

THE PROBE



Jabs & Justice

EQUALITY OF ACCESS & INDIA'S VACCINE PROGRAM

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Civil Services

A conversation with
Dr SY Quraishi

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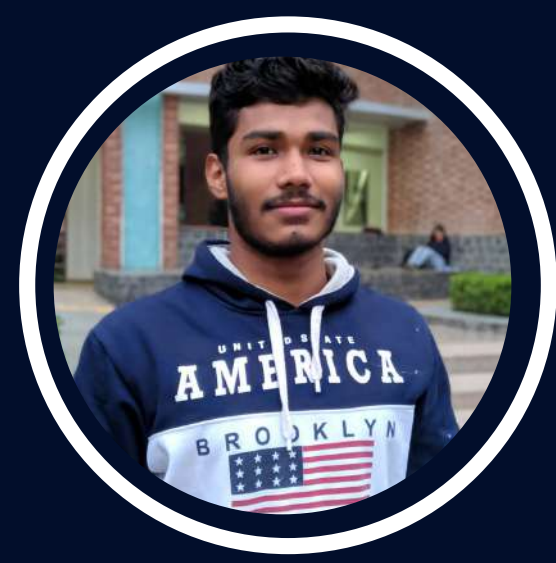
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Politics for all Kolkata

📷 **Beyond Parties**

Shopkeepers putting up flags of various political parties to display for sale ahead of assembly elections in Bengal, in Kolkata, India, on February 22, 2021 (Photo by Debarchan Chatterjee/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

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Bengal Decides~ Analysis of the Bengal Elections 2021:

As the early trends of the state election results of four states and a union territory started seeping out in the early hours of 2nd May, it was West Bengal among these which occupied the centre-stage of public attention and intrigue. **Read more Pg 21**

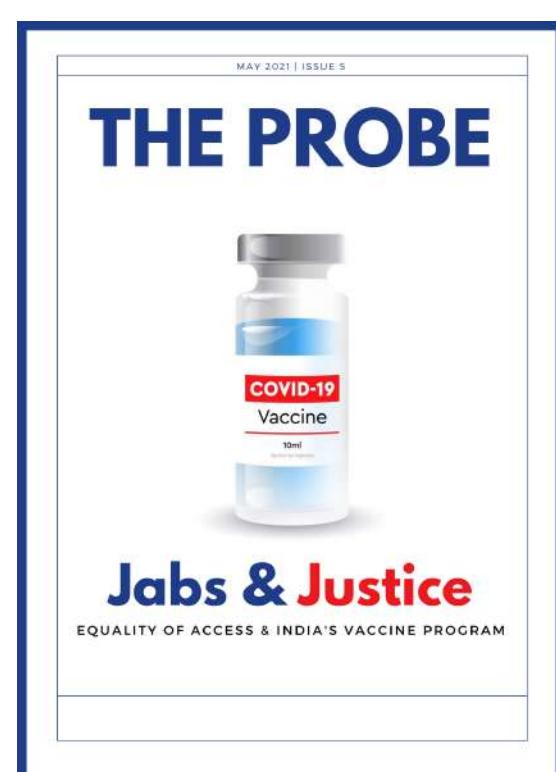
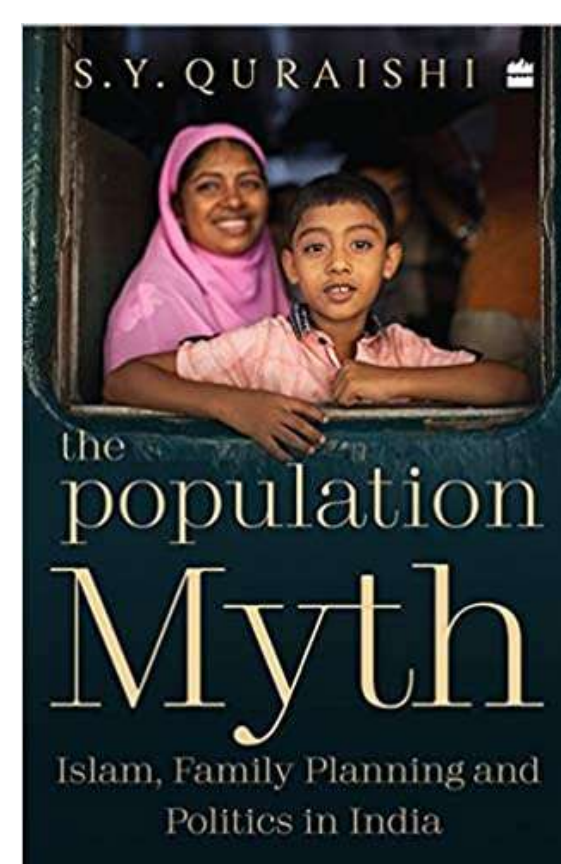
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Jabs & Justice



by *Spriha Mehrotra, Aaryan Gadhok & Saberi Mallick*

Equality of Access & India's Vaccine Programme

The world today is grappling with a healthcare and humanitarian crisis no one had envisioned or anticipated. The magnitude of this crisis has raised issues, concerns and questions in all domains of human life. Today, when we stand at the brink of finding the answers to these questions

and return to some sense of normalcy, we are faced with the extraordinary problem of vaccinating everyone against the coronavirus to end the state of a pandemic. The agendas of universal vaccination all across the globe has given a rise to moral and ethical dilemmas and has urged us to rethink

▲ A medical worker jots down details onto a vial of the Covaxin vaccine against the Covid-19 coronavirus at a primary health centre in Hyderabad on May 25, 2021



what is right and wrong in such times. Herein, when we specifically study the case of India, the events that have unfolded recently raise three major controversial problems that we must look at to understand the Indian interpretation of universal vaccination, the aspect of equity and nationalism it enshrines and the kind of impact it has on the stakeholders, the people and the vaccine-makers.

Differential Pricing: Protectionist Capitalism?

The country was collectively taken aback and shocked when the Central Government announced that from May 1, the Indian states and private medical institutions and hospitals will be allowed to

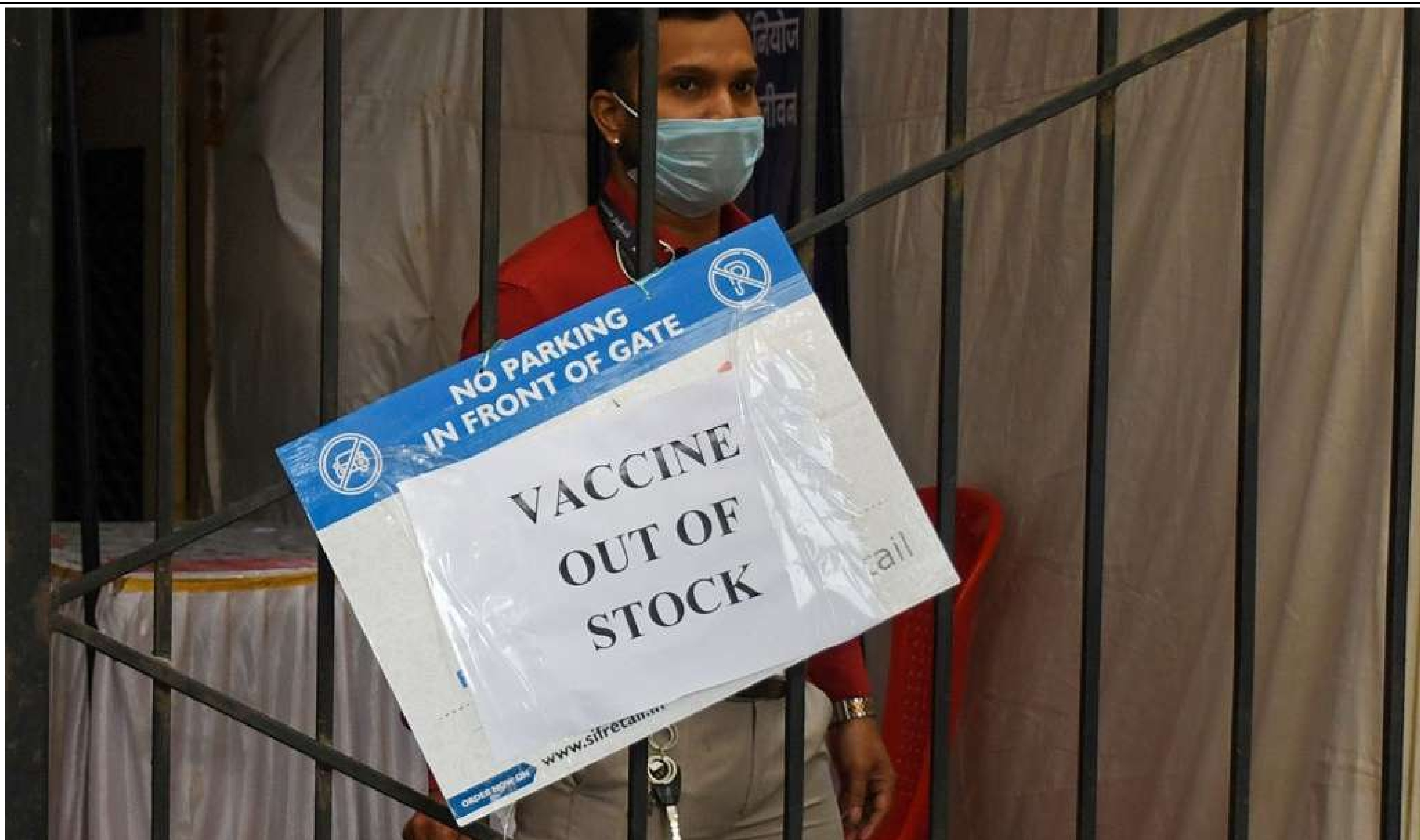
directly buy vaccines from the manufacturers, particularly the Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech (BB) in India, at prices fixed by these producers from the open market. This was not entirely an unpredictable move as the Centre had, on April 19, already announced loosening on regulation by means of allowing flexibility for private manufacturers to set the prices for their vaccines. The decision, to allow this duopolistic market to operate on self-set prices meant that these entities could then make profits on their product and its sale, not to mention how the government also did not exempt them from GST and other overhead costs which would then be reflected in the final price of the vaccines, and this entirely

becomes a prominent moral objection especially in a pandemic. The issue was further aggravated when SII and BB came out with their respective pricing structures for selling the vaccines produced by them. For the former, the state governments could procure COVISHIELD for Rs. 400/shot and the private hospitals could purchase the vaccines for Rs. 600/shot. As for the latter, the states could purchase COVAXIN for Rs. 600/shot while the private hospitals could buy it for Rs. 1200/shot. Both duopolies charged Rs. 150/shot from the Central Government for their vaccination campaign while also reserving 50% of their product for the Centre while putting the remaining 50% to the open market for sale and purchase. Needless to say, the share of the Centre would be distributed to the states

▲ A man wearing PPE performs the last rites to his relative who died of the Covid at a crematorium on April 20, 2021 in New Delhi, India.

▲ A medic shows Covishield vaccine vials, after the virtual launch of the COVID-19 vaccination drive by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Jan. 16, 2021.





for vaccinating the citizens.

This entire strategy raises a multitude of flags. Primarily, it loses value as a 'universal vaccination' campaign. The ideas of affordability, central responsibility and accountability, administrative cohesion and access to healthcare remain unanswered under this scenario. What instead prevails is a sense of archaic capitalism in times of social chaos. This has manifold impacts and implications on economic and political terms too.

To understand this situation on an economic front, we need to realize that vaccines, not just for coronavirus but rather for any other ailment, are goods that are said to have a 'positive externality'.

This implies that the production and consumption of such goods do not only benefit those on either end of this transaction but rather benefits everyone around the consumer and producer too. Those who are vaccinated do not only save themselves from the virus but are also less likely to transmit it to others. For this particular reason, most economists don't believe the purported efficiency associated with market-based solutions to have any effect on vaccine pricing strategies. This also leads to a hypothesis on the matter of why the government should then exempt vaccines from the price mechanism and let the forces of demand and supply decide their prices. Socially, this might have a twofold detriment on the accessibility to vaccines – a)

Considering the supply of vaccines decreasing presently, the resultant prices would be over-inflated and thus, vaccines to states and private hospitals would become relatively expensive; b) It would also affect the way in which vaccines are administered to people, making the rich more likely to get vaccinated because they would be willing to pay a few more extra bucks for it, rather than the bracket who won't be able to give in to these prices. What is worth noticing here is also that the bracket who would find these vaccine prices unaffordable are the ones who need it more than the richer strata of the society. We are also obligated to note that the States would vaccinate the people for free, but the prices for them also are expensive due to burdening healthcare expenditure that is crippling the pre-decided allocation of their respective budgets. The shortages in oxygen, medical paraphernalia like beds, ventilators and PPE kits to name a



◀ Vials of India's indigenously produced COVID-19 vaccine-COVAXIN by Bharat Biotech.

few have already put unforeseen pressures on each state's treasury that vaccines that are expensive might be pushed back on the priority list. States have already started temporarily halting the vaccination campaigns for the 18-44 age group on the pretext of shortage of vaccine doses. This decision can be seen as a consequence of a slow-down in vaccine production, increased active case-load of the second wave, differential vaccine pricing which makes it harder for the states to re-negotiate prices with the manufacturers who already have commitments with international bodies and other countries. An amalgamation of all these factors would obviously have the states reconsider their respective vaccination drives.

The Centre's response to the call for "One Nation, One Price" has been a capitalistic defence on their pricing policy on the lines of how this would lead to incentivised demand, higher production competition and attract overseas investment. This was followed by revised

pricing slabs by both SII and BB after they revealed to be making profits even on the base price of Rs. 150/shot that was being charged to the Government of India. The question, very blatantly then becomes – Are profits that important amidst a crisis of such a catastrophic magnitude?

Are human lives really that dispensable?

On all these accords, the country rightly questioned the Centre and asked for justifications to this tiered pricing framework. Even after attracting international attention on the same, the government's response has stood for and pushed for an invariably protectionist market-profit mechanism. Many have suggested that the Centre should become a monopsony and not have states and private hospitals be a part of the vaccine market to avoid such discriminatory price

"I don't ever believe we'll reach herd immunity. What we will do [with vaccinations] is dramatically decrease transmission"
-Bloomberg, May 12, 2021

structures. The Centre should also try to work up a yardstick to ensure that each state receives enough doses of vaccines through a policy of equitable distribution and not through political gambits or machinations. In the end, COVID-19 is not something to be politicised, out of respect for those who are constantly trying to fight on the front end and to those we have lost to the virus.

Differential pricing only supports the idea that the Centre might be trying to abandon the State and private machinery in a time that it is needed the most by them. Even though health and healthcare is a state subject, ensuring that a pandemic is warded off is of humungous national interest and thus, demands unwavering accountability and responsibility on part of the Centre. It also demands sensitivity in the manner of prevention and mitigation from the Centre, which they must guarantee to the people by means of spearheading the vaccination drive in the country.

Age Categorised Vaccination Drives

The seemingly inexorable "second wave" currently ravaging India's fragile healthcare system complemented by a failure of containment exposes the very lackadaisical and incompetent nature of our current regime, leaving an irreparable image

dent aggravated by Modi's plunged approval ratings. Visuals of political campaigning in West Bengal and Assam likewise, was a grave administrative miscalculation on part of the BJP, which is now the subject of public ire and faces flak from international media as well. Despite having a progressive and early outlook on the production of viable vaccines, substantiated by proper approvals by the DCGI, the CDSCO, the ICMR, and a competent task force; the failure to contain the new wave throws light on the existing loopholes and crevices in our administrative block when it comes to effective policy implementation. The near-universal vaccination drive faces new obstacles in the form of limited doses, vaccine hesitancy in rural areas, and a schedule for an age-oriented inoculation programme. India, following in the footsteps of other nations, consciously set out to vaccinate the elder population first, while scheduling the relatively younger gentry for later phases. The Indian policy, criticized by some, can be understood to keep the surrounding ethical dilemmas in the centre focus. Formulating an age-oriented vaccination schedule requires empirical data on three key factors: the mortality rate, demographics of the region, and initial vaccine supply. The decision of the government to primarily jab the elder population may be viewed through the narrow prism of ethics and morality. People above the age of 55, those

dealing with co-morbidities like asthma or diabetes especially, are at greater risk of death; thereby contributing to the increased mortality rate.

Decreasing the mortality rate through a "direct" measure requires inoculating the elder population first, developing antibodies, and keeping them immune from the contagious virus.

The demographics of India and the West are at odds with each other, with India being a relatively young population. When it comes to an age-related vaccination drive, we should look the other way. India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35. In 2020, the average age of an Indian was 29 years. Biologically the elder lot are at a greater risk of infection and death, but a reversed programme will prove instrumental in saving as many lives as possible, thereby keeping the elderly at a low-risk ratio. This explains the indirect vaccination, required at a time when supply is limited in the backdrop of ever-increasing demand. India's majorly young population acting as the backbone of the Indian economy,

constitutes a majority in all three sectors: agriculture (primary), manufacturing, and service. At a time of economic contraction and near recession, it becomes indispensable for the working class to continue with their business and services to keep the economic engine running. Children and young adults are at a lower mortality risk while simultaneously bearing a greater contraction ratio, considering their movement, peer contacts, and social engagements throughout the working day. If we take the case of India, vaccinating the younger generation first keeping in mind certain demographic mathematical models will prove more beneficial in achieving herd immunity through indirect vaccination thereby flattening the curve as a result. If enough people are vaccinated, the level of indirect protection in a population can be high, which is very essential. Had it not been for indirect protection, smallpox would never have been globally eradicated in 1977. This is not just the prediction of a mathematical model. This effect has been observed in empirical data on influenza vaccination from Japan, where vaccination of schoolchildren was found to reduce deaths in the elderly. Similarly, some jurisdictions practice cocooning, where if a vaccine does not work in a vulnerable person due to their advanced age or an immature immune system, they vaccinate the people around them instead. The key is to reduce the R (Naught) of an individual which indicates the number of people one is expected to infect. Indonesia and countries in the Far East have set an administrative precedent by overlooking mortality rates to shift

their complete focus on slowing down transmission by vaccinating the younger residents first. A rough 5 per cent of the Indonesian population is above the age of 65. Thus, indirect protection is the only plausible step to be taken in lieu of a vaccine shortage and limited supply. Countries like Japan, on the other hand, should primarily vaccinate their middle-aged citizens, who form the chunk of Japanese societal demographics. The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked major havoc on normal societal functioning, the worlds' resilient supply chains, and the economies of nearly all nations. An age-oriented phased vaccination programme must be backed by enough mathematical models to substantiate their claims and strategies, with demographics having a crucial role to play in achieving herd immunity. In unprecedented times like these, it becomes imperative on part of the authorities to take accountability and serve in the greater interest of humanity, while simultaneously looking at the larger picture in the frame;

being rational and pragmatic.

Intellectual Property Laws

Intellectual Property Laws (IP Law) are a host of legal measures intended to regulate an organisation or an individual's dissemination of ideas and information through the use of copyrights, patents and trademarks. They are often defended on the ground that the provision of complete intellectual control over one's creation provides a ready source of profit which is likely to incentivise innovation. The categories subsumed within the larger ambit of IP Law include Copyright law, Patent law, Trademark law and Trade-secret law. Patent law allows inventors of new products to prohibit others from using, selling or replicating their creations. As with other advances in medicine, vaccines are also subject to patent laws. In light of the

extraordinary conditions ushered by the Covid - 19 pandemic, India and South Africa raised the demand for the waiving of IP protection at the World Trade Organisation in August 2020. This was under the assumption that the distribution of the patents utilised by Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax, Johnson & Johnson etc would empower local bodies in middle-income countries to rapidly manufacture the vaccine. This demand came under opposition from Western pharmaceutical companies who believed that the loss of revenue incurred from the dissemination of the patent would deter innovation. Additionally, concerns regarding the paucity of raw material, long manufacture periods and a lack of technical know-how required to produce a finished product, from what is essentially a blueprint, have also been raised.

In 2020, Oxford University announced its intention to donate its vaccine formula, in what could have bolstered vaccine accessibility across the world. However, hopes for the open sourcing of vaccines were short-lived as Oxford chose to partner with the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, at the recommendation of Bill Gates and his foundation. This intervention provided the pharmaceutical giant with an opportunity to benefit from the unprecedented profits generated from the sale of vaccines, raising debates surrounding the ethicality of benefitting from widespread human suffering. The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which was negotiated as part of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and



▲ Youth Congress activists demonstrating against Prime Minister Modi on the issue of alleged Covid-19 mismanagement at Matka Chowk on May 17, 2021 in Chandigarh, India.

Trade (GATT), mandates members of the World Trade Organisation to implement minimum levels of patent, trademark and copyright protection, failing which the country is liable to WTO administered sanctions. Some economists hold the belief that the implementation of TRIPS in developing countries is likely to be conducive to development as it is expected to incentivise growth and encourage foreign investment. The TRIPS agreement is not universally agreed upon, with some within the developing world believing it to be a tool of Western imperialism. Such objections, rooted in the belief that implementation of the agreement will lead to higher prices as most owners of intellectual property tend to be located in the Global North, have translated to hesitance in the implementation of the agreement in the Global South, with some Asian countries passing laws in favour, but not effectively enforcing them.

In October 2020, India and South Africa proposed a waiver suggesting that the constituent countries of the WTO be excused from the implementation and application of certain provisions of the TRIPS Agreement. In an attempt to facilitate the equitable distribution of vaccines, the temporary waiver would facilitate the rapid production of vaccines and other essential medical equipment. The proposal garnered the support of more than 100 states and secured the co-sponsorship

of 60 states.

The rampant prioritisation of capital over human lives raises serious questions regarding ethicality. Under the unprecedented conditions unfolding all around us, swathes of the population have had to relinquish their individual freedoms. People have consented to being excluded from the public sphere -with those employed in the informal sector often losing out on their source of income and livelihood- solely to secure the collective interest of the population. People have adopted the use of masks and other precautionary measures, essentially surrendering their right to bodily autonomy. In such a situation, wherein individual rights have constantly been circumvented to ensure utilitarian benefits of the greatest public good, it becomes indefensible for pharmaceutical companies to prioritise profit and the protection of their intellectual property over what could effectively save millions of lives across the world.

It is important to consider the role of global inequity in hindering universal vaccine accessibility. The stockpiling of vaccines by developed nations must be viewed in conjunction with developing nations having to make do with the limited resources and technology at their disposal. Much like the

pharmaceutical monopolies in the case of HIV/AIDS treatments which caused over a million deaths across Africa in the early 2000s, the blocking of vaccine patents in the name of protection of IP rights and encouraging 'innovation' is likely to impact the most vulnerable within the developing world who will be unable to amass funds to purchase life-saving doses fundamental to combatting the Covid - 19 viruses.

Bengal Decides

ANALYSIS OF THE 2021 WEST BENGAL STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

BY RITABRATA CHAKRABORTY AND SOUVIK BISWAS



As the early trends of the state election results of four states and a union territory started seeping out in the early hours of 2nd May, it was West Bengal among these which occupied the centre-stage of public attention and intrigue. The all-out attempt of the BJP, the enormity of the task at TMC's hand in order to survive in its home, and only ground, and the ramifications the results would hold for the country's political trajectory were all revolving in the minds of people. By the end of the day, they were trying to come to terms with the scale of Trinamool's victory which surpassed the most optimistic of estimates. What explains this astounding victory, or turnaround according to some observers?

A Revitalised TMC Party and Government: With a surprisingly underwhelming performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Trinamool, and Mamata Banerjee, faced a stiff task of reversing the unmistakable rising tide of anti-incumbency, with an emboldened BJP determined to clinch the state two years later. As charges of corruption, extortion and strong-arm tactics rained down on the party, especially at the local level, the party roped in someone who perhaps deserves the greatest credit for churning out the victory, besides Mamata herself- Prashant Kishor. Realising rightly that she continued to be the prime source of support, Kishor devised public outreach programmes like 'Didi Ke Bolo' (Tell it to Didi) to showcase the image of a working and accessible CM as well as equate the government with her,

thus enhancing her populist mileage. Kishor-led IPAC supplied the party with ground-level aspirations and grievances, steered the leaders at various levels, and instrumentally shaped the issues which ultimately formed the election narrative. The Duare Sarkar (Gov. at the Door) initiative in the governance sphere, which started last December marked a massive administrative push to include left-out potential beneficiaries of one or the other government scheme. The prime move was the Swasthya Sathi Health Scheme to provide up to five lakh rupees health coverage to every family, injecting special hype at a time people (has) had been particularly perturbed financially and health-wise. All these helped to offset in some measure the anti-incumbency and also paint a picture of a performing government. Also, his brainchild was the Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chai(Bengal wants its own daughter)campaign slogan to subtly infuse Bengali sub-nationalism in the discourse.

Consolidating Women and Minority Voters :

A factor that ensured that TMC raced ahead of BJP was the former's evident success in cementing its hold among Muslim voters

and women in general. While minorities have, since TMC came to power in 2011, largely sided with it, the party put in special attention this time to further complete that electoral domination. The efforts did pay off as not just traditional areas of support, but also neighbouring districts of Malda and Murshidabad, which had been bastions of the Congress, now inclined towards Trinamool. As speculation rose over possibilities of BJP coming to power, the minorities expectedly saw the election as an existential question, thereby deciding to side en masse with a party that was believed to be most able to nullify that possibility. Adding to this, TMC aced out its rivals by slicing out a predominant chunk of the female vote bloc. Reasons for this are many. When the government started the Kanyashree scheme to provide an annual scholarship to girls aged between 13 and 18, an one time grant of 25000 to girls turning eighteen, and a monthly scholarship for girls pursuing MA/MSc, it laid the groundwork of creating a section of content girls and their families proliferating with each passing batch. Besides, widow pension schemes, issuance of Swasthya Sathi cards in the name of female members, Mamata's recurrent appeals to specific women flocking her rallies, projecting herself as the only remaining woman chief minister whom BJP is determined to oust- all these formed a favourable female perception towards her and her party. Aiding this was Mr Modi's taunt-like Didi-o-Didi calls in his speeches and leaders of his party publicly trivialising her fracture on her leg, turning into emotive



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee attends a rally of Trinamool Congress on a wheel chair as she was injured on her leg, before Assembly election in Kolkata.

factors which did not go down well with people, especially women. Thus, with these two huge sections in its kitty, the TMC just needed to pick up a certain minimum percentage of the secular-liberal, and non-minority male voters to sail through, which it eventually did.

Chinks in the BJP's Armour

Despite the massive deployment of resources and a singular focus of the national leadership towards capturing power, the campaign strategy of the BJP was beset with several problems which only deepened its rift with the electorate. Faced with such a formidable face as Ms Banerjee, the party didn't announce any CM candidate, reflecting its acute lack of any leader to face her head-on. Micro managing the campaign

centrally, from themes of the campaign to candidate selection, the top leadership ensured little control of the state unit in battling an essentially state-level election, thereby bolstering TMC's charges that they were seeking to capture Bengal without a capable leadership or any knowledge of the state's culture and ethos. What firmly established this perception were repeated gaffes by leaders like JP Nadda while trying to invoke Bengali luminaries like Tagore in the speeches. Cashing in on this, the TMC, with much success, posited itself as the protector and representative of the

unique culture of the state, fighting it out against outsiders looking to bombard people with promises but detached from their historical-cultural moorings. and North Bengal where BJP's sweep was expected to be a foregone conclusion witnessed a resurgence by the TMC. Demographically speaking, the BJP had hoped to maintain its Lok Sabha domination among SCs, STs, OBCs and especially Matuas. In the end, only the last group remained in large numbers with them. Amid a raging pandemic, a protracted eight-phase schedule with juxtaposed pictures of the PM addressing rallies amid a crumbling health infrastructure in different cities of the country, especially in the latter half, further created an adverse public perception. But, beyond all these, what probably dented them the most was the near-unfiltered

inclusion of leaders from TMC in the run-up to the polls, damaging its own credibility as an alternative and ridding Trinamul of some local-level points of public grievance. This unfiltered inclusion created a rift in the party dividing into New BJP and Old BJP, spawning instances where both were fighting between themselves. The BJP also chalked out a strategy of fielding the MPs who won in the 2019 general elections to convey their intent but it backfired with most of them losing. With thousands of farmers camped at the capital's borders for months against the farm laws, leaders like Rakesh Tikait and other farm union leaders campaigned in the state with the sole message of the imperative of resisting a BJP government from coming to office. This, aided by civil society movements like the 'NoVotetoBJP', helped to ensure that what was essentially supposed to be an election to retain the incumbent or not transformed into a referendum on whether to vote BJP or keep it at bay. Naturally, such a situational bipolarity solidified and increased TMC's vote chunk.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses supporters of the BJP during a mass rally ahead of the state elections at the Brigade Parade ground in Kolkata.



