciousness itself, to turn the object needs a metamorphosis of philosophical conceptuality.

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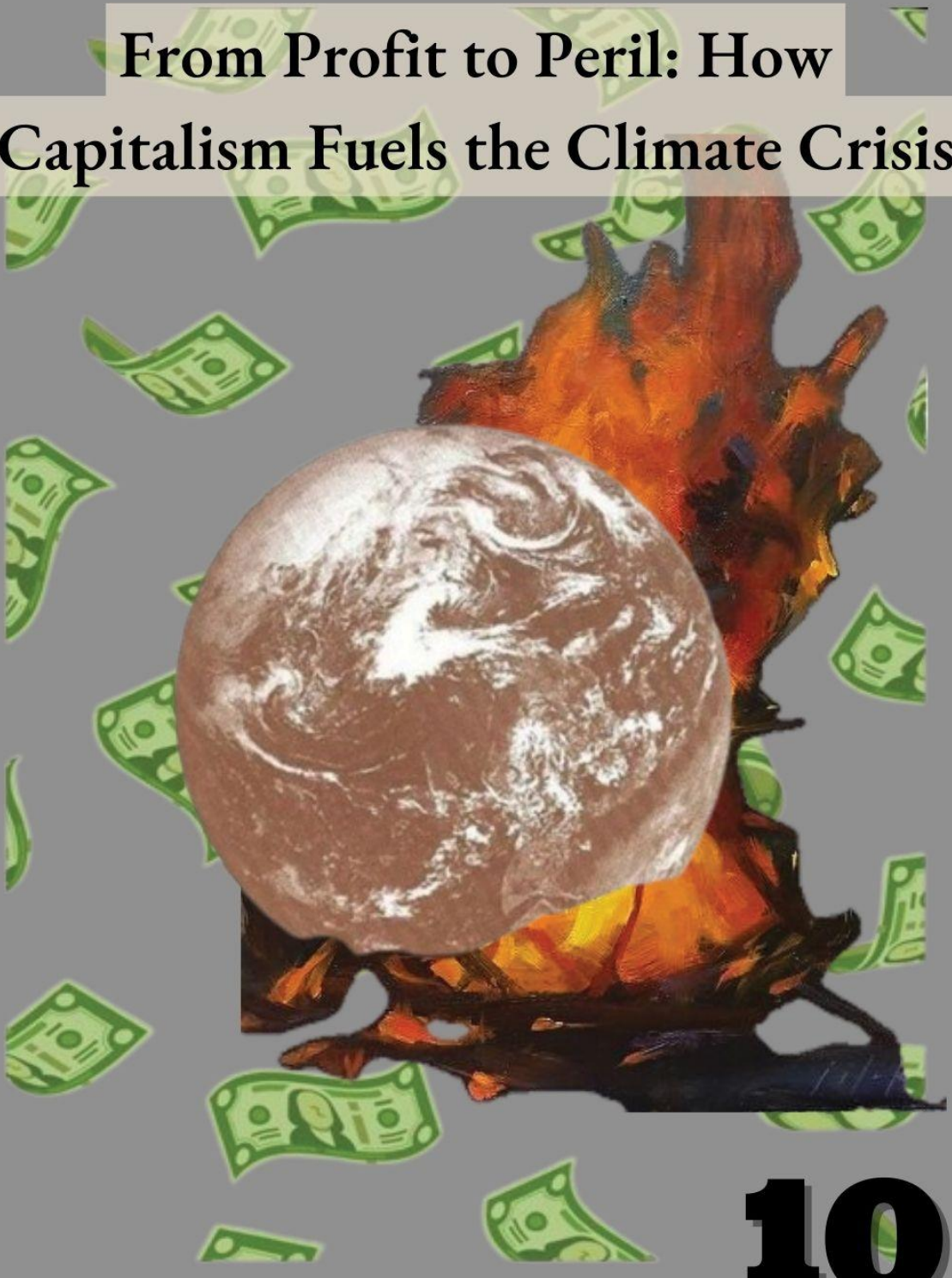
From Profit to Peril: How Capitalism Fuels the Climate Crisis



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From Profit to Peril: How Capitalism Fuels the Climate Crisis

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The popular term climate change is now beginning to be replaced by the term climate crisis. As carbon emissions and atmospheric temperatures soar, and resultant natural disasters affect millions globally, public policymakers are talking about the possibility of a climate emergency. We constantly hear about the ways to prevent climate change. Things like sustainability, eco-conscious choices and mindful actions are specifically pinned on the greater population by global leaders and self-proclaimed climate activists. But how often do we discern the centuries of historical distortion of resources to address the issue of climate crisis?

