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In Memory of respected
Late Prof. Partha Nath Mukherji
(1940–2021)

A stalwart of Indian sociology and a mentor
whose contributions continue to enrich public discourse.

Contents

Editorial Perspective

It is with deep respect and affection that we dedicate this commemorative edition of *Dialogue*. This commemorative edition of *Dialogue* is dedicated to the memory of **Professor P. N. Mukherji**, an eminent sociologist, teacher, and thinker whose intellectual depth, moral clarity, and commitment to public purpose continue to inspire generations of scholars and practitioners.

Professor Mukherji's body of work reflected a rare blend of theoretical rigour and moral imagination. His lifelong engagement with questions of development, ethics, governance, and the moral foundations of social life underscored his conviction that scholarship must remain deeply connected to the lived experiences of people. For him, the purpose of knowledge was not merely interpretation but transformation, an ideal that defined his academic journey and his contributions to society. His writings and reflections often found resonance within these pages, reflecting his belief in open discourse and interdisciplinary dialogue as vital to national regeneration.

This edition of Dialogue carries a selection of writings that together reflect his enduring legacy. It includes the text of his address titled **"Differentiation, Integration and Exclusion: Dynamics and Challenges to Nation Building," delivered on the occasion of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's 123rd birth anniversary**, as part of the Rumination Series of Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF). The inclusion of this piece, in particular, captures his deep engagement with the idea of India, its plurality, its contradictions, and its collective striving toward ethical nation-building.

Alongside, this issue features articles and tributes contributed by Professor Mukherji's family, friends, colleagues, and students, each offering a deeply personal perspective on his intellectual and human legacy. It also brings together a range of analytical and reflective pieces on themes that resonated with his scholarly interests, from social change and governance to identity, culture, and participatory development.

Together, these contributions form both a tribute and a continuation of the discourse he so passionately nurtured. They reaffirm the enduring

relevance of his ideas and his vision of a society anchored in justice, reflection, and moral responsibility.

In honouring Professor Mukherji through this edition, *Dialogue* also reaffirms its own commitment to the pursuit of informed, ethical, and inclusive scholarship, values that he exemplified throughout his life.

Warm regards,

P C Haldar

President

Astha Bharti

Differentiation, Integration, And Exclusion: Dynamics And Challenges To Nation-Building[1]

Late. Prof. Partha Nath Mukherji

It is a strange coincidence that I should be speaking on nation building on the 123rd birth anniversary of—in the words of Mahatma Gandhi—the foremost patriot of India. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose established a national government-in-exile, the Azad Hind Government, and led the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army [INA]) drawn from ex-prisoners of the British Indian army and thousands of civilian volunteers from the expatriate population in Malaya and Burma—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, women and others, who fought shoulder to shoulder and sacrificed their lives for the liberation of India. On July 6, 1944, he gave a clarion call to all Indians: 'Give me blood and I shall give you freedom', and sought the blessings of Gandhi, who had opposed his militaristic route to *Azadi*, christening him Father of the Nation. Netaji symbolised the spirit of secular India more than anyone else and was among the founders of sovereign India. He epitomised the spirit and soul of Indian nationhood that he helped forge during his battle with the British Empire.

Second largest in population with a cultural heterogeneity far above any other country, India is by far the most complex country in the world. To imagine India in its 'wholeness' is virtually impossible, hence the need to go on endlessly rediscovering her. One after the other, cataclysmic changes have threatened the existence of the Indian state, the humungous transfer of persecuted, life-endangered populations from Pakistan (from both the western and eastern frontiers) following the Partition, to the incendiary language agitations that rocked the country in the 1950s, to secessionist threats from the North-East and Kashmir,

[1] This paper was written for a talk by late Professor Partha N. Mukherji, on the occasion of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's 123rd Birth Anniversary on 23 January 2020, at the Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF), New Delhi.

and later in the west (Khalistan). It is puzzling how India regenerates itself, one historical upheaval after another.

In this presentation, I shall briefly discuss the following: (*a*) the variability and ambiguity inherent in politically volatile concepts such as ethnicity, nation, nationalism and nation-state; (*b*) how these concepts impacted our leaders of the anti-colonial freedom movements; (*c*) the South Asian postcolonial experience; and (*d*) the conceptual theoretical contributions from the South Asian laboratory.

Conceptual variability

Concepts and theories related to ethnicity, nation, nationalism, and nation-state are beset with controversies, ambiguities and are riddled with rival definitions. Politically pregnant and volatile, these have serious consequences for people, their cultures, their lives and wellbeing, and cumulatively, for the world.

Three threshold points mark the evolution of the 'nation'. *First,* the landmark Treaty of Westphalia, signed in 1648, which called for the ending of the Eighty Years' War between Spain and the Dutch and the Thirty Years' War in the German phase. The principle of 'exclusion of external authority over domestic issues' reflected the belief that 'the autonomy of states was a precondition for the relative monopoly of power within.'[2]

Second, the French Revolution of 1789 witnessed a victorious people explicitly declaring itself a nation. An aggressive policy of constructing a unitary nation with its citizens having a single political and cultural identity provided the initial normative definition of the modern democratic nation-state.[3] (Linz *et al.,* 2003:1).

Third, the post-colonial phase is marked by (*a*) the formation of new states in Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere, mostly emerging out of the shackles of colonial tutelage; (*b*) the establishment of the United Nations; (*c*) the rise of the multicultural USA; (*d*) the rapid process of transformation of the world system leading to global integration of the labour market and much else.

In the dominant Eurocentric discourse, a nation is generally a social group defined by its cultural-ethnic identity shaped by common descent, language, religion, cultural values, shared historical experience, and so forth. In this formulation, the 'nation-state' is a specific form of state in which there is congruence between a territorial state and a particular nation—the *ethnic* nation. In this formulation, *cultural-motivational*

factors hold primacy, and structure is merely viewed as a product of culture.

The dominant Eurocentric formulation could neither accommodate the emancipated post-colonial multi-ethnic states, nor satisfactorily theorise on the increasing multiculturalism of ethnic nation-states induced by large-scale immigration through the labour force in the international labour market.

The Eurocentric discourse on the nation-state begged the question: where was the place for the post-colonial multi-ethnic states? How does one reconcile the increasing multiculturalism of ethnic nation-states?

Ethnic group, ethnicity

A standard definition of the ethnic group specifies the mandatory presence of attributes such as (*a*) common descent (real or supposed); (*b*) socially relevant cultural or psychological characteristics; and (*c*) a set of attitudes and behaviours within a social category. The proportions of the mix can vary (Smooha 1989: 267–68). Banton refers to the ethnic group as 'culturally distinctive, autonomous group', but goes on to add that 'the more general application is to a *distinct category* of the population also sharing common cultural features and social institutions as a group' (Banton 1983: 11, *emphasis added*). Paul Brass distinguishes between ethnic category, ethnic group, and ethnicity: 'any group of people dissimilar from other peoples in terms of objective *cultural* criteria and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements of complete division of labour and for reproduction, forms an *ethnic category.* The objective cultural markers may be a language or dialect, distinctive dress or diet or customs, religion or race' (Brass 1991: 19, *emphases added*). Finally, Connors is prepared to accept any 'distinct group' visible to an anthropologist or even to an untrained observer (Connor 1972) as an ethnic group.

The common denominator running through the definitions is *'*cultural commonality*',* differentiating one group/category from another, making it the disting uishing feature of an ethnic group/category. The objective cultural markers for such commonality could be *any* cultural attribute(s), singly or in combination (Mukherji 1994: 23)

To bring clarity into the plethora of definitions, I have proposed that the logic of identification of an ethnic group lies in the internalization of cultural attributes and/or values by its members, since

birth or through long socialization. The cultural attributes so internalized are available through ancestry or history—real, imagined or invented—for delineation as boundary markers for ethnic categories/groups *(*categories refer here to *statistical aggregates;* whilst groups, to members tied by a *consciousness of kind).* Thus, a person is generally born into cultural categories such as religion, race, caste, language, region, etc., constituting the potential for the formation of religious, racial, caste, linguistic, regional ethnic *groups,* respectively.

Nation: classic approaches

The concept of nation is perhaps even more bewildering. Let me introduce four classic approaches by Marx-Engels, Ernest Renan, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm, very briefly.

The modern nation for Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels was a *historical phenomenon* 'to be located in a precise historical period of the ascendance of the bourgeoisie as a hegemonic class, which at the same time [was] the period of consolidation of the capitalist mode of production' (Nimni 1985: 62). A distinction was made between national communities that possessed the capability of acting as agents of this historical transformation (*historical nations*), and those that lacked it (*non-historical nations*). The former exercised the right to self-determination meaning state independence; the latter were socially regressive feudal enclaves, in Engel's words, 'ethnographic monuments' that had to 'culturally and politically perish to pave the way for the unifying leadership of the bourgeoisie' (Nimni 1985: 66). Such a formulation would lead one to infer that the structural imperatives of capitalism and a state consistent with its growth, would lead to cultural homogenization through assimilation of 'regressive' minority ethnic cultures (Mukherji 1991: 2).

On 11 March 1882, French historian Ernest Renan, a contemporary of Marx, gave a landmark, seminal lecture on 'What is a Nation' (*Qu'est-cequ'une nation*), which symbolised the French Revolution of 1789 and the evolution of the *civic nation*. He demonstrated, neither race, nor language, material interest, religious affinities, geography, nor military necessity were adequate for a nation. A nation for him, on the one hand, was 'a soul, a spiritual principle', that was anchored in the rich legacy of collective shared memories—a 'culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion', and on the other, in the 'present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate

the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form'. These two factors cement the 'large-scale solidarity', that is the nation.

At this historical juncture, he thought, 'the existence of nations is a good thing, a necessity even' as they provide the 'guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master'. Historically, '[the] nations are not something eternal. They had their beginnings and they will end'. His conclusion is oft quoted:

> Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains. A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates the kind of *moral conscience* which we call a nation. So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices, which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist (Renan 1882 [1992]: *emphasis added*)

Ernest Gellner, after studying the history of human civilisation almost echoes Renan when he states 'nations like states, are a contingency, and not a universal necessity'. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances. He concludes, 'nations and states are not the same contingency'. However, '[...] nationalism holds that they are destined for each other: that each without the other is incomplete'. While the 'state has certainly emerged without the help of the nation', not all nations emerged with the blessings of the state (Gellner 1983: 6). He argued, '[…] *nationalism is a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'*. This gives rise to a paradox: the number of 'potential nations' is much greater than the number of 'possible viable states', hence, 'not all nationalisms can be satisfied, at any rate, at the same time' (Gellner 1983: 1-2; *emphasis added*); this implies that a state is based on one dominant nationalism at a time, the others are accommodated. This posits an *ethnic-cultural homogeneity* for such a *typical* nation-state, which rarely exists, and which *logically* can only happen if 'a territorial political unit…either kills, or expels, or assimilates all non-nationals' (1983: 2).

The dynamic of nation-states, within this framework, is explained by the process of homogenization in society that will be brought about by *mature industrialization*, with increased social mobility, a *standard high culture,* and a uniform mode of communication. Most *folk cultures*

will opt for this; some will not. The latter would be considered 'counter-entropic' and would either remain a problem or could develop a parallel high culture out of the folk culture and form an autonomous state (1983: 61). Embedded in nation-states, counter-entropic folk cultures will remain a source of problems or pose a threat of secession.