This, aided by civil society movements like the 'NoVoteToBJP', helped to ensure that what was essentially supposed to be an election to retain the incumbent or not transformed into a referendum on whether to vote BJP or keep it at bay. Naturally, such a situational bipolarity solidified and increased TMC's vote chunk.

North Bengal- Bucking the Trend

In North Bengal, the situation has been quite different. The BJP and TMC bagged around 30 and 23 seats respectively. It was a neck to neck competition and in some districts like Darjeeling, BJP won all the seats, sweeping the TMC. So why are the results so much different here than in the Southern part of Bengal? Let's look at some micro-level cases to glean the larger picture. Siliguri, one of the important towns in Darjeeling, voted for BJP this time.

I (Souvik Biswas) conducted an interview picking people at random. Many of the young college-going students said they want to vote for Sanjukta Morcha. Many middle-aged people said that they want to vote for BJP. They gave the reason that Omprakash Mishra, the TMC candidate from the Siliguri constituency, is a person belonging from Kolkata, and asked a simple question, 'How can a man from Kolkata know the problems faced by the people of Siliguri?' This reflects the broader perception of the disconnect of the region with South Bengal.

In the Siliguri constituency for many years Ashok Bhattacharjee, the CPIM candidate has won but this time he was defeated by Sankar Ghosh, the BJP candidate. It is widely speculated that Ashok Bhattacharjee lost because of anti-incumbency. Another most important constituency is Dabgram-Fulbari from where Goutam Deb won every time but this time he was defeated by BJP. Holding various

ministries including tourism, he has been battered with charges of corruption like inducting his daughter into the Kanyashree scheme which is meant for needy girls. During the election, he gave threats to an ashram that if they didn't vote for him he would destroy the ashram. These threats surfaced online which greatly damaged the stature of Goutam Deb. Deb also lost owing to the lack of Trinamul's micro-level political activities. In the Alipurduar district, Suman Kanjilal won, defeating Sourav Chakraborty. Earlier in March, the BJP changed its Assembly election candidate for the Alipurduar constituency. Suman Kanjilal, the general secretary of the Alipurduar district committee of the BJP, replaced noted economist Ashok Kumar Lahiri as the party's candidate. Observers in the district say that the top BJP leadership may have buckled under pressure from a section of leaders and workers, who had been protesting Mr Lahiri's nomination and demanding a local candidate. They felt the pulse of the people and that made the BJP win this seat.



Economist Ashok Kumar Lahiri who was initially chosen to run from Alipurduar, was replaced.



A police station is seen alight during clashes with Gorkhaland supporters during a strike called Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM), in Sonada near Darjeeling on July 8, 2017.

Now coming to the hotbed of North Bengal politics that is the Darjeeling region which is famous for the demand for a separate state known as Gorkhaland.

In 2017, during the Gorkhaland agitation that saw violence and police action, the GJM got virtually split with Bimal Gurung's aides Binay Tamang and Anit Thapa forming their own group. Bimal Gurung went into hiding following the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation that saw violence and police action. He came out of three-year hiding in October 2020 to sever ties with the BJP. He announced quitting the NDA and an alliance with Mamata Banerjee's TMC. When Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced her Trinamool Congress (TMC) candidates for the West Bengal Assembly election, she left three seats for "friends" in the Darjeeling Hills. The "friends" were from the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM).

What Mamata Banerjee did not specify was which GJM faction she would be supporting in the Bengal election. There are two GJMs that split during the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation. Bimal Gurung's GJM is called GJM (I) and the other faction is under Binay Tamang and called GJM (II) or GJM (Tamang).

And, both factions put up their candidates in the Bengal election. The lack of clarity at the top in the TMC over which GJM faction to support saw some

party leaders canvassing for the Tamang faction and the others for Gurung's.

BJP took advantage of this situation. Interestingly, the BJP has a separate understanding with the GNLF founded by Subhash Ghising and the original group to demand a separate Gorkhaland. They roped in Mohan Ghising, son of Subhas Ghising. This had a clear advantage for the BJP and they ousted both factions of GJM, winning two seats out of three in the district.

Also, in North Bengal, we can find a stark contrast with South Bengal regarding the turncoats. In South Bengal, top leaders who defected from TMC to BJP have lost like Rajib Banerjee who once led the forest ministry. But in North Bengal, the outcome has been quite opposite. Trinamool leaders of North Bengal who in the past held different ministries like Rabindranath Ghosh and Gautam Deb lost to BJP. Goutam Deb lost to Shikha Chatterjee who deserted Trinamool in 2018 and Rabindranath Ghosh conceded defeat to his former colleague Mihir Goswami who joined BJP last year. It has been really interesting to see that many turncoats defeated heavyweights in North Bengal.

The Decimation of Left-Congress:

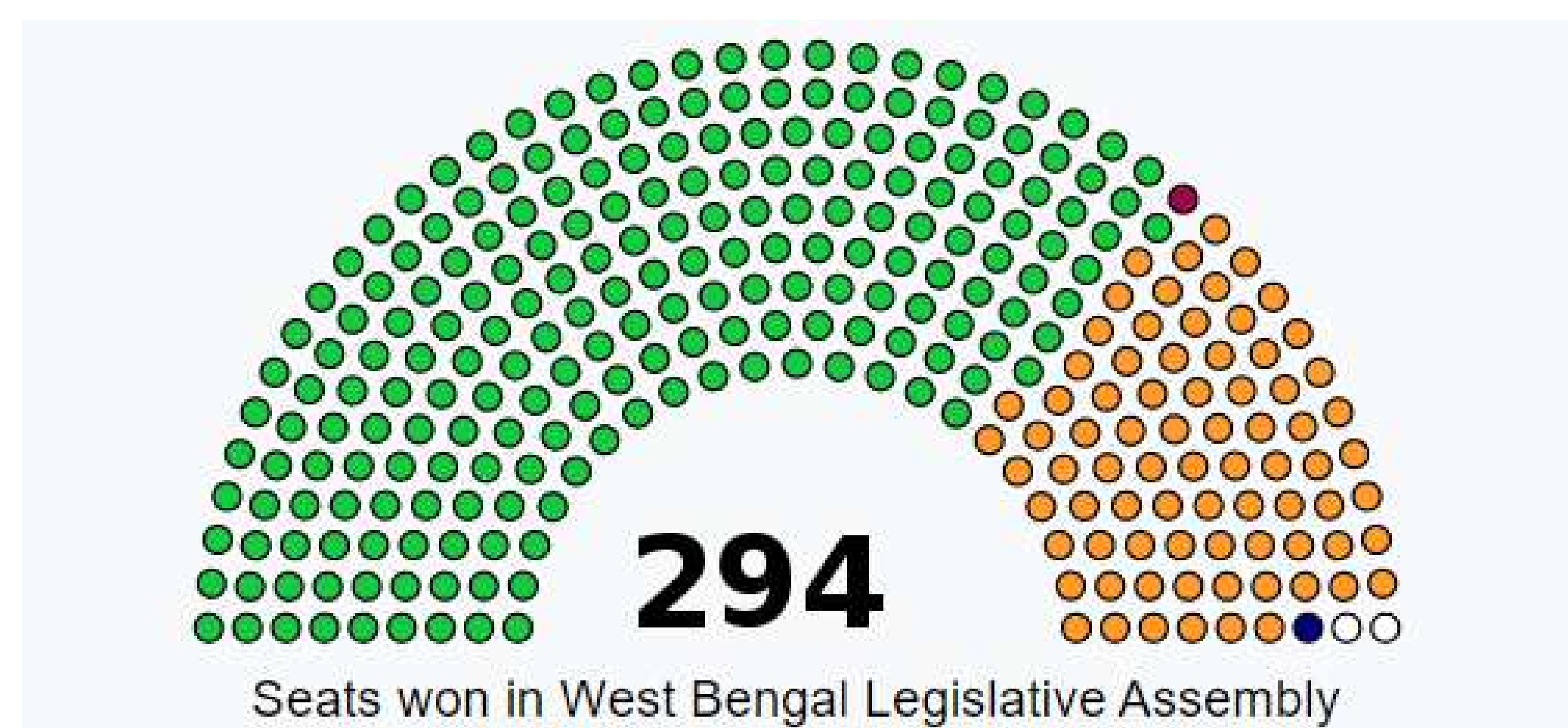
The dismal performance of the two parties may seem baffling but the background to the run-up to 2021 suggests that it is perhaps the nadir of a long drawn out descent. A person even with a rudimentary knowledge of Bengal's political history knows that for decades since Independence, the Left and Congress had been the only dominant players, with the former

ruling the state for thirty-four years at a stretch till 2011. While Congress naturally remained the main opposition initially, Mamata Banerjee formed her breakaway party Trinamool Congress(TMC) in 1998. Unlike other such Congress-splits like NCP which continued to share space with the parent party, the TMC in Bengal gradually edged it out to become the main opposition party. Even in 2016 when TMC returned for a second term in office, the Left and Congress, now in alliance, absorbed nearly entirely the anti-incumbency vote to become the only opposition with BJP having to be content with just three seats. However, thereafter began the rapid erosion in their vote share. As the 2019 Lok Sabha results were out, it became stunningly evident that the BJP had almost completely supplanted the Left as the main opposition, with the sharp spike in one's vote share corresponding to the free fall of the other. Yes, a certain portion of TMC's vote also did shift to the BJP but the congruous but opposite movement of the Left and the Right was for all to see. It still had a committed cadre of workers but a depleted organisation and disconnect with the masses provided little fuel for a comeback. As the 2021 elections approached, the Left- Cong again launched a twin attack on TMC and BJP, highlighting their failures and presenting a young, vibrant crop of candidates to energise the campaign, and bring back and galvanise the lost votes.

A certain part of that continued to be with the BJP but crucially, the rhetoric on dangers of a possible BJP government struck deeper with the electorate, resulting in a mass shift to TMC to preclude that possibility, as the Left-Cong unlike TMC, wasn't perceived to be strong enough to form a government and thus thwart the saffron surge. Thus BJP was certainly kept at bay but at the cost of reduction of both the Left and Congress to nil.

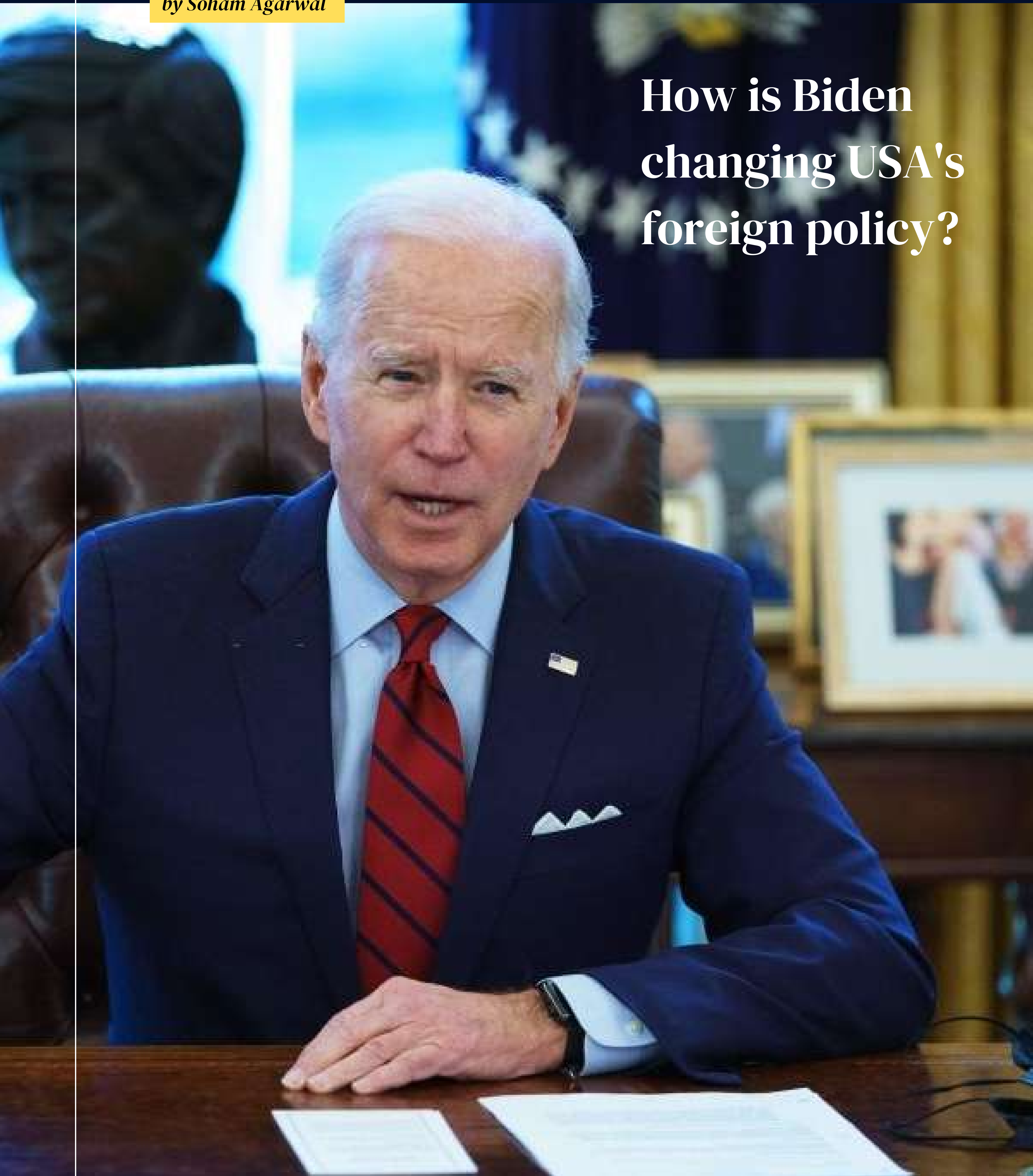
The pre-poll induction of Abbas Siddiqui-led Indian Secular Front(ISF) into the alliance to cut into Muslim votes didn't help either, with ISF winning just one seat and failing to aid alliance candidates elsewhere. Also, the induction of ISF, with the background of Siddiqui looming in people's minds, irked a certain part of the left-liberal secular support.

The newly-elected Assembly is also the first instance with the hitherto unthinkable absence of any Congress or Left MLA and how the two parties, especially the once invincible and entrenched Communists claw back to prominence, if not power, is to be seen in times to come.



- TMC +
- BJP +
- MORCHA
- GJM

How is Biden changing USA's foreign policy?



📍 U.S. President Joe Biden signs executive actions in the Oval Office of the White House on January 28, 2021 in Washington, DC. President Biden signed a series of executive actions Thursday afternoon aimed at expanding access to health care, including re-opening enrollment for health care offered through the federal marketplace created under the Affordable Care Act.

The foreign policy of each country is based on the national interests of that country, But in the 21st Century, there have been comprehensive changes in the mode of determining these national interests. In IR there is a tendency of changing the allies and enemies of a country but its national interests remain eternal. The national interests of a country are determined by various factors like the country's recent past, its geo-polity, geographical location, and the concurrent needs of the country. Apart from this, there is an important factor in determining the priorities and national interests of the country and that is the mindset and ideology of the leaders and powerheads of a country.

Owing to his America First Policy, the 45th US President Donald Trump (2017-21) made several changes in the foreign policy of the USA. His careless and eccentric statements and senseless acts aroused resentment among the allies of the country. Before Trump, America had been acting as an effective player in the issues like coordination between the countries to maintain a law-based Global Order by acting as a leader in the maintenance of democratic values and human rights, Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Climate change, terrorism, etc. But this American First Policy of the Trump Administration started confining this global leader position of America, resulting in a dent in the image of America and its effects all

all over the world. The resulting Power Vacuum is tried to be filled by the rising Communist Power-The People's of Republic China. Apart from this a type of uncertainty also sowed in the allies of the USA, resulting in imbalance and uncertainty on the Global Level and shake in the rule-based International System. Election Night on the 3rd November 2020, and the upcoming weeks proved to be a high voltage drama in America and the World. From carelessness in fighting with Covid pandemic to the violence of Capitol Hill, Trump's policies led America to divide.


Throughout this period, the newly elected President Joe Biden adopted a patient, mature and statesman-like posture emphasising the unity of the nation and focusing on revamping the US economy and dealing with the pandemic. Throughout the post-election period, Biden highlighted the necessity of a united and imaginative approach to the nation's problems. This was also the strategy President Biden wanted to adopt regarding the conduct of American foreign relations. Unlike Donald Trump, Biden made his utmost deliberate effort to reach out to many of America's

closest allies in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

So between all this chaos when Joe Biden took over the presidential charge with his colleague and famous Human Rights activist Kamala Harris on Feb 20, 2021, the world took a sigh of relief. In his very first declaration regarding the Foreign Policy of the country, Joe Biden gave the slogan "America is back, Diplomacy is back", indicating towards the end of the "America First" policy of his predecessor. He promised the world that the Biden administration intends to steer a cooperative, multilateral, and much more stable and predictable course. It wishes to engage with both allies and foes and is highly unlikely to pursue an isolationist, protectionist, or semi-authoritarian policy. Joe Biden has promised, for instance, to convene a global "Summit of Democracy" during his first year in office.

"Before Trump, America had been acting as an effective player in the issues like **coordination between the countries to maintain a law-based Global Order**"



 US Secretary of State A. Blinken (R) meets Prime Minister of Israel Netanyahu (L) in Tel Aviv, Israel on May 25, 2021.



Europe is an area where Joe Biden has been diametrically opposite to Trump's foreign policy ideas.

TRANS-ATLANTIC RELATIONS

In Trump's regime, the US-Europe relationships deteriorated to almost an unprecedented extent. But now it's been 5 months since the Biden administration is working and the rumours of the death of US-Europe relationships now appear to be greatly exaggerated. A full-throttled U.S. diplomatic reset with the European Union is well underway to repair and rebuild damaged ties after Donald Trump's presidency. Unlike Trump, Biden will not try to divide the Europeans to weaken the European Union, thinking that it would give the US more advantage in US-EU trade negotiations, which Trump has mistakenly believed. He is aware of the weight that the European (and other) allies bring to the table and how this strengthens America's standing and influence in global affairs a great deal. He may also attempt to revive the negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which started in the Obama administration and was soon abandoned by Trump. Unlike

Trump, who frequently lambasted NATO and predominantly viewed the EU as a competitor and a "foe," Biden and his advisers have gone out of their way to reaffirm strong U.S. commitment to Europe and seek to display emotional intelligence. Ticking one more diplomatic box, United States Secretary of State-Antony Blinken, has already participated in the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels in February 2021, where a wide range of topics were discussed, in two NATO ministerial meetings, and in the G7 ministerial meeting in London in person. Apart from this, re-entering the Paris climate agreement and ongoing efforts to salvage the Iranian nuclear agreement, Biden has already re-joined the World Health Organization and joined the COVAX global vaccine initiative, restored U.S. funding to the UN Population Fund, lifted Trump-era Sanctions on International Criminal

Court officials, re-entered multilateral arms control arrangements with Russia, and re-engaged in a multilateral forum such as the G7 and the G20.

Middle-East

The Middle East is one of the serious challenges that Biden and his foreign policy team have to face now. It was not the same Middle East that Biden had left 4 years ago with the end of the Obama administration. There are new equations and aspects that have been arising over there in the past 4 years in Trump's Regime. Here it can be said that it is one of the areas of Trumps' Foreign Policy success. But now the new president needs to focus on the relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

During Trump, radical changes were made like the Abraham Accord and rumours of Secret Security Cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran; these are some of the things to focus on. Moreover, the Trump administration reflected a deep shift in American policy. He tried to become more neutral in the cases of the Middle East and tried to unite countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia, against Iran. Now Biden wants to resume the Nuclear Peace deal with Iran, confronting the confederacy of Israel and Saudi Arabia and UAE. Regarding Israel, it intends to accept the Abraham Accord and also stick to shifting the US embassy to Jerusalem and also it is not going to undo the recognition of Golan Heights as Israeli territory. But he criticized

the neglect of the Palestine Question and also not supporting Israel openly in the current struggle between Israel and Hamas in Gaza Strip.

Regarding Iran, as stated above, Biden intends to revive the nuclear peace deal and also lift out the economic sanctions that were imposed by the Trump Administration. Though the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in January 2020 by the US and the killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in late November 2020 have poisoned the atmosphere and empowered the hardliners in Tehran, however, Tehran's increasingly desperate economic situation may be a decisive factor in the success of any renewed nuclear negotiations. Regarding Syria and Iraq, it intends to focus on fighting with ISIS and Al-Qaeda but is not likely to increase its military in either country. Regarding Afghanistan, the new administration has stuck to the withdrawal of troops from the country. America would also play a role in the democratic transition of Afghanistan.

Relations with Saudi Arabia are a matter of serious concern for the new administration. Though Saudi Arabia's strategic importance as one of the major allies for the country will affect the country, Biden may have second thoughts about the supply of large and sophisticated military technology to the country but the issue of Human rights may become a contentious issue in this.

From above it can be clearly stated that the new administration, unlike Trump, won't create a power vacuum in the middle east. .

Though America's policy has always mentioned that it wants to maintain peace in the region, it is not going to impact the supremacy of the USA in the region. The new trends show that the USA may not be going to support Israel, as openly as Trump did, and also not going to neglect the question of Palestine. The Policy to stop Iran from getting the Nuclear Weapon will continue. The president is also keen to revive the Iranian Nuclear Deal (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). Overall the USA is not going to lose its effect, creating a Power Vacuum there and the national interests of the country will be a top priority.

"Tehran's desperate economic situation may be a decisive factor in renewed nuclear negotiations"

INDIA, CHINA AND QUAD

India has an important role to play in the US foreign policy and there has been continuous improvement in the Indo-US relationships from the regimes of Bill Clinton, George W Bush, Barack Obama and then Donald Trump. Even the new

president Joe Biden has been in favour of a strong Indo-US partnership as senator since the decade 1970. He also wrote a letter to the then US president George W. Bush in 2001, to lift off the sanctions imposed on India after the Pokhran Nuclear Tests. He also had a significant contribution to the successful completion of the Indo-US Nuclear Deal in 2008.



U.S. President George W. Bush (R) welcomes India's Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee to a meeting in the Oval Office, 2008

But there were also some apprehensions in India regarding the new president Joe Biden.

While showing his diplomatic immaturity, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried to strengthen the support of the Indian Diaspora, for the then US President Donald Trump, by giving the slogan "Abki Baar, Trump Sarkaar" (This time Trump Government) – improvising the popular slogan of BJP "Abki Baar, Modi Sarkaar" (This time, Modi Government) during Lok Sabha elections in India, addressing an event, named "Howdy, Modi!", of more than 50,000 Indian diaspora at Huston in September 2019. This arose resentment among the democrats in the USA and they called it a senseless interference of India in the domestic politics of the USA. Similarly, as the election of Indian origin Kamala Harris as the Vice-President of the USA created a festive atmosphere in

India, on the other hand, Mrs Harris's strict stance on the issues like Kashmir, Human Rights etc. in the past, also gave rise to many apprehensions in the diplomatic circles.

But after analysing the past 5 months of the Biden administration, it appears most of the apprehensions were baseless. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, in a conversation with his Indian Counterpart S. Jaishankar, re-affirmed the growing US-India partnership and discussed issues of mutual concern, including COVID-19 vaccination efforts, regional developments, and next steps in expanding bilateral ties. He also highlighted India's role as a pre-eminent U.S. partner in the Indo-Pacific and the importance of working together to expand regional cooperation, including through the Quad.

The Biden Administration has strongly opposed China's infiltration into the Ladakh region and putting military pressure on India. President Biden himself has described China as a threat to world peace.

Proposed in 2007 by the then Japanese PM Shinzō Abe, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) between the countries like USA-India-Japan-Australia, caught pace in the Trump administration and the first meeting of the foreign ministers of these countries was held in 2019. On the other hand, the organising of a virtual meeting of these QUAD countries by the Biden administration on 12th March 2021, has taken this group to new heights. In this conference, free shipping under international laws, the establishment of peace and security and a new strategy



Xi Jinping & China remain major hurdles in Biden's foreign policy plans.

for the Covid Vaccination etc. in the Indo-Pacific region has been announced. Apart from this, some news also claims that China's aggressive policy on the Indo-China border and violent skirmishes between the two countries has also been discussed in this virtual conference. China is also concerned over this increasing cooperation between these QUAD countries and also states them as "Asian-NATO".

By giving importance to QUAD, it is clear that the Biden Administration will also continue to follow the policy of stopping China

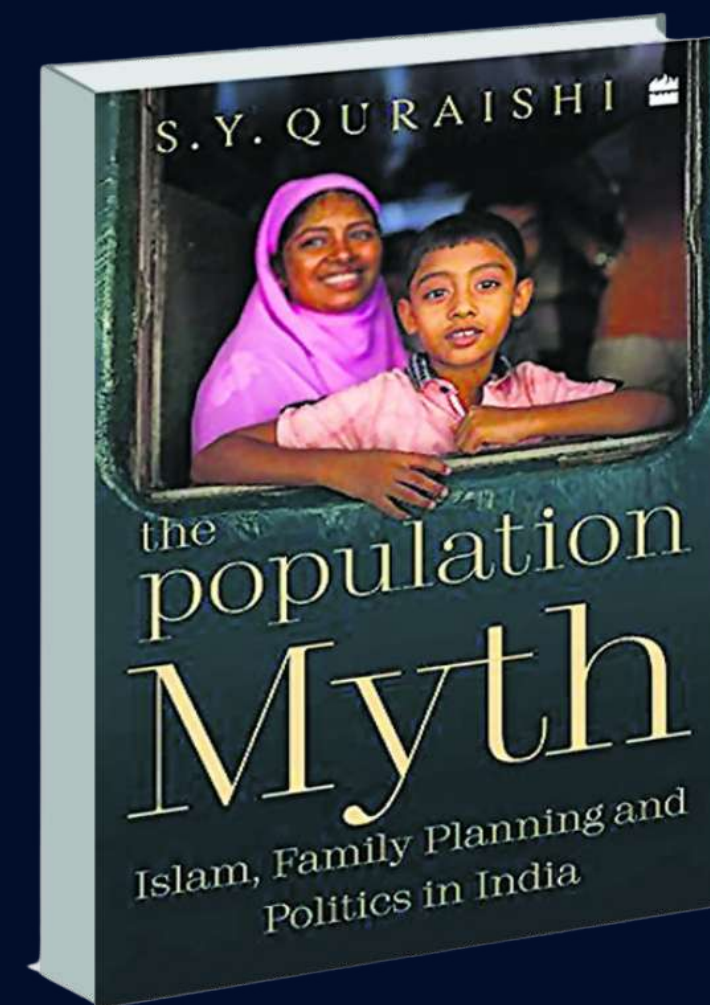
strictly (As there were some apprehensions that the new US government might be in favour of China).

In India, when the growing cases of Covid in April-May-2021 led to a widespread humanitarian tragedy, the USA government, though lately, lifted off the ban on the supply of raw materials required for Vaccine Manufacture. Apart from this the USA government also sent instant medical aid worth more than 80 million USD, to India. In this scenario, the USA is also supporting the demand for a patent-free Covid vaccine of India in order to fight Covid Pandemic.

Expert Talk

Interviewed by Riya Jeph
& Shubham Kumar

17th Chief Election Commissioner of India **DR SY QUARAISHI** on his book "The Population Myth"



Riya Jeph: Today we have the immense pleasure of interviewing Dr SY Quraishi, a former bureaucrat, he has also been the seventeenth Chief Election Commissioner of India, the first Muslim to achieve such a position.

His newest book 'The Population Myth' debunks the ideas and narratives surrounding the Muslim population's growth rate and their tendencies towards birth rate control and family planning. Will Muslims ever take over the Hindu population in our country? Are they inherently averse to family planning measures? Or are

all these assumptions part of the larger Hindu narrative which is being constructed by the right-wing forces in India against the Muslim population?

These are some of the topics and questions that we'll address in today's interview.

Dr Quraishi: Now today we are discussing my book, which is called 'The Population Myth: Islam Family Planning and Politics in

To view the full
video of the
conversation
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"A myth, which I also started believing is that there is an organised attempt by the Muslims to increase their population with the intention of capturing political power."

India'. This book is a result of 25 years of labour. Not that I just had to keep working on it but it was on my table and often I worked on it and every time nearing completion, a new set of data will come in and then I have to have a look at the whole thing once again to see whether the new data has changed my perspective. The data which I am mainly talking about is the National Family Health Survey. It is massive data generated by

the Government of India every five years.