Climate change is usually presented as something new, controversial, and highly technical. Anthropogenic[1] climate change has been present for at least decades and possibly millennia. Natural climate fluctuations predate human history, and the politics and policy of climate change have parallels in previous environmental and social issues. Therefore, there is a need to critique an understanding of environmental concerns based on a narrow scientific technological perspective and view them within a social-political framework. The political and policy debates surrounding climate change require historical discussions on issues like deforestation, pollution, and resource management to broaden the scope and understanding of environmental justice.

Environmental historians write critical socio-environmental history to explore the interrelationship between nature and humans, culture and politics and the uneven social impacts of human attempts to appropriate and transform nature. They challenge the dominant Western "anthropocentric worldview." Anthropocentrism places man at the centre of the world, independent from nature, and more valuable than non-human entities. The latter is considered to exist for the sake and welfare of human beings. This human exceptionalism favours human interests at the expense of other species or the environment. Again, environmental

historians upturn this human chauvinism by revising human-centric ideas of nature.

For example, in Unsettling Anthropocentrism (2004), Eileen Crist and Helen Kopnina question and critique "the dominant cultural motif of placing humans at the centre of material and ethical concerns." They link anthropocentrism to the current climate crisis, calling for an investigation of its historical roots. The cultural project of human exceptionalism, they argue, has physically and ideologically displaced "nonhumans, subhumans, and wild nature." The 'human' colonization of the planet has been accelerated by imperial expansion and colonization of the "New World," the Industrial Revolution and technological inventions during World War II. The scholarly debates raging around anthropocentrism centre around this connection of anthropocentric hierarchies with the advent of capitalism.

For John McNeill, "The Earth is rapidly moving into a less biologically diverse, less forested, much warmer, and probably wetter and stormier state." In 2008, Ellis & Ramankutty concluded that "most of 'nature' is now embedded within anthropogenic mosaics of land use and land cover." When did the Anthropocene begin? For Crutzen and many other scholars, the Industrial Revolution marks the beginning of this new epoch. Particularly, the usage of the steam engine made possible an increased burning of fossil fuels at an unprecedented rate, creating ecological imbalances.

The UNFCCC signed at the Earth Summit in 1992 aimed to "prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference" by cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Is it then agreed that global warming is undeniably anthropocentric? Again, the link between industrialisation and capitalism and increased anthropogenic activity is not unknown. The steady increase in human population from 1800-2000 has put heavy pressure on land, destroyed tropical rainforests and accelerated biodiversity loss. When IPCC published its sixth report in 2021, wildfires were raging across the world from Siberia to North America, burning acres of land and displacing millions of people. The report categorically argues that carbon pollution and greenhouse gases from human activity made major changes to the planet Earth, transgressing planetary boundaries. Climate scientists suggest a stop to fossil fuel burning. However, our modern industrial and urban civilization from the last 170 years has been built on fossil fuel.

However, according to Nathan F. Sayre (Politics of the Anthropogenic, 2012), more

crucial than identifying the beginning of the Anthropocene is understanding how it dislodges current assumptions about the climate crisis. A great example of this is climate justice. “Whose Anthropocene?” ask environmental historians to illustrate the uneven impact of Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW) on underdeveloped nations, the Global South. For Kathleen D. Morrison (Provincialising the Anthropocene, 2015), the Anthropocene is a Euro-centric concept that “hides a disturbing extension of colonial discourse into a post-colonial world.” The concept of the Anthropocene raises important inquiries regarding the reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment, yet it falls short of providing definitive solutions. This limitation stems from its confinement within a Cartesian framework that dichotomizes Humanity and Nature, failing to acknowledge the intertwined nature of humanity within the natural world and vice versa.[2] Moore argues for the Capitalocene, which he posits began with significant shifts in land and labour dynamics around 1450 to 1640. He introduces the notion of a "world-ecology" dialectic, where capital, power, and various strategic relations evolve within the fabric of life itself rather than acting upon nature externally. Moore suggests that capitalism's ability to generate value lies in its exploitation of "Cheap Natures"—such as labour, food, energy, and raw materials—necessary for accumulation. He further contends that capitalism's contemporary crises, particularly since the advent of neoliberalism in the 1970s, can be attributed to the escalating challenges in accessing these Cheap Natural inputs.

