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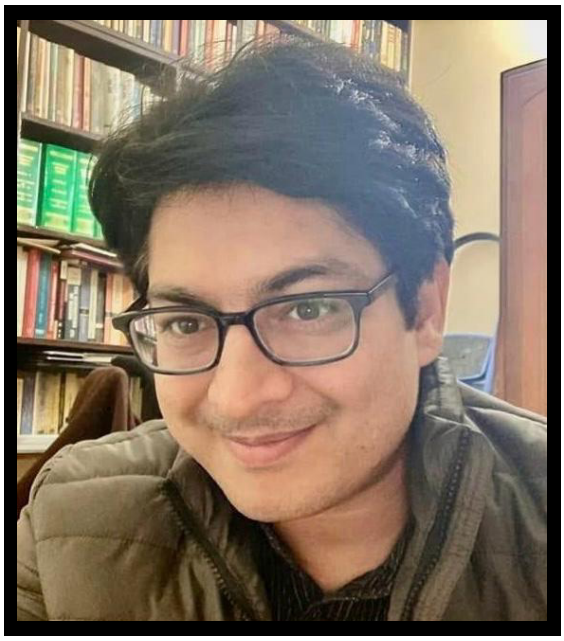
FACULTY ADVISOR'S NOTE



Professor Syed Areesh Ahmad

I am very happy to present to you the second issue of the Ramjas Political Review. Its release is an apt testament to the continued efforts and hard work of the Ramjas Political Review Editorial board, and in particular the brilliant captain of this ship, Prem Ansh Sinha, who is its Chief Editor.

Ramjas Political Review is the academic journal of the Department of Political Science. It is led entirely by the students of the department and is committed to the goals of excellence and high standards. It offers a platform to upcoming scholars to seriously engage with the contemporary world and attempt to comprehend its nuances while at the same time showcasing their flair for research and academic writing.

I commend the editorial board for their meticulous work in curating, reviewing, and refining the content to ensure its academic excellence. Their dedication has been instrumental in shaping this issue into a valuable resource for students and scholars alike.

I hope that this journal will continue its journey, year after year, and scale newer heights.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S NOTE

Prem Ansh Sinha

In the battle between guns and ideas, ideas will, eventually win. Because the ideas are invisible, and they linger, and sometimes, they can even be true. Eppur si muove: and yet it moves (Neil Gaiman, 2015).

It is a common lament of the students of social sciences that we do not learn anything that would make us distinct from our peers. The monotonous nature of societies does not engulf Ramjas Political Review, which is an organisation having a wardrobe filled with a hundred caps.While media has ceased to be a reliable source of information and killed by the commercial sector across the world, and what has been left out remains a source of entertainment; academia remains the last bastion of knowledge.

As the erudite author Arun Shourie never fails to repeat, we must always write like an avalanche, coming down full of facts, rejecting twisty opinions; academic writing helps us provide this space to research and write from primary sources, something which is rare in the other forms of writing that cater to keep readers glued to the pages. And, having something like this in an undergraduate college adds more fun to this idea, which is discovered mostly by the post-grad students.

Ramjas Political Review could not have been what it is today, if not for Professor Areesh, who guided us throughout each juncture, wherever and whenever we found ourselves befuddled with the array of tasks. I would also like to take this space to thank Prathit, Adwaith, and all the members of the Editorial Board of the previous issue who were always there with their prompt help, whenever we required them! Our Editorial Board could not have got better, each one of us possess a different yet relevant skill.

With this, we are determined to carry this legacy forward, with an objective of making Ramjas Political Review synonymous with undergraduate-run political science journals. I am sure this outstanding work of our authors from various institutions across the country would be a delightful and insightful read for readers across all domains!

Cheers,
Prem Ansh Sinha
Editor-in-Chief
Ramjas Political Review (Volume 1, Number 2)

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A Conversation with the Former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor to India, Mr Shivshankar Menon

Interviewed by Prem Ansh Sinha (Editor-in-Chief, Ramjas Political Review)
Edited by Piyush Rangra (Associate Editor, Ramjas Political Review)

An edited transcript of the interview as taken on December 6th, 2023 is as follows:

PS (abbreviation for Prem Ansh Sinha): Mr Menon, the Agnipath scheme brought up some really interesting issues in the context of India-Nepal relationship that could add China to a position of advantage. Kathmandu had expressed its disapproval about the scheme. When the Nepali soldiers, and most of them being the Gurkhas, would retire after their 3.5 year tenure, they would not be receiving any pension nor would they be able to benefit from the other sorts of government of India jobs.

My first question, with respect to this is:
a) what in that case would stop the retired soldiers with proper military training from joining the Maoist insurgency groups? What's your take on this, sir?

SM: Well, you know we need to separate two things: one is our doing the Agniveer scheme and its impact on our relationship with Nepal, and second is the second order effect of the same on Sino-Nepal relations and Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Under Nepalese law, citizens can serve for either the Indian Army or the British Army. Over two million Nepalese people are dependent on Indian recruitment. The repercussions of the same can be seen in the drop in the number of applicants for getting into the Indian army. Furthermore, ten Nepalese have been killed while fighting in the Russia-Ukraine war which is illegal as per law. Also, this will result in loss of a pool of friends in Nepal that will have a bad effect on our relationship. Lastly, this issue has the potential of incorporating changes in Indo-China relations.

PS: With China's eagerness to recruit the Gurkhas in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), what does it mean for India?

SM: Well, there is no proof and no eagerness on part of the PLA to recruit Gurkhas to their fold. The PLA has a completely different military culture that exports personnel to security companies across the globe and is an instrument of the party. As far as my opinion is concerned, countering China is of no interest to India. India's interest lies in building a good relationship with neighbours. Countering China is like throwing a baby out of the bath water that will harm India's interest. China's interest is in making India and her partners fight out themselves. Indeed, China is on a driving seat in the relationship, but chasing India's interests should be of utmost priority.

PS: How appropriate do you think this hypothesis is that if a country has prior friendly relations with India, and is trying to establish an amicable bond with China - the decision is not in favour of India? To put it clearly, if a small nation state in the Indian Ocean wants to pursue friendly relations with China while not disrupting its prior relations with India, should India try to talk them through it? For instance, let's take the case of Maldives.

SM: Well, once again I would like to reiterate this fact that our job should be and must be to further India's interest. India's bigger interest lies in a peaceful periphery and our neighbours who will help us in boosting peace, prosperity, and security in the region. Since our neighbours are also sovereign states, their sovereignty must be respected and India should act as a provider of stability. India should build and flourish its relationship with neighbours through commonalities in history, culture, and tradition. Lesson for India is to make itself a better partner.

PS: A recent article on the Indian Express reads, "The National Council Secretariat is in the process of bringing in a National Security Strategy (NSS)." There is no official notice about it, but we have seen your vocal stand for the same. There are criticisms in the USA for their NSS, that a) it is not actually a strategy, which is a guide for choosing among options, but a list of objectives and deadlines. Strategy by definition says that some things are more important than the others and not all nice things go together; b) strategy documents overgeneralize. What do you think of it and why is it required? When can we expect India's NSS?

SM: Well, any public document which covers sensitive issues like a National Security Strategy will have its own share of limitations. The strategy serves a three-fold purpose. Firstly, it will provide the priorities of the government in power. Secondly, the public will get a glimpse of what is going to be the course of action to be followed by the government in the domain of security. Thirdly, strategy is placed against realities and is not futuristic. Furthermore, any such strategy will omit a level of detail due to it being made public and will get supplemented by the National Defence Strategy (NDS), National Foreign Policy Strategy (NFPS), and other confidential documents that will be kept out of public domain. NSS will have to be a generalisation and accuracy of the same should not be expected since it will be based on certain assumptions with ascribed probabilities. Lastly, strategy has an ends and means problem that is driven by goals, means and situations. Goals are long-term, means change slowly because it takes time to build national strength and situations are the most dynamic of the three that makes or breaks any strategy. There are three reasons for building NSS. Firstly, as put by Robert Gates (Former Defence Secretary of the United States), NSS is built for an educative function. Secondly, NSS can be used to indicate policy shifts. Lastly, NSS is meant for dissuading your enemies. India's NSS has been readied before as well with four drafts, but its release is subject to a political call to be taken by the government.

PS: What do you think India should have in mind about the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)? With around a hundred and fifty states benefiting from Chinese investments, why would any Southeast Asian Country want to side with India on any polarising policy issue?

SM: There is nothing for India to deal with respect to the Belt and Road Initiative. Most countries that are joining BRI are siding with their own interests since they are sovereign states. India has not joined BRI due to her own concerns that we have flagged. One of them being that the flagship programme under BRI is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is buttressing Pakistan's position in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and is a Chinese transgression in the Indo-Pak status quo. But, BRI also carries a pro with it that projects done under its banner are commercially viable and usable by everybody. For example, Colombo Port developed under BRI has almost 80% of its trade to and from India. Lastly, Belt and Road also carries dependency with it which has led to many nations ending up in a debt trap after taking loans under BRI and even China has pulled back from investing more money into the initiative due to its financial inviability.

PS: All of us know how the sun never set on the British Empire, and within just a few decades, the territories gained through centuries were lost. Empires fall. A few weeks ago in London, Dr Jaishankar, said "the US is not in decline, it is in the process of reinventing itself." Do you think the External Affairs Minister would have said the same if he were not holding the office? Several scholars believe that the USA is on a decline due to how white-collar jobs are not secure, the cities are not safe, the schools are failing, et cetera; and that China shall be the next USA. What is your idea of this situation?

SM: This question carries two parts. The first part deals with whether domestic factors can ruin a nation? Do you think the US was much better during the 1870s and 1880s which were the times of the Wild West? Absolutely not, yet it was during this time that the US economy showed tremendous increase. Hence, in my opinion adjudging a country through its domestic factors is very dangerous while formulating your policy. Now, coming over to the second part. In my lifetime, the US has been written-off five times yet she bounced back. First was during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, second during the fall of Saigon in 1975, then during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the Dot Com Crash, and subsequently 9/11. However, the US has kept her share in the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the range of 25-30%. She is still the only superpower militarily with global reach. Furthermore, she is the primary source of innovation. Society is in the process of constant change, which brings its own chaos with it, but distribution of power within society does exist. She has been able to preempt a peer competitor. Conventional wisdom says that China will never be able to surpass the US in terms of per capita income (PCI). The US has demonstrated capability and can reinvent herself. The question of whether she can beat China is a question of our times which cannot be answered now.

PS: A few years ago, you had said that there are five types of Pakistan - the civil society, the business community, civilian politicians, military, and the jihadi elements, where you said that diplomacy and military alone cannot work. Can you please elaborate on this aspect?

SM: Well, of the five Pakistans, two are structurally inimical to India. One being the Pakistan military that has its institutional interest in having India as an enemy. Second is the Jihadi tanzeem that has

ideological reasons to be anti-India. Other three are very much open towards India. The policy prerogative should be to make them stay neutral towards India, and then make them dependent towards having a stable Indo-Pak relationship. In my opinion, Pakistan is not a Westphalian state since it has no hard border, no constitutional order and does not clear any count of enjoying Westphalian tag. Hence, Pakistan is a brand new state and must be dealt with through the mechanism that I have just stated of treating her as existing in the form of five avatars.

PS: A follow up on the same, how do you see the future of Pakistan will look like?

SM: The answer to this question is similar to that of the question on the US. Pakistan has been failing since its inception, but still will stay on as a nation state. The reasons for the same are that her neighbours want her to exist more than anyone across the globe. If Pakistan does not exist, Afghanistan will become a Pathan majority state that will be terribly threatening for other communities. The proposed Akhand Bharat will have 40% Muslim population. Iran will encounter a Balochistan problem. Hence, for all such reasons, Pakistan will stay on as a failed nation state.

Siddhant Jain (Audience): Should we treat morality and national interests as binary opposites? Can we establish an equilibrium between the two while taking action and framing our policies?

SM: Well, they cannot be separated. Every Indian theorist from Kautilya onwards will tell you that the purpose of political power is *dharma*. You cannot separate morality from self-interest. But, you can define morality differently in accordance with your desires, because sheer power is not enough to make the state achieve what it wants to achieve. State in order to achieve its objectives needs to have the acquiescence of the public that is especially applicable for the state to have while conquering foreign territories. Political power needs to be legitimised by the use of any of the given three - ideology, charisma, or institutional framework. Legitimacy is the bedrock of ethics in politics and statecraft. Any state requires a sense of ethical justification for legitimising its behaviour. Hence, statecraft does pose serious ethical problems such as killing two people and getting hundred people saved or the other way around. Thus, a state can never have a purely amoral statecraft as is evident from Kautilya's concept of *yogakshema* which implies that in the welfare of his subjects lies the welfare of the king. Hence, national interest and morality are inseparable since every decision made in national interest requires moral grounds.

PS: I would like to end our conversation with a question that I remember asking you at the Indian International Centre, a few weeks ago, and I request you to highlight this for our audience as well. Do you think that with the sheer rise in the number of think-tanks in India, Indian Foreign Service is still a viable career option?

SM: In my opinion, IFS is still a great career option. It allows you to test your theories in reality. It is a place where rubber hits the road. However, there are two riders before you think of joining IFS which

you must strongly consider. Firstly, you should enjoy change, and secondly, you must enjoy working with people since diplomacy is a public business and is not meant for introverts.

PS: Thank you very much, Mr Menon for having this conversation!

SM: Thank you very much and wishing you all the best!

Ends.

Featured Essays

Why Caste Differs in Punjab Politics?

Viraj Thakur

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Introduction

In this paper, I seek to provide an analytical overview of why caste dynamics is different in Punjab politics, and how Deras have surfaced as institutions with immense political sway in this context. This is done through a close examination of key scholarship dealing with caste in Punjab, which provides a better understanding of the particularist nature of caste in politics.

To this end, I trace the rise of Jat Sikhs in the social order of Sikhism in Punjab and then compare this with Dalit Sikh efforts at attaining vertical mobility. I argue that analogous attempts to gain mobility have resulted in limited gains in social capital for the Dalits. Considering the reasons for this paradox, I then outline the response to this paradox in the form of Deras.

How Jats rose to the top of the hierarchy

As Jodhka (2004) notes, the tenets of Sikhism denounced caste practices. This lack of ritual sanction implies that the Jats, considered Shudras in the Varna system (Ram, 2007), were not judged for their perceived impurity upon converting to Sikhism; in fact, the Gurus willingly raised Jats to positions of authority in the newly-developing religion owing to their indifference to the Brahmanical hierarchy (Puri, 2003).

Despite a formal denunciation of caste, the Gurus and thus Sikhism still existed in a world with caste hierarchies (Jodhka, 2004). Thus, in the agrarian economy of Punjab, a social order arose due to "material and political considerations" given the derecognition of the varna system, with land ownership as the primary, but not only, determinant of social status. The Jats have established a hegemonic control over land in Punjab, deriving not only their economic prosperity, but also their sociopolitical dominance from it (Ram, 2012).

They established this control due to support from the colonial government; the Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900 restricted the transfer of land to the agricultural castes, which excluded the Dalit Sikhs (Puri, 2003). Due to a lack of alternative employment opportunities, the Dalits were forced to become labourers for them (Ram, 2012), which entrenched a power dynamic in the form of the *jajmani* system (Jodhka, 2004). Thus, historical political backing and hegemonic control over socially valuable economic resources like land granted the Jats a high status.

Analogous efforts by the Dalit Sikhs

At the same time, some collateral gains from colonial development policies enabled occupational mobility for the lower castes, who escaped the *jajmani* system entrenched in agriculture by migrating to canal colonies as workers (Puri, 2003). This mobility became pronounced in post-colonial Punjab, through the Green Revolution in the 1960s. With the commercialisation of agriculture under the Green Revolution, the gulf between the agriculturists and the labourers increased (Ram, 2007). Mechanisation and the influx of migrant labour from neighbouring states reduced dependence on local labourers (Ram, 2007). However, around this period, a newly formed Dalit middle class began to penetrate the service sector and saw economic prosperity (Ram, 2007). They often migrated abroad, and gained exposure to secular values and education that shaped Dalit consciousness in the state, leading to demands for increasing wages (Ram, 2007) and a share in sociocultural spaces in the community. This mirrors the Jats' climbing the socio-economic ladder through land ownership.

Additionally, the inclusion of lower-caste Sikhs in the scheduled castes has meant greater representation in government positions, which has accentuated their political influence (Ram, 2012). This shows state support for the Dalit Sikhs – analogous to colonial state support for the Jats, but based on egalitarian principles (Ram, 2012).

Why has the extent of vertical mobility been different for Dalit Sikhs?

However, as Jodhka (2004) points out, caste inequalities persist in Sikhism in Punjab. Why has the extent of vertical mobility been different for the Dalits?

Firstly, as Ram (2012) highlights, Dalits often face social boycotts from the dominant castes on demanding a share in common resources. Secondly, despite economic prosperity, Dalits hold a disproportionately low share in agricultural land in Punjab even today (Department of Planning, Government of Punjab, 2020). Given the importance of land as a symbol of prestige, this often translates into a lower position in the social hierarchy despite politico-economic prosperity (Ram, 2012). Within this entrenched value system, further perpetuated by the Jat Sikhs, what recourse do the Dalit Sikhs seek?

Conversion is not a viable solution – the spectre of caste hangs over the Dalits despite their religion (Ram, 2012), evidenced by the remnant notions of their supposed impurity that chase them, leading to avoidance behaviour and their landlessness that disenfranchise them in Sikhism (Jodhka, 2004). Additionally, Sanskritization – emulating the practices of the upper caste to attain purity and thus vertical mobility – does not work either, as it is not possible to 'emulate' land ownership, which functions as the primary indicator of social status in Sikhism in Punjab (Ram, 2012).

What have the Dalit Sikhs done in response?

Consequently, the infeasibility of traditional solutions to caste inequality and "the systematic denial of their fundamental human rights has forced Dalits to establish their own separate religious centres...known as Deras" (Ram, 2012, p. 652). This assertion of an alternate identity can be traced back to the *Ad-Dharm* movement, which argued that the *Ad-Dharm* religion is a belief system that was destroyed by the Aryans, but is now on the brink of revival (Ram, 2012). The movement has now reappeared in the form of the Ravidassia religion (Ram, 2012). Deras are the physical manifestation of this movement with unique "identity markers" that differentiate this religion from Hinduism and Sikhism (Ram, 2012, p. 701).

The *Ravidassia/Ad-Dharm* religion is considered the native religion of the Dalit Sikhs, and is based on the teachings of Guru Ravidas, a Dalit Sikh himself – hence, if Dalits themselves join the folds of this religion, it cannot be termed as 'conversion' (Ram, 2012).

Apart from its appeal to egalitarianism, it fosters a sense of pride in the Dalit identity. Symbols of the higher caste are adopted to rebel — Guru Ravidas wore the sacred thread of the Brahmins, but steadfastly hung on to his hereditary occupation of shoemaking, thus "attribut[ing] dignity to manual labour", a source of Dalit pride that persists today (Ram, 2012, p. 672).

Thus, Deras and the *Ravidassia* religion form a key component of the lives of many Dalit Sikhs, implying their significant influence on politics given their numerical preponderance. The presence of Deras provides great scope for future research on how the particularist nature of caste in Punjab could lead to novel theories and strategies, in both theorizing and in the field of electoral politics respectively.

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GDPR and DPDP: A Comparative Analysis on User-Centrism

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Introduction

The shape and the volume of ideas and conversations that flow through a medium are directly influenced by the rules and regulations governing said medium. To ensure a freer flow of ideas and conversations, one must have regulations that increase user capacity. One of the primary ways of doing that is through a decrease in state capacity. In this article, we discuss the formulation of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP), and how they have and might influence user capacity in the digital domain through a comparative analysis of the two regulations.

The Ideas of Personal Data and User-Centrism

Both the ideas of privacy and user-centrism, especially in the digital domain, are quite inter-related; while privacy talks about the ownership of one's information (Alan, 2019), user-centrism talks about the ability to have said ownership over one's information. Following the Right to Privacy verdict (Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) and Anr. vs. Union of India & Ors.), it was realised that privacy is "necessary", "reasonable", and "proportional". However, to use said fundamental right to privacy, one must have the user capacity to make optimal use of it. One's privacy, as an individual, primarily concerns their personal data, which is information that relates to an identified or identifiable individual. This information could range from easily accessible information, such as one's name, email address, or phone number, to extremely sensitive information such as medical records and passwords. In the digital arena, access to one's personal data is provided to avail different services, but such a transactional framework also harbours dangers to one's digital privacy and therefore needs to be regulated through legal means.

User-centrism is the idea of giving primacy to the rights and liberties of a user over company policy and state regulation. It is the idea of putting the user at the centre of both policy design and policy implementation. This concept is especially important in the digital domain, given the flow of extremely sensitive personal data. That said, the implementation of user-centric policy design often comes with a high implementation cost for companies, as seen in the implementation of rights in GDPR, according to the International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP) Annual Privacy Governance Report

2016, data controllers consider three aspects of the regulation most challenging to implement in their organisation: the right to be forgotten, data portability, and gathering explicit consent. However, given the importance of the powers provided to rights holders, the benefits heavily outweigh the cost, especially in the long term.

In the following sections, in order to gain a better understanding of the two regulations, we will briefly discuss the formulation of GDPR and DPDP and the principles they were based on.

GDPR: History

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was adopted on April 14th, 2016, and enacted on May 25, 2018. Built as a regulation to unify the digital data privacy and protection laws of the members of the European Union (EU), it was the first of its kind cross-sectoral, economy-encompassing digital data protection law. Drawing its power from Article 8 of the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Charter), it puts prime focus on the rights of the individual over their personal data. Even before the signing of the Charter in 2000, GDPR can trace its roots to the Data Protection Directive, 1995 (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2018), which provided directives to its member states for the formulation of their own national digital personal data protection policy. The current regulation states seven principles that are to be followed in the processing: lawfulness, fairness, and transparency; purpose limitation; data minimisation; accuracy; storage limitation; integrity and confidentiality; and accountability. (Elstgeest, 2018)

DPDP: History

The draft DPDP Bill, 2022, was introduced after the retraction of the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, this was done in order to form a comprehensive legal framework set to the global standard (Burman, 2020). DPDP can trace its origin back to Justice KS Puttaswamy case of 2017, where the fundamental right to privacy was reaffirmed. Other than that, the recent introduction of GDPR in Europe at that time helped accelerate the lawmaking process. The bill became an act in August 2023. It too is a cross-sectoral, economy-encompassing, digital data protection regulation. Until now, the protection of personal data was regulated under Section 43A of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, however, given the growing usage of the digital medium, it was highly pertinent for the Government to bring in a comprehensive law regulating said medium. The act tries to bring in the digital protection law while bringing minimum disruptions ensuring the process is followed (Burman, 2022). It bases itself on the following seven principles (similar to those of GDPR) - consented, lawful and transparent use of personal data; purpose limitation; data minimisation; data accuracy; storage limitation; reasonable security safeguards; and accountability (PIB, 2023).

User-Centrism in GDPR and DPDP

Though both regulations lay emphasis on provisions that provide increased user-centric policies, there are a few key differences, especially seen in the rights to be forgotten and data portability. Data portability, according to GDPR, is defined as the process of movement of data from the data principal to the data fiduciary across different applications, programs, and cloud computing services. In the age of Big Data, swift movement of large and complex data in a standardised format becomes imperative (Milt; Elvy, 2017). In the realm of personal data, data portability works with Personal Identifiable Information, which means data that can be used to identify a specific person. From a consumer's perspective, the personal data they put on various social media sites like Twitter and Facebook remains consistent throughout these different applications which increases the accessibility of data. Article 20 of the General Data Protection Regulation provides for the Right to Data Portability: "The data subject shall have the right to receive the personal data concerning him or her, which he or she has provided to a controller, in a structured, commonly used, and machine-readable format, and have the right to transmit those data to another controller without hindrance from the controller to which the personal data have been provided." This provision gives a user-centric approach to data privacy which places the autonomy of a person's personal information with the "data subject". This right allows the individual to reuse their personal data for their own purposes across different platforms.