Now, what are the “myths” that I’m talking about? There are mainly five myths that I will be dealing with. The first is that Muslims produce too many children and are disproportionately higher than all other communities. Let me deal with this right away. It is true that the Muslim birth rate is higher, but not the way it is projected by the right-wing. The impression created is suppose there are two children in a Hindu family, there will be ten in a Muslim family. Or if there are three in a Hindu family, there will be eleven or twelve, but this is not how it is. Even I believed it when I started researching it and I found that at no point in time, the difference was more than one child. Now does it not come to you as a surprise? Didn’t you have the impression that every Muslim family will have ten children, fifteen children? The second myth is out of the same thing that the Muslim acceptance of family planning was the lowest. But who was the second lowest? Let’s not forget that they were the Hindus. So if Muslims were making a mistake, or if they were being anti-national as also mentioned in the narrative then the second most unpatriotic were Hindus! Will that be the right thing to believe?

Riya Jeph: This mention of myths and narratives surrounding the Muslim population brings me to your interview for the Indian Express, which you gave when your book was initially published, so there you confessed that 25 years ago, you used to believe in these narratives. How is it that

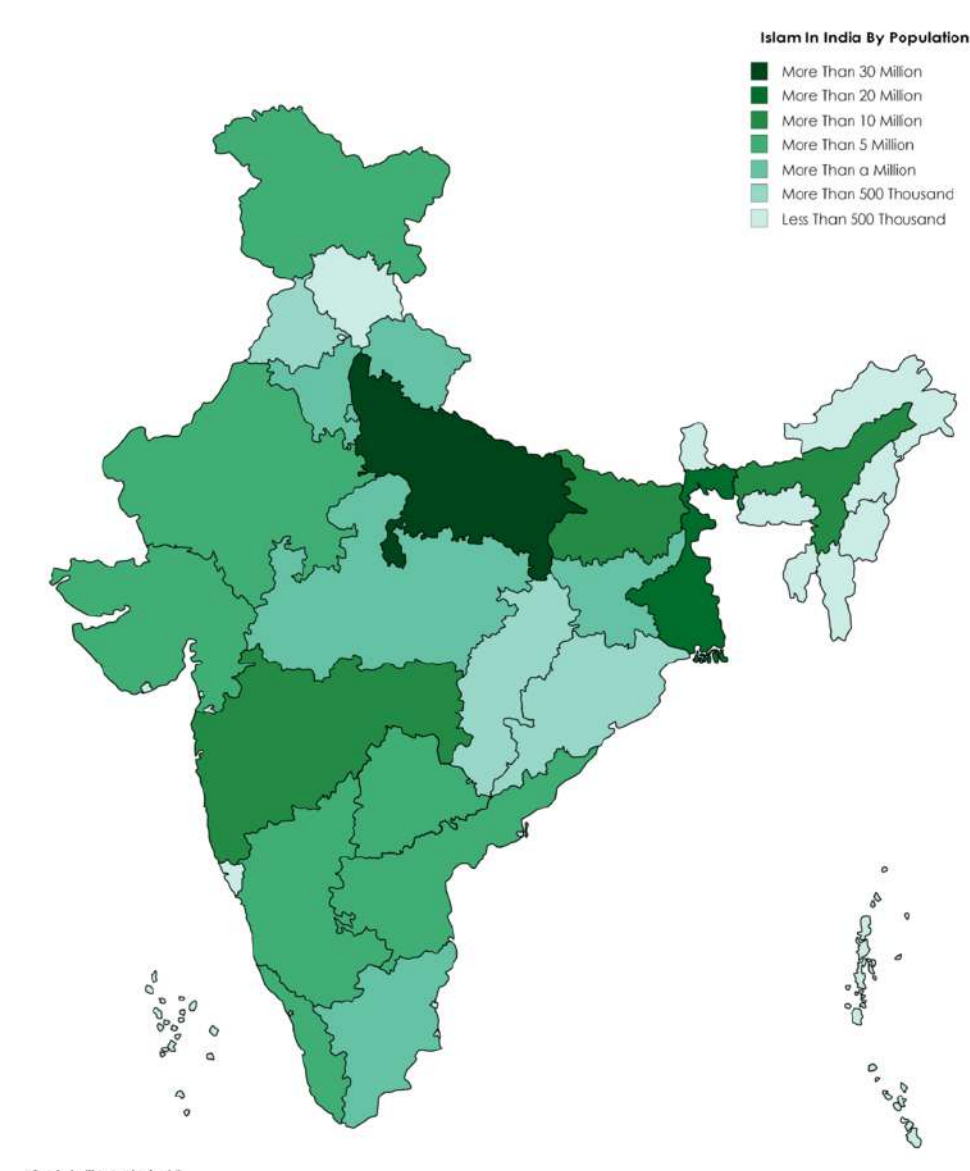
such narratives are created against a particular sect of the population, and how come you, despite being a Muslim yourself believed in such a narrative 25 years ago?

Dr Quraishi: The fact that every other day we read something about this or hear something about this is because this was the narrative that was being spread very deliberately, as a matter of policy. The second myth was that the Muslim rate of growth is disturbing the demographic proportions and this now to a certain extent is true in the sense that after partition in 1951, the first census after independence, the Hindu

“ It is true that the Muslim birth rate is higher, but not the way it is projected by the right-wing.”

proportion of the population was 84 percent and the Muslims were 9.8 per cent. Now, this has disturbed a little because from 84, Hindus are now at 79.8%, and this has got distributed among the Christians, Jains, Buddhists and everybody

else. The Muslim population proportion has gone up from 9.8 to 14.2. But after that actually, this proportion change has stopped because Muslims for the last 20 or 30 years or so have been adopting family planning faster than the Hindus. I told you earlier that the gap was never more than one child. Now it has come down to less than half a child, it has come



to 0.48. The gap is narrowing because Muslims are adopting family planning faster than Hindus.

The third myth, which I also started believing is that there is an organised attempt by the Muslims to increase their population with the intention of capturing political power. Now that was wrong. That has turned out to be wrong because I had asked a friend of mine, who was the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, Prof. Dinesh Singh, who is a great mathematician. I gave him my data and said, “Professor just tell me in how many years Muslims will surpass the Hindu population”, and he made a mathematical model for me, which is published here in the book. He said, “Forget about it, it will never happen. Not in sixty years, not in six-hundred years never because the base of Muslims

is so small and Hindus are so much larger.” Another fact that will come to you as a surprise, at the time of independence in the 1951 census, the number of Hindus were 30 crores more than the Muslims. Now despite the higher birth rate of Muslims, the gap is now 80 crores, and in the coming years, it is going to increase. So, finally, I finish with the four-five myths that I am dealing with. Now to address polygamy; the impression was created that Muslims have 4 wives and twenty or forty children. A very top leader of the country gives statements like “Hum paanch hamare pachchis ” or “ hum char humare chaalis ”. These are the slogans that we’ve heard all the time. This is a total myth though; at three-four levels this is a myth. Number one, the actual number of polygamists among the Muslims is the least of all. In fact, one survey of Government of India in 1975, according to which every community in India has some polygamy



including the Hindus. In fact, the tribes which are never Muslims, had 15%, then Buddhists, Jains, then Christians, then Hindus 5.8 and Muslims 5.7. The least polygamous were the Muslims.

Riya Jeph: Muslim personal laws allow them to enter into a polygamous relationship, whereas it is banned in Hinduism. So how come Hindus tend to be more polygamous than Muslims, according to the data cited by you?

Dr Quraishi: Well, see the Hindus and all other communities were banned from polygamy in 1955 and the data which I am talking about is a Government of India survey of 1975, twenty years after the Act. But the point I’m trying to make is while polygamy is constitutionally allowed by the Indian Constitution, the Muslims are the least polygamous. Now if I’m not polygamous, why am I ready to die for it? If there is a demand for a ban on polygamy, I think Muslims should accept it because if you’re not actually practising it then why fight for it. The condition is that you can marry more than one but provided you will treat them equally. I say that actually there are not one but two conditions, because you have to see the

"While polygamy is constitutionally allowed by the Indian Constitution, the Muslims are the least polygamous."

context. There is only one verse in the Quran which says you can marry two, three or four. Now the context is that Allah is talking about the orphans and the widows and he's saying that treat them fairly, treat them with justice, do not misappropriate their property, don't replace them, don't substitute their good thing with your bad thing and the best way to do justice to it is to marry from among them two, three or four. I'd like to mention that even the Muslims probably feel that Islam is against family planning and non-muslims definitely believe that, even Muslims believe that. even I believed that frankly but when I studied the Quran and Hadis by myself, I found that Islam is not against family planning, in fact, Islam is the pioneer of the concept of family

" ...nowhere in the Quran, there's a prohibition of family planning or birth control."

planning. We may not be following it but Islam as a religion is a pioneer because 1400 years ago in the Quran there's a verse for young people- You should marry a man when you have the wherewithal to bring up a family. And now one man went to the Prophet and he said that the Quran says that I should marry when I have the wherewithal but I am a poor man. I don't have the wherewithal but I have sexual needs, what should I do? So the Prophet then explained to him that you should marry because marriage keeps you away from looking at other women with lust. When you have the means you should marry and till you are in a position to support a family you should resolve to fast because fasting suppresses sexual desire. So there's an injection in the Quran, then there's an explanation of the Prophet. To me, together they are proclamations of family planning and I'll finish here. There's Hadis, Hadis is whatever the Prophet said or was reported to have done as seen by others. So somebody went to the Prophet and he said I am making children and I am tired of them and I want to practise family planning by following 'Al-Azl' which is the withdrawal method. And he says that although I want to do that, I don't want any more children but a Jew is saying that it is minor .

infanticide. So the Prophet says that the Jew is lying, which means that it is not infanticide- if you want to go ahead, go ahead.

Shubham Kumar: The 17th verse of the 31st chapter in the Quran translates as 'do not kill your children for fear of want, we'll provide for them and for you, surely killing them is a great sin'. This is often interpreted as 'it is not a man who makes food but Allah, who settled you in the land and has been providing for you and will provide for those who will come after you.' What's your interpretation of this myth because it is believed that this verse goes against the movement of birth control?

Dr Quraishi: Now, nowhere in the Quran, there's a prohibition of family planning or birth control. All we have is interpretation. Now, interpretations of like the two verses that you mentioned, I have mentioned these two verses plus many more to the same effect that you are mentioning. They are all mentioned here (showing his book). There are only interpretations for or against family planning and now this was actually against female infanticide. You know the era, Pre-Islamic era of the Jahiliyyah age or age of ignorance ; they used to

bury their girls alive! They used to kill their girls! Now it is something that is happening unfortunately even today in the form of infanticide and foeticide. Now, that verse came in that context that- do not kill your daughters and the excuse they used to give was that 'I have too many children', 'I am very poor' they used to kill not their son but their daughters. This Ayat came in that context that- do not kill in the name of poverty or affordability because if they are born we will provide for them, we'll take care of them. This was the context. As I say these are basically the interpretations which are being made, positive and negative. Now you mentioned the right thing but what about the verse which says that only when we have the wherewithal, you should marry. What about that? This is very specific. It's talking about marriage whereas you are talking about, you know, killing of the children particularly daughters. So, this verse is specific to marriage: don't marry until you can bring up a family; until you have the means to look after the family.

Riya Jeph: Factors like literacy rate, age at marriage, influence the TFR. If we look at the data and compare it with that of women in other religions, Muslim women are at the bottom in workforce participation, they get pregnant at an early age, they have the lowest net attendance ratio at middle and higher school compared to women from other religions, they have the lowest literacy rate. So Muslim women tend to be at the bottom of most developmental indicators. Is this because of



religious values in Islam or there are other reasons?

Dr Quraishi: Now there are three factors mainly- one is literacy (particularly of girls), second is income and third is delivery. Now, these three lead to marriage getting delayed and if there's literacy, there will be more income. So there's an interplay of factors, now unfortunately and sadly this is true that despite Islam's emphasis on education, Muslims are the least educated and their girls particularly so, which is a very unfortunate situation and it's for Muslims to introspect and think about it. You know the very first word of the Quran which reveals the Prophet is 'Iqra'. 'Iqra' means read or recite oh Prophet! In the name of Allah, and there is a hadith on the Prophet that education for both, boys and girls is compulsory. Acquire education even if you have to go to China. Now, why will anybody go to China to acquire an education? What education? Not "quranic education" for sure. So, the fact that Islam emphasises education but Muslims are the least educated is a matter of concern which the Muslim community should be worried about. And I have highlighted the fact that we have to focus on the education of the girls because as the literacy grows the number of

children goes down, and as the income grows, the number of children goes down and with service delivery...so obviously you focus on these three...and all three are secular concepts, there is no religion here, as you point it out.

So we have to focus. Otherwise, we are barking up the wrong tree if we have not diagnosed the cause of backwardness. How will we treat it? Therefore, having diagnosed the cause of backwardness, you have to deal with this backwardness and work on these issues.

Riya Jeph: How come despite having good religious teachings in Quran, Muslims couldn't keep up with other religions, like what could be the possible reason or does it still remain undiagnosed and we have to research further?

Dr Quraishi: No, no. It is undiagnosed in the sense that Muslims should themselves have an enquiry into this that why when the religion imposes the duty of education for girls, why aren't you giving it to them? Why is there a gap between Islamic teachings and Islamic practice? That needs to be studied. But again there is an interplay of facts because one

reason for Muslim backwardness in literacy and education is their poverty, they cannot afford to send their children to schools, in fact, far from sending them to schools they need 6 or 8yrs of children to start working, helping their parents in work and earning activities so they are withdrawn from school and sent to work, all these facts need to be seen and education must get the top priority, which is what one of my main recommendation in the book is.

Riya Jeph: Don't you think there is religion as a factor as well because there are madrasas everywhere and Muslim children are enrolled into them, rather than their parents having them enrolled into govt schools, so should we start a discussion in the Muslim community to soften the clutches of religion from the children and move them forward towards modern education of science and English, move them away from *madrasas*, if they are not helping as we are seeing right now.

Dr Quraishi: Yes, there is truth in what you mentioned, number one that *madrasa* is an Arabic word for a pathshala, just the same place which you may call school in English, pathshala in Hindi, madrasa in Arabic and Urdu.

It's an Arabic word, so madrasa is much misunderstood, the madrasa is where the darsa is given, the root of this word is da-ra-sa, darsa means lesson- where teaching is done, now madrasas were working when there were no primary schools, madrasas were the first to come up with, in every village,

there will be a mosque, that mosque also started enrolling students and started giving them education, it is not a competitor for a government school or a normal school.

Now you may be going to the normal school but at the same time, we go on to study the Quran, every child is supposed to learn the Quran, to read the Quran, learn to read it once. where will he read it? Is it taught in the government school? The private school? No. So, that is why the need for madrasa comes. Otherwise, my own children, we hired a maulvi to come to our home and teach them the Quran. My daughter lives in London, she hired a maulvi in London to come home and teach the children.

Those who cannot afford to hire a private tutor, send their children to the madrasa.

And madrasa is nothing but where there is teaching of Quran and also normal teaching, the primary school teaching, the language. Also, I learned Urdu, the first 6 months or a year in a madrasa, which was owned by my father, my grandfather in fact. So, we learn there and as soon as you grow up, you go to a normal school, so this madrasa is grossly misunderstood.

Now the second point you raised that why is it a religious factor in the mind of Muslim scholars? I did a primary survey also for this book in Hyderabad, Lucknow and in Alwar district which is in Rajasthan and continues to be an area of Mewat and Gurgaon and Faridabad. And I found that 75% of the people said that Islam is against family planning, we asked

them why is it that you have too many children? They say this is because of our religion which prohibits family planning. That is the ignorance which is penetrating the mind of these people; so we asked them who told you that? They say, the local maulana, the local Imam. So we went to the local Imam and asked, "Why are you against family planning?" He said because religion is against it. I said, tell us where Islam is prohibiting, he had no idea.

So just learning vague feeling that Islam is against it, without actually your knowledge. I have tried to throw this book to create a resource material that should be taught to *maulana*, from the Quran, from the *hadith*, for the girls' education that Islam treats girls and boys equally. I have given, in my book, several verses from the Quran which talk of equality of men and women in the same breath and in Islam, the Quran says women have the same rights as men, same functions as men, so repeatedly the equality is asserted by the Quran and by the *hadith*, which could be the reason that the female infanticide, the foeticide among the Muslims is less. You know, one possible positive figure about Muslims is

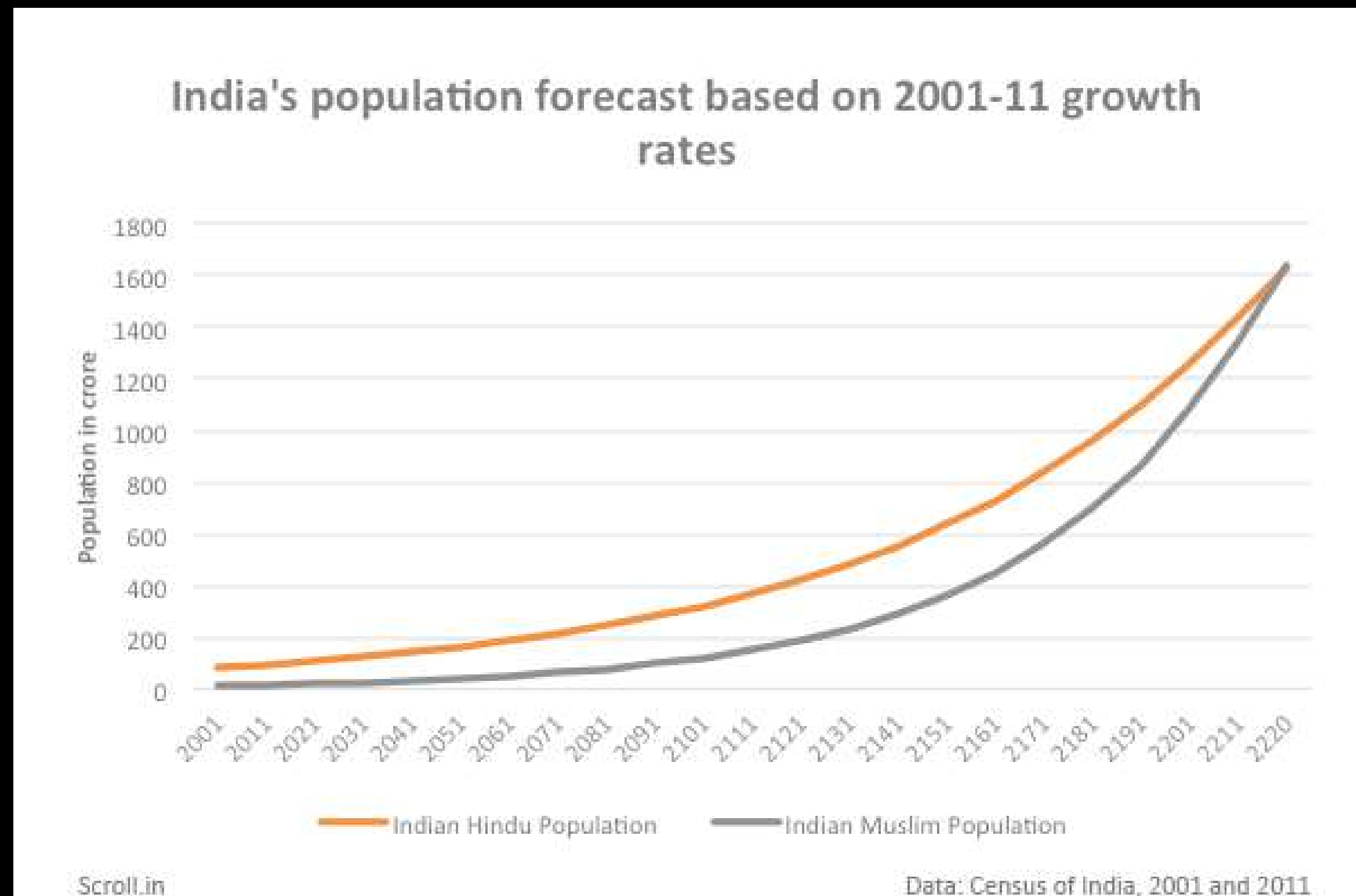
that the gender ratio among Muslims is better than other communities, particularly the Hindu. Now, the Hindu's gender ratio is 939 girls per 1000 men, for the Muslims, it is 951 because foeticide is less, maybe because some people have read, heard about the concept of equality of girls and practice it. In fact, there is a hadith that "blessed is the man whose first child is a girl". In another hadith there are two girls, in fact, there is one that says if there are three daughters, that person will enter paradise shoulder to shoulder with me. So you know, these are the kind of hadith and verses which may be keeping Muslims from female foeticide.

Riya Jeph: Most of the Indian population especially the Hindus, see Islam as it is being presented by the maulanas that you talked about when you went to Alwar, who were the orthodoxies among the Islam population and who

**"...the Hindu's
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were against education and family planning measures. The orthodoxies in the Islamic population are misinterpreting the Quran for the masses and somehow that is not working well for the population. Do you think something should be done about that, maybe a discussion should start?

Dr Quraishi: Yes, very good point, very good suggestion that the quality of these maulanas should be evaluated by some Muslim clerical body itself, whether they are suitably educated in the Quran and in the Hadith, or they are misinformed and ignorant so that need to be audited and there should be a constant check on their knowledge otherwise they will be spreading misinformation. For instance, this disinformation among Muslims that they should not take Covid vaccination. Now this is quite widespread, they had even opposed the polio vaccination because of the lack of trust in the society and in the government, the polio drops were totally attacked. 'you give it to Muslim children they will become sterile and it is a measure to control their population', there is a movement organised or spontaneous against covid vaccination which is very uneducated and unfortunate. So leadership should come forward and dispel these myths.



And they are coming forward and asking people to follow the Government of India guidelines and make themselves safe.

Shubham Kumar: There are a number of statements in circulation like "Ham 5 hamare 25", and our Prime minister linking population with patriotism. And also the "organised conspiracy" (as per right-wing) to take over the Hindu population. How would you address people with such a mentality and what is the truth behind this particular myth? How should we as students and responsible citizens of India, react to this?

Dr Quraishi: Yes I heard the Prime Minister say this in his Independence Day speech from the Red Fort and he linked it with patriotism in a different manner and in my mind, it is a very wrong thing to say. And if he used this in our context that Muslims produce the most number of children, they are unpatriotic but then don't forget who is the second-highest producer of children-Hindus, so are you saying that they are the second most unpatriotic and Muslims have 49% of family planning and Hindus 54%, and who is the most patriotic the Sikhs as

hey have 80% acceptance of family planning but these same guys call the Sikhs Khalistanis at a drop of a hat, so linking this with patriotism is absolutely absurd, to say the least.

Shubham Kumar: So sir according to you it is just a political stunt.

Dr Quraishi: Absolutely it is a stunt, totally political and ill-informed and I have to clarify something to both of you there is no Muslim rate or Hindu rate of population growth. If that was the case then in 24 states the Muslim family planning is better than of the Hindus in Bihar. If religion was a factor then all across the country the Muslim birth rate will be the highest but in Bihar, it's 4.11 and in Tamil Nadu, it is 1.74 and in 24 states the Muslim planning is better than the Hindus of Bihar so what will you call it a Hindu population rate or a Muslim population rate? In Sikkim, it's 1.11 and in Bihar 3.91.

Riya Jeph: If we look at it, the major reason why these narratives and myths exist around Muslims is that there are different personal laws for religions in India, and they somehow create a sense of insecurity amongst people. Do you see UCC as a solution to put an end to narratives and myth surrounding the Muslim population? If we have the same law for everyone then there won't be any scope left to create baseless narratives about anyone.

Dr Quraishi: Good question, you know if you ask anyone why they are demanding UCC. If I ask you or your friend the answer would be for everyone there is a limitation of one wife, for Muslim there is no limitation, and there are many reasons to mention like property rights. Islam gave property rights in the 1400s and Hindus gave property right 40 to 50 years ago so what about that and if there is a common civil code we will go into larger issues. And personally, I am in favour of the common civil code but the demand is coming out of total insincerity and the ignorant narrative that every Muslim has four wives which is incorrect factually. If there is no polygamy, why do we need to ban it if it is hardly there in the country, so it is based on mistrust. The Muslims would likely to oppose it thinking Hindutva is indirectly being put on them and otherwise if you create knowledge with education which Shubham asked that "what should be the role of students?". It's to spread knowledge and provide information against disinformation and let people come to their own conclusion. And even I would like to debate that I

am making some sense. You should write articles on this and have debates in your college and that's how knowledge would spread and correct information must come out and let us reach our own conclusion. And my conclusion in the book is that Hindus and Muslims are at the same end of the spectrum and if Muslims are the most backward Hindus are the second most backward that is why their rates are the second-highest. And if we see family planning has become a success in India, 26 out of 29 states have come below the replacement rate, they have come down to 2.1 which means if two parents die, two children can take over and now we have only three states, we have to focus on Bihar, U.P and Madhya Pradesh and to a certain extent Rajasthan and if we continue this, there is no trouble to the Hindu community with the Muslim rate of growth.

Shubham Kumar: Family planning is a success in countries like Malaysia, Bangladesh, Iran etc but when it comes to India, it can not be considered a success amongst Muslims! What can be the probable reasons for that, and what solutions would you like to put forth?

Dr Quraishi: There are two things in my book. There is one chapter on family planning in dominant Muslim countries like Iran which has a much higher rate, even Bangladesh has overcome India and we have to see why. Then there is another chapter in the book on what is the attitude of different religions on family planning, so the way forward is

that we should educate Muslims on family planning and tell them to disagree with their *maulanas* if they oppose it as family planning is essential. There must be a staff, for example, if you come to me as a family planning worker and ask me why do you have 4 children and the person says because Islam says so; so are you equipped to answer me-no. Because you have not been trained, you must have a booklet in your hand and our faith leaders must have a seminar with them and send them to Iran and Indonesia so they can see their models and Friday prayers or khutba, family planning is being talked about. They'll take inspiration from them. We'll learn a lot. And by seeing what is happening in other countries as there is no compulsion for Iran to make family planning necessary but they are doing it and it is not against Islam. So this is a myth.

Riya Jeph: Thank you, sir. We had a great discussion with you and we hope you had a great time as well.

To view full video of the interview, [click here](#).



The Patent Crisis

By *Rahul Khullar*

With the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring B.1.617 (first originated in India) variant as “**Variant of Global Concern**” and India witnessing an unprecedented rise in SARS COV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) infections, one piece of advice that is being given to us from governments and medical experts is to shun ‘vaccine hesitancy’ and get inoculated as soon as possible to break the chain of transmission. It is deplorable that India being the largest manufacturer of vaccines globally, is not having enough doses to meet its domestic ends at the pace as thought out by the government at the commencement of the inoculation drive. Perhaps domestically, it might be due to policy paralysis, but internationally this shortage is due to the provision of ‘Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs)’. IPRs are of many types, but the most well known are copyrights, patents, trademarks and trade secrets. Today’s topic concerns patents and their waiver. Patents under **TRIPS** (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) agreement of WTO (World Trade Organisation) provides the patent owner (Patentee) the legit means to prevent others from making, using or

selling his/her invention for a limited period (usually 20 years). For instance, the AZD1222 vaccine co-developed by Oxford & Astrazeneca and patented by the duo. It is being manufactured by Serum Institute Of India (SII) under the name of Covishield. SII can manufacture it because patentees (Oxford & Astrazeneca) did a mutual agreement with SII and gave it a ‘Voluntary License’ with all the requisite expertise to produce Covishield jabs. In return, SII has to pay a royalty to the patentees (Oxford & AstraZeneca). In SII’s case, the royalty is 50% on net sales. If it’s selling a vial of Covishield at Rs.300, Rs.150 out of it would be paid to Oxford and AstraZeneca as royalty. This is due to the patents that in India, out of 3000 pharma companies with a strong network of over 10,500 manufacturing facilities, only two companies (Serum Institute Of India & Bharat Biotech International Ltd.) are presently manufacturing Covid-19 vaccines. The majority of the manufacturing capacities of Indian Pharmas are being disused, and the onus of inoculating 136.64 crore Indian citizens and providing commercial vaccine shipments internationally have been left over to these two companies overstraining them and creating a supply deficit.