This essay will delve into the reasons why capitalism is supposedly an indefatigable method for perpetually generating more wealth and greater social prosperity and argues that the root causes of today's environmental crisis, with climate change as its chief concern but not its sole aspect, stem not merely from mismanagement of Earth's resources, but rather from the inherent workings of capitalism. In essence, it implies that the capitalist economic system fundamentally causes and exacerbates environmental difficulties, in addition to resource allocation and utilization challenges. This viewpoint argues that tackling the environmental catastrophe necessitates more than simply surface-level repairs, but also fundamental structural changes to the economic and societal structures that underpin it.

The rise of capitalism was not a sudden or deliberate occurrence. Instead, it emerged gradually from the European feudal system through a lengthy and ongoing evolutionary process shaped by various interconnected

factors such as social, political, cultural, technological, scientific, and economic influences, although these factors played out unevenly over time. (Wallerstein, 2002, p. 19). As capitalism evolved into a comprehensive socio-economic system, various societal elements collaborated to reinforce its inherent tendency toward continuous capital accumulation, leading to increased alienation from nature and a heightened environmental impact. This expansion, both in quality and quantity, was far from a smooth or peaceful process. Society found itself compelled to defend against the commodification of human labour and the natural world (Polanyi, 2001), but through coercion, adaptation, and conflict, the system gradually assimilated people and nature worldwide. Consequently, the relentless pursuit of profit, and compelling participation under the threat of elimination, became the 'motor force' (Sweezy, 2004, p. 91-92) behind both the core and the periphery of the globalized economy.

The pursuit of profit-driven growth in capitalist economies has led to increased energy consumption, driving the search for new energy sources (Li, 2008, p. 53). This reliance on fossil fuels like oil, gas, and coal has significantly contributed to greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. However, attributing the predicament of global warming solely to the technological aspects of oil and coal extraction overlooks a critical aspect, that is, within capitalist paradigms, technological advancement is contingent upon its profitability and market viability. Hence, the proliferation of technologies such as those associated with oil and coal extraction is intrinsically tied to their economic feasibility within capitalist structures. As Huber (2008) emphasizes the intricate relationship between energy and society, highlighting their mutually influential dynamics (p. 106). This interconnectedness extends beyond energy to various resources within market frameworks. For instance, 19th-century industrial mining for soil nutrients was intricately linked to profit-driven production. This mining emerged alongside intensified capitalist agricultural methods and urbanization, accelerating soil fertility depletion. Consequently, farmers increasingly relied on external fertilizers to maintain productivity (Foster & Clark, 2003, p. 192). This heightened demand for fertilizers led to the large-scale importation of soil nutrients, notably guano from Latin America and phosphates from various Pacific islands.

Throughout history, humans have continuously sought new energy sources, leading to the widespread exploitation of oil, gas, and coal, particularly since the

Industrial Revolution, which is directly responsible for the historical and current increase in GHG emissions. To conflate the problem of global warming with the technology of oil and coal extraction per se overlooks the fundamental role of capitalism. It suggests that these technologies became widespread due to capitalist production, where profitability drives technological adoption. In essence, it implies that addressing global warming requires understanding the economic system that incentivizes certain technologies over others.

Despite efforts to transform capitalism into a more environmentally friendly system, it is inherently incapable of overcoming the environmental crisis and achieving sustainability. This is because capitalism, even when environmentally conscious, is driven by principles like surplus value, capital accumulation, and unchecked competition. These principles lead to the exploitation of nature and labour, causing environmental degradation. (Marx, 1977, p. 638). The structural need for capitalization of land, labour, and money within the market system exacerbates social dislocation and environmental deterioration. Therefore, the environmentalist transformation of capitalism cannot effectively address the current environmental crisis.

To achieve a truly green economy, an environmentalist transformation is imperative. This transformation must align with the principle of sustainability, which denotes maintaining ecological conditions essential for the current social order's preservation. In essence, for capitalism to sustain itself without degrading its physical production conditions, it necessitates a form of capitalism that safeguards nature, treating it not as a mere commodity but as a fundamental component crucial for perpetuating market society indefinitely. This implies that environmentalism must prioritize the protection of nature to ensure the perpetual reproduction of market dynamics.

Since the existence of capitalist production is eventually dependent on capital accumulation, it follows that hegemonic environmentalism would in fact have to ensure the continued expansion of market society, as evident in the concept of ‘sustainable development.’ However, this approach is flawed. It assumes that capitalism can sustainably manage its natural production conditions, overlooking its exploitative relationship with the environment. Capitalism relies not only on exploiting human labour for profit but also on appropriating natural resources. Therefore, the notion that capitalism can

preserve its ecological conditions while expanding is flawed.