GDPR also provides the Right to be Forgotten in articles 17 and 19. There are certain grounds on which the data subject can have their data erased. There are certain restrictions to this right to be forgotten under Section 60 which relate to the use of personal data for public interest, and in Section 43 which aims to align the right of erasure with the right of freedom of expression and information.

Unlike GDPR, DPDP does not grant the Right to Data Portability or the Right to be Forgotten. Both the Srikrishna Committee (2018) and the Joint Parliamentary Committee formed to review the Personal Data Protection Bill (2019), had recommended the inclusion of both these provisions. While the Right to Data Portability provides the individual with the autonomy of migrating their data from one platform to another, the Right to be Forgotten refers to the right of a data subject to get their data erased. The Srikrishna Committee, in its report released in 2018, recommended that the right to be forgotten will compete with other rights, and the implementation of this provision may be decided based on factors like the sensitivity of the personal data to be restricted, the relevance of the personal data to the public, and the role of the data subject in public life. That said, DPDP did receive a downgraded version of the Right to be Forgotten, namely the Right to Erasure, which, because of its vaguely worded nature, opens several doors to exemptions from said erasure by stating ambiguous reasons. This opens the door to exploitation of the user and compromises user-centric ideas.

Other than that, there still are several problems within DPDP that include provisions that can lead to a compromise in user capacity. These include the shrinkage of the clauses from 90 to 30 from the proposed 2019 bill to the current act, this is due to the conversion of the language of the act into basic English. The usage of SARAL language (Simple, Accessible, Rational & Actionable Law), according to

Apar Gupta (2022), which could lead to compromised judicial takings because of the levied vagueness and brevity. There has also been a marked shift of power from the legislative to the executive, as out of the 30 provided clauses, there have been mentions of the phrase 'as may be prescribed' a total of 18 times. Another problem with the phrase is that of vagueness. With such a high amount of ambiguity in the text, the assumption of power from the state can lead to severe compromises to not only the user-centric needs but also to the checks and balances of India's institutions.

Conclusion

Though both the regulations put a heavy focus on the promotion of user-centric regulations, the rights provided and the wording of the DPDP regulation seem lacking. One must ensure policies are liberal for the individual, especially in the case of multicultural, pluralistic societies where personal data and information gain heightened importance because of the uniqueness found in such societies.

To ensure a free and liberal flow of ideas and a reinforced belief in one's institutional system, policies have to provide as many rights to the individual as possible without compromising state capacity. However, this has not been the case, as can be seen with the recent introduction of bills for the electronic medium, such as the amendment to the IT Rules, 2021, and the Telecommunications Bill, 2023. This, coupled with the ambiguous and vague wording of such bills, has led to a reduction in user capacity and a decrease in transparency and accountability. This is a case for DPDP, as noted by Professor Subhasis Banerjee (Professor, Computer Science and Engineering, IIT Delhi), who says the regulation "facilitates data collection and processing by the government and private entities rather than data protection (Gupta, 2023). Thus, it becomes the duty of civil society and informed citizens to ensure the increase in user capacity, because it is through the empowerment of said capacity that one can actualise their goals and aspirations.

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Navigating Ideological Crossroads: Utopianism, Religious Fundamentalism, and its Threats to Democracy

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Introduction

This essay is a larger enquiry into the utopianism of religious fundamentalism and its ability to threaten democracy as a form of government. It is important to systematically unravel the threads of this dysfunctional relationship on both religious and structural levels. These often feed into each other resulting in feedback loops. The prevailing geopolitical hostility over West Asia, and the revamp of radical terror outfits in Central Asia, are an outcome of a utopian thought being injected into religious philosophy and preachings, thereby giving rise to fundamentalist groups. This article uses the term 'utopianism' in a way that reflects the essential ambiguity of Thomas More's (1516) neologism (utopia is a good place that is no-place). They articulate what Ruth Levitas calls a desire for a better way of being, opposite to that referenced by 'dystopia.'

Parallel Foundations of Fundamentalism and Utopianism

On the other hand, fundamentalism refers to the strict adherence to the orthodox beliefs and principles of any faith. Fundamentalist groups across religions aim at preserving the core dogma of their belief systems, presumed to be under some threat from the external world. This divorce of the realistic world from an ideal one (described by Lyman Tower Sargent as an outcome of social dreaming) leads to the idea of a "pure" religious space, meant only for the people of one particular religion or faith system. The notion of a pure theocracy does not stem from a sacred religious text (except for Islam, wherein categorisation of the world is ordained by the Qur'an [10.25] and [6.127] into Dar Al-Islam, Dar Al-Harb, and Dar Al-Aman), but rather from a myopic interpretation of the same. The conflicting doctrines of Gush Emunim and Neturei Karta are a suitable example of this textual fallacy. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, as an outcome of the terror events of October 7th, 2023, can be understood only by carefully unveiling the layers of the contesting ideologies at play.

Gush Emunim was an Israeli ultranationalist orthodox movement that translated into a formal organisation in 1974, after the Yom Kippur war. Founded by Rabbi Abraham Kook, the movement advocated for the creation of a Jewish homeland (Eretz Israel) and to expel the impure elements (Islamic) from it. In the name of the Torah, the leaders of the group bolstered the belief that the

settlement of the Jews in the land of Israel would bring redemption upon Earth and the beginning of the Messianic era. Through its strong influence in the political circles, the group was successful in establishing several Jewish settlements in the territories captured in the 1967 "Six-Day War", especially Judea and Samaria. In stark contrast to this, Neturei Karta, another orthodox Jewish group, rejected Zionism and believed the creation of the state of Israel to be against the will of God. It was against the settlement of Jews on the land of Israel before the arrival of the Messiah. Both the groups believe to be following the real word of the Torah, however a discrepancy in its interpretation leads to two opposing radical religious thoughts. On the other end of the spectrum is Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist group that believes in the complete annihilation of Israel. It was formed in the initial years of the first Intifada (1987) by members of Muslim Brotherhood and a few religious factions of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Hamas considers the ancient land of Palestine to be Islamic Waqf and the establishment of an Islamic homeland a prerogative of the Palestinian muslims. The Hamas Covenant, 1988 explicitly eliminates any scope of a peaceful compromise and solidifies the utopian vision of a liberated Palestine (from land to sea) under the sovereignty of Islam.

The Interwoven Matrix and Shared Beliefs

The relationship between fundamentalism and utopianism occurs at several structural levels. Religious fundamentalism contains utopias, and stems out of discontent and abomination for the present. It involves a complex interplay of critique and desire, and often looks backwards, utopianism of a golden age, which fundamentalists seek to revive. Fundamentalist groups are often driven by the idea that their 'purity' is in danger. They work towards setting up boundaries to physically isolate the pure elements (people, beliefs, space et cetera) from the dangerous outside world. An outcome of this communal isolationism is distortion of perspective (as discussed above), because in addition to people, even information is screened and censored by these boundaries. The members of these groups are cut off from the wider social norms and values and the difference between the outside world and the inner group is seen as a manifestation of evil. A suitable example to understand this is Bin Laden's 1996 'Declaration of Jihad' against the west, and the subsequent attacks of 9/11. Through his recruitment videos, Bin Laden characterised the deployment of American and non-muslim troops in Saudi Arabia post 1991 Gulf War, as a blasphemous act and an affront to the sanctity of Islam. He called for 'Defensive Jihad' against the perceived aggression of what he believed to be 'the nexus of Jews, Christians, and their agents', voicing Samuel Huntington's theory on the clash of civilizations. Bin Laden's utopia meant the creation of an Islamic Caliphate, a Muslim brotherhood for only muslims, governed by Sharia and Islamic principles of finance and social conduct. For those outside this corporation, there was nothing but enmity and contempt.

Tug of Ideals – Religious Fundamentalism Versus Democratic Values

Religious fundamentalism is antithetical to liberal politics, as Lucy Sargisson has rightly remarked in her paper, "Religious fundamentalism and utopianism in the 21st century". Democratic principles, as suggested by Robert A. Dahl in his classic book, 'Polyarchy', stand at contradiction with the fundamentalist values. Dahl provides a framework for conversion to a democracy through eight institutional guarantees: 1) freedom of expression; 2) freedom to form and to join organisations; 3) the right to vote; 4) eligibility for public office; 5) alternative sources of information; 6) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; 7) free and fair elections; 8) institutions for drafting government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference. The concept of "Twin Tolerations" given by Alfred Stepan underscores the pragmatic relationship between religious and political authorities in a society. It emphasises the idea that the state and religious groups must have mutual tolerance for a democracy to prosper and function effectively. Fundamentalist groups seek to control political systems, impose their beliefs on the state, and slowly erode the principles of secular democracy. This can upset the delicate balance advocated by Stepan, and can strain the coexistence of religious and political authorities in a liberal democracy.

Conclusion

The prevailing religious instability throughout the globe calls for a thorough understanding of how rising fundamentalism threatens democracies, and democratic values beyond that of political ploys. The ideology of fundamentalism knows no bounds and has taken over both the developed and underdeveloped world of today, unleashing horror stories. From 9/11 to 26/11, terror attacks like these have given rise to the politics of viscerality, emotion, and physical force, accompanied with the loss of massive innocent lives. Many have argued that the recent surge of fundamentalism is out of movements and modernity and not perhaps a precondition of it. As written by Bassam Tibi, "The fundamentalists are modernists, not traditionalists; they return to tradition for a modern agenda, selectively picking elements to create a political order." Hence, liberal democracy and fundamentalism have become contending ideologies of today. Perhaps the question we must all seek to answer is how can we create a world of peaceful co-existence off these clashing ideologies?

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Why So Many Ramayanas: A Sociological Perspective

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Introduction

The epic of Ramayana, which is present in different versions, is one of the most important texts in Hinduism which holds significant cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and religious connotations. Despite a common theme across the different versions of Ramayana, there exist significant differences. The piece "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" by A.K. Ramanujan" (Ramanujan, 1992) showcases these variations by taking reference to five different versions of it.

Ramanujan's article analyses the different "tellings" of Ramayana through the lens of different authors, places as well as cultures. While showing how different "tellings" are interrelated, he argues the need to look at stories and narratives from different perspectives. Through the means of highlighting differences, the article shows that the same story can be portrayed in myriad ways in terms of their – starting, ending, theme, chronology of events, and emphasis on characters. For example, while the Tamil Ramayana emphasizes on water as a source of life and fertility, such emphasis is missing in Valmiki's Ramayana (Ramanujan 1992, 40). However, the article is silent on the question of why there are differences in the 'tellings' of Ramayana. Why has the same story been written in different styles with varying emphasis on characters, plot, and themes? It is this silence on the questions which this essay attempts to answer.

While critically analysing Ramanujan's piece, I would answer the above-mentioned questions in a twofold manner. The first part of the essay argues that Hinduism as a religion is composed of various cultures and that the process of 'Sanskritisation' has attempted to integrate them within the ambit of Hinduism through the circulation of stories, narratives, and epics. The second part attempts to put a spotlight on the fact that because each community holds a different set of values in terms of – beliefs, ideologies, et cetera, the stories that circulate among them get 'indigenised' to reflect the values and ideals of that community.

Reshaping of Epics through Sanskritisation

It is a well-known fact that the population of India is an eclectic composition of various races such as Aryans, Mongolians, Scythians, Dravidians, and many others. All these races came from different directions and after fighting among each other, got settled into different parts of what we now call India. Each of these had their own beliefs, customs, rituals, and institutions which were, more often than not, not in consonance with each other. Still, if we observe today, there is a stark commonality between the practices, rituals, traditions, narratives, and stories that are followed within the diverse region and population of India. Why is it so and what contributed to this apparent 'uniformity'?

Mary Douglas (Douglas, 2003) explained that a society can be divided into the form of two concentric circles – the inner circle which consists of the dominant class representing purity and the outer circle which represents the classes who seek to come as close to this inner circle as possible through imitation of practices of the dominant class. In the Indian context, this process is termed 'Sanskritisation' where the lower caste attempts to 'adapt' to the customs, rites, beliefs and, all other things which seem to represent the Brahminic way of life though it is not a one-way process (Srinivas, 1956). This process results in uniformity in terms of stories, narratives, customs, rituals, and traditions among the diverse population of India.

This process of Sanskritisation is not only limited to the adoption of new customs and habits but also includes the exposition to new ideas and values, mostly through Sanskrit literature. One of the primary tools of Sanskritisation are myths and stories of Sanskrit literature which spread themselves to the non-Sanskrit population through the means of harikatha (Srinivas, 1956). These stories depict the values, standards, and beliefs, that a particular community upholds as ideal. For example, in versions of Ramayana, Rama is portrayed as an ideal of holding the institution of monogamy.

However, what is considered to be 'ideal' varies across communities. What communities may consider the warrior-like spirit of fighting as ideal, others may consider the ability to solve things peacefully as ideal. Therefore, the stories depicting the standards of 'ideal' also get 'modified' or 'indigenized' from community to community.

Stories: A Tool of Cultural Hegemony

One may ask – why do communities want to promote their ideals through stories and epics? And why Ramayana was chosen as a means of promotion of values?

Gramsci (Lears & Jackson, 1985) mentioned the concept of hegemony as "a condition in which a fundamental class exercises a political, intellectual, and moral role of leadership within a hegemonic system cemented by a common world-view or organic ideology." In the Indian context, the upper castes form the "fundamental class" which aims to exercise its intellectual and moral leadership to maintain its

position in the caste system. One of the means to this end is the employment of common narratives in the form of epics or stories which reinforce their value systems. For example, in some Ramayana, society in Ayodhya was based and ordered on the rules of castes (Prakash, 2022). By using such versions of Ramayana, the upper castes attempt to exercise their hegemony to further reinforce their position in the caste system.

Why was Ramayana chosen as a text to promote a 'common-world view', but not some other texts? The answer probably lies in the text of Ramayana which is based on hierarchies and legitimisation of it. The clash of "subaltern" communities with upper-caste versions of Ramayana led to the subordination of their Gods and rituals (Prakash, 2022). Another reason could be the vast amount of reverence that the text of Ramayana and its characters command across various communities in India.

The next section engages with the phenomenon of 'indigenisation' vis-a-vis the Jaina and Thai version of Ramayana, and will attempt to analyse how these versions reflect their cultural values and ideals.

Stories: A Mirror of Values Of Community

Ramanujan, in his essay, shows the differences between the Paumacariya and the Valmiki's version of Ramayana (Ramanujan, 1992). In contrast to the portrayal of Ravana in Valmiki's Ramayana, the former shows Ravana as one of the leaders of Jainism with qualities of a noble leader (such as chastity), who got killed by Lakshman. Further, while containing references to various legends in Jainism, the Paumacariya version presents a more rational version of Ramayana by avoiding the instances which were devoid of common-man logic such as lifting of mountains or crossing sea in one jump. This is in accordance with the community values of Jainism which revolves around Satya (truth) Brahmacharya (chastity) et cetera.

Similarly, in the Thai version (Ramanujan, 1992), where the values of Buddhism such as – Right Thought, Right Action, refraining from taking what is not yours, et cetera – are considered to be ideal, the incident of Sita's birth is related to stealing of rice ball which gives rise to the prophecy that she will cause the death of Ravana. The instance highlights that violating these values may invite tragic consequences as happened with Ravana.

Conclusion

While critically analyzing Ramanujan's article, this essay attempts to find out the causes of differentiations among versions of Ramayana. This piece argues that since each community considers some values as 'ideal', the stories and epics which are central to Sanskritisation get 'indigenised' or 'domesticated' when they come across those communities. This highlights the importance of not using

the binary lens of right or wrong while looking at a story or narrative, but placing it in the appropriate contextual background. This becomes increasingly important in today's polarised world where cultural appropriation and weaponisation of epics have become an art.

While the scope of this essay was limited to Ramanujan's piece and Ramayana, this phenomenon of 'indigenisation' of epics is neither limited to the Ramayana nor Hinduism. The epics such as Mahabharata and sacred books of other religions such as the Bible and Quran are also the objects of the phenomena of 'indigenisation'.

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Academic Essays

Astropolitics: A Holistic Perspective On Modern Geopolitics

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Introduction

Everett Carl Dolman in his book, "Astropolitik: Classical Geopolitics in the Space Age" elaborates on how modern Geopolitics has outgrown its territorial landscape, encompassing the Spatial Arena, thus giving birth to the term "Astropolitics". The politicisation of space programmes amalgamated with space-related policies in both the public and private spheres depicts the importance of the application of strategy in the current global landscape, which forms a significant part of Geopolitics. Thucydides, while illustrating the concept of *Realism*, talked about how the absence of an overarching authority may cause the state to lay in a position of constant conflict with other state systems leading to the need for a 'Balance of Power' (Oldemeinen, 2010), which in today's era of technological and scientific advancement becomes essential, with respect to the politics of space.

This article aims to explore the distinct aspects of Astropolitics rooted in Modern Geopolitics and trace their relevance in the 21st Century along with future prospects.

What is Astropolitics?

Astropolitics, in terms of modern geopolitics, refers to the study and analysis of the political, strategic, and policy-related aspects of outer space activities and their impact on international relations (Alonso-Trabanco, 2019). It involves examining the interactions, conflicts, and cooperation among nations in the context of space exploration, satellite technology, space policy, and the utilisation of space resources.

This term is derived from "astro" meaning related to space and "politics" pertaining to the governance and relations between states. Astropolitics comprises a wide range of topics, including space security, space law, space exploration, satellite communications, and the militarisation of space.

Historical Context

The foundation of Astropolitics emanated from the ballistic missile-based nuclear arms race between the two nations during the Cold War era following World War-II, thus, leading to an unprecedented space race of the time. The Soviet Union scored a major victory in the early stages of the space race by

launching Sputnik-1 on October 4th, 1957 (The Launch, 1957). Later, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to journey into space aboard the Vostok-1 spacecraft (Mahmud, 2002). This milestone solidified the Soviet Union's lead in space exploration, demonstrating their ability to put a human into orbit and safely return them to Earth. It was at this point in political history when the world began to witness an arms race beyond the *terra firma*, extending itself to the realm of space.

In the face of the Soviet successes, US President John F Kennedy subsequently delivered a speech in which he set the ambitious goal of landing an American on the moon (The Apollo, n.d.) before the end of the decade. This challenge, known as the "Moonshot," galvanised the American space program and led to the Apollo program (The Apollo, n.d.). Neil Armstrong's famous words, "*That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind*," (The Apollo, n.d.) marked a monumental achievement in human history. Additionally, Both the US and USSR invested heavily in aerial and satellite-based reconnaissance programs as part of their overall intelligence-gathering efforts (Muszyński-Sulima, 2023).

The *U-2 program* (Muszyński-Sulima, 2023), initiated by the US in the 1950s, focused on employing high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft capable of flying at extreme altitudes. These U-2 aircrafts conducted overflights of the Soviet Union, gathering crucial intelligence on nuclear installations, military facilities, and other strategic targets. This initiative proved invaluable during the early Cold War years, providing critical insights into Soviet missile capabilities and even influencing pivotal events like the Cuban Missile Crisis. In the 1960s, the US introduced the *SR-71 Blackbird program* (Prisco, 2020), unveiling a high-speed, high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft designed to operate at near-invulnerable speeds and altitudes. This aircraft conducted reconnaissance missions over hostile territories, including the USSR, significantly bolstering US intelligence capabilities. In tandem with these aircraft-based efforts, the US developed satellite-based reconnaissance capabilities under programs like *Corona and Midas* (Muszyński-Sulima, 2023). This initiative involved deploying satellites equipped with advanced cameras to capture detailed images of the Earth's surface. The intelligence gathered from Corona and Midas proved instrumental in obtaining vital information on military and strategic targets, thus contributing substantially to the evolving landscape of Astropolitics.

The Soviet Union, during the Cold War, established a multifaceted approach to aerial and satellite-based reconnaissance, significantly influencing the dynamics of astropolitics. The *MiG-25 "Foxbat,"* (MiG-25 Foxbat, 2023) originally known as an interceptor, also featured reconnaissance variants equipped with high-speed and high-altitude cameras. These specialised versions were employed for overflights, gathering vital intelligence on potential adversaries. Additionally, the *R-12 "Dvina" missile* (Soviet Missile, 2023), initially designed as a medium-range ballistic missile for offensive purposes, found a secondary role in training Soviet air defence units. It was used to simulate intercepting reconnaissance aircraft, contributing to defence strategies. The Soviet Union paralleled the US's efforts by developing satellite-based reconnaissance capabilities through the *Zenit program* (Muszyński-Sulima, 2023). This initiative involved deploying satellites equipped with advanced cameras and film-return capsules, akin to the US Corona program.

These programs, led by the US and USSR, significantly contribute to the understanding of how the Cold War rivalry led to the politicisation of space in the modern era.

Astropolitics in the Contemporary Multipolar World

In the current multipolar world, the space race has evolved beyond the historic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. At present, various countries are actively engaged in space exploration, driven by scientific, commercial, and strategic interests.

Space agencies such as National Aeronautics and Space Administration (US), Roscosmos (Russia), Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (Japan), Indian Space Research Organisation (India), China National Space Administration (China), and European Space Agency (Europe) have launched myriad space missions over the course of time, thus, emphasising their paramountcy in the spatial arena of the 21st century. However, such missions may conceal within themselves a political motive transcending the goal of scientific advancement.

For instance, India's 2023 Lunar mission, Chandrayan-3 attracted massive attention and appraisal from countries worldwide. However, the phenomenon also invited negative comments from UK journalists asking India to return the 2.3 billion dollar aid that India had received in the past few years. Furthermore, this was paired with unproven allegations of using the aid money for the furtherance of ISRO's space programs (UK Aid Worth, 2023).

This example depicts how achievements in the field of science can lead to the nationalisation of space programs and problems in fostering a unified space agenda.
In another instance, amid increasing tensions with Ukraine in March 2022, the Russian government's space agency removed flags of several countries painted on a rocket in the spaceport, Baikonur. While flags of nations including the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan were taken off, India's flag was kept intact.

This exemplifies how geopolitical conflicts between countries may explicitly reflect their space programs and policies.

Commercialisation of Space

Besides governments, various private companies such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic have also joined the sphere of space exploration. Many of these companies have commercialised this sector by providing space tourism services and asteroid mining.
Redwire, a private space agency, is one of the pioneers in the field of asteroid mining. The agency's primary focus is on developing technologies to extract resources from asteroids and other celestial bodies. Additionally, another private space agency, OffWorld, is developing a fleet of robots designed for asteroid mining and planetary construction. Their technology aims to create a scalable solution for resource extraction..

In 2015, the US government passed the US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act (CSLCA), which states that US companies are entitled to maintain property rights of resources they have obtained from outer space (Blount, 2016). Moreover, other countries such as Luxembourg and Japan have also expressed their interest in the field of asteroid mining. The convergence of this common interest rightly points out the fact that in future, the central governments of varying nations may clash with each other for the celestial resources mined by private space agencies, thus, giving a more commercial and capitalist-oriented shift to the concept of Astropolitics.

Space Governance and Laws with a need for International Cooperation

As space activities grew more prevalent, there arose a need for legal frameworks to govern the use of outer space. This led to the development of international space law, which culminated in the creation of the *Outer Space Treaty in 1967* (Treaty on Principles, n.d.). Also, with the recognition of a need to have a permanent space body within the United Nations, *the United Nations Officer for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)* was established in 1961 through United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1721 (XVI). UNOOSA's mandate emphasizes the peaceful use and exploration of outer space. It focuses on promoting international cooperation, ensuring the equitable benefits of space activities, and mitigating potential conflicts.