 Adar Poonawalla, chief executive officer of Serum Institute of India Ltd., poses for photograph in Pune, Maharashtra, India

India-South Africa Waiver Proposal

On 2nd October 2020, sensing the exigency for a patent waiver, India and South Africa representing developing and low-income nations, pioneered the proposal of a waiver from certain provisions of the Trade-Related Aspects Of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The duo demanded that the WTO members should work unanimously to ensure that IPR such as patents, copyrights and industrial designs do not impede the timely access to affordable medical products, including vaccines and medicines essential to combat COVID-19. Many countries at that time were divided in their opinions, with the United States of America and the European Union (EU) being the primary opponents to the waiver proposal. But recently, Biden's administration, despite earlier vacillation, came in strong support of the waiver. As the west follows the USA, many changed their stances, like the EU and France from earlier being opposed to now a supporter of the proposal barring certain exceptions like Germany, which opposes the patent waiver on the grounds that it would disincentivize the pharmaceutical industry and will halt further medical innovations. But pragmatically, this is not the case as the waiver proposed is a temporary one (until the pandemic ends) and not of a permanent nature. Amid this challenging

situation, public health is sacrosanct and of paramount importance. We cannot endanger humanity over trivial financial losses of pharmaceutical giants. However, such a waiver can only be enforced if the final proposal, which will have to be reworked through discussion, is accepted by all the members of WTO given the consensus-based nature of the WTO.

Patent waiver not a Panacea

There are many bottlenecks in the process of expeditious vaccine manufacturing rather than merely waiving off the patents. We need to understand that waving off the patents and sharing the vaccine recipe and technological know-how are two different things. Even if patents are waived off, then also the other generic manufacturers would take substantial time to develop a new vaccine because patent waivers stipulate that anyone can produce a patented product without facing any legal suit from the patentee however it does not compel the patentee to disclose its trade secrets, technological know-how, and product recipe. Therefore to produce a patented vaccine, the generic manufacturers will need first to understand its composition, do reverse engineering, run the clinical trials from scratch and at last need to get regulatory approval as well, which is a rigmarole and would not serve the dire need of ramping up the vaccine and other Covid-19 related production at this critical stage.

Uncertainties & Alternatives

Despite the USA supporting the patent waiver, no one knows how long it will take for the WTO member states to reach a consensus given the complexity of the member states' issues and diversified opinions. At this time of public health emergency, we cannot afford to wait for a consensus to reach this will cost us many

dear lives.

The alternatives are, firstly, to issue Compulsory Licences (CLs) to generic manufacturers by paying a reasonable royalty to the patentee. This is one of the flexibility provided to all the WTO member States in the field of patent protection included in the WTO's agreement on intellectual property- the TRIPS agreement. Under it, the government allows someone else to produce a patented product without the patentee's consent or plans to use the patent-protected invention itself.

In the case of India, we also have section 92 of The Patent Act Of 1970 as well which empowers the central government to issue compulsory licences under three conditions:

1. There must be a national emergency
2. The requirement must be highly urgent.
3. Should be for public non-commercial use.

A lethal virus killing 4000+ people a day does qualify for all three. So theoretically, India can do this. In this way, India can circumvent the patent barriers and provide impetus to the vaccine and other Covid related diagnostic productions. But here also, the problem is the same as with patent waiver. The patentee cannot be compelled to share the trade secrets or technological know-how so still, it will take substantial time to produce a generic vaccine if we make it via reverse engineering. But this is in the hands of the nations to issue compulsory licenses, unlike patent waivers where WTO's member states have to decide unanimously. As everyone is

uncertain about the endgame of the pandemic, so governments should not delay any further in using such legit flexibilities. India, which is facing the dual threats of the virus and post virus recovery fungal infection, Mucormycosis aka Black fungus which has now been declared as an epidemic in many states and UTs, with its patented medicine viz. Amphotericin B running short of supply, Indian Government should not delay any further in invoking section 92 of The Patent Act Of 1970, i.e. 'Compulsory Licensing' and empower its credible pharmaceutical companies to produce generic drugs in abundance so that we could prevent any further deadly Covid waves. Invoking this provision will not only suffice the supply deficit but also help bring down the cost of such vaccines and medicines drastically. Although if we would have done it earlier, we could have saved many precious lives from this catastrophic second wave of Covid-19. But it's never too late. We should invoke it right away.

Secondly, to effectively use the provision of compulsory licensing in bringing the present ongoing crisis under control, nations must insist their respective patentees of Covid vaccines and other Covid related drugs to share their technological know-how, expertise and trade secrets with the world so that production could be ramped up. There must not remain any 'vaccine inequity' which could impede our target of achieving 80% global 'Herd Immunity' to end this pandemic.

Thirdly, we need to improve our supply-chains as well. Countries should not hoard vaccines or practice 'Vaccine Nationalism'. It has been noticed that many developed countries are sitting on the vaccine doses in far excess than required for their population. For instance, Canada has secured enough vaccines to inoculate its entire population five times. This approach is highly detrimental and promotes vaccine inequity which could certainly prolong the pandemic.

Fourthly, as India pioneered for TRIPS waiver at WTO last year, it must also pioneer by giving away the IPR and related expertise of its own indigenously produced 'COVAXIN' vaccine, which was co-produced by the government-owned Indian Council Of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Institute Of Virology (NIV) and manufactured by

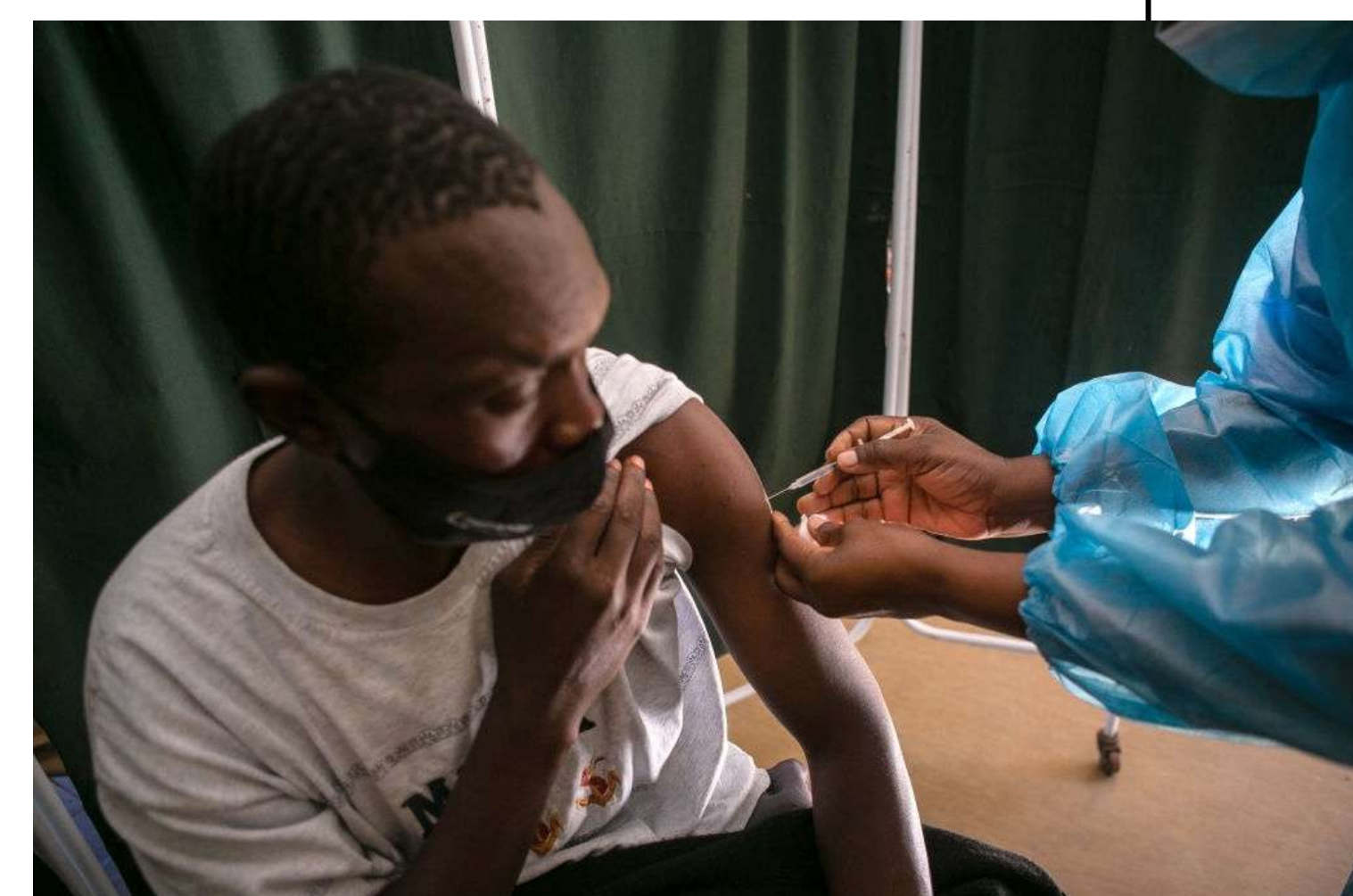
Bharat Biotech International Ltd. (BBIL). A "Public-Private Partnership". This will help India set a precedent in front of the International community so that the world could follow in India's footsteps.

World Concerns India

India having a colossal population, a deadly 'Variant Of Global Concern' (B.1.617) multiplying amidst its huge populace, with a slow vaccination drive in proportion to its vast population, the steep trajectory of daily Covid-19 cases and acute shortage of vaccines and other Covid related diagnostics is a matter of concern for the world in general and India in particular. Such situations make future Covid waves inevitable. Nobody is safe until everyone is safe. In a country like India, which constitutes about 18% of the world population, it becomes indispensable to prevent somehow the deadly covid surge, which certainly would affect the world too. So if the virus beats India, the pain will be felt by the world as well. Hence it becomes crucial for India to lobby for patent waivers at the International and domestic level as well.



Representatives of various non-governmental and health sector organizations stage a demonstration to demand the removal of patents of anti-covid-19 vaccines from pharmaceutical companies in front of the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium on April 7, 2021.



A man gets his first jab of the Covaxin vaccine at a hospital on May 12, 2021 in Harare, Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was the first African country to approve the Covaxin Covid-19 vaccine, developed by Bharat Biotech International.





Peace in turbulence

A general view of the Dome of the Rock mosque at the Al-Aqsa mosques compound in the Old City of Jerusalem.





Israel & Palestine Explained.

BY ANIMA SINGH & PRIYANKA

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, often referred to as the 'World's Most Intractable Conflict'- has primarily arisen out of the claims made on same land by Jews as their biblical birthright and Palestinians who inhabited the region before the influx of Jews. On 6th May, the overlong conflict was renewed once again after Palestinians protested against an anticipated decision by the Israeli Supreme Court over the eviction of six Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah. This was followed by the storming of AL Aqsa Mosque by Israeli Police and a few days later, HAMAS and other

Palestinian groups fired rockets from Gaza into Israel which was retaliated by Israel. This continued until 21st May when Israel and HAMAS reached a truce after 11 days of fighting.

Marked by protests, rioting, rocket attacks on Israel by HAMAS and Israeli airstrikes aimed at devastating the Gaza Strip, the violence claimed the lives of at least 243 Palestinians with many reported injured.

This very recent and brutal development in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship is not spontaneous and can be better understood by knowing the contexts referring to the past of this seemingly interminable war.

Most of the Israeli History is known from the Hebrew Bible. King David had ruled the region in 1000 BCE and his son Solomon built the First Temple in Ancient Jerusalem which was later destroyed when the Babylonians annexed Jerusalem, taking control over Judah in 6th century BCE and the Jews were expelled to Babylon. This was followed by the reign of Emperor Cyrus who won over the Babylonians in 538 BCE in which, Jews were allowed to go back to Judah.

This is when the rebuilding of Solomon's temple took place and the Second

Temple was built. This temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE which marked the exile of Jewish people from their holy land. From 1517 to 1917, the Ottoman Empire ruled over much of West Asia including the region of Israel. During this time, the population of the region consisted of Muslims, Christians and Jews who lived in harmony and peace prevailed.

An Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist, Theodor Herzl in the 19th century disseminated the idea that Jews need to have their own state and should leave Europe for the same. This idea of Jewish Nationalism came to be called Zionism. The idea attracted Jews from Europe where they were facing discrimination and in order to create a Jewish State, many Jews bought land in Palestine and started settling there. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration was announced by the British to establish Jewish homeland in the state of Palestine, which hid behind it the motive of garnering support from the Jews in the First World War. The aim of creation of Jewish Homeland was opposed by the Arabs claiming that it would lead to subjugation of Palestinians. After the First World War, British established a colony in Palestine which was called Mandatory Palestine following the League of Nations Mandate. When the Nazis gained power in Germany, many Jews fled to Palestine and their numbers increased significantly in the 1920s and 1930s which led to very bitter conflicts between the Arabs and Jews who saw the

inundation as an act of land grab. In 1936, Arabs revolted against the British and were suppressed with the help of Jewish Militias. After this clash, a limit was announced by the British on Jewish Immigration which was flouted during the Second World War as many Jewish Organizations helped in the illegal influx of Jews fleeing to save their lives into Palestine. Later in 1947, the question of Palestine's future was referred to the United Nations which voted to split the land into two countries.



📹 Palestinians clash with Israeli security forces as they prepare to demolish the house of Palestinian Mohammed Cabha who has confessed to the murder of French-Israeli settler Esther Horgen, in the West Bank village of Tura al-Gharbiya near Jenin, on February 10, 2021. (Photo by JAAFAR ASHTIYEH / AFP)

Israel was declared an independent state in 1948. Arabs saw it as a conspiracy to move them out of their land and opposed this new development bitterly but Israel emerged victorious against the Arab states and ended up occupying more land than previously envisaged in the UN partition plan. War made many Palestinians flee from Israel and settle in refugee camps near it's borders which is how the Palestinian refugee crisis began and the formation of Palestine Liberation Organization (terrorist organisation, PLO) took place. In 1967, a Six-Day war erupted which happened to be between

Israel and the Arab Countries. This war has particular significance in moulding the circumstances in the form we are witnessing now as after the war, Israel captured Golan Heights from Syria, Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip from Egypt and also took control over West Bank & East Jerusalem from Jordan. Gaza and the West Bank together are called 'Occupied Territories' after the 1967 war. In 1987, hundreds of people were killed resulting from the uprising of Palestinians against the Israeli Occupation of Gaza and West Bank which is called the First Intifada (Arabic for 'Shaking Off'). This was followed by peace talks and the Oslo Peace Accord was signed in 1993 & a second accord was signed in 1995. After the signing of these records, Palestinian authority took control over some regions in Israel but peace didn't last for long and Second Intifada was launched in 2000. In 2005, HAMAS, a Sunni Islamist militant group won a majority in elections after which frequent rocket strikes have flared up by HAMAS on Israel and retaliatory action followed by the latter which eventually have led to violent & ferocious invasion of the Palestinian territory and the killing of people on both sides.

"Israel was declared an independent state in 1948. Arabs saw it as a conspiracy to move them out of their land..."



The Question of Land

The conflict emanates from the question of land and now revolves around this territorial occupation of Gaza Strip and West Bank by the Israeli forces. Protests against these occupations and the response which they have received has been very brutal and the situation appears to be perplexing as both Jews and Palestinians keep up with claiming their right over a single geographical region. With this question of land there are other prominent issues which have played a role in some way or the other to

ignite the already blazing conflict like the regional security, Border issue, Water rights, control of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and issue of Palestinians' freedom of movement along with other multiple small and big issues which inflict stress on the region. At present, Gaza is ruled over by HAMAS, Gaza's borders tightly controlled by Israel and Egypt and the West Bank is administered by Israel. The demands made by Palestinians and Israelis, which are in no congruence even at a single point, are the centres or the core of this continual war. Palestinians want Israel to give them the authority over the West Bank and Gaza for establishment of the Palestine State with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Independent state of Israel. Palestinians also wish that the refugees who lost their homes in 1948 should be made able to come back. On the other hand Israel has

different demands. They want sovereignty over Jerusalem, recognition of Israel as a Jewish state and the return of Palestinian refugees to Palestine and not in Israeli territory. Tensions run high particularly in Gaza, the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem where both Palestinians and Israelis reside.

A Multiplayer Conflict

The Israel-Palestine state of affairs are enmeshed in the long drawn out interests of regional and international players. It seems as if the Middle-East zone is not just a stretch of land with its serene relief features, but rather a geopolitical game board with critical players. The incumbent prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu has been firm on Israel's response in the precarious situations. In view of some analysts, the seesawing internal politics of Israel which was in doldrums for long, may witness the reopening of channels for Netanyahu's revival. Indubiously, Israel considers its military retaliation to the almost daily rocket attacks from Hamas ruled Gaza as legitimate. Benjamin Netanyahu has even argued that if Israel were to put down its arms, there would be no more Israel and if the Arabs were to put down their arms there would be no more war. Presently, the most tendentious player in the wrangle is the organisation named HAMAS (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya). At its inception in 1987, during the first intifada, it was largely

humanitarian in nature with a separate military wing . However , its identity and activities have transformed over time and so has its Charter . Ismail Abdel Salam Ahmed Haniye, has taken lead in public messaging during the conflict. He is considered a close aide of Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Hassan Yassin , the father of HAMAS . This organisation with its capricious line of action overtook the popularity of Yaseer Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and has been the de facto ruler of Gaza since 2007. The Palestinian politics is in disarray with the Fatah as the rival party to HAMAS ruling from West Bank under Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Both the parties are at sword's point and ready to capitalise the situation in their favour. At this point it seems that HAMAS has grabbed the ongoing leadership crisis in Palestine by commandeering the present crisis leaving aside the Fatah led Palestinian Authority. It would be over simplification to think that the regional


players have been mute spectators amidst the stalemate . The Egyptian position has been seen as a pertinent one. Dennis Ross, a former US diplomat with expertise in the Middle East peace process suggests that the only ones who have real leverage on HAMAS right now are the Egyptians . This is true to the point that the Egyptian government sent mediators for ceasefire talks ,since the beginning of tensions . As per Palestinian news Agency Wafa , Mr Abbas met the Egyptian mediator to discuss the rebuilding of Gaza and internal relations. Egypt also shares a border with Gaza and has negotiated a ceasefire in

board like the UN ,EU ,Russia ,Turkey and so on . However , the intensity and significance of the role played have varied.

A Territorial Impasse

Israel lies on the shores of the Mediterranean and at the centre of the Middle East .It is bordered by Lebanon to the north , Egypt



 The Israeli Iron Dome missile defence system (L) intercepts rockets (R) fired by the Hamas movement towards southern Israel from Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip as seen in the sky above the Gaza Strip overnight on May 14, 2021. - Israel bombarded Gaza with artillery and air strikes on Friday, May 14, in response to a new barrage of rocket fire from the Hamas-run enclave, but stopped short of a ground offensive in the conflict that has now claimed more than 100 Palestinian lives. (Photo by ANAS BABA / AFP)

the past as well. The close proximity of Israel with the US is not a concealed fact . Over 3 billion dollars is sent as security assistance to Israel every year . President Joe Biden backed the Israeli's right to self defence , but changed his narrative after in-house pressure by Jewish lobby and party comrades coupled with the brazen human rights violations . Although the gulf countries like UAE and Bahrain had concluded Abraham Accords with Israel ,an uneasy diplomatic situation was witnessed due to the attacks on holy places. Qatar has had its own role because of the ties with HAMAS in bestowing financial assistance . Since time immemorial the Middle East has given the chance to many players to roll the dice on the

to the south and Syria and Jordan to the east. The territorial demands of the conflicting parties lie at the core of this labyrinthine dispute . The holy city of Jerusalem has passed various hands of occupation since the aeons and is the most perplexing point to deal with . The contention is beyond political as it involves a whole gamut of territorial ,historical , archaeology and above all emotional aspects. On one hand , the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent state which they aspire for and on and on the other hand, Israel regards the whole of Jerusalem as its capital. The UN



did not recognise the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza Strip in 1967, but the issue was neither resolved conclusively then and neither now. In reality, the territorial limits of Israel have been kept vague and undefined intentionally. The relations of Israel with its neighbours are also fraught with uncertainties over the border. Syria aspires to restore the status quo ante in Golan Heights. As Palestinian refugees and their descendants occupy the Gaza Strip, West Bank as well as Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, the relations of Israel with the above are antagonistic. The whopping number of Jewish settlements in several areas has made the life of Palestinians harrowing.

A Dickey Trail Ahead

Ostensibly, both parties have claimed victory in the latest round of fighting which ended inconclusively. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israeli forces had caused maximum damage to HAMAS with a minimum of casualties in Israel. Despite the appalling experiences of countless Palestinian

families, HAMAS also asserted that it was triumphant. It kept the fight on till the last moment. Some 300 rockets were fired on the 11th day against Israel. The unprecedented riots and protests both in occupied West Bank and Israeli cities during the Gaza attack manifest that the growing Palestinian resentment was tapped well by HAMAS. It has been reported that even Israel's Iron Dome was overwhelmed by the reinforcements of HAMAS. History has been the witness to the fact that promises in the Middle East are nothing but chimerical. While Israel claims an unconditional truce, HAMAS asserts otherwise. The prerequisites to ensure relative stability if not an absolute one in the region are many. A commendatory political condition and the feasibility of diplomatic channels need to be assessed. Evidently, the contentions at hand cannot be resolutely ameliorated even if the international community voice their concerns and states like India present their balancing opinion on the solution to the problem. The predicament in the region seems to take all the time in the world to reach a breakthrough. Amidst the knotty issue, the lives of innocent people are strangulated and this is something that needs expeditious redressal for the sake of humanity.



Smoke billows from Israeli air strikes in Gaza City, controlled by the Palestinian Hamas movement, on May 11, 2021. - Israel and the Islamist movement Hamas in Gaza exchanged heavy fire, killing at least 26 Palestinians and two Israelis, in an escalation sparked by violent unrest at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. (Photo by ANAS BABA / AFP)



A Palestinian demonstrator hurls rocks with a slingshot next to burning tyres during a protest by the border with Israel, east of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on May 10, 2021. (Photo by SAID KHATIB / AFP)



Palestinians stand next to a burning barricade during clashes with Israeli police officers during the holy month of Ramadan on May 8, 2021 in Jerusalem, Israel. Tensions continue in Jerusalem's Old City after clashes in Al-Aqsa Mosque where dozens of Palestinians were seriously injured. (Photo by Amir Levy/Getty Images)

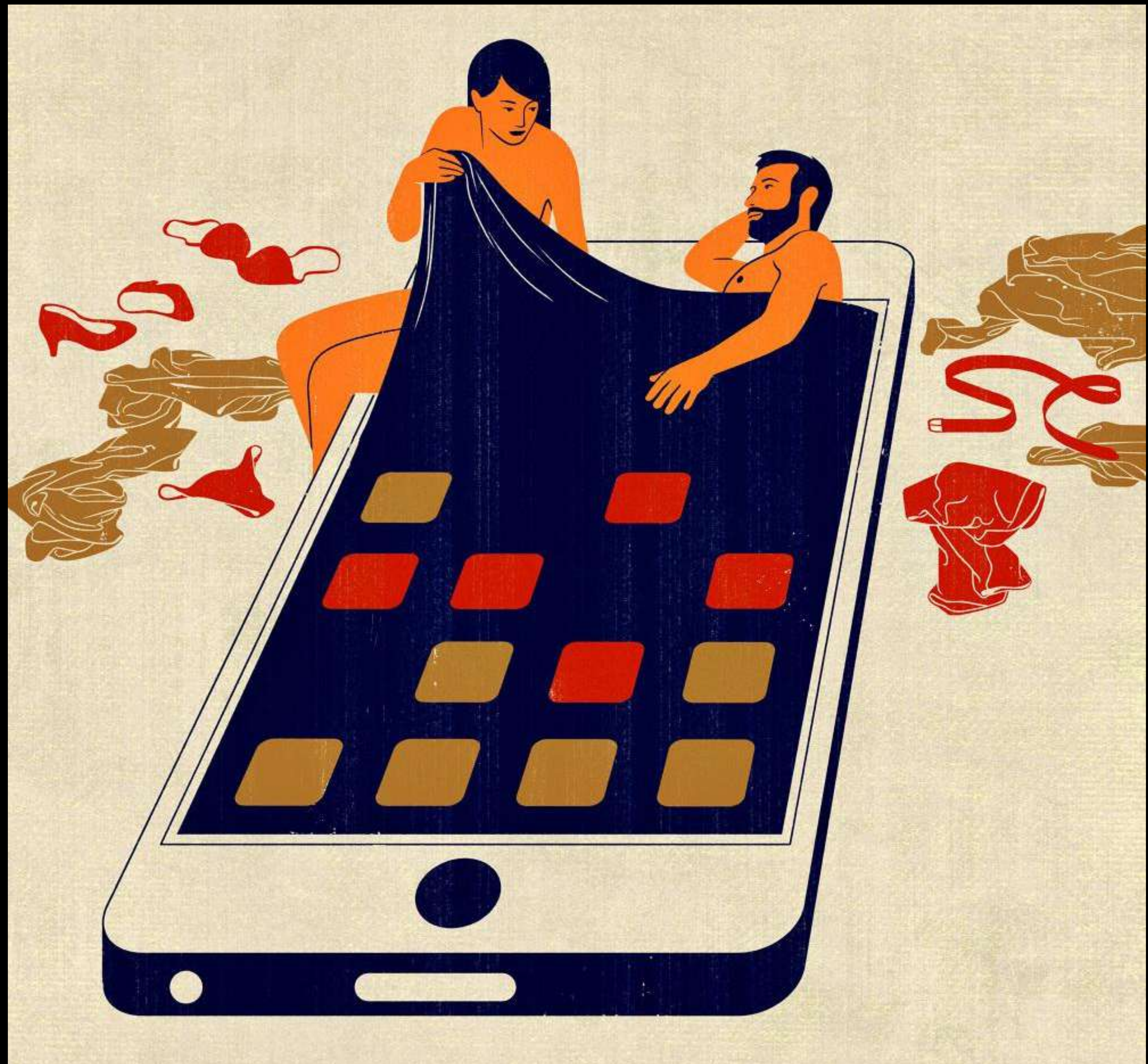
Crossing Lines: A perspective on Infidelity

by Meghna Rathore
& Abhilasha Rawat

Evolutionary psychologists have made efforts over the decades to understand why humans do what they do. Their thoughts, emotions and behavioural patterns are carefully observed to form the history of human evolution. It is well noted that not every activity performed by humans is well thought out and involves their 'rational' self; instead, more than some of our instincts and 'gut feelings' stem from the way our ancestors lived and adapted to their surroundings, they evolved psychological mechanisms. Infidelity too can be viewed through the lens of evolution.

Infidelity with the lens of evolution

Humans follow the most basic instincts that come to them as naturally as they would to any animal, procreation is one of the most important results of such instincts; and the only rule of procreation is, the more, the better. This is why we shall try to base our theories on this



one overarching truth.

In many theories on evolution including Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection, it is stated that the males in our ancestral society used to look for females to reproduce with as someone they could provide for since women were busy taking care of their young ones, who in return would take their lineage ahead. To ensure that their resources like food, shelter, protection from other males and surroundings are in safe hands they used to look for females with long-term mating intentions like themselves.

Similarly, females had the same intentions apart from the fact that their reasons were rooted in their biology. Women, in general, are more involved in the birth process, starting from conceiving to the nine-month-long gestation period to lactating for years until the newborn is all grown up and ready. This investment is relatively a lot more as compared to a valuable but only investment made by the male members,

ejaculation. Thus, females were incentivised to find long term mates who were supposed to be true to their partners and would only and only provide for their females and their offsprings.

"(Women's) investment is relatively a lot more as compared to a valuable but only investment made by the male members, ejaculation."

If humans were made to procreate then why do we see infidelity as a blasphemous condition in a monogamous relationship? Plus, from an evolutionary perspective, surely more people having sex would mean more people, So why do we get so upset over what someone else does with their lives?

Romantic jealousy in relationships too can be traced down to adaptive evolutionary practices that started billions of years ago. This unequal but biological share of investment by both males and females in the birth-giving process is called the parental-investment model. This model proclaims that the increased chances of carrying their 'good' genes forward against the process of natural selection, made it easier for men to procreate with a lot of women simultaneously. Thus, in many theories and articles, men are shown as those bunch of homo sapiens that are more prone to venturing out of their monogamous relationships as compared to women. Even today, a study shows that while 20% of men have reported having extramarital sex, only 13% of women report sharing this experience (much of this behaviour, on both sides, likely goes underreported).

Another reason supporting this theory is that the pool of fertile women was lesser in number as compared to the pool of fertile men. This is because in ancient times there were no measures to predict a woman's fertile window which begins from her menstruation and ends on her menopause and since not every time a couple's procreation activities resulted in a child, men found themselves wandering around to look for more opportunities to increase their gene count.

What our some of our readers think: Can infidelity be ever justified?

Cheating is totally unacceptable. It can affect someone's emotional and mental state. Seeing ur loved one loving someone else and switching over affects him/her badly and his colleague too. Loyalty is rare nowadays. Monogamous relationship isn't a big deal, it's d prsn who should understand playing with someone's emotions is not good

I think that context is just an excuse it is in all probability cheating....the relationship is already broken so break it off completely and then start a new relationship

A monogamous relationship has certain expectations attached . Also no one should feel not good enough

Why does context matter? And to what extent? Or Why an absolute no?

