

THE PROBE



DECAPITATION OF DISSENT

Afghanistan: 2 years since
Taliban
Pg 48

Decapitation of Dissent
Pg 8

A Conversation with Dr Avijit
Pathak
Pg 14

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear readers,

Dissent and disagreement lie at the very foundation of any functioning democracy. They form the core tenet of a healthy civilisation. The right to exercise them freely, thus, occupies a central position in a polity too. With the same in mind, this issue's cover sheds light on the nature and extent of academic freedom in India. An insightful discussion with Dr Avijit Pathak on the same adorns this issue. The Probe Survey is back in this again, with diverse opinions on the cover story.

As one of the most important spaces for higher education in India, the recent recruitment row at the University of Delhi has escalated into a serious conundrum. The Probe had a conversation with Dr Rituparna Patgiri who provided a first-hand experience of the recruitment procedure. This issue dives into the annals of history with an enthralling discussion with Ms Mugdha Sinha, Joint Secretary to the Ministry of Culture. We also return to the traumatic Operation Bluestar almost four decades later.

From issues at the level of the international community to micro-level phenomena, this issue offers a variety of content to the reader. Happy reading!



The Probe is a non-profit, student-run, independent & non-partisan monthly magazine published by Caucus, a student organisation of Hindu College, University of Delhi. Caucus was founded in 2007, and The Probe in 2020. Our ambition lies in creating a platform that promotes writing & reporting among the students and enables them to engage in a learning experience with experts & working professionals.

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CONTENTS



Vinay Panjwani, Moving Pixels

COVER STORY

The Decapitation of Dissent:

How Academic Critiques Transformed into Transgressions

Tracing the contemporary evolution of academic freedom in India, the text emphasises recent sackings in public and private universities. Alongside, it examines the role of the state within the same.

8

From the Classroom to the Courthouse with Dr Avijit Pathak on Academic Freedom in India

14

In conversation with The Probe, Dr Avijit Pathak elucidates upon the evolving situation and narratives regarding academic freedom in India.

The Probe Survey: Academic Freedom in India

18

This survey divulges into the discourse surrounding academic freedom in India, dwelling into the thinning lines between academic critiques and transgressions.

POLITICS

Indraprastha College's Recruitment Row with Dr Patgiri

24

In conversation with The Probe, Dr Rituparna Patgiri provides an inside perspective on the recent recruitment row in IPCW.

HISTORY

Unravelling the Pyrrhic Victory of '84 32

An examination of military and civil blind spots during Operation Bluestar

This article takes a deep dive into the nuances of operation Blue star & its repercussions on Indian polity.

Archives: Cultural Repertoires of the 21st Century 36

In conversation with The Probe, Ms Mugdha Sinha expounds the role of archives in a post-colonial nation like India against the backdrop of the rampant modernisation, globalisation and advancements in science and technology that is characterising the world today, as well as its geopolitical schisms.

INTERNATIONAL

Afghanistan: 2 years since Taliban 48

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the modern Taliban regime in Afghanistan

Taiwanese Conflict 58

The article aims at recounting a detailed history of Tawain and a critical analysis of its present geopolitical condition and significance.

SOCIETY

Social Metamorphosis: 68

Converting Young Souls into the Walking Dead

This article provides a snap into the state of affairs surrounding the ever growing number of student suicides.

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THE PROBE

by **STUDENTS**
for the **WORLD**

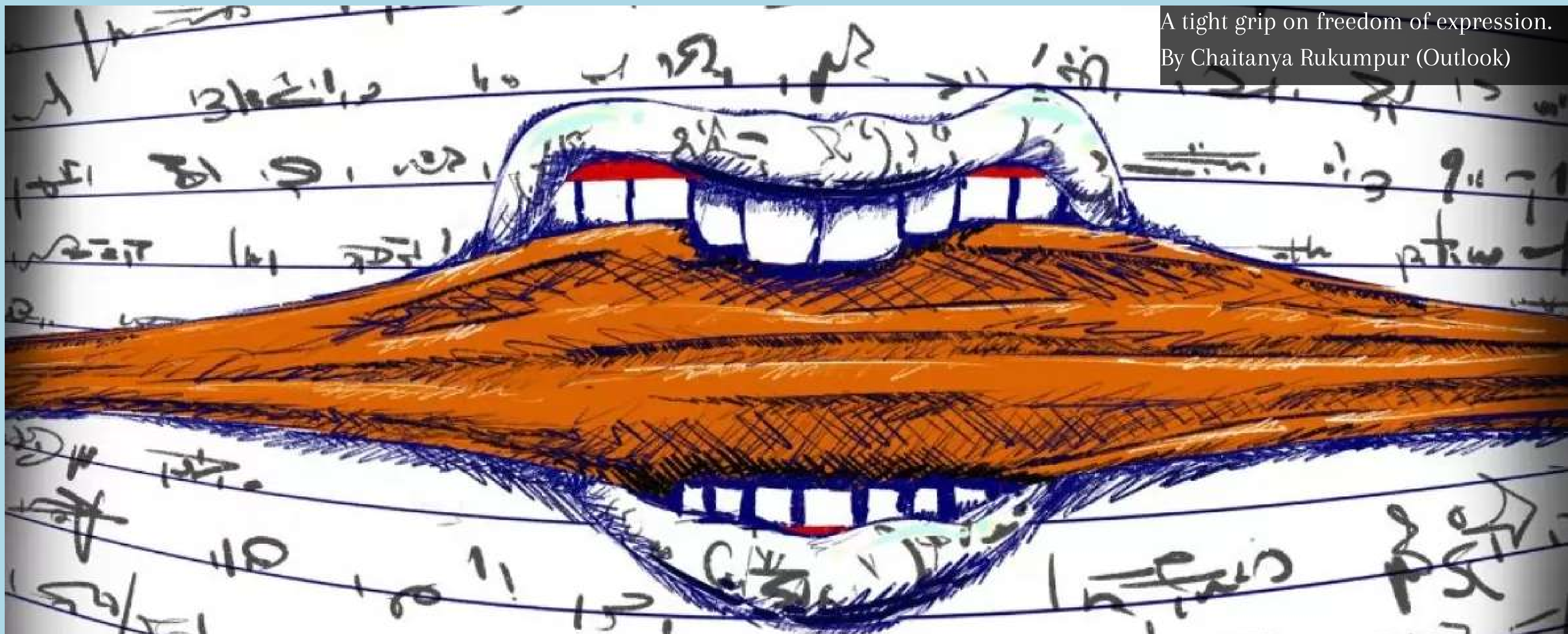
THE DECAPITATION OF DISSENT: HOW ACADEMIC CRITIQUES TRANSFORMED INTO TRANSGRESSIONS

By Rijul Bhagi & Shubh Mathur

This article traces the contemporary evolution of academic freedom in India, emphasising recent sackings in public and private universities. Alongside, it evaluates the danger of the rapidly thinning lines between neutrality, dissent and transgressions.



“ I also believe that academic freedom should protect the right of a professor or student to advocate any other minority viewpoint - no matter how distasteful to the majority - Richard M. Nixon ”



On 25 July 2023, an (now former) Economics professor from **Ashoka University**, **Dr. Sabyasachi Das** published a research paper titled **‘Democratic Backsliding in the World’s Largest Democracy’** centred around a discussion documenting irregular patterns in the 2019 general election in India. He did so by inculcating 80+ sources focused on varied topics including identifying whether the irregularities are due to electoral manipulation or by precise control, i.e., the incumbent party’s ability to precisely predict and affect win margins through campaigning.

Although Dr Das had clarified that he could not comment on the extent of the (alleged) manipulation, the data analysis raised a furore within the socio-political ecosystem of the country. Owing to the fact that if Dr Das’

evaluation had any merit to it, Indian democracy would end up on its deathbed. While the contents of his deductions are still disputed, the repercussions he has been subjected to following the publication have reignited the fiery debate on the status of academic freedom in the country. All of the aforesaid is best summed up by Dr Das’ former colleague, **Dr Pulapre Balakrishnan** who (most likely) resigned to stand in solidarity with Das. Dr Balakrishnan then stated to **The Telegraph Online** that **“Academic freedom was violated in the response, and it would be unconscionable for me to remain.”**

While the firestorm isn’t anything unusual in Ashoka’s short history with the 2021 embroilment between former Vice Chancellor **Pratap Bhanu Mehta** and Ashoka trustees (where he was reportedly told his

intellectual interventions were something the varsity could no longer protect) still omnipresent. However, the Das matter is ubiquitous owing to how **The Wire** has reported the alleged intervention of political forces.

While state censorship regardless of party in power is not foreign to the population, Ashoka distancing itself from Das’ paper has thrown their reputation as a **“leading liberal arts and sciences university”** into turmoil. Pupils from all backgrounds with varying credibility have provided commentary on its hypocritical definition of liberal with arguments being propagated that it is liberal as long as the discussion remains in the classroom and to some extent as long as the suits funding it do not get entangled in hot water due to the actions of the boots running it daily.

Academics & Politics: The Contemporary Kalinga

On 22nd August 2023, *The Wire's Siddharth Varadarajan* reported that officials from the Intelligence Bureau visited Ashoka University seeking a conversation with Dr Das. Furthermore, the report indulged in inputs which proclaimed that some of Ashoka's investors and its board members were subject to angry calls from the Prime Minister's Office as well as from the office of the Union education minister where they questioned Dr Das' intentions. While the veracity of the visit cannot be ascertained, if the IB visit is true, it is no less than damning the quintessential academic ecosystem within the country.

It is no less than a fact that students and professors alike who revel in the academic intelligentsia often indulge in diversified research projects incorporating themes that can be unsympathetic to the mainstream discourse. The aforementioned Wire report included an overlooked detail that Ashoka University has hosted "sleuths" from the State's local Intelligence Bureau, who attend seminars and events to take notes when the topic is even vaguely political. Such a situation does not need a prodigy to establish the State's insecurity.

Yet, such a state of affairs is categorically diabolical as the progression of society has relied

upon scholars much like the ones at Ashoka and their nationwide compatriots to wallow into niches which make the majority uncomfortable. In a democratic system to which the country plays host that has its scaffoldings structured around one's right to freedom to express their views and as of 2017, privacy too (*see Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) & Anr. vs. Union of India & Ors.*), State intervention in academics is fiendish.

While there is a valid notion that all rights are limited and not absolute, rather governed by the security and sovereignty of the State, regrettably, those lines have thinned beyond recognition as even in Dr Das' case the State is (allegedly) infringing upon one's liberty based on gross conjecture. The same characterises the cost of dissent in a highly sensitive situation where dissent has seemingly transgressed into treason and subversion. Such instances recollect stories of various scholars across the sands of time who have had to compensate for dissent with liberty, respect, and employment.

Nevertheless, such occurrences have recommenced a symposium circumventing the pretense under which the state attempts to constrain the train of thought of scholars like Dr. Das. His paper did not categorically threaten the sovereignty of the State and neither did it endorse any unlawful activities or secessionist propaganda which necessitated a probe. Rather, it focused on a certain group of people who **could have** done something unethical

and could have required further inquiry much like every other politician in history regardless of political inclinations. Furthermore, it enhanced scrutiny over the government's ability to influence private entities and evoked deliberation surrounding the state of public universities.

Of the Public vs. By the Public

The case of Dr Sabyasachi Das rings an echo from a similar yet different case that was seen much closer to home around one and a half decades

ago. In 2008 the *University of Delhi* saw mass protests against the inclusion of the essay '300 *Ramayan*', in the history curriculum. The essay by linguist, poet and scholar **A K Ramanujan** goes on to explain how there are many different iterations of the Ramayana and no particular version of it could be considered to be "*The Real Ramayan*". This would go on to be met with protests by certain student groups who claimed that the essay "offended the sentiments of millions of Hindus".

One is free to disagree with the stance that a particular student organisation takes. I hold very strong opinions on the absolute misuse of force that we as students often get to witness, and in more unfortunate circumstances, be subjected to the same. What is hard to argue against is the fact that much like any other organisation, student groups did and still do have a voice to raise for things that they think are of concern (given that they do so in a peaceful manner). While one may disagree with the exclusion of the essay from the curriculum, there is one small fact that makes the situation back in 2008 different

from what our contemporary reality is. The criticism regarding the essay was by and large led by students and academics, with minimal State intervention.

The harassment that Dr. Das faced was more so, if not almost exclusively from the end of the State. Systematic deconstruction of any critique of the State is one of the cornerstones of fascism. While the debate of whether our nation is moving towards a less inclusive superstructure has become overly complicated, it is hard to deny the fact that the recent attack on academia does unfortunately incorporate (according to some commentators) fascist tendencies.

Along the lines of these systemic attacks, there is also what could be considered a cultural attack in the way that universities and university spaces aim to fulfill. In many ways, the West also has its version of a cultural attack on institutions that should offer education. The central question we must address is "*What purpose does education serve?*". The unfortunate reality that we get across globally is that there is a push to make college degrees more "employable". And while this might even be a good idea on paper, it does undermine one central tenet of what education can and often does fulfill.

The reduction of education to the level of a consumer commodity nullifies the fact that a very large number of people around the globe aim to be educated not for the return on investment that it offers, but because as **Plato** put it

"is there not also a second class of goods, such as Knowledge sight and health, which are desirable not only in themselves but also desirable in their results?". The self-actualising role of education is being undermined. Unfortunately, we have forgotten the fact that education is not something that is to be bought or even achieved, rather it can be classified as something that needs to be attained. The capitalisation and privatisation of Central Universities, which is a core agenda that the current administration is pushing for, tries to undercut the very fact that education can be used as a tool to liberate the masses, but instead, it is being used as a way to "make better workers". This also points out what is (at least in our opinion) one of the core problems with capitalism.

While unemployment is a problem in this country, instead of addressing central problems that are often the root of unemployment such as the fact that even though the billionaire class is growing, the wages of the worker stay stagnant, and the fact that there simply are not enough jobs to begin with. Capitalism tries to convince us that this and every other problem regarding employment could be done away with simply if we could foster better workers who would never be encouraged to question why the status quo that rules us keeps getting richer, while the living conditions of the poorer classes keep getting worse.

According to Brazilian philosopher and thinker **Paulo Freire**, the system of education that we are working towards is called the banking model of education. According to the Banking model, the function of educators is reduced to that of bank clerks, and students work as deposits and investments rather than living people with aspirations of their own. The students in such a condition are forced to uncritically take in information and are completely removed from the notion of holistic education that helps them develop more completely. It is this system that in part is responsible for repeating certain prejudices that we as a society hold.

Another important concept that Freire pays attention to is the multi-directional exchange of education. Freire says that not only are teachers supposed to work as educators of the youth, in a functional education system, but it is not unreasonable to assume that teachers at times also get to learn from students. The elimination of hierarchy is given relevance as it can help create an environment that encourages self-actualisation.

It is vital to anyone who is trying to come up with an effective way to organise the education sector to

recognise the fact that very often people do not have a functional definition of what is an effective education space; the concept of freedom is multi-faceted and the implications of the concept of academic freedom imply not only the right of academics such as Dr. Das to work without worrying for the repercussions that his work might cause, or for the work of A K Ramanujan being omitted from the course in a very uncalled for manner, more than that it also implies that we must foster an environment that encourages us to be critical about the structures that are surrounded with. One question that we should ask ourselves as students is whether we are truly free to receive a real education that not only prepares for the world that exists outside of academic institutions but also provides us with the tools that help us understand the structures of the world outside and the self within us.

While the attack on academics based on their work is debilitating, students across the country face a much more literal threat. That is the threat of outright violence. Not very surprisingly, the main brunt of this is faced by students from minority backgrounds. According to **Nazia Erum**, while instances of verbal and physical violence have

been present ever since educational institutions have existed in this country, there has been an increase in such instances because of the larger trend of normalization of violence against some communities, alongside antagonisation of them.

For the past decade or so, multiple instances of violence against the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University, also show how the physical space of the university campus, especially those which focus more on social sciences, is now coming under threat. The assumption that we hold for the students and academics, especially those from the social sciences is that people are expected to intentionally ignore the real-life implications of what is being taught in classrooms. The attack on physical space is just as much an attack on academic freedom as it tries to override the very principle of solidarity that education and educators must work to oppose. Simply put, students cannot be expected to be academically free until they are allowed to be physically free and more importantly safe. All questions of freedom and academic validity come after one is free to be oneself and express oneself without the threat of physical and verbal violence.



Source: India Today

The State of Play -

At the time of writing the situation surrounding Dr Das is still unfolding although considerably slower. Many professors across the nation have been hostile to Ashoka and other universities as they felt Ashoka's actions were sacrilegious of academic dignity and that society was on an inevitable path to dictate what and how research should be done.

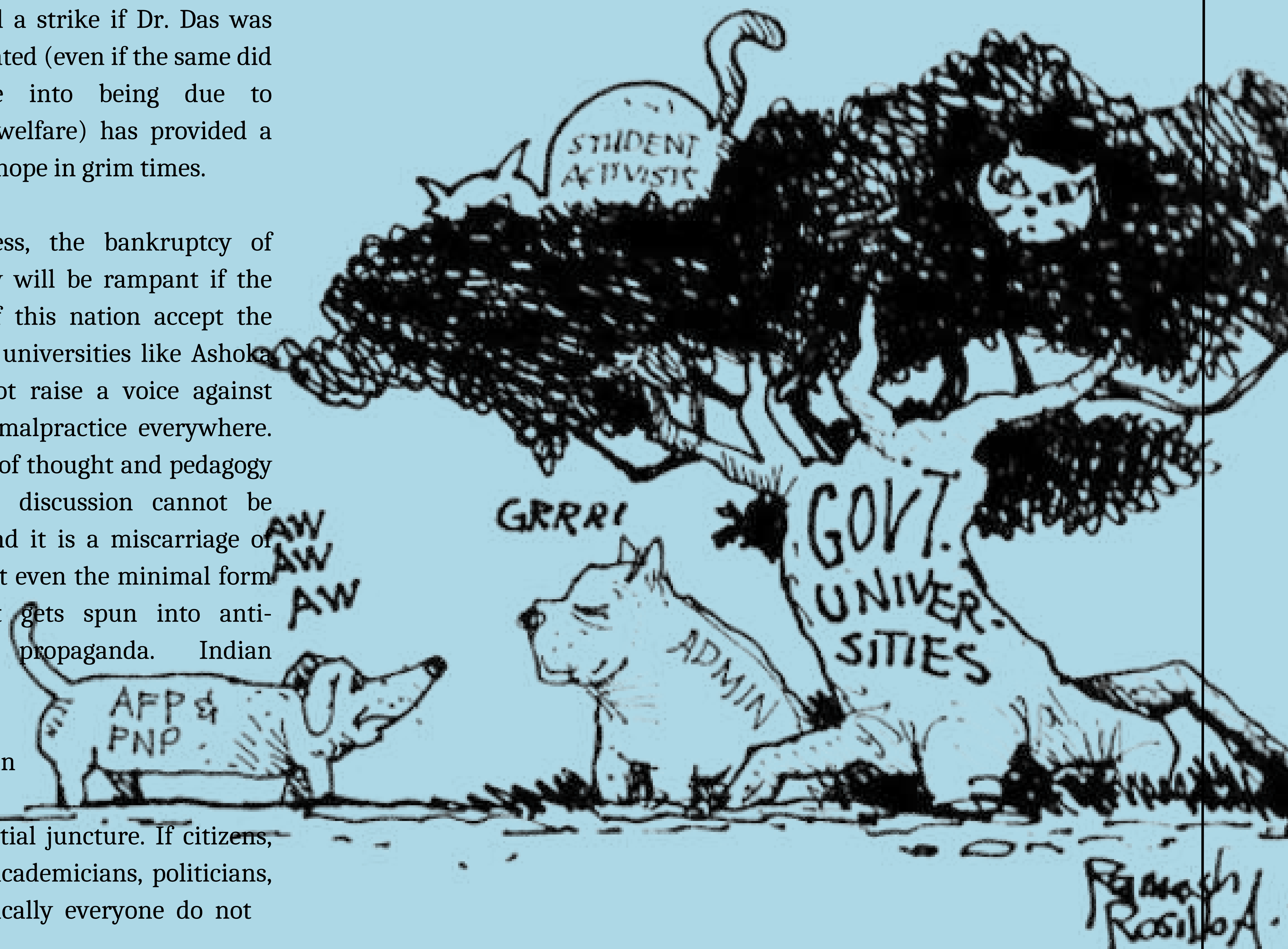
Even though the times surrounding the status of academia in the country are seemingly harrowing, the solidarity among professors with a spine has been mesmerising with instances like the resignation mentioned earlier by Dr. Balakrishnan. Along with this, the consensus in Ashoka where multiple departments threatened a strike if Dr. Das was not reinstated (even if the same did not come into being due to student's welfare) has provided a beacon of hope in grim times.

Nevertheless, the bankruptcy of democracy will be rampant if the citizens of this nation accept the actions of universities like Ashoka and do not raise a voice against academic malpractice everywhere. The value of thought and pedagogy of critical discussion cannot be defined and it is a miscarriage of justice that even the minimal form of dissent gets spun into anti-national propaganda. Indian society once again stands at an ever-- consequential juncture. If citizens, scholars, academicians, politicians, and practically everyone do not

demarcate the limit to which the state or associated elements can interfere with peaceful practices. We would have done a gross embarrassment to the people who sacrificed everything to uphold liberty.

The case of Dr. Das cannot be looked at in isolation rather, it must be examined through a microscopic lens in comparison to how research-based academia should function. Such a critique is not a tool of political mileage against the party in power either, as violations of academic rights have been done from all sides of the political compass across the world. Critically, it is the citizen's job to police the State in such actions and until they do, it says more about citizens and less about the government.

One may choose to ignore the colour of repression concerning Dr. Sabyasachi Das. But until and unless we all take action, the bloodstains will continue showing the bruises on the dying body of academia, and academic freedom.





From the Classroom to the Courthouse with
DR AVIJIT PATHAK
on Academic Freedom in India

Q) You have been at the forefront of the educational sphere for over 30 years. Can you elucidate on your experiences with your research projects with regards to the limitations subjected upon you, any censorship you might have encountered and how esteemed academicians like you had to tackle the growing influence of mass media in academia?

Dr Pathak - With deep gratitude, I recall my university. It nurtured me and helped me to evolve and grow as a teacher/researcher. With freedom and creativity, I learned and unlearned. Nobody interfered. I could experiment with my pedagogic art, the reading list for the courses I taught, or the way I expressed myself through my books and articles, and engaged with my research scholars. Of course, we grew and

evolved through constant conversations and dialogues with our colleagues and other experts in the subject. In a way, I was lucky. However, I am not very sure whether in these turbulent times, my university would be able to retain the same tradition of free and critical enquiry.

*EVOLUTION OF ACADEMIC
FREEDOM*

Q) The development of the academic ecosystem has been rapid and the role of media within the same has increased as it is easier to share research in the mainstream ideologue. Do you think there are more pros or cons to such a situation?

INFLUENCE OF STATE AGENTS

Dr Pathak - I have always believed that college/university professors—particularly, in the domain of liberal arts and humanities—should also play the role of public intellectuals. Hence, it is not a bad idea if historians, political theorists, economists and sociologists participate in the public debate, and write in newspapers, magazines and other forums. However, the real challenge is to retain the spirit of critical enquiry, even though there might be tremendous political/ideological pressure to follow the 'line'. I understand the intensity of the challenge some of us experience, particularly when the propaganda machinery turns everything into its opposite, and even the slightest form of dissent tends to be stigmatized as 'anti-national'.

Q) Recently in a piece, you wrote that you celebrated the vocation of teaching owing to the vibrancy of dialogue in the classroom. In your experience, how would you assess the situation now-a-days owing to the increasing fear among professors and students for their modes of expression?

Dr Pathak - I have learned from my own experience as well as from the works of Paulo Freire and Bell Hooks that the spirit of engaged pedagogy requires the cultivation of the culture of debate and compassion

-ate listening in the dialogic classroom. If dialogue disappears, democracy dies. However, it is sad that these days the neoliberal assault on education and hyper-nationalist aggression are destroying the culture of the classroom. How can there be free enquiry if education is just reduced into a marketable product with the mythology of 'placement and salary package'; or, for that matter, if teachers and students are subject to surveillance, and continually fear that not to be a hyper-nationalist is to be stigmatized as a 'traitor'? This is really frightening.

Q) The Wire, in August, published a story that officials from the intelligence bureau visited Ashoka University to investigate Dr Sabyasachi Das and attempted to speak to his compatriots. How would you judge such a situation?

Dr Pathak - A research paper written by a young professor can unsettle the otherwise powerful government, and even the university management!