Several countries have collaborated on mega projects such as the International Space Station, which is a collaborative effort involving multiple space agencies from different countries. These include NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia), ESA (European Space Agency), JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency), and CSA (Canadian Space Agency), amongst others. Such initiatives require a great deal of cooperation and collaboration among the states, thus, enhancing the need for proper space governance and cooperation laws.

Space Security and Militarisation

The military use of space is not new, yet it has developed and become more advanced today. Major powers, such as the US, China, and Russia, now have their own military units specialised in space operations, indicating that space has become a new big power competition .

It is believed that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) project – often referred to as "Star Wars" – heralded the militarisation of outer space. As a comprehensive and complex space-based missile shield, SDI was conceived as a game-changer that could decisively alter the strategic balance of power in favour of Washington (Alonso-Trabanco, 2019).
In China, the *People's Liberation Army* (PLA) established the *Strategic Support Force* (SSF) in 2015 to meet the new types of threats of the modern age. The SSF is a new type of combat force operating in near space, outer space, and network space. The organisation is divided into two departments; the *Network Systems Department*, which focuses on electronic warfare and cyber operations, and

the *Space Systems Department*, which is responsible for executing the SSF's space missions such as space launches, tracking, and surveillance.

On the other hand, Russia developed a mobile ground-based laser weapon system called 'Peresvet', which is said to be able to dazzle or even fight satellites in orbit. Russia also has great electronic warfare capabilities, such as jammers and communications satellites (Wehtje, 2023).

Considering these instances, one can gauge that national security has expanded to outer space as independent access to space is considered a strategic and critical asset in the modern era.

Emerging Challenges and Future Prospects

With the advancement of science, technology, and a race for establishing dominance in this multipolar world, the future of Astropolitics possesses the mettle to open doors of new opportunities and ventures for geopolitical diplomacy via space exploration. In his Sea Power Theory, Mahan argued that control of the seas, particularly the Pacific, was crucial for a nation's global influence. He believed that a powerful navy was essential for securing maritime trade routes, protecting colonies, and projecting power internationally (Foundations: From Geopolitics, n.d.). Similarly, Mackinder in his geopolitical 'Heartland Theory,' argued that control over the Heartland would give the controlling power significant advantages in global geopolitics (Foundations: From Geopolitics, n.d.). The same strategies can be applied in the case of space diplomacy.

Dr Thomas S Cole proposed the idea of using celestial bodies, such as the moon and asteroids, as "stepping stones" to facilitate the expansion of human activities beyond Earth (Foundations: From Geopolitics, n.d.). This aligns with the idea of 'colonisation' of Mars and utilising its resources as proposed by billionaire Elon Musk (Sankaran, 2023). This vision, which is aimed at saving humanity in times of crisis, is set to bring in a new world order and political system of governance altogether in the coming future.

Conclusion

The emergence of astropolitics marks a significant evolution in the realm of modern geopolitics. As territorial boundaries become less defining, the spatial arena of outer space has gained prominence, leading to the birth of astropolitics. This paradigm shift is highlighted by the increasing politicisation of space programs and policies, both in the public and private sectors, demonstrating the criticality of strategic application in the global landscape.

The historical context of astropolitics is rooted in the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, culminating in an arms race that transcended Earth's boundaries into the realm of space. The achievements and strategic advancements made during this period set the stage for a new era of political dynamics, profoundly influencing international relations. In the contemporary multipolar world, space exploration has diversified beyond the historical dichotomy, with various nations actively

engaged in endeavours driven by scientific, commercial, and strategic imperatives. This has given rise to a complex web of interactions where scientific ventures in space may inadvertently become arenas for geopolitical confrontations. Moreover, the commercialisation of space by private entities introduces a capitalist-oriented dimension to astropolitics, potentially leading to future disputes over celestial resources. The development of space governance and international cooperation mechanisms, exemplified by the Outer Space Treaty and the UNOOSA, highlights the growing recognition of the need for collective frameworks in managing outer space activities. Simultaneously, the militarisation of space introduces new security concerns, emphasizing the necessity for responsible and regulated use of this strategic domain.

Considering these emerging challenges and prospects, the future of Astropolitics promises to be a dynamic arena for geopolitical diplomacy and strategic manoeuvring. As humanity ventures further into space, the governance, security, and utilisation of this final frontier will undoubtedly shape the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century and beyond.

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Recontextualising the 'Colonial': Unveiling the Indian Constitution's Cosmopolitan Tapestry

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Today, as I sit down to pen down my thoughts on the lovely article by Mr Rangra, something rings the doorbell of my mind – Terrence Ball (2004) called the discipline of political science a "backward-looking enterprise" – for it is etched to the core of the discipline to glance through the Archean classics in search of solutions to even the most contemporaneous of all problems, for Platonian dialectics and Aristotelian logic being a 'living past' – and this, according to him, is not a *vieux jeu* obsession with the bygone past, but a testament to its academic richness, as it is compelling to visualise how the discipline situates itself between the authority derived from the past and its utility for the future.

Rangra (2023), in his text, quoted Mr Nariman, who "invoked Ambedkar's remarks" by looking back to the constituent assembly debates. His methodology, thus, involves a sign of healthy mutualism with the constitutional debates of the past – the very essence of the discipline of political science that Ball (2004) talked about – travelling back in time to situate Ambedkarite arguments to fill in the jig-saw of the present – which, though served the purpose of his argument, opens a new, unconventional front – of the 'Indian constitutional culture', being a backward-looking enterprise, where the original text and the original debates being frequently invoked in its creative reinterpretation to solve a contemporary problem. This is not only limited to Mr Rangra's article or Mr Nariman's comment but is omnipresent – from drafting a judgement to arguing for a cause in a media debate, the original text and debates are vigorously referred to.

Constitutionalising Indian Culture

Indian constitutional culture is not a fancy term I used to make this text look more 'academic', but it is in sync with the observations of Madhav Khosla (2020), who writes, "The Indian Constitution has not only endured but also consolidated into the Indian psyche, to the extent that it has become a part of the national identity" – he argues how every debate and every problem is now a 'constitutional issue', with the debaters on both the sides of the table take recourse to the constitution to buttress their views – however contradictory it may be.

This, which I would like to call 'constitutionalisation of the Indian way of life', involves its backward-looking disposition, which Mr. Nariman resorts to, to support his view. Also, Mr. Sengupta, when he hailed the constitution as a text to engage with, only solidified the coveted positioning of the constitutional ethos in the Indian way of life. More importantly, the ending remarks quoted by Rangra

(2023), where a constitutional recourse is taken to support two sets of mutually exclusive arguments – of the Constitution promoting or having no role in putting an excessive burden on the judicial shoulders is again a testament to Khosla's (2020) observation.

Indian Constitution: A Social Touchstone

In the beginning, I drew a reference to Ball (2014), who interpreted the backward-looking disposition of the discipline of political science as its biggest strength. This reminds me of something – Popper once said that "Western thought can be Platonic or anti-Platonic, but cannot be non-Platonic" (as cited in Dai, 2012). Similarly, an Indian, now, can either be pro-Constitution or anti-Constitution (remember, Mr Sengupta himself said that the text is not sacrosanct), but can hardly be oblivious to the constitution. This is the biggest testament to its unique positioning in the Indian society – Indian society, being the interface between the Indian civilisation (representing two thousand years of civilisational 'continuity') and the Indian nation (representing the element of 'change) – as Khosla (2020) says, the Constitution is now a "touchstone", which finds a way in even the most mundane of all disputes – as, for instance, I remember my friend invoking Article 19 (1) (a) when he was asked to zip his mouth – and I'm sure, we, in our lives, have at least once invoked the constitutional provisions – mostly 14, 19, and 21 – to win arguments with our peers and loved ones – representing what Redfield would call the devolution of ideas from the great tradition (the mental or moral aspect of Indian society, including values and norms, which, according to Austin, is embodied in the constituent assembly) to the little tradition (the material aspect of Indian society, manifested in the day-to-day lives of the masses).

Riggs and the English Orchestra

When K Hanumanthaiyya lamented that he had to hear the symphony of an English orchestra, whilst he wished for the music of veena of sitar (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949), he would've never dreamed of how this 'English orchestra' would find a substantial position at the very heart of the Indian socio-cultural ethos. If the Constitution of India is as colonial as it is claimed to be, untouched by the very essence of India, we would have been like any other postcolonial country out there – with what Fred Riggs (1960) called "prismatic societies", where the constitution and written laws are so alien to the masses that it miserably fails to integrate with the social ethos of a country – and as I previously argued, the Constitution of India is now an inseparable element of the Indian culture, closely linked to its very ethos, that the idea of modern India will perish with the annihilation of this text. Yes, it is not sacrosanct, but it is supreme. Yes, it is supreme, yet not infallible, thus, as rightly said by Sengupta, it is something to be engaged with – and more importantly, a force to reckon with (Rangra, 2023).

A Heavily Descriptive Text or a Labyrinth of Normativity?

Sengupta engages with the text by critiquing it on three levels, as succinctly summarised by Rangra (2023) – I will go one by one. One, Sengupta claims that the Constitution is colonial, as it is extraordinarily descriptive and prescriptive, based on the assumption that Indians are inferior to

Europeans. I will counter this argument with two arguments – one at the theoretical level and the other at the practical. One of the potent criticisms of the Constitution of India is its complexity – which, in my opinion, has to be demystified for the masses to understand. Even the most learned judges could not grasp the essence of the constitution – at least that is what the inconsistencies in judicial interpretations tell us.

For instance, for a simple question of whether article 13 of the Constitution is a limitation on the amending powers of the parliament under article 368, the Supreme Court, in Shankari Prasad vs Union of India (1951) held that constitutional amendments are immune from Article 13, and was further upheld in Sajjan Singh vs State of Rajasthan (1965). However, in Golak Nath vs State of Punjab (1967), the Supreme Court outmanoeuvred the previous verdict to state that Article 13 limits the amending power of the parliament. Nevertheless, in Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala (1973), the Supreme Court upheld Shankari Prasad's (1951) verdict to declare that the Parliament, while exercising article 368, can amend any part of the Indian constitution, including part III, and Article 13 is not a limitation on this power. [However, in the same case, the Basic Structure Doctrine was fashioned, which acts as a limitation on the amending powers of the Parliament.]

Thus, given the 'extraordinary descriptive nature' of the Constitution of India, even the puisne judges are unable to capture its essence – so, how is it colonial, as claimed by Sengupta? Even today as novel interpretations of various provisions of the Constitution of India pop up, we cannot help but marvel at the hieroglyphic subtext hiding behind these 'extraordinarily verbose descriptions', smiling to the puisne excavators in the dark, waiting to be unearthed and reunited with the Indian psyche.

A Text for Indians or a Text for India?

At the theoretical level, I would argue that Mr Sengupta's observations of the constitution being a verbose text written for the 'inferior Indians' (Rangra, 2023) to read and understand essentially attaches a narrowly local context to this universalist document located at the crossroads of global constitutional landscape. To elaborate upon my assertions, I would love to situate the constitutional developments in India at the heart of the Indian national movement. It is indisputable that the Constitution of India is the result of culmination of all socio-political developments in India since the creation of regional political associations – to be precise, the Bangbhasha Prakashika Sabha (patronised by Rammohan Roy) in 1836 and the Zamindari Association (1838) – through the creation of INC in 1885, and all socio-political reforms since then – the mass movements, successive reforms, and finally, freedom.

Indian scholars, from the philosophers of the bygone ages to the modern thinkers always placed a premium on 'cosmopolitanism'. From the upanishadic thoughts of *vasudeva kutumbakam* to Vivekananda's unity of the Brahman, from Tagore's cosmopolitan humanism to Gandhian unity of humanity, from Roy celebrating constitutional developments across the world to Narayana Guru preaching 'one caste, one religion, and one God for humanity', the Indian freedom struggle (both social and political) has always been cosmopolitan and all-encompassing. Granville Austin (2021) called the Indian Constitution a "social document" – but for me, it is a 'value document', something that

encompasses all of humanity – a value document that any global citizen can relate to, and claim that this is my constitution. Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Madhav Khosla (2016) declare the Indian Constitution to be cosmopolitan, not just because of its commitment to the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but because of its unique situatedness "in the crossroads of global constitutional law", and according to them, from its promulgation, the Constitution of India has been a "flagbearer of universalism".

The Right Interpretation is the Cosmopolitan

A simple example that visualises the cosmopolitanism of the Indian Constitution would be the judicial interpretations of the Supreme Court, which often takes recourse to international jurisprudence to 'rightly' interpret the Indian constitutional provisions – for instance, Munn vs Illinois to expand the fringes of Article 21 to read 'life' as 'human-like existence', the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to fabricate the coveted Vishaka guidelines, and the subtle references to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights while delivering Hadiya judgement (Shafin Jahan vs. Ashokan KM) or striking down Section 377 (Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India). It is an ecstasy to see how the Indian constitutional law deliquesces with international jurisprudence – with both reinforcing each other as inseparable parts of the same whole, descending into a composing oblivious trance, thus proving the arguments of Mehta and Khosla (2016).

On similar lines, Julian Ku and John Yoo (2013) expand upon Anne-Marie Slaughter's (2005) concept of 'new sovereignty' through 'a transnational network of government officials' by adding:
"... Judges on some national courts increasingly... cite precedents from other countries and international tribunals, stitching together, in countries that respect international law, something like a transnational body of law in discrete areas..." (p. 210).

However, Ku and Yoo (2013) present it as evidence of eroding state sovereignty in the era of globalisation, by antagonising international jurisprudence vis-à-vis domestic constitutional law and legal structure. So, it becomes imperative to question whether the 'sovereignty' of the Indian state is under any kind of threat from this 'transnational body of law', especially since we've seen some instances where the Supreme Court interpreted the Indian Constitution from the light of extra-territorial jurisprudence. As I argued before, backed by the observations of Mehta and Khosla (2016), the proper way to interpret Indian Constitution is by situating it in the crossroads of international constitutional law and jurisprudence – it is not something that compromises with the constitutional value of sovereignty, but when read with Article 51(c) (respect for international law) and the cosmopolitan nature of the text, mirrors the very nature of the Indian society itself – "Whatever is here, may be found elsewhere; what is not, cannot be found anywhere else" Mahabharata (18:56-33) – in simple words, 'India is the microcosm of the universe'.

In sum, rather than being a text for Indians, the Constitution is a text for India – and India being essentially universalistic, makes the text cosmopolitan. Thus, any claims of the Constitution of India being overly descriptive for 'mediocre Indians' to read and understand occludes the very cosmopolitan

nature of this text, as any such claim bases itself upon the presumption that the text is narrowly local, ignoring the universalist elements that flood its spirit.

Nature of the Social Contract: Beyond Pinched Prescriptions

In his monumental essay on Enlightenment, Kant (1784, 2012) says that a contract is inherently void that "binds itself and ordain to put the succeeding [generations] into such a condition... by obligating [them] by oath to a certain unchangeable symbol" – it is, according to him, "a crime against human nature" – and indeed, the Constitution of India is neither that symbol nor that contract that bound the Indians of the 1950s and the successive generations to itself. For instance, consider Ambedkar, who, when asked why the word 'socialist' could not make it to the preamble alongside sovereign, democratic, and republic, replied:
"What should be the policy of the state, how the society should be organised in its social and economic side are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether" (Bhattacharya, 2016).

Khosla and Mehta (2016) say that the Indian national movement has always been self-conscious "to be free, not bound by a particular tradition or a specific social contract". In simple words, the Indian national movement was all-encompassing and universal – it was not bound by any ideology – it was an all-class movement – the capitalists and the workers, communists and the capitalists, men and women, rich and poor, tribals and urban folk, Hindus and Muslims, peasants and zamindars – all mortgaged their lives to breathe in a free India. This all-encompassing nature of the Indian national movement resulted in laying the universalist foundations of the Indian Constitution.

It is universal not only because of the nature of national movement, but also because of the fact that it was not a product of a revolution, unlike the French constitution, which bound an entire society and its future generations to the values of laicite, French idealism, and homogenous nationalism that now, in the age of globalisation, Paris is struggling to keep pace with multiculturalism (consider Burqa ban); or the American Constitution that prescribed the values of merchant-capitalism to its existing and upcoming generations (that at one point of time, uttering the word 'communism' was as good as sedition in the USA) – rather, it is a document that aimed to give birth to a revolution – a revolution that shook the very foundations of medieval feudalism, paving the way for constitutionalisation of Indian way of life, that Ambedkar had dreamt of long ago – the land of Buddha, where the triumvirate of liberty, equality, and fraternity exist in harmony with the cosmopolitan elements of the Indian constitution (Chakrabarti, 1986).

This 'non-prescriptive' nature of the Indian Constitution (in opposition to Sengupta's claim that the Indian Constitution is highly prescriptive), can be seen on multiple fronts, of which I would like to quote one: this is the same constitution that saw two polar phases of the Indian economy – the Nehruvian dirigiste and the new liberalised economy. The same constitution presided over our tumultuous journey from centralised planning to the triumph of market forces; everything was done in

a day, and we did not even have to amend the constitution for that. In other words, the Constitution of India has just spelt out the foundations of the nation – and has given the steering to the parliament without any prescriptions. If we can surf through what economists call the 'landmark event in post-Independent Indian history' with the very same constitution, how is it prescriptive?

Like An Accordion Capable of Contextual Stretches and Compressions in Meaning

Unlike the American Constitution, the Constitution of India can be changed by the parliament according to the caprices of time, and over a hundred amendments since its inception simply testifies the same. But it is not that simple. I am not arguing that the flexibility of the Constitution, allowing for interventions through amendments when social realities change, makes it non-prescriptive. I argue that at any point in time, the Indian Constitution is universal, beyond any ideologies, and has never bound future generations to its principles. For instance, consider the definition of 'state' under Article 12, which reads:
"...'The State' includes the Government and Parliament of India and the Government and the Legislature of each of the States, and all local or other authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India..."

I would like to stress the expression "other authorities" here, while the traditional expression of 'state' is limited to the central, state, and local governments, article 12 is 'non-prescriptive' enough so as to accommodate institutions like LIC (Life Insurance Corporation of India), ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation), and SAIL (Steel Authority of India Limited) in the broader fabric of 'state' – not only it accommodates the present institutional structure, fifty years from now if the concept of 'state' itself changes in a hypothetical situation where the government delegates the responsibility of governance to civil society organisations and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), or even if a new institution altogether comes up that performs the functions of state, radically altering the present-day nation-state structure, the Indian Constitution, without the need of any amendments, is ready to welcome the new change, however radical it might sound to be.

Today, successive judicial interpretations have come up with more than fifty primary and secondary rights stemming from Article 21 of the Constitution, including the very recent 'Right to Privacy', which, in the first place, had no 'explicit mention' in the original text. If more than fifty different rights – including those of bodily integrity, death with dignity, travelling abroad, a clean environment, marrying the person of one's choice, eating the food of one's choice, livelihood, education, transgender rights, and more – can find a place in the text without tweaking its original provisions, the Constitution of India is, as Ananth Padmanabhan (2016) comments, an "accordion... capable of contextual stretches and compressions in meaning". It is, within its present structure, capable of accommodating any major changes in the polity, economy, and society. So, how is it 'prescriptive'? What is it prescribing?

Accusations and Exonerations

Now I come to Sengupta's second and third charges that revolve around the 'un-Indian' or colonial nature of the administrative structure (Rangra, 2023), which, for Tagore, was "untouched by human contact" (Rao, 2021), and for Gandhi, was characterised by a "disconnect with traditional India" (Rao, 2021); and the positioning of colonial policies like preventive detention in Part-III of the Constitution, which reinforces the saying that 'what the Constitution gives with one hand (fundamental rights), it takes away with the other'. Instead of considering these as proof of the colonial nature of the Indian Constitution, I would like to see them as its criticisms, for, as I mentioned before, the Indian Constitution is not a contract that binds the successive generations to its yoke, but a flexible document that can accommodate novel interpretations with or without amendments, in accordance with the prevailing socio-political-economic needs.

Rangra (2023) quoted Mr Nariman saying the "amendments cannot be foreseen" – yes, it cannot be foreseen as it is not a contract that prescribes a particular social order – it can be changed as and when the need arises – so, is it the so-called colonial spirit of the constitution that has kept the bureaucracy 'untouched by human contact' and the draconian laws of preventive detention amidst the Bill of Rights, or is it the lack of willingness to alter it to the needs of the changed Indian social milieu? If Mr Gupta (Rangra, 2023) can exonerate the constitution from the charges of burdening the judiciary and shift the charges to the government's incessant desire for litigation, why is the colonial nature of the constitution being used as a mask to cover the need for legislative reforms and political enlightenment?

We the People of India

Years ago, Laxmi Narayan Sahu claimed that the Indian Constitution has no manifest relationship with the fundamental spirit of India. If so, then who is "We the People" etched in golden letters in the opening lines of the preamble? Is it, as Loknath Mishra would ask, another "slavish surrender to the West" (The Museum of British Colonialism, 2022), as it is another line picked up from the Constitution of the USA? I doubt it. As I argued in this piece, the Constitution of India is not an alien text; it is now an intrinsic part of Indian culture, or its very essence. The constitutionalisation of the Indian way of life, as Khosla (2020) explained, makes us rethink the essence of "We the People".

Critics say that the text is the 'Constitution of the Congress', for Austin (2021) himself said that the constituent assembly was a "one-party assembly in a one-party country", but Rajeev Bhargava (2013) was right in situating his argument in the proper context, where Austin (2021) mentioned *en passe* that "Congress is India, and India is Congress", to be read with Rajni Kothari's (1964) conclusions of Congress being the widest social coalition, which was nothing less than a mini-India, as rightly pointed out by Austin (2021), 'a microcosm in action', where thoughts and aspirations of every visible and invisible Indian had found a place to dwell in the 'conscious, cosmic chaos known as India', and reading all these together, we will start appreciating the observations of the Supreme Court of India while delivering the Kesavananda Bharati judgement (1973) – "we have to accept 'We the People' as 'We the People'" – thereby demolishing any claims of the constitution being a beautifully-engineered colonial construct.

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The Emerging Paradigm: Examining the Role of State and Big Tech Firms as Political Units in the 'Tech-Era'

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Introduction

Our ability to craft and innovate tools has been a defining factor in the evolution of the material world as we know it today. While we lack the highly entrenched instinctive behaviour that certain other species boast, our analytical reasoning skill has aided us in gleaning sundry 'techniques' from nature, giving us the title of 'technologists' from the beginning of the evolution process itself (Buchanan, 2023). This shows that technology has always been a part of human endeavour, irrespective of any particular epoch, thus throwing away the attempt to define a particular era as the 'Tech-Era' into the shadows of futility. However, the term 'Tech-Era', in all its appearances in this work, points to the era of, inter alia, information technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and data economy - the period post-mid-20th century. In this 'Great Tech Game', it is climacteric to understand the new position, role, and relevance of the state. The question of the relevance of the state as a political institution arises from the recent emergence of private entities, referred to here as Big Tech firms, whose dynamic influence in governance and in the interaction between people and the state has transmogrified at an exponential rate (Suri, 2022). This calls for a paradigm characterised by a system of sharing power between these two entities. For developing such a paradigm, analysing the challenges posed by the big tech players to the state at various levels would be helpful.