Only Context can measure the damage of cheating...

I think context matters a lot, if A is in a toxic relationship with B and despite several attempts by A to put an end to the relationship somehow B doesn't understand and A is too polite yk just say stuff on the face. Then "cheating" as people would call it is not immoral.

Why does context matter? And to what extent? Or Why an absolute no?

An absolute no because it is a breach of trust. Why would you be with someone whom you can't trust

But how did this(wandering phenomenon) affect the females of the group? Also, what role does this feature of humans play in the complicated human evolution theory?

Since men were used to these adventures, it makes it obvious that they would impregnate multiple women which would result in the division of the original resources gathered by men, automatically reducing the share from the primary woman's piece. This insecurity of their male partners finding someone else and providing for them makes women more fragile when it comes to **emotional infidelity**. Men on the other hand, who used to be very particular about their resources and how effectively their genes are carried forward were very specific about **sexual infidelity**, which is to say that what if they were nourishing and providing resources to someone else's child with his female, who has apparently been 'poached' without his knowledge.'(poached is a scientific term used in the Daves at el theory to address a person who has broken the exclusivity bond between them and their partner).

Everything seems to make sense, right? Not really. In close examination of the aforementioned information, this whole theory of 'men are more likely to cheat' and 'men are the providers' seems a bit off? If yes, then rightly so. The theories that surfaced way back in the 1850s have not focused much on how women can also be infidels. The parental investment model tells us that since women are more

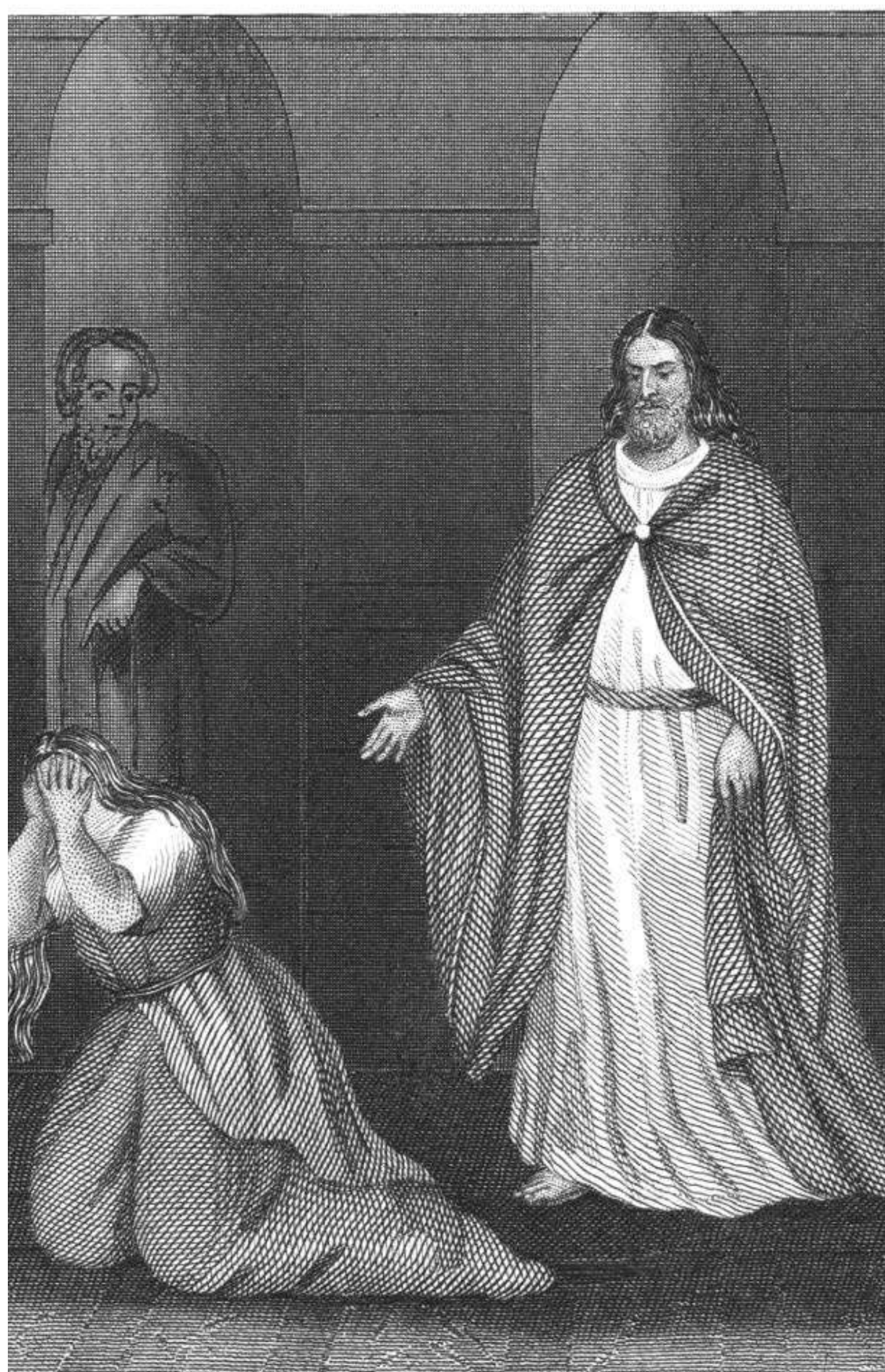
invested in the birth process they would likely choose long term mates and would prefer to keep their eggs in one basket (quite literally). But it went against almost everything scientists thought they knew at the time, when Cornell University researchers studied the mating habits of bobolinks 30 years ago, they saw that it wasn't just the males who were fooling around on the side. The females were too—and for good reason.

“The genetic data from the bird studies really turned things upside down,” says anthropologist Brooke Scelza of the University of California-Los Angeles. “All of a sudden it was clear that females were [choosing more than one mate] and presumably if they're doing this commonly across species, there are some benefits.” But why? How would evolution explain this?

Polygamy (and polyandry) is nothing new for monogamous human relations. In non-Western, natural fertility societies such as the Himba of Namibia, polygamy is widely accepted. The Himba marry but extramarital affairs are also broadly acknowledged and encouraged. Females of that community, when interviewed in anonymity, explained that these children who were born out of the ‘wedlock’ increase their reproductive success, that is more offspring than those who do not. Mating with multiple partners increases the genetic diversity of a female's

offspring, increasing the odds that at least some will survive regardless of flickering environmental conditions. It can help a female acquire so-called “good genes” for her young one. It provides a hedge against possible infertility in her social mate. It can also help her access valuable resources such as food that additional mates might control. Even though the theories are sound, Scelza says that proof of a correlation between multiple mates and greater reproductive success for women remains thin.

In hindsight, infidelity was advantageous for evolution and well, for us. These theories have their fair share of criticisms but they do help us form a cohesive picture of our past, which only require some tweaks to be able to be accepted in our current times. It could be rightly pointed out that Darwin and his scientific descendants missed half of the picture. Perhaps, they were the products of their time, however, regardless of this, the matter of fact is that evolution does not discriminate and neither should we.



Exodus 20:14 Seventh Commandment -
"You shall not commit adultery"

Polygamy an inherent wrong?

From the evolution perspective, males and females were supposed to be polygamous. Up until 200 years ago, many countries including Japan and China were polygamous in nature. Even in current times countries like Saudi Arabia and modern Turkey practice polygamy, many religious texts have seemed to approve of this practice including Quran and the Bible. So, after all of these improvements and encouragements from various lords and religions, why did huge sections of our societies choose monogamy over polygamy?

The advent of Democracy might have played a substantial role in shaping our practices. Greek from its early Socratic period shows that democracy as an institution can become a prerequisite condition for monogamy to flourish. Greeks are considered to be the first to have experimented with this monogamous culture and obviously, there was no turning back from it. But why the Greeks only? If we analyse monogamous relationships, we would decipher that they are more democratic in nature and monogamy is more ‘fair’ to its practitioners than polygamy ever was.

Earlier in hunter-gatherer societies, few males from a large pool of fertile males dominated the small pool of fertile females which evidently shows that a few weaker and poor males who didn't have property and other factors to bond with females,

remained unmated. As a consequence, the left out males use other methods to secure themselves a mate. That could be through non-aggressive methods of poaching somebody else's exclusive partner or through aggressive methods like coercion or sexual abuse. This is also one of the plausible reasons why even today, women are double as likely to experience some form of sexual violence over the course of their life. It should be kept in mind that this is just a hypothesis of a few evolutionary scientists to examine how acts of sexual violence are related to evolution, and thus, neither they nor we find ourselves in the midst of justifying such heinous crimes. Tracing back to where we left, we should recall here that Socrates was from Greece and thus his society was the first one to experiment with democracy and monogamy was just an extension of the practice in human's personal relationships. It spread in other societies of the world when Romans adapted it after 27BC and since then nothing including the fall of the Roman empire could stop its spread.


"...in hunter-gatherer societies, few males from a large pool of fertile males dominated the small pool of fertile females."

Marxist theorists like Friedrich Engels in his book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, emphasised the role of private property in propagating monogamy. They postulated that humans were

initially more sexually promiscuous. With the growth of private wealth, males felt the need to pass on their wealth to the progeny of their own, demanding women to be monogamous. This also became causation for the subordination of women in the family structure. However, later theorists argue that the imperative to reproduce led to the accumulation of private property. Power, prestige and property became preferable factors for women to choose their male partners. These became the prerequisites to reproduction and gained higher acceptability in society.

position and property. Historians find out a link between despotism and polygyny. The hierarchical communities established a single chief leader as the utmost sacred and social authority. With innumerable examples from history, it is well observed how rulers used those prerogatives to acquire wives, sometimes in hundreds and even concubines. This even popularized 'harems' for the protection of women from being abducted by other males, as one



 A popular meme: Unfaithful womanizer guy turning around amazed at another woman while walking with his girlfriend on street. It is amusing how human thinking reimagined this picture in multiple scenarios

However, the initiation of this concept didn't lead to its immediate popularity. The growth of social wealth and stratification came closely related to the extension of polygyny. In the competitive environment, males often sought mates by abducting women of other bands or through trade. The situation aggravated with the increase in economic production, beginning with the agricultural revolution. Those who were higher in the social pyramid often held multiple wives by the virtue of their

of the duties of the ruler. In later years, the existence of monogamy, as the social norm, came due to the more functionalist approach towards it. It transmits the idea that a family, as a social institution, is essential in stabilizing society. The division of labour within the family, associated with gender roles, forms a substantial part of this perspective. The man, playing the instrumental role,

supports the family financially and establishes the family's status while the woman, playing the expressive role, provides emotional support and physical care to children. As per the approach, the differentiated roles of sexes coordinate to form a well-balanced society in the industrial world.

Feminist theorists, however, beg to differ. This came along with their critique of marriages, claiming to contract with higher bindings on women over men. Marriages are seen as a patriarchal institution for men to dictate over sexual, reproductive and domestic services of women as well as a bourgeois institution founded on a hypocritical morality, to protect ruling class men's property and inheritance rights.

Ethics of Infidelity

Funnily enough, monogamy was never about trust, faith and intimacy but the demarcation of labour and inheritance. However, even in the present times where the most virtuous act, in relationships, seems to be maintaining honesty with the partner, where does infidelity stand on the ethical parameter? At prima facie, it might look like an easily answerable question pertaining to the norm of it being 'morally wrong' and 'never justifiable.' Nonetheless, the nuance of morality when talking about infidelity needs to be explored. The primary reason for the general despise towards infidelity is the breach of trust that might cause serious

psychological harm to the person. Undeniably true, the person being cheated on will be hurt, maybe to an extent that causes self-worth issues, insecurity or other traumatic disorders. Therefore, infidelity can never be valued or preached.

However, can it be justified in any context? Let's take two major approaches in ethics to answer that. Firstly, based on utilitarianism, theorists classify a 'good' or a 'right' act as the one that maximizes the happiness and wellbeing of all. As already established, infidelity will cause pain on the part of the partner but what also comes into account is the wellbeing of the person who cheated and the relationship in totality. For example, if there's a person A who's constantly feeling neglect and abandonment in the relationship with a person B and resorts to infidelity, the utilitarian theory, measuring the overall utility justifies the act of person A. Some might argue the existence of alternatives like communicating with the partner or breaking things off, but those are irrelevant to the discussion. Critics may also say that principally, infidelity is incorrect and even a thousand good outcomes cannot outdo the wrongness of the act. On the counter, let's look into the concept of deontology in ethics. It judges the morality of an action based on the action itself over the consequences. The context, however, still stands. For example, killing a person is ethically wrong but killing in self-defence is justifiable. Continuing the same example of infidelity, even as per the deontological ethics, the action of person A is still justified due to the mitigating factors, in this case being to get out of the toxicity of the relationship. Therefore, contextually the idea of infidelity being an absolute wrong can be contested. One might say that it is still a vice. However, defining black and white spheres in human relationships becomes complex and highly subjective. Breach of trust even at

its core becomes inescapable.

Whether it be cheating in an exam where you pledged your teachers for honesty or lying to someone where you see the lie having a higher value to the other person, one may argue all their life, the best way to go about it. The attached expectations in a relationship are values that one may or may not hold at a higher ground over the functionality of relationships in the real world. This, at the end of the day, is an individual choice. Even the Korean judiciary says 'the private interests of sexual autonomy' comes before the 'the social interests of sexual morality.'

The reasonability of infidelity is beyond the scope and reach of our imagination. Defining infidelity in a relationship relies on the choice of the couple, over any discussion on ethics and evolution. Thus our aim was to study and try to understand those choices and give ourselves the vision to see things in a clearer light.

P.s. Don't cheat.



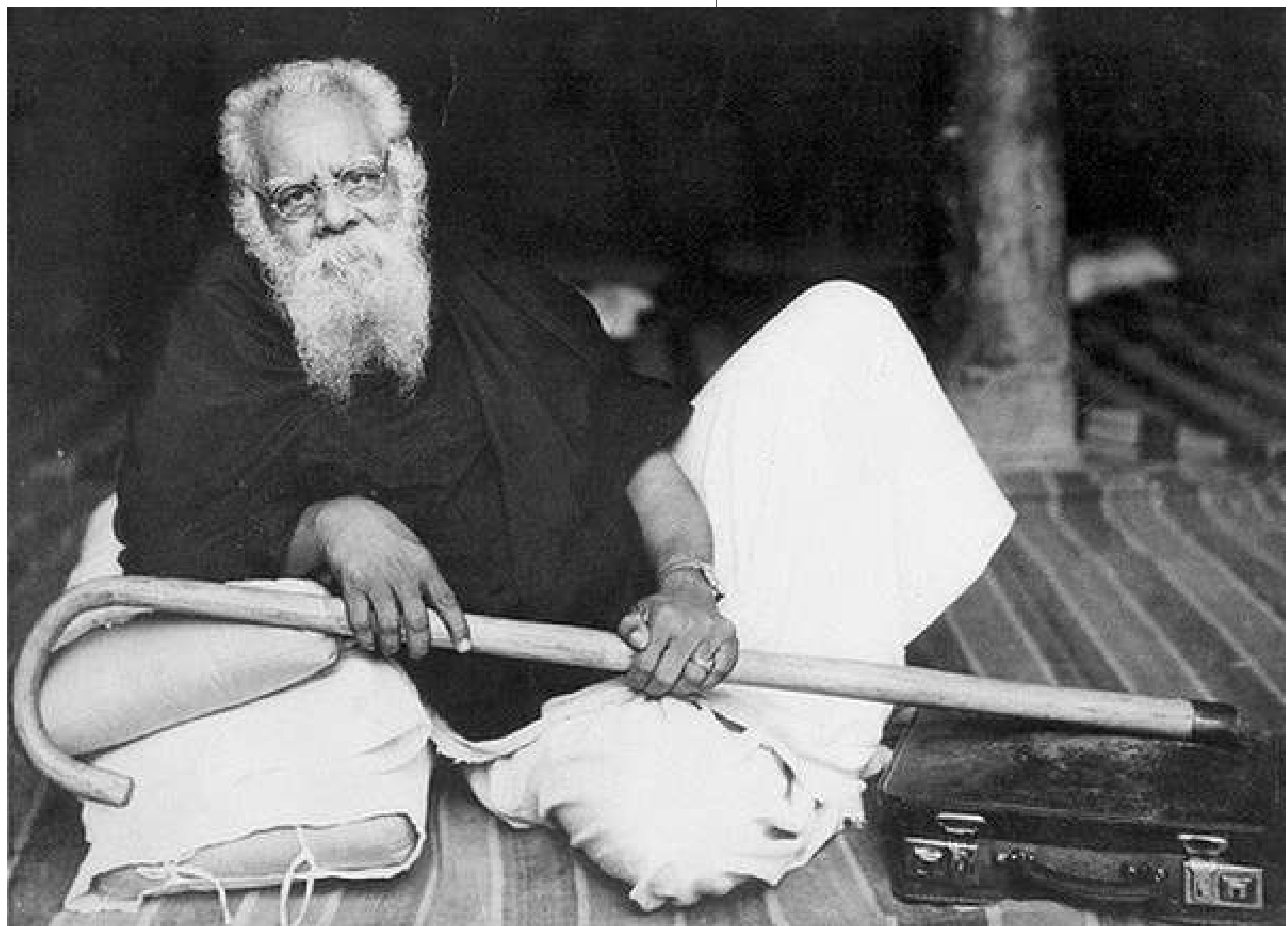
Can Periyar's Politics Be Accepted In Today's Anti-Caste Discourse?

BY SOUVIK BISWAS

"The Jews are only interested in themselves and nobody else. They somehow contrive to have the rulers in their pocket, participate in governance and conspire to torture and suck the lives out of other citizens in order that they live (in comfort)." "Are they not comparable to the Brahmins, who too have no responsibility but have the rulers in their pocket, have entered the ruling dispensation and been lording over (all of us)?" These are the words of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, popularly known as Periyar. While critics of the caste system such as Ambedkar wrote in-depth theoretical pieces to reiterate that their fight was against Brahmanism and not the Brahmins themselves, Periyar did the opposite, and with much gusto.

The first statement above can, when read on its own, raise a number of questions because it looks like a sentence straight out of an anti-Semitic tabloid during the Nazi regime. Periyar was known to be crass and quite irrational in many of his arguments and is often pitted against Ambedkar, the latter being famous for his theoretical clarity and exposition. While this may be partially true, a large portion of this argument can be said to be misrepresentation and bad translation of nearly forty volumes of writing, compiled from speeches and manuscripts in Tamil. Periyar, a man who fought against Brahmanical

hegemony for most of his life, was accused of engaging in hate-mongering and for vilifying Brahmins by many. His politics have come under fire for not directly addressing issues concerning Dalits, as he conflated them with the larger bloc of non-Brahmins, which also included the economically and socially affluent castes of Tamil Nadu. The question remains: can Periyar's politics be classified as anti-Dalit?



Ever since the inception of the non-Brahmin movement, Brahmin ideologues have accused it of standing in the way of Dalit reform. The continuance of atrocities against Dalits, their social and economic poverty, and their lack of political participation in Tamil Nadu despite its being ruled by Dravidian parties for decades are all credible points in support of this argument. However, it has now been co-opted by some members of the intellectual class and the nationalist right-wing in dangerous ways. Narendra Subramaniam argues that Periyar's conception of the Dravidian

'contains at its centre the Tamil-speaking Shudra of Tamil Nadu' and that the Dalits exist only in its outer layer. Rupa Viswanath argues that as far as the Dalits were concerned, Periyar prioritized social reform over long-term legal and political solutions. Others have tried to elaborate on how there has never been Brahmin hegemony in the

state, with OBC groups occupying many important positions of power even before Independence. N. Kalyan Raman has clarified that the preponderance of Brahmins in government posts was due to their high literacy 'which was corrected in due course.' By quoting statistics that showcase some backward castes' having held government posts in numbers disproportionate to their population in a lone year or two, these theorists fail to realize that by only looking at the immediate historical and social context of Periyar's political thought, they miss the bigger picture of his critique of the

"The continuance of atrocities against Dalits,..., in Tamil Nadu despite its being ruled by Dravidian parties for decades are all credible points in support of this argument. "

Brahmin nation-state and his espousal of Dalit emancipation everywhere.

Periyar's work as a social activist can be said to have begun in 1924 with his participation in the Vaikom agitations. The inability of the untouchables and other lower castes to use the roads surrounding the local temple spurred a number of agitations which brought the attention of the Congress and Gandhi. His work in creating a newspaper, Kudi Arasu (The Republic) was instrumental in providing a non-Brahmin perspective on national events. He vocally supported category-wise representation and wrote about it extensively. While he encouraged his followers not to trust their Brahmin political counterparts and called upon upper-caste Hindus to even convert to other religions in rather intimidating tones, this was done for the complete annihilation of the caste system and for such liberation to be spearheaded by those

oppressed by it. The Self-Respect Movement was important in this regard aimed to cultivate pride and respect in non-Brahmin identities and to discourage their implicit support in the perpetuation of the caste system. It was an attempt to encourage these communities to define themselves without the oppressive Brahmin lexicon and as completely outside the Brahminical social order. This was a direct attack against communities within the non-Brahmin bloc that fashioned themselves like their upper-caste oppressors.

Much before Independence, it became increasingly clear to Periyar that the emerging polity would be overwhelmingly representative of the Brahmanical upper classes due to lack of support from the Congress in social reform movements. It is with this fear that he envisioned a new alliance being forged between the various non-Brahmin and Dalit groups, based on lived experience and injury. According to K.R. Manoharan, even his idea of a Dravidian nation can be seen as an attempt to imagine a rational state in which citizenship and the rights of all groups, especially Dalits, Shudras and women would exist on an equal plane, free from the shackles of Brahmanical Hinduism.

"...it became increasingly clear to Periyar that the emerging polity would be overwhelmingly representative of the Brahmanical upper classes due to lack of support from the Congress in social reform movements. "

The present arguments against Periyar have to be juxtaposed with the rise of the Hindu Right and their recent attempts to appropriate Dalit icons such as Ambedkar in order to create a myth of inclusivity in Hindutva politics. While Ambedkar provides the upper-caste-dominated right-wing parties access to a fresh vote bank, Periyar offers no such lucrative political gains. Karthik Manoharan and S. Anandhi argue that while the RSS has appropriated Ambedkar's ideology in its larger majoritarian and nationalist discourse, it hasn't been able to do the same with Periyar because of his scathing critique of the legitimacy of the Indian state. To quote them, "One could also say that Ambedkar's criticism and rejection of Hinduism was more theoretically intensive than that of Periyar. Periyar, however, rejected the nation-state and its ideology, either in its 'secular' or 'communal' manifestations. Hence, Periyar remains untouchable and 'anti-national'." The politics behind the branding of Periyar as a villain and a black hole in contemporary Indian politics seem to be part of a larger project to erase key social movements and their leaders from popular imagination.

This does not mean that Periyar and many of his contentious statements do not need to be problematized, but one must not fall into the pit of decontextualization. His statements about Brahmins and, especially, Brahmin women border on attempts at vilification, but, when considered in light of his struggle to eliminate the root

of Brahmanism which has often been cited as the brahmin himself, his words do not seem that heinous, especially since Ambedkar had also put forward many similar ideas. "Historically [Brahmins] have been the most inveterate enemy of the servile classes (Shudras and the Untouchables) who together constitute about 80 percent of the total Hindu population. If the common man belonging to the servile classes in India is today so fallen, so degraded, so devoid of hope and ambition, it is entirely due to the Brahmins and their philosophy." (B.R. Ambedkar, Writings, and Speeches, vol. 9, p. 215)

However contradictory his politics may seem, the goal of his political life can be summed up in this statement from an editorial published in his newspaper, "...to strive for, among other things, each individual to develop their knowledge and skills, the progress of each section of the society, the growth of a sense of equality and camaraderie among the people, ending of religious conflicts, and to destroy the feeling of casteism and caste-based inferiorities." (Kudi Arasu, 2 May 1925) Periyar's anti-caste politics and his critique of the nation-state continue to hold relevance in our volatile political environment. His political atheism can act as a powerful tool against the communal agenda of political parties today and aid in legitimizing organized dissent against all levels of political and social authority. It is only fair that we

write, critique, and further expand our understanding of him if only to remind ourselves of the power of resistance in the face of collective dissociation and erasure.





Reforming Indian Civil Services

By Shagun Dubey

The bureaucracy is considered to be the backbone of any country's administration. India is not an exception wherein it is considered to be the steel frame of administration, though with a big old rusty dent. Milton Friedman had famously said, "In a bureaucratic system, useless work drives out useful work." Indian bureaucracy is an age-old heritage that India has inherited from its colonial masters after independence. Though the political leadership wanted to do away with the elite hierarchical administrative system meant to suit the needs of the British colonialists, the founding fathers decided to adopt it since there wasn't any alternative administrative system in place, and forming a new one would have been a cumbersome task. The article examines the application of the NPM model on the current Indian bureaucracy briefly and delves into the deep yet interesting interface between the political executive and the civil servants.

An Evaluation of the Indian bureaucracy – the dented steel frame of India

Around 39% of the people surveyed by Transparency International in 2020 under the Global Corruption Barometer Survey said that they had paid a bribe in the previous year while 89 % of them believed that government corruption does exist and is a big deal. The Politicians-businessmen-bureaucrat nexus in India is one of the primary reasons for the above problem. Though India has been ranked 63rd out of 190 countries in terms of ease of doing business, the problem persists. The cumbersome and lethargic administrative machinery not only serves as one of the reasons behind people trying to resort to an expensive yet quicker way of getting their work done but it also hinders the investment flow in the country. Promotions in the services are still decided by the level of seniority and not by performance and efficiency. Advancement in career should be performance-based giving an edge to a competitive environment encouraging efficiency and initiatives among young officers. The current system of performance appraisal for the Indian civil servants has been quite ineffective in tackling the problem and everyone gets their promotion only when the time is due. However, the recent initiative of a 360-degree performance appraisal is a welcome step in that direction, though not

foolproof. The system is 'illegal, non-transparent and arbitrary', remarked the Parliamentary Standing Committee. The system also faced its first legal challenge in 2017 when a senior officer who was denied the appointment to the position of a Secretary to the Union Government challenged his negative appraisal. He was denied the position in the second round of appraisal, as well; however, he successfully managed to get hold of the cabinet of the Himachal Pradesh government – being ruled by the same party as in Centre – after withdrawing the legal challenge against the system. Surprisingly, having been named in multiple cases of corruption, the officer wasn't eligible for the appointment at the Union level but was found good enough to be the Cabinet Secretary of a state government. This loophole emphasizes the need for the call for

terminating the service after failing the second round of appraisal. Such periodic testing of performance should be done for the junior level officers as well.

In 2018, an Indian Prime Minister, for the very first time, interacted with the front-line bureaucracy famous for their lack of accountability, corruption, and inefficiency. Several factors contribute to the problem. While interactions as such would help in boosting the morale of the workforce but resolving the problem needs a carefully

crafted vision and action plan, and political will for more than just filling the coffers with votes during elections. Bureaucracy loves discretion and authoritative control but never suffers the consequences of the worse decisions. There is no insecurity, no system of checks, and no performance-specific criteria for promotions. Stalling instead of solving problems with diligence is a landmark of Indian bureaucracy.



Students clang 'thalis' as they protest demanding an extra attempt for the UPSC aspirants who missed last attempt due to Covid, at Jantar Mantar, on March 26, 2021
New Delhi, India.

There is little space for discretion at the lowest rungs of hierarchy wherein the officials are just supposed to follow the orders from the above. Even the decisions concerning the most local of all the problems in an area are taken by the higher authorities through orders and circulars and executed unquestioningly by the local officials. Funds aren't dispersed on time which causes the delay of action or forces the officials to spend from their own pockets and wait for the reimbursement. This doesn't only cause the quality of work done to be poor because of a strenuous budget and lack of funds but also encourages corruption since the value spent and the funds reimbursed aren't necessarily the same. This makes the local bureaucracy a

"There is little space for discretion at the lowest rungs of hierarchy wherein the officials are just supposed to follow the orders from the above."

passive recipient of orders, professionalism of which is judged by the level of adherence to the order. This kills innovation, limits capability, and results in a total wastage of the contextual knowledge of the local officials. The culture of 'rule compliance' often diminishes the difference between the means and the ends to be achieved by transforming the means itself into an end, the ultimate goal being – compliance of rules. The all-secure jobs of the permanent executives and the nexus between them and their political counterparts are concerning for the general public s.

who view the bureaucratic elite as a highly 'insulated' lot of the public service completely in contrast to what they need to be – providers of service and security to the people. 89 % of the people participating in a research survey felt that the service has an extremely flawed and inverted system of rewarding wherein the corrupt and morally skewed bureaucrats get promoted while the honest and upright ones get transferred as punishment. The senior-level posts, which require a sophisticated understanding of the respective domain and specialization of subject matter, are generally occupied by the officers from the Indian Administrative Service which comprises generalists. The two Administrative Reform Commissions have suggested recommendations quite useful to tackle this problem, for example, holding competitive exams for the senior posts open to all the other all India services, lateral entry of experts on a contract basis, and assessing their efficiency at reasonable intervals.