Eric Hobsbawm, while accepting Gellner's 'political principle', differs on his conceptualisation of the 'nation', which 'cannot be defined a priori', as it belongs to a particular and recent historical period; it is 'a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the "nation-state" (Hobsbawm 1990: 9). Human beings define and redefine themselves with reference to a single option—the choice of belonging to a 'nation' or 'nationality'. Consequently, *'[t]he "nation" as conceived by nationalism, can be recognized prospectively; the real "nation" can only be recognized a posteriori' (1990: 9, emphasis added)*. Nationalism, therefore, can be 'state-led' or 'state-seeking'. Hobsbawm's position is more consistent with that United Nations Charter, which 'postulates a common nationality in a plural society in the context whereof the word "people" must mean "a people" which can be identified with a nation entitled to statehood' (RoyChowdhury 1980: 148).

General discourse on the nation

The general discourse admits of a variety of conceptualisations of nation, nationalism, and the nation-state.

At one end of the spectrum, Connors identifies the *ethnic group* as the common point of origin of a nation. When it becomes 'self-differentiating', that is, a sizeable percentage of its members become aware or believe 'that one's own group is unique in a most vital sense', it acquires 'nationhood' (Connors 1972: 337). In sharp contrast, Smooha holds the view that the achievement of *sovereignty* by an ethnic group transforms it into a nation (Smooha 1989: 267–68). For him, the nation is an *outcome* of *self-determination,* not just its political expression.

Paul Brass, with his vast experience of Indian complexity, introduces the concept of *ethnicity* as the transformation of the ethnic group into a *subjectively self-conscious ethnic community*. 'Ethnicity is to ethnic category, ' he observes, is what 'class consciousness is to class'. This transformation is the process involving the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of *any aspect of culture* to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups'.

Ethnicity, then can operate at different levels in the political arena: It can (*a*) act as an *interest group* ('to improve the well-being of group members *as individuals'* (e.g., economic well-being, demand for civil rights, better educational opportunities and so forth; (*b*)go further and demand that *corporate rights* be conceded to the *group as a whole*, ranging from (*i*) 'a major say for the group in the political system as a whole (e.g., extension of protective discrimination), or (*ii*) control over a piece of territory within the country (formation of a new ethnically preponderant territorial unit), or (*iii*) demand for a country of their own with full Sovereignty'. He argues the political invocation of its 'corporate demands' is a sufficient condition for an ethnic group to graduate into a nation or nationality (Brass 1991: 19–20, *emphases added*).

Corresponding to these two situations, Brass identifies two kinds of nationalisms: ethnic and state-centered. The former is the process of ethnisisation of cultural groups in a multi-ethnic state; the latter, with the state project of (*a*) amalgamating of diverse groups in the formation of an *inter-ethnic composite* or *homogeneous national culture* through the agency of the modern state or (*b*) by accommodations arrived at between conflicting ethnic groups in multi-ethnic societies (1991: 20; *emphasis added*). Consequently, Brass's framework, it would appear, can encompass a situation in which, within a multi-ethnic state, there is a concurrent existence of *state-centered* as well as *ethnic-centered nationalist projects,* which could be complementary or antagonistic to each other.

It follows that (*a*) a nation can exist without its seeking sovereignty; (*b*) a nation can exist before its demand for sovereignty; and (*c*) a nation can become a sovereign nation-state. This puts him into a fuzzy category of multinational state.

The nation for T. K. Oommen is 'a *territorial* entity to which the people have an *emotional* attachment and in which they have invested a *moral* meaning: It is a *homeland-ancestral* or adopted...It is the *fusion of territory and language, which* makes a nation; a nation is a community in communication in its homeland*'* (Oommen 1997: 33, *emphasis added*). For him, quite clearly, the nation exists independent of the state, and he approvingly endorses the view that 'states can exist without a nation or with several nations...*nation can be coterminous with the population of one state or be included together with other nations within one state or be divided between several states'* (Oommen 1997: 18, *emphasis added*).

India's two leading historians, Irfan Habib and Bipan Chandra, were confused by the many voices that made up the discourse. Both set out to explore the reality, only to converge on the conclusion that India indeed was a nation with a civilisational depth that found its identity through the national movements spearheaded by Gandhi, and including other national leaders who fought their anti-imperialist battles. Habib took pains to trace the origins of India's nationhood from Rig Vedic times through Sanskrit, Greek and Persian sources, and attested the contributions of Albaruni, Amir Khusro, Akbar and Abul Fazl's *A'in-e-Akbari*; and of social reformists such as Ram Mohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Keshav Chandra Sen; and others (Habib 1975: 14–20; 1997: 3–10).

Bipan Chandra, with his team, in their seminal work *India's Struggle for Independence 1857–1947*, concluded that the struggle for national independence developed into the Indian national movement, neither led nor controlled by the bourgeoisie, 'developed into one of the greatest mass movements in world history' (Chandra et.al 2014: 15, 17). In fact, 'its multi-class, popular, and open-ended character meant that it was open to the alternative hegemony of socialist ideas' (Chandra *et. al.* 2014: 15). Significantly, it was argued that the Indian national movement had begun the process of the Indian nation-in-the-making (Chandra *et.al.* 2014: 12).

Given the variability in the conceptualisations of the ethnic group, nation, nationalism, and the nation-state, it is not surprising that the task of accommodating these variations into generalisable formulations and propositions is problematic. Nonetheless, formulations of *nation* can be broadly distinguished by, (*a*) those which regard the ethnic nation as *independent* of the state – the *multi-national state*; (*b*) those which regard the nation-state as congruent with the ethnic nation—the *culturally homogeneous nation state;* and, (*c*) those which regard the whole gestalt of multiple ethnicities, along with other secular social formations, such as class, gender, etc. constituting a civic-secular nation congruent with the state— the *plural, multiethnic, secular nation-state.*

Indian national movement: The South Asian laboratory

The major actors and players in the anti-colonial phase of the freedom struggle were not only familiar with the classic discourses on the nation, but these deeply influenced their thoughts and actions with far-reaching consequences for the sub-continent and the nation formations. Jinnah,

Iqbal, Gandhi, Savarkar, Ambedkar, and Nehru were among the main leaders who either espoused or questioned/rejected their goodness of fit with the post-colonial reality.

Partition of Bengal and Gandhi

The Partition of Bengal (which included Bihar and Orissa) by reconstituting the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam on 16 October 1905, ostensibly for purely administrative reasons, despite a groundswell of resistance against it, became the turning point in the dynamic of anti-imperial resurgence and mobilisation. Gandhi, fresh from South Africa, in his Socratic style as the 'Editor' responding to the 'Reader' in *Hind Swaraj*, is clearly excited: 'the real awakening [of] India took place after the Partition of Bengal'. He thanked Lord Curzon for his discourteous behaviour and language, his disregard for all the 'prayers' from the 'people of Bengal' against partitioning Bengal. Gandhi prophetically announces: 'India awakened is not likely to fall asleep. The demand for the abrogation of the Partition is tantamount to a demand for Home Rule…*As time passes, the nation is being forged. Nations are not formed in a day; the formation requires years* (Gandhi 1938: 21; *emphasis added*). Curzon's *administrative decisio*n to create a Muslim majority province of 18 million Muslims and 12 million Hindus was decoded as a political move to divide and rule India.

Gandhi rejected the colonial concept of the nation, declaring: 'The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India…. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently, they divided us (1921: 31).[4]

Gandhi had shifted base from ethnicity to *civilisational bind* as the basis of a pluri-cultural Indian nation. Simultaneously, conservative Muslims of the feudal aristocracy read in this *Hindu* opposition to the creation of a Muslim majority province. The All-India Muslim League (AIML) was formed in Dhaka on December 30, 1906, in a conference presided over by Khwaja Salimullah Khan, Nawab of Dhaka. Aga Khan was anointed the President of the organisation in the presence of 3000 delegates from all over India.[5] (Akbar 2009). The resolution passed by the AIML reflected the conservative concerns for 'national interests' of the Indian Muslims.

Jinnah, INC, AIML

It is noteworthy that 30-year-old Muhammad Ali Jinnah had joined the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1906 as the Secretary of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and had won the appreciation of Moderates like Motilal Nehru, Dadabhai Naoroji, Sarojini Naidu, Surendranath Banerjee, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, and others. He was regarded as the face of Hindu Muslim unity in a united struggle against British rule. He agreed to join the AIML in 1913, on condition that this would not conflict with his loyalty to the INC. By the time he gave his Presidential address in 1916, after great effort, he had been able to stitch up the consensual Lucknow Pact (December 1916), which he signed with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the then President of INC.

The Lucknow Pact conceded separate electorates for Muslims in the Provincial Legislative Councils, in which only Muslims could elect Muslim representatives; agreed to weighted representation of Muslims in excess of their proportion in the general population in Muslim minority provinces; and asked the British to hand over greater democratic authority to Indians. In addition, Muslims were granted voting rights in general constituencies wherever they fulfilled their voting requirements.[6] (Owen 1972: 563; Jinnah and Tilak 1916: 124–31; *see* Appendix 1).

Clearly, the Moderates in the Congress (including Jinnah, who, along with nationalist Muslims, did not subscribe to the idea of separate electorates), went the extra mile to try to create a Hindu-Muslim unity (in the face of considerable opposition from conservatives on both sides). Gandhi was new to the scene, and Nehru was yet to come to the limelight.

Jinnah was a strict constitutionalist who, notwithstanding his acknowledgment of the 'benevolent despotism' of the British, sought speedy self-government for the Indian people through legal-constitutional struggles within the framework of British parliamentary democracy to attain self-governing Dominion Status as in Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

The Hindu Muslim unity that he fostered became a major factor in Gandhi's call for support of the Khilafat movement in Turkey. It resulted in a groundswell of national social mobilisation through *satyagraha,* only to be suddenly withdrawn by Gandhi after the violence in Chaura Chauri (1922).[7] True to his principles, Jinnah resigned from the INC in 1920.

The repudiation of the Lucknow Pact by the Motilal Nehru Report 1928 came as a shocker, which replaced separate electorates by joint electorates in the Provinces; with reservation for Muslim communities only where they were in minority (that too for ten years), and for Hindus only in the Muslim majority Province of NWFP, with no bar for the Muslims and Hindu minorities additionally contesting elections in general seats; Punjab and Bengal were declared as states with no minority hence no reservation; there was to be no reservation of seats in the House of Representatives; and the constitutional status of India would be of Dominion Status.[8]

Internal split within AIML with fierce opposition against Jinnah's leadership in Punjab, and with Iqbal openly and vigorously repudiating Jinnah's solution of separate electorates and minority rights in his Presidential Address of the AIML 1930, prompted a greatly disenchanted Jinnah to return to his profession in London [1930–34] (Britannica Academic 2015). The ideological position of Iqbal made it clear that 'European democracy cannot be applied to India without recognising the fact of communal groups'. Hence, the 'Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India within India is…perfectly justified' (Iqbal 1944: # [3a]). 70 million Muslims in India were 'far more homogeneous than any other people in India'; consequently, the only group that could qualify for the status of 'a nation in the modern sense of the word'. The Hindus were still aspiring to become a 'homogeneous' nation. Therefore, the problem of India was not that of constituting a nation—it was an *inter-national* problem (Iqbal 1944: # [9a, 9b]).

Jinnah was persuaded to return after AIML, virtually in shambles, needed him desperately. It was the trauma of the 1937 election that was the tipping point for AIML politics, with Jinnah making *gestalt* U-turn from his secular credentials, and vigorously applying the western conceptualisation of the nation to formulate his two-nation theory. Despite his vigorous campaign for the 1937 election, and emerging as the second largest party with 106 seats, AIML was unable to form a government in any of the 11 provinces,[9]Including Muslim majority provinces of Punjab, North West Frontier, Sindh, and Bengal; by contrast, INC gained power in eight provinces, with absolute majority in six[10] (See Appendix 2).