The Expanding Role and Authority of the Big Tech Players

A detailed historical analysis of the evolution of the world order shows that this conflict between private actors and the state is a continuous phenomenon, manifesting in different forms in different epochs (Suri, 2022). From the magnates of steel and telegraph lines in the previous era, today we have mighty companies bringing disruptive innovations with their influence and presence sprawling across the globe. However, the power grab we are witnessing now is occurring on a much larger scale than the previous ones. The reason for this can be inferred from the oft-repeated description of the Big Tech firms - the magnitude of influence, power, and wealth they possess, which, if rounded off to a value (if at all quantifiable), would give a number never seen before.

While each epoch is characterised by a conflict (of varying intensities) between the state and the private actors, the new disruptive force of innovation, materialised, and commercialised by private parties, is a product of the existing political sentiments of that period. To take the present case, the rise of capitalist

liberal democracies in the 20th century paved the way for technological development, which in turn sowed the seeds for the rise of the 'Big Tech Companies' with Apple, Amazon, and Google coming to the limelight in the late-20th century, and Facebook making its breakthrough in the early 21st century (Lindman *et al*., 2023). However, progress in this direction has led to a social order where a few companies exercise monopolistic authority over other companies while exerting influence over large swathes of people; this stands in stark contrast to the ideals of liberal democracy. This contradiction would be dealt with in further detail in the second part of the work.

Over the years, the Big Tech firms have expanded their horizons. The fact that they have accumulated vast resources over a very short period of time is an astounding reality. In the midst of this ballyhoo, their actions have shaped their role, from mere profit-oriented corporations to important political entities at par with (or better than) the state in terms of information and influence. Let me provide an illustration from the book, *The Great Tech Game* by Anirudh Suri - consider the 'Forbes List - The World's Most Powerful People': after the first four positions held by political leaders, Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, occupies the fifth place, while other 'tech pioneers' like Bill Gates and Larry Page hold the seventh and tenth positions, respectively. In short, three of the ten most powerful leaders globally are from Big Tech firms. How this power is deployed to influence the people and politics of the world is beyond one's imagination (Suri, 2022). Their influence is wide enough to effect sweeping political changes, from influencing the public mindset in the run-up to elections (Romero, 2018) to changing the way people see themselves and others (Tova *et al.,* 2023). To gain better clarity on the authority exercised by these companies, it would be helpful to highlight a few dimensions in which these companies impact the people and politics on both a domestic and global scale.

Replacing the 'Fourth Estate'

This is a period when the platforms created by these private actors are the most used and relied-on sources of information. They have almost replaced the 'fourth estate', that is, the press, and have created a 'fifth estate' for themselves (Greene, 2018). This new source of information is more robust, faster, and broader, but at the same time, it is unreliable and often pliable at the cost of the right to free speech. The curbing of free speech often happens at the cost of its own founding purpose (Kleinman, 2016).

This simply indicates the unrestrained power exercised by these companies; while the press used to be an essential check on the actions of both public and private actors. Today, we have a case where the dominant private actors themselves are the primary sources of information (Greene, 2018).

Another important aspect is the quality and nature of the news and information disseminated. As popularly believed, our style of preference is often influenced by the negativity bias. This inherent bias in the minds of human beings has been exploited by the Big Tech companies to shape the design and flavour of their products, that is, information. The way information is presented to us is hence structured accordingly, giving politically charged, negative, and shocking news a higher position in the scroll-down list. As Lucie Green pithily writes in her book, *Silicon States: The Power and Politics of Big*

Tech and What It Means for Our Future, the substitutes for the press we have today are dependent on "populism and shock value" (Greene, 2018).

Influencing the Political Atmosphere

The most ostensible way in which the Big Tech companies influence the complex ground of politics is by providing political leaders with a novel dimension of campaigning and advertising. The massive success of this kind of election campaign in the 2008 and the 2012 US presidential elections by Barack Obama is a testimony to the effectiveness of this method (Pilkington, 2012). While such a strategy might appear harmless or even welcome in the political sense, the sore part arises when this strategy metamorphoses into a system of close, business-style cooperation between the political parties and the private players. What this entails is a free flow of information covering minute behavioural data of the people, often transgressing the boundaries of the citizens' privacy. Further, misinformation campaigns provoking communal violence and perpetuating skewed perspectives engender political ruckus (Romero, 2018).

Citizens as Victims of Surveillance Capitalism

The Big Tech firms' hold over the dissemination of information and their ability to influence the political atmosphere of a country places people directly at the receiving end. In this era, data is the 'new' fuel, and these private actors are the repositories as well as the beneficiaries of this fuel. In such a system of 'surveillance capitalism', as propounded by the Harvard professor, Shoshana Zuboff (Zuboff, 2019), people are seen as mere sources of data. The data, thus extracted, is further employed by these companies to manipulate the collective behaviour of society to advance their own positions as profit reaping Big Tech firms. Ultimately, this leads us back to the question of right to privacy and the issue of tactical manipulation of people's behaviour, including, but not limited to, the stark drop in people's attention span as a result of purposeful addictive technologies crafted by these companies (Hari, 2022).

These dimensions of influence exerted by the Big Tech companies have placed them in an elevated niche in the political society - at a position on par with the state. However, some might argue that the profit-driven mentality of these companies makes them a misfit for comparison with the state, which is altruistic in nature. Over the years, they have accumulated huge profits and established themselves as the forerunners in their arena. But at the same time, they have also contributed significantly in the form of job creation, corporate social responsibility and so on. Take the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, which wrecked the global economy and engendered social havoc. These companies donated several million dollars to assist the state in calibrating relief efforts. They have also invested in upscaling scientific research and emergency responses. The creation of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator in the World Economic Forum's COVID Action Platform by Mastercard, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust is a suitable example in this regard (Chene et al, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognise that the increased popularity and influence of Big Tech firms in light of the pandemic is a double-edged sword for the common people. While acts of donation and

public aid by these companies have improved their image in the public domain, their rising power, and policy-influencing presence could strengthen their dangerous role as lobbying forces (Chene, et al, 2018). Therefore, analysing the interaction between the state and the Big Tech firms is climacteric.

Understanding the Interaction Between the State and the Big Tech Companies

As discussed in the initial part of the previous chapter, a conflict between the two important political units - state and non-state actors, existing at that time, is a recurring phenomenon in several phases of history. Today, while unravelling the friction between these two entities, that is the state and the big private companies, we should not assume that the latter is a successor of the dominant private actor of the previous epoch. The reason lies in the simple fact that the disruptive private forces of an era are a product of the global political sentiments of that era, and are not the 'progenies' of their counterparts in the preceding period. Nor are the previous dominant actors entirely supplanted by the new private actors. Instead, the new player is just an additional layer to the already existing set of various private actors who were the defining forces in the previous epochs (Suri, 2022). Hence, a fair framework for operation of both the entities cannot be gleaned from a regulatory mechanisms of the previous generation.

However, certain generalisations and patterns akin to the interaction between them would be an interesting matter to deal with. Professor Theda Skocpol, in her article, *'Bringing the State Back in: A Report on Current Comparative Research on the Relationship between States and Social Structures',* describes the relational approach and how it was employed by Stephen Krasner, Alfred Stepan, and Peter Katzenstein in their respective works (Skocpol, 1985). In this approach, the state is considered in relation to the then socioeconomic and political atmosphere, pictured along with non-state actors with particular interests (Skocpol, 1985).

The Current Political and Socioeconomic Environment

The current socioeconomic and political atmosphere is heavily centred around technological progress, especially in terms of AI and semiconductors. In the global scenario, new alliances, partnerships, and projects between countries to advance their own technological status are not uncommon. The huge expectations and cheers post the signing of deals between India and the US in the areas of AI, 5G or 6G technology, Open RAN (Radio Access Network), and so on are a testimony to the growing significance of technological growth and digital literacy (Manohar, 2023).

With the emergence of these companies backed by new trends and ideas, we are witnessing a massive metamorphosis of the industrial economy into the 'digital economy', with a different structure, new market leaders, and novel challenges (Suri, 2022). As a result, tech-driven markets and e-commerce are the new destinations of economic activities, with things happening at a busier and more rapid pace than in ordinary physical markets. Further, data, an intangible object, whose significance is greater than that of any other commodity, is the new fuel of the economy. Such changes in the economy extend to the

socioeconomic front as a provocative force, driving existing forms of inequality to a more deplorable stage while at the same time paving the way for new forms of unemployment (Lohr, 2022).

Apart from these, the unprecedented rise in technology and the allied sectors has transformed the labour market too. While technology was supposed to be a labour-enhancing force, it has, over time, paved the way for replacing several jobs. But to look on the positive side, it is equally valid that this development has facilitated the sprouting of new employment opportunities. Along with new opportunities in the labour market, technology, as a force of change, has gone further to even influence the manner of working of professionals. Alas! This includes the transgression of work time into the realm of family time with the advent of the digitalisation of workplaces (Hari, 2022). In short, the Big Tech companies are finding themselves as a strong, independent political unit with their tentacles of influence, and control reaching over to the economy, social order, governance, and ultimately to the minds of the people. In this political and socioeconomic environment, throwing light on how the Big Tech firms see themselves as a political unit would help push the analysis of the issue to a higher pedestal.

The Political Status of the Big Tech Companies

To put this in a single sentence, "With great power comes great responsibility." As Brad Smith and Carl Ann Brown argue in their book, '*Tools & Weapons: The promise and the peril of the digital age',* the Big Tech companies, having created a new world order founded on technology, bear the responsibility to address the issues that sprout from this new order (Smith & Browne, 2019). Many scholars have attempted to deliberate on a pragmatic system based on a win-win framework between the state and these companies. For instance, going by the classical liberal theory, the government could function in a limited manner for fostering public good, while the Big Tech companies would be economic actors (Lindman *et al*., 2023). There would be a bright line of division in their roles, and their operation would be characterised by exclusivity towards each other.

However, an inevitable question that arises from the assumption about the Big Tech firms' political responsibility is whether these companies have any characteristic features that make them an effective political institution. After all, these companies are run by a group of highly educated men, which does not constitute a representative group. It violates the basic principle of the modern state, that is, the nation-state – the 'principle of representation' (Suresha, 2015). The answer is that it cannot act as a state but as a distinct and parallel political institution.

While the arguments and observations posited above might ostensibly portend a new reality where these companies stand as alternate, equally strong candidates as the state, the fact is that the companies cannot simply take up the role of state. Political science scholars might have had the tendency to shout this out at the beginning of the article itself. This is because the state is a body that exercises legitimate coercive authority (Peter, 2010), and the power it exercises has a source, say the constitution adopted by citizens in modern liberal democracies. Further, it must have a defined geographical purview such that it has power over the people residing within that area. On the other hand, these companies' powers are

incidental to their unprecedented popularity and economic prowess; these powers are not innate in them, as opposed to the case of the state. Ergo, the question is not about replacing the state; rather, it is about coexistence with the institution of the state.

Take the case of Facebook, a company, or a "community" — Mark Zuckerberg's propensity to call it a community indicates his wish to elevate Facebook from the status of a company to a larger (political) unit (Abrams, 2017). As everyone knows, Facebook functions on the basis of certain rules and regulations that it has set for itself, in addition to certain other rules based on the country in question. Further, it ensures its users certain rights, including protection of one's privacy (Meta, 2023). However, it is evident that these rights and protection measures are characteristically different from those assured by the state. While in a democratic system, citizens are both the beneficiaries and the authors of these rights, in the case of Facebook and other such platforms, users are excluded from the rule-making procedure. (Shadmy, 2019)

The Big Tech Companies as Superstate Structures

Having said that, what is the nature of this other distinct and parallel political institution, mentioned earlier? The Big Tech firms as a super-state structure could be an answer. To see these companies as super-state institutions like the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), and so on might appear far-fetched at the outset. However, it is very evident from the nature and extent of power exercised by the Big Tech firms that these companies almost have a similar impact on a state's sovereignty and its subjects as that of institutions like the EU and WB. However, the rub is here - the discipline of political science is yet to expand from its age-old central theme of 'state' so as to understand the super-state structures, including the Big Tech companies, which mostly came into the scene after the advent of neo-liberal capitalism, post 1970s (Suresha, 2015). The congruence of such a conception might also lie in the similarity of questions arising from the concepts of the superstate and the political nature of Big Tech firms. Both concepts raise questions regarding legitimacy, the state derives its legitimacy from representation, but that is not the case with the superstates and the companies (Suresha, 2015). The same is the case with the intrusion of these bodies into the sovereignty of the state.

However, this comparison can be problematic. A teleological analysis of superstates shows that these institutions are for the mutual benefit of the countries that come under their purview (Suresha, 2015). However, in the case of Big Tech firms, it is about increasing their profit and popularity (Clarke, 2021). Hence, it is technically impossible to fit Big Tech companies into the definition of superstates.

Navigating the political status of Big Tech firms can be tumultuous if it is done by attempting to compare it with existing institutions within the political structure. A way of solving this quandary can be to perceive these companies as a novel entity on its own in the political system with the capability to influence the people to a large extent, while possessing the powers similar in quantum, but different in nature and source to those of the state.

Conclusion

Today, the institution of governance, that is, the state, is facing an apparent existential crisis with the advent of mighty, transnational companies, collectively termed the Big Tech companies. With their purview and control expanding over millions of people and their philanthropic contributions (Maschewski & Nosthoff, 2022), and seeing an increase in recent times, many have been auguring a novel political system with these companies enjoying the force of a state. With their rise, they have acquired new social responsibilities and a different political status. On examining the political status of these new players, it is evident that they are indeed novel, not only in terms of the nature of power exercised by them, but also in the way they compete and interact with the state. Moreover, it is too early to establish a permanent regulatory framework to curb the powers of these new political entrants, as it is not possible to extrapolate how their political powers will unfold in the future. The only feasible solution is to accommodate the new players within the political arena, and any such solution can only be of a stopgap nature because of the impossibility of accounting for future transmogrification or, perhaps, even the degeneration of their political standpoint. Ergo, time and effort must be invested in studying the true nature of the political niche occupied by the Big Tech companies and then, subsequently, carefully charting out a formal or informal separation of powers between these companies and the state.

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Confluence Over Consensus: Reconciling Participation In Deliberative Democracy

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"The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence, and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. It is not belief that these things are complete but that if given a show they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action."
(Dewey, 1932)

Abstract

The paper will try to connect John Dewey with the ideals of both deliberative and participatory democracy via the theory of communication. To show Dewey's deliberative side of the project, the writings of Jürgen Habermas will be analysed, wherein the question is whether Dewey anticipated the idea of publicness and communication in the writings of Habermas on deliberation. This will be a way of analysing what Dewey regarded as deliberation against what he did not. In particular, Dewey, being sympathetic about the deliberative aspects, went beyond this approach to claim congruence between the social and political with the aim of highlighting inequalities among people and securing social self-development. This line of argument will help construct a view of Dewey's writings about the ideal democracy, wherein the role of communication is not to build consensus but confluence, the mutual recognition of issues, where reason is not prioritised. This will be reflective of his participatory approach, which is based on the notion that individuality is social. So, the task in this paper will be to establish grounds for searching the moral philosophy for an individual's participation and inclusivity via the ideal of democracy.

Introduction

John Dewey's focus on multiplicity paves the way to correct exclusiveness embedded in deliberative discourse. This shows how, while retaining the elements of deliberation, one can work towards fuller participation in social processes. First, it is vital to note what Habermas and Dewey meant by communication in the public sphere and what makes their ideals different. Thus, the aim of this will be to address what Dewey's ideal for deliberation is. The paper further highlights the tussle between a rational critical approach and reflective agency. The former is embedded in Habermas's communication, whereas the latter is in Dewey's.

It should be noted that the concept of the public sphere advocated by both is not the concern of this paper. Rather, the aim is to highlight the module through which communication occurs. For this,

Dewey's concepts of reflectivity, continual changes, and the idea of growth to advocate a superior theory of communication will be utilised.

Did Dewey Anticipate Habermas's Communicative realm?

Habermas puts strict limits on democracy. The ideal of democracy, for him, was restricted to basic political decisions through the route of discursive will formation. Furthermore, consensus is important. The key concern of Habermas was how political action can occur in rational critical discourse via communication. Communication, for him, produces norms, and norms establish laws. Laws are thus reflective of procedures of communication. For Habermas, the ideal public sphere is where 'rational-critical debate' about public issues is conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions (Calhoun, 2017). His public use of reason is grounded in normative principles of openness and rational political discourse (Habermas, 1992). The requirements of intersubjectivity provide the basis for norms directed towards the notions of justice (Habermas, 1994). He identified a more or less stable zone of publicness – 'the public sphere' – located between civil society and the state, grounded in the former and addressing the latter (Calhoun, 2017). For him, it is 'communicative rationality' in the public sphere that results in consensus. By following normative procedures, the agreements based on 'reason' will stand reliable (Whipple, 2005). Habermas believed that "coming to an understanding means that participants in communication reach an agreement concerning the validity of an utterance; agreement is the intersubjective recognition of the validity claim the speaker raises for it" (p. 168). Thus, his task was democratic will formation via deliberation. This was his discourse theory of democracy. The public sphere was to provide inputs to the state as well as parliamentary decision-making processes. His great emphasis on rational discourse embedded in universalisation elevates certain norms at the expense of other modes or expressions. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas showed how, in the 18th century, the role of the public sphere was prominent in articulating demands and checking the arbitrariness of the state (1992). He analysed a mutation — from a rational discursive, public sphere inhabiting consensus to the practice of consumption headed by corporations and dominant elites. Citizens became mere consumers. This changed the recipe of public opinion. His idealisation of the bourgeois public sphere opens the door for criticisms like domination by certain people. But critics argue Habermas himself falls into his own criticisms of communicative distortions. That is to say, for him, the advent of system-level distortions in communication hampers the formation of free will. Also, critics have argued that communicative distortions take place even when priority is given to certain rationalities and consensus-building. This is to say, he neglected the positive impact differences of opinion can have in a society. "Consensus, in a liberal-democratic society is – and always will be – the expression of a hegemony and the crystallisation of power relations" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 49). For Habermas, deliberation will result in reasonable outcomes only when the 'ideal discourse' is followed (p. 88). However, the critical-rational debate is prone to manipulation because of power relations in public communication. Thus, Mouffe criticised him for not considering the role of passion and manipulation in critical rational debate. Another critic of Habermas, Shalin, notes how he is not open to the idea of 'constructive properties of dissent' in the public sphere (Whipple, 2005). In fact, Gutmann, Cohen, and other deliberative theorists recognise the need for alternative modes of discourse, but neglect the need for reflectivity and dissent in public

discourse. This is the point where one can find Dewey relevant. The divergence from Dewey comes when one assesses these universal norms stated by Habermas. Dewey rather proposed a more layered principle of communication. Habermas's condition of democracy has roots in certain normative arenas of decision-making based on a critical rational approach, as mentioned above. Whereas Dewey's ideal of democracy is a process for progressive social transformations, intelligence and experience were Dewey's substitutes for reason. He gave space to experiences in constituting communication. Thus, there is a continuous reconstruction of one's concrete self. It should be noted that Dewey is not opposing the idea of 'reason-giving', but this, for him, is not equal to democratisation. His focus on open, critical, and reflective inquiry can help go beyond mere rational deliberation towards a wider arena of individual participation. So the answer to the question that was posed at the start of this section, that is, whether Dewey anticipated the Habermasian idea of communication, moves hazily towards a negation. Although both talked about deliberation via communication, the modules adopted differed. Bringing in the aim of this paper, in the next section, it will be assessed how exactly Dewey moves beyond these limits of communicative deliberation towards communicative multiplicity.

Moving Beyond Deliberation

Here, the point of analysis can be initiated via the Lippmann-Dewey debate in order to explain Dewey's conception of human nature and the role of democracy. Lippmann, in his book *The Phantom Public*, while arguing passivity and political alienation among the masses, said they were incapable of making decisions (1925). For him, too much democracy leads to a crisis. There must be a central body of decision-making headed by elites to make informed decisions. The ideal for him is to "leave their proxies to a kind of professional public consisting of more or less eminent persons" (p.1). While refuting this argument, Dewey traces the role of democracy as realising both individual and collective capacities. To resolve the issue of the 'eclipse of the public', he gave his notion of 'The Great Community' (Dewey, 1946). He distinguishes between an association and a community. "Associated or joint activity is a condition of the creation of a community. But association itself is physical and organic, while communal life is moral, that is, emotionally, intellectually, and consciously sustained" (p. 151).

Thus, for Dewey, the community is not grounded in homogeneity but in free communication. "We are born organic beings associated with others, but we are not born members of a community" (p. 154). For the creation of a community, communication is a prerequisite. Communication must be open, inclusive, and render diverse experiences and conceptions of the good to seek growth. This points out how mere collective action is not communication. Rather, it is a way to set free, pluralistic conceptions of the good, and "the clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy" (p. 149).

Dewey's work brings to light dangers of idealising (as in pure deliberation). This is not suitable for unequal social arenas. Idealisation based on universal norms is aimed at consensus (as seen in the works of Habermas). But in contrast, Dewey focuses on the idea of open debate, giving way to the ideas of dissent and reflection. He says, "..the ground or basis for a belief is deliberately sought and its adequacy to support the belief examined. This process is called reflective thought" (Dewey, 1910, p. 1-2). Before

moving on, it is essential to briefly explain an aspect of Deweyan democracy that will help base the argument for reflectivity, as stated above. The medium of self-development for him is social. Hildreth (2012) argues that it is difficult to place Dewey in a purely participatory and deliberative democracy. To sketch compatibility, one must view the Deweyan ideal of democracy as something political as well as social. In his book, *Democracy and Education*, Dewey states:
"Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (1946, p. 91).

Two distinguishing features of Deweyan democracy are as follows:

1. "..not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control."

2. "..not only freer interaction between social groups but change in social habits- its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse." (p. 91)

This is to say, education must build social relations in a way that people can enable personal interests within them. Moreover, there must be "..habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing order" (p. 104). For him, an individual's intellectual power decays when "it consequently leaves a man at the mercy of his routine habits and of the authoritative control of others" (p. 158-9). Dewey, thus, traces the importance of reflective thinking in everyday life. For social continuity, experience and reflections on habits are important. Reflective openness consists of responsiveness to changing environments.

Hildreth gives the notion of cooperative inquiry in the works of Dewey, which represents a normative model for public problem-solving. This includes both deliberative and participatory stages. This happens when people come together and identify public problems, lay down strategies, and analyse their consequences in return. "Deweyan cooperative inquiry understands deliberation and action as distinct, yet interconnected, phases of democratic engagement" (2012, p. 41). So the central theme is that of 'action' instead of which module of democracy should be followed. This, for Hildreth, is a continuous process, not embedded in a predetermined roadmap. He further argues that "..normative theory is better served by applying deliberative and participatory theory to different domains of democratic practice," and this integration can be traced back to the works of Dewey (p. 44). Hildreth showed the importance of the deliberative as well as participative aspects of Dewey. But the kind of deliberation he talks about is itself embedded in the coming up of individuals to preserve their social identity. Dewey's notions of associated living and the idea of community via communication are where he focuses on the element of debate wherein a 'public' is created and appropriated by 'free communication and inquiry'. Thus, this follows from his argument for "improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion" (Dewey, 1946, p. 208). These are the deliberative elements in his writings. On the other hand, the integration of democracy into our day-to-day lives, the need for self-development, and multiplicity highlight the participatory aspects. Furthermore, in a similar vein, Jeff Jackson argued that the interrelation of political and social factors shows Dewey's

divergence from the purely deliberative aspects (2015). As individuals are embedded in their social circumstances, where power relations are prevalent, one needs to move beyond the deliberative structure to bring in debates about such inequalities. He argues how this aspect of Dewey helps participative democrats preserve their theory. That is, "Dewey's democratic thinking stresses the interconnection of political and social - the idea that interactions within political and policymaking forums cannot be isolated from the quality of the broader relations existing in society" (p. 9). Talking about self-development, Jackson tried to show how democracy, as something participative, can be used to unblock the road to self-development in Dewey. Deliberative obsession with particular modes of participation can be lethal and exclusionary. But how exactly can participation pave the way to self-development? In other words, how does participation in a community embrace individual freedom? The crux goes something like this - Dewey saw individuality as social. He says, "Self, or individuality, is essentially social, being constituted not by isolated capacity but by capacity in response to the needs of an environment—an environment which, when taken in its fullness, is a community of persons" (Peng, 2009, p. 78).