Indian bureaucratic system is one of the least transparent in the world. Though the Right to Information Act might have done some benefit, the problem of 'transparency not being a structural part of the system' persists. Transparency should not just be an end – an additional liability to be achieved - but an integral part of the system as one of the primary means for delivering the end goal of public service. Many researchers have found that a specific focus on

ensuring transparency has resulted in an additional burden of tons of paperwork delaying and faltering the implementation part. Digitalization of services and a robust grievance redressal mechanism are the two most important things to ensure transparency in the contemporary world. The realm of appointments, transfers, and promotions is something that needs a significant dose of transparency. Digitalization should be accompanied by a simultaneous effort to digitally educate the masses; otherwise, it would be left redundant in a country where around 90% of the population is digitally illiterate.

Indian Bureaucracy and the New Public Management

Hierarchy of authority, division of labour, sticking to the absolute rule of law, the procedure becoming the end itself resulting in inefficiency, corruption, and red-tapism are some of the Weberian features characteristic of the Indian bureaucracy. India is adopting some features of NPM in a phased and careful manner while taking into consideration the local environment and problems native to the land. Examples include Public-Private Community Partnership, e-governance, lateral entry of specialized experts in civil services on a contract basis, measures focusing on transparency and accountability, citizens' charter, etc.

"Indian bureaucratic system is one of the least transparent in the world. "

Political Executive – Civil Servant interface

The relationship between the political executives and permanent executives is complex and one which has evolved over the years and was bred by the political masters of the newly independent India.

The only regret of the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was not being able to reform the bureaucracy which was a colonial legacy in its entirety. Framed in a way to further the interests of the colonial government and unquestionably enforce law and order, the Indian Civil Services ensured to have a life doing governmental work as insulated from the general mass as possible. Bureaucracy is not neutral as largely perceived. Its taming depends on the political executives – the Prime Minister and their cabinet – and the party system. A majoritarian government wields considerable power over the services while a coalition government; busy ensuring its survival, rarely finds time to alter the administrative machinery – for better or worse. The socialist model followed by the political leaders of the newly independent India helped to convert the existing elite bureaucratic system into a patron-client arrangement with the public, conferring immense power into the hands of the officials and diminishing the actual goal of public service.

The era of 'committed bureaucracy' under the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi, infamously remembered as the 'License-Permit-quota' raj not only destroyed the already stunted economy but also rusted the administrative machinery with corruption and red-tapism. Rajiv Gandhi's stark remarks against bureaucracy and attempts to decentralize administration were short-lived given his assassination in 1991. The government led by PV

Narasimha Rao saw a sharp cut in the size of the bureaucracy amidst the reforms to liberalize the economy, and limited and phased withdrawal of the government to give space to private actors. While UPA-I saw many administrative reforms including the landmark act of Right to Information, UPA-II was mired in corruption. The reforms of post-2014 are of special interest to scholars, academicians, politicians, and civil servants alike. Two of the most important periods in the history of the Indian bureaucracy since independence are – the ones under Ms Indira Gandhi and Shri Narendra Modi.

Indira Gandhi's Committed Bureaucracy

The period was of considerable importance which left a near-permanent taint on the Indian bureaucracy during the 1970s. The idea of committed bureaucracy entailed the hundred per cent devotion and loyalty to the government, its policies and programs, and even its ideology. The need for a committed bureaucracy was felt when the INC had suffered a loss in the 1967 elections and it was believed to be caused due to the failure of the bureaucracy to deliver party policies and programs. It formed the foundation of the 'politicization of bureaucracy' which had cemented its ground by the 1990s. This gave birth to a culture of political loyalty among the civil servants and established a system of rewards wherein those who worked according to the whims and fancies of their political masters got rewarded while those who decided to choose a rather professional and honest path were transferred either frequently or to considerably less important departments. This led to the development of a strong unholy nexus between the bureaucrats and the politicians which exist to date with the entry of an additional player – businessmen. This was one of the primary reasons for plummeted economic growth, widespread poverty, and complete failure of the governance model.

Babu, Neta, and Baniya have haunted Indian economic growth for too long a period.

Minimum government, maximum governance

While the changes brought in during Ms Gandhi's regime were to make a bureaucracy committed to

to the Political leadership and penalize those who were reluctant to comply with the official diktat, the regime of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is introducing sweeping and unprecedented reforms to reinvent bureaucracy giving rise to multiple perspectives and speculations; it might be too soon to judge their implications. The government till now has been characterized by forced retirements of top bureaucrats, lateral entry of experts from outside, changes in the recruitment process, and a careful set of efforts to untangle the web of bureaucratic control over governance.

Popularizing the motto of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance', the government has given effect to various reforms suggested in the second ARC. The first of all was the 360-degree appraisal system to assess the performance of bureaucrats inviting feedback from seniors, juniors, peers or any credible person having dealt with the official. Though the reform was a much-needed one, it has been questioned for being an illegal, arbitrary, and unexplained system of assessment. Along with the



Annual Confidential Report, a 360-degree evaluation will also be taken into consideration to assess the working ethics and general behaviour of an individual for appointments at the level of secretary and above. This arrangement of performance evaluation resembles private management; however, people fear its misuse.

Immediately after coming back to power for a second term, the government retired 27 IRS officers who were under the scanner for charges like corruption, sexual harassment, etc through a less-often used rule. The Department of Personnel Training sent a notice to all the ministries and PSUs to conduct a monthly review of the 'tainted' officers working in the Union government. This has helped to bring the corrupt officials under scanner and surveillance and the threat of forced retirement at any point in time. While this is a welcome step and a strong attack on the 'permanency' of the job, the procedure is highly arbitrary and prone to be misused given that most of the information regarding the process is confidential. However, the officials – against whom the actions have been taken – have had a dented image and suspicious records. Though the central government has clarified that it is to better facilitate the young officers with the knowledge of the Union administration, reforms like allocation of services (which was earlier distributed by the UPSC) at end of the foundation course and

mandatory central deputation of fresh recruits during the training have given way to suspicions regarding the formation of a 'committed bureaucracy. In 2018, the government announced a major reform – as a pilot project – of opening up the closed corridors of civil services for the private individuals having expertise in specific domains for the appointment at 10 joint secretary positions for 3 years (extendable up to 5). While it is a long-awaited and welcome reform, critics have raised questions over the appointment method – by specifically constituted committees and not by the UPSC. UPSC has been one of the most independent institutions which have managed to successfully maintain its credibility. With no clearly defined eligibility criteria and bypassing of the UPSC, the reform rings a bell for an apparent threat of inserting private players into the domain of public policymaking and furthering of government's ideology. However, defenders of the reform argue that to promote the culture of a committed bureaucracy, the government doesn't need to hire individuals from outside when it can cultivate it in the services itself without any major hindrances. Questions have also been raised about how efficient the employees hired for a temporary basis are and no scope for promotion would be in comparison with the officials loyal to their job and have worked for the public for over 10-15 years. There has been a shortage of bureaucrats since the 1990s because the work pressure on each one of them has increased tremendously hampering their efficiency and the need is to recruit a larger number of civil servants which is surprisingly reducing over the past few years.

Way Forward

In order to create a 'citizen-centric administration and public service delivery system', a few changes or

reforms that can be considered in order to induce economic growth and public welfare.

- Promotion in the services should not be based on a seniority basis but a strict system of assessing performance. A 360-degree appraisal system is in place for the top bureaucratic posts but the junior level lacks any such arrangement. Well-framed and transparent guidelines for such an appraisal to be formulated.

- The officers should be made to choose a particular field of specialization after 10 years of service and UPSC should be conducting an exam to evaluate their specialization.

- Appointment, transfer, and suspension should be done by a body on the recommendation of but independent of the political leadership. This will help in reinstating transfers back from being a political tool to harass honest officers.
- There should be separate structural units or executive agencies to govern a particular domain responsible and answerable to its parent ministry. The chief of the agency to be chosen by a competition open to all the services and should give annual statements of set targets, efficiency, and service quality.

- An independent agency to charge and prosecute cases of corruption against the service officers with well-framed guidelines to be set up with permission by the government to prosecute the said official to be granted within two months. If in negation, appropriate reasons to not prosecute the official be submitted by the government.

- A comprehensive grievance redressal portal/mechanism for

each ministry to be set up with legal statutes backing them and the general public to be made aware of the portal. ● Measures to ensure flexibility and discretion at the lower rungs of the bureaucratic administration to be undertaken. Effective

administrative and financial decentralization and delegation of authority should be ensured.

● Rules and procedures to be streamlined with contemporary needs and to be made more facilitating rather than harassing the citizens.

● Flexibility to explore alternatives and have a cost-benefit analysis of those alternatives. ● Contracting out specific projects of social welfare to private players.

● Exploration of backward budgeting as an option in a few cases.

● Behavioural changes in the government workplace and incorporation of transparency, responsiveness, citizen-friendly environment, accountability, and participation. Apart from the above suggestions, there have been various recommendations made by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission in 2005 which if implemented can prove to be pretty beneficial for the efficiency of the administrative system. However, only very few of them have been adopted.

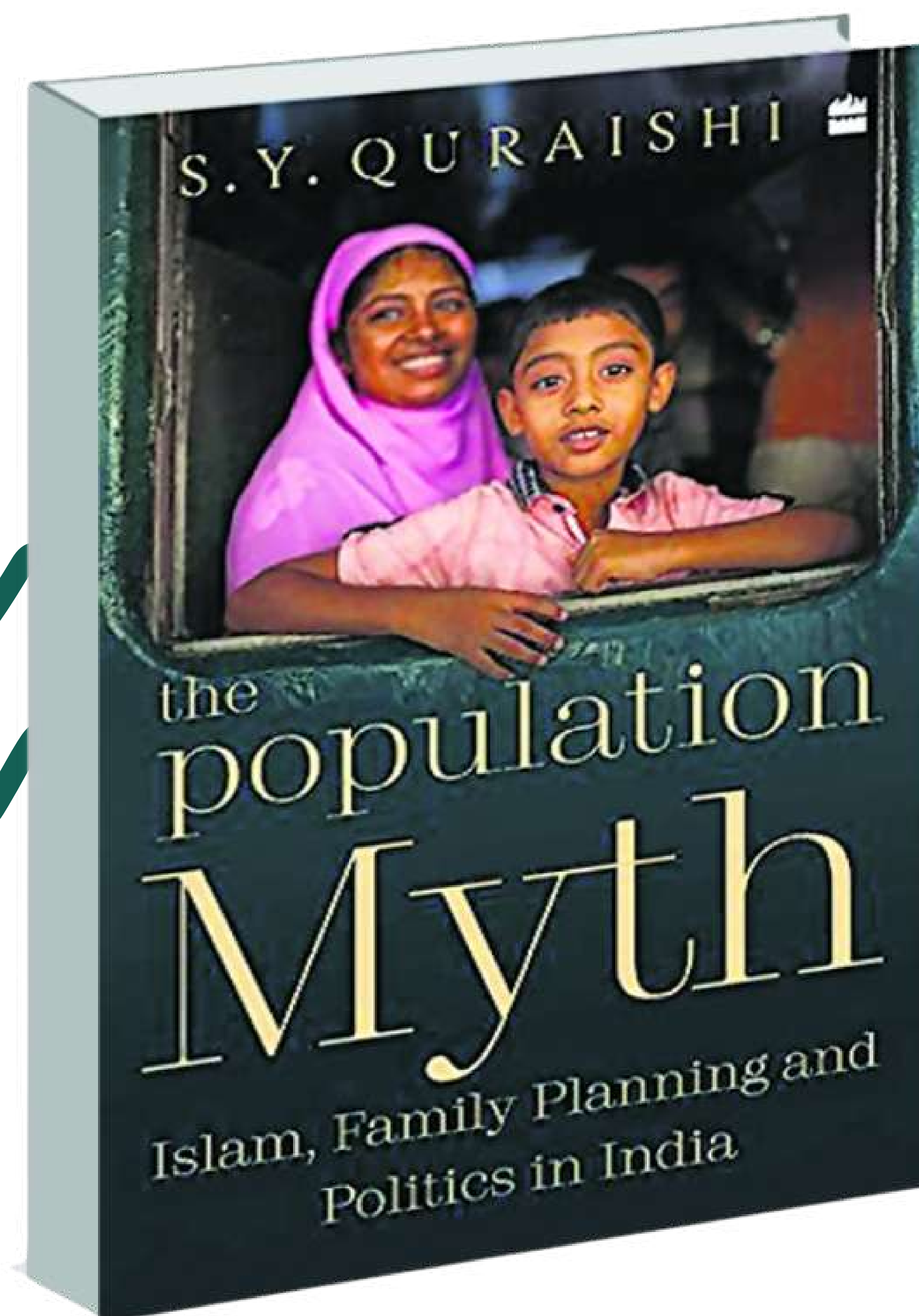
Conclusion

Reforming civil services is one of the major challenges for any government given its embeddedness in the system and resistance to any kind of change or reform. The leaders till now have been extremely unwilling to take major

initiatives in the realm of reforming the bureaucracy. However, the recent reforms are not only unprecedented but historic. Reform roadmaps like Mission Karmyogi are yet to fully roll out and its implications are yet to be ascertained, but this is a landmark moment in the history of the services whether for better or worse.



Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) aspirants stage a protest demanding compensatory attempts in the UPSC Civil Services Exam, at Shanti Van Chowk on January 15, 2019 in New Delhi, India. Aspirants, who took up the UPSC Civil Services Prelims Exam, allege that the introduction of CSAT was done in favour of English medium students and aspirants from the engineering background.



★★★★☆
(3.5/5 star rating)

"The Population Myth"

by Dr SY Quraishi

Hardik Narayan Shukla

Most of us will agree to the fact that India's population is increasing at an alarming rate and needs to be checked upon. However, when it comes to determining the cause for the population surge, a major narrative that has surfaced across the country is that the Muslim community has been averse to the idea of family planning and is responsible for the reckless growth of the country's population. The argument goes further to allege the community of an 'organized conspiracy' – to have more children and eventually gain political control in India.

With the inspiration of debunking the propaganda behind the spread of this narrative and addressing the unfounded apprehensions which arise as a consequence, 'The Population Myth' hit the stands on February 15, 2021. The book, authored by former Chief Election Commissioner Dr S. Y. Quraishi, helps one gain a multi-dimensional understanding of population growth and family planning in India.

The population is a very complex, intricate and dynamic subject. A layman is therefore likely to be uninterested in learning about the changes in demography and the factors influencing them. However, as an aware and responsible citizen, we should have at least a basic understanding of family planning and the policy initiatives of the government in this regard. Our ignorance towards knowing the real facts and data about our country paves way for us to fall prey to propaganda, spread solely for political gains.

The simple language and lucid style of writing used by the author make this book an effective read to understand the demographic structure of our country from a broader perspective and get insights into the framework of policy making. All the arguments proposed by the author are based on solid data, which effectively counters the misinformation campaign.

Although it is obvious that the book is centred around the Muslim community, it starts becoming uninteresting, repetitive and a tedious read when the author talks only about Islamic tenets and Muslim family planning for three chapters at a stretch. This attempt by the author restricts the diverse subject at hand. At many points, it appeared that the quotes and sources cited were unnecessary. The author's effort to present a broad argument is visible, however not significant.

India's changing demographic ratio, in which Hindu's share declined from 84% in 1951 to 79.8% in 2011 and Muslims increased from 9.8% to 14.2% in the same period, has been a cause of concern over the years. Based on this premise, many believe that Muslims will soon outnumber the Hindus. It is also alleged that this is an organized effort by the Muslim community to gain political power in the country.

Putting forth an elaborate statistical analysis of data (from censuses, National Family Health Survey and several other impeccable sources), Dr Quraishi counters this false propaganda. He highlights that although the fertility rate is increasing in Muslims, the Muslim community is faring much better in adopting family planning compared to other communities. In fact, a substantial Muslim population opted for sterilization, which is prohibited by Islam. Owing to this, the differential in growth rate between both Hindus and Muslims is narrowing. Given the trend in the last 70 years, it is projected that by 2101 the population of India will stabilize at 1.7 billion, with 1.27 billion Hindus and 320 million Muslims, a far cry from what the exaggerated and doctored narrative tells us.

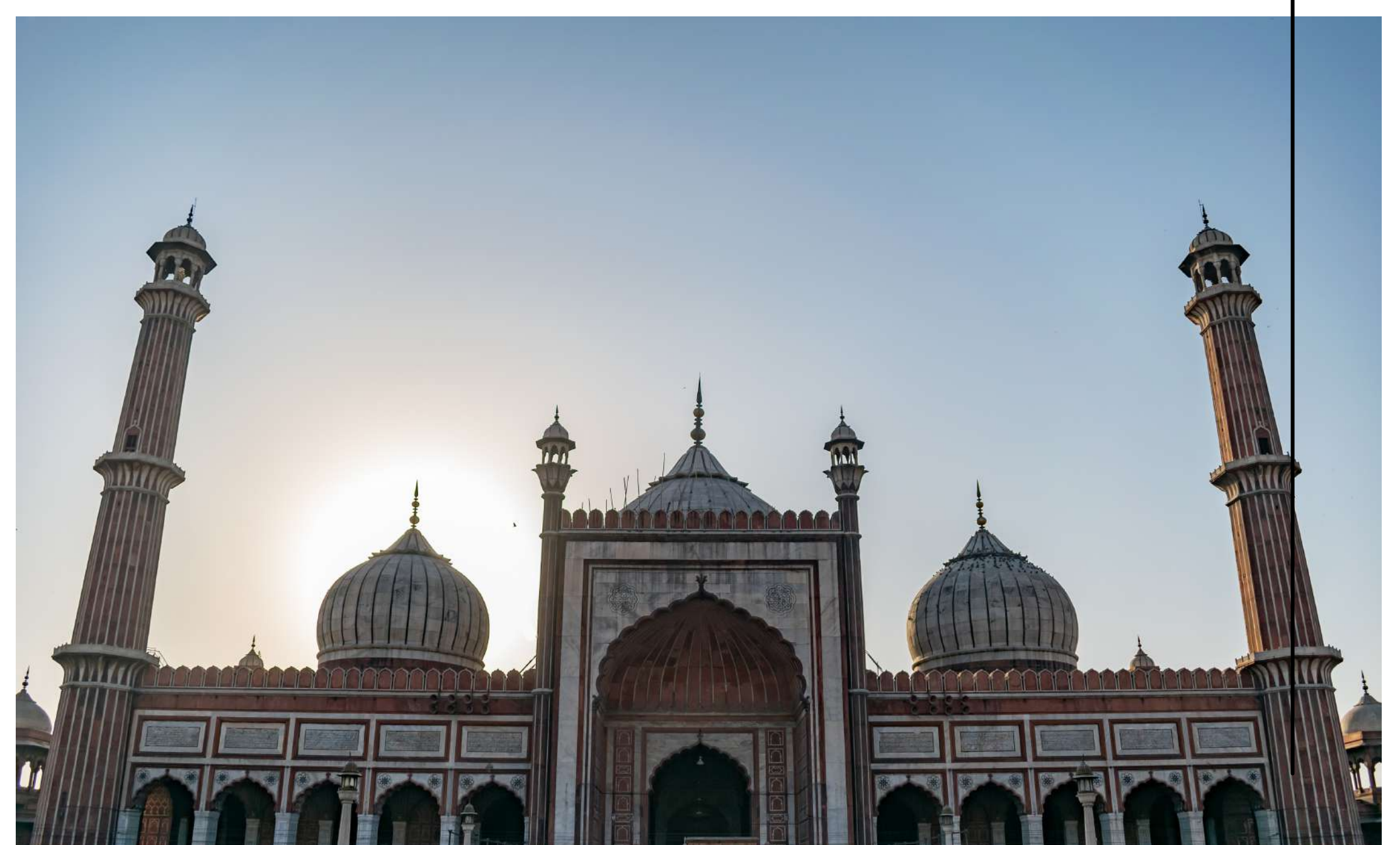
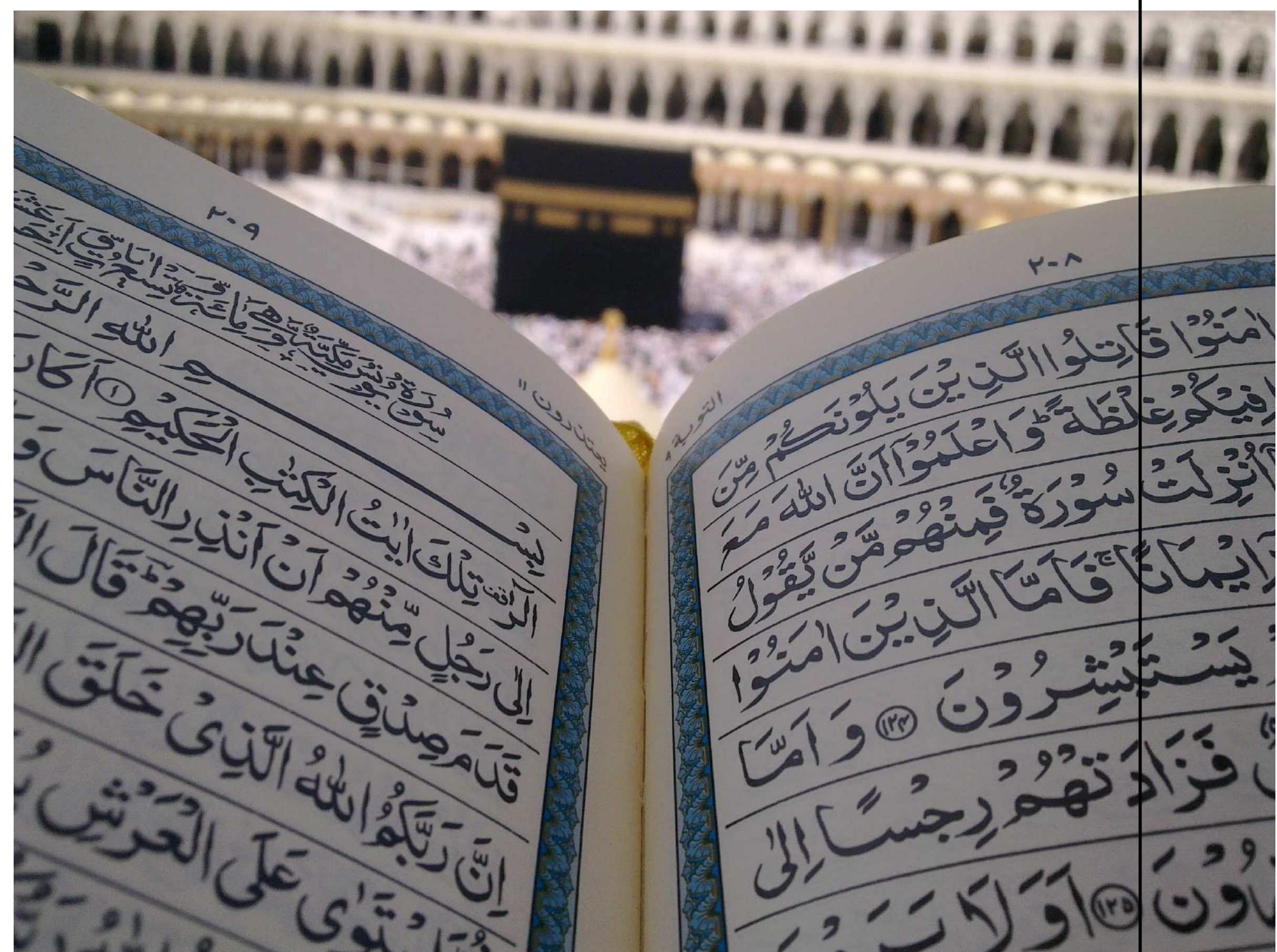
As outlined by Quraishi, religion is in no way inhibiting family planning in Muslims. The high birth-rates result purely from the socio-economic backwardness of the community in terms of literacy level, income and access to health services. The author suggests a 'target-specific approach' to meet the specific needs of the Muslims and other communities lagging behind in family planning. Through his meticulous effort in presenting such a well-researched and data-intensive study to back his arguments, Dr. Quraishi is successful in busting the wrong perception about the Muslim community. However, this plethora of information, some of which include highly technical jargon, makes it cumbersome for the readers to stick along throughout the end of the book. Anyways, the author seems to be in no mood of compromising with any

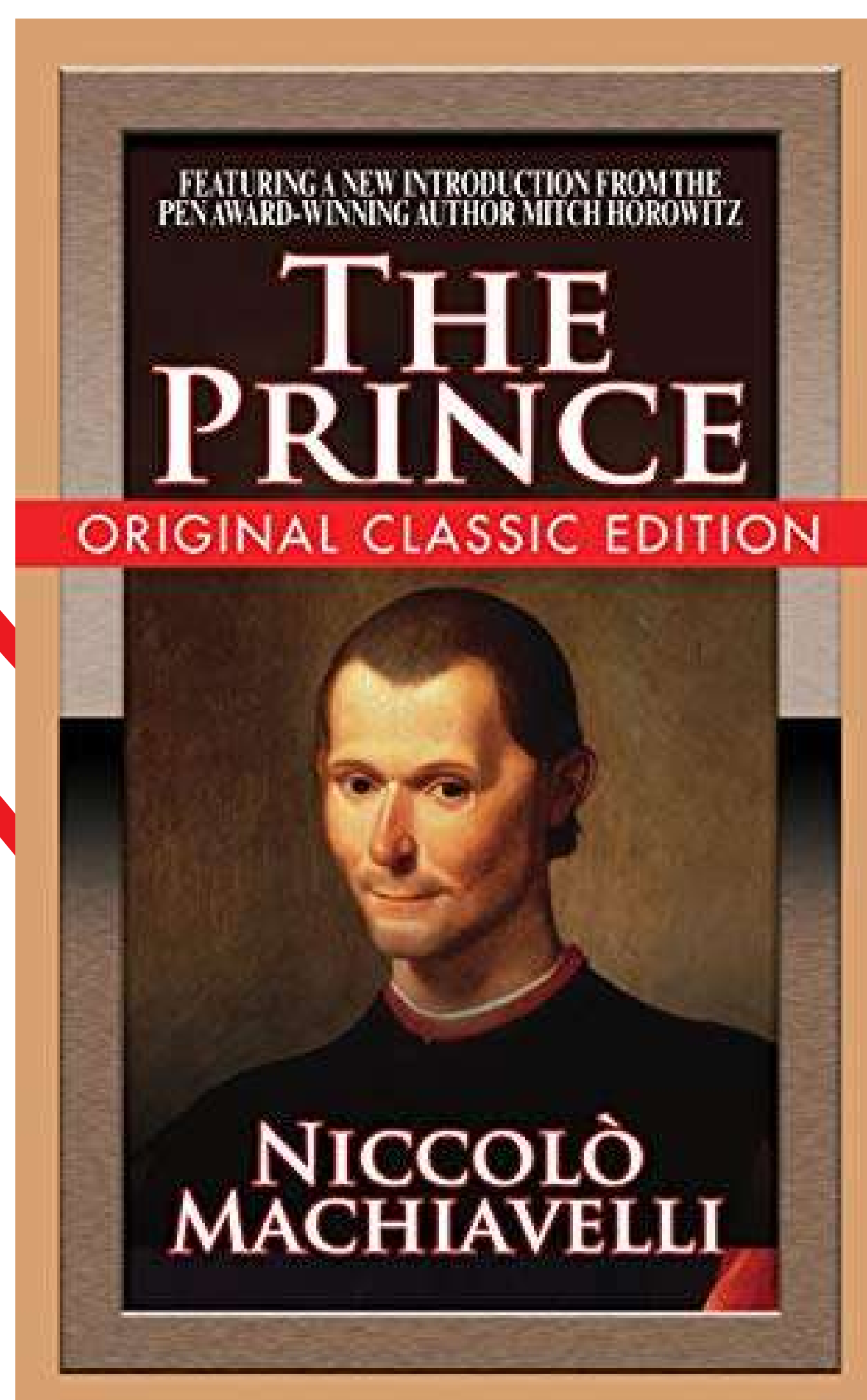
bit of data or fact related to the subject of the book, probably to make a strong and authentic argument.