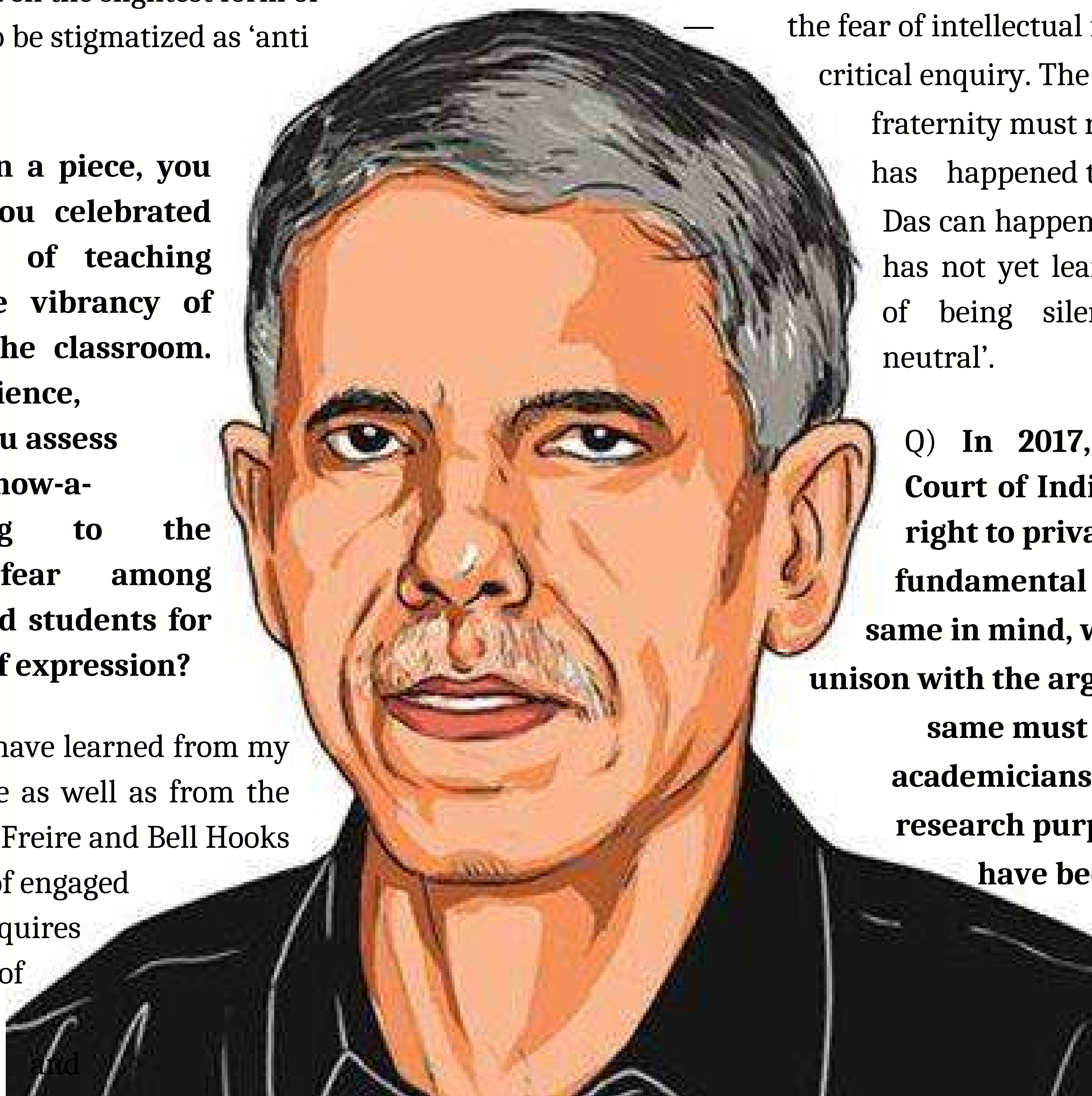
This indicates the normalization of pathology — the fear of intellectual freedom and critical enquiry. The teaching

fraternity must realize that what has happened to Dr Sabyasachi Das can happen to anybody who has not yet learned the politics of being silent and 'value-neutral'.

Q) In 2017, the Supreme Court of India held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right. With the same in mind, would you be in unison with the argument that the same must be extended to academicians for personal & research purposes? As there have been cases where academicians have been arrested for owning supposed

"banned" political content, which in turn can violate articles 14,19 & 21 of the constitution.

Dr Pathak - As a teacher, I have always believed that academic/intellectual freedom is inseparable from moral responsibility and commitment to the possibility of epistemological pluralism. For instance, I would like a Professor who otherwise loves Karl Marx to encourage young students to read, say, Karl Popper's critique of Marxism. Likewise, I might like Gandhi; but I need not be offended if my students and colleagues refer to Ambedkar and Periyar, or even



civilized intellectual debates, contestations, conversations and the maturity to live with peace and dignity amid philosophic/political differences ought to enrich the culture of learning. Hence, it will be really pathetic and dangerous if academicians/scholars are arrested, or interrogated by the cops for their research findings or even the sources they use. This is nothing but some sort of 'bulldozer academics'.

NEUTRALITY, CRITIQUES, SEDITION

Q) Recently, a group of individuals hosted the We20 summit in Delhi as a mirror to the G20 summit. The event was later hindered by the police. How would you interpret this move & continuously thinning line between criticism of the government and criticism of the nation-state?

Dr Pathak - What distinguishes a vibrant democracy is its ability to live with the plurality of voices, including dissenting voices. And hence, a critique of the policies of the government, or a nonviolent mode of resistance should not be seen as a conspiracy, or an 'anti-national' venture. If we fail to make this distinction, there is a danger: democracy might be reduced into some form of electoral autocracy. The tsunami of FIRs and sedition charges does by no means indicate the good health of our democracy.

Q) There's a constant debate going on within the country surrounding undertrials which involves many scholars and academicians. How big of an impact does such a situation make on the quality and ability of scholarly practices that are ongoing in the country?

Dr Pathak - Think of the great intellectual/philosophic tradition developed by the likes of Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. They critiqued the ideologies of domination; they critiqued all sorts of authoritarianism or totalitarian ideologies. Imagine Antonio Gramsci—his Prison notes, his illuminating reflections on culture, politics, education and society. Yet, the political Establishment saw them as a 'threat'. In fact, there seems to be no end to this conflict between the mighty authoritarian state and creative dissenters. Ironically, we are seeing this conflict even in India—a country that seeks to project itself as the 'mother of democracy'!

IMPLICATIONS OF ACADEMIC CENSORSHIP

Q) In contemporary times, Ashoka University has thrived upon its claims that the scaffoldings of their pedagogy rest upon critical thinking, innovation etc. Yet, its actions haven't reflected the same, with the recent paper by Dr. Sabyasachi Das causing a rift between its faculty and administration owing to how it acted in the past as well. Would you be inclined to agree that universities are de facto liberal as long as it helps them and/or they owe at least basic protection to its scholars/ researchers on contentious topics? Also, does ownership- public or private- play a role in it?

Dr Pathak - I cannot comment on the survival strategy that a private/elite university in India has to evolve in order to exist as a 'liberal', yet 'non-political' centre of learning. Liberal arts and humanities, 'star' professors, neoliberal/market-driven 'brand consciousness', and the all-pervading discourse of hyper-nationalism—it is not always easy to walk safely. Possibly, from Professor Pratap Bhanu Mehta to Dr Sabyasachi Das—we are seeing this inevitable contradiction and paradox that is rooted in the making of the Ashoka University.

Q) Adding onto the previous question. The rift between Ashoka's admin and professors still portrays a certain sense of solidarity between the faculty. In a constantly evolving situation like this, how do you visualise the evolution of solidarity within academia?

Dr Pathak - Yes, the solidarity of the Professors of Ashoka University arouses hope, particularly, at a time when the psychology of fear has almost crippled the larger teaching community. It has to be seen whether this intellectual solidarity is merely temporal, or is transformed into a sustainable and life-affirming movement for saving education from the neoliberal assault as well as hyper-nationalist aggression.

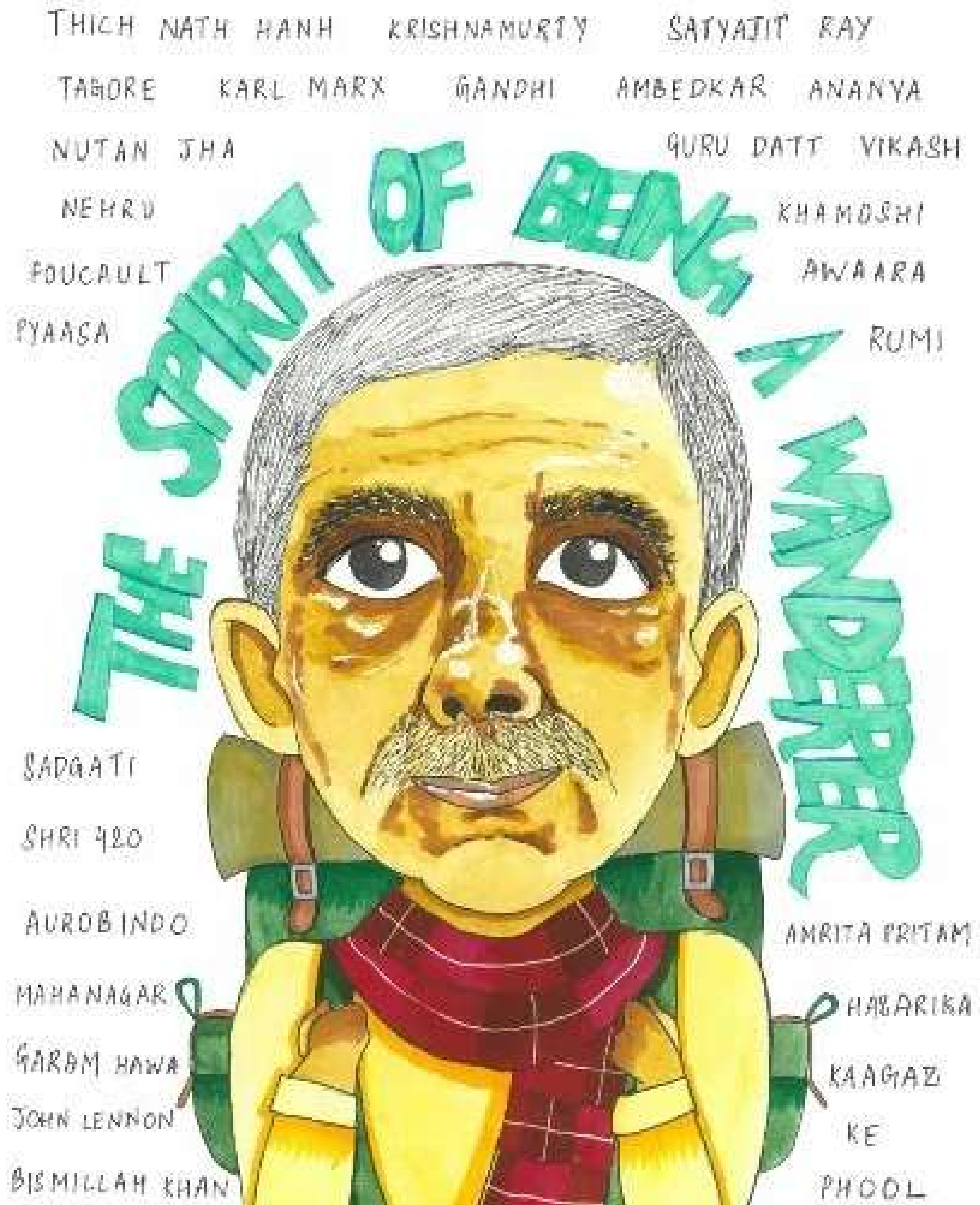
Q) How would you visualise the future of academia with an emphasis on the multitude of comparatively younger scholars who are coming into the research field? Owing to such contentious times would you agree that such situations lower the quality of professionals who

do end up devoting their life to academia?

Dr Pathak - I love to celebrate what Antonio Gramsci would have regarded as the 'optimism of the will' rather than the 'pessimism of the intellect'. I hope

bright and sensitive young minds will join the vocation of teaching and research, act as transformative intellectuals, and keep the moral conscience of the society alive.

Avijit Pathak taught Sociology at JNU from 1990 to 2021.



THE PROBE SURVEY

Academic Freedom in India

Interviewed by Shubh Mathur



Chandni Saxena

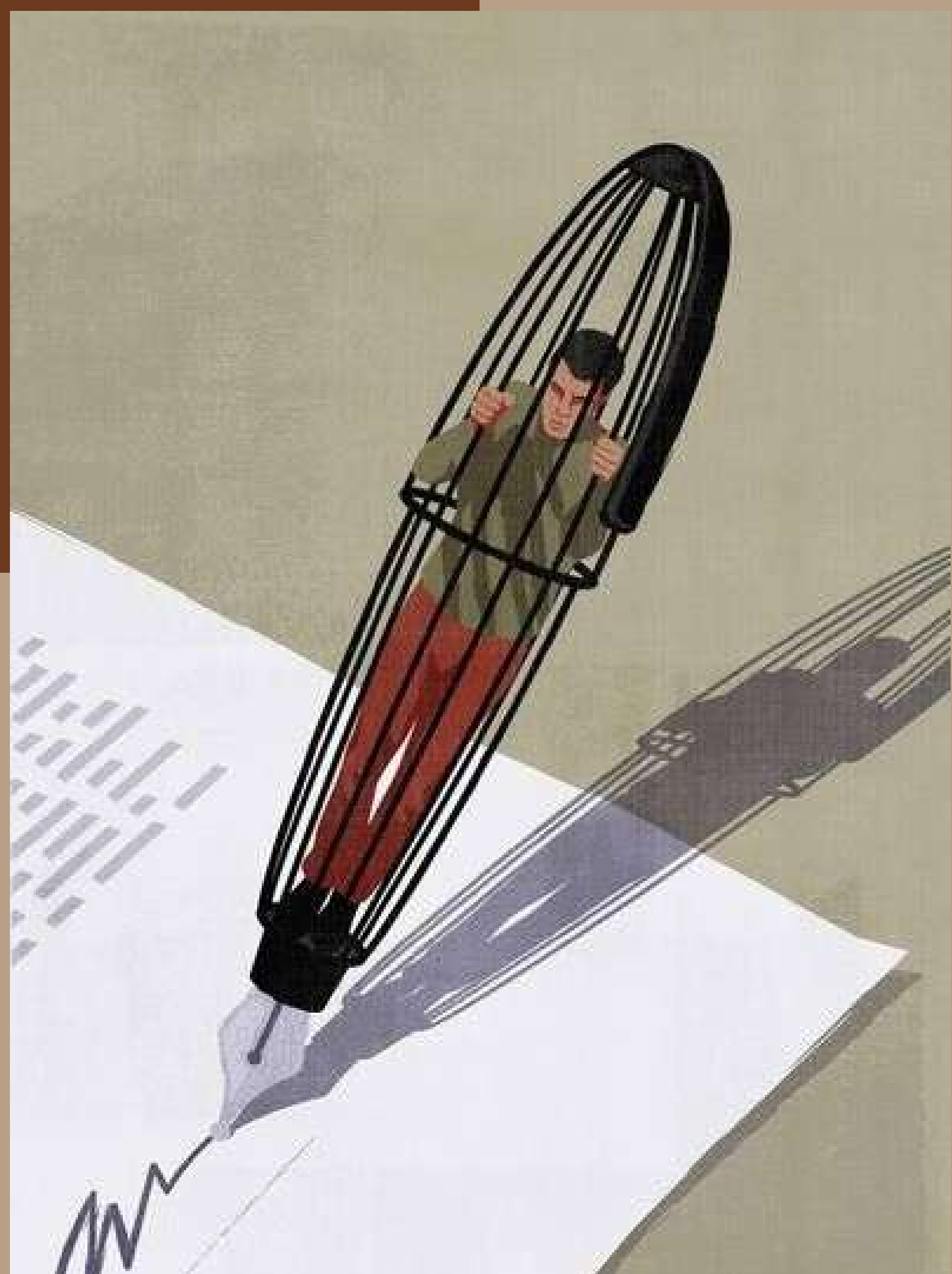
“We want deeper sincerity of motive, a greater courage in speech and earnestness in action”

Academic Freedom in India traces its history back to the nation’s historical journey. Traditionally, free speech and thought emerged at the time of Rig Veda, continued in the Mughal Period and culminated in 1947 with the enshrinement of the freedom of speech and expression in the Indian Constitution. Legally, as jurist A.G. Noorani points out, universities, as creatures of statute, fall within the definition of ‘the state’ in Article 12 of the Constitution. Hence, entire chapter on fundamental rights applies to them.

If we look at the current state of academic freedom in India, then the very first task is to grasp knowledge about the influence of state agents in academic research. Mirroring the influence, the situation is just as bad— if not worse —at state universities, where numerous state governments actively try to meddle with the autonomy of colleges. The Universities and colleges (Administration and Regulation) Act 2017 reduces teacher representation and increases the number of nominees from the state government while allowing the state governor to replace the governing body of a college with their own “administrator.” It could be inferred that it becomes very crucial to strike a balance between state involvement and academic autonomy to foster a thriving research environment in India. Where criticism occurs, debate paves its way automatically. On one hand, the utopian view envisions academic institutions to be impartial and provide well-rounded education, however, the reality check as shown by the V-Dem Institute of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden indicates a sharp downward decline in India’s position in an Academic Freedom Index.

There has been an unprecedented assault on academic freedom as well as on academics, cases where university authorities have denied students and faculty the right to hold public meetings, discussions, or film screenings on issues they deem ‘controversial’. Many events – especially those touching on ‘sensitive’ issues like Kashmir or Maoists – were called off because of threats from various student wings. Moreover, student leaders have been charged with sedition, and various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act – under which it is difficult to get bail.

The repression of dissent on university campuses has taken the form of arrests, the banning of student and faculty unions, and a variety of other punitive measures. All these reflect the ramifications of academic censorship. It becomes very important for the government at both levels to restore and strengthen conventions on institutional autonomy; and inform student and faculty unions of their rights to academic freedom and free speech. In the end, academic freedom is crucial in fostering a dynamic educational environment and democratic society.



Gauri Garg

Since Independence, there have been not only structural reforms but also major concerns over the state of academic freedom in India. The National Emergency of 1975-1977 was a major event which saw an unprecedented attack on academics as a whole and specifically on academic freedom. The need for safeguarding academic freedom also was raised during this period. Similarly, since 2014, there has been a sharp decline in freedom of speech and expression in the country with a targeted assault on academic freedom and research by state agencies which was accurately reflected by a sharp downward decline in India's position in the [Academic Freedom Index](#) developed by the V-Dem Institute of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. India is now associated with rapidly accelerating democratic backsliding. For instance, Article 19(1) of the Indian Constitution prescribes the Freedom of Speech and Expression, but subject to "reasonable restrictions" when there is a threat to the sovereignty and integrity of India, or security of the state, or public order, or contempt of court, or defamation, or incitement to an offence. But the way these "reasonable restrictions" are interpreted can be subjective and the fine line between what is "reasonable" or "autocratic" can be blurred when these are defined in terms of the state and what it deems to be "reasonable".

In such scenarios, it is hard to identify whether the public's sentiments are hurt or if there is a threat to the government's authority. Questioning the state's authority is the basic tenet of a democracy. Criticising the government can lead to academicians being charged with sedition and such cases often lead to (alleged) blatant misuse of the law. Neutrality on certain matters is promoted only if an opinion trespasses its bounds and criticises the government but extremism is welcome when the state is being praised.

Researchers and teachers are constantly finding themselves in situations where their opinions or questions may land them in controversy and the education system is constantly being censored when state agents get involved in controlling expression, also censoring the student culture.

Vaidehi Krishnan

Not solely about academic freedom in India, but also what I consider to be deeply problematic in how we most often perceive educational institutions, which to some extent enables political forces, like the present dispensation to systematically dismantle all that academics and students consider essential.

Present-day educational institutions draw inspiration from the 'factory model of education' that was employed in Prussia and the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. This is mostly attributed to the rise of industries and the need to foster a disciplined and obedient citizenry that produces ideal workers (subservient, effective, abiding etc.) and to bring various sections of society together under one uniform system. Even though the usage of the term is disputed, it does mirror most of the classrooms and lecture halls that we have been a part of a large number of students, with one teacher who is responsible for imparting information, while the students are expected to retain, memorise, and regurgitate. Paulo Freire called this the 'banking concept' in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which the teachers deposit information and the students receive it. I strongly believe that the power dynamics in such an equation will never allow for an environment that is conducive to learning and the multidimensional exchange of information.

Add to this the complexities in the field of epistemology—how knowledge is made accessible or inaccessible to groups of people and who decides what is important enough to be taught, among other pertinent questions. Social and political epistemology are newer fields of enquiry and research as they go beyond what philosophers have conventionally been interested in when it comes to epistemology to include sociological and political aspects as well, but they provide compelling insight into how power dynamics impact educational spaces and why they are usually targeted. This is most famously seen in the work of Michel Foucault, who talked about 'power-knowledge,' bringing the complicated relationship between power (institutions such as universities, governments, etc.) and knowledge to the forefront.

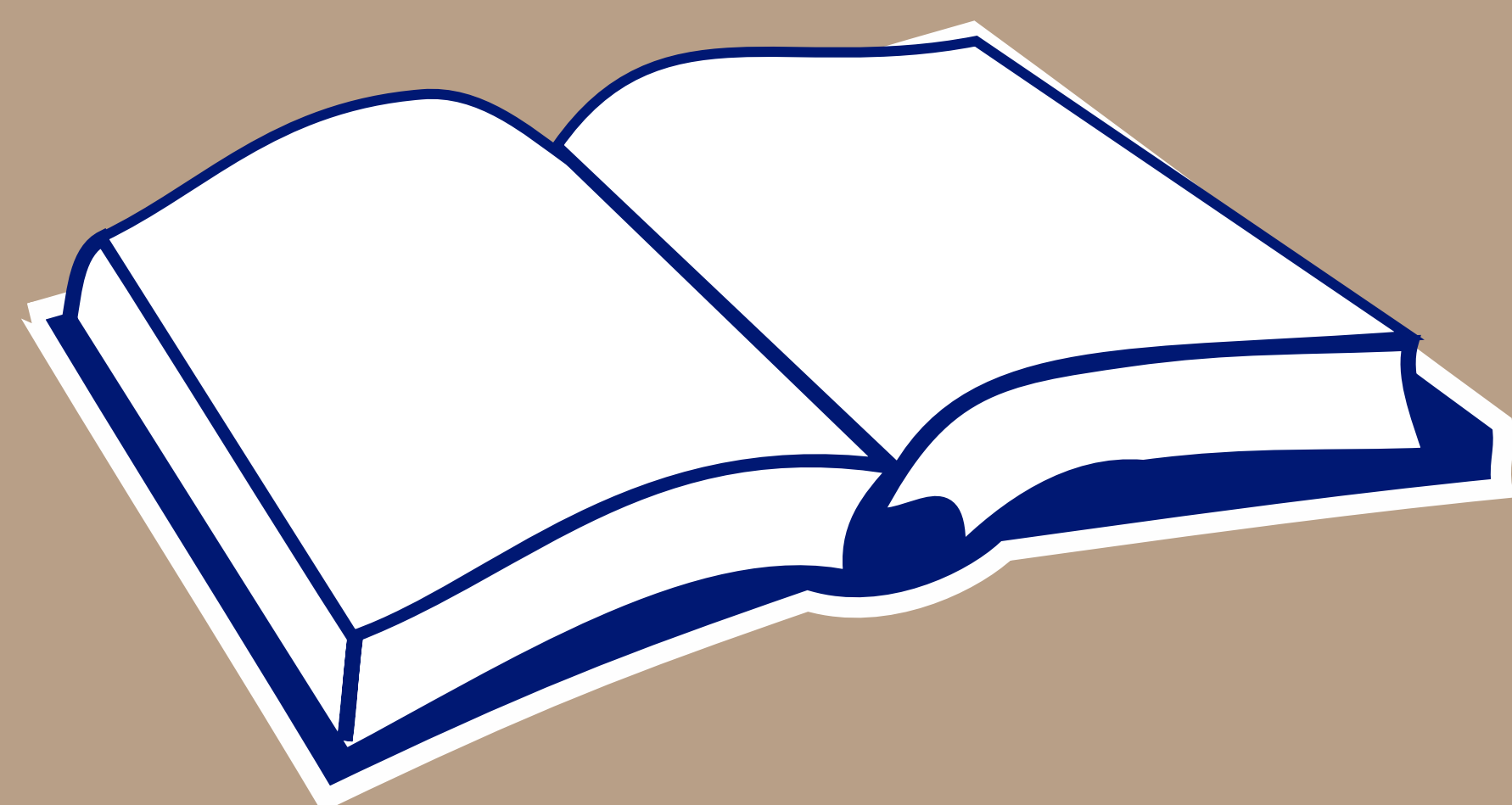
The notion that universities are bastions of free-thinking, intellectual enquiry and growth, and the intermingling of ideas depends on the autonomy of those who inhabit these spaces and give them life. For me, the creation of safe spaces where students are encouraged to engage with ideas and texts, become conscious consumers of knowledge, and become active citizens empowered to think for themselves depends on the love and passion for the discipline and teaching that professors bring to the classroom. In the presence of constant job insecurity and the absence of professional autonomy, it makes sense for them to struggle to give their best and not be able to teach how they would want to. Having to worry about finishing the syllabus on time and, more importantly, fearing backlash for their views is bound to be draining and must feel incredibly restrictive. The notion that I talked about earlier for the reasons mentioned above does not sit well with those in power, especially if they intend to maintain and sometimes even restructure the power hierarchy to somehow make it even more exclusive and discriminatory.

This culture of suppressing dissent, shackling free thought and discussion, attacking academicians and students, and constantly questioning their ideologies and motivations seems to me to be a classic case of carefully diluting the quality of education in the country. This would help raise the upcoming generation to be highly obedient and

in line with the ideas of the dispensation because they will not experience a classroom that actively fosters critical thinking and analysis with professors who have spent valuable years honing their skills and have a deep love for their discipline. When seen with the FYUP and the countless omissions from the revised syllabus across levels, I think the systematic efforts at reducing education to pieces of paper and a marketplace where we pay to get a shot to apply for the highest-paying jobs are patently clear.

These attacks are not just on the educational institutions in the country but are also a means of restructuring what we know and how we know it, affecting society at large. Looking at the recent developments in DU as well as other universities show a pattern of undermining and successfully tearing down the culture of free enquiry and education that was practised by some, if not all, in these spaces. What is even more alarming is the lack of public awareness and outrage at these attempts, which makes sense if we look at how we have been made to think and believe that such attacks were “inevitable” and “are not new”, as if lacking the novelty factor makes the situation less serious. It is almost as if we are being eased into the end of education as we have known it (but I don't feel fine).

The last line is a take on R.E.M.'s song, 'It's The End Of The World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine).'
:)





POETICS



INDRAPRASTHA COLLEGE'S RECRUITMENT ROW WITH DR RITUPARNA PATGIRI

Interviewed by Siddhant Sinha



Siddhant

Serious allegations of impartiality and irregularities have been levelled against the University of Delhi, not just by the faculty at the Indraprastha College for Women but even by others including those at Satyawati College (Evening). You are a part of the founding faculty of the Department of Sociology at IPCW and have dedicated many years to its growth. So can you give us an idea of what the recruitment procedure for permanent faculty is like at Delhi University? Who are there in the panel and what credentials, at least ideally, are considered for the post?