This is the idea of the community he favoured. Rather than being based on rational circumstances aiming at consensus, it is based on the idea of confluence. Thus, democracy, being both social and political, is based on this confluence. In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), Dewey elaborated on the role of 'habit' and 'reflective' thinking. These two are derived from everyday experiences. The argument here is that dissent can arise in a society due to the very fact that different people with different experiences are a part of it. But keeping them under a single umbrella in the process of communication requires reflective thinking of our own experiences as well as those of others. This is to say, individuality being social is grounded not only upon one's perspective, but also that of others with whom one may or may not relate. This can be seen as a major shift in the writings of Dewey towards a reconciliation between deliberative and participative perspectives. Here, one participates in others' experiences. With this, social change and growth take place. And this is what can be called the constructive role of 'dissent'. This can be seen as linking the idea of dissent with Dewey's social participation. That is to say, "To Dewey the scientific mind... [is] apparent whenever beliefs [are] not simply taken for granted but established as the conclusions of critical inquiry and testing" (Whipple, 2005, p. 170). "Reflectivity is the painful effort of disturbed habits to readjust themselves..." (p. 162). Habits and reflectivity are born out of experience resulting from social processes. Thus, humans have the agency to reflect on their experiences and march towards change. This is in sharp contrast with the hegemony of consensus, as explained by Mouffe.

Conclusion

Habit is the mainspring of human action. As systematically explained in this paper, for the realisation of self-development and true freedom, one must participate in the community. This space is where open and free communication occurs and becomes a breeding ground for a citizen-centric democratic process. This paper thus showed Dewey's normative ideal of democracy as the 'way of life' in which he highlights the importance of an experimental approach to democratic life. It highlighted how people are not bystanders and passive (as advocated by Lippmann), but rather are active agents who reflect on their

experience to shape their future and make decisions. This is only possible when we go beyond rationality to grasp the advantages of differences of opinion and dissent. That is to say, to go beyond consensus towards the idea of confluence.

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Comparison of the role of religion in the political systems of Iran and Saudi Arabia

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Religion is the paramount source of legitimacy in Arab countries. It has played a decisive role in influencing the political systems of several West Asian States, particularly those of Saudi Arabia and Iran, two of the most dominant antagonistic powers in the region, with two ideologically opposing sects of Islam: Sunni and Shiism.

In Saudi Arabia, the religious elite and the politicians have worked together to establish and safeguard the Saudi state since the founding of Wahabism in the country. The Saudi state recognises Mohammad Bin Abdul Wahhab's school, Wahhabism, as the only sect from which the state draws its religious discourses. However, the Saudi state is by no means a theocracy. It is a monarchy with a strong influence of Sunni Wahhabism, which was a driving force in the creation of the Saudi political system. Wahhabism is not considered a distinct Islamic sect, and Saudi Arabia has been able to export its influence to other societies as well.

Historical Foundation of Saudi Arabia and Iran as Politico-Religious Entities

The Wahhabiyya movement, a Muslim fundamentalist movement, emerged in the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century as the brainchild of Muhammad Ibn Abdal-Wahhab, a Hanbali theologian. As part of his ideology, Muhammad Ibn Abdal-Wahhab believed in absolute monotheism or oneness with Allah regarding one's personality, character, and action (*Tawheed)*. Wahabism's beliefs are also derived from the views of the theologian Ibn Taymiyyah, according to whom any Muslim could become a *kafir* or infidel if they do not practice their religious obligations or duties, such as praying five times a day, fasting, pilgrimage, alms-giving, et cetera, due to laziness or apathy. He also declared war on certain standard practices in the Arabian Peninsula.

Firstly, he detested and forbade any Muslim to pray in a tomb or *Dargah* of any saint, because the core of Wahhabism is the belief that Islam only permits monotheism, and therefore, praying to any other associate of Allah, especially Sufi saints, is considered haram. An example of how his views translated to Saudi society was when the tomb of Zayd Ibn al-Khattab was destroyed by followers of Wahhabism in the village of Uyaynah to deter Muslims from visiting his grave, resulting in the Wahabis being termed as 'temple and tomb destroyers' in Western literature. Secondly, the Wahabis also frown upon *hurafah* or superstitions such as wearing amulets, sorcery, visiting fortune tellers, adorning mosques and shrines, et cetera, as they consider these practices as going against the Islamic creed. Abdal-Wahhab was also adamant in interpreting the Hadith based on elucidating the first three generations of the Muslim community, or Salaf, and did not adhere to any other interpretations made

by later clerics or scholars. Thus, for Wahabis, any reform or re-interpretation of Islam is unacceptable and often considered blasphemous.

The ulema (religious clerics and the descendants of Abdul-Wahhab and his disciples) have been propagating the Wahhabi doctrine under the tutelage of Mohammed Bin Saud, who founded the first Saudi state in the 18th century and ruled a small town called Diriyah in the Najd region. In order to extend his rule over the entire Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and to notice the growing influence of Wahhabism in the Saudi Peninsula, Mohammed Bin Saud entered into a pact with Abdal-Wahhab. Under this pact, power was divided into two realms - the political power would remain in the hands of the House of Saud, whilst the religious power would remain in the hands of Abdul-Wahhab and his disciples. Such an arrangement has made sure that Saudi Arabia will not turn into a theocratic state.

The impact of this pact made sure that the existing Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula were now forced to follow a foreign leader and were subjected to the control of an outside Imam (Muslim community leader) rather than being able to follow their own religious beliefs. The tribal leaders, in exchange for bringing their tribes within this dual-fold of Bin Saud and Abdul-Wahhab, gained material and status-raising benefits from the former. Mohammed Bin Saud furthered his powers by using the Bedouin tribes of the Najd region under the religious legitimacy provided by Wahhabism as part of his expansionist wars across Saudi Arabia. Abdal-Wahhab also played his part by issuing a fatwa against any practice that differed from Wahhabism and prohibiting any opposition to the current political rulers by declaring that it was forbidden by Islam.

As the state continued to grow under the partnership of the House of Saud and Abdul-Wahhab, it slowly replaced the spoils of war with taxes to be paid by their subjects, and Mohammed Bin Saud's successors grew from mere tribal leaders to the leaders of a religious-political entity that shaped the current Saudi elite known as Najdi-Wahhabis. The elite Islamic clerics have continued to use Wahhabism to impose their religious views on the people of Saudi Arabia since these views act as a way to protect their status, power, and interests in a society where religion is still considered the highest legitimate power. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, the only way any Muslim would be considered a good and pure Muslim and not a heretic, irrespective of their sect or ethnicity, is once they adopt and follow only the "true interpretation of Islam," that is, Wahhabism. This, in turn, requires their complete loyalty to the political rulers, who are the guardians of the faith, and prohibits any opposition to the political authority since enmity towards the rulers is considered enmity towards Allah. Thus, Wahhabism succeeded in turning the positions of both the political head of the state and the religious head into extremely powerful religious institutions that can never be defied because defiance of these entities directly translated to defiance against the religion (Alrebh, 2017).

Iran, in comparison, is a theocracy with a Shia majority. The head of the state, the Ayatollah, is an Islamic cleric or ulema - and every decision, every action, and every legislation needs to be derived directly from the Shariah. The Shia clergy are the most significant, influential, and highest form of authority in the country, they directly propagate the teachings of Allah through the political structure

of the society. This powerful clergy emerged when the Safavid dynasty (1502-1722) made Shi'ism the official religion of the Persian Empire, and taking advantage of the subsequent turbulent Iranian history, the Shiite clerics acquired a considerable degree of independence from the state and started playing a crucial role in the country's affairs (Moazami, 2011).

Throughout the reign of the centralised, modernised, and militarised bureaucratic Pahlavi regime of the 1920s, the ulema transformed itself into a distinct force. Several practices, such as *ta'ziyyah,* or a passion play that commemorates the martyrdom of Al-Husayn and his family, as well as visiting the shrines and tombs of local Shia leaders - a practice that is considered heretic by Wahabis of Saudi Arabia, began during this period, mainly at the counsel of the Shia clerics. These activities also coincided with the escalation of debates between the Shia scholars in Iraq and Iran regarding the role of the clergy in interpreting Islamic percepts. During this debate, one group of scholars reiterated that the only legal interpretation should be based on the teachings of the twelve Imams. In contrast, the group that won the debate, called the *Uṣūliyyah*, held that despite countless fundamental sources (*usul)* that need to be consulted, the final source for any legal interpretation of the Islamic verses must remain in the reasoned judgement of a qualified Shia theologian or scholar (clergy), called the *mujtahid.*

The idea of the *mujtahid* became especially prominent after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, wherein Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution and the political and religious head of the state, was both a *mujtahid* and a *Marja* (source to follow), thereby cementing him as the ultimate source of religious wisdom and authority. This enhanced position of the Shia clergy in Iranian society also made sure that now the clergy had the power and the backing to act as representatives of the Hidden Imam (final of the twelve Imams, who require total obedience and loyalty, and it is the primary duty of every Muslim to follow him).

Incorporation of religion into the political structure of Iran and Saudi Arabia

Soon after the Islamic revolution, on April 1, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic, and a series of changes followed that differed significantly from the Reza Shah regime. The Ayatollah-led theocracy of Iran approved a new constitution based on Shiite principles, interpreted by the clergy, who named Khomeini as the de-facto religious and political head of Iran for life. The Family Protection Act of 1967, which provided rights and guarantees to women in marriage, was abrogated. As a result, women were denied equal rights as men in divorce and custody and were required to wear a veil in public mandatorily. Shariah laws were deemed ultimate in civil or political society, and often brutal punishments were reinstated.

Iran is a theocracy, which means that its complex and unorthodox political system combines elements of both modern Islamic religious hierarchies with democracy, with a vast network of elected and non-elected institutions influencing the decision-making process in the power structure. At the very top of this politico-religious system lies the Supreme Leader, i.e., the Ayatollah, who is usually chosen from among the senior members of the ulema. He is also the *de facto* leader of the executive. The Ayatollah performs a host of other functions, such as overseeing the military as well as the appointment of

military and judicial leaders, supervising the constitution, which is written and often revised per the Shariah laws, and creating all the state's policies. He also appoints the senior commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

An eighty-six-member body comprising senior clergymen known as the Assembly of Experts elects the Supreme Leader. The assembly is charged with reviewing the work of the Supreme Leader. It can, in principle, dismiss him from office, but such an event has never happened, mainly due to the increasing powers of the Supreme Leader over the years. Due to the closed nature of the Iranian government system and the fact that all notes of the assembly's biannual meetings are confidential, it is not possible to determine how carefully the assembly monitors the activities of the Supreme Leader.

The only two bodies in Iran that are elected by the people directly through Universal Adult Franchise are the posts of the president and the majlis (parliament). The president is officially the leader of the executive, but in reality, his position is second to that of the Supreme leader. Iran's president is elected for four years, with the requirement being that he must be a Shiite Muslim. The powers of the president have varied over the years, with many observers speculating that the political whims of the Supreme leader take precedence over almost every decision of the president (Bruno, 2008). The majlis, or the parliament, is a 290-member body of deputies who represent Iran's thirty provinces. They are tasked with introducing and passing legislation. The members are elected for four-year terms, and five seats are reserved for religious minorities. However, the approval of the candidates by the Council of Guardians (the most influential body in Iran) is more important than the approval by the people (Bruno, 2008).

The most influential body controlling the Iranian state is the unelected yet extremely powerful Council of Guardians (CoG), which comprises twelve members - six theologians appointed directly by the Supreme Leader and six jurists approved by the majlis. They review all legislation passed by the parliament as well as candidates for election as per Islamic law, thereby overriding the powers of the Parliament and once again reiterating the supremacy of religion over the political system of Iran. Some of their interventions include - in the 1980s, the CoG forcefully intervened to prevent laws passed by the parliament regarding land reforms. In 2002, they also rejected legislation that would have limited the use of forced confessions in criminal trials.

The Supreme Court of Iran is the highest judicial body in the state. Its members are chosen by the head of the judiciary and appointed directly by the Supreme Leader. A Special Clerical Court is also explicitly established to try the clergy members for various crimes, including 'ideological offenses'. The Supreme Leader oversees it and has managed to silence many clerics who have criticised the regime's policies over the years.

In comparison, *Saudi Arabia* is a monarchy. There is a complete lack of any democratic structures within the political framework of the country (except elections at the municipality level), mainly because democratic ideals are not compatible with Wahhabism. The Kingdom had never written a constitution other than the Basic Law of the Government document, which provides guidelines for running the government and the rights and responsibilities of the citizens. Since the kingdom is a

monarchy, the king holds absolute political power and has the unrestricted right to assign and dismiss ministers and judges. The three crucial ministries of defence, interior, and foreign affairs, and the thirteen regional governorships are all held by members of the Saud family. The king is also the prime minister and the protector of the two holy mosques of Islam, namely the Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. The legislative body called the Consultative Council, established in 1991, is supposed to be the legislative branch, yet it has limited powers and only symbolic authority. It is the king who has the ultimate power to appoint or dismiss members of the government, include whoever he wants in the council meetings, and also choose the topics of discussion.

Other than the king, it is the Wahhabi ulema who exercises enormous power and influence over the political system of Saudi Arabia. The Council of Senior Scholars was established by a royal decree in 1971, is the head of the official religious establishment, and advises the king on all religious matters. The king appoints the council, and the government pays the members their salaries. Such is the power of this council that in 2010, King Abdullah declared that only the members of the council, as well as a few selected Islamic scholars, could issue a *fatwa* in Saudi Arabia. The council often provides religious support for government policies and rarely opposes them. Similar to the ulema in Iran, the Wahhabi ulema are also the ultimate interpreters of the Shariah. They also control the Ministry of Islamic Affairs Endowments, the Ministry of Justice, and the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (religious police).

The Supreme Judicial Council ranks second in the ulema hierarchy and was established in 1975. It is the main reference point for the judges of the kingdom. It addresses significant issues that ordinary courts cannot address, such as capital punishment cases, which should only be handed out per the Shariah law and can, therefore, be only interpreted by the ulema. In the third place comes the specialised religious ministries, with some of the important ones being the Ministry of Justice and the Religious Affairs ministries, as well as several independent religious bodies like the Council for Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil, the Muslim World League, the International Islamic Jurisprudence Forum, et cetera. Other than these specialized religious bodies, all the other ministries of the Kingdom must be involved in extracurricular religious activities. For instance, the Saudi Armed Forces have a Moral Guidance Administration founded and operated by Sunni clerics, which consists mainly of graduates from religious colleges headed by the ulema. The Ministry of Education is also one of the leading employers of religious college graduates tasked with teaching religious education across the Kingdom's schools (Alsaif, 2013).

The Najdi-Wahhabis today control all the vital ministries and institutions, with the elites within the group controlling the most important positions. As of 2016, the Najdi-Wahhabis hold around 90% of the country's ministerial positions. They also enjoy a majority in the Consultative Council, thereby cementing them firmly as the second most crucial decision-making body of the state and the most important body in terms of religion. They also control other vital ministries like Municipal and Rural Affairs, Finance, Health, Education, and the Ministries of Interior, Defence, and Foreign Affairs. However, in practice, the Wahabis tend to limit their authority to religious teaching and jurisprudence and usually leave the political authority to the king and his deputies. They only intervene in

government matters if the king asks them to. Nevertheless, they form the ultimate supporting force of the Royal Family, which can be witnessed by the fact that every senior member of the royalty surrounds themselves with a group of loyal adherents from the Najdi-Wahhabi lineage. Thus, it will not be wrong to assume that although ultimate authority over the country and the government lies with the king, the ulema comes second in legitimising the government and possesses a mutually interdependent relationship.

Therefore, it has been observed that despite having completely different political systems with opposing sects, both Saudi Arabia and Iran have certain similarities that are rooted in the religion of Islam. While religion takes precedence over every matter of politics, law, and society in Iran, in Saudi Arabia, religion is an instrument that tends to be used by the political elite to keep the society under its control. While Iran does display some democratic ideas, even on paper, Saudi Arabia does not even pretend to do so since yielding away any democratic rights to the people could translate to the House of Saud losing its influence over the country.

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Exploring the Representation and Societal Perceptions of "Fallen" Women in Sevasadan and Umrao Jan Ada

Mahak Sharma

Introduction

The forthcoming paper endeavours to scrutinise specific focal points: the manner in which the two novels delineate the diminishing societal status of the two heroines, Suman and Umrao Jaan, and the respective attitudes of the authors toward these women labelled as "fallen".

Narratives Of Transformation: Sevasadan and Umrao Jaan Ada

Commencing with the poignant quote, *"Eventually everyone tastes the bitter fruit of remorse,"* the subsequent narrative embarks on an exploration of two seminal novels, 'Sevasadan' and 'Umrao Jaan Ada'. Penned by the prolific authors Munshi Premchand and Mirza Hadi Rusva, these literary works exemplify the tenets of realism within an Indian context. While Premchand's distinctive narrative style defies the static nature of characters, allowing them to evolve in response to changing milieus and circumstances, Mirza Hadi Rusva's contributions also shine through, bringing depth and authenticity to the narratives.

Sevasadan, set against the backdrop of Varanasi, one of India's holiest cities, delves into the harrowing descent of a beautiful Brahmin woman, Suman, from her erstwhile position as a cherished daughter to a life mired in prostitution. The novel casts a discerning eye on the hypocrisies that pervaded Indian society, particularly concerning women's rights, the practice of dowry, and the issue of prostitution. Written during a period of significant clamour surrounding women's reform movements in India, Premchand's work lays bare the prevailing attitudes towards courtesans, who were often regarded as social pariahs to be eradicated rather than comprehended within the context that led to their unfortunate circumstances.

Apart from the primary plot that revolves around Suman's fall from grace and her subsequent quest for redemption, there exists an additional narrative strand that involves the expulsion of courtesans from the city's centre. By the early twentieth century, when Bazar-e-Husn (Sevasadan) was composed, society had witnessed substantial transformations. Emerging voices in the city sought to redefine the image of Kashi (Varanasi), distancing it from the traditional socio-cultural centrality of courtesans. As court and aristocratic patronage waned, courtesans, especially those of higher social strata, were compelled to pivot toward a different clientele. This transition resulted in a shift from the cultivation of classical musical and artistic skills, as exemplified by Umrao Jaan Ada, to a preference for more popular ghazals, reflecting the evolving tastes of the urban elite and the burgeoning middle class.

The novels intricately illuminate the interplay between societal shifts and the fate of women within this evolving landscape, offering a rich tapestry of Indian society during the period.

Umrao and Suman In 'Umrao Jan Ada' and 'Bazar-e-Husn'

The heroines of "Umrao Jan Ada" and "Bazar-e Ḥusn" (also known as "Sevasadan") exhibit significant differences in their backgrounds and life choices. Umrao, a Shia Muslim, and Suman, a high-caste Hindu, come from distinct communities. Umrao was kidnapped as a child, with her destiny largely out of her control, while Suman, a married woman, made the choice, albeit under challenging circumstances, to become a courtesan.

Umrao's perspective on Suman would likely be mixed. In her conversations with Rusva at the beginning of the novel, she partially excuses girls born into the homes of prostitutes, understanding that they have limited role models and face degradation from an early age. However, her views on girls like Suman, born to respectable parents but forced into undesirable situations, are quite clear. Umrao condemns parents who put their daughters in such positions, blaming them for the downfall of many respectable women.

Umrao grew up in a loving, middle-class family and had a contented life until her abduction. She emphasises that her entry into the courtesan profession was not her choice but a result of her circumstances and powerlessness. She acknowledges her past, but does not shy away from it, stating that she had been born unlucky and left stranded by fate and chance.

Umrao's early life reflects her contentment and appreciation for her family, and she does not view herself as exceptionally beautiful. She accepts her fate and adjusts quickly to her new situation due to the kindness she receives.

On the other hand, Suman's comfortable life is disrupted when her father's imprisonment forces her family into poverty. She is initially resentful, but eventually accepts her situation. She is described as more materialistic and less content with her life compared to Umrao. Suman aspires to a luxurious life, envies others, and craves recognition and respect. Her vanity and love of display lead her to make choices, which she later regrets.

Suman's transformation takes her through various phases, from becoming a courtesan to embracing piety in a widows' ashram. Her character evolves over time, and she experiences a change in her values and priorities. However, despite her transformations, she continues to seek recognition, and her happiness remains elusive.

In contrast, Umrao's character remains consistent throughout the novel. She adapts to her circumstances and learns to find fulfilment and self-respect in her unique situation. She becomes an independent and self-reliant individual who accepts her life with serenity.

The two heroines' differing outlooks and life journeys highlight their contrasting approaches to adversity and self-discovery. While Umrao finds contentment and wisdom in her circumstances, Suman's quest for recognition and a better life leads her through various phases of change, ultimately leaving her dissatisfied and unfulfilled.

Both novels, "Umrao Jan Ada" and "Bazar-e-Ḥusn," serve as platforms for their respective authors, Rusva and Premchand, to critique societal issues and expose the injustices, corruption, and hypocrisy prevalent in their societies. In these works, the heroines' experiences and transformations are central to conveying these messages.

Women Status And Representation

The issue of women's status within society has remained a continuous and prominent subject of concern since the early nineteenth century, both for social reformers and colonialists alike. During the nineteenth century, women were largely perceived as homemakers and were frequently deemed incapable of participating in the public sphere on an equal footing with men. This prevailing perception not only demeaned and debased women, but also relegated them to the singular role of childbearing. The dominance of men in this context led to a sense of entrapment among many women, as they found themselves confined within their homes, unable to escape the constraints imposed upon them by their husbands.

One illustrative portrayal of these confinements can be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's seminal short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper". In this narrative, Gilman, an acclaimed feminist writer of the 19th century, presents a woman grappling with postpartum depression, who is consigned to a room that further exacerbates her psychological distress. Gilman employs this anonymous protagonist as a vehicle to challenge conventional notions of gender and to dismantle the prevailing structures of male dominance.

Throughout "The Yellow Wallpaper", Gilman adroitly encourages readers to interrogate societal perspectives on feminism and the delineation of gender roles. Symbolism, particularly in the form of gendered spaces, is deftly utilised to both underscore the constraints imposed upon women and to evoke empathy among readers for the travails faced by women during this era. Women in the 19th century were frequently burdened by bitterness and were deprived of essential human rights, receiving scant recompense for their contributions to society. This societal milieu, as observed in the upper echelons of Hindu families and elite strata, particularly underscores the difficulties encountered by women of that time.

In the context of the novels “Sevasadan” and "Bazar-e Husn”, a comparative analysis is drawn between Premchand's and Rusva’s perspectives on women. Both emphasise the nurturing and supportive roles of women, valuing them for more than their mere objectification as sexual beings. However, Premchand's representation of Subhadra, a woman unable to bear children, is indicative of the societal expectations and pressures placed upon women in the nineteenth century.

The novels also delve into distinct attitudes regarding women who transition from respectable backgrounds to become courtesans. While Premchand adopts a more stringent stance, aiming to reform such characters, Rusva demonstrates a higher degree of tolerance, acknowledging the intricacies of their existence within the broader social fabric. This variation in perspective reflects their broader societal outlook.