In his Lahore Presidential Address of 1940, Jinnah in his new incarnation, fuelled by Iqbal's radicalism and the electoral trauma of

1937 election, firmly stamped the western imprint of the nation, demanding the right to self-determination of the Indian Muslim nation for a sovereign state of Pakistan. Emphatic in his assertion, he declared:

> Mussalmans are a nation according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homelands, their territory, and their state. We wish to live in peace and harmony with our neighbours as a free and independent people. We wish our people to develop to the fullest our spiritual, cultural, economic, social, and political life, in a way that we think best and in consonance with our own ideals and according to the genius of our people (Jinnah 1940: # [26]).

Gandhi–Jinnah Exchanges

This was not only an outright rejection of the Government of India Act 1935, which laid the foundations of a future secular democratic state for India, but went further than Iqbal's claim for a Muslim India within India. It is important to visit the Gandhi-Jinnah exchanges between 9–27 September 1944,[11] to understand how the western ethnocentric model of the nation was argued out in the postcolonial context of the Indian subcontinent.

Failure of Cripps Mission to grant freedom to a unified India, Hindu-Muslim differences notwithstanding (which could be settled between the two subsequently), led Congress to launch a nation-wide movement on 8 August 1942 asking the British to Quit India. All senior leaders of the INC, including Gandhi, were put behind bars. Rajagopalachari with his contrarian view on granting Pakistan, if the Muslims so wanted, had resigned from INC and did not participate in the Quit India movement. Gandhi, requested him to work out a negotiating document for dialogue with Jinnah, known as the Rajaji Formula.[12]

Right from inception, the dialogue was embroiled in a basic procedural disagreement, which remained unresolved: Gandhi maintained he was negotiating in his individual capacity, and welcomed him to either do the same or represent the AIML. Jinnah stubbornly held to the position that he as AIML president represented all Muslims in India whereas Gandhi was no more than a representative of the Hindus. Gandhi countered his argument saying that even if Jinnah was wearing the mantle of leadership of all Muslims, not all Muslims wanted Pakistan. He asserted that his leadership was inclusive of all

communities. The Rajaji proposal of holding a plebiscite involving all inhabitants in Muslim majority districts was not accepted by Jinnah.

Gandhi's appeal that the Congress and the AIML, unitedly achieve freedom from the British first, and thereafter settle Hindu-Muslim differences between themselves, even if it meant separation, was rejected. Instead, Jinnah was adamant that in accordance with the spirit of the Lahore Resolution, 'we should come to a complete settlement of our own immediately and by our united front and efforts do everything in our power to secure the freedom and independence of the peoples of India based on Pakistan and Hindustan' (*Jana Sangh Today*, 'Letter from M. A. Jinnah, 25 September 1944').

What is significant in this dialogue is Gandhi's conceptualisation of the nation as it pertained to the reality of India, which has universal relevance. He is alarmed by the implications of the two-nation theory: 'I am unable to accept the proposition that the Muslims of India are a nation, distinct from the rest of its inhabitants…Once the principle is admitted, there would be no limit to claims for cutting up India into numerous divisions, which will spell India's ruin'. How can 'a body of converts and their descendants' be a 'nation apart from the parent stock'? He goes to the extent of suggesting, if it has to happen, '[...] let it be a partition between two brothers'. He points out the fragility of the ethnic nation based on a singular criterion like religion. 'Hypothetically', he argues, what if the 'whole of India accepted Islam', would the different linguistic groups—Bengalis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamilians, Maharashtrians, Gujaratis—'cease to have their special characteristics' on converting to Islam? Would they revert back to one nation? Decades later, Muslim Pakistan would suffer the secession of East Pakistan with the creation of Bengali Muslim Bangladesh.

Gandhi is clear that the 'test of our nationhood' originated 'out of our common political subjection'. If unitedly, 'by our combined effort' we 'throw off this subjection, we shall be born a politically free nation out of our travail'. He then cautions, even after this experience of a common struggle, in the absence of a 'common master holding us together in his iron grip', we 'seek to split up into small groups or nationalities', there would be no dearth of 'claimants to the throne that never remains vacant' (*Jana Sangha Today*, 'Letter from Gandhi to Jinnah, 15 September 1944').

In a final effort, Gandhi 'prayed' not to take 'the responsibility of rejecting the offer', which he thought satisfied the demands of the Lahore Conference of 1940. He advised:

> Throw it on your Council. Give me an opportunity of addressing them. If they feel like rejecting it, I would like you to advise the Council to put it before the open session of the League. If you accept my advice and permit me, I would attend the open session and address it' (*Jana Sangha Today*, 'Letter from Gandhi to M. A. Jinnah, 25 September 1944').

Jinnah was the last person to risk such a (mis)adventure. He promptly rejected the suggestion on procedural grounds:

> [L]et me remind you that only a member or a delegate is entitled to participate in the deliberations of the meetings of the Council or in the open session respectively. Besides, it is most extraordinary and unprecedented suggestion to make. However, I thank you for your advice (*Jana Sangha Today*, 'Letter from Jinnah to Gandhi, 26 September 1944').

The suggestion made by Gandhi was neither 'extraordinary' nor 'unprecedented' given that the AIML in the past had warmly invited Congress 'Hindu' leaders to their conferences and meetings.

Gandhi's outright rejection of the two-nation theory amounted to a repudiation of the dominant, narrow Western conceptualisation of nation. To him, it mattered little how the West predefined 'nation'; what was relevant was the empirical reality of India as a pluralistic nation steeped in civilisational depth. First, he demonstrated the fallacy of conflating religious and linguistic identities—associating Hindus with Hindi, and Muslims with Urdu—observing that both spoke Tamil and Bengali without knowledge of Urdu, in Madras and Bengal, respectively. He further indicated to the distinction between 'nation' and 'nationality,' the latter is better described today as ethnicity. He replaced the concept of nation based on ethnicity, to one based on India's age-old civilisation, enriched by her variegated cultures, to which *all* communities residing in India had contributed over historical time. In doing so, the Indian nation embraced a *comprehensive* inclusive cultural and structural plurality that found its fullest expression and evolution in the anti-imperialist Indian national movement. The independent state of India was founded on this *civic-secular-civilisational nation*. This formulation is a precursor of the civic-secular basis of the nation-state in the wider democratic discourse.

Ambedkar on the partition of India

During the course of the Jinnah-Gandhi talks, Jinnah had advised Gandhi to read Ambedkar, purportedly to clarify his concept of the Muslim nation.

Indirectly Ambedkar counters Gandhi when he is critical of the 'Hindu argument' that since Hindus and Muslims share certain social customs in common; that just because certain religious rites and practices are common to both; that all Mohammedans do not speak a common language; that many speak the same language as the Hindus; all these, he argued, did not support the proposition that the two communities constituted one nation (Ambedkar 1945: Part I, Chapter II). They are 'the result of purely mechanical causes'; partly from 'incomplete conversions' from 'caste and outcaste Hindus'; partly, these common features were the remnants 'of a period of religious amalgamation between the Hindus and the Muslims inaugurated by the Emperor Akbar, the result of a dead past which has no present and no future'. So, it is small wonder that the inertia of pre-conversion past resulted in the ineffectual and incomplete 'Muslimisation' of converts. Nor do they have 'any common historical antecedents which the Hindus and Muslims can be said to share together as matters of pride or as matters of sorrow?' (Ambedkar 1945: Part I, Chapter II)

Contrarily, a country like Switzerland counted on three or four languages to maintain its stability.[13] He echoes Renan when he says that ultimately, it is the 'will' of a people wanting to be a nation that is sufficient condition for making of a nation (Ambedkar 1945: Part I, Chapter II; emphasis added).

He now takes up the arguments for Pakistan and interrogates them, one by one:

(1) Granted that there existed communal antagonism between Muslims and Hindus. But had it reached an intensity that there was 'no will to live together in one country and under one constitution?' (Ambedkar 1945: Part V, Chapter XIII [III]).

(2) Citing historical precedents of French in Canada, English and the Dutch in South Africa; French, Italians and the Germans in Switzerland; he asserted communal antagonism was not a sufficient condition for partition. Why then should it be impossible for the Hindus and the Muslims to agree to live together under one constitution in India? (Ambedkar 1945: Part V, Chapter XIII [III]).

Ambedkar's stocktaking of the situation has considerable theoretical significance. *Musalmans in India, he argued, have not been a nation, they want to become one,* which they can, because there was much in them that 'can roll them into one'. Yet, there are many commonalities and differences between them in terms of modes, manners, rites and customs. The point is *'If the emphasis is laid on things that are common, there need be no two nations in India'*. Contrarily, *'if the emphasis is on points of difference, it will no doubt give rise to two nations.'* 'Jinnah apparently', he observed, 'took the line of British writers who [made] it a point of speaking of Indians as the people of India' who could never be a nation (Ambedkar 1945: Part V, Chapter XIII, [V]). He veers close to Gandhi's position when he asserts that the commonalities between the two communities did not necessitate the creation of Pakistan.

Ambedkar failed to understand how Pakistan was an answer to the plight of Muslim minority in India, when it ends up espousing the cause of Muslim majority in Muslim majority areas, where they were, at any rate, safe. 'What good is Pakistan then?', he questions (Ambedkar 1945: Part V, Chapter XIII, [VI])

Admiring Jinnah's organisational acumen and leadership, he was convinced 'Not partition, but the abolition of the Muslim League and the formation of a *mixed party* of Hindus and Muslims was the only effective way of burying the ghost of Hindu Raj (Ambedkar 1945: Part V, Chapter XIII, [VI]; *emphasis added*).

Savarkar, Hindu nation and Hindutva

One can discern an earlier and a later Savarkar. The earlier Savarkar expressed some dilemmas: If Hindus constitute a nation**,** what do Muslims constitute—a nation or a community? His dilemma finds expression in his Presidential speech of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937. He acknowledges, even if grudgingly, 'there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India' (Savarkar 1937: 13). He goes on to clarify:

> India cannot be assumed to be a unitarian nation, but on the contrary two nations in the main; the Hindus and Moslems … the utmost that we can do under the circumstances is to form an Indian *State* in which none is allowed any special weightage of representation and none is paid an extra-price to buy his loyalty to the State (Savarkar 1937: 14; *emphasis added*).

By distinguishing between the nation and the state, he sought somehow to accommodate the Muslim, without being quite clear about

what to think of their 'nation' status. This conceptual anomaly he will try to resolve in his Presidential address in 1938, and thereafter.

In his next Presidential speech (1938), he worked out a rationale for Hindu Rashtra, arguing this time for a Unitarian nation. Invoking the religious philosophical concepts of 'Brahma' and 'Maya', he comes to a more definitive conclusion. He, 'found nothing objectionable in the ideal of uniting all India into a consolidated political unit … [for] it suited well with Hindu mentality … always prone to philosophies with a universal urge.' Indeed, 'the ideal of Politics itself ought to be Human state, all mankind for its citizen, the earth for its motherland' (Savarkar 1938: 23). *If one-fifth of the human race that resided in India* 'could be united irrespective of religious, racial and cultural diversities, merging them all into a *homogeneous whole*, it would be but a gigantic stride taken by mankind towards the realization of the human political ideal' (Savarkar 1938: 23; *emphasisadded*). This was consistent with the fundamental Hindu philosophy and spiritual truth—'all this is but one and indivisible Brahma' (Savarkar 1938: 23).[14]

Having said this, he reminded his audience that in its 'political aspect' the 'counterpart' of *Brahma* was *Maya*, 'the principle of division' (Savarkar 1938: 23; *emphasis added*). The problem was with the condition '*If'*. He argued, unfortunately, '*the Moslems remained Moslems first, Moslems last and Indians never*!*'* (Savarkar 1938: 24; *italics original*) This antipathy of Muslims against India derived from their being unable to grow out of their 'historical stage of intense religiosity and the theological concept of the state'. Consequently, their 'theology and theocratical politics [divided] the human world into two groups only; The Moslem and the enemy land…territorial patriotism is unknown to the Moslem…unless in connection with a Moslem territory'. A real Indian Moslem could not 'faithfully bear loyalty to India as a country, as a nation, as a State,' because it was to him '"an enemy land" and doubly lost'; for non-Moslems, including Hindus, were in a majority (Savarkar 1938: 27–28). So long as they remained 'the faithfuls', their 'political and cultural mentality is also essentially anti-Hindu' (Savarkar 1938: 28).