Nature is crucial in the production process, as labour interacts with the environment to create ‘use value’. While labour is essential for producing ‘use value’, nature's services, such as air, water, and raw materials, also contribute to it. However, these natural services do not directly add to the exchange value of commodities and may even reduce it by introducing "free" elements into production. (Marx, quoted in Burkett, 1998, p. 98). Despite its importance, nature is often seen as worthless within capitalism because its productive force is not reflected in exchange value.

Every environmental component is dependent for its survival and self-limitation on the ecosystem in which it grows (Commoner, 1973, p. 30). On the other hand, contrary to the ecological interdependence emphasized by environmentalists, capitalism's drive for market expansion leads to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. The environmental transformations cannot prevent the progressive expansion in capital's free appropriation of the environment, simply because more production necessitates higher amounts of natural resources to generate use value. While efforts have been made to mitigate environmental degradation through the implementation of various environmental measures, such as higher rates of recycling may alleviate some pressure on the environment, however, they are hindered by their resource-intensive nature and the thermodynamic constraints of achieving complete recycling. The profitability of recycling also depends on the availability and cost of raw materials, often resulting in the exportation of electronic waste to poorer countries where it is improperly handled, aggravating environmental and social problems.

Additionally, the end product of recycling must be cost-effective to incentivize companies to choose recycled materials over newly sourced ones. Since the exchange value of commodities is determined by supply and demand rather than the inherent value of the natural resources used to produce them. Therefore, raw materials will only be relatively expensive when they are scarce,(Marx, quoted in Burkett, 1998, p. 96), which implies that recycling becomes profitable when the extraction of new resources becomes more challenging or costly. While straightforward products like glass and plastic bottles or paper can be recycled relatively easily, complex items like electronics and cars present greater challenges due to the variety of materials

they contain. Kang & Schoenung (2005) note that current recycling methods struggle with complex products, often relying heavily on manual labour and making full recycling capital-intensive. Consequently, much electronic waste, or 'e-waste,' is often shipped to less developed regions for 'recycling,' where it is often burned, posing significant health and environmental risks. (Widmer et al., 2005). This practice is far from sustainable.

Hegemonic environmentalism, within Polanyi's double movement, is a protectionist movement of society, while also perpetuating its capitalization, resulting in degradation despite some forms of protection. The writings of Polanyi suggest that the protectionist countermovement is a spontaneous reaction to the negative consequences of liberalization, such as social dislocation and environmental destruction (2001, p. 147) or, put differently, that there can only be a countermovement when the problem is already apparent enough to cause alarm to society (hence the state). The counter-movement focuses on addressing immediate issues rather than underlying causes like capitalization of resources. Protective measures may seem effective in the short run, but the root cause remains unresolved. Thus, hegemonic environmentalism operates within the framework of capitalism and is limited in its ability to address the structural unsustainability inherent in the system, both politically and economically. It tends to focus on addressing symptoms rather than root causes, thereby perpetuating the status quo and hindering meaningful progress towards ecological sustainability. Its policies and strategies prioritize protecting nature only to the extent that it doesn't impede the profit-driven economic system. Economic growth, not ecological sustainability, is the primary motive. Environmental measures are implemented by companies as long as they don't hinder production or profitability. When environmentalism does pose a threat to profits, companies are pushed to innovate or cut costs, aligning with capitalism's inherent tendency to expand. This often leads to the shifting of environmental degradation to other areas or sectors, where regulations are lax or absent. Thus, while environmentalism may appear to address ecological concerns, its limits are ultimately defined by the imperatives of economic growth within the capitalist system.

There is no denying the seriousness of the global issue at hand. Should the forecasts by the IPCC come to fruition, the potential consequences of global warming would be unparalleled in human history, impacting

both society and the environment on an unprecedented scale. There has never been a more urgent moment to confront the root cause of the environmental crisis than now. What is required are profound socio-economic transformations that extend beyond mere attempts to enhance economic efficiency or alter the outward manifestations of our energy dependence. The question isn't what has to happen, but whether the needed change is possible. Enacting radical transformation entails relinquishing the idealized market paradigm, connoting the inevitable decline of capitalism's hegemony in societal organization.

Endnotes

1. "Anthropocene." a term coined in 2000 by geologists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer. They contended that the Earth had entered a new geological epoch, the "Anthropocene," where human activities drove planetary evolution, especially over the last 300 years.

2. Moore, Jason W. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital.* London: Verso, 2015.

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