Ultimately, the divergent treatment of characters like Suman and Umrao is rooted in the assessment of their transgressions. Umrao's actions are primarily self-contained, whereas Suman's choices have far-reaching consequences, impacting not only her family, but also a wider circle of acquaintances. This differentiation is rooted in the concept of distinct categories of sin, with the latter category being considered more severe by the authors.

Rusva underscores the significance of refraining from causing harm to one's fellow human beings, contending that sins affecting others are of greater magnitude. Umrao's actions primarily affect herself, whereas Suman's choices result in widespread suffering among her family and those within her social milieu. This delineates the variation in how these two women are portrayed in the two novels, while simultaneously reflecting the authors' distinctive perspectives on society at large.

Wise men have divided sinners into two categories those whose deeds are limited to themselves and those whose acts affect other people as well. In my humble opinion, those in the first category are lesser and those in the second category are the greater sinners. Take to drink or worship idols; burn the Kaaba or the Koran. These the Lord might perhaps forgive, but not that you hurt a man.
(176)

She acknowledges this herself when she says: there is not another witch like me in this world. I have destroyed my family with my longing for pleasures. I am my father's murderer. I have put a knife to Shanta's throat.
(196)

In these powerful words, her self-awareness resonates with a profound feminist perspective. By acknowledging her unique identity as a woman, she confronts the societal expectations and restrictions placed upon her. Her declaration of being unlike any other "witch" challenges the stereotypes and conventional roles assigned to women. Moreover, her acknowledgment of the impact of her desires on her family and her role in Shanta's life reflects a feminist critique of the patriarchal structures that can shape women's lives. It is a stark reminder that women have historically been held accountable for desires and actions beyond their control, and this self-awareness signifies her recognition of the injustice inherent in such constraints. This moment in her narrative serves as a potent feminist statement, highlighting the need for women to assert their agency and challenge the societal norms that have for so long constrained their identities and choices.

Female Protagonists in "Sevasadan" and "Umrao Jan Ada" as Agents of Gendered Self-Representation

Suman in "Sevasadan": Redefining Redemption

In the pages of "Sevasadan", Suman's story is a profound narrative of transformation and self-discovery, where her path to self-representation takes a spiritual and moral turn. She transcends her early materialistic desires and embarks on a quest for redemption and moral elevation. Suman's journey reveals the extraordinary capacity of women to reinvent themselves, even in the most challenging of circumstances. Her narrative teaches us that identity is not static, but can be redefined in pursuit of a higher purpose.

Umrao Jaan in "Umrao Jan Ada": Mastering the Arts, Mastering Self-Representation

Umrao Jaan, on the other hand, is a woman of a different mold. Kidnapped as a child and thrust into the world of courtesans, she harnesses her skills in poetry, music, and dance to achieve recognition and

self-representation within her niche. Her life story serves as an inspiration to all women who seek to define their own narrative. Umrao Jaan's mastery of the arts mirrors her mastery of her self-representation, proving that women can shape their identities by actively participating in the creation of their own stories.

Parallels and Contrasts: Empowering Diversity in Self-Representation

While Suman and Umrao Jaan both challenge societal norms, their journeys differ, reflecting the diversity of women's experiences. Suman's transformation is a deeply spiritual one, driven by the quest for redemption and moral ascension, whereas Umrao Jaan's self-representation revolves around mastering the arts and achieving recognition within her social milieu. Their stories highlight that there is no singular path to self-representation, and women have the agency to redefine their identities in various ways, transcending societal expectations.

In the vibrant tapestry of contemporary discussions on women's self-representation and identity, the stories of Suman and Umrao Jaan continue to resonate. Women today, much like their predecessors, grapple with complex societal norms and multifaceted identities. These narratives serve as timeless sources of inspiration, prompting women to assert their own agency in defining their identities, defying societal constraints, and crafting narratives that are uniquely their own. Within the dynamic discourse surrounding women's self-representation and identity, the captivating tales of Suman and Umrao Jaan offer a thought-provoking perspective. They beckon us to consider that while contemporary women certainly grapple with multifaceted identities and societal norms, they also inherit the legacy of resilience and reinvention. What's truly remarkable is that, in addition to drawing inspiration from the past, we can foster a unique idea — that women today have the power not just to assert their own agency, but also to collaboratively reshape societal norms, fostering an environment where every woman can craft her distinct narrative without constraint, breaking new ground in the ongoing saga of women's self-expression.

In the realm of “Sevasadan” and “Umrao Jan Ada”, Suman and Umrao Jaan transcend the boundaries of their eras to embody the spirit of resilient self-representation. Their stories, whether on the path of spiritual redemption or through the mastery of arts, capture the essence of women's remarkable ability to redefine themselves. In a world reluctant to grant them agency, these heroines break free, offering an enduring reminder of the endless possibilities of gendered self-representation. Their narratives remain timeless inspirations in the ongoing odyssey of women's identity and self-expression.

According to Judith Butler in her work "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity", she argues that "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.” Butler argues that gender identity is not an inherent or stable quality, but is performed through repeated actions and behaviours. She suggests that the concept of gender is a social construct, and individuals have agency in how they perform and represent their gender. This perspective resonates with the diverse ways in which Suman and Umrao Jaan redefined their identities in response to their respective circumstances.

For Suman, her transformation from a materialistic, high-caste Hindu woman to a person seeking spiritual redemption can be seen as a performative act of gendered self-representation. She actively constructs her identity based on her personal journey and pursuit of a higher moral purpose. This aligns with Butler's idea that individuals have the capacity to perform and represent their gender in ways that diverge from societal norms. In Umrao Jaan's case, her mastery of the arts and her recognition within her social setting also exemplify the performative nature of gender. She actively shapes her identity as a courtesan, who is not confined to the conventional roles assigned to women in her society. This aligns with Butler's notion that gender is a continuous process of self-representation and performance.

Furthermore, the reference to Butler's work can be used to accentuate the enduring relevance of the themes in "Sevasadan" and "Umrao Jan Ada" in contemporary discussions on women's self-representation. While it is true that Suman and Umrao Jaan actively performed and redefined their gendered identities, there are contemporary perspectives that argue women today face both continuity and change in their identity challenges. Some contend that while women are certainly challenging and reshaping their identities, they may still contend with persistent societal expectations that influence and even restrict the narratives they construct. This dual narrative highlights the ongoing complexities and nuances in the evolution of gender roles in the modern world.

The juxtaposition of Umrao Jan Adā and Bazar-e Ḥusn or Sevasadan affords a nuanced examination of the societal position of women in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century India. These literary works serve as compelling lenses through which to scrutinize the pernicious implications of the prevailing dowry system and the caste hierarchy. Moreover, they issue trenchant critiques of the prevalent practice of consigning women to marriages with ill-suited partners, a nefarious scheme often perpetrated by either unscrupulous or desperate male relatives. In the backdrop of these narratives, the prevailing male-conceived archetype of the virtuous, chaste, pious, and self-sacrificing wife emerges, a figure exalted in theory, but frequently marginalized in practice by the very same male custodians of societal norms. It is within this complex milieu that the lives of courtesans are depicted over a temporal span of approximately eighty years, an endeavour that also chronicles the gradual erosion of their social status within the broader fabric of Indian society.

These works serve as a testament to the resilience and agency of women in negotiating their identities within a society that often sought to confine them to prescribed roles and expectations.

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Multiculturalism and Feminism - Distinguishing Amongst Cultural Practices

A review of Susan Moller Okin's "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?"

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Introduction

Susan Moller Okin's paper "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" deals with the tensions of multiculturalism, feminism, and the protection of minority cultures and religions. Okin's argument is surrounded by these themes, arguing that minority cultures and religions that practise gender-oppressive practices must not be protected, as protecting them would create a hostile, oppressive environment for women.

Okin expresses in her writing that the argument for the preservation of minority group cultures affects women more than men because women participate more in the domestic sphere than men, and since cultures mostly govern the domestic spheres of life, women are more affected (Okin, 1998). Additionally, she argues that most cultures preach the control of women by men, especially in the reproductive and sexual spheres (Okin, 1998).

Her views raise multiple questions. Do some deserve protection or more protection than others because of their tolerable practices, and if yes, how do we distinguish amongst these practices and decide which are tolerable? This paper tries to answer these questions by using the works of various scholars, but firstly critically analyses Okins' arguments. The findings are that all cultures must be respected, accepted, and equally deserve cultural protection and general support, and argues that having an objective criterion for distinguishing between oppressive and enabling cultural norms has inherent flaws.

According to Okin, creating a society that is accepting of minority cultures means that women will have to live in oppressive, hostile environments, which affect them adversely because these cultures practise inherently oppressive practices. Okin regards this as too high of a cost for women to bear and, hence, rejects minority groups' rights for multiculturalism (Okin, 1998). A practical application of her argument would be, for instance, the tribes in Nagaland. The Indian constitution provides special protection for minority culture of India in Nagaland, but this culture is known to have patriarchal norms and men controlling the decision-making roles, adversely affecting women (The Constitution of India, 1949). This is the crux of her piece, which adds a lot of weight to the literature on multiculturalism as it brings in the dimension of feminism to it, and highlights the connections

between gender and culture. However, her views have been criticised on multiple accounts by various scholars. Finally, Okin claims that unless women are fully represented in negotiations about group rights, they will be adversely affected rather than being promoted through the endowment of such rights.

Two scholarly articles that are essential for this theme are Saskia Sassen's "Culture Beyond Gender", as it extends Okins' arguments and brings in new dimensions to multiculturalism - intercultural inequalities, and Will Kymlickas's " Liberal Complacencies", as he highlights that both multiculturalism and feminism are based on the same underlying principles, fighting for a more inclusive conception of justice, and there's a common interest in fighting for them.

Criticism of Okin's Views

Okin has been criticised for having a narrow lens towards multiculturalism. Joseph Raz, in his response to Okin, writes that Okin does not consider issues that are equally as serious as gender oppression and restrictions on the individual autonomy of women. I agree with Raz, as cultures can be oppressive towards other groups too, like LGBTQ+ and disabled members, or practice oppressive practices like casteism or racism. This aspect is overlooked by Okin. This is not to say that just because a culture is also oppressive towards other groups, its impact on women specifically should be ignored. Rather, this just emphasises a narrow view of multiculturalism. Saskia Sassen, in her response, also points out that Okin overlooks the dynamics of intercultural relationships and dominant cultures with minority cultures (inequalities among cultures). Overlooking this aspect is expensive because it plays a fundamental role in developing cultures. Joseph Raz, in his response, highlights this, claiming that the interactions among cultures in closed political and social spaces can shape and change the practices of the culture.

Okin is also criticised for using "women" to represent a singular monolithic category by Sander L Gilman in his response to Okin (Gilman, 1999). I agree with his criticism, as Anne Philips (1996), in her piece "Dealing With Difference: A Politics of Ideas or a Politics of Presence", comments that many differences can exist within groups. Many differences exist between women; hence, they cannot be grouped into a singular category. For example, within the category of women, we have lesbian women, black women, single-parent women, Muslim women, poor women, illiterate women, financially dependent women, et cetera, all wanting different things and having different perceptions about themselves, and so cannot be seen as a part of a singular category. Similarly, many differences exist within cultures as well, where some members might have dissenting voices and not accept the oppressive practices of the culture. Okin does not acknowledge such differences and treats women and culture as singular categories. Another way to look at this is that every culture will have inherently negative qualities, so does this mean that no culture deserves to be protected? These aspects remain unanswered by Okin.

Okin (1998), claims that the oppressive practices of minority cultures restrain the personal autonomy of women in these cultures and violate their individual rights. This claim is made on a universal level

and is intended to apply to everyone. This completely disregards women's self-view and assumes that all women exposed to the culture see themselves as oppressed and would not voluntarily accept the practices. Sander L Gilman (1999), in his response to Okin, highlights the notion that Western, upper-class women believe they can speak for or represent all women in the world from different cultures, some of which they probably do not even know or understand. This stems from the assumption that these 'oppressed' women cannot speak for themselves and require a voice. In his response to Okin, Robert Post (1999) highlights that typically, an objective and external criterion of what constitutes 'freedom' and 'dignity' is created, which again disregards the self-view of the so-called 'victims'. To deprive women of the choice to decide what is oppressive for them, what is enabling for them, and to provide an objective criterion to decide if they are oppressed also amounts to restricting their autonomy. Women must, at the very least, be provided with the choice to decide if they are oppressed or treated unjustly and must be able to represent themselves. Not providing that choice results in the same oppression we seek to prevent. Hence, the notion of having objective criteria for unjust or oppressive practices is inherently flawed. To elaborate from an objective standpoint, polygamy is considered oppressive. However the women in these marriages may not always think it is oppressive or accept it because their religion provides for it. So it deserves to be given protection, contrary to what Okin says.

Some defenders of group rights claim that groups that are liberal must be given the right to protect their culture (Okin, 1998). However, an inherent loophole in this is: how can we ever verify if these cultures that claim to be liberal are, in fact, actually liberal? Since many of the oppressive cultural practices that Okin seeks to protect women from being practised in the domestic sphere, they are likely to remain hidden. It can be easily portrayed on the surface level that they are liberal but continue to practise oppressive practices in the domestic, private sphere, hidden from the world. The same has been highlighted by Okin (1998), in her essay. This makes it more challenging to award external protection to minority groups that claim to be liberal. It also makes it valid to question whether the requirement of cultures to be liberal in awarding them external protection is effective.

Further, advocates of group rights defend external protection for minority cultures because they need to protect their culture from extinction under the majority culture (Okin, 1998). However, this claim has an underlying assumption that minority cultures are always bullied by majority cultures and that they cannot coexist. The contemporary example of Belgium will disprove this assumption, as 60% of Belgium is a majority community (Dutch speakers) and 40% French speakers, but both of these communities are accommodated by the government through tools of constitutional recognition, representation in parliament, and community governments (Mnookin and Verbeke, 2009). Hence, majority and minority communities can coexist.

Do some cultures deserve protection, and others do not? Distinguishing between cultural practices.

Does a culture that provides a hostile or discriminatory environment to its members still deserve group rights or cultural preservation? Can we objectively decide which cultures deserve to be protected and which deserve to be extinct?

Joseph Raz (1999), in his response to Okins' paper, claims that we should not assume the right to reject the wholesale cultures of various groups within ours in similar circumstances. He claims that we should not reject other cultures just because of the injustices they endorse or their oppressive practices, just like one does not reject the culture that one belongs to for being oppressive. This claim is helpful because it means that we should preserve cultures despite their oppressive, unjust practices. After all, all cultures inherently suffer from problems that are as serious as they are unjust to women. Raz says that just because a culture practises specific acts that require it to be stopped is not reason compelling enough to not preserve, respect or generally support that culture. The answer to our question, then, is that all cultures deserve protection, respect, and general support despite their unjust or oppressive practices.

Another dimension to look at this question is the outsider-insider aspect of culture. Joseph Raz (1999), argues that only a person who is not a member of a culture can desire its extinction. He claims that the thought of letting our culture go extinct is so bizarre that we cannot even envisage it if we are insiders of our culture. So, he claims that the only reason we can actively threaten the existence of distinct cultural groups is that we do not have a membership, or at least view ourselves as not having a membership of that cultural group. This points toward the subjectivity involved in what we consider cultures deserving of protection. It is interesting to ponder if Okin would have had a different view on the cultural preservation of minority cultures that are unjust or oppressive to women if she herself had membership in that culture. Raz also highlights that we are more sensitive to the background and context of our culture than others, and this again portrays the subjectivity involved in what we see as oppressive or unjust practices. Hence, we cannot escape the subjectivity of distinguishing amongst cultural norms.

Since intercultural dynamics and the role that every culture plays in the development of another is so fundamental, the absence or even reduction of different cultures would have detrimental implications for each other. The simultaneous presence of dominant and minority cultures stems from pain and rage during intercultural engagements, and these sentiments have the potential to change aspects of the gender arrangements of the minority culture, as argued by Saskia Sassen (1999), in her response to Okin. Additionally, a minority is a minority only because of the presence of a majority. In the absence of a majority, the minority would be just any other culture. So the presence of multiple cultures also impacts cultures. As earlier highlighted in this paper, the dynamics of intercultural and dominant cultures with minority cultures play a fundamental role in their development, which may be negative or positive. For example, the ban on cow slaughtering in India had been criticised for adversely affecting some Muslim communities directly, whose livelihoods were based on selling cow meat. When the affected communities took this matter to court, the entire issue was portrayed as a Muslim versus Hindu religious issue, rather than addressing the issues of the affected livelihoods in the first place (De, 2018). This illustrates how the relationship between majority and minority cultures can affect minority cultures.

Conclusion

Okin provides us with a very rich essay on multiculturalism and the gender aspect of culture. The varied responses to her essay extend her arguments and create a fruitful discussion on the topic. However, Okin has a narrow lens towards multiculturalism, ignoring other issues equally serious. She views cultures and women as singular, monolithic, categories, and disregards the self-view of women.

This paper has demonstrated that since we can never objectively determine which cultures are oppressive, all of them deserve protection, respect, and support. An objective criterion for distinguishing amongst cultural practices is flawed, and we cannot escape from the subjectivity involved in the same. To deprive women the agency to decide what is oppressive for them, what is enabling them and to provide an objective criteria to decide if they are being oppressed or not also amounts to restricting their autonomy.

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Of Majoritarianism, Marginalisation, and Manipur

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Introduction

What is identity, one may ask. The answer would lie in a hierarchy of markers, starting with gender extending to nationality. Somewhere in between lies religion and ethnicity. Somewhere along lies a minority. The diversity and vibrance of the identities in a country like India are often awed at, but the ground-level reality has changed rather drastically from the short-lived delirium of harmony. Post-independence, India emerged as a secular state, but with a unique concept of secularism. Brajeshwar Prasad from Bihar proposed the inclusion of the word 'secular' given its vitality for the Indian national leaders and its potent role as a security of the morale of the minorities (Jha, 2002). However, he came to be ridiculed for conflicting socialism and liberal democracy. But the stance changed by the nearing end of years of blood, sweat, and tears of the constitution makers. Separation of state was a step towards democratisation. The European model of secularism was one of indifference towards religion and altogether a dissent of it. But a country having been emancipated from clutches of severe oppression was bound to fall into clutches of majoritarian oppression in the absence of guarantee of protection by the State for all alike. The spirit of European secularism, of complete separation of state and religion, had to be accompanied with the philosophy of *parens patriae*. The state had to protect the weaker from the oppression of the stronger and could not be stone cold in terms of religion. What emerged after long hours of debate and discussion was a young, democratic India with secularism as the *fait accompli*, having political recognition without having been given a definitive form. The concept was that of a protective, welfare state, and words simply fell short and unconstructive to describe it. The fate of Indian secularism, as can be seen now, has turned out to be a tragedy. Love for the nation has been utterly confused with the love for one's religion (Hasan, 2020). Fierce nationalism has taken a surge even in peaceful times for the protection of a creed, which is under no immediate or future threat. We have shifted greatly, and rather sadly, from reverence of ideals of harmonious co-existence. To be protected as a minority, it has become important to be associated or affiliated with the majoritarian upholding (Sahoo, 2020).

Constitutional Framework for protection of the Minority

The framers of the Indian Constitution foresaw the majoritarian tendencies of the people. A nation fresh out of years of emancipation has to be kept out of the clutches of all possible social issues, and one which is difficult to trace is majoritarianism, as there is no clear-cut manner in which it can be identified in its gestation period. Nothing initially seems out of the blue when the majority section seeks to assume a paternalistic rather than a brotherly role, and soon the patronisation takes the colour of dominance and silent suppression. In order to prevent these tendencies, the Constitution confers certain provisions for accommodating minorities to develop. Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution specifically confer cultural and educational rights of minorities to maintain any educational institution of their choice, interpretation of which is no doubt a judicial matter. Article 30

(2) further provides for scope of seeking funds from the state for such institutions. Interpretation of these two articles further roots in the Freedom of Religion as guaranteed by articles 25 to 30. For the sake of this article, the accepted definition of 'minority' has been the group whose population is less than 50%. However, the question that arises is over how the 50% of the population is calculated; is it calculated with regards to the composition of a particular area, one state, or the entire country at large? One community could be a minority at one place and a majority at another, and therefore not only the rights need to be absolute, but also the criteria that determine the status of a minority community. Through the developments of the cases of *re: The Kerala Education Bill* (*re: The Kerala Education Bill,... vs Unknown, 1958)*, T.M.A. Pai (*T.M.A. Pai Foundation & Ors vs State of Karnataka & Ors, 2002),* and most recently the ongoing AMU case (*Aligarh Muslim University Through its Registrar Faizan Mustafa vs Naresh Agarwal, 2006)*, the conceptualization and implementation of a definition of 'minority' may be traced, yet the grey area remains large.

From even a superficial reading of the relevant provisions of the constitution, the very goal of the state as a guardian for the disadvantaged is clear. State has been guided towards the light of protecting those who are socially downtrodden. If the majority, which already assumed a substantial quantum of power in the state machinery, is given the benefit of a loophole due to the lack of a universal, non-contested definition of 'minority', the very purpose of a welfare state is defeated and internal peace threatened. Equating national minority communities with those of the national majority is *prima facie* biased and inegalitarian (Requejo, 2005).

A Historical Background of Manipur

The Northeastern state of Manipur is one layered with ethnic diversity and no stranger to civil strife. The current scenario presents a scene of direct socio-political and total geographical separation between the valleys and the hills. Since time immemorial, administration of the valleys and the hills were always two distinct set-ups. There has been a distinct legal system and system of land ownership under tribe chieftainship in the hills as opposed to Maharaja rule in the valleys. After India attained independence, Manipur subsequently joined India in 1949, (*Manipur Merger Agreement, 1949*) abandoning its sovereignty and its erstwhile 'Kangleipak kingdom', and earning statehood in 1972 (*North- East Area Reorganisation Act, 1971)* which brought along with it popular dissent among its populace. Manipur has a lengthy history of inter-ethnic conflict and insurgency. The United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the first armed opposition organisation, was established in 1964 with the goal of separating Manipur from India and creating a new nation (Manipur, India - A safe house for dangerous men, 2007). With time, numerous other groups emerged in Manipur, each with its own objectives and the backing of various ethnic communities. While the valley-based Meitei insurgents demanded a separate nation from India, the Kuki insurgents sought for a state within a state under the provisions of Article 244 A of the Indian Constitution. Following Manipur's attainment of statehood, the hills' administration underwent corresponding reforms. Through the Twenty-Seventh Amendment Act of 1971, the Union government added Article 371 C to the Indian Constitution in order to address unique issues that might result from administrative reforms. The Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Order, 1972 was then issued by the Indian President, and as a result, the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) was established to safeguard the interests of the tribals and provide for accelerated

development in the hills (Bhatia, 2010). However, this is a contentious issue because of reports at the ground level about the ineffectiveness and disability of the HAC and its institutions. The proposed reforms aimed to grant hill villages 'internal autonomy' within the state, but the majoritarian administration is unwilling to give up the hegemonic control it has wielded for more than 50 years (Haokip, 2022). The pent-up resentment and systematic exploitation of the minority tribes, especially under the Biren administration, unfolded in the form of dissent, protests, and counter protests which eventually led to the recent pogrom of 2023, where the Meiteis' consistent majoritarian goals are the core cause of this exploitation.