In his vision of the 'Organic Hindu Nation' (as opposed to a territorial nation), Muslims, along with other religious minorities—Parsees, Christians, and Jews—would be the minority communities, with the difference that Moslems alone would be the suspect community. Drawing on European parallels, Muslim community would be to the

Hindu nation, what the Jewish community was to the German nation; what Arab and Armenian communities were to the Turkish nation.

Clarifying his position on the two-nation theory, he was at pains to explain, 'It is a historic truth', he asserted, 'that the Mussulmans are a nation … Islam is a theocratic nation based on the Koran right from its inception. This nation never had geographical boundaries…. Wherever the Mussulmans went, they went as a nation. They also came to Hindustan as a nation'. That is, Muslims by default constituted a trans-territorial nation. (Long interview to Bombay Marathi weekly *Aadesh,* 23 August 1943).

Finally, the assumption behind the definition and composition of the 'unitary Hindu nation' is extremely important. According to his 'correct definition of Hindutva', not only 'Vaidik's or the Sanatanists', but 'non-Vedic religious schools' (Sikhs, Jains, and others, including tribals) form part of the 'common Hindu brotherhood'. He was confident that 'our non-Vedic brethren such as the Sikhs, the Jains, and others, will find no just reason to resent the application of the word "Hindu" in their case also' (Savarkar 1937: 5–6).[15]

> Savarkar shifted his position: *from* a grudging acceptance of two antagonistic nations living within a multi-national state; *to* a majority-community-Hindu-nation living with multiple ethnic communities such as Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsees, Jews, tribals, and Muslims; *to* a unilaterally redefined Hindu nation of Vaidik and non-Vedic Hindus, which sucked within its fold the Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsees, and tribals, and differentially distanced Christians, Jews, and Muslims from the Hindus.

Indian democracy: constant creation of democratic space

The dominant liberal view of representation in western democracy discourse assumes that citizen participation in democracy is primarily for a voter to elect her professionally competent representative (leader), who will then best represent her interests/preferences (Schumpeter 2000; Berelson 2000). Representatives so elected to the democratic institutions, thereafter, are more or less, allowed to carry forward the agenda of the aggregate of interests they represent, while the citizens go their ways pursuing normal apolitical lives.

For a post-colonial, complex developing country like India, which over a long duration in history has institutionalised systems of

asymmetrical social-cultural discrimination, class exploitation, and oppression (caste, communal, and class), this is not so simple a proposition. Elected representatives, by and large, tend to get influenced by the pressures of their interest groups in the socio-cultural structures. Even overt consensus on policy goals such as eradication of poverty, universal primary health care and education, preventive health, gender justice, and so forth, does not so easily translate into action carrying commitment and a sense of accountability. Thus, representation by elected representatives, by itself, cannot adequately perform the democratic task of pursuing aggregate of societal interests. Therefore, the political system needs to create *democratic space* over and beyond the political institutions of the state; so that unattended grievances can be sublimated to attract attention on issues were missed out or neglected.

Given her size and complexity, India has weathered many a storm that seemed to rock her nationhood. Let us visit some of critical significance.

The Partition: Tragic Great Migration

Few could have imagined a bloody, catastrophic forced migration of nearly 15 million people fleeing their homes, leaving over 2 million dead and all their properties behind on both sides of the newly independent states of India and Pakistan. All this was within a matter of weeks. India, barely baptized as a new nation in the sub-continent, was to face its worst pangs of birth. Whereas the creation of Pakistan was supposed to resolve the problem of seemingly irreconcilable communal polarisation and hatred, it only helped to fuel it even more. Three major findings of a rigorous study of the impact of Partition on the take-up of agricultural technology and agricultural productivity is revealing (Bharadwaj and Mirza 2019):

1) Areas with more refugees have higher average yields, are more likely to take up High-Yielding Varieties (HYV) of seeds, and are more likely to use agricultural technologies within the first 60 years after partition in India.
2) Greater levels of education of the refugees and their higher concentration in money lending has contributed to agricultural development.
3) There is qualitative evidence for the role of land reforms soon after partition, particularly in areas with refugees, as a factor in explaining higher agricultural productivity.

Hapless refugees not only turned adversity into advantage; they contributed to the strengthening of the agricultural economy. This speaks volumes of the political ecosystem that fostered the process of integration of displaced refugees with the economy, polity, and society of India. The Indian nation weathered its first devastating storm.

Linguistic ferment: territory and language

Ethno-linguistic identity has always been a repository of potentially politically combustible sentiments. We have seen how Lord Curzon's obduracy in partitioning Bengal in 1905 led to a political conflagration that compelled the British government to roll it back in 1911. The INC respecting this ethnic sensitivity formed 20 Congress (territorial) Circles (1920) for organisational efficiency.

The independent government had inherited four Categories of states: (A) former provinces under governors; (B) former princely states singly or combined; (C) former Chief Commissioners' provinces and some princely states; and (D) Andaman and Nicobar Islands formerly under a Lieutenant Governor. This alien colonial administrative arrangement met with severe protests demanding a linguistic rationale for the states. Violence scarred the demand by 16 northern districts of Madras for a separate Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh. Prime Minister Nehru constituted the States Reorganisation Committee in December 1953 with former Chief Justice Fazl Ali as Chairman and H. N. Kunzru and K. M. Pannikar as distinguished Members to work out economically viable linguistic states. The Report was presented on 30 September 1955, and enacted on 1 November 1956.[16] The process of *differentiation* and *integration* of states had begun. India now became a union of 14 States and six UTs in the Act of 1956; the numbers rose to 22 States and eight UTs in 1972; 25 States and seven UTs in 1987; 29 States and seven UTs by 2014; and 28 states and 9 UTs by 2019.

National official languages

Apart from *territorial* assertions of linguistic ethnicity, there has been a demand for regional languages to be recognised as a 'national language'.[17] Initially, India had 14 national languages. Thereafter, Sindhi acquired the status in 1967; Manipuri, Nepali, and Konkani in 1992; others followed to make up 22 national languages.[18]

It has been perceptively observed: 'In the West, people are happy with one language, okay with two, suspicious if there are three, and if

there are four, they will disintegrate. Here, on the contrary, if there are three languages we feel okay, if there are two we get suspicious, and with one we would disintegrate' (Choudhury, quoted in Kazmi 1992).

Social justice and protective discrimination

Likewise, the Constitution amendment in 2006 followed massive, and occasionally, violent protestations demanding protective discrimination for Other Backward Castes (OBCs), whose presence in government and in private educational institutions was disproportionately skewed.[19]

Reversing authoritarianism

Public outrage against promulgation of President's rule on 26 June 1975, led to its abrogation on 21 March 1977. Contemporary democratic history has witnessed how the Indian nation-state has weathered problems of humongous magnitudes—the exiled Tibetan Buddhist migration; the refugee influx of 10m during Bangladesh war; the Khalistan secessionist movement of the decade of the 70s and 80s;[20] of moving towards a powerful resilient economy from an economy in distress.

Theorising nation, nationalism and nation-state

I have been arguing that if a logical and coherent conceptual–theoretical framework of the nation-state is reasonably efficient in comprehending the complex South Asian reality (which is second to none), we can expect its generalisabilty beyond the South Asian context. Universal generalisations are an *utopistic* goal of social sciences. The task of abstracting the universal out of the particular is the *process of indigenisation and universalisation of social science* (as opposed to *parochialsation*).

Theoretical orientation

1. The *logic of identification of an ethnic group* lies in the internalisation of cultural attributes and/or values by its members since birth or through long processes of socialisation. The cultural attributes so internalised are available through ancestry or history—real, imagined, or invented—for delineation as boundary markers for ethnic categories/groups ('categories' would refer here to statistical aggregates, whilst

'groups', to the members sharing a sense of consciousness of kind). As Eriksen (1993: 12, *emphasis added*) pertinently observes, ' … only in so far as *cultural differences* are *perceived* as being important, and are made *socially relevant,* do social relationships have an ethnic element.'

2. *The politicisation of an ethnic group/category leads to its ethnisisation*. The phenomenon of ethnicity, refers to *identity formations* of ethnic groups/categories in competition for scarce resources (economic, political, cultural), or against perceived unjust exploitation of its own resources by others, or is activated under conditions of political or cultural oppression directed against such actual or potential groups. Therefore, consistent with (1) and (2) we have a variety of ethnicities, like religious, linguistic, tribal, caste, racial, and so on. This is the *cultural-particularistic basis of ethnicity.* It follows that ethnicity does not have to be territorially bound.
3. *Ethnicity can become the basis for mobilisation of ethnic movements*. Such movements can be broadly categorised as (*a*) those, which target their change objectives within the framework of the nation-state, as opposed to those, (*b*) which seek to establish a new nation consistent with a sovereign state. In the former situation, they are part of a process of the dynamics of 'incorporated ethnicities'in the overall project of *a pluri-ethnic nation-state building;* whilst the latter seek the substitution of the existing nation-state, with a new project of nation-state building, by replacing the existing *nationality* with an alternative one.
4. In this conceptual scheme, *nationalism can exist prior to the establishment of a nation-state;* however, 'a people' constitute a nation only when it becomes congruent with a sovereign state. Just because a culturally homogeneous ethnicity is able to play the role of interest group, does not entitle it to nationhood (Brass 1996). Besides, there are *three fallacies* about cultural homogeneity of ethnicity*: (a) culturally homogeneous* ethnic groups in a pluri-ethnic society are likely to be *internally differentiated*; (*b*) further likely to be *stratified into classes*; and finally, (*c*) non-ethnic factors are relevant or critical to the concept of the nation-state (for example, inter-ethnic differentiation of religious and caste ethnicities in Uttar

Pradesh and Bihar, the ethnic-class differentiations of class and ethnicity in Bihar and Gorkhaland in West Bengal).

5. When ethnic mobilisation is directed towards self-determination for a sovereign state, this is *ethno-nationalism*; when such mobilisation transcends ethnic, class, and gender domains, the resulting phenomenon is *civic nationalism*.
6. Ethno-nationalism is primarily anchored in *cultural particularistic* values, while civic nationalism, generally speaking, is *cultural-universalistic* in orientation. But neither of these are exclusively cultural particularistic or cultural universalistic. This does not mean ethnic nationalism does not at all entertain cultural universalistic values, nor does it mean civic nationalism is ethnicity-free; rather, it is *ethnicity-transcending*.
7. Societies can be analytically divided into domains of *asymmetries*. The number of domains is theoretically as many as the scientist conceives of as analytically relevant for explaining or exploring reality. I have identified five domains in terms of *counter-concepts* of discrimination (cultural-ethnic), exploitation (class), oppression (political), gender disparity, and eco-environmental (physical-natural interface with human society).
8. Embedded in each of these domains are primary and subsidiary contradictions, defined as actual or potential oppositions arising out of differences which are socially perceived, sooner or later, and/or ideologically/ theoretically constructed, having change/ transformation (or resistance to change/ transformation) consequences for the social system under reference. Contradictions are ubiquitous; a society without contradictions is a dead society with no future. Society can be conceptualised as interrelated and inter-penetrating structures of asymmetries of the domains, assuming that the 'whole' social system is greater than the sum of its domains and their structures of asymmetries. Society, therefore, is a constellation of primary and subsidiary contradictions embedded within the domains of asymmetries.
9. The presence of contradictions does not *ipso facto* mean the absence of stability and peace. However, the *fact of social conflict* can be identified with the primary contradiction that

gave rise to it, and the subsidiary contradictions with which it is interfaced or interpenetrating. Contradictions can be antagonistic, non-antagonistic or complementary.