Dr Patgiri

I think that's a very good question to get to know the recruitment process. I've been teaching in Indraprastha College or rather was teaching in Indraprastha College for the past three years. I completed three years in September. As soon as I had finished my PhD, I joined. When the permanent recruitment happens, first, there is an advertisement, which is released by either the college or the constituent department. After that, applications are called. And then screening is done. After that selected number of applicants are called for the interview. If you look at the list of people who have been called for the interviews, across colleges, at the University of Delhi, there are at least 200 to 300 people who are called in a day. You can imagine that if the interview starts at 10, how long does even one candidate get to answer questions, isn't it? And we all know that in subjects like Sociology, you cannot assess someone on the basis of rapid-fire multiple-choice questions, isn't it? So this is one part of it.

Now, in the interview, the selection happens on the basis of your API, which is the Academic Performance Indicator, which is supposed to indicate your contributions towards teaching, research, and then your academic score. So your API is on the basis of these three things. The API is used to shortlist people and after that, the interview has 100 percent marks. This is the problem with the interview process because there is a possibility that there can be biases in the interview. If it's 100 percent, it is obvious that it's not going to be a fair process and there is the possibility of manipulation which has happened. In fact, this is not a new argument, because this argument has been given in JNU long back that why should research scholars be judged only on the basis

of the interview. That long-standing demand was actually taken into cognizance and the viva was given 30 marks and the written was given 70 marks to reduce the bias and the way that caste and racism can work out in the interviews.

In the interview process also it's very demoralising sometimes because experts are asking questions about August Comte's full name, about you know, the city that he was born in. Someone was asked about the length of the new education policy and how many pages it is. Believe me, someone was also asked if they knew how many Oriya research scholars were there in JNU. So these are very random questions. And I was asked why I don't work on tribals. Now, these are not questions that test sociological ability. It's very random in a way and then the thing is, you may have a chance that you may not know the answer to these questions, which is why then it becomes easier to say that the interview was not right. In IP College, I felt my interview was okay. It was 15 to 20 minutes because they were asking me a lot of questions from the papers that I had taught. I was, I think, able to answer as much as possible. Then they asked me about my contributions to the department and the college. And I have also answered those questions. They also asked me about my last publication, and if I had a research project that I had recently completed. Fortunately, I even had, yes, as an answer to the research project, which is a rarity at a college level and also for an ad hoc. But I said that, yes, I have completed this research project, very recently. And then my last publication was in 2023, in a journal called Sociological Bulletin. And now that I'm wondering, I am actually thinking if they even asked these questions to the other candidates, because those who have been selected, do they have these publications? Do they have those credentials as of 2023? Because when they asked when was your last publication, the indication was that it could not be really late in time. This is how the recruitment happens.

In the panel, there is generally a subject expert, there is a Vice Chancellor's nominee, there's the Principal, there is a Teacher in Charge, or an OSD or an HOD, but because ours was an ad hoc department, we did not have a TIC, which is very important in the context of our department and the happenings. And then there were, I guess, two or three other people. This is the composition.

Siddhant

You mentioned that even the questions asked have a sort of tendency to eliminate people randomly. So does the recruitment process have any mechanism to restrict such biases or blatant favouritism? And you mentioned in one of your tweets that one can check out the profiles of the people recruited and understand why they were chosen in the first place. Moreover, what kind of connection do you think is being utilised here? Do you think they then attempt to paint the university with a certain idea?

Dr Patgiri

I said in one of my tweets that you can check out the profiles of the people who have been recruited to mean that you can check whether they have contributed to the discipline or not. I didn't mean that they have any kind of connection or other things. What I also feel is that, irrespective of ideological leanings, if someone has the qualifications, and the ability to teach, that should not deter them from getting appointed. But my concern is that, is it possible that the five of us had no qualifications and we were really, really unqualified, that we had to be thrown out? Because if you look at the achievements of IP College in the last six years, we have done tremendously well. And this is not something that I'm making up. These are available in the public domain. Ten students had positions in university exams in the last six years. Several students make it to Delhi School of Economics and other universities every year and it's because we have taught them.

I would say that it's not about the others. There were eight positions advertised, so there was a possibility of hiring other qualified teachers as well. But the five of us were equally qualified and deserving and had given blood and sweat to the growth of the department and the college. Because if you're asking these questions about our contributions to the department and the college, then of course, you know, we have done more than the rest.

Siddhant

That was a question in my mind as well and I'm sure that many would have the same question. So moving on to the basic structure of recruitment at Delhi University, correct me if I'm wrong, but the issue of the lack of permanent faculty at the DU has been in

use for many years, for over a decade now. So what was the reason behind not recruiting professors on a permanent basis? Does it have to do with the university's finances, or is there an attempt to promote contractual employment? How does the university go about this?

Dr Patgiri

Yeah, I think this is, again, a very important question because it raises larger issues about labour and contracts. So Delhi University for the longest time didn't have recruitment for permanent teachers. And it's not just Delhi University. In many universities, the institutions run on the labour of ad hocs and guests who are appointed contractually. I think it's a very exploitative system also, because you have a threat that your job is going to go away, and you will be on the roads like us. Then you cannot speak up. You cannot really put a lot of effort into anything. Also, when we are asked about whether or not you have been able to do research and things like that, it's not easy if it's a contractual job. Primarily because many places wouldn't even want to give you research grants if you don't have a permanent job. Then your research profile automatically falls.

The second is that we are unable to participate in many decision-making opportunities because of the ad hoc nature of the job. And that is also detrimental to a university. I'm not really sure why recruitment does not happen, because, to be honest, I only started teaching three years back at IP college. But this is a very universal problem and I think it helps the state, and the institutions when labour is precarious because there is always some sort of fear, and hesitation associated with what one can do. One has also heard stories of how ad hoc teachers have been exploited in many colleges. What happens is that they end up doing a lot of their own work plus permanent faculties work. In IP, that was not the case, because all of us were ad hocs and there was a great deal of solidarity and camaraderie amongst all of us. We took our teaching very seriously, we took everything very seriously.

So I would say that the system itself is not conducive for the running of a university, but in the manner in which permanent recruitments have now happened is also very, very murky. You cannot be displacing people who have been teaching in particular places for years. They build their lives and families and, you



know, their children around these jobs. So displacement is very hard. I understand that newer people also should be absorbed and given chances, but there have been many positions advertised, so you can definitely take them in those. There's no need to displace the existing ones. I mean, you're not really solving employment, you're creating a different set of unemployed people.

Siddhant

You mentioned that the burden on ad hocs and guest lecturers is rising to a great extent. On the same note, the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) had its election last week where the RSS-backed NDTF's candidate Prof. AK Bhagi was reelected. So what has been the role of the teachers association in this? What stance does it have on the problem?

Dr Patgiri

Even today, I read in a newspaper report that Professor Bhagi, the president of DUTA said that he will try to make it happen or rather absorption happen for all the displaced faculty. But you know, I have a very small plea, and I have been raising this since day one, even when NDTF or other parties have come to campaign to IP. If displacement happens in a subject like sociology, where will you put the displaced faculty? Because there are only 10 colleges that offer this discipline. Where will the five of us be absorbed? Are there enough seats? There are not enough seats, there are not enough vacancies. So then it may work out for larger disciplines like Political

Science and Economics, but it doesn't solve our issue. The only colleges that are left to have interviews are maybe three colleges, and they have not advertised these many posts either for our absorption. So it means that we will actually not have a place in DU anymore. It's very, very clear.

Siddhant

The university has seen the dominance of a particular line of thought, among both the student and the teachers. Many claim that there are some discrepancies taking place to favour some with regard to recruitment procedure as well. As someone who has taught at the university for some years and has even been a student here, do you think such claims are correct and is there some sort of academy censorship too, forcing to tow a particular line, and what has been the historicity of this problem?

Dr Patgiri

As we know, be it Gramsci or Althusser, they have spoken about how education is very closely tied to ideology. My only point is, I know that there are certain shifts in ideological practices. But it shouldn't bother people who are committed to teaching, because when we are in classrooms, we are not political beings, we are teachers. Particularly for the five of us, I can say that we have not been part of any political alliance. Although I've studied in JNU, I've never been a member of any political group be it left, centre or right. And then when we are going to the classrooms, we are only talking about what is there in the syllabus, and

what is sociologically relevant. So ideology has no role to play.

Also, I think, the best part about a cosmopolitan university space is that you don't really have to think about ideology. Precisely because if the governments change, does it mean that tomorrow, we start attacking people who may have different ideologies from the government that comes into place? It shouldn't be like that, isn't it? We are supposed to be educators, we're supposed to be teachers, who teach both sides of the story, who communicate, as clearly as possible, the fact that education is not, in that sense, rooted only in ideology. I, for instance, refuse to believe that you have to have political affiliations if you have studied in a space like JNU. In fact, a lot of people ask me, how come I do not have political connections, even though I spent so many years in JNU. And I've been very clear that I just wanted to do what I wanted to do. A lot of people may say, it's apolitical. It's not also apolitical, it's just that it's not necessary to be tied to a party in that sense. We don't have to engage in party politics.

Censorship, yes. I feel there is censorship in the classrooms. But it's not just today, it's always been there, in that sense, in multiple ways. And in a subject like Sociology, a lot of censorship happens within ourselves, also, because we are talking about the familiar, and it's not really easy to critique the familiar as you know, Beteille or Berger would say. You're also a Sociology student, so I know you're familiar with these people. So then the question of censorship is also a lot about what kind of trust you have with students and what kind of communication there is. So yeah, that is the story about it.

Siddhant

You talked about the need to have less ideological bias in classrooms, and definitely, not everyone needs to engage in such party politics. So how do you see the growing influence of a particular ideology and the alleged clampdown of all other voices at the university? I mean, even talking about the syllabus of not just sociology, but even beyond, that has been a source of contention for some time now. How do you view these developments and the pursuit of academic dialogue at the university?

Dr Patgiri

Yeah, I think the new education policy just came in.

So there was a lot of syllabus revision in this process, and the effects are going to become clearer in the coming years. It's too soon yet because it's not been a lot of time and we're actually thinking how maybe things can be shaped from here. I would say that there are certain subjects in which the revision was much necessary. You know, like the sociology of kinship, I feel that that paper really needed revision. So now there is a paper called 'Families and Intimacies' and that's a much better syllabus.

But yes, I have more logistical concerns, which are that the number of hours has been reduced, and the syllabi are vast. So to complete that kind of syllabi in that time is very, very difficult. I'm not really aware of what happens within the steering and the executive committees, because I am not a permanent teacher. And this is what I was saying that, as ad hoc teachers, we were not part of the major decision-making bodies, which is why we wouldn't know what went down there, and what happened there. But when we were having meetings amongst ourselves, we were very free to make a syllabus. As much as possible, there was a concerted effort to include both historical and contemporary texts, keeping in mind all kinds of perspectives. But you should ask this question to people who have been at the decision-making levels, you know, in terms of the steering committee and the executive committee. They'll know more about what happens because the final thing happens there.

Siddhant

Even the credit system has been changed a lot with a lot fewer credits imparted to the core papers. Coming back to the issue of IPCW a bit, with the entire faculty removed, do you all have some way to approach this, to do something regarding the recruitment process?

Dr Patgiri

We are just ad hoc teachers. We actually don't have a lot of power, and now we are displaced. All we can do is talk about the issue like I'm doing to you and actually see what the Delhi University Teachers Association does. Because Professor Bhagi, the President, has said that they'll ensure replacement and you know, recruitment in other colleges, but I'd want to know how that will happen in Sociology. If they do have some concrete steps in mind, we are more than happy to listen and be a part of those decision - making. But at this moment , we are

aggrieved primarily because we have lost our livelihood, we have lost our jobs. We don't even know why because if you look at the achievements of the department, I don't think any of us deserve to be treated like this. The action should be taken by DUTA because they are our representatives. We have elections, we vote for them. So it is, in that sense, their responsibility to take it ahead.

Siddhant

I think the amazing work happening at the Department of Sociology at IPCW is visible and Hypatia, the student council has done really well too over the years. Talking a bit about your work at 'Doing Sociology', an independent, women-led platform for democratising Sociological pursuit. You are one of the co-founders there. How is your work there? How do you see Sociology in a more 'away from the class' setting?

Dr Patgiri

In the last few days, there have been a lot of people who have expressed solidarity and love, and they have all said that I deserve better, I deserve more than what has happened here. But my passion has always been for public education. Because I have studied in the best of public universities- Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. I always wanted to be a teacher. I didn't have any other career options and I didn't even think about them. I was not one of those people who wrote UPSC exams, I was not one of those people who did anything else. I wanted to be an academic and an educator.

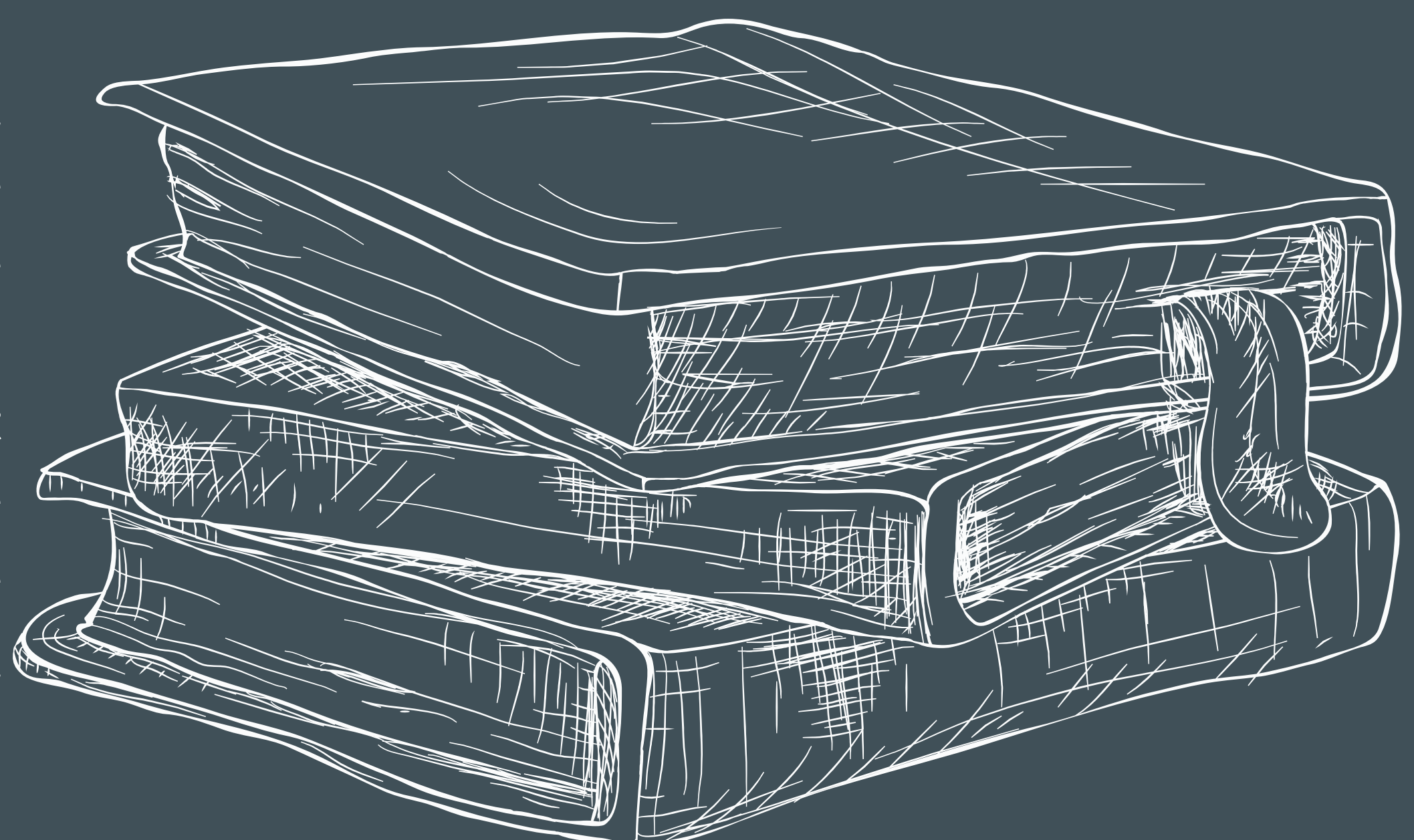
Doing Sociology is about our passion for public education. Three of us built the platform. I think that it gives me a lot of freedom, a lot of passion and love for the discipline, which has made me who I am, as a teacher and as a student. This is our contribution or our love back to the discipline and young people because we see that there is a lack or a dearth of e-resources and e-spaces, particularly in the Indian context. You have blogs and platforms outside like LSE Review of Books, LSE South Asia Blog or the Sociological Review Foundation. But there was nothing like Doing Sociology in the Indian context which is why we thought of nurturing young people who would be able to write pieces and express some of their views, academically, because it's not a popular opinion piece platform. It is a proper

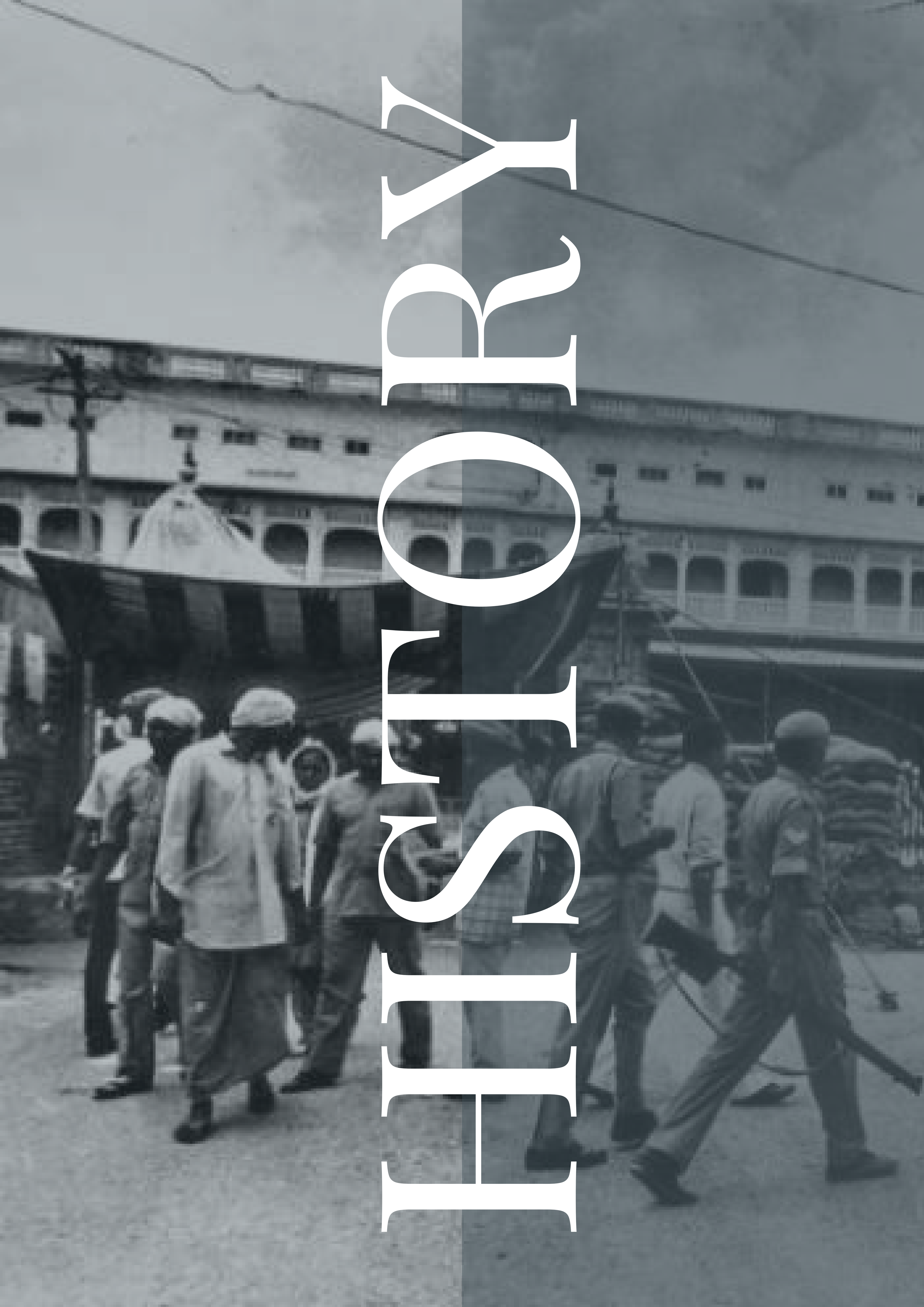
academic blog and it also brings very seasoned and established academicians like Professor Jodhka or the recent interview with Malini Sur, to people who will then get exposed to their works and might be interested in reading them further. We felt that giving them some audio-visual input could actually create some interest in reading their works as well because you also know that with the new generation, there is a bit of an attention span issue. All of us have so much access to the digital. It's happening to even me, I mean, I can't really blame my students, they are much younger. So it's basically about that passion to do something for public education. Something that it's free of cost because it's a very voluntary, independent women-led initiative.

We don't have any funding, which is why the website domain and everything else is paid for by the three of us, we share the cost. The only thing that bothers me sometimes, or rather disturbs me is when people ask, how much are we paying for the articles and I have to very embarrassingly say that we can't pay because we are non-funded, and it's actually our salaries that pay for this. That's the only bit that hurts me. But apart from that, I think it's something that gives me a lot of joy. Young people should find it in themselves to also be part of these collectives, which give us that community space because if spaces are shrinking, then we do need alternatives, isn't it? For instance, The Probe and Caucus. I'm pretty sure that you thought of coming up with it years back because there was this need for some student-led think tank.

Siddhant

'Doing Sociology' has done a lot of pioneering work with regard to democratising education. I'm sure many students from other social sciences as well, are very much interested in this kind of work. Thanks a lot, Dr. Patgiri for joining us today. It was a pleasure talking to you.





RY O r S H I



UNRAVELLING THE PYRRHIC VICTORY OF '84

AN EXAMINATION OF
MILITARY AND CIVIL BLIND SPOTS
DURING OPERATION BLUESTAR

By Daanyal Zaidi



Lt Gen Prem Nath Hoon describes operation Blue Star as a 'Black Chapter' in the 'history of armed forces', a completely pyrrhic victory critiqued by the top Brass within the army itself. The operation was pockmarked with blatant disregard of Hierarchy, both military and Civil, along with complete ignorance of religious sentiment. The operation was a response to a series of acts of aggression by Sikh militants which had led to complete administrative collapse in the state. What should have been a pacifying operation for the state, turned into a bloodstained catastrophe.

The Administrative collapse in Punjab became evident when DIG A.S. Atwal was shot dead outside the Golden Temple on 25th of April 1983. His assassination led to mass panic in the area with his personal security guard fleeing the scene along with a hundred or so policemen who did the same. The killer walked back into the Sarai complex within the confines of the Golden Temple, which houses a number of inns for pilgrims. What happens next is best described by Mr. Ramesh Inder Singh, the then District Magistrate of Amritsar. Soon after the news of Mr Atwal's death reached the Chief Minister Darabara Singh's office, who instead of taking any action rang up the Prime Minister's office for instruction. P.C. Alexander, who was the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, further delayed the response for two more hours as the Prime Minister was on a tour in Rajasthan. Mr. Alexander ultimately ordered the police to not enter the temple as the situation had become politically sensitive. And all this while DIG Atwal's body lay outside the shrine

Finally the SGPC was asked to hand over the killer and several other militants involved in similar acts of violence. The letter was overlooked by the temple administration even after an ultimatum was served for a fairly valid reason. The militants had usurped the authority in the temple and occupied places in the Sarai Complex and the Akal Takht without the explicit approval of the SGPC. The SGPC had no means to oppose the militant groups.

The murder of DIG A.S. Atwal highlights the complete administrative collapse in Punjab and the height of lawlessness in the state. Firstly, instead of promptly arresting the perpetrators, the SSP, Amritsar called the political leadership for further instruction. The Chief Minister instead of formulating comprehensive actions for this breach of Law and Order which is a state subject, looked up to the Central Government in Delhi for instruction. This chain of events shows the complete decay of every substantive norm of federalism present and points to the larger problem of positions in the state legislature being appointed by the stalwarts in the central government. Secondly, the inaction of the state government towards the assassination of a dignitary of the state raises questions on its sovereignty. Lastly, these events highlight the heights of administrative collapse in Punjab.

The Army Advances

On the fifth of June, the army was moved to Amritsar to 'clear the Golden temple by swift and decisive action, and capturing maximum militants, weapons and ammunition', says Lt. Gen. K.S. Brar, one of the commanders tasked with

the operation. The militants had erected fortifications all over the temple and had made it impossible for any representative of the state to go inside. Every scenario pointed towards an intervention by the army, and for such a situation the GOC in Chief, Western Command, Lt Gen. S.K. Sinha had issued a set of guidelines in 1982. These set of guidelines were rather extensive and were articulated to ensure transparency in such a sensitive operation where the Army is intervening in a civil matter, that too on holy precincts. The General remarked that the militants be reminded of their desecration of a holy place and if the troops entered, the onus would be on the militants because they refused to come out. The militants should be given maximum possible time with psychological pressure put on them. The General also was of the opinion that before commencing the operation, Akhand Path be played by the regimental granthi and before commencing the operation the troops should take off their shoes and pay obeisance to the Guru Granth Sahib before going in. He emphasised the need to isolate the militants from the Sikh Qaum and by portraying the intervention as a last resort.

General Sundarji and rest of the command completely disregarded the above suggestions and planned a speedy mop up operation using the SFF and Para commandos to launch the assault on the Akal Takht and minimum force was to be used. The operation from the very beginning turned disastrous with the Special forces being trapped in the Parikrama (the corridor surrounding the *sarovar*) by the militants hiding in the rooms lining the corridor. The



“The Compound in the Centre was littered with dead and wounded, all civilian, as the army casualties have been lifted away..... Each room I had checked had two or three dead bodies and a few survivors, dazed due to heat and shock.”

entire trajectory of the operation went haywire and even the reserves had to be called in. The earlier attempt to not use heavy arms was ditched and an armoured personnel carrier was then utilised to carry the soldiers till the base of Akal Takht. However, this endeavour also failed as the militants shot flat the wheels of the vehicle which decapitated the entire initiative. In the end the leadership resorted to tank fire and the indigenous *Vijayanta* tanks were used to bombard the Akal Takht till Bhindranwale and his militants died.