Deconstructing the Manipur Issue

The rippling effects of majoritarianism are observed even amongst the subaltern landscapes where sub-groups drown in in-fighting. The Manipur issue has made news headlines lately and echoed the seepage of majoritarianism even amongst minority groups. 57% of the population lives in the valley region (*Manipur Population Census data, 2011*) of which, the majority are the Meiteis, who follow Hinduism. The remaining population resides in the hills, the religion primarily being Christianity. The people of Manipur form a minority group in the wider demography; however, upon an inspection of the regional politics, one can get a gist of the multi-faceted power conflict. With affiliations to and acceptance of the agendas of the majoritarian Hindu nationalists, the Meiteis managed to catch hold of the centre stage in public discourse. Sadly, their religious identity became a tool at the hands of such nationalists to portray their creed as "victims" to the "extremes" of the minority population of Manipur. Where the aim of the discussion should have been amelioration and immediate restoration of peace in the country, newspapers rang the bells of "religious persecution". It did not take long before the political violence came to be seethed in religious colour. With allegations such as "Myanmar illegal immigrants" and "opium cultivators" the entire Kuki-Zomi population came to be vilified. The events of May 3 (Dhillon, 2023) unfolded into a brutal slaughter of the tribal population in Meitei dominated regions. The Meitei were quick to add their side of the story and propagate the "immigrant" agenda. In early 2023, Meitei Tribal Union submitted a writ petition to the Manipur High Court to seek Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. They complained about not being able to buy land in the hills while the tribal population can do so in the valleys. They argued that to remove this unjustness, they needed to be included in the scheduled list (Manipur High Court admits plea on ST status of Meiteis, 2023). The single-judge bench even passed the order directing the state government to confer the ST status on Meiteis. This order was stayed by the Supreme Court, calling it "factually incorrect" (Pal, 2023). Meiteis are included in the OBC category, but they further seek the ST status. The distinction between the status of the Kukis and the Meiteis is necessary to acknowledge the state demography. If both are given the same rights, majoritarian forces will rise rampantly. The state government is, in all regards, biased against the hill population. They seek to benefit the already privileged. The demand is not only a jibe on political ideals of equity but also on the economics of welfare. A Pareto-optimal solution only comes when the welfare policies uplift both communities in an equitable manner, but this is clearly not the closure the State Government is seeking to achieve. Meiteis, who already have better access to education and job opportunities will slowly take over the state machinery to the jarring disadvantage of the Kuki-Zomi population. If we start to talk of political equality, we must also be mindful of the difference in the seats allocated to hills and valleys in the State Legislature. 40 seats are allotted to the valley, while

20 to the hills (Harad, 2023). The Chief Minister has conveyed his prejudice and malignity quite clearly, having called the hill-dwellers "poppy cultivators" and "illegal immigrants" in more than one recorded public speech. The signs are clear but the solution is not so much. Arguments forwarded by the Meiteis can be assumed to be plausible in the lack of conceptual clarity of what defines a minority. Mere land disparity in no way defines minorities.

The very concept of minorities proves to be quite difficult. Through judgments such as that of TMA Pai, efforts have been made with regards to seeking a clear end to the hazy cloud of undefined territory, the basis of which is entirely based on claim and contention. The majority of Manipur as a state is Meitei, but the problem arises with the 'demographic' analysis. Meiteis are a minority in the hills; Kuki-Zo tribes form the majority in the hills and a minority overall. The jamboree of differences arises as a group seeks to contend for a minority status where it is in minority despite its dominance all in all. If we simply define minorities as "those which are lesser in population", we open a door to nowhere. A powerful majoritarian group may, because of the 'demographic' and historical divide be a minority in one particular smaller section of the entire vast territory; however, when given that the majority of state machinery resides with them, it shall be an easy task to hijack the rights guaranteed exclusively to the minority, ultimately disgracing the constitutional vision of uplifting those who need the support of the State.

The Victim-Perpetrator Roulette

The focus of mainland media yet remained on religious protectionism and nationalistic chauvinism (Khare, 2022). The Meitei population very cleverly sought attention on the basis of their religion and the North and Central Indian populace have been successfully mobilised into their support. The nasty politics does not end at misrepresentation of the issue and contortion, but moves towards claim over victims of their own atrocities. Soon began the roulette of victimisation and perpetration. The majority within the marginalised community in an attempt to gain the traction over the minority, blamed the Kuki-Zomi populace for the violence and consequently all attempts of theirs came to be hunted down as barbaric and incessant acts of violence. The fine line of morality between perpetration and self-defence warped and wore thin, ultimately stripping the community of its right to protect itself. More so, the derogatory pin-pointing led to popular rebellion resulting in complete chaos. Yet the Hindu nationalists persisted in support of their "comradery", to protect "Bharat Mata" (Mother India) which they have blatantly confused with the Hinduistic religious identity. The insecurity and fear of being outnumbered is deep seated and the same is counted upon by the slightly advantaged marginalised community to gain association with the "cultural hegemon". It merely warrants them to continue on with their unprovoked ethnic cleansing.

Having explained the ethnic demography of Manipur, one thing that comes to the forefront is the systematic marginalisation of the tribal segment. The tribal groups which comprise around 40% of the population account for 19 out of the 60 constituencies in the state. Going by the 2011 census (*Manipur Population Census data, 2011)* and data analysis by the Zomi Students' Federation and Kuki Students' Organisation presented in the form of a book called 'The Inevitable Split' documenting the events in Manipur in 2023, one tribal MLA from the hills represented more than 60,000 people,

whereas one from the valleys was accountable to 40,841 people. It shows up as a prime example of political injustice, wherein a group is severely underrepresented and sidelined. The Constitution of India, under Article 244 (2) guarantees a special provision for autonomous administration of the tribal areas in the Northeast. But the protective provision itself becomes redundant when the hill council is reduced to a mere advisory body instead of an administrative one. Apart from political deprivation, economic disadvantage and development concentration are two other factors leading to systematic marginalisation. The piece of documentation that has been mentioned before also highlights, the practice of making separate allocation for the hill in the budget was discontinued in the absence of any reasonable explanation. Fund allocation for the hills rarely crosses the one-tenth benchmark despite accounting for a great majority of land. Often, the Grants-in-Aid is diverted to the development of valley regions (*The Inevitable Split,* 2023).

Meitei dominated regions, especially Imphal often complain of infiltration by the hill dwellers. However the contention here must not be mindless finger-pointing. One major factor for probable crowding is the very crowding of government institutions in the valley region, keeping the hills deliberately underdeveloped and deserted while citing environmental reasons.

The social status of hill people is outrageously that of "*Haomacha*" which means untouchable (*The Inevitable Split,* 2023). There are layers and layers of marginalisation on the microscopic level. When we look from a vantage we can observe that the whole population of Manipur forms a minority in India. On a national level, the Meiteis and Kuki-Zomi groups suffer the brunt of majoritarian tendencies rather than as a group. There is great power in the hands of the Hindu population. Over the course of years, we have seen the unification of national identity with the colour saffron. Evidently, any minority group would want to benefit from the shades of the colour orange, especially to seek certain privileges guaranteed to sections culturally different from the mainland. Meiteis have strategically used such tactics. They have appealed to the senses of the national majority to seek fervour. The 'narcissism of minor differences' (Hausing, 2011) is not only a deciding political factor at a regional level but also at the national level.

Conclusion

Ideologies are one of the most powerful tools in the hands of the hegemon. Once a well-defined thought, moral or otherwise, is presented to the people, it gives a false sense of cause to the people. They mobilise and polarise into fragments in favour or against that agenda. Nationalistic identity itself has always carried a divine form and unified the citizens together for the interest of the nation. However, its amalgamation with religious supremacy has led to something vicious (Gupta, 2007). Supremacists sway the national fervour to their requirements and the marginalised become silenced. The majoritarian tears down the marginalised and seethes it with violence only for the events of Manipur to reincarnate itself.

Manipur is a mini world-system in itself. The principles of modern capitalism - the rigid developed and the underdeveloped, are applicable and interpreted politically. The minority may have the 'special right' but not real state power. The dominant class seeks to take over these bare entitlements in the name of 'immigrant crisis'. The national majority joins in for their personal advantage. Events repeat themselves

in one form or the other. Self-defence becomes violent perpetration and so on and so forth. These are the times that call for concretised solutions and not vote-bank politics.

The tribal population has time and again reiterated the demand for separate administration, a complete separation of the hill and valley region. Creation of a separate state may not be feasible given the small land size and population, but creation of a Union Territory and its administration by the union itself is the safest and practical most long-term solution. Not only will it allow the state to actively protect ethnic violence, but may as well provide for ground level development which has for so long been denied to hill areas. There might be difficulties in implementation of demands, however that does not leave space for 'it-shall-too-pass' strategy. Political hue and cry, mobilisation, or integrationist groupism will only lead to further tensions, Provided the nature, scale, and intensity of the conflict the violence will continue to live in the minds of the people in addition to the already existing years of animosity. Forgiveness will come in years, the urgency till then resides in creating a demarcated undisputed separate administration.

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The Great Fall:

McCarthy's Ouster and Republican Political Cannibalism in the House of Representatives

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Abstract

In October of 2023, Kevin McCarthy became the first House Speaker in the United States history to be removed through a motion to 'vacate the chair'. The primary question addressed in this research is why the US House of Representatives broke over two centuries of precedence, and evicted their Speaker, pushing the US Congress into uncharted and unprecedented territory. The author argues that the main reason for Speaker McCarthy's dismissal was the historical trend of "political cannibalism" that has become a part of the Republican Party's nature in the 21st century. While other commentators have offered explanations ranging from personal vendetta to failed bipartisanship, the author of this research asserts that these explanations are not reasons, but symptoms of a broader tendency of the House Republican Conference to "cannibalise" its leadership. Through the use of qualitative historical approach analysis under an interpretivist framework, this research utilises historical records, individual testimonies, and journalistic reports to establish a causal link between the ouster of Speaker McCarthy and the historical propensity of Republican House members preying upon their leadership, which derives from factional antagonisms having overtaken any semblance of party unity. The author here points to processes set in motion by the 'Republican Revolution' of 1994, which have led the House Republican Conference to become an organisation where the desire to undermine, outmanoeuvre, and ideologically outflank each other has become a core political principle, resulting in the rank-and-file members showing hostility to their party leaders. The rise of Donald Trump, the vilification of compromise and the results of the 2022 midterm elections have further expedited the process of political cannibalisation, which manifested in a minuscule Republican minority overthrowing their leader. The legacy of now-disgraced former Speaker McCarthy is a House of Representatives in chaos and a Republican Conference ready to self-combust at the slightest incitement.

The Great Fall: Kevin McCarthy's Ouster and Republican Dynamics in the US House of Representatives

On 3rd of October, 2023, Kevin McCarthy, the Republican congressman from California, made history. McCarthy, who had been serving as the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, was ousted from his office by a majority vote of 216 to 210 (Escobar, et al, 2023). This marks the first time in US history that a Speaker of the US Congress has been removed by a vote of no-confidence. In this paper, it is argued that this historical debacle is not a fluke or a result of recent developments, rather, it is the culmination of a long trajectory taken by the Republican Party's House Congressional Caucus.

Using news sources, historical evidence, and political literature, this paper attempts to argue that McCarthy's unceremonious exit is a result of the fundamental nature of the modern 21st century Republican Party. Since 1994, the Republicans have gone through five House speakers within their 21 years of the House majority (roughly 4.2 years for each). In contrast, Democrats have had just one speaker in the eight years they held power in the House. This paper searches for the reason that Republican leadership has a high job turnover. In the light of which, this paper argues that the removal of Kevin McCarthy as speaker and the chaos that ensued is not an exceptional event, but rather a culmination of a long running process of self-destruction amongst Republicans.

Brief Context

The United States of America House of Representatives is the lower chamber of the bicameral US Congress. It serves biannual terms and its constituencies are based on census redistricting (Article 1, Section 2, US Constitution). The purpose of the US House of Representatives (colloquially 'the House') is to provide direct representation federally. Elections to the House that coincide with a Presidential election are called 'General Elections' and those that occur in the middle of the President's term are called 'Midterm Elections'. Along with the Senate, which uses whole states as constituencies, the House was born out of 'The Great Compromise' of 1787. As part of this deal, the Senate was to represent the long-term interests of the country and give voices to all states equally to prevent the hegemony of large states; while the House was to represent the current mood of the country and give the large states representation in proportion to their population to prevent minority rule. The total strength of the House is capped at 435 since the year 1910 (Ritchie, 2010). The most critical function of the House of Representatives is to appropriate funds through budgets, which allows the federal US government to spend money and keep its operations running. If the US Congress does not appropriate funds to the federal government in order to pay its employees and run its business, the government can no longer function and goes into a 'government shutdown'. In such a situation the US government can no longer carry out its operations until its supply of money is resumed by the Congress.

The Speaker serves as presiding officer of the House and its de facto leader. The constitution of the USA does not explicitly grant this position any power. Rather, all major and minor powers held by the Office of the Speaker today have been accumulated through the centuries by the holders of this office through rules passed by the House itself or through conventions (Chiu, 2019). In many cases, the power of the Speaker's Office has waxed and waned depending on the leadership capacity and influence of the individual who has occupied the position (Green, 2010). Initially, the role of the speaker was largely neutral, but under statesman Henry Clay, the speakership evolved into a political role, and since then the Speaker has also served as the leader of the majority party in the House (Ritchie, 2010). Today, all business of the House is presided over by the Speaker, who also appoints committees and has the authority to set the legislative agenda; along with a myriad of other accrued powers.

Under the current system, the House splits into two legislative groups – the House Republican Conference and the House Democratic Caucus. These groups fundraise for candidates, help them get nominations and whip votes for each side when the House calls for a vote. There are elected officers

within the caucuses such as the chairs and vice-chairs who lead these groups and represent the official voice of the party. Even if these party groups are influential, it is notable that intra-party caucuses within each party also hold tremendous weight and tend to vote in blocs (Rubin, 2017).

Newt Gingrich and The Republican Revolution

The roots of the modern conditions of the House Republican Conference and the chaos it begets lie squarely in the 1994 'Republican Revolution'. Prior to the 1990s, the House of Representatives was dominated by the Democrats for a long period. Over the course of decades, the perpetual Democrat majority and Republican minority had reached a consensus called the 'new deal coalition', which embraced social liberalism, welfare spending and a proactive role of the state (Drew, 1996). Throughout the 1980s however, a new crop of House Republicans emerged on the scene, typified by Dick Armey of Texas and Newt Gingrich of Georgia. This new group of Republicans shared a deep resentment towards not only the Democrats, but also their own Republican leadership. They believed that the welfare state institutions were obsolete and that the Republican Party needed to adopt hardline right-wing conservatism as the gospel truth which guides all governing principles. These new Republicans believed they were fighting an ideological crusade to save the soul of America from oppression of the elites. As a result, they viewed political compromise as submission to the enemies of America (Rosenfeld, 2018).

In 1992, Bill Clinton was elected president of the United States, despite many Republicans viewing him as an over-the-top threat to the United States. By this time, Newt Gingrich had emerged as the leader of the House Republican Conference. Gingrich and his allies believed that Clinton's presidency was illegitimate and many on the far right of the Republican Party believed the president was a drug addict, murderer, and potential dictator with covert plans to perpetuate his tenure office and to end democracy in the United States (Gould, 2014). As the 1994 midterm elections approached, House Republicans created a 'Contract With America', which was a promise to try and dismantle the American liberal welfare state (Gillon, 2008). Gingrich made the anti-Clinton sentiment a core tenant of the party's platform and created a vicious personalised vilification campaign. A vote for Republicans in 1994 was made out to be a vote against the very personage of President Clinton. Republicans won the 1994 elections with a large margin and obtained commanding majorities. They took control of the House of Representatives for the first time in four decades. This 'Republican Revolution' was seen by many to be a triumph of personalisation of politics which led to demonisation of political opponents (Critchlow, 2015). The Gingrich led Republican Conference took control of the legislature, not as a tool of policy making but as a weapon of policy nullification. Republicans had waged a successful war on the concepts of consensus and compromise (Rosenfeld, 2018).

As the new House Speaker, Gingrich realised his dream of creating a House Republican Conference that not only stopped creating consensus with the Democrats, but also despised consensus amongst its own members. Gingrich's primary teaching to his caucus was "political cannibalism". He taught his caucus that Republicans had to learn to get rid of those amongst them who had outlived their usefulness in politics. Gingrich's foremost governing principle was nastiness, which to him was the

greatest political virtue. He remarked, "one of the great problems we have in the Republican Party is that we don't encourage you to be nasty. We encourage you to be neat, obedient, and loyal, and faithful, and all those Boy Scout words, which … are lousy in politics". Gingrich made animosity towards your own party colleagues a basic feature of the Republican Caucus (Zelizer, 2020).

Gingrich clashed with Clinton periodically and his fight with the president led to a government shutdown in 1995-1996. The shutdown cost the US economy millions of dollars and forced multiple government services to shut down (Drew, 1996). Gingrich admitted to the 'The Christian Science Monitor' that the shutdown was in fact a petty revenge ploy, which made it seem as if Gingrich was throwing a tantrum at the cost of the economy (Purdum, 2018). When Clinton was re-elected for a second term in 1996, many pundits and insiders blamed the vindictive government shutdown for the Republican loss. However, Gingrich soon found a way to undermine Clinton once and for all. When the infamous Clinton–Lewinsky scandal was revealed, Gingrich left no stone unturned to make a spectacle out of it. Advocate Ken Starr, who had previously investigated Clinton in a property scandal, was appointed to investigate the nature of explicit relationships between President Clinton and the White House Intern Monica Lewinsky. Based on his report, Gingrich instituted an impeachment inquiry into Bill Clinton. As the inquiry went on, a group of House Republicans tried to oust Gingrich and failed (Broder & Yang, 1997). This group of Republicans, who claimed to be "pragmatists", saw Gingrich's campaign against Clinton as a publicity stunt and painted him as an ideological fundamentalist. Gingrich had hoped that the American public would completely reject the scandal ridden Democrats in the 1998 midterm election — he was wrong. Republicans had a historic underperformance in the 1998 midterm elections and nearly lost the majority in the House (Gillon, 2008). The "pragmatist" faction led by Bob Livingston and John Boehner (then Chair of the House Republican Conference) made a second push to oust Gingrich. Gingrich was now widely viewed as a political liability who had caused heavy losses to his own party. As Gingrich's hold on power was loosening due to election losses, news broke out that much like President Clinton, Gingrich had also been involved in a relationship with a Congressional staffer (Dickinson, 2012). The so-called "Callista Affair" lost Gingrich any political mileage he might have had at that point. Instead of facing a challenge from his own caucus, Gingrich resigned his position and retired from Congress. In one of the final meetings with his colleagues, Gingrich complained that, "I'm willing to lead but I am not willing to preside over people who are cannibals" (The Associated Press, 1998). In an ironic yet cyclical display of ruthless politics, Newt Gingrich was removed from power by people who were following his lesson of "political cannibalism" (Saletan, 1998).

Between Gingrich and McCarthy

Upon Gingrich's resignation, his automatic presumed successor was his ally turned critic, Bob Livingston of Louisiana. But, as Livingston's election to the coveted office drew closer, it was revealed that he too was an adulterer. House Speaker elect Bob Livingston confessed to having been involved in an extramarital relationship and resigned before taking office (Neikirk, Dorning, & Blum, 1998).

In this vacuum, Republican Chief Deputy Whip Dennis Hastert became the new Speaker in 1999. Hastert was a compromise choice between the "pragmatists" and the "ideologues". His election was largely a result of the fact that no other bigwig was willing to throw their name in the ring out of the fear of dividing the already miniscule Republican majority (Dorning, 2014). Hastert instituted numerous measures to prevent a small minority of ideologues from hijacking the House. Of these, the most important was the informal 'Hastert Rule' which dictated that only those bills were to be presented in Congress that had the approval of a majority amongst the majority caucus beforehand. This not only weakened the Democrats ability to propose legislation, but also prevented extreme members of the majority party from presenting bills in the House (Babington, 2004). Compared to his predecessor and his eventual successors, Hastert might have been considered a 'good speaker'. He enjoyed the tacit support of all factions in his party and did not face any major opposition from within his own caucus. When Republicans lost the majority in 2006, he quietly retired as a well-respected politician. This is how his story would have ended had the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) not launched an investigation into his finances. Nearly a decade post-retirement, Hastert was accused, charged, indicted, and convicted of sexually assaulting at least five underage boys and using hush money to try and shut them up (Zapotosky, 2016). Dennis Hastert, the longest serving Republican Speaker of the House will go down in history as a convicted paedophile sex offender (Schmidt, 2017).

One of Gingrich's original rivals, John Boehner, succeeded Hastert as the new leader of the Republicans. Once Republicans recaptured the majority in 2010, Boehner became the speaker. Within a year of his election, Boehner already started facing opposition from a group of Republican Colleagues who identified themselves as members of the 'Tea Party', a right-wing libertarian movement that sought to reduce government spending and end the fiscal deficit (Cillizza, 2013). These Republicans voted against measures that were seen as bipartisan and considered such bills to be examples of Boehner bowing down to President Obama, a Democrat. The fact that Boehner did not nullify Obama's agenda completely and worked with him on occasion, proved to the hardline Republicans that Boehner was a part of the 'corrupt establishment'. His image as a 'pragmatic conservative' made him less and less palatable to the Tea Party extremists. Many of these hardliners voted against his re-election to the speakership in 2013 (MacAskill, 2013). In particular, when Boehner refused to threaten the Democrats with a government shutdown in the course of budget negotiations, he earned the ire of multiple fiscal conservatives of his party. Boehner also refused to support the racist 'birther conspiracy' dog whistle against Obama, a major talking point of many Republicans of the day (Boehner, Boehner to 'birthers': Hawaii good enough for me, 2011). Boehner was constantly opposed to his legislative agenda, and was blocked by the right-wing partisans of his caucus on many major bills. By the year 2015, Boehner believed he could no longer hold his leadership position in a bona fide manner. Caught between a progressive Obama White House and an increasing number of ultra-conservative detractors; Boehner stepped down as Speaker and Head of the House Republican Conference (Bacon, 2015). Boehner would later call the right-wing demagogic ideologues within his caucus "political terrorists", and declared them to be "legislative terrorists just looking to go to Washington and blow everything up" (Boehner, On the House: A Washington Memoir, 2021).

A new generation of Republican leaders who had pressured Boehner to leave was the triad of new leaders called the 'Young Guns', which consisted of Eric Cantor of Virginia, Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and Kevin McCarthy of California. Once Boehner was out of the picture, Kevin McCarthy was put up by the Young Guns and their supporters as the first choice for Speaker. McCarthy committed a major blunder before the speaker election. He claimed on national television that the Republican Party was using its House majority to enact a witch-hunt against Democrat Hillary Clinton (Prokop, 2015). By "saying the quiet part out loud", McCarthy had told the country that Republicans were weaponizing their legislative powers and severely undermined the credibility of the ongoing Benghazi investigations in the House. McCarthy's gaffe alienated many Republicans and he dropped out of the race for speakership (Steinhauer & Herszenhorn, 2015).

The Republicans' new choice for speaker was Paul Ryan. Ryan's term was accentuated with the rise and consolidation of the House Freedom Caucus. The Freedom Caucus was founded by ultra-conservative Republicans opposed to the establishmentarian pragmatism and compromise (Newton-Small, 2015). The aim of this caucus was to push the Republican Party and the House of Representatives to the political right (Lizza, 2015). The Freedom Caucus had supported Ryan to prevent themselves from being ostracised from the rest of the party (Newhauser & Fox, 2015). However, the Freedom Caucus mostly raged against Ryan's leadership rather than stand with him (Bade, 2016). Ryan's speakership also coincided with the rise of Donald Trump, who served as President from 2016-2020. Trump's brand of politics ushered a sea change in Republican Politics. The ideas of "Reaganomics" and "Compassionate Conservatism" were deemed obsolete and a new tide of "politics of rage" and "American Carnage" took over (Alberta, 2019). Trump's brand of politics advocated that the noisiest voices got the most attention, and therefore were the most powerful voices (Haberman, 2022). Under Trump's influence, the House Republican Conference fully embraced right-wing populism and anti-establishmentarian rhetoric, rejecting any need for policy making or electoral platforms (Kazin, 2017). In 2018, when Republicans lost the majority and Ryan stepped down as Speaker, he left a Republican Conference dominated by the worst instincts of "Trumpism" and hyper-partisanship (Werner, 2018).