10. I hold that the nation-state is a *dyadic* concept. The 'nation' and the 'state' are analytically separate and yet one does not exist without the other. The state, which is a political institution, is a *structural* concept. The 'nation', on the other hand, is a *cultural* construct. State formation and nation building are two analytically separate processes, with different historicities. The formation of a state does not *ipso facto* mean the establishment of a crystallized nation-state. It does mean, more often than not, the beginning of a *crystallising nation-state.* The process of transition from a *crystallising to a crystallised nation-state* is the task of nation-state building. The nation-state covers the whole range of non-linear, zigzag stages through which it attempts to crystallise as a nation-state.
11. This period of the process of crystallisation of the nation-state is generally characterised by internal strife and conflicts, sometimes fierce and violent and at other times non-violent, leading to accommodations, adjustments, new syntheses or ruptures. Social movements and conflicts, ethnic and non-ethnic can be regarded as the solid building blocks of a strong and crystallised nation-state.
12. The process and conditions leading to the crystallisation of a pluri-ethnic nation-state is marked by an overwhelming majority of its people, representing different culture identities, with competing and conflicting interests and values, internalising an evolved, shared set of values, which then provide the legitimate basis for its major societal institutions— economic, political, and social. In such a state the people develop a *citizen-based loyalty to a territorially defined state,* in as much as, they have a common stake in (*a*) preserving, promoting and enriching the plural-cultural traditions and identities; (*b*) in economic well-being; (*c*) in the enjoyment of political and civil rights and performance of obligations as citizens. There is an implicit assumption here of the existence of some kind of a broad democratic framework.
13. The maturing of a crystallised nation-state does not signal the end of contradictions and conflicts. It only means that the

nation-state is much less vulnerable to dismemberment and disintegration. The ultimate loyalty of the people to its state, in an affective-emotional-cultural sense, is strongly internalised. The nation-state provides a stable territorial framework within which societal encounters can take place for the ongoing processes of change and transformation. It means that contradictions generally get resolved through institutional structures and mechanisms.

14. A nation-state need not remain settled for all times. Social changes can be generated through endogenous and/or exogenous sources, introducing new contradictions, unsettling the erstwhile legitimacy of its institutions and institutional mechanisms. *In this sense, nation-state building is not a one-shot affair, it is a continuous process*

The South Asian states with varying political systems are among the late 'entrants' into the institutionalised international system of sovereign states, which has evolved historically since the seventeenth century. They are crystallising nation-states, each with their own project of crystallisation, for their nation-states. They are in one sense or the other, engaged in the *task* of nation-state building.

Through social movements and conflicts the Indian nation-state is going through a continuous process of *societal differentiations and integrations.* Democracy in India is more than the sum total of its democratic institutions; its vitality lies in allowing for the *constant creation of democratic space.*

Pakistan failed to negotiate with Bengali linguistic ethno-nationalism that resulted in Bangladesh. It is doubtful how effectively the process of ethnic incorporation of the Baluchis and Pathans is taking place in Pakistan. The recent trend towards the evolution of democratic institutions is a healthy signal.

Sri Lanka was beset with the challenge of ethno-nationalism. Its historicity clearly suggests how material and political factors have combined to sharpen the ethno-nationalistic contradictions. The present political climate seems to be favourable to a reintegration of the Tamils with the Sinhalese.

No matter how severe the threat perception of ethno-nationalism from insurrections in the Northeast or in Kashmir, India had not sought a solution through *ethnic swamping* of these areas by other ethnic

groups to offset the demographic advantages of the regional ethno–cultural aspirations. Recent events, however, seem to suggest a shift in this policy towards Jammu and Kashmir, after the abolition of the Jammu and Kashmir State, and its replacement by two Union Territories. *Secondly*, the attempt has always been to extend the democratic institutions to facilitate the sharing of power by the alienated and aggrieved groups. The *third* important strategy of statecraft has been to address the economic development of these regions through the democratic process. *Finally*, cultural articulations of their distinctiveness have been allowed fuller expression, and national recognition accorded through a variety of symbolic and substantive channels. I have observed elsewhere that 'in the Indian context ethnic identity and Indian national identity are not necessarily mutually antagonistic or exclusive; the former is often a necessary condition for the latter'(Mukherji 1994: 48).

Contextualising the contemporary: re-differentiation to ethnic nation or re-integration into the civic-secular nation-state?

There is little doubt that India is going through a phase of redefining the nature and character of the Indian state. During the freedom movement, the Indian (sub-continental-level) national movement got differentiated into an *ethnically plural* civic secular nation state (India), and an *ethnically exclusionary*, ethno-national homogeneous state based on religion (Islamic Pakistan). The former has stood the test of time despite many reservations that dogged its emergence as a post-colonial nation-state. The latter suffered cessation owing to the primacy of ethno-linguistic nationalism over ethno-religious nationalism, which could not be resolved (Bangladesh). Pakistan continues to be more fragile as an ethnic nation-state, as competing and conflicting ethnicities, within the fold of Islam, have not ceased to give up their ethno-linguistic assertions. Bangladesh, in contrast, does not have such a challenge.

What we in India are witnessing at present is the *resurfacing* of the latent, parallel, Hindu ethno-national voice for a Hindu nation within an Indian state during the Indian freedom movement, which relegated other ethnic communities to 'non-nations' within the 'Unitarian' Indian state (Savarkar). Though that feeble, ineffectual voice got overwhelmed by the other civic-secular voices of the times, it is now the voice of an overwhelmingly powerful ruling party (BJP) determined to set 'right' the seven-decade-old historic 'wrong' (read as Muslim appeasement in the garb of pseudo-secularism).

The recent controversies, and nation-wide social mobilisations, protesting the proposed Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the preparation of the Nation Population Register (NPR), followed by the National Register of Citizens (NRC), are to be comprehended in this context. There are strong apprehensions across parties on the substance and implications of the *gestalt* change envisaged.

The resurfacing of the Hindu ethno national voice and its state policies, has given rise to counter-mobilisations of the civic-secular voice. Political differentiation is sharpening with time. A *parallel polarisation* between votaries of the Constitution and those that are perceived by them as wrecking it, is taking a *spontaneous* form with youths and/or women playing a vanguard role, undercutting the ethno-divide.

Citizen mandate in state elections, subsequent to the roller-coaster mandate to the ruling party in the 2019 General Election, is indicative of a decline in the belief in the invulnerability of the ruling party. It may be recalled that CPI (M) government in West Bengal reached the epitome of electoral success in 2006, only to be reduced to an ineffectual party in the very next election![21]

There is perceptible *shift* taking place in the thinking and actions of a significant number on the project of Hindu ethno-nation; the problems of livelihood, well-being and democratic principles of liberty, equality, and freedom as enshrined in the Constitution, are being perceived as far more important in the face of a cascading decline of the economy, and the increasing use of state and vigilante force to subdue protest.

There is great apprehension among the Muslims that their homeland status is being subjected to questioning.

The question is: will the civic-centered counter-mobilisations in opposition to the ethno-national spirit of redefining the nation, work out a dialectic that will result in a reintegration of a more mature civic-secular nation state with enhanced citizen-consciousness; *or* will it result in a Hindu ethno-national state with non-nation space for other communities; or will an altogether different scenario take shape that is not within our reckoning?

Prognostications over the future scenario can be done with a theoretical framework and the substantive historical and contemporary empirical reality. The Indian nation is certainly at a crossroads.

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APPENDIX 1:

Proportion of Muslims in the general population and their weighted representation in the Provincial Legislative Councils

Provinces	Special electorate representation (per cent)	Muslim percentage of Total population
Punjab	50	55
United Provinces	30	14
Bengal	40	52.7
Behar	25	13
Central Provinces	15	4
Madras	15	7
Bombay	33.3	20

Sources*: Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Bal Gangadhar Tilak,* '*Lucknow Pact between Congress and Muslim League 1916*', India of the Past: Preserving Memories of India and Indians; *Owen (1972: 577)*.

APPENDIX 2: Elections to Legislative Assemblies (1937)

States	*Seats (nos.)*	*Majority party*	*INC*	*AIML*	*Govt. formed by*	*Remarks*
Sindh*	60	Sindh United Party (22)	8	None	Sind Muslim Political Party (which had won 4 seats) through defections	SUP won all 22 seats from Muslim reserved constituencies

Bengal	250	INC	54	27 (only from Muslim reserved constituencies)	Krishak Praja Party with 36 seats in coalition	
Assam	108	INC	33	10	Assam Valley Muslim Party in coalition with INC	Assam Valley Muslim Party won 24 seats.
Bombay Central	175	INC	86	18	INC	
Provinces	112	INC	70	5	INC	
Behar	152	INC	92	None	INC	
Orissa	60	INC	36	None	INC	
Madras	215	INC	159	9	INC	
North West Frontier Province	50		19	None	INC with minor party support	Muslim majority Province.
Punjab	175	Unionist Party (95) or 67	18	1	Unionist Party	
United Provinces	228	INC	133	26	INC	

Source*: Reforms-Elections, E.I.C. 1937.* Return showing the results of elections in India 1937. *London. Accessed at: https://dspace.gipe.ac.in/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10973/39732/GIPE-011885-09.pdf?sequence=3 (Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune)*

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Partha Nath Mukherji: Social Transformation, National Building, and How to Study It?

Prof. Dr. Rahul Mukherji* and Jai Prasad**

Partha Nath Mukherji (1940-2021) was an unusual scholar. One of the authors of this paper, his son, had the rare opportunity to witness Professor Mukherji's approach and scholarship from close quarters at home, which contributed immensely to his own evolution as an academic. It is therefore with some trepidation that a son attempts to gauge the scholarship of his illustrious father. This paper begins with a brief biography that sheds some light on Professor Mukherji's inspiration that led to scholarly contributions. Partha Nath Mukherji was a practitioner of what he called "indigeneity", which meant that he was averse to the blind application of propositions derived from Western scholarship. His substantial contributions were in the areas of social movements, conflict and change, participatory democracy, and state and nation formation. The paper will also discuss his grounded field-oriented approach to learning and his thoughts regarding why the Western domination of social science must move towards a different conception of universalization.

The Evolution of a Scholar

Professor Mukherji was a homegrown Indian scholar who took Western scholarship seriously but was averse to its inappropriate application. He will be remembered for having served a wide variety of distinguished Indian institutions, such as Patna University; the Delhi School of Economics; the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal

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Nehru University (New Delhi); the Sociological Research Unit (Kolkata) and later the Planning Unit (New Delhi) of the Indian Statistical Institute; the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai); The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi); The Council for Social Development (New Delhi); The Institute of Social Sciences (New Delhi); and the Policy Perspectives Foundation (New Delhi). He was elected Secretary (1987/88) and later President of the Indian Sociological Society (2004/2005) and was conferred a lifetime achievement award by the society (2013). More significant than all these achievements, he should be remembered for not following the beaten track.