Cleaning up the Sarai Complex

The operation to clear the Sarai Complex of militants was another massive botch up. Sarai Complex is made up of a few hundred residential complexes and a number of halls. The conditions in the Sarai Complex were exceptionally perilous as the militants were mixed with regular civilians in the dark. In such situations you need specially trained commandos who know when to practise restraint and when to fire to avoid civilian casualties. Instead, the task was

assigned to 9 Kumaon, an Infantry Battalion. The Kumaon Regiment has a distinguished service record but the Battalion assigned did not have training for such an operation, neither did they have the expertise. The following bloodshed that happened can not be attributed to the soldiers who had to operate in the dark, having to differentiate between a militant and a pilgrim before the militant fired at him, and all this judgement had to happen in a split of a second. Mr. Ramesh Inder Singh Opined that the situation could have been avoided if the operation was held in daytime but General Sundarji wanted the operation to be over before daylight. Brigadier O.S. Goriya was on the first officer to enter the Sarai Complex after the operation and his eyewitness account is as follows:

This excess in Civilian casualties can be attributed to the fact that the militants threw a grenade from a higher story down below where civilians were huddled together and this led to mass panic and civilians running towards the soldiers in the dark. By the time the operation was over the entire precinct was in smoke and all the previous tenets taken by the army regarding the sanctity of the complex were in a shambles.

There were a number of lapses and ignorance of protocol and hierarchy by General Sundarji, The central government also showed hints of back-channelling between the PMO and General Sundarji. Lt. Gen C.N. Somanna led a think tank back at MOD which proposed a plan of encirclement and the use of the army as a psychological weapon rather than a hard force. This proposal was put forward to the cabinet by the then Chief of the armed forces, General Vaidya, but was put off by P.C. Alexander and Indira Gandhi, even though it had the support of Pranab Mukherji the



finance Minister back then. Sundarji instead of going by the MOD's plan of encirclement established his own set of command structure by going behind MOD's back, directly to Mrs. Gandhi's office.

Lt. Gen. V.K. Nayyar has gone on record saying that Sundarji actively overlooked MOD's suggestions. He says,

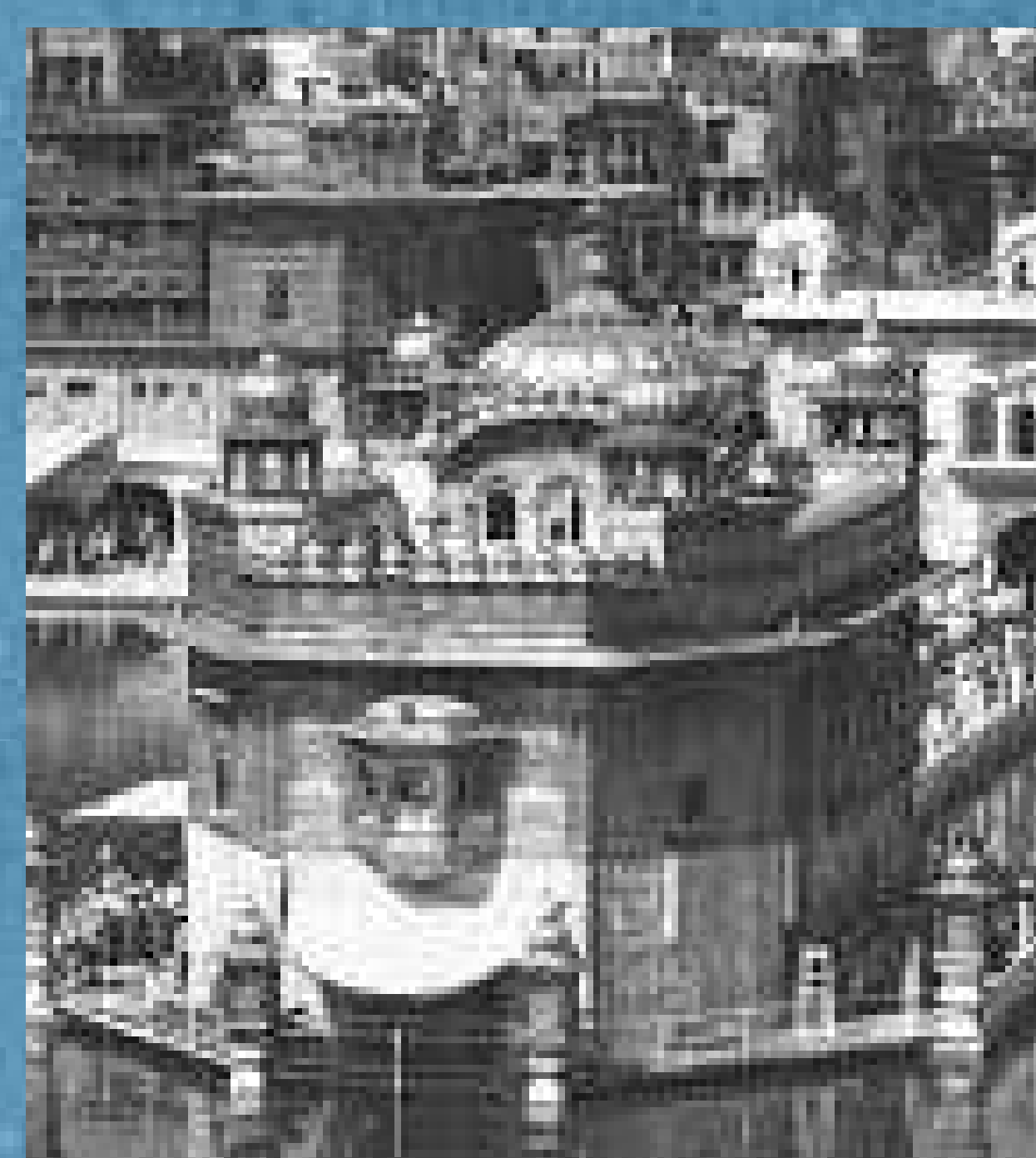
"I categorically recommended to him (Sundarji) that he should talk to the PM and convey the army's view.... The aim was to give the PM an honest and uninhibited opinion based on ground level inputs, impose caution on her in hardening the stance and prevent the Army's Involvement."

There were also certain blindspots in the official recording of the operation which were later rectified by the higher ups in the army. General Brar in his account says that the APC was hit by an anti tank RPG but on Mr. Ramesh Inder Singh's inspection of the complex after the operation, no damage to the body of the vehicle was revealed and just the punctures were visible. Another such dubious affair was the question of how many shells the tanks fired during the latter stage of the operation? In the official account, only one tank fired a few rounds but the SGPC employees counted more than seventy shells being fired and all three tanks firing them. Suspiciously just after the operation the tanks were moved to a firing range for practice. Lt. Gen. P.N. Hoon, who succeeded Sundarji challenged the veracity of the official report. He revealed that the tanks were moved to practice to justify the large number of spent shells and in actuality more than sixty rounds were fired.

Lastly the Civil Administration had no clue that the army would be moving in and got to know about it only after it was already there. More surprisingly the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, the President himself, had no knowledge that the army was mobilised. President Zail Singh only got to know about the operation two days later and did not know who moved his army. The Prime Minister had met the President barely three days before the operation, the details of what happened between the two are not in the public domain but the President was not informed regarding the impending operation. The operation accomplished what it had set out to do but at a very heavy human cost and led to the events which further cost the nation dearly. It is not that military operations cannot be carried out on religious complexes, Operation Black Thunder 1 & 2 are a testimony against such statements. Both operations went smoothly at a minimum human cost, while achieving their goals at the same time on the same precincts Operation Blue Star was Conducted on.

It is very easy for us to generalise the outcomes and point fingers when such catastrophic mistakes are made, especially when we're not the ones on ground. The Militancy in Punjab has cost us as a nation dearly and when reading about such topics we tend to forget about the civilians who had lived through it and support either the state or the insurgents depending on what end of the ideological spectrum we belong to. It is the people of Punjab who have lived through decades of uncertainty and violence of no fault of their own. Many of us wouldn't know what it is like to go about our

day with the fear of death lurking over us. Maybe that's why most of us don't think twice before labelling something in Black or White.



ARCHIVES: CULTURAL REPERTOIRES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

*Interviewed by Pushkar Pandey &
Vagmi Singh*



TEAM PROBE WITH
MS MUGDHA SINHA



MS MUGDHA SINHA

Ms Mugdha Sinha is a career civil servant with more than twenty years of wide ranging experience in governance, policy making and International trade negotiations. She has worked in the Ministries of Textiles, Industry and Commerce both at the Centre and in her cadre, the state of Rajasthan, and also in Food, Public Distribution & Consumer Affair, Science and Technology, and as Director General, Kala Kendra, Jaipur for the Government of Rajasthan. She is currently deputed as Joint Secretary at Ministry of Culture, New Delhi.

Pushkar: To begin with, we would like to know about your experience while making a transition from the Department of Science and Technology to the Ministry of Culture. Was it a drastic change? We would also like to know your vision for the department you are now handling.

Ms Mugdha Sinha: I am now on deputation to the Government of India, when I was heading the departments of science and technology, I was working in the state. So that is, as far as the transition goes. But if you know the lifecycle of a bureaucrat, the best part about the job, if I can say, is exposure to different desks and different domain knowledge. The idea remains the same, that you are doing Policy Making at all levels, which is the Joint Secretary in the centre and the secretary in the state. However, the subjects change. I was looking at science and technology in the state but here I'm looking at culture. But interestingly, there is a connection. The part of science and technology which pertains to museums is a thread of continuity here. After all, the museums, including science museums, are part of the Ministry of Culture. The second interesting thing pertains to when I was in Science and Technology Department. Before being in the department of Science and Technology, I was in the Art and Culture Department in the state. We started something called the Astro Knights Sky tourism. The aim was to disseminate information about astronomy to the larger public through everyday cosmic events, with the idea of creating citizen scientists. The thread of continuity which I was doing in the state, we also introduced in the centre. Your experience of having worked in the state also proves beneficial when you come and work in any other department because there's always a connection of the dots that happen in our service where we are more of generalist. For us, the aerial picture and the anticipation and the foresight is very important. I am very happy to have made that transition.

Vagmi: Ma'am on an informal note. You have been working as the director of Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur. As a resident of Jaipur, personally, the building holds immense cultural importance and cultural nostalgia. From its architecture to the events that are organised reflects the regional culture. And the space has essentially democratised art and art spaces, making them affordably interactive. Would the Ministry be considering to set up such cultural hubs across India? We would also like to know your opinion on the growth of cultural hubs in Urban areas vis-à-vis the increase in cultural consciousness.

Ms Mugdha Sinha: Yes, that's a very important question. I also very deeply enjoyed my stint as the Director General of Jawahar Kala Kendra for about two and a half years during the lockdown. We were able to keep the whole space energized through various online programs. Also, one good thing that we did during the lockdown was to get a database of artists collated and combined using the crowd-sourcing mechanism during the lockdown, which I think enabled a lot of artists to sustain over the lockdown period because we did not give them doles. We gave them programming and the money was given to them for programming that they did. This is something that made me satisfied if I can say, as we were able to keep the Jawahar Kala Kendra in working condition even during the lockdown. It's a three-decade-old institution created by Charles Correa, and of course, you have been around in the ministry yourself and you know that the honourable Prime Minister in January 2020 announced cultural spaces in five cities, which are Kolkata, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Varanasi and Delhi. And the first task that I had was to get these cultural spaces energised. We are also in talks with Mumbai to create a cultural centre, which will have a concentric circle, where you will have galleries for performance spaces, you will then storage spaces, conservation centres and studios for artists. We are also looking at programming because art and culture are not brick-and-mortar construction; art and culture are more about how you engage with people. With artists, arts and audiences. Each one of them is equally important in a win-win kind of situation. Also, when we look at Art we look at dying art, we also look at contemporary art. And then, of course, the artists that do both these kinds of arts and audience

which appreciate and when we talk about we're not just talking about visual arts, we're also talking about performing arts and all varieties of performing, visual, and literally arts. In the urban sphere, great strides have been made in creating cultural spaces. In Delhi, the Italian Embassy runs the Italian Cultural Centre; the Kerala Government maintains the Kerala House while the Bikaner House of the Rajasthan Government has become a cultural space as well! Recently, the Neeta Ambani Cultural Centre has come about as well. Now people are looking at connecting with people, authors, and performers to be able to provide artistic activity for people. We've also seen the ASI monument of the Sunder Nursery evolve into a cultural space, both a performance space and also a space where you can have literary activities. We've also seen these book cafes emerging.. You have so many literary festivals which go to a particular place every year and they transform the whole look of the city. You are from Jaipur you are aware that the Jaipur Literary Festival has given a new look to the city of Jaipur. Yes, of course, the whole landscape is changing because we live in very isolating times. We are connected but we are not doing these people-to-people conversations anymore. It becomes all the more important through platforms, online or offline for people to congregate together. Also because the longevity of the people is going up. You will find that you will now need to carve out space for the geriatric population and keep them engaged. If people are living from 60 years and upwards, then you also have to look at that segment, which needs to be kept out of isolation and depression, and also not become a burden to the children for having to keep them entertained. So you also have to carve out spaces in the neighbourhood, for people to walk down, enjoy and keep themselves entertained, which are safe spaces, to express themselves or to partake of expressions of other artistic and literary nature. I think in times to come, this human contact will become imperative. Because of festivals, the Festival of Library 2023 that you were a part of, and the International Museum Expo 2023 is an idea to bring like-minded people, and stakeholders together. We are all artists in some way. We either do literature, think, or even ideate. All of us must come together and deliberate through whatever means of expression that we can find. Because every bit of ideation, and every bit of doing performance, and just being itself I think, is contributing to the making of this nation. And that

improves the cultural ethos of this country. It is also important to sit and think as policymakers. And ask questions like what does the future have in store? Will we have libraries in the 22nd century? Will the museums exist the way they do now? What will be the relevance of history? Who will be writing history? In the 22nd century, will AI be writing history? Today, we are only debating that it's the hunter who writes the history tomorrow, it's it'll be neither the hunter nor the hunted, it will be some other third party that you'll have no idea about. It will only be done based on iteration. Now people are making images of different kinds of people. And you'll see that those images of different kinds of people are not very representative images. They're very stereotypical images. So if you say I want an African singer, he comes with all the stereotypes. So how is history going to be written? Will history repeat the ills of stereotypes and stereotypical ways of writing history? Because the AI is also learning from our iteration. When this happens in the future, it's important to think and talk about these aspects. The 22nd century is not very far from now. Otherwise, we will not know what to do when we reach the 22nd century.

Pushkar: I think, ma'am answered the first question wonderfully as to what sort of roles archives play and went on to address what sort of other kinds of sources are emerging or that could emerge in the future that can potentially go on to affect the way history is written. But to link to framing the identity of a nation, which is a process that is still ongoing. Archival interpretation has always been a constant theme of discussion. How do you interpret certain archives and certain sources or what roles do archives play and ought to play in terms of framing the identity of a nation?

Ms Mugdha Sinha: So, archives are like the minds and the memories of the nation. Because archives are built on all that has transpired in the past. It's like a collation and a compilation of all documentation. All the oral archives, which are like the Smriti, the thing that has travelled with us in terms of anecdotes and stories, are equally important because not everything gets transcribed, for instance when the author writes an autobiography, he may not be able to write everything that has happened. There will be a certain

selection, which is in a way, the survival of the fittest in terms of what is the best thing that should go in an archive. To a large extent, the archives show you the mirror of what has happened in the past. And that mirror also enables you to look at where you are headed in many ways. But archives are of our various ways. What we understand of the archives today is, is the repository that has been preserved by government efforts is what is immediately accessible to us. But there is a whole lot of personal archiving, that has also happened, which may or may not be accessible to all of us at the same time, but it's equally important. There are three pieces. One is what the government did in terms of record keeping. Second, the people who are not in the government are building their archives. And third is the archives that were built here, but did not stay in the country. These are all archival memories of the country, that need to be collated, compiled and brought together because that will give you a sense of history of what has happened in the country. Not just history, but the identity of a country is also linked to the kind of legacy and the kind of lineage the country carries. But we are not always conscious of our archives. And also, all the visual representations, which are all of the monuments in a way, all our living traditions imposing improving the dances, our culinary, our festivals, and the national typography. Everything is part of the archive. Some you can document and keep. Some you are only able to appreciate. I think archiving is very important. It has to be done in a scientific manner. And ever since we have assumed consciousness of the importance of archiving, I think we have built institutionalized pieces. In the country, we have the National Archives of India, and we have five different offices around the country that do this work. The States also have their archives. States also archive all the material that is there. Now, given the fact that India is a hugely diverse country with huge linguistic diversity, the archives in different languages need to be transliterated and translated into different other languages. So that what happened in one part, which is original history, and regional cultural aspects can become available, and accessible to people equally. Digitization becomes an important part because it is one way of putting everything on the cloud or a portal where everybody can partake of the digital resources that exist in the manuscripts or the archives that we have in the country. This is a huge task in itself. We have the National Mission on Libraries and the National

on Manuscripts. Moreover, archives also include maps, music that has been recorded by people, and videos. I think technology can help make this easily accessible, and I think too many more people than it is in the physical form. I think it important to build archives in the country, and not just for the country, because as a unit, all of us also need to archive our memories, archive our own life and the life of our ancestors to somewhere that is going to contribute to the making of the archival repository of the country itself.

Vagmi: Definitely, ma'am. Now moving on to the global aspect of archiving. Recently in the ongoing G-20 summit, the Ministry has conceptualized Cultural Corridor. It aims to create a museum in the making based on principles of knowledge sharing, inclusivity, and equality. It will not only have physical artefacts to display, but the major focus will be on digital displays. Similarly, can we expect collaboration with other countries on phygital archives? And if so, what would be the way forward?

Ms Mugdha Sinha: Yeah. What is happening in this whole space is the idea of doing the G-20, having 20 countries and UNESCO that participate in its deliberations. If you look at the cultural track, the focus of the cultural track was collaborations and museums' collaborations on the repatriation of objects. And now, there is an entire movement around repatriation, if you look at countries, they are increasingly interested in looking at what are the objects that have gone outside of their countries and how those objects can be brought back. India has very successfully managed to get more than 200+ objects back to the country in the last nine years. Similar efforts are also on in other countries. The whole concept is that there are various areas of collaboration, museums being one. While it may be expensive to have exhibitions and artefacts travel, because of various reasons some of those artefacts might be AA category and they might not be in a good state of conservation to travel to countries. This is where digital technology will enable you to at least look at objects that are available in different countries through phygital exhibitions. During the lockdown also, we had a similar kind of online celebration of International Museum Day. We have

built on this concept and created what is called the International Museum Expo. Digital, in times to come, will remain important because it is going to mediate that space where the physical may not be possible for various reasons like safety, long-distance travel, or financial reasons, but we can collaborate on the digital and the phygital space. There is a whole lot of collaboration that can happen in terms of capacity building and training. At the International Museum Expo, we had a masterclass on museums and Metaverse, which looked at the non-fungible token space, which is also how you can disseminate all the artefacts that you have to an audience that is interested in the vanity purchase of the physical, or the digital versions of the artefacts that you have in your museum spaces. The world is evolving in many different ways. The digital world is almost like an octopus, with so many different tentacles. Today you have digitisation, holographic technologies, orographic technologies and AI. Let's see how digital technologies would enable us to cooperate and collaborate in the museum space or any other space.

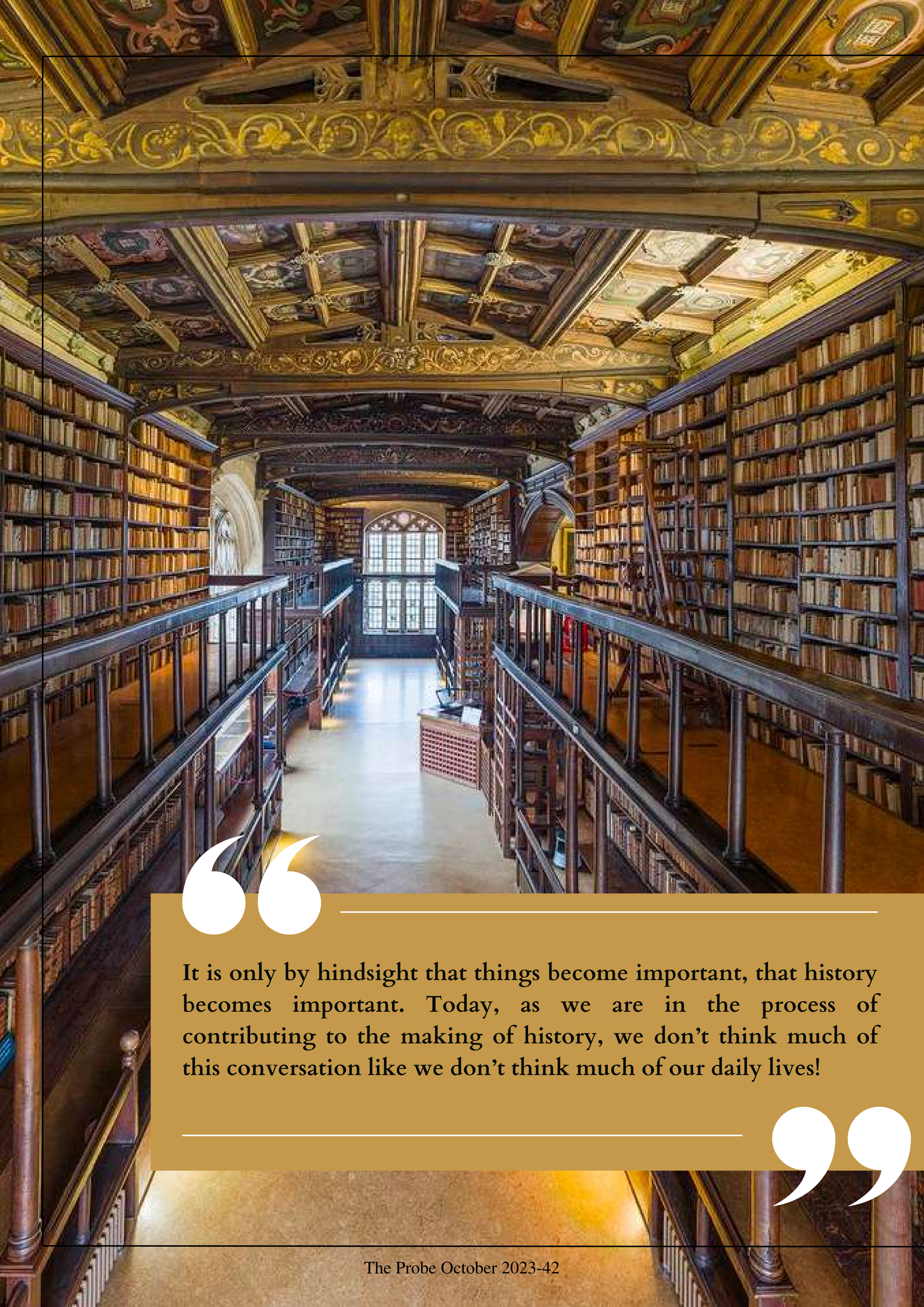
Pushkar: To follow up on the part about capacity building and extending it perhaps to the global scale. India's G-20 presidency has propped it to a position where it can rightfully claim itself as the leader of the Global South. But many countries in the Global South are witnessing the decay of their indigenous cultures, due to unstable leadership, inordinate westernisation, absence or concerns of archival or conservation techniques and so forth. What role, and message, does India have for them?

Ms Mugdha Sinha: Through the G-20 presidency, India has given the message of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. It refers to One Family, One Nation, One Future. And the future rests heavily on the present and the past. India has shown the way through the repatriation of objects. The whole momentum has been built wherein India taking the lead. If you look at what we have done in the space of the International Museum Expo, you will realise that ICOM highlighted our celebration of the International Museum Day at a very big and global level. We reached out to various museums across the globe as well as Pan-India, setting the stage for a second edition next year, as well as telling people that we are ready to cooperate on a larger global

space. I also feel that since the global South has progressed economically over the last two or three decades, they can look at culture in a more serious manner. The age that we live in is not an age that piggybanks on the salaried class. It piggybanks on the young generation, generation Z, which is involved in a whole lot of freelance work, which is part of the creative economy. So, when India talks of its 5 trillion economy and becoming the 3rd largest economy in the world, the space of art and art-related consultancy services are also going to form a big part of this regeneration. That I think is heavily linked to a culture because a lot of the growth potential is going to come from industries linked to culture. The creative economy, the AVGC that we see today, is what the FMCG was in the goods sector. So this is the space which is going to act as fuel for the nation's economic development and these are all people who are not the salaried class but those who do freelance and consultancy. This is all related to the space of art, science and technology, especially as the revival is going to take place because where are we first going to use our technology in this space? We will digitise our manuscripts, digitise our artefacts, put them to NFT, look at reconstructions of our temples, try to recreate the brushstrokes of art and so forth. Technology is a tool that is going to help us look at our already-created art and cultural space. India, because of the 5000+ years old civilisation history that it has, has a huge repository of culture. If you look at other museums in the world, be it the Metropolitan Museum, be it the Louvre Museum, all of these museums also have a South Asian Gallery, of which most of the stuff has come from India. So we have, over the years, created a huge repository of art and culture and even literature for that matter, which is now going to make a difference in the world. We don't have to aspire to be a leader, we already are a leader, because I don't think there is any other civilisation which has this humongous collection of literary and artistic, as well as tangible and intangible history that we have. If you look at the UNESCO list, you will find that there is a huge number of entries from India and in fact, if there were no restrictions on one entry per year, I think we will just flood the UNESCO market with many more entries. So yes, we do feel that the Global South is also recognising the need to look at the past to be able to look better at the future. So that sense of identity politics is also happening there, since the more global you become, the more you look for where you are in

the global world. I think that looking back is also happening. So maybe it's just a conjuncture of time that you are being forced to look at who you are and where you come from. So your lineage in terms of country, ethnicity and identity is making a lot of difference. So I think that is a common thread that runs across South Asia and the Global South because we were also part of the colonial lot where our culture was victimised and we were made to look at ourselves from a different lens altogether. So it is very important when we come into our own, to be able to look at ourselves from the lens we would like to use, to understand our identity. So this identity politics will become very important, wherein culture will enable that understanding of who we are and looking at the past will enable us to understand who we are as individuals and as a country. Where we come from will become very, very important. If we look back a few years down the line, we gave the world Yoga. Ayurveda hasn't really been understood by people due to various technical reasons, but Mehndi is now reaching the Mexican world, having been adopted as a different kind of colouring. We know that it has medicinal properties. So things are reaching the West from India. We were always a trading nation which was giving things to other nations; the Silk Route also ran through us. During the Harappan times, we were connected through the Lothal and the Dholavira ports to the Persian and Mesopotamian civilisations. So it is nothing new actually. It is like opening your grandmother's cupboard and finding something that you always knew existed but had never seen evidence of. We knew that we were always connected but we are now looking at it from new eyes. So that is how I see it.