Kevin McCarthy and 2022 Elections

Prior to the 2022 midterm elections to the House, polls and conventional wisdom said that Republicans would take back the majority in the House of Representatives (Fitzgerald, 2022). Kevin McCarthy, who had returned as Republican leader post Paul Ryan's exit, predicted that the Party would win in a landslide wave (Goldiner, 2022). But as the results came in, it was clear that the Republican wave had fizzled. They flipped just nine seats, and ended up getting a four-seat majority in a House of 435 members. Not only that, but Democrats still controlled the Senate and the White House. The narrow majority made it so that Kevin McCarthy needed the near unanimous support of his caucus of 222 members, since 218 is the needed majority number to be elected speaker. Upon the declaration of results, McCarthy had prepared for a gruelling battle to the speakership. But even before the floor vote, McCarthy faced an internal challenge from far-right Freedom Caucus member, Andy Biggs of Arizona (Zanona, Rogers, & Raju, 2022). Before the Speaker vote was to commence on the 3rd

of January 2023, several Republicans announced their refusal to support McCarthy (Beavers & Carney, 2023). Despite this, McCarthy decided to force a vote on the House floor. McCarthy failed to win over nineteen Republican votes and lost the first round of the Speaker election. This marked the first time in over a century that the majority party failed to elect a speaker in the first round (Brockell, 2023). Not only that, but McCarthy lost all the three rounds of voting held on the 3rd of January. The primary source of opposition to McCarthy came from the Freedom Caucus and its most conservative members. The anti-McCarthy camp did not have one single candidate, but worked to deny him the 218-vote mark. McCarthy began slowly whittling away at his opponents, and made many concessions to the extreme right flank of his party conference (Bushard, 2023). McCarthy's most significant concession was to grant a rule change that would allow a single member to file a vote of no-confidence against the speaker. At one point, after McCarthy lost the 14th round of votes, pro-McCarthy congressman Mike Rogers of Alabama almost physically assaulted an anti-McCarthy congressman Matt Gaetz of Florida (Wu & Hill, 2023). McCarthy finally won the Speakership on the 15th round of votes, with 216 votes for McCarthy, 212 votes for the Democrat nominee Hakeem Jeffries, and six republican members voting 'present' to reduce the majority threshold. This was the most rounds needed to choose a Speaker since the US Civil War (1860-1865).

The Ouster of Speaker McCarthy and its Aftermath

Within months of being elected, McCarthy came to loggerheads with his adversaries of the House Freedom Caucus. As previously stated, one of the main functions of the House is to provide funding to the government at large. To do this, the House must raise the "debt-ceiling", so that the government can borrow more money from the reserves and keep itself running. In May of 2023, McCarthy began negotiating with the Senate leaders and the White House under President Biden, a Democrat. The negotiations however were fraught with discontent, since McCarthy was being pressured by his Republican colleagues to demand large budget cuts, and Biden was unwilling to make any reductions to the expenditure on welfare schemes (Drenon, 2023). The mounting threat of the government defaulting on its debt did not stop the hardliner Republicans from resisting any compromise with the Democrats (Lange, Slattery, & Morgan, 2023). By the end of the month, McCarthy and Biden reached a tentative deal that further matured into the 'Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2023' (Gregorian, 2023). Neither the deal nor the final bill had the full endorsement of far-right Republicans (Blitzer, 2023), with seventy-one Republican members voting against the Act (Office of the Clerk, 2023).

McCarthy's true test came in September however, when the actual appropriations budget of the US government was put to vote in the House. On 29th of September, the Federal Government appropriations budget that was endorsed by McCarthy was defeated in the House. Hardline Republicans, most of them members of the Freedom Caucus, cross voted with the Democrats to tank this budget (Warburton & Morgan, 2023). In effect, this meant the US government would run out of money and shut down on the first of October. Rather than pass a full budget, McCarthy negotiated with the Democrats to pass a 'Continuing Resolution' on the 30th of September, which extended the ongoing budget and prevented a shutdown in the near future by kicking the can down the road (Edmondson & Hulse, Congress Narrowly Averts Shutdown as House Democrats Help Pass Stopgap

Bill, 2023). The Republican hardliners saw McCarthy's attempt at compromise a betrayal of their ideology, with many of them voting against the resolution. Now that the shutdown was averted, far-right House Republicans, led by Matt Gaetz of Florida, initiated a call to oust McCarthy from Speakership (Brassil & Lightman, 2023). Gaetz's dispute with McCarthy had a personal touch, but discontent against the Speaker also came from ideological critics of the Freedom Caucus. Even if a small group of Republican rebels were to try and remove McCarthy, it would be up to the Democrats to keep him in power by voting against his ouster. But rather than reaching out to Democrats to save his seat, McCarthy openly blamed them for the failure to pass a budget, despite having passed the 'Continuing Resolution' with their support (Fortinsky, 2023). McCarthy alienated his own party's right flank as well as the Democrats in the House (Benen, 2023).

On the 2nd of October, Gaetz filed the motion to 'vacate the chair'. The final vote on the 3rd of October saw the House vote to remove the sitting speaker. With a tally of 216-210 (Roll Call 519; House Resolution 757, 2023), 208 Democrats and 8 Republicans voted in majority to carry the motion to remove McCarthy from his position, making it the first time in history that such a motion had passed. Kevin McCarthy lost his gavel in less than ten months from the assumption of office (Edmondson, McCarthy Is Ousted as Speaker, Leaving the House in Chaos, 2023).

McCarthy's removal pushed the house into an unprecedented scenario. The Republican Conference was still divided, and most Republicans still harboured resentment towards the eight members who had unseated McCarthy. The Republican Conference's first choice to replace McCarthy was his lieutenant and Republican Caucus floor leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana. Scalise withdrew his nomination before a floor vote could occur (Broadwater, Edmondson, & Demirjian, 2023). Republicans then chose the poster-boy of the famous and infamous Freedom Caucus, Jim Jordan of Ohio to be their next nominee. Jordan pushed for a floor vote, but his candidature was blocked by the moderates of his party (Kilander & Garcia, 2023). In the course of three ballots, Jordan lost more and more votes each time before being removed as candidate by his conference (Kimball & Wilkins, 2023). The next nominee was Minnesota native Tom Emmer. Emmer was publicly denounced by the former president, Trump and rescinded his candidature before the speakership vote (Isenstadt & McGraw, 2023). The now fatigued House Republicans finally settled on Christian-Nationalist Mike Johnson of Louisiana, who was ultimately elected Speaker of the House on the 25th of October, 2023 (Sotomayor, Alemany, Caldwell & Meyer, 2023). In a span of twenty-two days, the House Republican Conference had cycled through a total of five different choices for the Speakership.

McCarthy's Fall and Politics of Chaos

Most commentators have ascribed McCarthy's fall to a multitude of reasons rooted in recent years. Some have blamed his lack of bipartisanship (Fortinsky, 2023; Benen, 2023), and oxymoronically others say it was his bipartisanship that sank his vessel (Brassil & Lightman, 2023). Both of these reasons obviously cannot be true together. Still other reasons have ascribed his fall to a narrow house majority of just four seats. This is however an ahistorical statement, since speakers with similar majorities have survived full terms in office, including Nancy Pelosi (speaker from 2006-2010, 2018-2022), who also

had a miniscule four seat majority in the House. Another argument made by many is that McCarthy's seat was threatened from the beginning by the Right flank within his party (Blitzer, 2023), and that his failure to keep his promises to them caused the revolt against McCarthy (Hulse, 2023). Still other commentators have placed the onus on individuals like Matt Gaetz (New York Post Editorial Board, 2023) or Donald Trump (LeVine, Scherer & Reston, 2023).

At best, these explanations are judgements of symptoms, rather than the root cause of the problem. By looking at Kevin McCarthy's speakership in a vacuum, as most commentators have done, they fail to take cognizance of the chain of events that led to the said event. It is only through the discussion of prior Republican speakerships of Newt Gingrich, Dennis Hastert, John Boehner, and Paul Ryan, that we can see a long-term pattern of disruption in the Republican Caucus, which is rooted in the principle of 'Political Cannibalism'. The attempt made here is to specifically contextualise the events of McCarthy's dismissal in the context of larger political forces that have been at play. Gingrich and Boehner had to leave their positions due to internal opposition, and Ryan also faced the threat of revolt from the Freedom Caucus (Bade, 2016). Hastert also had to make arrangements like the 'Hastert Rule' to keep the far-right minority in his caucus at bay.

The Political Cannibalisation of the leaders within the Republican party reflects a post-policy and post-consensus political reality, where classical ideologies have been made irrelevant by populism, culture wars, and media circuses (Martin, 2021; Alberta, 2019; Popli, 2023). By fighting against their own leadership, Republicans fundraise for elections (Gillespie, 2023), and polish their credentials as anti-establishmentarian populists (Kazin, 2017). Political Cannibalism is politically expedient not only because it helps Republican members climb the leadership hierarchy, but also because it keeps them from being burdened by the responsibility to govern. As Republican leadership administers and governs the House in a majority, the average House Republican can remain in office without actually caring about policy by simply raging against everyone else and scapegoating their leaders when they are confronted about the lack of concrete achievements. Political Cannibalisation makes it so that ungovernability (Hulse, 2023), personal vendetta (Donlevy, 2023), chaos (Cottle, Douthat, & Polgreen, 2023), and factionalism (Olsen, 2021) are not roadblocks, but advantages in the ascendency of a Republican politician. Political Cannibalisation induced chaos has allowed a shorter and more expedient path to power. Gingrich toppled the entire preceding Republican leadership, and was then ousted by Boehner, Hastert and Livingston in turn. Boehner was then forced out by the pressure of the 'Young Guns' including McCarthy and Ryan; who were then forced out by the Freedom Caucus and other far-right ideologues. This cycle of supplanting one generation of leaders by next is the true causation and the backdrop which should inform our inquiry into McCarthy's historical unseating. The trends and processes which began in the past of the House Republican Conference have led it to 'decapitate its own head'. The seeds of this historical act lie in the evolution of the modern House Republican Conference, as set in motion by the 'Republican Revolution' of 1994.

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5-4-3-2-1: THE DRAGON TALES

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Taming the Dragon

A dragon soaring through the sky with ambitious flames, her wings slicing through the air in a fiery dance of determined fervour, her victory remains immortal and inevitable for no single warrior can bring her to a point of capture. But there is one way out, which is to wait for the dragon to get down to the ground, all by herself. Patience is required, after which the dragon could be attacked from various points in different ways. Patience will ensure that the dragon does not leave the ground; various points of attack with well-reasoned different approaches will ensure that the dragon gets distracted on different fronts. Thus, this remains the only plausible way of capturing a strong and ambitious dragon.

Imaginary creatures, animals, and birds often assume the role of a high metaphorical significance. Dragon has long been associated with Zhōngguó and the People's Republic of China takes over the successive role in the region. The symbol of the dragon was associated with a group of seven constellations in the Chinese sky. Due to their presence in the east in the season of spring, people started associating the symbol with dawn, good harvest, and the ability to fly and rise high like the sun (Wilson, 1990).

Playing with the Dragon

Two years ago, on March 22nd, 2022, in a press conference, the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China was asked several relevant questions pertaining to his domain, which was the external relations of the People's Republic of China. Lianhe Zaobao, the only Chinese daily in Singapore, raised a question about the implications of the recent developments by the United States in the Indo-Pacific and the meetings of Quad. The Minister replied, "The US (United States) is staging a “five-four-three-two” formation in the Asia-Pacific. This is by no means some kind of blessing for the region, but a sinister move to disrupt regional peace and stability. The real goal of the US Indo-Pacific strategy is to establish an Indo-Pacific version of NATO."

The answer could not be ignored. Dr C. Raja Mohan, the former Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, the National University of Singapore at a recent conference on Indo-Pacific, hosted by the Council for Strategic Defense and Research added another part to the outermost concentric circle of this formation, which was a "one", and made it the "five-four-three-two-one" formation; which brings us to another question - what precisely is the "five-four-three-two-one" formation? The intelligence of the Five Eyes (FVEY), the strategic alliance of the Quad, the trilateral security partnership of AUKUS, the modern strategic relationship of US-Japan, and the one, the outermost concentric circle, being the US herself. The allegations were not something new, but what made me write this essay is to examine

the claims. Bringing in the code-breaking team of the Five Eyes was something peculiar. Is the intelligence data still shared between those five countries? If they do, what does it pertain? What is the scope of it? Is the United States intentionally forming this formation for a future purpose? How is China planning to combat this 'Chakravyuh'? Will this formation be formalised under a single umbrella in the upcoming years? But before answering these pertinent questions, it becomes necessary for us to briefly study the US-China relations.

Understanding the Dragon: US-China Relations over a period of time

It becomes pertinent to note that there is a remarkable imbalance in the US-China trade relations right now. In 2022, the value of the exports made by the People's Republic of China to the United States is thrice the exports made by the US to the PRC. 6.5 per cent of the total US exports were made to China, whereas 14.2 per cent of the total US imports were contributed by China. The US flags certain issues concerning the trade relations, which include the human rights violations in the Chinese firms, and the practices that "unfairly force and incentivise" the transfer of US data and technology to their country (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Trade is only one of the major components of the relationship, and it must be noted that this was not even a basic analysis of the complex trade relationship between the countries, where the US finds the independent policies of the PRC as a necessary evil.

Until Deng Xiaoping opened the Chinese economy in the late 1970s, there was a severed tie between the US and the PRC due to the long-standing dispute, concerning the recognition of the People's Republic of China, given that the US had rendered her explicit support to General Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China during the turbulent periods of 1940s. During the period from 1949 to 1970, the basic feature of the Sino-US relationship was confrontation (Chang, 2000). The "Ping-Pong" Diplomacy and President Nixon's eight days in China during which he met Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, and Chairman Mao, and signed the Shanghai Communique helped soothe the severed ties, but the real relief came after the historic economic policies taken by Deng Xiaoping.

The June Fourth Incident or the Tiananmen Square Massacre, where we do not have precise data about the number of deaths and wounded, but it ranged from the protestors to the soldiers was a blow to the ongoing rebranding of the PRC. The Government of the US suspended the military relations with the country and the PRC could not become a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) until 2001. In 1999, during one of the killing sprees of the US, there was an "accidental", as claimed by NATO and the US, bombing of the PRC Embassy in Belgrade by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The then-Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) had termed the bombing, which left three journalists dead and more than twenty people working there injured, "barbaric".

In October 2000, with the signing of the "US-China Relations Act of 2000", the trade relations saw a new high, and the PRC was granted entry into the WTO. With an exponential rise during the first decade, China left behind Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. China saved the world economy and pulled the US out of the Great Recession of 2008 (Jingjing, 2019). The ongoing trade

war, multiple allegations of human rights violations, and COVID-19 is leading to a steep rise in the tension between the two countries.

Waiting for the Dragon?

Five Eyes (FVEY), denoting the Anglo-Saxon countries of the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand (NZ), the US, Australia, and Canada is an integral feature of this formation. I had the honour of asking about the veracity of Chinese claims about the FVEY to the former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor of India, and he said that if China is making a claim about the Five Eyes through its official channels, it must have some proper shreds of evidence and we cannot ignore it. FVEY is informal in nature, and there is not much known about it, except the conspiracy theories and leak-outs. It brings us to the question - what precisely is the FVEY? Why is the membership limited only to these five states? How do they operate? If they have been a secret organisation, how did they come into play?

After the BRUSA Agreement of 1943, which was an official agreement between the Governments of the US and the UK to cooperate when it came to sharing cryptic data, the Sinkov Mission, led by Captain Sinkov went to meet Professor Alan Turing in the Bletchley Park, the place where the German Enigma codes used to be cracked led by Professor's team. The purpose of this visit was to obtain necessary intelligence data about the Enigma and collaborate on the workings of 'Ultra', the British codename of which was 'Boniface', and the US used 'Magic', to convey that German Enigma codes and the Japanese Purple codes were being cracked through human intelligentsia. Considered to be the most secret agreement ever entered into by the English-speaking world, the UKUSA Agreement was born out of the "British-US Communication Intelligence Agreement", which was concluded on March 5th, 1946 (Williams, 2023). The UKUSA Agreement was made public for the first time in June 2010, surrounded by several controversies brought by the former employee of the US National Security Agency, Edward Snowden in 2013. The members had to be staunchly anti-communist, which would make them appear politically trustworthy, in order to become full members of this exclusive community (Williams, 2023), apart from being an Anglo-Saxon member of the Allies. The magnitude of secrecy could be inferred by noting that even the Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, remained uninformed of its existence until 1973 (Vingoe, 2013).

All of these points leave one important thing for us - why is China worried about an alliance which was formed during the 1940s and has its details all out in the public? If this question had been raised right on that fine day of March, 2022, we could not have answered this; but as the former NSA of India rightly said, if China makes any serious claim, there has to be some background to it, a few months ago, in October 2023, we saw the intelligence chiefs of the Five Eyes coming together to make a joint statement. The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States, Christopher Wray said that the "unprecedented" joint call was meant to confront the terrible threat China poses to innovation across the world. Companies like Microsoft made official statements alleging state-sponsored spying, hacking, and intellectual property theft from China. The FBI had busted a Chinese plot through which they had been trying to infiltrate a renowned Australian research institute. The Chinese called it a "collective disinformation campaign", but could not reply to the allegations factually.

We credit the origination of the term "Indo-Pacific" to the work of German scholar Karl Haushofer, 'Indopazifischen Raum'. This term started doing rounds around the corridors of geopolitical discourses after Former Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe's speech in the Parliament of India, where he had talked about the confluence of the "Two Seas". It must be noted, as the experts call it, an attempt to add India as a counterweight to China. Subsequently, we saw a new Indo-Pacific Division in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India, and the US renamed its USPACOM (US Pacific Command) to USINDOPACOM (US Indo-Pacific Command). Such developments were an explicit signal to the PRC about the upcoming strategic encirclement of the country. Although China should not have given up on the 'rhetoric' of the Indo-Pacific, we saw her succumbing to the war of words. It should be highlighted that in his very address about the strategic isolation and encirclement of China, Minister Wang Yi refers to the area as Indo-Pacific, and blamed the US for calling out her hypocrisy of forming "exclusive blocs" while talking of multilateralism.

Irrespective, the Indo-Pacific remains a conceptual framework, which highlights economic and security interdependence; while Quad is a minilateral framework of leading democracies in the region (Pulipaka & Musaddi, 2021). Quad owes its origin to the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. India, Australia, the US, and Japan had run a joint military campaign to provide relief, together they contributed over forty thousand troops. As the Former Foreign Secretary of India, Mr Shyam Saran was quoted by the Lowy Institute, the "frantic phone calls" between the four states to coordinate the reliefs led to this idea. The other three states except India had a common understanding of it to be a de facto military alliance (Flitton, 2020). The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue started in 2007 through the Malabar Exercise in the Bay of Bengal, where Singapore had joined the countries too, as a reaction to the growing animosity of China to its neighbouring states, but it ceased to exist in 2008, when the Quad was "killed" before its subsequent revival in 2017.

What, or rather, who killed Quad? Often, in the geopolitical discourses, the blame goes to the Australian Government led by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, but Shyam Saran points out an interesting feature about how Australia was not the first to show reluctance about upsetting China, and he puts forth how upsetting China was not in favour of the broader interests of the US. It is important to understand the context behind Mr Saran's statement to the Lowy Institute, the US required the support of China in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to condemn Iran's nuclear ambitions and put strong sanctions. Thus, blaming only Australia for the death of Quad remains an unfair feature of the geopolitical discourses.

Quad was revived in 2017, and to put it in lighter terms, we missed an opportunity to include Singapore, which would have made it, in the words of Professor Ian Hall, Squad. Quad has been accused of being an "Asian North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)" by several Chinese commentators, but the member states have always emphasized how it is only meant to strengthen the economic, military, and diplomatic understanding between the four nations, and to promote the idea of "free, open, and democratic ideas in the Indo-Pacific". There is, of course, a subtext of standing against a common 'enemy', but owing to the individual interests of each state, this distinction cannot be made

explicit. Although the Quad has not done anything as explicit as the FVEY so far, the minilateralism in Quad is a signal to convey to the PRC, that if the need arises, the four states can come together on a single stage.

Similarly, AUKUS is another minilateral, or rather a trilateral organisation, the difference being, that it is a security partnership. The tripartite alliance formed in 2021 has its major focus on sharing strategic technologies, weapons, and allied subjects. In 2023, it was announced that the US would be sharing its much-adorned jewel, three used Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines, to Australia and would be putting in efforts to train the Australian sailors to operate the nuclear-powered submarines. In addition to this, the US and the UK will be undertaking a joint ship construction initiative. With this decision, the policymakers of the US are trusting their strategic partner, Australia, while they are unable to make up for a shortage of nuclear-powered submarines for their use is something that would go down in the pages of the history books (Singh, 2023). While Quad was a signal, AUKUS looks like the strongest of this strategic encirclement of the PRC.

The 'two' of the formation is the US-Japan relationship. Japan's alarm is the most acute given its territorial and maritime boundary disputes with the PRC over a set of islands in the East China Sea, known as the Senkakus in Japan and the Diaoyutai in China (Chanlett-Avery, 2018). Although Japan and the US have had their relations since the 19th Century, the two world wars had changed the entire matrix. Japan and the US have one of if not the most important partnerships in the world post-1945, which does not have both parties from the Anglosphere. After the Allied occupation of Japan had come to an end through the Treaty of San Francisco, the US came out to be an important strategic partner of Japan. Out of all the treaties signed in the Indo-Pacific, something that can hold a prominent significance is the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, which was signed on January 19th, 1960, where the US agreed to assist the Japanese military in case of any attack on any of the Japanese territories. It must also be noted that the United States has stationed its (roughly) fifty-six thousand army personnel in Japanese territories. This proximity to the American troops always keeps the tension up in the air.

How would the Dragon react?

The one, which was added by Prof Raja Mohan, is the conspirator, which is the United States of America. Almost every minilateral, no matter what its core objectives are, has an American presence, something, which could not be a matter of coincidence. The US has active military alliances with Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, and South Korea amongst several other states. It is not a surprise that a major global power like the PRC is keeping its guard on. It makes us wonder - what would an appropriate response from the PRC look like? Although this question crosses the current bandwidth of our conversation, we cannot be amused at how the PRC is building up its soft power and goodwill through the Belt and Road Initiative and investing heavily in infrastructure projects across Africa, ASEAN, and Latin America amongst several other countries. Closer ties with Russia are another feature of the Chinese response. While some Asian countries worry about China’s ascent, they want China to balance out the US dominance. Some liberal

democracies, while ostensibly endorsing American values, actually want to see Beijing have ideas and values that are different from Washington's, so that they can avoid Washington's bullying and finger-pointing. While liberal democratic values are more attractive, many countries feel they are more comfortable dealing with the Chinese than with the Americans (Hu & Meng, 2020).

Stepping onto the Dragon's Tail

Stepping onto a dragon's tail is a delicate dance between a much-expected danger and a much-awaited victory. While the Dragon has been surrounded from all sides, what if it is not alone? While there are commentators who argue that the US is a diminishing power, the External Affairs Minister of India was quite clear in his view that the country is in the process of reinventing itself. The doubts about the capabilities of the US could be put to the trash through one question - is there any country that could stage a similar formation against a powerful country like PRC? There could never be a better way to capture a dragon than shooting arrows from different points, while the dragon lies down exhausted on the ground, but what if, all of a sudden, she starts her ambitious flight again?

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