Professor Mukherji's upbringing was quite unusual. Partha Nath was born in Gaya, Bihar, on September 3, 1940, to Bijoya and Narendra Nath Mukherji. He was groomed in Patna in close association with family friends who included the likes of Jayaprakash Narayan (JP). JP was a close friend of his father. JP and his compatriots would often hide in the family home, Patalashree, during the freedom struggle. Congressman Awadeshwar Prasad Sinha, who served as a Member of Parliament from 1956-1976, was a fatherly figure. Senior statespersons such as Bihar's first Chief Minister, Shri Krishna Sinha, were family friends. India's first President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, would visit the family home. His mother Bijoya had taken to the *charkha,* and Gandhiji (Mohandas Gandhi) had appreciated her capacity to weave.

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamy Vivekananda, had a substantial influence on the young Partha Nath. There was a deep spiritual aspect to Partha Nath's upbringing. Patalashree was like an extension of the Ramakrishna Mission in Patna. Parents Bijoya and Narendra Nath served the evolving Ramakrishna Mission with their heart and soul. They would donate generously in those fledgling days of the Ramakrishna Mission when the monks could not even bear the costs of simple living. They had contributed towards the idol of Sri Ramakrishna, which is still worshipped in Patna. Partha Nath was steeped in this tradition, having associated with some of the saintliest monks of the Ramakrishna order. He was a learner steeped in the cosmopolitanism of the Ramakrishna-Sharada-Vivekananda religio-spiritual tradition that respected the catholicity of all religions. After all, had not Sri Ramakrishna seen the light by following Bhakti, Vedanta, Tantra, Christianity, and Sufi Islam, and proclaimed "As many are the paths, so many are the ways (Joto Mot, Toto Path)".

These aspects of Professor Mukherji's upbringing are important for us to understand why he often chose the paths that are not easily taken. He gave up the possibility of a PhD in Sociology at the prestigious University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and returned to his *alma mater*, the Department of Sociology at Patna University, for a PhD after enduring one semester of course-work. This was in the early 1960s. He had experienced discrimination at Illinois at the very moment when the Vice Chancellor of Patna University had offered the Master's gold medallist the job of a lecturer in the university department. He could have taken a detour via the London School of Economics (LSE). Rather than remain at Illinois or explore the option at the LSE, Partha Nath returned to his alma mater, the Department of Sociology at Patna University, to work under the guidance of Professor Narmadeshwar Prasad. Narmadeshwar Prasad subsequently introduced him to Ramakrishna Mukherjee. While based in Patna, he spent a substantial amount of time (1967/68) with Professor Ramkrishna Mukherjee at the Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata. A beautiful relationship evolved between the two, and Ramakrishna Mukherjee would earn a lifelong endearing title, which can only be aptly invoked in Bangla –– "Mashtermoshai" (my teacher) (on this relationship, see Mukherji, Jayaram and Ghosh 2019: 3-17). This unusual trajectory produced a PhD conferred by Patna University that resulted in two papers in *Human Organization* – a premier journal in social anthropology (Mukherji 1966; 1970). Both papers analysed social changes introduced by the Gramdan movement of land redistribution in Bihar, inspired by JP and Vinoba Bhave.

Partha Nath Mukherji's credentials were outstanding even as a young scholar who had experienced sociological research in Patna and Kolkata. The prestigious Delhi School of Economics welcomed this scholar from Patna University, thereby opening the doors for Partha Nath to spend most of his working life in Delhi (after 1970). He subsequently served several above-mentioned institutions in Delhi till the very end, apart from one brief interlude at the Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata (1980-1984) and another at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai), where he served as Director between 1996 and 1999.

Two significant reasons make Professor Mukherji different from many other scholars. He was keen that scholarship should adopt a lens that is respectful of but not subservient to the West. Second, he wanted

the scholarship to be deeply immersed in empirical materials on the ground. The two intellectual propensities were not unrelated.

Indigeneity and Non-Western Thinking

First, Professor Mukherjee's scholarship was driven by his insatiable desire for an indigenous approach to the study of India and South Asia, which would benefit from but not be coloured by Western scholarship. He wanted to follow this approach for comparative work on other regions as well. These efforts were only partially successful (Mohanty and Mukherji 1998). Indigeneity in the social sciences was an important theme of his research and life's mission (Mukherji 1986). He was inspired by Mohandas Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) and considered himself a socialist with a deep respect for Karl Marx and Mao Zedong. To give just one example, he would go back to Gandhi's writings when deeply concerned with the social unrest in Punjab in the 1980s. This led him to understand that the Gurudwara was a more significant social institution for a Sikh than a temple for a Hindu. If one wished to understand the Sikh response to the desecration of the Golden Temple, one needed to understand what the institution of a Gurudwara meant for a Sikh. His affection for Gandhi and JP made him an intellectual rebel at a time when Marxism was the hegemonic doctrine in Delhi. Let us explore how his grounded research produced significant insights into social movements and state formation in India.

Social movements, change, and participatory democracy

In Professor Mukherji's intellectual legacy, the mapping of social movements, social conflict, and change, especially in the agrarian setting, and democratic deepening, has a special place. His early study of Bhoodan/Gramdan, Naxalbari, and later work on the Punjab farmers, West Bengal Left Party hegemony, and Panchayati Raj demonstrate rich and grounded, fieldwork-based insights into Indian realities, while at the same time contributing to global debates on social contention and change across cultures.

Professor Mukherji's intellectual legacy offers a robust analytical framework that helps us think through social movements, social change, and democratic deepening both as a part of a continuum as well as parsimoniously. He demonstrated how, in order to study social movements, we must clearly define and locate them as part of structural asymmetries — latent and manifest–– and then find the primary

contradiction in social structure, at a given context or historical conjuncture, that best explains the driving force of the movement. Social conflict must be seen as a manifestation of structural incongruities that remain latent or manifest at specific points in time. Once the primary contradiction has been located, the researcher's task is to trace the historical path on which a reordering of social contentions, rules, and institutions occurs over a period, shifting the fault lines, or failing to do so.

He differentiated *movements*– that target changes in the *structure* of a system– with quasi-movements that seek changes *within* a structure. He opined: "Any social mobilisation for action directed explicitly towards an alteration or transformation of the structure(s) of a system … can be properly understood as a social movement. Mobilisations aimed at changes within a system are quasi-movements." (Mukherji 1977, 44–45). A typology of social change thus emerges, viz, within-the-structure changes; and addition, elimination, or replacement of structures. Further, he demonstrated how actors pursued change (institutional vs. non-institutional repertoires) that often impact not only their goals, thus often making the similar grievances appear as a quasi-movement in one setting and a structural movement in another. This impacted organizational forms, such as loose campaigns to cadre organisations, and repertoires, from petitions and boycotts to occupations and parallel institutions(Mukherji 1977, 51).

A structural analysis of social contentions is powerfully demonstrated in a 1981 article (with Manabendu Chattopadhyay) where the authors analyse village-level evidence from Birbhum, Naxalbari, and Gopiballavpur— electoral constituencies from where erstwhile Communist Party of India – Marxist Leninist's (CPIML) members fought state-level elections for the first time in 1977. They argue that agrarian relations had already been moving away from feudal structures, and in the direction of capitalist development with proletarianization of agricultural labour reconfiguring conflict lines in these regions (Mukherji and Chattopadhyay 1981, 138–40, 156–60). In his seminal study of the Naxalbari peasant movement, he demonstrated how social conflicts must be read as a window to structural contradictions. Social conflicts, he argued, "provide a context in which the articulation of the structural features of the system acquire greater prominence"— often helping resurface latent relations that remain concealed in normal times (Mukherji 1987, 1607). His analysis of the farmers' movement in Punjab

found how the primary contradiction in agrarian relations shifted toward unequal terms of trade between rural and urban sectors as the Green Revolution economy expanded, transforming the non-electoral politics of pressure groups to active participation in electoral politics (Mukherji 1998, 1043–44).

While social movements are powerful vehicles of social change, they do not always lead to substantive reforms. True democratic deepening is a process much more complex than conventional studies of social movements might permit. Professor Mukherji, ever a votary of democratic decentralization and participatory democracy, cautioned that decentralisation per se should not be confused with democratisation: one needed to distinguish between deconcentration, delegation, and devolution of power (Mukherji n.d., ISS Occasional Paper). When studying any model of decentralization, we must disaggregate the bundle and then trace the combinations of powers, accountability, and participation that enabled ecision-making powers toward citizens, rather than treating all decentralization as a blanket reform. Professor Mukherji was sceptical towards the idea that the so-called "public private partnership" was an ultimate form of "decentralization", reflected in the rise of NGO/INGO-led service delivery models after the 1991 liberalization of the Indian economy. He pointed out the grave possibility that accountability might move upwards towards the donors rather than downward towards the citizen in such models, which might increase managerial efficiency but reduce public accountability. For him, democratic deepening requires institutional designs that guarantee voice, transparency, and answerability at local levels, not just the outsourcing of services.

Mukherji's analysis of West Bengal combined his framework on social contention and democratic decentralization. He questioned why the dominant Left Front government, known for its Panchayat (village government) level party penetration, crumbled after Nandigram and Singur. Mukherji and B. N. Ghosh pointed out that the primary contradiction was not "industry vs. agriculture" per se, but in how the party-state exercised power, and the manner in which land was acquired in Nandigram and Singur, instead of the mere fact that agricultural land was acquired (Mukherji and Ghosh 2010, 201). Comparing with Kerala, Mukherji and Ghosh maintained that party "democratic centralism" in West Bengal had pervaded local bodies, turning the idea of devolution

of power to the local Panchayats meaningless, subordinating local arenas to party hierarchies. This precluded any meaningful dialogue and public deliberation at the local level and between the local and the central levels. This contradiction resulted in electoral loss in 2011 (Mukherji and Ghosh 2010, 199–205).

Discomfort with the Nation-State

Professor Mukherji was rather uneasy with the ethnic basis of a nation. Religion, race, or language, he opined, have often not defined the people/citizens/residents within a territory. Apart from the ethnic basis, there could also be class-based, gender based, ecological, and other sources of conflicts within a state. His work on nation-building grewout of his research on social conflicts. He toyed with the Gandhian idea of civilization, which could be considered at the level of South Asia rather than being restricted to a partitioned India. He was fond of citing Gandhi when he argued that the British did not create India. Rather, they could rule over the subcontinent because the subcontinent had a broad socio-cultural basis (Mukherji 1999). He was not only worried that nationalism and social integration could not be easily sustained in a country so widely socially diverse, but was also not at ease with the idea of "multiculturalism."Multiculturalism, he opined, could lead to ghettoization and oppression. He favored the habit of accepting pluralism based on a civilizational basis where different communities and identities should be able to express their differences through federal and democratic institutions (Mukherji 2010).

There are not many scholars in the academe apart from visionary leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru who have thought in terms of a civilizational legacy. One of the authors once presented to him the idea of a "state-nation" articulated by Alfred Stepan, Juan Linz and Yogendra Yadav (Stepan, Linz and Yadav 2010). India, as a "state-nation," was conceived as an entity that first became a state and then decided what the key constitutional ideas around it would be. A nation was thus created out of some fundamental ideas, which were respect for religious, linguistic, and regional diversity embodied in secularism, socialism, federalism, and rights guaranteed through universal adult franchise. Partha Mukherji was vehemently opposed to the idea that the state came first and then came the idea of India. He, like Vivekananda, Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, and Maulana Azad, believed that the constitution was premised on a pre-existing

civilizational legacy. Perhaps he was pointing in the direction of what Amartya Sen called the "argumentative Indian" (Sen 2005).