Pushkar: That was a wonderful analogy, ma'am. We would now like to move on to exploring the process of archiving. The first question that we would like to ask, pertains to a term that you have already mentioned during this interview, living history. India has the privilege of having a panoply of ancient traditions beyond the pale of mainstream society that can be termed "Living History". But at the same time, ever since its independence, India has always been in the quest for industrialization, urbanisation, development and so forth. How do we at this juncture, seek to balance this aspiration, especially with regard to tribal cultures and other cultures that are beyond the mainstream, that have to be integrated into the mainstream?



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It is only by hindsight that things become important, that history becomes important. Today, as we are in the process of contributing to the making of history, we don't think much of this conversation like we don't think much of our daily lives!

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Ms Mugdha Sinha: Oh, so I don't look at it as integrating all the Tribals into the mainstream. India was always a land of the gramvasis, the shaharvasis and the vanvasis. This lens is a very British colonial lens which emerged because they were not able to invade the forests. So they said okay, the forests and their inhabitants are an isolated lot. When I think of anthropology, while looking at tribals, I feel that when you look at the tribals, you are able to understand yourselves, slightly in a better light. They are the original Aborigines of the country, who have managed to stay in close sync with nature, and they give us a very good template today to how to live and how to find solutions to our everyday problems through nature. So I will not in my own capacity be happy mainstreaming this because this whole concept of mainstreaming is a concept of the Industrial Revolution where it was felt that uniformity would make it so much easier to bring about efficiency. In addition, uniformity allows you to govern people easily. So that was a British template; let everybody become the same, whole, and uniform, so that we are able to govern them in a much better manner. But India actually thrives on diversity. So, I find our tribal brothers and sisters, their tribal diversity, bring something which is very, very important. They have not been mainstreamed into the capital West and they still retain a lot of the holistic part of who we were indigenously. There is a lot that they can teach us. So, I am totally against mainstreaming them, I am all for providing education and better health facilities to them and they can be islands in the country, which will remain the way they are. Because see, what what did the West do? Columbus went and discovered America but at the cost of killing all those original Native Americans and then you go back today and you want to bring them back and give them reservations and stuff like that. I think there is enough in our bandwidth, in our mindscape, that we can all live together. Some people will live in the forests and protect them, some will live in the city and create urban structures and there will be some people who will live in the village and ensure that the villages remain clean and pure and pristine for the cities to be able to work. So there will be a three-tiered system and I think that there is beauty in it. I think we should allow them to remain the way they are. They can evolve. The choice is very important. They should have a choice, whether they want to be like us or whether want to be like who they are. We should

be accepting and accommodating of the choices that they make for themselves.

Vagmi: Let us move on now to identity politics and continue that proposition. India has rich repositories of oral folklore, chants, and songs, as you mentioned. There are also languages without scripts, which are only spoken. For instance, Marwari is not a scripted language. It is just orally spoken. Even within a language, there are regional variations. So, what are your suggestions to archive and preserve those languages the way they are?

Ms Mugdha Sinha: If you talk of languages, they say that every 10 kilometres not just the language, but even your cuisine, dress and customs will change. This is how diverse the country is. We came about as a result of 565 principalities coming together, each with its own set of customs, rituals, and everything. So as far as preserving the language goes, we are working to ensure that while the 22 scheduled languages of the Constitution are preserved, more than these languages, we also preserve the variety of dialects we have. In the festival of libraries, we got to see that we today have a Gondi script which has been distilled from the various old manuscripts, and the language now has a script, so that you can at least preserve it for posterity. However, a language can only be preserved if you have a grammar of the language; if you have an alphabet of the language, and if you have people who actually speak the language and continue to have literature in that language. There are lots of organisations who are working even on mainstream languages. For example, a lot of revival of Urdu has happened. People are now wanting to revive Hindi. We are still celebrating the 14th of September as the Hindi Diwast. There is still a vast divide if you look at the language festivals that are organised in the country. Of the 238+ festivals that we have in the country, most of them are English language festivals. There are very few vernacular language festivals. There are very few festivals devoted to Hindi. How do you preserve not just these languages, but also the lesser-known languages? The lesser-known dialects? The lesser-known scripts? A lot would depend on what kind of instructions that one is given in their schools. Do we have a three-language policy? Are we only mainstreaming everybody and teaching everybody English because it's applicable to the globalised citizenry? Or are you only teaching them Hindi?

What happens to a language that the child is speaking at home? Are we able to give him formalised education in that language? Or is he able to only speak based on what he knows from his parents? If you look at Ernakulam, which was the first literate district in the country, many people, not just from the city, but from the state, are not able to write the language. While people are able to speak in Malayali and read in Malayali, writing in Malayali is very difficult, especially today. When you are using the computer, you are hardly writing a language. When you are using dictaphones and when you are sending voice messages, your whole focus is on speaking. So sometimes I get very worried because of the fact that with so many of the digital tools that are going to be thrown at us, especially with AI also in the making now, I just hope you remember to read and write and speak. These are skills that we are increasingly losing. We are not writing letters anymore. So much literature is getting published, but I doubt that those many people are actually reading the literature which is coming out. So yes, each one of us has this responsibility, of carrying forward the language that we were born speaking so that we can keep it and preserve it for posterity. The only language we know today is the computer language, which is English. So it is very important that informally all of us, and formally, the schools, the government policy, the various literature festivals, even the libraries, work towards the preservation of our linguistic diversity. All the resources that are kept in the libraries need to be transcribed. Nowadays you don't have people who can read Old Persian, Old Arabic, Dari or Pashto in our country, to name a few examples. Every few centuries, the way the language is written and its vocabulary will change. So it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that the language survives. It is also very important to have directories of people who know these languages and to use technology to ensure that these languages survive in their written and spoken forms, as well as to ensure that their literature also survives. Language rides on literature. The more the literature is written in a particular language, people will be able to look back and be able to pick up and read and go back and learn the language. So it is very, very important for literature to get promoted through various literary platforms.

Vagmi: The National Archives of India has a rich repository of documents, and maps that are vital

for any historian or scholar trying to understand India's past. These documents are also translated into Braille to provide accessibility to especially abled. With digitalisation, how is the ministry going to ensure inclusivity?

Ms Mugdha Sinha: That is a very important question. Ensuring access to people who want it in a particular manner or a particular form is extremely important. Digital technologies and assistive technologies have come to the aid of digitization to enable all these manuscripts and archival records to become accessible to everyone in a more inclusive manner. So when we talk of the people who are, sightless or sight-challenged, while we usually only think of braille records, we can now do with podcasts for them. That is a far simpler and quicker method of transcribing, translating and making records available. There are exhibitions that now have a tactile component, which is very important for the touch and feel they provide. We need to ensure that we are able to preserve our records so that they remain with us in the physical form. The best way to ensure that everything gets preserved and is available at one portal is to digitise them and then we can look at various ways in which they can be made, inclusively accessible to various populations, and then disseminate them. We live in a very, very difficult age of Social Media where there is so much information, an information apocalypse is happening, that you don't really know what is happening in the world. I think that earlier when there used to just be a PIB note or a press release, more people knew about the things that the government is doing. But now in this age, there is this huge black hole of you putting out things in the market and hoping that people will figure it out. When people don't figure it out, you have to specifically reach out to them and have them join such initiatives. So I don't know how this whole model of inclusivity will work. We can be inclusive and yet people may not know about us. We now have a bureaucracy of platforms. There is a platform that does the argumentative work, there is a platform that does only pictures, and the other platforms do something else. Yuval Noah Harari describes this as the tyranny of technology where you are bombarded with information and yet we don't have all the information. At a certain point there will be fatigue in how much the person on the receiving end can actually receive.

Vagmi: With the advancement in technology, non-fungible tokens have gained importance as a way to not only archive but also trespass art gatekeepers. However, it has also led to illegal replication, through buying and selling, of original work and violation of copyrights. What are the steps that the ministry has taken to regulate the circulation of illegitimate NFTs?

Ms Mugdha Sinha: People are able to figure out loopholes even in the best of your rules. So I can only say that you have to be one step ahead of them, whether it be in terms of countering the counterfeiting of currency or the hacking of cyberspaces. There will always be a section of people who will thrive on the unethical. The sale and transfer of anything that rides on cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin is so far banned in our country.. As you very rightly pointed out, it can be for the visual performers and the performative art people, it can create profit or earnings through volumetric representations. So when a writer writes a book in two years' time, and he is able to churn out say 1000 copies, from the sale of each copy he is able to justify the fact that he spent about a year and a half or a year or two in writing the book. But when a painter spends the same two years making a painting, he may or may not be able to sell that painting. Also, from the art connoisseur's view, if they cannot have the original, can they have a certified copy, which is an NFT version? Any purchase of art or association with art on the third party's site is associated with vanity and validation. NFTs provide profitability out of the purchase of vanity. It is not the actual physical possession of a good, say the first copy of the Mona Lisa for example, but a third or a fourth or maybe a replica. Maybe it is that age where we thrive on vanity and the purchase of vanities and if money can be made out of it, why not? However, nothing can be off the radar and has to be regulated because these transactions in the country impact the whole economy itself. Right now, we are not subscribing to anything that can be sold or transferred unless it can be monitored by the country's RBI. So, the model on which NFTs thrive is based on the value you can create out of a second, a third and a fourth copy and so forth. Of course, such CLM transactions have to be regulated.

Pushkar: I would like to come to our last question now. I couldn't help but notice that even throughout this interview, and even before it, you were bombarded by an entire array of different

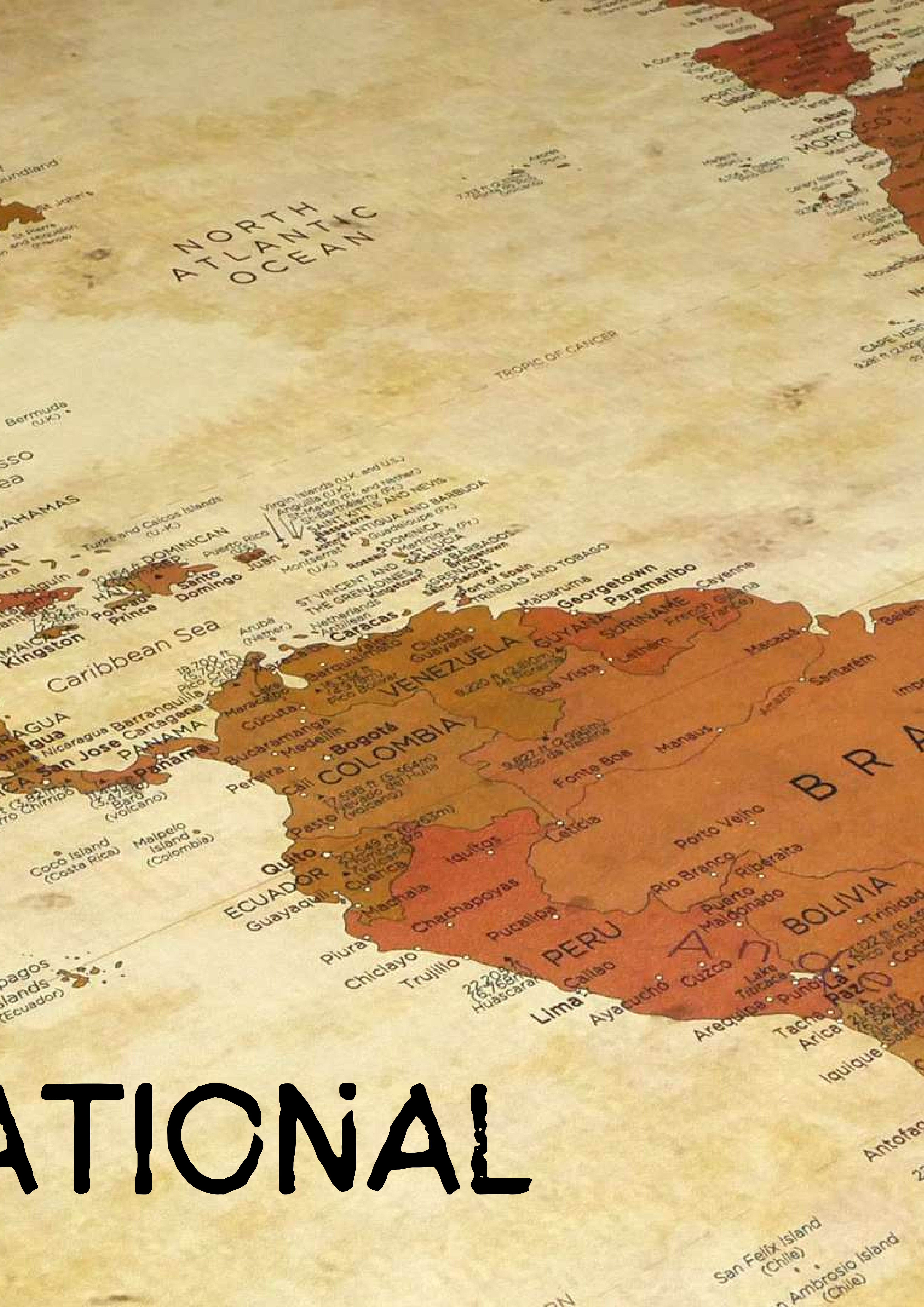
tasks or responsibilities. As an accomplished bureaucrat, how do you archive the sort of information that you have to deal with on a regular basis? You could maybe also extend that to personal experiences and belongings and share any interesting instances or methods or personal tips for our readers.

Ms Mugdha Sinha: Everyone follows the age and template of their times. I remember when I was young, when we would move on from one class to the next, we would have this little diary in which you would have your friends write personal notes for you. I still have that diary containing such notes from when I passed out of school and entered college. Another form of archiving happened because we did not have mobiles to store our phone numbers. So our phone diary was the earliest form of archiving numbers, based on which you were able to stay in touch with your people. Every year, when the new diary came, it was my job to copy the addresses and phone numbers of the entire family. So this was my oldest form of archiving. Archiving is happening on the institutional and professional side, but none of us are able to archive the histories of our families. We don't know the names of our ancestors beyond the third generation. Very few people end up writing autobiographies or exploring the landscape of their parents and their forebearers. There was this whole system of artists who were genealogists. When you would go to any temple, they would create a whole genealogy, connecting you to your parents grandparents and ancestors based on your Kula-Devi. However, that is now lost to history. Tribal people maintain their genealogical records on cloth. These are things which we are not doing despite the fact that we have the best of digital and technological resources. Today, you don't have to do things manually, courtesy the cloud computing, social media and the internet. These are very difficult times that we live in.

It is dangerous to be so available on the web yet if you're not on social media though, you are not connecting with your community. Nobody is looking at it this way, that someday this whole discussion that we are having will have relevance to something else, because of how focused we are on the present. It is only by hindsight that things become important, that history becomes important. Today, as we are in the process of contributing to the making of history, we don't think much of this conversation like we don't think much of our daily lives!



INTERNATIONAL



NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

TROPIC OF CANCER

Caribbean Sea

INTERNATIONAL

AFGHANISTAN:

2 years since Taliban

By Hiya Prakash, Riddhi Sharma, Rijul Bhagi

This article provides a deep dive into the ramifications of the second Taliban regime in Afghanistan, emphasising the state of its economy and the conditions of women, alongside indulging in the historical events that provided the foundations for such a dire situation.

Afghanistan has been in the throes of political instability for centuries now. Ever since Daoud Khan's coup in 1973 brought down Zahir Shah's monarchy, the country has undergone two foreign superpower interventions, and an insurgency, which has left the Taliban emerging as a key player at the helm of governance in both cases- 1996-2001 and the recent takeover in 2021. The Taliban has emerged stronger this time, with territorial control of nearly the entire country and a weakened resistance front.

However, it has failed in its promise of being 'liberal'. Owing to the continuous unabated persecution of ethnic minorities, confinement of women to their homes alongside denying them education, and the right to work or move freely. While brutal punishments of stoning, flogging and burying under a wall have also seen a return.

Afghanistan has also been a victim of a string of earthquakes recently, including one on October 7th 2023, when a 6.3 magnitude earthquake with its epicentre in the Zinda Jan district of the Herat province levelling villages. The earthquake took the lives of over 2,000 people (although the numbers were later revised to over 1,000 by the Taliban) with whole families buried under their homes. A disproportionate number of women and children (over 90% according to UN agencies) made up the fatalities as they were entrapped in their homes, while the men were out working.

Moreover, aftershocks and tremors followed, with another 6.3 magnitude earthquake hitting the Herat province on October 15th. Due to the magnificent destruction, there has been a scarcity of shelter, food, healthcare and emergency services which has resulted in delays in rescuing people from the debris. Furthermore, overburdened clinics have become a common sight, with countless cut off from medical care, and people have been bereft of a roof over their heads leading to exposure to low temperatures, which are projected to fall to sub-zero temperatures in the

approaching winter. The psychological trauma on Afghans has been immense as well with people losing their whole families in the earthquakes.

The earthquakes have elevated an already dire situation in the country which was already reeling from a crippled economy and escalating humanitarian crisis. Along with the aforementioned, international aid has been negligible due to the non-recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate government.

To understand how Afghanistan ended up here, we will be analysing the two years since the Taliban's takeover- what it has meant for the ordinary Afghans living under its rule, the condition of Afghan women, the consequences of its crippling economy and how the international community views the Taliban regime.

9/11 and the US Intervention

While the situation in Afghanistan is a culmination of a multitude of factors that collapsed into the Taliban takeover in 2021, the attack on the World Trade Centre 20 years ago provides a crucial starting point as it would go on to lay the base of the American reaction and rhetoric towards the Middle East.

In his 2002 book, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek points out how 9/11 was a turning point in the foreign policy of the USA. The attack saw the strengthening of a colonial and imperialist narrative that the US was a superior nation whose job was to ensure peace across the planet. Although this narrative had never really disappeared from the US foreign policy, post 9/11 there was a steady rise in military expenditure and also a moral panic with the Bush administration launching acts such as the patriot act. Under such circumstances, it was only natural for the general populous of the USA to feel as if the intervention in the Middle East was for the greater

good.

The topic of active resistance against the Taliban requires a fair pedigree of attention. A bleak and unfortunate reality of the situation in Afghanistan is that the USA is one of the main reasons why they are in the conditions that they are in. However, it does not disprove the fact that one of the crucial factors that were responsible for the first displacement of the Taliban in 2001 was because of foreign intervention by NATO forces.

The contemporary reality now is that NATO wants nothing to do with the country and they have actively caused it harm by not only leaving the Taliban in power but also by directly and indirectly arming them with some of the most destructive weapons that are known to mankind. Nonetheless even in such a situation organizations such as the **National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF)** have started to mobilize. The NRF first came to light on the world stage with the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in the late 1970s. They operated in the North East of Afghanistan in a small district by the name of **Panjshir**.

The landscape of **Panjshir** is littered with decommissioned Soviet tanks and other vehicles which serve as a reminder of the past that it harbours. Most people in the district considered themselves a part of the resistance even when they didn't possess arms. This characterises the nature of resistance that exists all across the Middle East. The people who are actively part of the resistance don't resist because they have an ideological or political disagreement with these oppressive organizations, they do so because they are fighting for their rights. A visible parallel could be drawn to the Vietnam War, where the Vietcong were a body of fighters who comprised very few professionally trained soldiers. Rather, most of them were farmers. The reason that they were able to put up such an astounding resistance was not thanks to an intrinsic desire to protect Communism, rather they saw the NATO invasion as a direct attack on their sovereignty.

The people of **Panjshir** see themselves as the followers of **Ahmed Masood**, the son of the anti-Soviet fighter, **Ahmed Shah Masood**. Unfortunately, the sheer military power of the Taliban and their physical coercive ability of them is far greater than that of the forces of the NRF. Illustrated by instances like when

40 resistance fighters who were aligned with the NRF were shot down in the Panjshir district on September 13, 2022. Alongside the arrest of 101 more.

Nonetheless, the impact that such instances have had on the morale of the **Panjshir** people has been limited. While there have been certain limitations to what the NRF can achieve, it is important to note that the NRF does prove that even in dire situations of authoritarianism and religious extremism, there still exists the possibility that one could resist the rule of those in power.

Another vital feature within the operations of the NRF has to do with the fact that a considerable number of neighbouring states, especially Tajikistan have taken a very overt stand when it comes to supporting the NRF. This is exemplified by the fact that the headquarters of the NRF is based in Tajikistan.

The diversity within the ranks of the NRF owing to its Uzbek & Tajik composition alongside a decent amount of Non-Pashtun Afghans gives us another important insight into the nature of this insurgency.. Naturally, the NRF also gets a decent amount of support from underground women's groups that have otherwise come under attack, and the NRF in return also provides aid to some of these movements when they can. Many of these spheres of resistance that exist against the Taliban have a coming trend, which is a very considerable amount of support from the younger population of Afghanistan. Even though, the most obvious method of protest against the Taliban is to join insurgency groups such as the NRF, a lot of them have also been working in a much more peaceful manner.

The Taliban & its Origins

A key to understanding what is happening *now* -and what might take place *next*- is to look at the past and how the Taliban came to prominence. The term 'Taliban' literally means 'seekers of knowledge' or 'students of Islam' and has been a part of Kandahar's Quran Belt for centuries. In the mid-1970s, Afghanistan had been undergoing modernization for decades, and both the United States and the Soviet Union were eager to get involved in building Afghan infrastructure. They hoped to establish a foothold in

Afghanistan due to its strategic position at the crossroads of Central and South Asia and its abundant natural resources.

Due to the influx of foreign aid and the Afghan government becoming the primary employer of the country, corruption proliferated, paving the way for a revolution, now known as the **Saur Revolution of 1978**. The Saur Revolution brought the **Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (or the People's Republic of Afghanistan)** into power, headed by a Marxist-Leninist government.

The result of the same was on one end, you had a group of people influenced by Marxism, and on the other end, Islamists who wanted to establish a type of Muslim brotherhood-style Islamic state. However, the ruling government suppressed Islamists and other opposition groups while continuing to campaign against traditional Islamic practices. The compulsory literacy program for girls further fueled rebellion in the western countryside.

With the country in turmoil, the United States saw this as an opportunity to funnel money into the hands of Pakistan's intelligence services, who were allies of Afghanistan's Islamists. The U.S. ended up allying with an Islamist group known as **mujahedeen**, who were fighting a foreign enemy on their land. The mujahedeen waged a guerrilla-style war against Soviet forces, who consequently withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. Within three years, the newly established government disintegrated, leading to the transformation of former mujahedeen commanders into regional warlords who began to feud amongst themselves. Amid this turmoil, **Mullah Mohammad Omar**, a former Islamist mujahedeen commander, sought support from Pakistan. In Pakistan, a generation of Afghan refugees had been raised in camps and educated in madrassas, where they adopted a strict Islamic ideology called **Deobandi**.

Mullah Omar garnered support from Afghan refugee camps to form the Taliban, primarily composed of a new generation not associated with the mujahedeen. Even resulting in some clashes with the mujahedeen. Throughout the 1990s, the Taliban continued to recruit from these war-ravaged refugee camps. While **Mullah Omar**, based in **Kandahar**, gradually expanded his influence across Afghanistan, culminating in the capture of **Kabul** in 1996 and the

establishment of the **Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan**. However, they weren't entirely successful as they didn't gain full control with the northern regions remaining under the control of other factions, and most of the international community refusing to recognise them as a legitimate government.

Legitimacy & Non-Legitimacy of the Taliban

Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has aged significantly, bearing the scars of bloodshed that have passed through its land. With the cessation of US intervention and the Taliban's return to power, the Afghan people now find themselves in a precarious situation. They feel abandoned, left with fewer resources and diminishing hope in the face of this resurgent and aggressive regime. Moreover, the Taliban has neither earned the trust of most Afghans nor convinced the nationals of their capacity to govern, and they follow a political ideology that clashes with contemporary international norms of governance.

One crucial aspect of the Taliban regime concerns the question of **international legitimacy**. This legitimacy is closely tied to the international community's recognition of a country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which are vital for a nation's identity and its capacity to self-govern without external interference. Countries that are recognized and maintain diplomatic relations with other nations generally enjoy better access to global resources and markets. Such recognition also facilitates international trade agreements, access to foreign aid, and the establishment of economic partnerships—critical factors for a nation's economic development and the well-being of its people.