In the process of clearing out 'the myth', the author provides a historical account of family planning in India. He lists all the major policies formulated and the assessments made in modern India regarding birth control and also evaluates and analyses the success and failure of these initiatives. Hence, this book will surely be an insightful and interesting read for both policy-makers and policy enthusiasts alike.

Propaganda and baseless narratives disturb the diverse cultural and social fabric of the country by inducing hate between communities. Awareness and a will to understand the true side of the story is important to ensure peace and harmony between all in a diverse country like India.

The book is an attempt on that front. However, it can also be seen as an attempt to whitewash the shortcomings of the community itself, by other readers. The book fails to give a balanced view on the condition of women in Islam, religious fanaticism, but in all, it succeeds in distinguishing the truth from the myth.





★★★★☆
(4.5/5 star rating)

THE PRINCE

-NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

- Vasu Agarwal

For such an unconventional genre, I was quite impressed by the content I found in this beautifully written classic book. It most definitely changes the way one's thoughts are formed. One can relate to it in everyday life and figure out subtle things that most people are oblivious to. One can simply say that if we understand how a leader should lead, we can turn dreams into palpable results. Through this book, Machiavelli attempts at making the reader understand many important concepts which are generally neglected by us in today's world like he talks widely about principality, colonies, authoritarianism etc. (which I'll be talking about in the rest of my review) in which we develop images that are lived out in real life. The book is dedicated to the enthusiastic patron of Renaissance culture in Italy, Lorenzo de Medici. This book also mainly talks about how a ruler should rule and act in a manner that shows his powers.

Tips and tricks are really important for us in today's world, and this is what this book gives you, tips and tricks to be a great leader of all times. What does a politician want, keeping in mind the current scenario? It's power and respect, but many of them fail to attain both power and respect. This book explains very clearly the concept of attainment of power as well as the respect of the people.

Now I'll be talking about the concepts that were highlighted by the author Machiavelli. The one reason why the great philosopher is different from the rest of them is that he not only talks about what a state is but also tells us how to run the state in an effective and efficient manner. Back in my school days, this line was really famous "If everyone is your friend, then you have no friend", this line basically means that you need to be very clear with your choices, and that's what Machiavelli asks a king to



Portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Florentine statesman and diplomat, author of "Il Principe" (The Prince). By Santi di Tito. Palazzo Vecchio, Florenz, Italien. (Photo by Imagno/Getty Images)

do. He asks them to have only a few people on whom they can rely and trust. And these people should be the one who thinks for the good of the king before their personal needs. I would like to quote J.k. Rowling here when she says, "It's our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities". With this, I move to my second point, and that's about the art of war. Some would say that it's not relevant in today's world, but if we look at it from a wider perspective, it is applicable in today's competitive world too. This is really important not only for the kings but for corporate leaders, or if you're a branch manager or a salesman because it teaches you how to handle your enemies and be on the top.

You should always be prepared for the most unpredictable situations too. The next point which I'll be talking about is that a country should have its own armed forces to be well protected. We can also implement this concept in our corporate world by comparing the army men with the employees of the company who are loyal to them and are ready to work for the company dedicatedly. And in return, the only thing they want is respect for their work, and it's the duty of the leader to take proper care of its employees. To understand the problems of the people, you need to be connected with them very closely; in other words, Machiavelli tries to say that you need to make your presence everywhere,

not once or twice but repetitively. By making your presence you would be able to connect directly with people, and by doing this, you can also create fear in the hearts of the people who want to backstab you and take your throne. Well, we can also implement this in our lives as a politician or a leader by establishing our presence in public, or in front of our subordinates.

Now I'll be talking about the most interesting question which Machiavelli raises, "Should a leader be feared or loved?". Machiavelli himself answers this mystifying question. He says that a great leader is the one who is loved as well as feared, but it is better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both. Machiavelli viewed humans as "ungrateful, fickle, false" because if he is a king who is loved, they'll not support him completely they'll support him till the time he's powerful, and once the powers are weakened, you'll see the support for the king fades away. But if the people are afraid of the king, they'll support him till his last breath because if they don't, they will have to face serious consequences. So a ruler should have a grip on the people along with being humble to them.

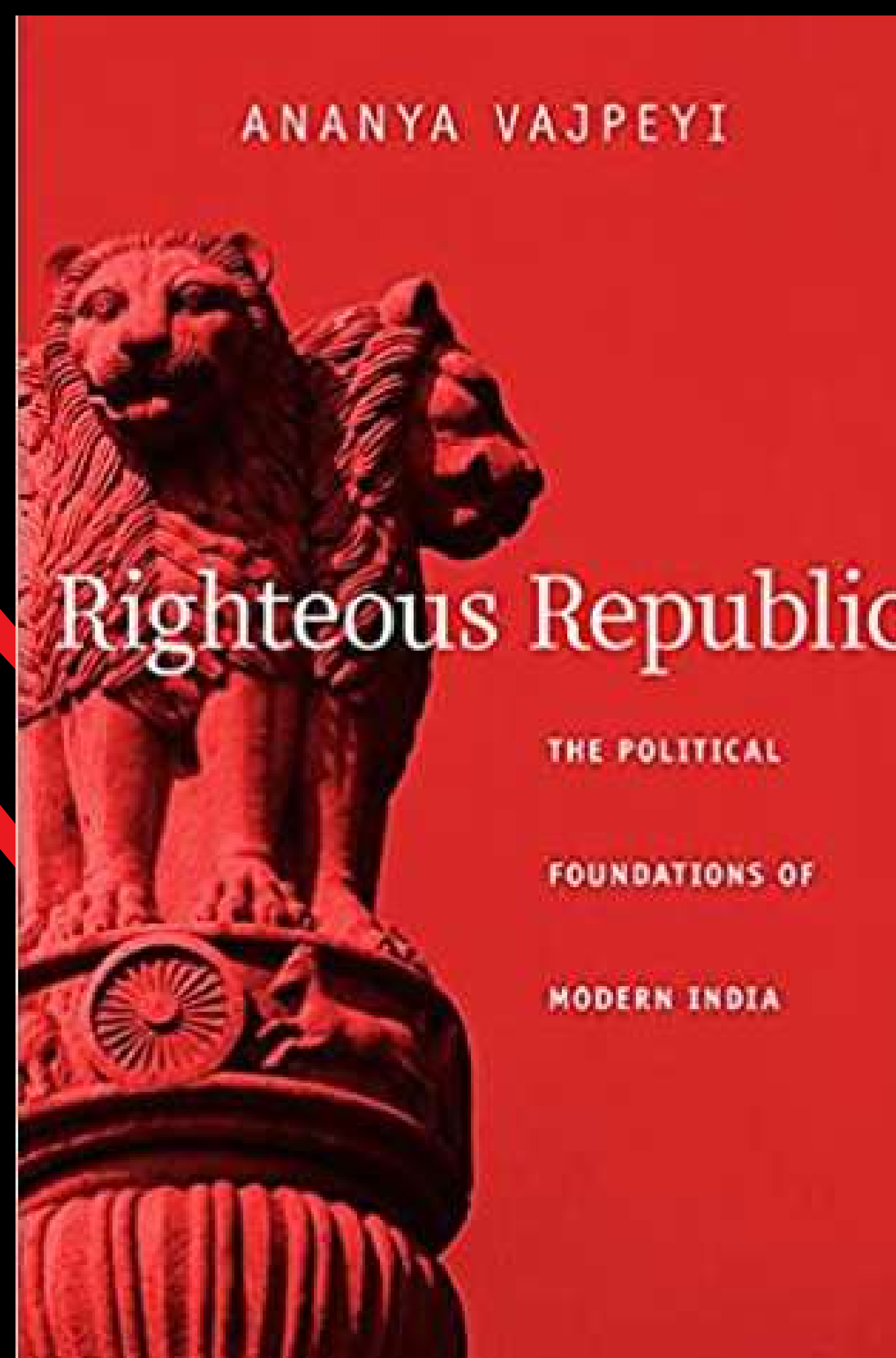


I've been able to highlight some of the important tips given by Machiavelli, but there are loads to add to the list. While some books may provide a good source for entertainment, some make us think more. This just happens to be one of those books that not only change the perception of the world around you but how you view your life as well.

The so-called father of modern politics, Niccolò Machiavelli, had a unique and distinct writing style that was uncommon for his time. He, as a writer, politician, philosopher as well as a poet, had to face many difficulties. He wrote this book when he was forced to retire from politics and went to his native village. After writing the two books, Discourses of Livy and The Prince, he got the attention of the world.

These books were published after three years of his death, but these books still hold great value. And that's what I really like about this book; one can directly connect with the solutions explained by Machiavelli. I would highly recommend it. "The Prince" opens you up to a whole new world of perception, and I'd even say it is as important as reading lighter books during these times.

"The Prince" opens you up to a whole new world of perception, and I'd even say it is as important as reading lighter books during these times.



(4/5 star rating)

**THE RIGHTEOUS REPUBLIC:
THE POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS OF
MODERN INDIA**

-ANANYA VAJPEYI

- Preet Sharma

Ananya Vajpeyi's work "Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India" is an unconventional way of imagining and understanding Indian Intellectual History. Ananya Vajpeyi in her book explores and reimagines the Idea of India through the eyes of some of the most influential founding fathers of India who grounded Indian intellectual tradition in India's glorious past and yet were not oblivious to the use of relevant western categories. Ananya Vajpeyi asserts that the "Raj" part of Swaraj has dictated the historical narrative as being the main focus of scholars trying to understand the creation of the Indian nation. She points out that the "Swa" or the "Self" to whom this sovereignty belongs is rarely explored. Ananya Vajpeyi in her work "The Righteous Republic" attempts the search of the 'Self' that she claims runs in conjunction with the search for India and its sovereignty. The sources that she draws on range from classical texts, poetry, painting, scripture, architecture, and epigraphy dating back to as early as the life of Buddha to the twentieth century, as the domain of self extends over politics, religion, art and culture.

The book centres around the categories attributed to five influential founders of modern India: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, and Dr BR Ambedkar. She writes that these personalities were partly selected because they were not only among the most reflexive and influential founders of India but also because, in each one of them, she saw an ethical and epistemological engagement with self and sovereignty so strong that through their ideas we become capable to reimagine India through their vision as the Righteous Republic. Ananya Vajpeyi defines the Righteous Republic as a storehouse of some morals and values which is fundamental in establishing India's historical identity in the world or justify its claim to moral authority in a global community. She argues that they saw India's freedom not just as freedom to rule itself but as the freedom to be itself.

Discovering the "Swa" in Swaraj:

Ananya Vajpeyi defines Swaraj as the ligature between self and sovereignty. She ponders upon what the "Self" means for the five founding fathers. She claims that for Gandhi, Swaraj is a virtue in the form of Ram Rajya (Ram Reign) a civilizational norm of ethical sovereignty, just rule, and ideal ruler. The idea of "Self" for Rabindranath Tagore can be signified through symbols and for him, the self is concealed and primordial. For Abanindranath Tagore, Vajpeyi writes that the art of claiming self is also becoming self. For Jawaharlal Nehru, the Self is engaged in a constant process of discovering and discernment. The self for Nehru is secular, rational, and fair-minded. For Ambedkar the Self has to be carved out in an unequal society, it has to go on from being crushed to becoming most emancipated. Swaraj for them was not just about creating an institution of nation-state with political independence but it was also about Indianizing the soul of Indian people that was crushed and westernized due to the colonial impact.

During the national movement soul searching and radical reinvention of India was taking place. Ananya Vajpeyi in her book emphasizes using indigenous concepts like Ahimsa (non-violence), Viraha (longing), Samvega (aesthetic shock) etc. as central ideas to create and project ideals of the Righteous Republic. She is successful in bringing out the novelty and inventiveness of the work of founders through philological attentiveness.



The Association with Bright Ideas:

Ananya Vajpeyi associates one or two specific categories and analyses ideas of each of the founding fathers through those categories. In chapter one, she traces the ideas of Swaraj and Ahimsa focused on Mahatma Gandhi's understanding of the concepts. She looks at Gandhi as someone who made possible an epistemological break in the Indian tradition of political thought. Epistemological break refers to a category by Alasdair Macintyre which happens in order to overcome an epistemological crisis (a crisis in tradition) when present ways of knowing no longer seem adequate to explain the happenings around us. Epistemological breakthrough refers to when "new ways of knowing and new pieces of knowledge come into proper alignment with one another." She argues that Gandhi's Ahimsa reminded Indians of their political-mythological history. Ahimsa is not only Non-Violence as it is often translated in common parlance, but she argues that the notion of Ahimsa reinforces Karuna (pity), Anrumsya (non-cruelty), and Abhay (fearlessness). Swaraj for Gandhi is a virtue, it was much larger than political independence.

Ananya Vajpeyi focuses on the category of Viraha (longing) when tracing ideas of Rabindranath Tagore. Viraha she claims is a longing produced by the separation of lovers, unbound teleologically it may or may not end in sundered lovers reuniting. The India of the past for Tagore becomes a place of love from which he feels sundered.

o Tagore, she claims, was appropriated as the national poet, but he never believed in the idea of the nation-state. She writes:

"The idea of India that resembles a lover for whom one longs in perpetuity is very different from the idea of India as a nation-state, the object of political desire."

Abanindranath Tagore was a prominent artist in the twentieth century and was also Rabindranath's nephew. He made a trio of paintings depicting the life of Emperor Shah Jahan. His painting "The Passing of Shah Jahan" won the silver medal at Delhi durbar in 1903. Anand K. Coomaraswamy explicates the Pali word "Samvega" as an aesthetic shock. Vajpeyi argues that Abanindranath's Shah Jahan's paintings are expressions of aesthetic shock he underwent while thinking about the loss of true Indian art during colonial rule. Samvega is understood as a brief shock that is strongly felt when the perception of the art of work becomes a serious experience. Coomaraswamy explains the experience at two stages: emotional and cognitive. The first when we have sensation and the second when we understand the meaning. Abanindranath was shaken to his very roots by a vision and successfully imagined a wide horizon of Indian art through which ideas of power and beauty can be depicted. Abanindranath's other masterpiece, Bharata Mata was appropriated by the nationalists but Ananya Vajpeyi argues that Bharata Mata emphasized reforming the Samaj (society) rather than compelling people to change their Sarkar (government). She argues that "her primary function is pedagogical and not retributive."

Ananya Vajpeyi argues that Pandit Nehru's discovery of 'Self' was based on two significant categories of selfhood, Dharma (norm) and Artha (purpose). She considers three texts for analyzing Nehru's search for Indic self, Discovery of India, Nehru's writings on National Symbols, and Letters that he wrote to Chief Ministers during his tenure as Prime Minister. She here refers to Dharma as a category that denotes the self's aspiration and Artha as a significant category that denotes the self's purpose. Ananya Vajpeyi in this analysis turns to Alasdair Macintyre's essay "Poetry as Political Philosophy." Nehru during the national movement appears to be using exactly the language of political imagination and post-independence he transforms into the one who has the responsibility of imparting political governance. Nehru admired Ashoka and looked up to Mauryan Imperium as a historical ancestor that had the weight of Dharma and can act as a guiding light. She writes :

"Nehru was in the extraordinary and completely unique historical position of having to give India both its flag and its five-year plans, its credo and its credit, its perduring civilisational identity and its unprecedented democratic transformation."(p.207)

Ananya Vajpeyi argues that Dr BR Ambedkar reinvents Buddhism and she traces his ideas through the category of Dukkha (suffering/Self's burden). Dr BR Ambedkar argues that the four noble truths should not be taken as foundational to Buddhism because if suffering is everything going by four noble truths then we cannot hope for any kind of social order that is oriented towards the end of suffering. He interprets Dukkha (Suffering) not as something that is the result of an individual's own actions (individual karma) but as a concept that denotes collective social suffering. He sees suffering as socially constituted and which can be healed only by treating it as a central category. Ananya Vajpeyi explores the possible reasons why Ambedkar became a Buddhist, she refers to the book "Untouchables: A Thesis on the Origin of Untouchability" where Ambedkar argues that untouchables in the Hindu caste are none other than former Buddhist. He argues that Untouchability was created to destroy Buddhism in India. Thus, he saw Buddhism as the natural home of India's untouchables, also Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism was not positive (attraction towards the religion) rather it was a negative choice as a rejection of other religions. She also argues that Buddhism was having a celebrated and ubiquitous renaissance in twentieth-century India. Sir Edwin Arnold's 'The Light of Asia' was published in 1879. Ambedkar describes Buddha as Marga Data (Giver of a Path) rather than as Moksha Data

(Giver of Transcendental Emancipation). He was for Ambedkar, man and only man: a mortal. Ananya Vajpeyi argues that Ambedkar created a new Buddhism or Navayana.



Conclusion:

Ananya Vajpeyi writes that her account of India's Self is a preliminary rather than a definitive account and it has aimed to open a door rather than to write a total history. In my opinion, Ananya Vajpeyi is successful in narrating a conception of a righteous republic through the eyes of Gandhi and the great founding fathers of the Indian Republic. The book is a break from the way Indian political thought is understood. I see a sincere attempt from the Vajpeyi's side to understand the Indic self through indigenous Indic categories of *Ahimsa*, *Dukkha*, *Samvega*, *Viraha*, and *Dharma* and *Artha*. The need is to search for more categories in Indian tradition that can enrich Indian political thought. I think the category of "Tyaag", which is Sacrifice, can be another important category that can be employed to understand India's national movement and its figures. I also see a sincere attempt at her side from moving beyond binaries whether they are religious/secular or modernity/tradition. In this interesting book, Ananya Vajpeyi makes a serious attempt to move beyond the imposition of western categories on understanding ourselves and culture. But there are certain criticisms or intellectual fault lines in her book. Karuna Mantena writes that Ananya Vajpayee uses external categories to evaluate ideas of thinkers, but these thinkers have never consciously understood or articulated these categories themselves. Ananya presents these categories as objectively rather than interpretively. Dilip Menon's criticism of Ananya Vajpeyi's book regarding the reading of Dr BR Ambedkar is valid. The last chapter of the book describes the category of Dukkha (suffering), and Dr BR Ambedkar is the central figure in chapter five. Ananya Vajpeyi puts forward several assumptions regarding why Dr Ambedkar would have converted to Buddhism, which suggest assumptions rather than concrete evidence. However, overall Ananya Vajpayee's book is an interesting work that should be given the credit of trying to provide an unconventional intervention in the way modern Indian political thought can be understood by the categories that were part of the discourse in ancient and medieval India.

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Hong Kong's Human Capital Reversal

BY AARYAN GADHOK

It remains an indubitable fact that a major segment of the millennial gentry unequivocally eye the opportunity of working in a developed liberal economy like Hong Kong, which provides a robust economic landscape conducive for conducting business and services. However, we witness a reverse trend being played out in the current global landscape with large human capital shifting their economic base out of the territory to other parts of the world, preferably the West and other liberal Asian countries like Singapore or Taiwan. The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong strategically tucked in the Dragon's underbelly currently braves the turning geo-political tides in East Asia

An estimated 216,000 Hong Kongers have obtained BNO(British National Overseas) passports from the British passport office in 2020 alone, intending to shift economic camp to the UK in light of the harrowing events of Chinese interference in the region. Reports suggest that the UK granted five passports a minute to Hong Kongers in 2020 as China tightened its grip on the semi-autonomous region. Hong Kong's terrific performance on the economic front has put the nation, smaller than the size of

Delhi, on the list of countries serving as poster boys for economic prosperity and capitalistic success. The nation's growth trajectory can be traced through history, keeping the political discourse chosen by its leaders in centre focus.

Hong Kong, being a part of mainland China originally, was relinquished to the British empire on account of having lost the opium wars in the late 19th century. The British signed a 99-year lease for the territory with validity till 1997 post which an authorized handover brought Hong Kong under the "one country, two systems" principle, deeming it as a Special Administrative Region(SAR) having limited democracy. The system will last till 2047.

Since then, Hong Kong has witnessed an unparalleled acceleration on the economic periphery, boosting its GDP and raising the standards of living for its people. It has attained the status of a developed nation, credit to it being an attractive investment hotspot for high net worth individuals. The ease of doing business and tax concessions provided by the government have attracted major foreign players whose enterprises have created jobs in the service sector,

contributing an estimated 90.3 per cent of the GDP. Its strategic location in the east allows easier penetration into the markets of Mainland China, serving as a crucial factor for multinational conglomerates. Globally, Hong Kong ranked second in wealth per adult after Switzerland in mid-2019 and 10th in the number of people with more than \$50 million in assets.

Hong Kong's dilemma can be understood in the context of notorious political interventions by China, which is the primary reason for migration of human capital towards the West. Hong Kong's rich are moving out of the territory to secure asset safety somewhere else. Time and again, China has tried to exert its political influence over the semi-autonomous region, sending shivers down the spines of pro-democracy supporters. It triggered a series of protests in the region back in 2019 with repeal of the controversial extradition bill as their primary demand. The passing of this extradition bill in June 2020 proved to be the last straw for democracy valuing citizens who took to the streets of Hong Kong and are now seeking citizenship in countries like the UK, USA, Canada, and Singapore. Hong Kong is witnessing the migration of skilled human capital like entrepreneurs and

"HK's dilemma can be understood in the context of China's interventions"

service providers to other countries due to fears of state control over economic institutions and a curb on free-market forces with civil and political liberties taking major hits as well. Traders and business persons fear that the corruption drives taken out by the state government would hamper their ability and freedom to carry out businesses on their own accord, free from state influence. China's increasing expansionist policies under Jing Ping's regime have threatened and violated international diplomatic agreements triggering an unavoidable trade war with the USA, which has had major ramifications on the economies of both countries.

Hong Kong's standing as a stable international financial centre acts as a gateway for global capital flow into the Dragon economy. The SAR serves as a springboard for China's global economic expansion, which heavily rests on Hong Kong's currency, debt and equity markets to channel foreign direct investment. International conglomerates use the region as a backdoor entry to expand into mainland China. An array of state and privately owned Chinese companies are listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange, which enables them to generate significantly higher amounts of capital through IPO's, in juxtaposition to listings on the Shanghai or the Shenzhen stock markets. Further political deterioration may lead to US Senators amending the 1992 Hong Kong Policy Act and stop treating it as a separate customs area from the mainland. The diplomatic move may have a damaging effect on Chinese companies, which rely heavily on Hong Kong's special status under United States law in terms of tariffs, free exchangeability between United States dollar and Hong Kong dollar, intellectual property, and acquisition of technologies among others. The current political narrative has destabilized Hong Kong's credibility as the world's leading financial and legal centre,

caused major capital flight, a reverse flow of human capital and collapsed the region's booming property and stock markets, in addition to being detrimental to China's own economy. The 'new era' of Chinese geopolitical ambition and subsequent global domination requires swift control and influence over the Western-Pacific, popularly referred to as China's Backyard before foraging into the West and beyond. Control over its backyard gives China the essential regional primacy required for out-flanking the US alliance arrangement and undermining the QUAD nexus in the Western-Pacific.

The BNO passport offer by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, as some foreign policy analysts, may say, mischievously bends around the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration regarding the resumption of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong.

The only stakeholders that stand to profit from this are countries like the UK and Singapore, receiving highly skilled, advanced human capital and service providers at their end whose influx would further thrust their economies in the right direction and create a more heterogeneous society conducive for strengthening democracy and ensuring equitable representation.

Will Navalny Smash 'Putinism'? Kremlin Critic Alexei Navalny's Struggles and Putin's Defence

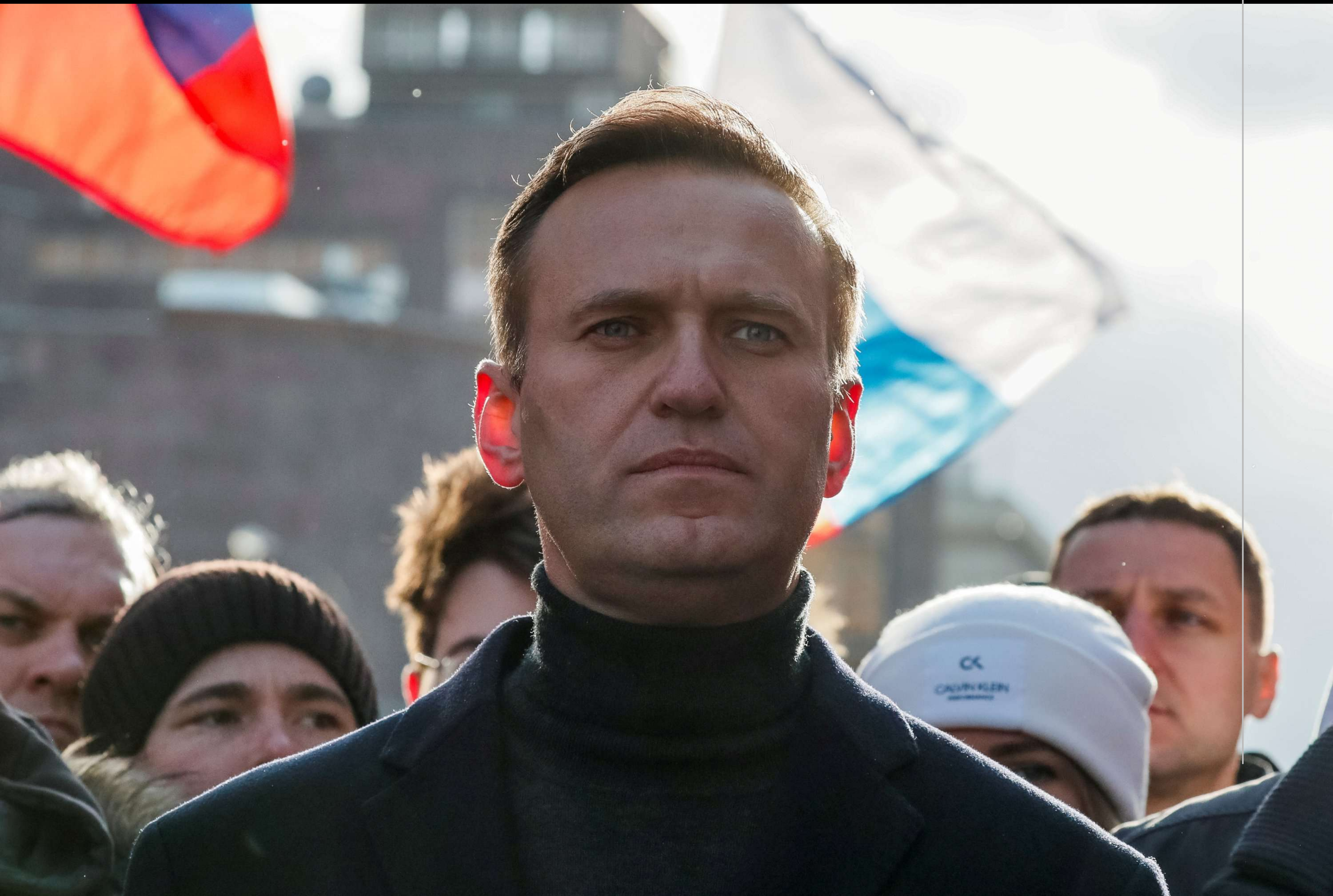
BY VARSHA VALSAN

The world is no longer bipolar but Russia, the successor of USSR, remains the biggest country with its non-diminishing influence in the international arena with one man on the apex: Vladimir Putin. A man who was the head of foreign intelligence of KGB, the Soviet secret service agency, when 'Moscow was silent'. A man who did the lion's share of work in refining post-soviet Russia and making Moscow heard. The Russian federation is shielded in the arms of this prudent leader for almost 20 years of his undeniability, but with a distant dream of amelioration of democratic values and freedom of speech. Certainly, there are all kinds of complications

in Russian governance that can happen when power condenses on one point. One thing which is definite at this point is voices of dissent and there have been different faces for Russian opposition: now it is Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption campaigner and political activist.

NAVALNY: HEADLINES FROM BEHIND THE BARS

Alexei Navalny started his opposition through social media with his 60 lakh YouTube subscribers and 20 lakh Twitter followers since he knew its importance in reaching out to the youth better than most.



Navalny has been on the screen for quite some time endeavoring to expose state corruption through various ventures like RosPil, Ros Yama etc. In 2011, when a radio host asked Navalny's stand on United Russia, the party of Putin, he said 'United Russia is a party of crooks and thieves.' He also revealed his findings on state corruption which he thought were obvious. But in the same studio, Evgeny Fedorov, a high-ranking member of Duma and United Russia, accused Navalny of terrorism and receiving financing from C.I.A. In 2017, he published the documentary 'Don't Call Him Dimon', telling the story of corruption by Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian president from United Russia. His anti-corruption organization FBK also released another documentary named 'Putin's Palace: History of World's Largest Bribe', alleging that Putin possesses a palace worth 100 crore dollars. Moreover, by introducing the tactic of 'Smart Voting' in order to consolidate opposition against United Russia, Navalny succeeded in bringing a change in Russia's regional politics. The election stripped Putin's party of three major city councils and Navalny's allies won deputy seats. Because of the fact that Navalny started his campaigning online, Putin and his comrades dismissed him as a blogger, but they never thought of him gaining such a massive scale of public response. These are only the major part of the efforts Navalny made. He kept on doing videos and organizing protests which Russia hadn't witnessed for a long time. The incredible part of the dissent is the kind of response that rural Russia gave. A good part of Russian masses believes in Navalny.