Different regions, empires, and states may have different civilizational legacies. Greece and Turkey, for example, may have had a different civilizational trajectory. This can be characterized as the ability of the empires and kingdoms to exclude the "other". Greece treats the Turkish people and the Persians as barbarians in many of its museums. Rule by the Achaemenids and the Ottomans is an experience that the Greeks would like to forget. Likewise, in Turkey, which was once a part of the Byzantine Empire, the Hajia Sophia Mosque was originally a Byzantine church, then a mosque, and subsequently a museum until 2020. Today, under autocratic Erdogan, Hajia Sophia has been turned into a mosque almost exclusively dedicated to serving Sunni Muslims.

Professor Mukherji was suggesting that India enjoyed a fundamentally different civilizational legacy. Here Buddhism declined, but not the Buddha. Islam arrived and learned to co-exist with what we call Hinduism today. Can anyone tell whether Kabir was Hindu or Muslim? Out of these two great religions was born Sikhism, which drew from both the world religions and maintained its unique character. The Syrian Christians of Kerala have practiced Christianity even before the birth of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, unlike in many countries, political Hinduism can be challenged in India despite an overwhelming Hindu majority. Professor Mukherji worried that this civilizational legacy could be overturned if Hindu nationalism, just like the idea of Pakistan, learns to forget the argumentative and accommodative nature of Indian civilization. He expressed this worry in no uncertain terms in his last substantial lecture, the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Memorial Lecture delivered at the Policy Perspectives Foundation (January 2020) titled: *Differentiation, Integration and Exclusion: Dynamics and Challenges to National Building* (for details see, https://ppf.org.in/reports/pn-mukherji).

Methodological Approach

Professor Mukherji was interested in research that would serve India and would be based on grounded knowledge. Not only was he in love with fieldwork, but he also possessed an extraordinary capacity to earn respect from persons in the field who were concerned about his research. Such persons could range from the legendary Maoist leader Kanu Sanyal

to the farmers' leader Bhupinder Singh Mann. The scholar was more deeply concerned with conceptualizing the situation on the ground and making it speak to those who knew sociological niceties of the research, than pleasing some editor of a peer-reviewed international journal.

Partha Nath Mukherji was a scientist who believed that a research design should produce its own scientific results without being biased before the research had been conducted. He once compared agrarian relations in areas with greater or lesser capitalist penetration in agriculture in the early 1980s, only to find that capitalist penetration in Indian Punjab and Eastern Uttar Pradesh had largely freed rural labor from bondage than in feudal Bihar. Professor Mukherji would accept these results, and his ideas about socialism and capitalism would evolve from here.

Grounded knowledge derived from fieldwork is not easily available. One needed to devise a clear strategy to obtain this data. This required not just going to the field. One also needed to earn the respect of persons who would feel comfortable revealing the minutiae of local issues with which an outsider may hardly possess any commitment to engage. Why would anyone reveal the secrets of a social movement? This was as true for the Maoist insurgency in Naxalbari in West Bengal (1960s and 1970s), or the individual Maoists who contested elections in Gopiballavpur (1977, West Bengal) for the first time. It is equally applicable to the Singur/Nandigram (West Bengal) crises, where the plight of the peasants involved precipitated the decline and fall of the Communist Party of India Marxists in West Bengal, who subsequently were unable to retain power after thirty-five years of continuous rule till 2011 (Mukherji 2019:125-43). He often opined that a researcher should not approach the field with a questionnaire before knowing the facts on the ground. Often, this exercise requires a pilot study and sensitization on the ground regarding how to approach the more conceptual research questions in the field. Thereafter, one needs to devise a strategy for obtaining answers to sensitive political questions by approaching other issues, where respondents will be more amenable to respond. The challenge was to win the trust of persons who might consider the researcher significant and trustworthy enough to part with privileged information. Only when the field researcher had won the confidence of those who were being interviewed would the researcher receive the desired data rather than be misled by the interviewee (Mukherji 1983, Ch. 2).

This approach is not conventional wisdom even in the premier institutions. Most researchers collect data or have assistants collect it without a good understanding of why certain persons reveal certain bits of information. One of the authors experienced substantial resistance from colleagues at the Political Studies Centre at Jawaharlal Nehru University when he decided to take methodology students to the field without a questionnaire. The experience of going Professor Mukherji's route, however, turned out to be very exciting for students. They learned how to formulate questions based on how important issues in politics are related to experiences on the ground. They were then able to collect data on diverse issues, such as the relative absence of riots in Jammu, or why the Hyderabad-based MV Foundation succeeded or failed largely in bringing children from poor families to school. It is well known to the students that the MV Foundation and its founder Professor Shantha Sinha have played singular role in wiping out illiteracy among the poor in India.

Professor Mukherji was deeply concerned with assertions regarding the universal nature of social science knowledge derived from the West. He reasoned that social science is created between subjects who create knowledge and the objects they study. Between these two reside social relations that create the content of that knowledge. Such knowledge that is created in the West, such as theories of modernization, democratization and communicative action are influenced by conditions in the West that may not be applicable to non-Western societies (Lipset 1959; Huntington 1968; Pzerworski 1991; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Habermas 1984, 1987). If non-Western societies began to apply these models to redress their problems, they could be coming up with the wrong answer. Moreover, powerful and well-funded institutions of higher learning and funding agencies supported such models. Knowledge, after all, is not just created rationally; it is also supported by social, political, and financial power that allows paradigms to sustain themselves even after they are fundamentally challenged (Kuhn 1996).

Mukherji was not averse to universalizing knowledge. He was concerned, however, that what is considered universal knowledge is based largely on empirical materials drawn from the Western experience. To give just two examples, if nationalism and capitalism were intertwined in the West and had a role to play in the nation-state formation in Europe, the same dynamic may not hold for post-colonial non-Western settings such as China and India. India and China, for example, were not nation-states, but they may have had a cultural binding that cannot

be accommodated within the framework of the formation of nation-states in Europe. Likewise, the bourgeoisie need not produce democracy in a post-colonial setting, as modernization theory would predict. India's democratic consolidation, for example, occurred at low levels of per capita income and with a small middle class. This may have had more to do with certain values that were pursued after decolonization that were consistent with the idea of India that emerged as dominant at that time. That idea may have had a civilizational basis, as Mohandas Gandhi or Amartya Sen would suggest (Gandhi 1997; Sen 2005).

Why are Western-centric applications often inappropriate for understanding the post-colonial non-West? What we consider "universal" needs to account for developments in non-Western, post-colonial settings before being considered as propositions with universal applicability. For example, state-formation in Europe based on "war-making" suggested by Charles Tilly would not apply to post-colonial settings where the state arrived after the departure of colonial powers. It was not the case here that war-making among smaller sovereigns led to the need for funding that produced welfare and the state in Asia, as Tilly would suggest. Propositions regarding the formation of states in Western Europe based on war-making or the consolidation of capitalism may not be an inappropriate lens to understand state formation in non-Western post-colonial settings (Spryut 1994; Tilly 1990; for a synoptic view on Partha Nath Mukherji's understanding of indigeneity in the social sciences, see Mukherji 2004: 15-65).

How would Professor Mukherji seek to universalize knowledge on state formation? His test would require not just a rigorous analysis of state formation in Europe but also in other non-Western settings before one sought to universalize propositions on the primacy of capitalism or "war making" for the formation of states. The same would be true for ideas around which a state could get consolidated. Those ideas may have little to do with what we call the formation of a classic nation-state. Ethnicity-based nationalism, after all, is beginning to topple democracy even in Western settings such as the United States, as much as it poses a threat to democracy in non-Western settings such as India and Turkey.

Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, Professor Mukherji's legacy shows a way of doing social science that is both empirically grounded and exacting, as it is

normatively embedded in deeper civilizational values derived from India's ancient syncretic humanism. His emphasis on "indigeneity" was never against the universal search for truth inherent to scientific search, but an insistence that "concepts" must be empirically rooted in the fields and contexts wherein they are applied and tested. Instead of a Eurocentric social science—often bound by the hegemony of western academia and frequently blind to India's ground realities—he chose to maintain a "disciplined eclecticism" in social sciences, where theoretical orientation becomes more important than theories *per se*, demonstrating that indigeneity might be an essential condition of universalizing social sciences (see Mukherji 2013).

He left an impressive corpus of scholarly work on social movements, social change, and social conflicts. His emphasis on locating "primary contradictions" within agrarian and political structures, the importance of rule implementation in established institutions, the aims and goals of change-seekers and resisters, and how the fault-lines of conflict shift over time in many ways pre-empted the historical-materialist lens to "politics in time," as also the mechanisms of endogenous institutional change. He showed how social contention has the potential to reconfigure social institutions, but the process is not straightforward or inevitable, and one must pay attention to the mechanisms and historical path taken by movements, their leaders, their organizational forms, and the goals and values upheld by the movement (see Mukherji 1977, 1981; 1987). His search for concrete definitions and refusal of Eurocentric ideas also led to his discomfort with the concept of nation-state/state-nation orthodoxies, as well as the idea of "multiculturalism." He pursued a deeper, historically grounded line of enquiry that accorded a greater role to India's civilizational legacy and its pluralism grounded in respect for multiple faiths and traditions, conflict resolution based on argumentation and negotiation, and coexistence based on a universal humanism.

His legacy reminds us that credible knowledge is a hard pursuit that requires patient, iterative, and open-ended search for empirical data based on trust-building in/and knowledge of the field, and a theoretical orientation that has its feet in indigenous realities but its head in a process of universalization of social sciences. Western-born propositions about state formation, democracy, or development must be constantly refined, reformulated, or even rejected in debate with postcolonial realities and histories, not merely borrowed and applied to

them. His programmatic legacy compels future scholars to seek conceptual clarity with a grounded search for empirical truth, and to treat India not as an anomaly but a site from where universal social theorization could progress in constant dialogue with Eurocentric theories.

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Remembering Partha Nath Mukherji[22]

Prof. BB Mohanty

Partha Nath Mukherji, one of the eminent sociologists of the country, former director of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and past president of the Indian Sociological Society, died on 12 February 2021 at the age of 81. His death brought to a close the career of one of the giants of his generation and a significant participant in over half a century history of Indian sociology.

Mukherji's distinguished teaching career included periods of service at Patna University, 1963–70, University of Delhi, 1970–72, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1972–79, and the Indian Statistical Institute, 1980–96. He was a much sought-after academic given his talents, scholarly vision, and above all, professional integrity. He was offered the director's position of the Tata Institute of Sciences, Mumbai, in 1996 and of the Council for Social Development, New Delhi, from 1999 to 2001. He also served as the secretary and the president of the Indian Sociological Society. Towards the last phase of his career, he was associated with the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, as its S K Dey Chair Professor and subsequently as Professor Emeritus.

Mukherji is one of the few sociologists who broadened the horizon of sociological research in India, which was preoccupied mostly with caste studies and caste-based analysis of social change using the ethnographic—cultural and structural-functional perspectives. His writings marked the beginning of a new era in Indian sociology on the study of social conflicts and movements. His conceptualisation and theorisation of Gandhian, Maoist and peasant movements provided a new framework for understanding social movements as well as mobilisation. Similarly, his contribution to methodology in social sciences is noteworthy. While acknowledging the importance of

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qualitative and micro village studies, he was insisting on macro quantitative analysis with the application of statistical tools, even though his own research was primarily qualitative.

He was of the opinion that in order to contribute to a larger development discourse and to have an impact on policymaking, we need to go for larger studies. His concern was how many narratives or case studies one can write? To him, macro-level empirical studies that combine rich quantitative with qualitative analysis provide the best mix for a more in-depth explanation. Mukherji was indeed a staunch advocate of methodological pluralism.