However, gaining international legitimacy has proven to be a significant challenge for the Taliban-led government. This challenge primarily arises from the negative global perception of the regime and the trust deficit that exists between them and the rest of the world. Former Afghan government official **Farid Amiri** has voiced concerns, highlighting that *"the Taliban has ties with international terrorists, and their return to power seems to have emboldened jihadi organizations in the region. As they continue to*

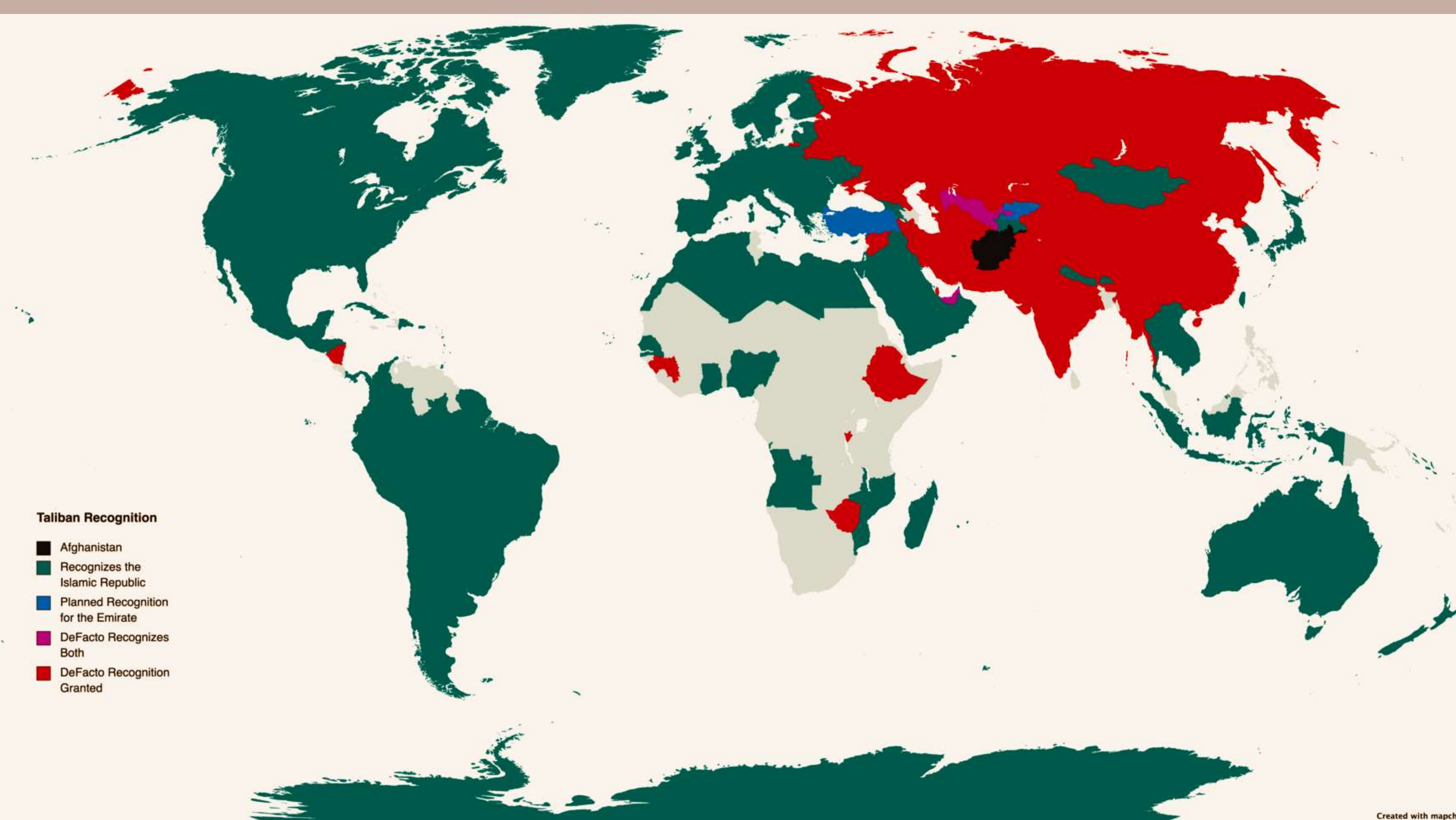
consolidate their position, their tactical and strategic links with terrorism financiers and sponsors will grow, potentially jeopardizing peace and security in the region and beyond."

The Taliban have also demonstrated a steadfast commitment to a strict interpretation of **Sharia law** as the foundation of their rule. This has raised concerns in the international community, particularly among Western nations. As an illustration of the divide in beliefs, Afghanistan's education minister declared, "The Almighty Allah has distinguished between men and women. A male is the ruler, he has the authority, he must be obeyed, and the woman must accept his world." This statement underscores the stark differences in values and ideologies between the Taliban and Western nations, further complicating the quest for international legitimacy. The lack of gender equality and the restrictions on women's participation in the workforce have raised questions about the Taliban's commitment to human rights and inclusivity. In response to the Taliban's actions and principles, **John Kirby**, Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House, made it clear that the United States has not recognized the Taliban as the legitimate governing power in Afghanistan. The international community has echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing that the Taliban must fulfil their

commitments to gain legitimacy. The emphasis on strict Sharia principles is viewed by the world as regressive, deepening the trust deficit between Afghanistan and other countries.

The interactions between the Afghan government and countries, including China, Russia, and the United States, as well as border clashes between Taliban forces and neighbouring countries, have caused internal disturbances and friction. The United States continues not to recognize the Taliban government. Since the fall of Kabul in 2021, no country has recognized the Taliban as a legitimate government of Afghanistan. However, some countries have provided de facto recognition, making them functionally recognized by some nations. In 2022, the United Nations passed a resolution condemning the Taliban government and urging non-recognition.

Countries like Pakistan, Turkmenistan, China, and Russia have provided de facto recognition. In contrast, countries such as Canada, Australia, Germany, Finland, and many others oppose recognition. They express profound concern over the fact that half of Afghanistan's population suffers from extreme food insecurity. This situation is foreseen to worsen during the winter with little chance for economic recovery and a decrease in poverty.



Impact on Terror outfits regionally & globally

The 'war on terror' brought the US to Afghanistan and collapsed the Taliban regime in 2001. However, two decades later, its withdrawal from Afghanistan is being seen as a major setback to that very war. The Taliban is once again in power and has successfully established the **Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan**. The Taliban takeover in 2021 renewed fears of Afghanistan becoming a terrorist haven once again, while its defeat of the US and its Western allies emboldened terror outfits across the globe.

This was seen as an atmosphere of celebration descended among jihadist groups across the globe, while governments and civil society saw with shock as the Taliban took over Afghanistan. The Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh was the first to congratulate Abdul Ghani Baradar, the public face of the Taliban, on the victory against the "*American occupation*" claiming how this would be "*a prelude to the demise of all occupation forces, foremost of which is the Israeli occupation of Palestine*".

Meanwhile in Syria, **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham** with

Al Qaeda took out a procession and distributed baklava. In districts of southern Somalia controlled by al Shabad, an Al Qaeda affiliate, three days' worth of celebrations were announced. However, Al Qaeda did not directly comment on the Taliban takeover.

In Afghanistan's neighbourhood its namesake the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan or Pakistani Taliban, founded in 2007 is an umbrella organization consisting of various hardline Islamic terrorist outfits that pledge allegiance to the Afghan Taliban and replicate its model of functioning, although they are not directly a part of the group. The TTP is an anti-state militant organization directed towards the Pakistani state and military forces, aimed at establishing a Pakistani state based on its interpretation of sharia.

Its decline from 2014 to 2018 was a result of the Pakistani government's crackdown, aided by drone technology provided by the US, as a result of its ties with al Qaeda, and the Afghan Taliban.

There has been a strong resurgence of the TTP, ever since the US- Taliban negotiations which saw the peace deal "agreement for bringing peace" signed in February 2020. Ten militant groups joined the TTP in the months following the Doha Accords, including al Qaeda affiliates and four major factions which had



earlier parted ways from TTP in 2014.

The Taliban takeover in August 2021 was portrayed by the TTP leadership as a resounding success likening it to their anti-state militancy which would result in a similar victory. They were seen congratulating the Taliban regime, while even renewing their pledge of allegiance to the Afghan Taliban.

Post the Taliban takeover almost 40 allied groups joined TTP's ranks, strengthening the grouping. Moreover, TTP leaders imprisoned in Afghan jails were released in huge numbers with senior leaders like the founding deputy emir Maulvi Faqir Mohammad being released as well. Attacks by the TTP increased manifold within months of the Taliban takeover, reporting the highest monthly average attack rates in the last five years.

The Pakistan government has alleged that the TTP is operating out of Afghanistan, where after the Taliban takeover they have been working with greater operational freedom. However, the Taliban leadership has dismissed the TTP as Pakistan's internal issue denying any such ties with it.

The Taliban is, quite ironically, trying to contain terror on its soil- the Islamic State-Khorasan province (IS-K). The IS-K has gone on to call the Taliban "unrighteous," taking responsibility for over 400 attacks on Afghan soil post-August 2021. The Taliban has been successful in counterstrikes, for instance, it killed the intelligence officer of IS-K responsible for the Kabul airport suicide bombing which was responsible for 170 civilian and 13 US soldier deaths. Although both the Taliban and IS-K are hardline Islamist groups, there are ideological underpinnings which differentiate the two. While IS-K believes in global jihad for establishing a caliphate, the Taliban's objectives are rather restricted domestically in controlling the Emirate.

To what extent the Taliban regime will endorse an anti-terror stance needs to be seen in the light of its links, albeit weakened, with Al Qaeda (especially through Sirajuddin Haqqani, Interior Minister), and local jihadist groups such as the TTP in Pakistan and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, for it to gain currency among nation-states the world over, curbing terror in Afghanistan would be key.

Afghan Women

The Taliban had come with the promise of being more liberal in their outlook towards women, however a month into the Taliban regime, the promise remained elusive with the Taliban asking women to stay indoors for their '*foot soldiers weren't habituated to seeing women in public and were not trained to respect them*', a ban on secondary education for girls and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which had been a beacon of progress in women's rights over the past two decades having been converted into the the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, the brutal morality police known for its public executions, stone throwing and amputations of those who deviated from sharia. Hasina Safi, the last acting minister of Women's affairs who migrated to New York, called for international aid to the Taliban to be conditional on their respecting women's rights. "*We cannot evacuate all the women from Afghanistan and no one wants to leave their home, their country.*"

This was followed by compulsory gender segregation in classrooms the following February, eventually enforcing full gender segregation, with women allowed to go 3 days of a week and men the rest three days in universities. Moreover, women were required to cover their faces even when the teachers were female. Further in October 2022, women were prohibited from pursuing an education in certain fields such as agriculture, mining, civil engineering, veterinary, and journalism, as these were supposed to be "too difficult for women." The death knell to university education came in December 2022, when women were prohibited from public and private universities for allegedly 'not adhering to the dress code'. Having fully banned secondary education in September 2022 itself, Afghanistan became the only country where the state deprived women of education beyond 6th grade.

Women were further dissuaded from pursuing their careers, with women public servants who made up around a quarter of the government force, asked to stay at home within a month of the Taliban takeover in 2021. In fact, reports have come to light that women were forced to sign an attendance sheet every month, in order to keep alive the fiction that they weren't fired. Women professors were prohibited from

teaching at Kabul University. Female flight attendants were fired in August 2022.

Curbs on women in media were implemented- no woman could act in shows or films while series or films having women could not be aired. Moreover, female journalists were ordered to cover their faces on air and the only woman in the Commission of Media Violations was removed in October 2022. In December 2022, the remaining women working in local and international NGOs including the United Nations were disallowed from doing so.

Women's movements were also restricted, with a mahram or a close male relative accompanying them in public becoming mandatory. They were disallowed to even access healthcare services if a male was not accompanying them. Further harsh dress code rules, with a burqa being mandatory in public, were imposed. Reports of female students in Ghazni being forced to cover their faces in June 2022.

The mere presence of women in public spaces became increasingly regulated with a harsh dress code imposed- a burqa along with the face veil becoming compulsory in May 2022 if they were to step out of their homes. Further, a mahram or a close male relative was supposed to accompany them at all times if they were to travel long distances (more than 45 miles.) They were disallowed to even access healthcare services if a male was not accompanying them.

Gender segregation was imposed even in recreational spaces such as parks, which were eventually closed to women altogether for authorities could not ensure segregation there. Public baths for women began to be closed in certain provinces such as Balkh and then across the country. Women were all but confined in the four walls of their homes.

In the face of severe oppression, Afghan women have continued their resistance to the restrictions and curtailment of their basic rights to education, work and freedom of movement. Afghan women have been protesting since the Taliban takeover, with women taking to streets holding placards stating: "Why is the world watching us so cruelly", after the Ministry of Women's Affairs was disbanded in September 2021. Taliban even ordained that permission for protests had to be first sought from the Ministry of Justice with information on the location and timing of protests

along with banners and slogans furnished before the ministry. However, women protesters reported how permissions for protests were never given.

While sporadic protests continued, on 13th August 2022, almost a year after the Taliban takeover, 40 women marched the streets of Kabul in defiance, observing 15th August as a black day (when the Taliban took power in 2021). The more recent protests in July 2023 were over the closure of beauty parlours, Women came out to the streets, raising slogans of "Bread, Justice and Work," for this meant that the last of public spaces enjoyed by women were locked.

Women protesters had to bear the brunt of their participation. with peaceful protests disrupted, women beaten with whips and electric batons, tear gas and shots fired in the air to disperse women. They were threatened for their life, abused both physically and verbally and called 'whores.' The Taliban have viewed the women's protests as being influenced by the West. Women protestors were interrogated upon arrest about the role of Western Organisations in instigating them. Reports of many women protesters having disappeared have come to light. When asked, the Taliban officials either denied their role in the disappearances or justified them by claiming that those who "disrupt the public must be arrested." Many had to flee Afghanistan, due to the threat to their lives.

Met with a violent crackdown on their protests, women had to take their protests indoors, leveraging the use of social media to broadcast their protests and spread awareness about the deteriorating condition of women in Afghanistan, even when access to mobile phones was restricted and internet quality was poor. Even here they were met with criticism and threats from Taliban officials or their supporters.

Two years into the regime, it is all but clear that the Taliban's promises of respecting women's rights were but lies meant to assuage fears which have become a reality today- with women having but disappeared from streets and public spaces, and their rights to education and participation in socio-economic life curtailed. The muted response of the international community has further aided the Taliban's suppression of their voices, as seen in the brutality with which protests by Afghan women have been crushed of late. There have been incessant calls by women and human rights activists around the globe to end the gender apartheid in Afghanistan.



Challenges and Prospects of Afghanistan's Economy

The Afghan economy faces critical challenges that demand practical, feasible, and long-lasting solutions. Despite its strategic location in Asia, Afghanistan has grappled with a multitude of issues over the past four decades. The main drivers behind these problems include political instability, security challenges, a relentless cycle of poverty, excessive reliance on the primary sector of the economy, a low level of education, brain drain, mismanagement of natural resources, foreign interference, capital flight, and various other factors.

Achieving political stability is crucial for fostering economic growth. This stability is essential for implementing sound policies that address education, poverty, health, and, ultimately, create employment opportunities for Afghans. Afghanistan is gradually recovering from decades of conflict; however, after the withdrawal of troops in 2014, which had artificially inflated the nation's economic development, the economy has slowed down. The agriculture sector

needs to be modernized. Afghanistan is one of the agricultural countries, and this sector is the backbone of the country, contributing the majority of the national income, with almost 67 percent of the population engaged in it. Therefore, concrete steps must be taken for the all-round development of the agricultural sector throughout the country at the earliest. New agricultural strategies need to be widely adopted, raising agricultural productivity through better HYV seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, improved tools and equipment, and scientific crop rotation, among other scientific cultivation methods. Immediate steps are needed to enhance the coverage of irrigation facilities along with the reclamation of wasteland.

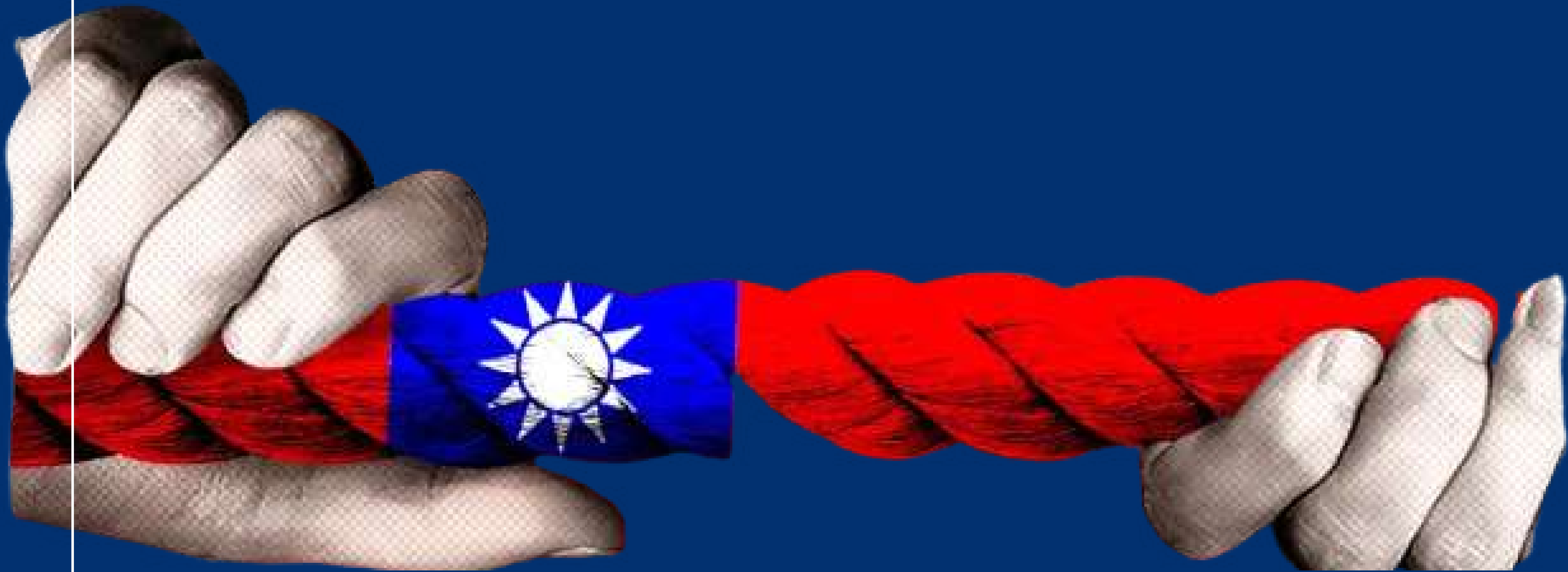
Regardless of potential future improvements, the reality remains that, since 2001, Afghanistan has remained extremely impoverished, with the majority of its population growing up in refugee camps. To achieve economic growth and development, it is imperative to safeguard the lives and property of citizens and stabilize unstable political activities. Afghanistan is blessed with natural resources, and these resources should be maximally utilized. It is high time for Afghanistan to attain political



independence and autonomy in making economic decisions and policies. The government should make these decisions independently, free from foreign influence. Close monitoring of domestic production is essential to enhance the country's productivity, with a shift towards exporting rather than importing goods and services. Developing the industrial sector and increasing exports are crucial steps to diversify the economy. The government should convene groups with contrasting interests at the round table to better understand and address the security challenges hindering Afghanistan's economy, whether in cases of legitimacy or non-legitimacy. Furthermore, the government should create opportunities for foreign direct investment (FDI). Attracting FDI can gradually address current issues such as abject poverty, low income, and unemployment. Political stability is a necessity as it ensures equality, equity, and justice for every citizen. Additionally, an efficient economy requires a well-educated workforce, regardless of gender. Afghanistan's government needs to acknowledge the mistake it is making by banning women from the workforce. Finally, immediate action is required to implement policies that address poverty levels.

Conclusion

The situation of Afghanistan is a very complicated one and it is very difficult to say what the future holds for it. In the past 2 years, we have seen a very radical and abrupt transformation of the central character of what the Afghan State, economy and culture had previously taken. Foreign powers, namely the USA have decided to take an approach of non-interference, however, this is a very ironic situation as it was the foreign powers that were the ones who aided such fundamental groups to begin with. If there exists hope for the Afghan people, it exists not from the outside of the Afghan republic but rather from the local groups that have organized against the Taliban. Even with that said, the situation might not improve for at least a few years. Economically, Afghanistan is in one of the worst situations that it has been in. Culturally speaking, one of the most unique cultures of West Asia now faces almost destruction in the face of Islamic fundamentalism. Resistance is a strong action and a strong emotion. The question here is, "How much resistance can one provide when one is faced with virtually no resources?"



TAIWANESE CONFLICT

By Arindam Roy & Riddhi Sharma

The ongoing conflict between Taiwan and China is a complex and multifaceted issue with significant geopolitical, historical, and economic implications. This article delves into the intricacies of the situation, exploring Taiwan's strategic position, historical background, the One China Policy, and the economic significance of the region. As both Taiwan and China invest heavily in their military capabilities, the need for continued vigilance and diplomatic efforts to prevent escalation is paramount, given the far-reaching consequences such a conflict could have on regional and global stability.

In August 2022, the meeting between the U.S. House of Representatives Speaker **Nancy Pelosi**, and Taiwanese President **Tsai Ing-wen** drew strong condemnation from China. In response to this visit, China flexed its military might by sending warships, including an aircraft carrier into the seas around Taiwan, infringing upon its airspace and simulating a seal-off. President **Xi Jinping** of China declared that the goal of *reunification* with Taiwan *must be fulfilled* and did not rule out the possible use of force to achieve this objective. As we delve into this intricate geopolitical issue, we must adopt a comprehensive perspective.

Geopolitics, a way of looking at the world, is rooted in understanding the complex interplay of political power, geography and the heterogenous fabric of culture, and is essential to grasp the nuances of this evolving situation. Taiwan is located at the concurrence of the East China Sea, South China Sea and Philippines Sea, southwest of the Japanese Island Chain. It is mostly mountainous in the east with gently sloping plains in the west. These mountains are generally described as a Porcupine's quills or as a shield.

It also lies inside the **First Island Chain** - a term conceptualized during the Cold War by the West as the first line of defence to contain the spreading influence of the Soviet Union and its socialist allies - **People's Republic of China, DPRK (North Korea), Laos** and **Vietnam**. Taiwan was, and still is, the midpoint of the First Island Chain, stretching between South

West-Japan and Eastern Vietnam while passing Vietnam to the East, and the Philippines, and Indonesia to the West respectively.

The Island Chain Strategy proposed to surround the Soviet Union and China with naval bases in the West Pacific to project power and restrict sea access, while the islands, especially Taiwan, performed the functions of '**unsinkable aircraft carriers**' to house strategic forces in case of an invasion. Ever since the dissolution of the USSR, the People's Republic Of China has replaced the USSR to become the primary target of this policy.

History of Taiwan

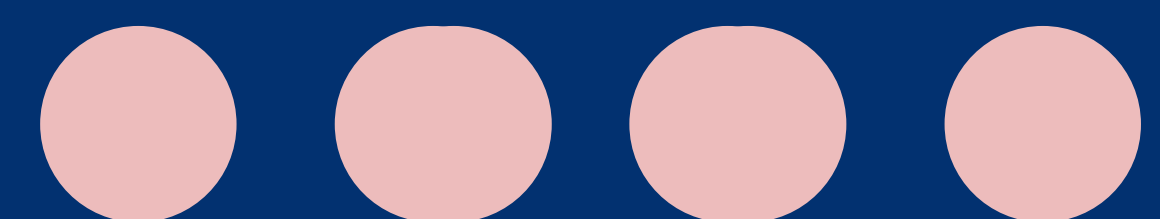
"We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China."

-Xi Jinping, President of the PRC, speaking at the Great Hall of the People



Protecting the First Island Chain is necessary for the US and its allies, as past the chain lie multiple US Air Force/Naval bases such as in Okinawa (Japan), Guam (Pacific), and Honolulu (Hawaii) and beyond that, the Western mainland proper. Hence, threatening the chain would not only mean threatening the US military bases but also the mainland itself. Even today, Taiwan remains situated in the middle of the chain, acting as a thorn in China's side.

According to historical records, the history of Taiwan could be chiefly divided into 5 periods - The Dutch Rule (1624–1662), The Kingdom of Tungning (1661–1683), the Qing Dynasty Rule (1683–1895), Japanese Rule (1895–1945), and the Republic of China Rule (from 1945 till now))



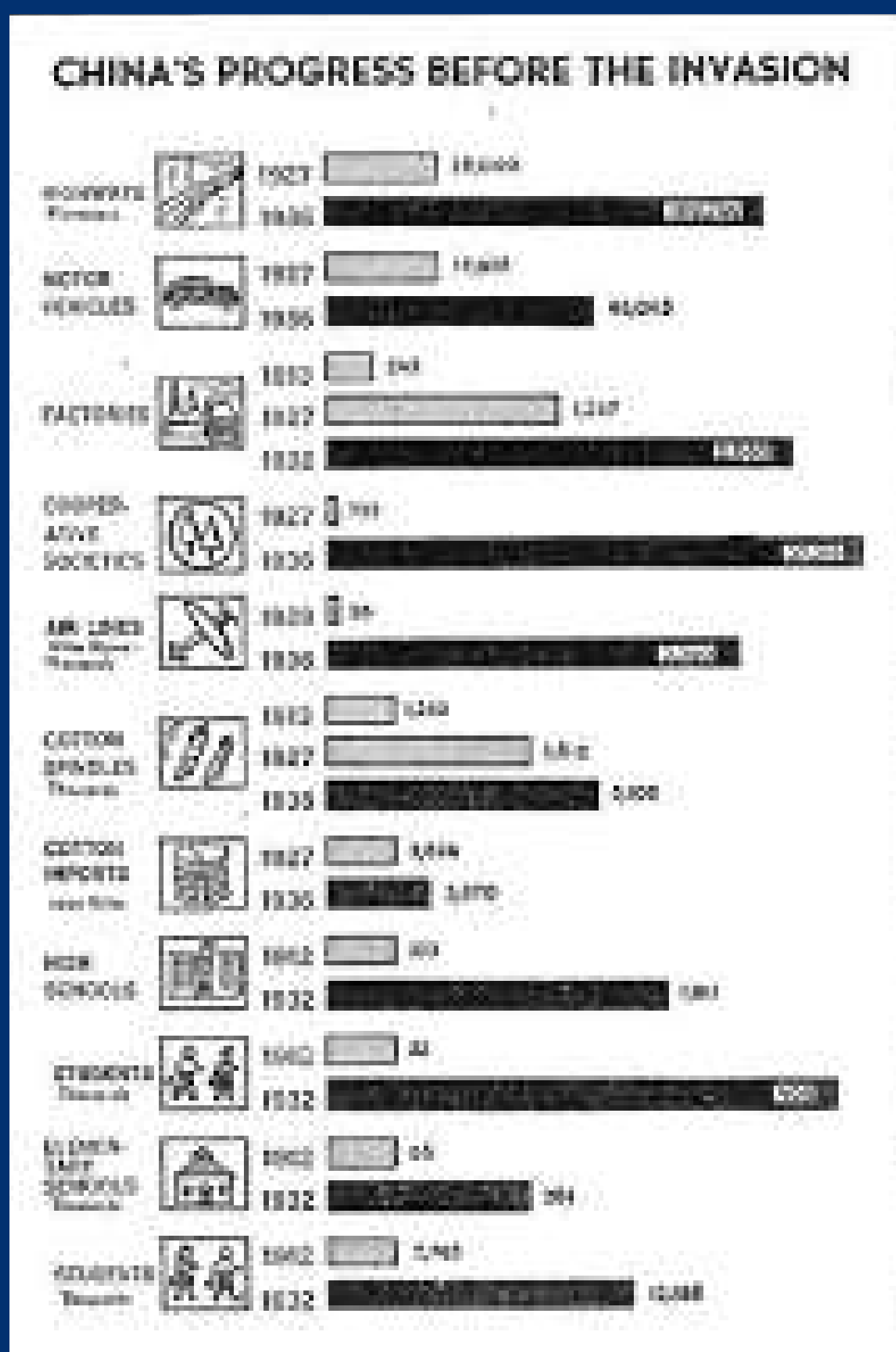
In the early days of tribal movements in mainland China around the 21st Century BCE, two major ethnic groups emerged: the Han in Central, North, and South China, and the Manchus, who migrated from regions near Mongolia. The Han established numerous kingdoms, which often disintegrated due to political instability.