There is always a need for opposition when the state becomes autocratic and masses lose their voice. Russia is now struggling with an authoritarian tradition which impedes political developments and balks at its economic improvement. Penurious responses to the pandemic, over dependence on natural resource extraction for economic growth etc. have made people think twice on the twenty years of 'Putinism'.

But being a Kremlin critic is a risky business. Navalny's reprisals caused him Gordian knots. A broad state-initiated campaign was initiated to stop him. There were multiple arrests and jail time for protesting and convictions for embezzlement and fraud. One of the convictions led to a ban on him from running for president. He was also convicted of slandering a Russian World War 2 veteran. The most vicious of all was when Navalny fell seriously ill on a domestic flight and was immediately transferred to Germany for treatment. It was observed that Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent belonging to Novichok family which is used by Russian spy agents. He alleged that this was with a political motive of getting rid of him and accused Kremlin, but Putin denied it. This vociferous leader prevailed over death and came back to his homeland.

The very first minute he arrived he was arrested. Navalny was convicted of violating his parole by leaving the country. The lead members of his team were charged with several criminal offences following his arrest. Apart from this, the Moscow court opened another case to declare Navalny's organization FBK as an extremist terrorist organization which goes against Russian interest. But the case was adjourned passing an interim order which insisted the organization stop operating. Following this, Navalny's team stated that it will halt its regional campaigns across the country. Also, a criminal probe was set in motion against Navalny's lawyer and Ivan Pavlov Navalny's right hand was accused of leaking classified information. His close relatives including his wife were also arrested for a variety of charges.

Recently, Navalny has ended his 3-week hunger strike due to his extremely poor condition. He is still fighting without fear. But everyone could really sense the shrinking opportunities of Navalny to be heard even though he owns a clout.



IS PUTIN A MAN BEYOND POLITICAL CHALLENGERS?

Is Alexei Navalny capable of stripping down Putin from power? As per report of Glasnost Defense Foundation (GDF), watchdog of media freedom in Russia, a significant number of journalists and activists who were Kremlin critics have died under suspicious circumstances during Putin's reign. The list includes Alexander Litvinenko, Boris Nemtsov, Anna Politkovskaya, Boris Berezovsky etc. Even Russian government tried to label the GDF as 'Foreign Agent' in 2015. Western interference has been Putin's diplomatic tool to defend himself against a potential backlash. With its strong intelligence network FSB and wide collection of weaponized poisons and nerve agents like ricin, polonium, novichok etc., Russia is now hunting down all the voices against the Kremlin.

In these suspicious deaths of Kremlin critics, the evidence trails never reached Putin in most of the cases. Putin has strong supporters like Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Chechen republic, who is accused of having a part in these deaths. Despite all these facts, Russian federation is now exposed as having an organized crime wing for witch-hunting, making it one of the dangerous places for dissidents. What matters here is the Kremlin and federation.

WORLD AND RUSSIA

Something which is unavoidable in this episode is the influence of the West. The West and its media interests have been keenly watching autocratic experiences and opposition movements across the

world. But it is having a particular interest in Russia's opposition as in the time of cold war. It is striving hard to make use of the situation, comparing Putin to the worst autocrats like Qadhafi, Idi Amin, Hosni Mubarak and Kim Jong-un and makes Navalny another Aung San Suu Kyi and Juan Guido. The European Court of Human Rights also called for Navalny's release but Putin condemned it as 'unlawful'. Since it is Putin and Russia's internal affair, western countries have certain limitations. But still the western media have a cameo appearance which can create a significant turn.

Uproarious efforts of Navalny have gained the support from Russian masses which is capable of producing a backlash against the federation. Putin's defense against Navalny may create a backfiring for Putin. Despite all the domestic convulsions, Putin still firmly remains in power. A large part of Russians still believes in the sagacity of their leader since he is salient in post- USSR Russia. Finally, how can ballot boxes conclude things when there are allegations about fairness of Russian elections?

Regardless of these Russian opposition facts, the world has witnessed the perpetual nature of dissidents. They are voices with a cause and they will never cease to exist. The world has to be cognizant about the oppositions and disagreements whether it is in a democracy or authoritarian regime, whether it is in Russia or India. This consciousness is an accolade to the struggles we have been through and an admiration to the breakthroughs which helped to create fearless political spaces.



The Covid Crisis: Capitalism's Insuperable Falley or Callous State Response?

BY YASHOVARDHAN SINGH

The past year has been a testing time for all of us, socially, economically, physically as well as mentally. History tells us that humanity has faced a myriad of crises and with time, has successfully overcome it. However, this time it seems different. We are currently equipped with the most advanced medical technologies, state control, and industrial capacities yet this pandemic struck us in the most calamitous way possible. This inevitably forces us to ponder over what went wrong: Was it the State's callousness or is this incipient of a market failure?

It was on January 9 when the WHO announced mysterious coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan, China and it was not long before January 31 when WHO declared Coronavirus as a global health emergency. The scientists knew that a pandemic like this was coming after the SARS outbreak in 2003 and there have been news reports conveyed the same to governments as well. However, no action was taken and when coronavirus struck, the governments were unprepared. Even during the initial days of the pandemic, the governments were as much in

awe as the common population, when ideally, they should have taken the lead in ensuring protection to their citizens. The state, being all-powerful and advanced, has a monopoly on surveillance. Even with all the terabytes of data and inarguably the best doctors at disposal, it failed to properly address, let alone mitigate the pandemic.

The greatest argument in favour of capitalism is the efficiency it produces. It equates demand and supply, connects buyers and sellers, enhances productivity, and subsequently resolves all problems. But what happens when something like a pandemic is lurking around, ready to pounce at any moment? In normal living conditions, there will be no demand for items such as N95 masks or PPE gears because the common population is oblivious to the idea of a pandemic hitting them. However, when such a situation arises, the demand breaks off the roof. Firms cannot ramp up production and match supply because all economic activity gets suspended, or worse, workers are infected, and hence, there is not enough labour force. Does that imply that Capitalism



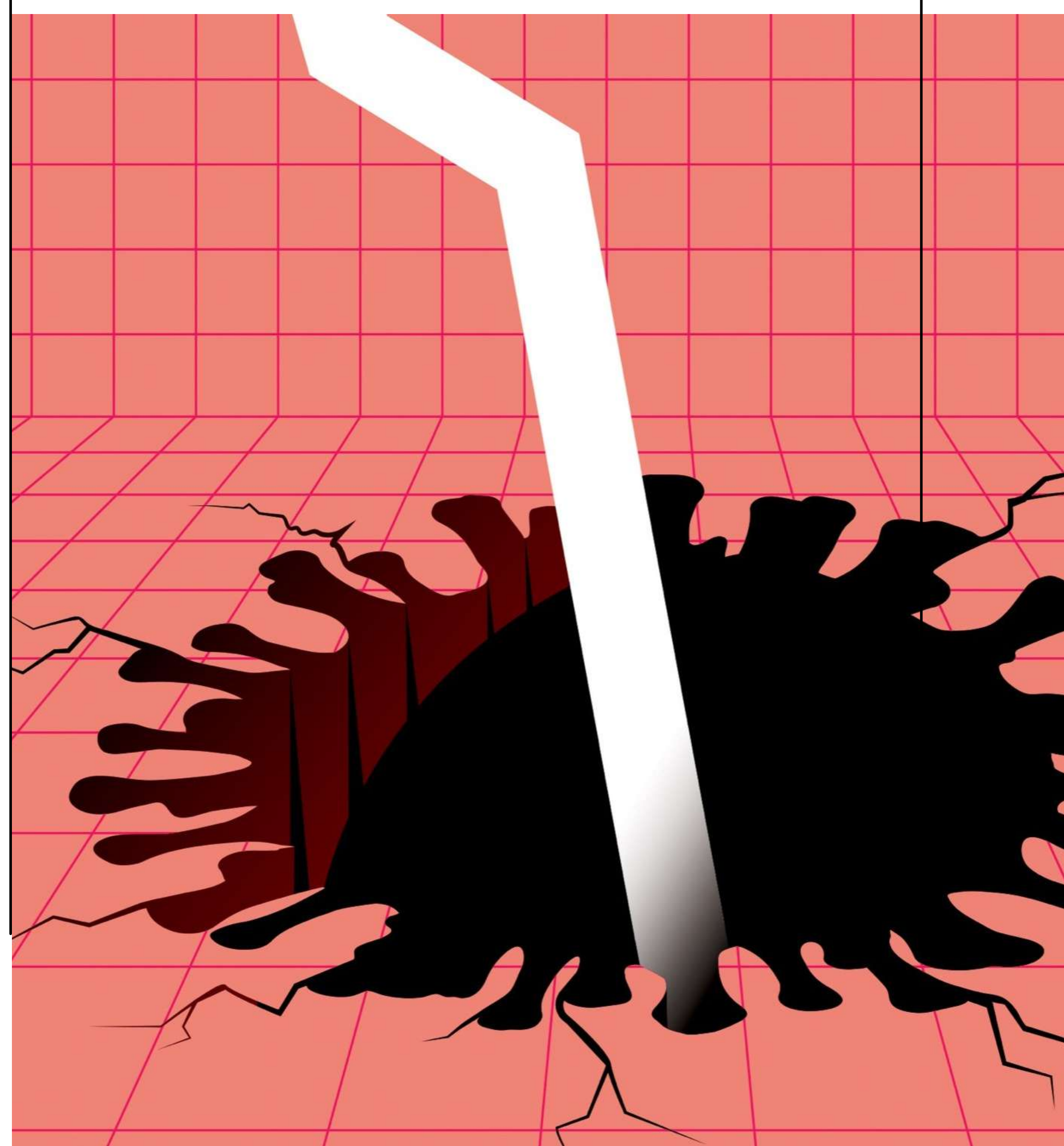
does not equip the society to be prepared for such a catastrophe and the markets fail to achieve equilibrium and resolve problems in times of such crises?

Globalization, during its inception, was touted to be the 'right way forward', the common populace, blinded by its incandescence and the world leaders, embraced it with open arms, probably due to the greed of untrammelled wealth accumulation, it projected. Sure it did make the world a lot richer and produced massive enormous wealth, and it does get its credit for that. But what about the dream of a better world? Of a place where countries are helping each other in times of crises? What we hoped was affluent and better-placed countries supporting those in need. Instead, what was witnessed was an argy-bargy between the United States and China with the former blaming the latter for a crisis while China itself was struggling, causing quite the kerfuffle. When Marx said that in the international sphere, core countries (the ones with maximum capital and influence) have undue influence over periphery countries (the developing countries) through the hegemony of international power structures, a corollary to that was how the core countries use it for their betterment. US President Donald Trump understood the risk his Presidency was going through at that time, and very conveniently, he changed the international narrative. The entire Global North, instead of focusing on how to tackle the forthcoming situation, was engaged in casting aspersions on China, even without any credible evidence to support their claims. These allegations were discredited by the WHO causing a setback to the USA, and its immediate response was to revoke its fundings to the WHO, seriously paralyzing the functions of the 'World Health Organisation' in the middle of a 'Global Health Emergency', giving us an ugly reminder that the 'effective' international institutions are not so effective after all, at least when they to stand up against countries like the USA.

This was just the first wave of COVID-19 which disproportionately affected some countries. Those who weren't affected much, such as Germany and India, were too quick to celebrate this short-lived victory, only to bear the brunt of the virus later. In

the first wave, when Italy was suffering from covid and its health structure was at the choke point, Germany didn't help Italy with the excess beds, using its stable healthcare structure. Rather, the help came from Cuba which provided it with doctors, masks, PPEs. Italy was deemed perfidious for taking help from Cuba, the premier nemesis of capitalism, especially by its allies which provided it with little or no assistance during the crisis. Vile ideological clashes poisoned the noble cause of helping others. This was the point where global politics had stooped.

All the important hallmarks of capitalism reneged on their promise of better well-being. International Trade was one such example. In the 1st wave, when medical research showed Remdesvir was effective and India had the productive capacity to produce it in large amounts, India was being called upon by the entire Global North to produce and export it to the countries which were devastated by the pandemic, especially the USA. India did the same and hoped (rightfully so) that when the time would come, these developed countries would return the support. However, the current vaccine supply crunch in India is evidence of how India misjudged. When India requested the United States to lift the raw material export ban for India to produce more vaccines, the immediate response was an arrogant and narcissistic denial. It was only after numerous requests and hues and cries that the USA finally complied. This shows



that even in times of a crisis, countries don't follow the fair rules of international trade, benefiting from the comparative advantage. More than anything, it paints a grim picture of how self-centric developed countries are. Even when a developing country ravaged by the pandemic pleads before them, they blatantly reject it. This gives us a lot to think about how 'fair' and 'fulfilling' international trade and global aid is.

Capitalism is known to produce inequality. While some schools of thought oppose this inequality, others are of the view that it is necessary to keep the engine of development running. However, the ongoing pandemic has made the common man realise how this vast accumulation of capital has today become a means of saving life and experiencing luxury even in a morbid period like the ongoing health emergency. While the majority population does not have proper beds with healthcare facilities, so much so that there are crowded outside hospitals, the rich have, very conveniently, taken their private jets and shifted to better-off countries, living in their armageddon (the doomsday bunkers) which is worth millions and enjoying the luxuries of life in the most flamboyant way possible, leaving the rest of the nation to burn in the arson of this virus. According to a report by Oxfam India, it is estimated that 170000 people lost their jobs every hour in April 2020, whereas the top 100

Billionaires of India added a whopping 12.97 Trillion Rupees. The wealth added by just the top 11 billionaires of India during the first wave of the pandemic can sustain the NREGA or Health Ministry's resource requirements for 10 years. Today, this capital divide is a gloomy reminder of how unfortunate and uncertain the lives of those without proper economic backing are and while COVID has brought its wrath on humanity as a whole, 99% of the people have to bear it in a greater proportion than the rest 1%.

The markets have failed us, but the State is no less. This was a golden opportunity for States all over to swoop in, to make the situation better and give a strong retort to the neoliberal motto of "State is not the solution, State is the problem". However, much to our chagrin, nothing like this happened. In countries like the United States, the State for the longest time was not even ready to recognize that a pandemic has struck the people, despite repeated signals and warnings from its health arm. In countries like India, the matter at hand is entirely politicized and response, delayed because of red-tapism. Where we expect regular briefings by doctors, what we get instead are briefings by health secretaries. Instead of the protocol being designed by biostatisticians, health experts, and doctors, the secretaries and other government executives are deciding the way forward.

India was quick enough to impose a lockdown in the first wave itself. But after that, instead of developing a comprehensive plan to tackle COVID, the State-sponsored a manhunt against certain religious groups with its force, in the name of 'covid superspreaders', forgetting that the virus, a biological threat to the human race, is ignorant to the social construct of religion. A lockdown, though an effective response, is also an easy one that requires minimal brainstorming on behalf of the

government executive. But the Welfare State today is supposed to do much more than simply imposing a long lockdown to break the chain of virus transmission. Providing people with a livelihood, or at least means for bare subsistence is a duty of the State, especially when it is curtailing their right to work. The State failed miserably at this. Global poverty increased, but it was more pronounced in countries like India because of the already existing high rates of poverty, and the absence of blue-collar workers in the industrial workforce as they retreated to their villages. The informal economy is the backbone of almost every labour intensive developing country, and these rampant and seemingly never-ending lockdowns are a strong blow on the already feeble backbone. The much-debated migrant crisis is the premier example of how the State failed to look after a significant lot of the population. In addition to the Covid crisis, the people at the lowest economic ranks of the society were facing another crisis, much more morbid. The crisis of existence: To live or not to live, this became the question. And for all this, only the State can be held culpable which became extremely insensitive and obdurate. "This is for your safety", "We have achieved victory", "The government is proud to announce that we have defeated the virus", were some of the statements that came rather quickly from certain Heads of States. It should make the common man question, how do these Statesmen define 'victory', 'safety' or 'defeat'?. The response lies in Toni Morrison's novel

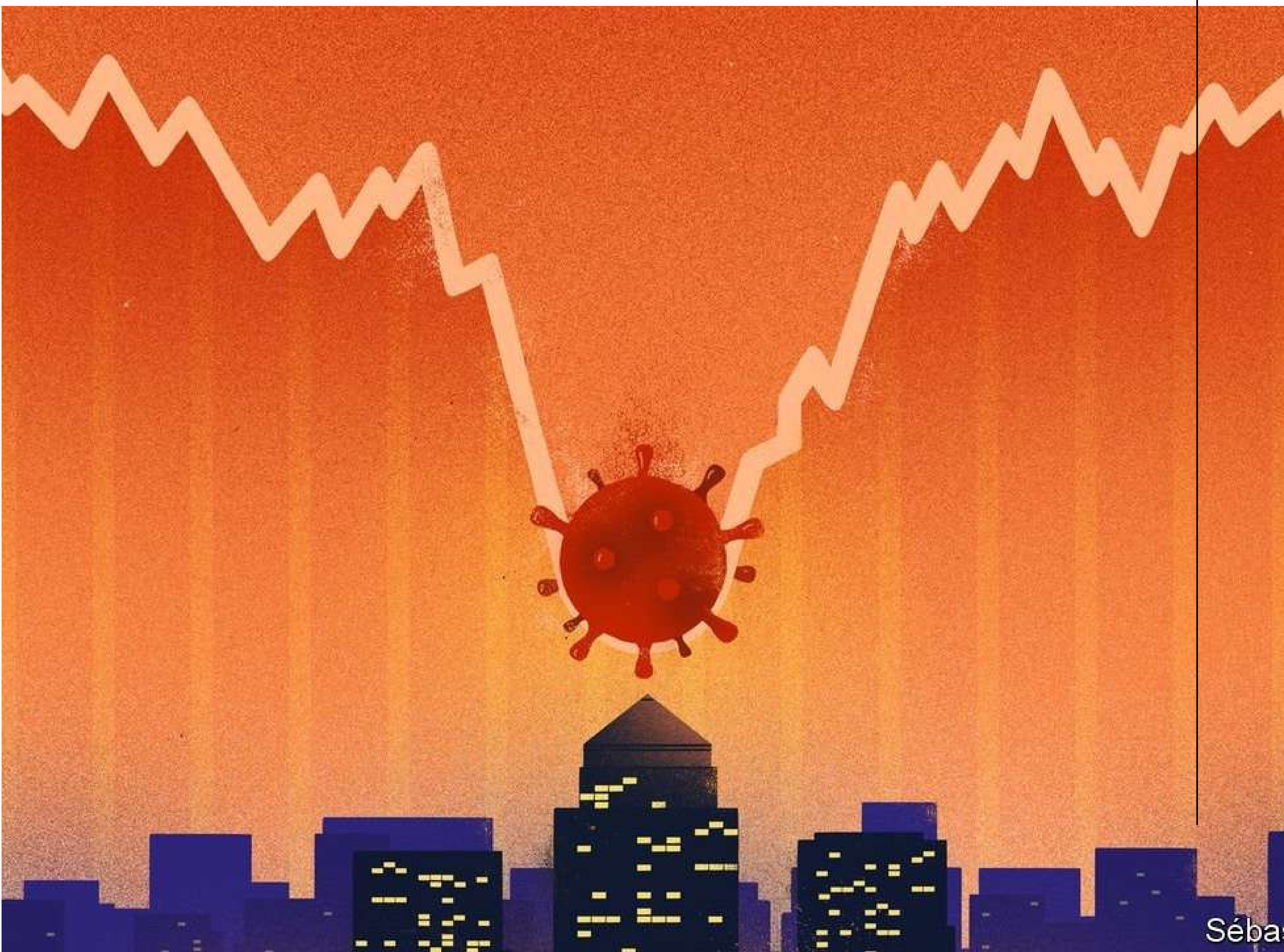
'Beloved' where she says, definitions belong to the definers (here The State) and not the defined (The Subjects). This pandemic has proven this in a rather appalling manner.

While the Market and the State both failed us, there was a third pillar that worked silently, and to a large extent helped avert a much deadlier and frightening version of the pandemic: The Community. Be it during the first wave or the second wave, the people around us helped in whatever little way they could. Be it during the migrant crisis, when people went out of their homes to feed the migrants, quench their thirst, or provide conveyance for whatever little distance they could.

Helping neighbours go to the hospital when the ambulances were overcrowded and delayed, providing food free of cost when people were in isolation are all examples of how the third pillar of the economic activity silently supported the other two despite their dismal performance.

Doctors were mentally and physically drained but continued to treat patients, after their working hours, and even free of cost. It showed how, even while people had a lot of problems to deal with, they did not refrain from supporting their community in this emergency. They stopped acting under a monetary cost-benefit analysis of their actions, and instead, went out of their way to support those who were in need. People helping each other through social media by providing leads on oxygen cylinders, beds, and other essential items show that community has often been undermined in the functioning of society. People are often divided between the right way forward: The State or The Markets. However, this crisis has set a strong precedent that one should not be shocked if both fail the community. In such a case, it has to raise itself to become the third pillar where people help each other to sail through the disastrous times.

For all the horrid memories this pandemic brings, it also strengthens our faith in humanity, more than ever.



NFTs: Absurd or Evolutionary?

BY SHAILY BIRLA

Time and again, the media flashes with the news of an explosion in the world of Blockchain. From Nyan Cat being sold as a one-of-a-kind piece of crypto art to Jack Dorsey (Twitter's Founder) selling his first tweet as an NFT for over \$2.9 million, it leaves us questioning what is it all about and why the value of certain insane virtual items is skyrocketing? To understand this, acquainting ourselves with the concept of NFTs or Non-Fungible Tokens is essential.

An item is fungible when another homogeneous item can replace it. For instance, a Rs. 50 note can be interchanged with another Rs. 50 note, without making any difference to their values.

NFTs, on the other hand, are a type of **cryptocurrency asset** which are unique, making them appropriate to be collectables. Think of them as a painting that is one of its kind, like the Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci.

One can visit the Louvre Museum to see the painting, take its pictures and perhaps reproduce it.

However, there will never be another original painting. Similarly, NFTs are the exclusive property not in the tangible but virtual form.

How do NFTs function, and what is their purpose?

Most of the NFTs are a part of a blockchain called Ethereum, which is similar to cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin or dogecoin. Blockchain is a kind of a digital ledger of transactions where the information is duplicated and distributed to the computers that form a part of the blockchain. This makes it next to impossible for anyone to cheat the system and forge the records.

This explains the exact purpose NFTs serve. NFTs confirm the ownership of the item and make this information indestructible by taking advantage of the blockchain's function.

Where does the absurdity lie?

The story of Mike Winkelmann (the digital artist known as Beeple) being "among the top three most valuable living artists," by selling his "Everydays – The First 5000 Days", has taken the world of fine arts by a storm.



However, here is where the craziness starts. The music, videos, digital artwork, et cetera present in an NFT are available to the general public, which can be viewed, heard, experienced, and even downloaded! Does that mean that ordinary people can consume something people are buying for millions for free?

Technically, yes. The only difference is that the individual buying the NFT also receives something that cannot be copied: the Certificate of Authenticity (COA) and the Ownership of the NFT.

What makes them valuable then?

There are two main reasons behind it. Firstly NFTs are designed to be rare, which is revolutionary in the field of the virtual economy. There is no doubt that the resource can be duplicated online; however, it is not the art that has the value here. It is abundant. Instead, there is a scarcity of the COA associated with a specific artist, meme or a moment.

But mere scarcity does not make the NFTs valuable. Any ordinary individual can produce a banana and duct tape art and sell it as an NFT, but it does not assure him millions of dollars. Or something to be sold as an NFT and being scarce must also bring the collectors or investors some value that can be maintained in the future.

One of the reasons why Nyan Cat's meme was sold at such a high price was because it is a meme that most people have viewed, and it has left an imprint in their mind. The investors know that people will remember this meme, and this NFT will retain some sort of value or salience. Therefore, if they sell this asset in the future,

It will maintain its value or appreciation since there will always be a demand for such assets. The surge in prices is nothing compared to what NFTs will be worth down the road.

In fewer than three months, the market cap of some of the major NFTs has increased by more than 1000%. With Beeple's NFTs selling out in the blink of an eye, many well-known individuals have added to the hype of NFTs by selling their flagships as NFTs. The emanation of high profile NFT projects and companies across various blockchain system is a hint of the potential market growth.

Impact on the Stakeholders:

- **Artists:** "There are some artists making bank on this stuff... it's just that you probably won't," David Gerard, author of Attack of the 50-foot Blockchain.

Although NFTs benefit artists to get recognition and monetise their artworks, not all artists selling their art as NFTs would benefit from this platform.

- **Investors:** Since NFTs work like speculative assets, investors do take advantage of buying the NFTs at a lower price and selling them for profits once the prices rise up. The only drawback is that the prices going up or down is subjected to the dynamic market conditions, which provide no certainty to the investors.
- **Peripheral Service sectors:** NFTs marketplace, insurance, trading, and indices are some of the areas which have experienced significantly rising investments along with the growth of NFTs, which in turn has opened doors to various job opportunities for crypto-enthusiasts.
- **Government:** Cryptocurrencies, to a certain extent, make the banking system irrelevant, which is concerning for the government as this directly impacts the implementation of fiscal policy. Additionally, the loss of government control invites crime-related concerns surrounding the NFTs. Nevertheless, governments are now working upon the laws to gain more control in the world of cryptocurrencies and regulate them to ensure no malpractices are occurring over the platforms.
- **Society:** Along with NFTs, the entire blockchain system is gaining a lot of popularity amongst the public, specifically investors. This, in turn, has started an intense, competitive race of computers across the globe to build the next big block chain.

Regardless of the profitability and benefits of such projects, the costs involved are generally paid by society. A massive amount of energy is burnt up to support the functioning of such algorithms. This energy is not environment friendly causing significant damage to it and contributing to climate change.

The years-old debate about whether to develop the technology or to sustain the environment has sparked yet again. The solution requires the middle ground to be identified and worked upon.



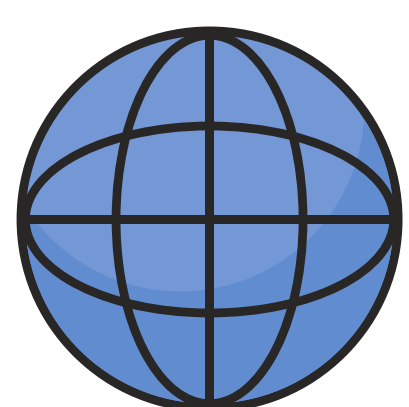
About Caucus

We, at Caucus, value academic discussions and discourse. It is through these conversations that we can tickle the intellect of our members and invoke opinions from across the spectrum. We make humble efforts towards the development and intellectual growth of our members. Through this process, we are able to produce scholars who are articulate and opinionated. We are an active society in Hindu College, University of Delhi. Given the competitive environment of Delhi University, it is our prerogative to stride further ahead and give our members an edge over their fellow companions. It is in this direction that we encourage our members to express their opinions on issues of policy, international relations, domestic and international developments among others in the form of the written word. The blog is meant to provide a platform to our members as well as serve to the wider prospective audience by providing perspectives on various subjects. Caucus – the discussion forum is a place where we discuss, debate and share our thoughts and ideas. Caucus was formed in 2007 in Hindu College, University of Delhi. We at Caucus not only discuss and deliberate, we also provide our members avenues to grow and explore through the various events that we organise. We organise group discussions on a weekly basis where we discuss current events. Some of our annual events include the “International Hindu Model United Nations” where we host various institutions for a two day long immersive and competitive MUN experience. We try our best to provide delegates with an immersive and holistic experience the best hospitality. This year, we also started an educational lecture series called “Compass” where we invited various industry experts. This not only encouraged us to look at issues from a different viewpoint but it also gave our members a chance to interact with these experts on a one-on-one basis. Moreover, we also train and send delegations to various MUNs. We also have a blog and encourage our members to contribute to our online blog with their opinions on trending topics. This helps them express their creativity and thoughts. We also encourage members to indulge in research and provide them all the necessary support regarding research and publication. Last but not the least, we at Caucus do not forget to have fun. We often discuss films and pop culture and we love playing pictionary. Do follow us on social media to stay updated on our events.

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