In 1368, the Ming Dynasty rose to power, unifying China and establishing cultural ties with the West. In the early 1600s, the Manchus invaded Beijing, supplanting the Ming Dynasty with the Qing Dynasty. While elsewhere, supporters of the Ming like Zheng Cheng-gong, sought refuge in Taiwan. In 1662, he expelled the Dutch and founded the Kingdom of Tungning, which the Qing later conquered and incorporated into its empire.

During the 19th Century, major world powers, including the British Empire, Imperial Germany, and notably the modernized Japan, defeated the Qing Empire in multiple conflicts. One such war was the year-long First Sino-Japanese War, fought over the Chinese client state of Korea. It resulted in the adoption of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895. Under this treaty, Taiwan was ceded to Japan, and although short-lived, the independence of Korea was recognized.



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These historical events illuminate Taiwan's dynamic past, marked by indigenous populations, waves of immigration, shifts in power, and foreign rule, ultimately shaping Taiwan's modern history under the Republic of China.

Due to poor management policies, widespread corruption, recently lost wars and inefficient leaders (for instance, the last Qing emperor was only 5 years old during his reign), the desire to see a unified China, less parochial in outlook, fed a growing nationalism that spurred on revolutionary ideas. In 1905, a young man named *Sun Yat-Sen* formed the Tongmenghui, led an uprising against the monarchy and later established the **Republic of China** (ROC) on 1st January 1912. A brief period of warlordism and civil war ensued after which, the ROC under *Chiang Kai-Shek* and its military wing, the Nationalist Revolutionary Army (NRA), finally unified most of China in a daring campaign labelled the 'Northern Expedition' in 1928, giving emergence to the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937) of relative peace and stability.

During the Northern Expedition in 1927, the **Kuomintang** (China's **National People's Party**, also known as the **KMT**) were not alone in their effort to oust the imperialists, and warlords and unify the nation. The KMT fought alongside the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**. This was called the **First United Front**. However, after the start of the Nanjing Decade, things between the two factions took a turn. Both started viewing each other with a sense of distrust. The CCP, which started as a study group with about 300 members, received foreign support, especially from the Soviet Union. Leader's personal biases, conflicts of personalities and class interests, ambitions of individuals and groups, a spirit of revenge, an influence of outside forces, and differences in revolutionary strategies, as well as visions for China's destiny sparked off a civil war between an ideologically conservative and radical force.

Although initially, their base was very much limited, the CCP managed to spread out its influence at the grassroots level over time. Inefficiency and deep-seated corruption made the KMT government unpopular. Hostilities between both factions ceased when the Second Sino-Japanese War began and a **Second United Front** was formed.



Map Credits - elevate.in

During the war, it was mostly the KMT on the frontlines against the Japanese, giving the CCP a splendid chance to recover not only its strength but also the ability to exert greater influence and gather more resources left behind by the Japanese. These included those in Manchuria, which had been invaded by the Soviet Union as a part of its war against Japan, and handed it over to the CCP, its ally.

When the Japanese surrender was in sight, the CCP launched a full-scale offensive against the KMT, thus effectively resuming the civil war in 1945. The Japanese surrender was formally signed in September 1945, and all the territories of China occupied by Japan, including Taiwan with Manchuria, which was handed over to the CCP by the Soviet Union as an exception, had been returned to the government - the Republic of China led by the KMT, as prescribed in the Cairo Declaration of 1943.

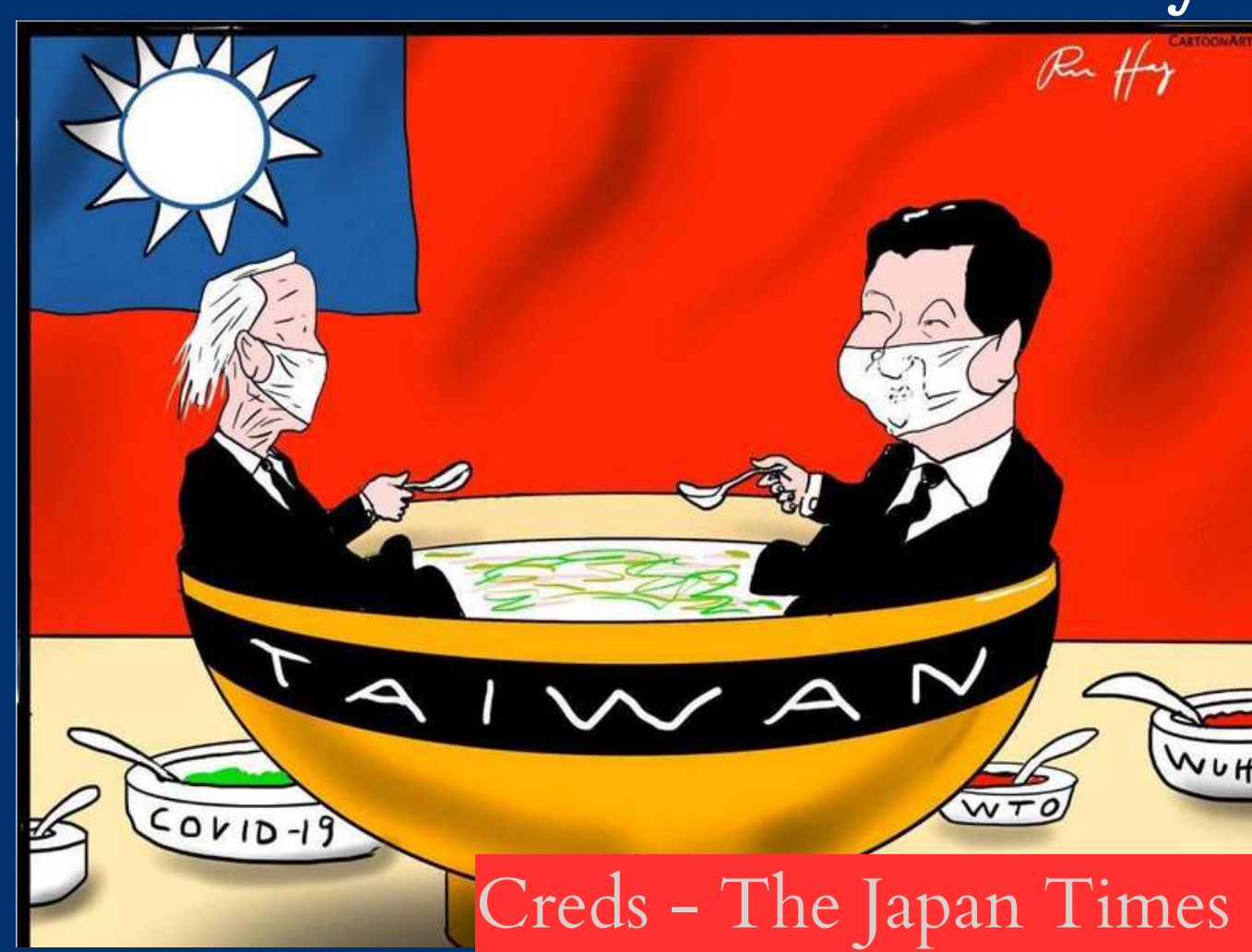
The CCP successfully managed to mobilize the lower classes, aided by the relentless KMT defectors. As the civil war progressed, the CCP along with its communist allies successfully pushed the KMT forces to the South-East, to the extent that Chiang and his two million Nationalist soldiers had to retreat to **Taiwan for refuge** in December 1949. It brought into effect the **theory of two Chinas**, claiming Taipei in Taiwan to be the temporary capital of the ROC, asserting his government as the sole legitimate authority in China. This began a period of Taiwan's de facto political independence from the Chinese mainland, under the nationalists and also led to the formation of the PRC by the communists, which continues to date.



credits- thediplomat.com

The Communist attempt to invade Taiwan through amphibious landings was thwarted by the Nationalist troops and all plans to invade the island were scribbled off when the Taiwanese government signed a **mutual defence pact** with the Americans in 1954, their former ally from the post-war. They continued supporting the Nationalists against the Communists even after the end of the Second World War. The treaties of San Francisco (1951) and Taipei (1952), formalized a peace treaty between Taiwan and Japan in which the latter renounced all its rights to Formosa (Taiwan) and the Pescadores island chain

What followed after these treaties was a series of strait crises. The first one occurred in September 1954, when the PRC started bombarding islands held by the ROC. In response to the bombardments, the **Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty**



Creds - The Japan Times

was formed. Following this, the Taiwanese government began to install military bases on the same islands, prompting the PRC to shell those islands once again. Only this time, they went a step further and tried invading it. The invasion was later intercepted by the Nationalist forces through aid from their American allies. This incident allowed the PRC to assess the extent to which the United States would go to defend Taiwanese territory.

In 1995, when Taiwanese president *Lee Teng-hui* visited Cornell University to deliver a speech on "**Taiwan's Democratization Experience**", the Communists were anticipating his visa to be cancelled, as a symbol of the American government's desire to uphold their official relations with Beijing. Contrary to their expectation, the USA did the exact opposite and allowed *Lee* to deliver his speech. Infuriated by the policy reversal, the PRC decided to launch live fire and ballistic missile exercises in the Taiwanese strait. It was specifically launched during the Taiwanese election period to intimidate the supporters of *Lee*, forewarning the disastrous implications for Taiwan in future. A few even landed inside the Taiwanese territorial waters, causing significant sea trade and flight path disruption. In response, the US decided to stage the biggest display of American military might in Asia, since the Vietnam War, by sending multiple carrier groups to the Taiwan Strait.

In the aftermath, since the Chinese naval and aerial power could not match its American counterparts, the PRC ended up ordering more naval destroyers, submarines as well and fighter jets from Russia to

build up its strength and defend against the American threat. Nicknamed “**Mr. Democracy**”, Lee ended up winning the elections with a 5% increase in polls, and the Communist attempts to intimidate the Taiwanese voters had ultimately failed

One China Policy

The One China Policy is a diplomatic approach that acknowledges the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only legitimate government representing the whole of China and consequently, does not officially recognize Taiwan as a separate and sovereign state. This policy has its roots in the Chinese civil war, that ended in 1949, when the Communist Party under Mao Zedong established the PRC and the defeated Nationalist Party.

Taiwan's perspective differs significantly from that of the PRC. While it functions with its government, military, and a democratic system, the official stance of the ROC remains the same, that of representing the entire China, including Taiwan. Many Taiwanese favor maintaining their de facto independence, and have elected leaders in support of a separate Taiwanese identity. They are wary of upsetting the status quo and potentially provoking the PRC, given its growing military strength. Some argue that Taiwan aligns with the Montevideo Convention, which outlines the criteria for statehood. The convention specifies that a state must have a defined territory, a permanent population, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other

states. While Taiwan meets these criteria, the PRC's viewpoint as the legitimate government of the entire China complicates the international recognition of Taiwan as a separate state.

Following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1970s, the United States sought to normalise relations with the People's Republic of China. Negotiations with the PRC could only proceed when the US abided by 3 conditions:

- 1.No diplomatic relationship could be maintained with Taipei if the United States were to establish official relations with Beijing,
- 2.The Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROC must be severed,
- 3.U.S. troops must be removed from Taiwan.

Following these guidelines, the PRC stressed upon its assertion of the ‘One China’ policy, whereby only one Chinese government could be recognized as a legitimate government representing the whole of China, thus declaring that relations with ROC (Taiwan) must be cut off. Although the US did recognize the PRC as the legal representative of China, the United States did not, however, give in to Chinese demands that it recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan. Instead, Washington acknowledged the Chinese position that Taiwan was part of China (and not the government).

The US dropped the Mutual Defence Pact with Taiwan in 1979 but formed the **Taiwan Relations Act** to protect the significant U.S. security and commercial interests in Taiwan. The TRA gives the United States the legal means to continue relations with Taiwan in economic, cultural, and security dimensions.

The Dragon's Backyard

A Chinese expansion towards the East is not the only thing being orchestrated by Beijing right now. Down south, the South China Sea is estimated to consist of at least 11 billion barrels of untapped Oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of Natural gas. Apart from aquatic resources and the \$3.37 billion trade, Beijing is making sweeping claims of sovereignty over the region.

Many of the scattered and sparsely populated islands, for instance, those belonging to the Spratly Islands, have been claimed by different nations surrounding the South China Sea. These nations include Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. Out of the 9 current maritime-area disputes in the sea, China contests with eight of them.

Some of these Communist claims are illegal and/or baseless. For example, the 1904 Qing Dynasty map demarcates the southernmost boundary of China as the Hainan Island. Therefore, by historical standards, China has never owned the South China Sea along with the **archipelago of Spratlys**. Meanwhile, the map of Vietnam (recognized by the contemporary Chinese state as well), from 1460-1497 onward, consisted of these two archipelagos.

Many of the islands claimed by China are, in reality, vital to the security and history of a few nations, such as the Philippines. And some have been taken by force, such as the **Paracel Islands** by the PRC from South Vietnam in 1974. The tactics at hand have been described as the ‘**Salami Slicing**’ strategy, whereby China, at first,

attempts to gather support of the international organisations in its favour through legal or illegal means. If that fails in its purpose, their militaries are ordered to carry out small-scale military operations which would not cause a war in itself, but could be used as an excuse to start one as 'self-defence'. These military operations offer **Hobson's choice** - the smaller and weaker nations can either suffer these military incursions silently or risk facing an all-out war with China. As of October 2023, confrontations between the Chinese and South China Sea nations have commenced, the most recent being on the 6th of October.

But the dragon's expansion does not end here. Recently Beijing signed a **security pact** with the Solomon Islands, an island nation close to Australia, that allows the Chinese navy to use their ports as well as to deploy security forces, giving Beijing a strategic foothold in the Pacific. From a historical perspective, it had been Australia that had earlier provided security forces to the island nation as part of a pact in 2017. This was later called for a 'review' in June 2023, while the presence of Chinese policemen could harm the relations between Canberra and Suva.

Moreover, China even signed a deal with the impoverished East Timor, another island nation situated north of Australia with vast amounts of untapped natural resources, which had been mistreated by Australia earlier during its independence movement. The pact allowed joint military cooperation and the Chinese to explore the development of East Timor's oil and gas resources.

Economics of The Conflict

"No matter which of these scenarios materializes, the consequences for the global economy would be devastating"

-Global Peace Index, 2023

Tensions between China and Taiwan are *only* going to escalate as time advances and the CCP further utilises aggressive tactics, more intense in its degree. Reunification seems possible either through coercion or compulsion alone, for diplomacy over the years has failed. If the PRC chooses to impose a naval blockade, the backbone of Taiwanese exports could break and without any proper support, they may have to give up in the long run. But this method would result in a staggering estimated loss of USD 2.7 trillion in the first year - equivalent to a 2.8 per cent fall in global economic activity, almost twice as much as the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Since Taiwan's biggest export is electronics, with a specialisation in microchips, this blockade would hurt not only the maritime nations nearby but also the other bigger players around the globe.

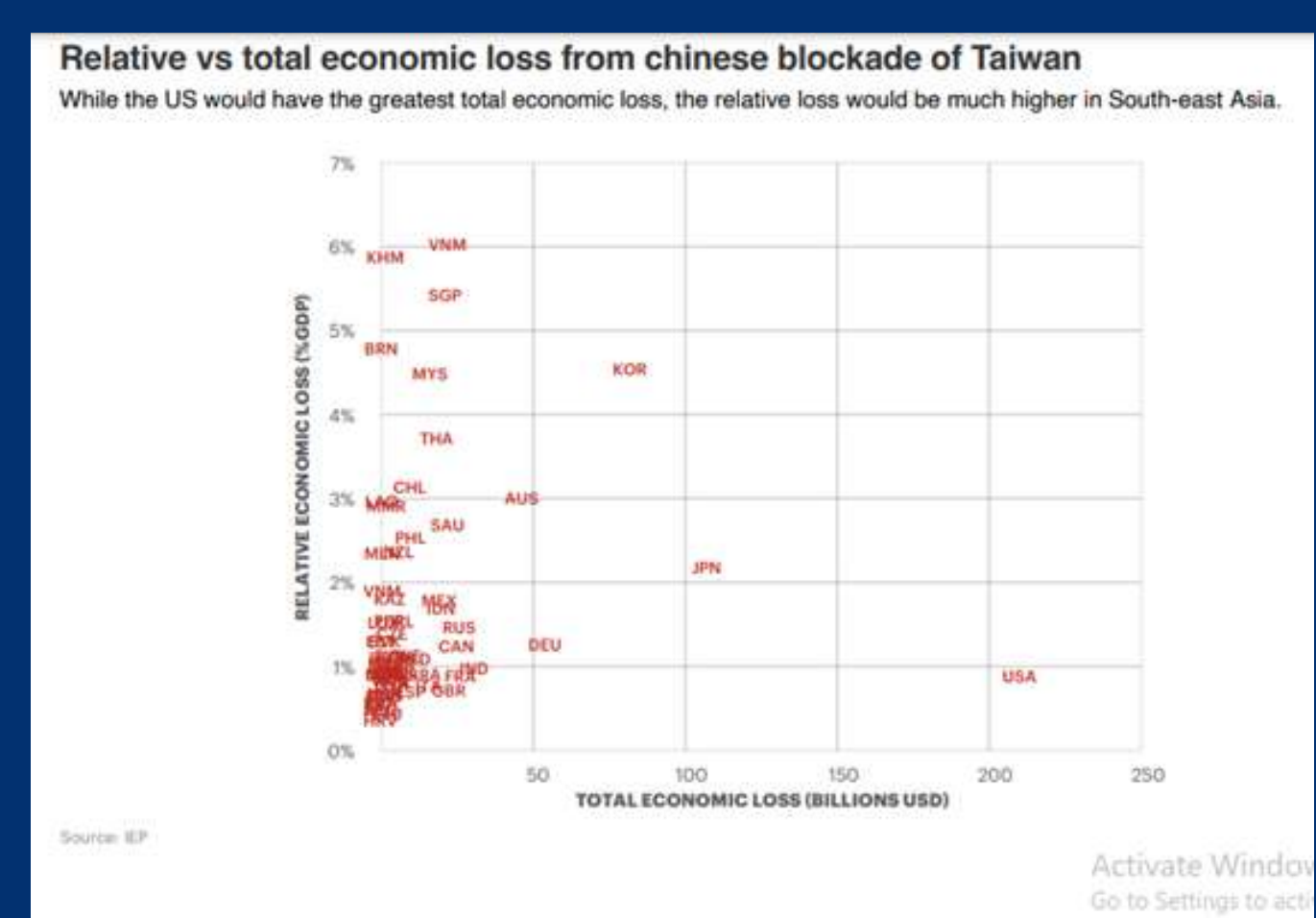
Taiwan also holds a prominent position in the global semiconductor industry, manufacturing chips that serve as vital components in various technologies, ranging from mobile phones to computers and even AI-powered weapons. It is a world leader in semiconductor production, boasting a 20% share of the total global capacity. Moreover, it holds a shocking 37% of the world's logic semiconductors production capacity and an astounding 92% of the

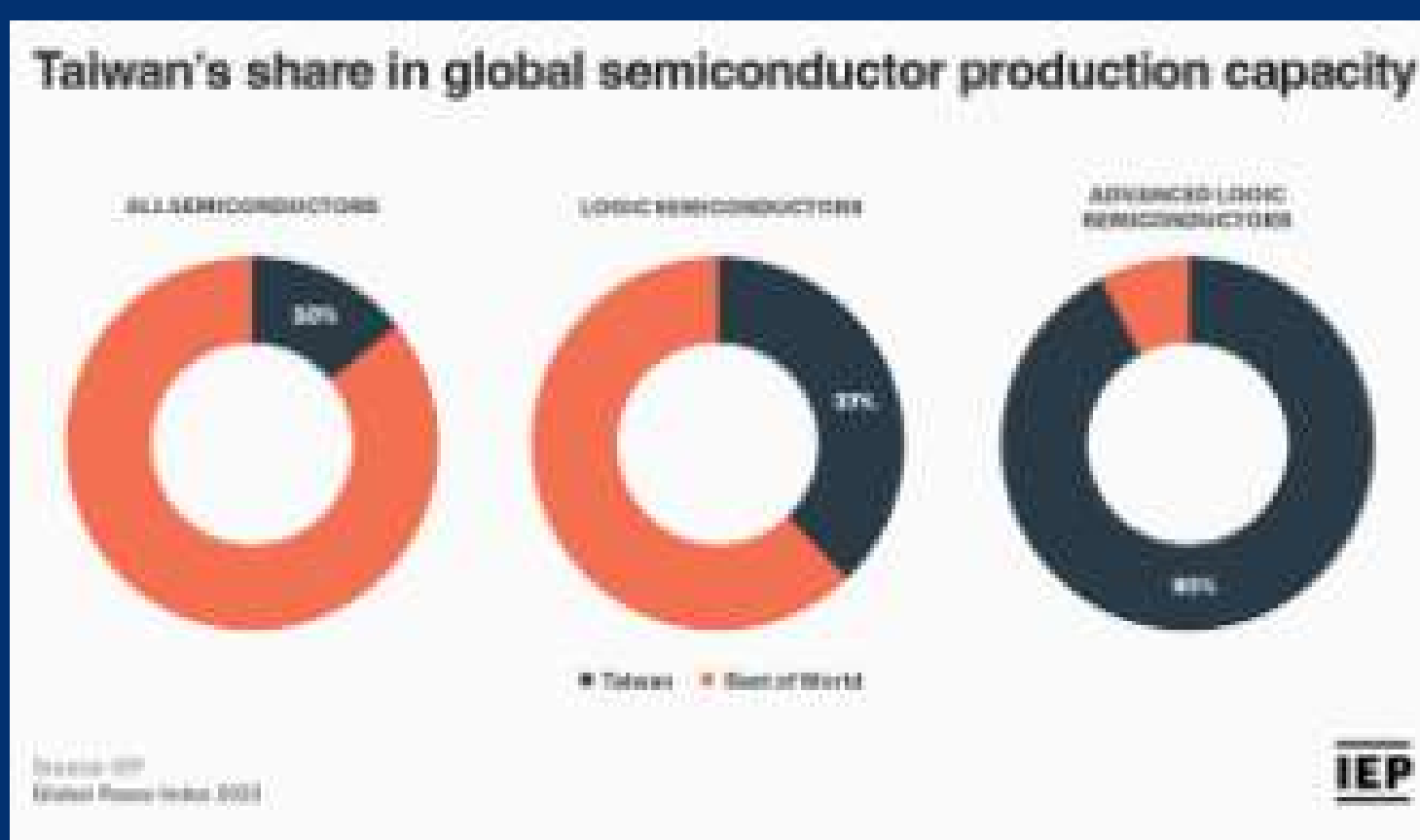
world's advanced logic semiconductors production capacity. Taiwan's leading chip foundry, TSMC, produces 35% of the world's automotive microcontrollers and 70% of the world's smartphone chipsets, operating in mainland China.

"My opinion is, you will be set back at least 20 years"

-Miin Wu, Founder of Micronix

In case the PRC decides to launch a full-scale invasion, not only would it adversely affect the world GDP but also hurt its economy in the long run. Fearing sanctions, risk-averse global investors would immediately cease lending, reducing the availability of trade finance and thus, impairing International trade. Global and domestic investors would certainly seek to move money out of China, straining its exchange rate to the degree that even China's strong capital controls and intervention by the Chinese National Bank (PBOC) would be unable to fully contain. Against the backdrop of a faltering domestic economy, a weaker RMB would reduce China's imports from the rest of the world. The conflict can usurp the \$270B trade between China and Taiwan, causing a 5-10% drop in the US GDP and a 25-35% decline in China's GDP.





A Comparison of Armies

"The United States is now viewing China as an equal due to the latter's growing army, which is an indication of China's increasing military strength,"

-Yin Dongyu, an analyst, residing in Beijing and specialising in the Chinese military.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) appears to be willing to delay the use of military force to the maximum, as it believes in the possibility of achieving unification with Taiwan through negotiation. However, it does argue that maintaining a credible threat of force is necessary to create conditions for political progress and prevent Taiwan from moving towards independence - essentially keeping Taiwan under tension till the government breaks down. Article 8 of China's March 2005 **Anti-Secession Law** states that China may resort to **"non-peaceful means"** if **"secessionist forces"** succeed in separating Taiwan from China if significant secession-related incidents occur, or if possibilities for peaceful reunification are exhausted.

China's use of these vague conditions allows for greater policy flexibility through 'Strategic ambiguity'. China continues to regard the Taiwan issue as the most important and sensitive matter in the relationship between the United States and China. In recent months, due to China's increased activity near the Taiwan Strait, the US and its diplomatic allies have increased naval activity in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait to uphold their navigational rights in international waters. Additionally, Washington has escalated arms sales to Taiwan, enhancing its military capabilities and developing asymmetric warfare capabilities to defend against potential threats from Beijing, which claims ownership of the island. Both sides have been stepping up a significant part of their GDP towards their defence budget. Faced with asymmetric warfare, the Taiwanese government developed the **'Porcupine Strategy'**, where the price of the invasion is to be made too high for the aggressor. The strategy is multidimensional and calls for investment in intelligence building, buying military equipment, and making use of resources available at hand like geography (such as strategic placement of anti-air facilities around the western mountains) and population, apart from building defensive capabilities. A possible conflict will not only devastate both ends but could also steer Beijing towards becoming a global pariah.

	China	Taiwan
Total active forces	2,035,000	169,000
Ground forces	965,000	94,000
Navy	260,000	40,000
Air force	395,000	35,000
Reserves	510,000	1,657,000
Tanks	5,400	650
Aircraft	3,227+	504+
Submarines	59	4
Naval ships*	86	26
Artillery	9,834+	2,093

*Only includes ships classified as principal surface combatants, such as aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and frigates
Source: The Military Balance 2022, IISS



"No one can say without hesitation whether China and the US would go into real conflict over Taiwan or the South China Sea, but with China's growing army, no one wants to see that happen,"

Yin said.

In conclusion, the ongoing conflict between Taiwan and China is a multifaceted issue with profound implications for regional and global stability. Taiwan's strategic position in the First Island Chain makes it a focal point in East Asian geopolitics, where the interests of major powers, including the United States and China, converge. Historical convolutions and differing claims add multiple layers of complexity to the situation, while the One China Policy shapes International relations. Furthermore, the economic significance of Taiwan, particularly in the semiconductor industry, underscores the global impact of disruption in the region. As both parties invest heavily in their military capabilities, the situation remains delicate, requiring continued vigilance and diplomatic efforts to prevent escalation that could have far-reaching consequences.



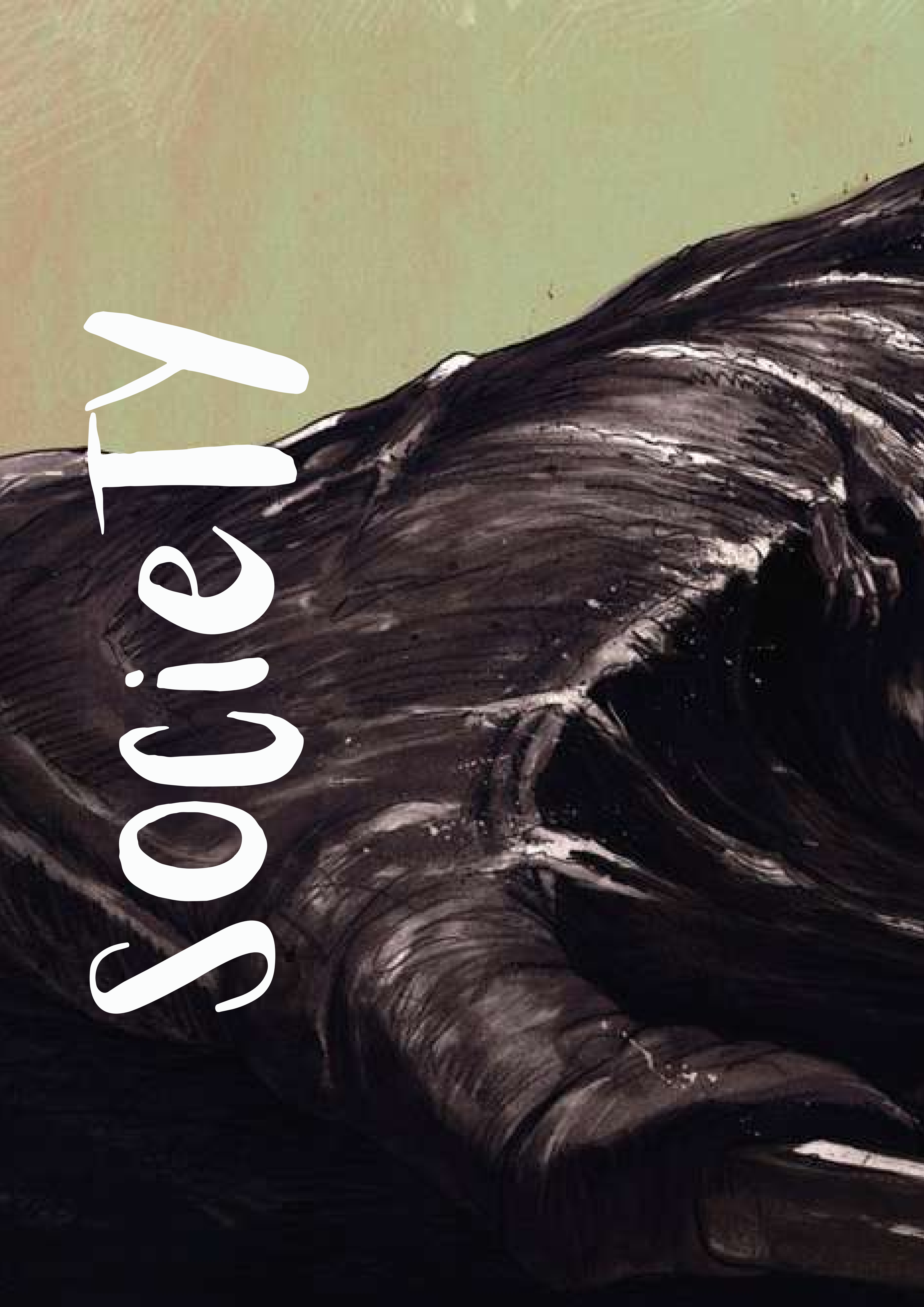
CHINA

TAIWAN

**POLICY OF
STRATEGIC
AMBIGUITY**

**IT NEEDS
MORE CLARITY
IN A CHANGING
SCENARIO...**

SOCIETY







SOCIAL

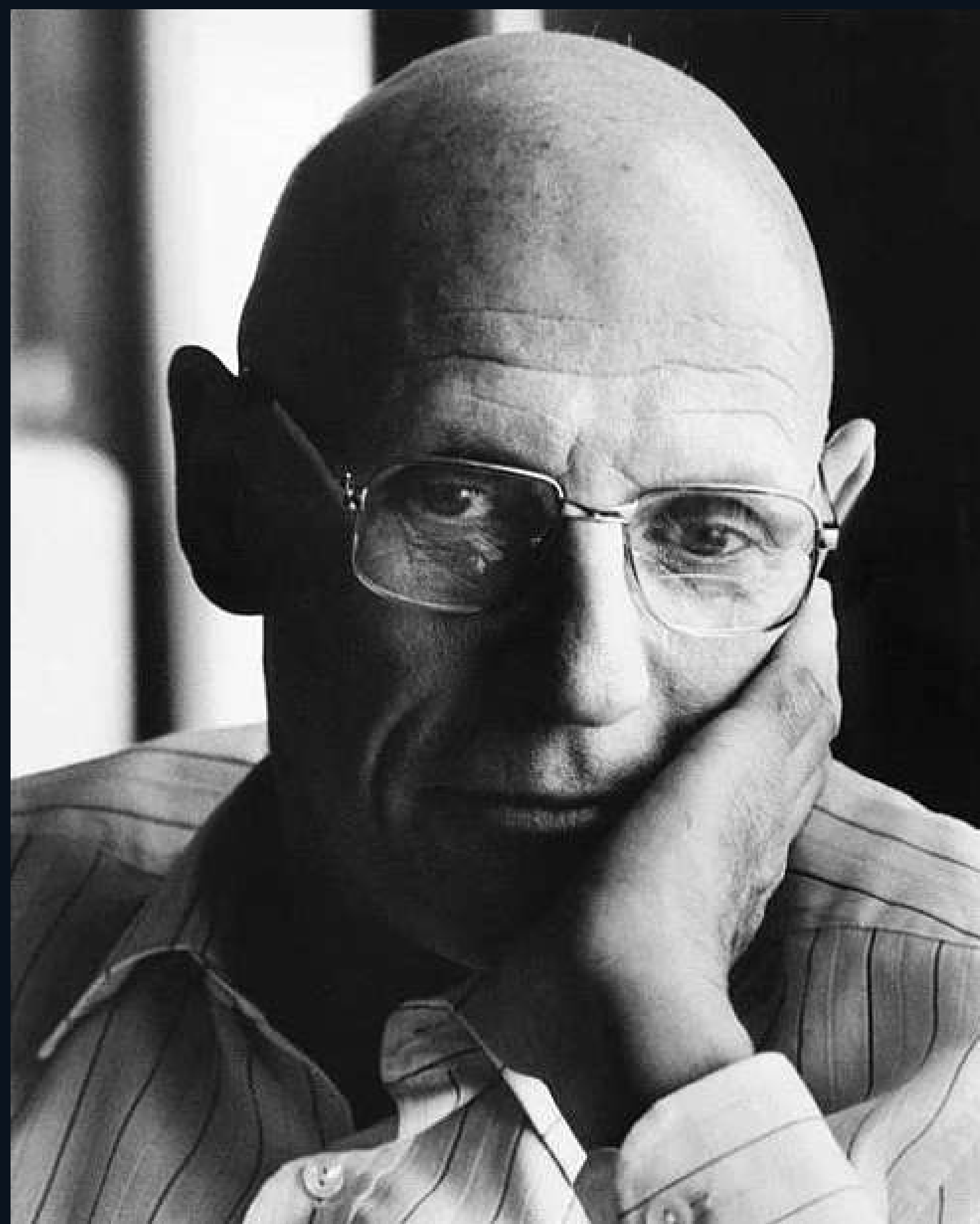
METAMORPHOSIS

*CONVERTING YOUNG SOULS INTO THE
WALKING DEAD*

By Ananya Mishra

In the past few days, the reported death of many young students within the premises of educational institutions has observed a common pattern of silence, apathy and ignorance. This article focuses on the perpetual factors culminating in rising suicide rates among youngsters.

If you fail to prove your mettle as a successful warrior, adhering to societal expectations and norms; you deserve to carry the guilt and burden of being a failure. You become a case study by professional psychologists, or a propaganda piece used by political parties till the next elections. When the world is regulated by the combined set of Kafkaesque bureaucracy and meritocracy; the metric for evaluating the worth of an individual remains riveted. All are guided by the common fallacies of institutional learning, behaviour and appraisal.



Michael Foucault in one of his popular works, *'The Social Theory'* talks about the principle of relative continuity. A continuity of punitive mechanisms and criteria propagated by the institutions, often interlinked with one another (the school regulated by the discipline mechanism of prison; the charitable institutions following up the altruist pattern of the church). All institutions emanate power as an incessant, uninterrupted and coercive source, inflicting it upon the group of docile citizens. Here, individuals are made as pliable or unformed receptors, indoctrinated by the process of 'modality'. It includes vigilant training, constant surveillance and disciplinary measures taken to remain operationalized as a dominant force (here, propagated by the institutions of state), acting on behalf of others (citizens) and controlling their ideas and actions.

The entire idea of 'docile minds and bodies' feels abysmally correct when one carefully observes the premier educational hubs of the country. This pathologically sick society fixated with the myth of success, traps around lakhs of children every year culminating with the nexus of a politically motivated neoliberal educational system. Fearing the existential crisis of job insecurity and a hyper-competitive world leads to the creation of false consciousness. An abhorrently incorrect dream about a well-settled life with upward social mobility gets brutally crushed after an individual enters another phase of their life. The tall billboards set up by the coaching centres decked up with percentile scores along with the glimmering faces of the toppers, conceal both the present as well as the aftermath reality of these institutions.

As per the reports of the Union Ministry of Education, around an average figure of 75 student deaths occurred between 2018-2023 in the top educational institutions (IITs, IIMs and NITs) in India. Another disturbing trend of rising teen suicide as published by the **National Crime Records**

Bureau (NCRB), 867 students in 2021 committed suicide due to fear of failure in examinations, comprising around 1% of total suicide in the country. The deeply entrenched hierarchically stratified Indian society distorts the homogeneous identity of 'students' into the everyday struggles faced by the individuals belonging to the marginalized community. **Emile Durkheim**, a French sociologist in his celebrated theory of 'Suicide' validates the sociological dimension of integration and regulation leading to the excess in suicide trends. The existing relationship between an individual with their community members along with the presence of normative rules, order and behaviour determines it.

In addition to the rising isolation, various socio-economic factors culminating with already existing Social Darwinism or hyper aggression to create a meritocratic order are responsible for the chronic restlessness amongst the youngsters.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE POLITICS OF MERITOCRACY

State-funded educational institutions, provision of financial aid/scholarships to minority community students and greater access to job security remain the principal parameters of an egalitarian education system. The constant forces of free market ideology with the rhetoric of 'start-up culture' have normalised the escapism of state-oriented measures. **Dr N Sukumar** in his book, '*Caste Discrimination and Exclusion in Indian Universities*,' notes about the route often taken to emancipate from social backwardness for the scheduled castes and tribes including taking up the government job. The withdrawal of the **Maulana Azad National Fellowship**, a thirteen-year fellowship program to aid minority students while pursuing their MPhil and PhD, was slashed in December 2022, by the University Grants Commission. Along with the paralysed welfare state mechanism, the uncertain trend of dwindling job opportunities, recorded as a 7.95% unemployment rate by the **CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy)** creates an environment of panic and distress for inhumane academic rigour.

Yet the competitive process regarded as a merit of selection remains an area of contention.

Lack of critical thinking, no creative exposure to empirical knowledge and disproportionate distribution of seats for entrance examination reflects a hyper-insensitive situation for the students. We impose the regressive discourse of homogeneity while assessing the standard orientation and aptitude of young minds. Imagine a student has a keen interest in historically tracing the quantum mechanism in physics, however, they lapse at MCQ-based standardized tests or can't score well. Would it be justified to start questioning their efficiency in science? It becomes an abysmal rat race competition. Functioned by the narrative of 'Placements and high salary packages', the additional skills comprising literature, aesthetics, poetry or philosophy have lost their relevance in contemporary times.

Mushrooming coaching centres and private colleges with their eternally ingrained extortionist policy reflect a stark divide in the accessibility of affordable education. Education has become a one-dimensional method, a reductionist agenda, entirely regulated by what the 'market' considers to be lucrative. Functioned by the narrative of 'Placements and high salary packages', the additional skills comprising literature, aesthetics, poetry or philosophy have lost their relevance in contemporary times.

Parents, while sending their children to educational hubs

SUICIDE
A STUDY IN SOCIOLOGY
By
EMILE DURKHEIM
Translated by
SPAULDING AND GEORGE SIMPSON
Edited with an Introduction by
GEORGE SIMPSON



drastic change in environment, frequent anxiety and depression due to underperformance, lead to the crumbling mental health of the students. It becomes deeply unrealistic for the parents to accept the notion of their child; giving up. In a report published by NewsLaundry, a senior police official from Kota said, "Many a time we have to threaten the family members to take their kids back when we can observe the visible sign of depression in their kids, they simply tend to take it lightly."

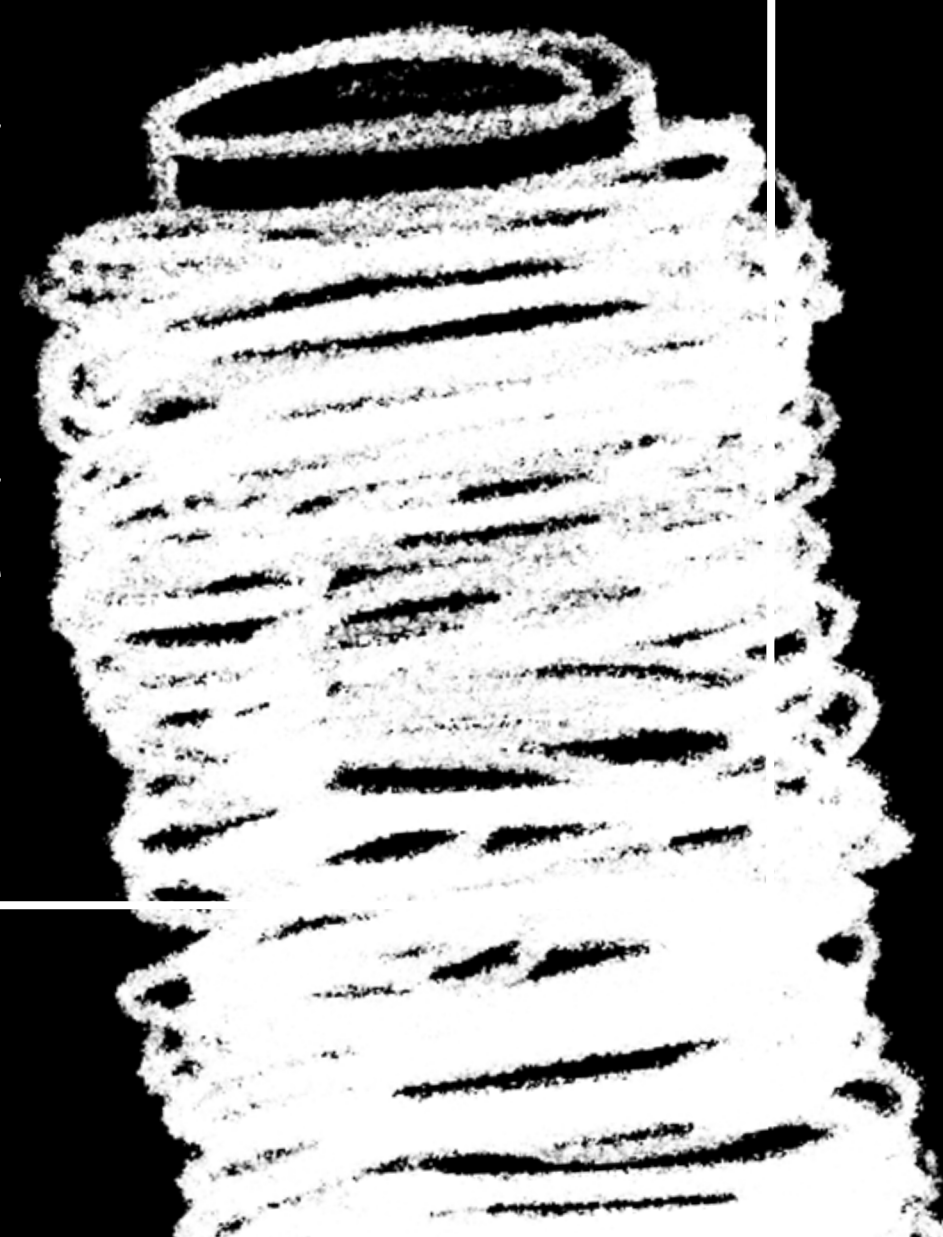
OVERLAPPING CASTE-CLASS AFFINITY

IIT-JEE OR NEET exams possess a special codified logic and coding to crack it within three hours. Around 80% of Indian students take additional coaching courses or study at 'cram schools' which guarantees your success if their directions are sedulously followed. In the essay, 'The Forms of Capital,' **Pierre Bourdieu**

talks about cultural capital accumulated by the family and class history of an individual. When combined with the modern sociological analysis presented by **Satish Deshpande**, it presents how the privilege carried by the upper caste, within a professional sphere happens in disguise or the form of 'castelessness'. Since the 1980s, the structural changes happening in the economy due to liberalisation, and the rising concept of entrepreneurship and managerialism created a spectacular success for the IITians in the global market. The dramatic shift in the career trajectories of the young graduates, the escalated dream from public centre job employment to working in Silicon Valley, added with an uninterrupted flow of corporate control. The ones with highly embedded social capital, individuals who graduated from fancy English-speaking schools and lucrative connections abroad seemed to tread over the marginalised caste group. Once admitted, ragging, ostracization and

segregation based on entrance test scores becomes a normalised task. *Thorat Committee (2007)* which aimed to investigate the reasons behind caste-based discrimination, reported that around 72% of them encountered some kind of sophisticated and subtle form of casteism in their class. Another report by the **Ministry of Education** denotes that around 58% of deaths occur among the marginalized community. There exists a binary within these higher educational institutes, the ones who vehemently oppose the criteria of reservation which dilutes the qualitative pedagogy or learning experiences. Others have been the survivors of atrocities and chauvinism all through their lives, reclaiming their spaces by breaking the glass ceiling of oppression.

Ranging from the rigorous academic discourse with an insensitive outlook from



the college administration to a purely Brahminical mindset of professors, openly portrayed inside the classrooms.

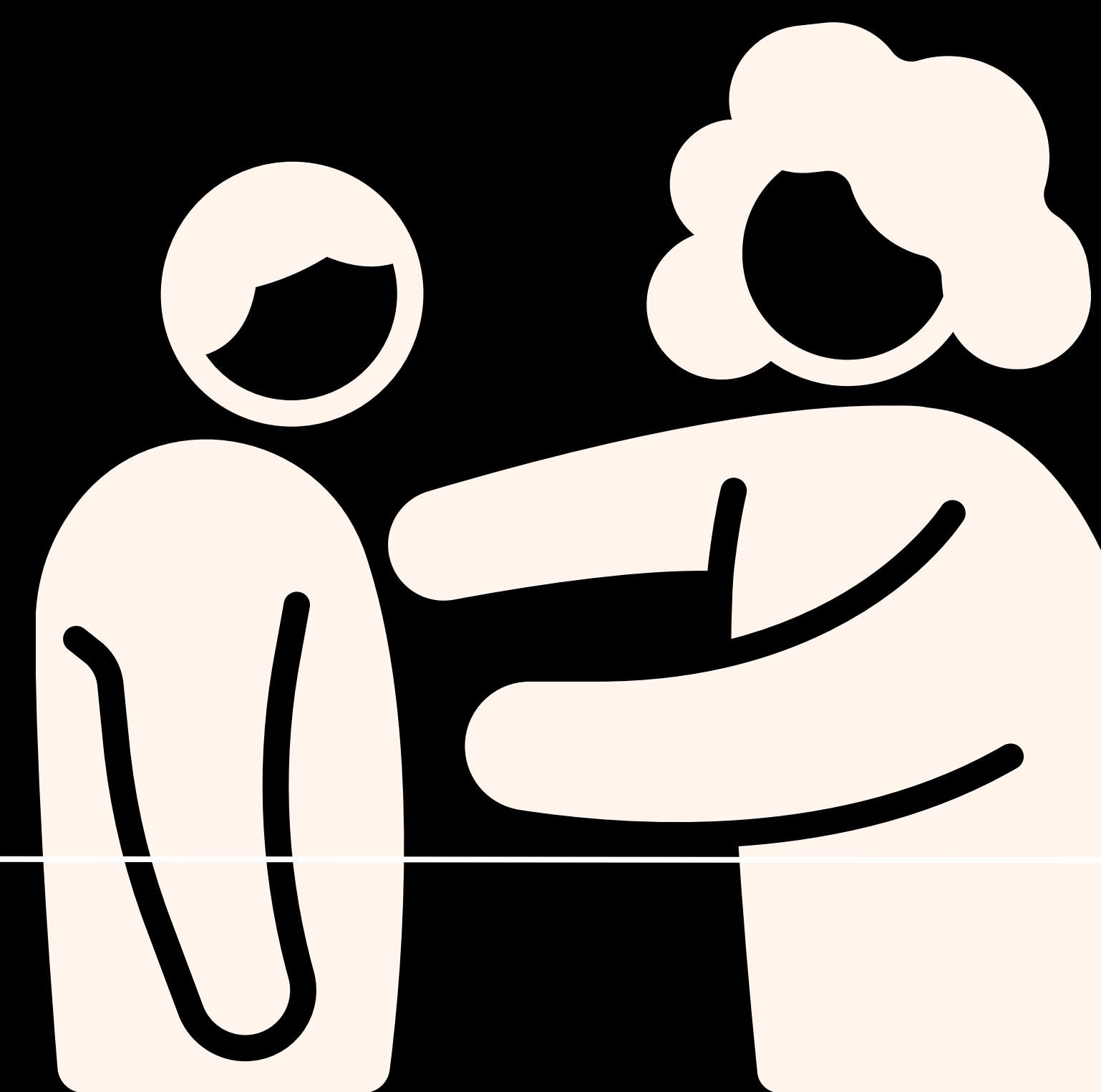
Recently, IIT Bombay hostel mess authorities came up with a traditional segregationist notion of Purity and Pollution and demarcated the dining areas based on vegetarian or non-vegetarian diets. The ethical policing of petty issues rather than focusing on rising suicide rates presents a questionable character of the authorities. Symbolic demonstration of the condolence meetings, a mere show-off, sometimes followed with even no suspension of teaching classes. Such segregationist policies create nothing but add more insecurities, and fuel contempt and dissatisfaction against the majoritarian ruling class.

CONCLUSION

Student Suicide is a microcosm aspect reflecting the need to revamp and restructure the hidden socio-economic fallacies in our society. Steps such as installing spring-attached fans inside the hostel rooms, career counselling sessions held with no visible interest shown by the guardians or relaxing a spare day in a week for rejuvenation remain rhetoric at the end of the day. To eradicate this cancerous social problem, solving the rote learning system which results in churning out a large segment of unemployed individuals with no specific skill assessment remains an imperative step. The onus of the problem cannot be completely burdened upon family members or parents. When the present GDP allocation for education remains as meagre as 0.7%, it represents the lack of integrity shown by the state. The death of young students in a country is equivalent to the death of hope: a hope for a better tomorrow, a hope for an inclusive future.



Those who require assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts may contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health suicide prevention helpline 011-40769002.

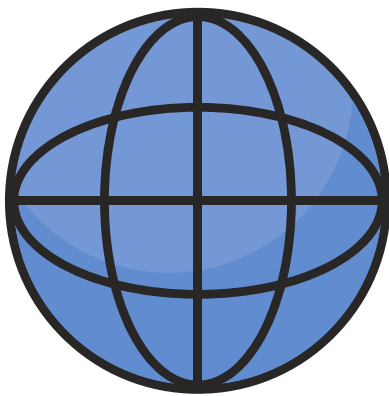




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