Indigenisation and Social Mobility

In order to engage with the West, he says that we need methodological sophistication and theoretical rigour. To him, we should not uncritically accept Western wisdom as "universal knowledge." In his view, the dynamics of social changes and development in a country like India that generate conflict and contradictions are infinitely more complex and, hence, incomparably more difficult to research. Therefore, he talks about the indigenisation of sociology, which he says should not be confused with parochialisation. He strongly voiced for the universalisation of sociology only through indigenisation.

Mukherji was quite critical of sociological research in India, including his own writings in the context of rapid ongoing changes. He says, much of the woes in the sociological fraternity lie in our shyness or ineptitude for undertaking quantitative studies of larger sample of villages. He said that we have no clear idea of how the development efforts by the state and role of the increasingly globalising market are affecting society, with what consequences, and for whom.

In which direction the professed goal of social equality is in progress, and how can they be further promoted and disseminated? In order to answer these questions, felt that if there is one area in which the role of the sociologists is of most urgent necessity, it is the macro-scale study of social mobility. Mukherji advocated for a composite index encompassing different domains of asymmetries to comprehend and theorise the process of social change. We together developed a research proposal on social mobility, which was presented at the South Asia Workshop in 2005, but unfortunately, the study did not take off due to a variety of reasons.

Stated precisely, the development of sociology in India drew much of its force from his work on diverse issues such as social movements, mobilisation, democracy and decentralisation, agrarian structure and rural labour, methods in research and nation states, etc. Mukherji's passing away truly left behind a void in the study of social movements and development sociology.

My intellectual inclination towards Mukherji began when I read his long book chapter (over 70 pages) on the Naxalbari Movement and the Peasant Revolt in North Bengal in the M S A Rao edited Social Movements in India. Thereafter, I started following and collecting his writings and looked for opportunities for interaction and association. Though I met and listened to him in many seminars, conferences, and public lectures, my interaction with him was very brief. When I was working at Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, my intimacy developed with him during a seminar in Maharashtra in 2001, where we had a longish one-on-one interaction for about one and half hours while taking an evening walk before dinner. Initially, in his usual style, he asked me about a dozen of questions on contemporary sociological writings and my research work. One of his questions, I remember was "Did you observe any kind of shift in Srinivas's writings?" I just said that off late, Srinivas seems to have indicated economic differentiation in rural India. In jest, Mukherji promptly added, if Srinivas would have survived for another 10 years, he would have shifted to class analysis to explain social change. He went on narrating a critical account of the sociological research in India, emphasising the necessity of a paradigm shift in terms of methodological innovation and theoretical as well as conceptual rigour. That memorable evening brought us closer, and thereafter, we remained in touch, and our professional and personal association grew stronger.

Mukherji had regular visits to Pondicherry University for a number of years between 2008 and 2016. His last visit was in November–December 2016 for the week-long Social Sciences Winter School organised jointly by Pondicherry University and the French Institute of Pondicherry. Faculty and students across departments have fond memories of his stimulating lectures, splendidly organised classroom deliberations, and penetrating questions. He maintained a fine distinction between professional and personal relationship. While on the professional front, he was blunt and sharp in his criticism, on the personal front, the warmth of his love and affection was profound.

Crystallised Nation States

'My last interaction with him was on 8 January 2021 just about a month before his demise, which was also in an evening and for quite a long time. I did not call him for many days as I was told that he was unwell and undergoing treatment. Observing my silence, he called me hearing the news of a cyclone alert for Pondicherry. He said that he had recovered and all of his parameters were normal, and started working on his pending paper on nation state and nation-building. When enquired about

the paper, he said my argument was that Indian nation-states have steadily evolved through a continuous zig-zag process of differentiation and integration and the process of transition from a crystallising to a crystallised nation state is the task of nation-building. When I asked "does a crystallised nation-state bring an end of conflict and contradictions?" his answer was that maturing of a crystallised nation state does not signal their end. Within few days, he sent the paper for my comments and I told him that I would need three weeks of time. After reading his paper, I sent my comments by email but did not receive any response. I was about to call him to know his views on my comments but meanwhile I got the message that he was no more.

Between the two evenings spanning over two decades, the one in which we started our interaction in Maharashtra and the other before his demise, I have learnt a lot from him. His frank critical comments and interest in my research had a tremendous impact on my career. Mukherji has left behind an impressive opus and legacy, and those of us who had the good fortune to be associated with him will miss him forever.

P. N. Mukherjee and the Idea of Civilizational Nation-State in India

Prof. Dr Anwar Alam*

It is my privilege and honour to engage with the ideas of the late Prof (Emeritus) P.N. Mukherjee. I had occasions of meeting and engaging him on several issues during his association with Policy Perspectives Foundation (New Delhi). Unlike an armchair theoretician, the theoretical insight of Prof. Mukherjee on a range of subjects, such as nation, nation-state, nationalism, nature of Indian state and society, secularism, democracy, nature of nation building, the question of minority, etc, in India came from his wide 'field experiences' combined with Gandhian socio-anthropological insight. The field guided his theoretical engagement. One of his lifelong engagements was to conceptualise 'South Asia' as 'civilisational space'. Speaking from within this paradigm, he begins and concludes with a central question in his latest publication (posthumously, 2022,'Differentiation, Integration and Exclusion: Dynamics and Challenges to Nation-Building', *Sociological Bulletin,* 71(3) 323–351, 2022):

W*ill the civic-centred counter-mobilisations in opposition to the ethno-national spirit of redefining the nation work out a dialectic that will result in a reintegration of a more mature civic-secular nation-state with enhanced citizen-consciousness, or will it result in a Hindu ethno-national state with non-nation space for other communities, or will an altogether different scenario take shape that is not within our reckoning? (P. 344).*

The above concern of P.N. Mukherjee reflects a collective concern of many, both within and outside India. Since the emergence of Hindu nationalism at the national level in the late 1980s, and more particularly with the coming of the Modi-led BJP government in power since 2014, India has witnessed the intense academic, journalistic, and political

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debates on the nature of Indian nationalism. Voices from the left, liberal, Gandhian and Nehruvian spectrum see RSS-BJP's vision of Hindu nationalism as a serious threat to the civilisational, plural, civic-secular fabric of Indian nationhood. An extremist view among them sees the real possibility of the dismemberment of India if votaries of Hindutva/ Hindu nationalism were allowed to consolidate their power and hegemony in the long term. They rallied behind 'Save Constitution' to checkmate the juggernaut march of this Hindu voice for the Hindu nation.[23]

Though keenly aware of inherent democratic deficiencies of Hindutva movement/ political assertion of ethno-Hindu nation and its serious implications for making minority community as a 'non-nation', to use Mukherji's word, (i,e, with its attendant political and economic marginalisation), he did not visualise that political assertion of Hindu national group for Hindu nation within the state poses a threat to India's national unity and territorial integrity. As he stated, '*The maturing of a crystallised nation-state does not signal the end of contradictions and conflicts. It only means, the nation-state is much less vulnerable to dismemberment and disintegration. The ultimate loyalty of the people to its state, in an affective-emotional-cultural sense, is strongly internalised' (p.342).*

What sets Prof Mukherji a 'distinct voice' amongst the critique of 'RSS-BJP rule', while upholding the vision of civic nationalism, is his understanding of ethnicity, ethno-nationalism and civic nationalism. He sees the Indian sub-continent as a 'civilisational land of infinite plurality'-which encompasses socio-religio-linguistic ethnic groups as well as internal differentiation (including gender differentiation) within each such group-of which Hindus constitute a dominant component. Thus, for him, ethnicity would remain a basis for political mobilisation and which normally falls into two categories : (a) those that seek re-arrangement within the power structure of nation state and (b) those that seek to become a 'nation' and constitute a 'sovereign territorial state'-reflecting a case of successionism and ethno-nationalism.

Mukherji avoids the popular expression of 'Hindutva' and ' Hindu nationalism'-which suggest a case of ethno nationalism. Rather, he described the current stage of Hindu mobilisation as '*resurfacing* of the latent, parallel, Hindu ethno-national voice for a Hindu nation within an Indian state', which was always present in the Indian freedom movement. The latter was a political mobilisation, which successfully

transcended ethnic, class, and gender domains, forging strong 'civic nationalism' and creating what he called a 'pluri-ethnic nation state' or a 'plural-multi-ethnic- secular- nation-state'. This could become a possibility due to India's strong civilizational ethos, which recognises the multiple sites of ethnic-political mobilisation but forges the strong bond of national-civilisational unity.

But unlike many, Mukherji does not romanticise the Indian civic-secular nationalism, i.e., painting it in terms of civilisational ethos of non-violence, living togetherness, respecting differences and 'belonging without othering' as Yogendra Yadav put it in his recent opinion piece[24]. Instead he recognises that conflict and contradictions are inherent parts of continuous nation building process and the Indian pluri-ethnic nation state has accommodated the political concerns of ethnic mobilisations with potential for successionism and integrated them within the 'idea of Indian nationhood'. As he said, '*Contradictions are ubiquitous; a society without contradictions is a dead society with no future'*. Thus, 'differentiation' and 'integration' have been an integral part of the Indian nation-building process. India witnessed many dissident movements or 'differentiating moments',etc, since it came into existence as a 'plurinational state' in 1947. It ranges from secessionist movements that arouse in the past and even exists today like Mizos, Nagas, Bodos in North East, Khalistani in Punjab, Islamist in Kashmir toviolent protest movements like Naxals and Maoists that seeks a violent overthrow of the existing constitutional polity on the one hand to ethnic mobilisation for statehoodand ethnic mobilisation for recognition of their language and incorporation in the affirmative programmes inclusion reservation in education and public employment opportunities on the other.

The plurinational-ethnic nation state, with its relatively democratic nation-building process, allows these and many other ethnic mobilisations to claim their own versions of 'nation'. However, the in-built civilisational bind of plurie-ethnic nation state —reflected in its participatory system, respectful of cultural identities and its belief in dialogue and negotiating process—accommodated and integrated them within the power structure of the Indian system. Thus, the original 14 states and 6 union territories (UTs), which were created through the State Reorganisation Act of 1956, rose to 22 states and 8 UTs in 1972; 25 states and 7 UTs in 1987; 29 states and 7 UTs by 2014; and 28 states and 9 UTs by 2019[25]. Similarly, the number of 'national/ Scheduled languages' listed in the Eight Schedule of the Indian

Constitution increased from the original 14 in 1949 to 15 in 1967, to 18 in 1992 and 22 in 2004. Further, the Manmohan Singh government (2004-2014) initiated a policy of constitutional recognition of 'classical languages in India. It began with recognition of Tamil as a classical language in 2004, followed by Sanskrit in 2005, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam in 2008, Odia in 2013, and Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali in 2024 (a total of 11 classical languages as of today). What these political outcomes indicate is that the *process of differentiation and integration* within the structure of plurarli-ethnic nation state remains at work despite the changing configuration of the ruling party in the country. Mukherji rightly stated that 'in the Indian context ethnic identity and Indian national identity are not necessarily mutually antagonistic or exclusive; the former is often a necessary condition for the latter'.

In fact, the democratization of politics and education brought historically excluded ethno-nationalist, religious, and caste groups into the political domain. The greater participation of lower castes and classes not only made the politics more competitive but also resulted in the 'vernacularization of political language, national identity and democracy' with high visibility of symbolism of ascriptive identity in the political process. This has produced two contradictory trends: *a high level of people's participation in the democratic political process on the one hand and the strengthening of caste, religious, and communal identity in everyday life processes at the cost of identity of citizenship on the other.*

Moreover, the competing electoral system in India has, over the years, deepened and strengthened the ethnic diversity of the country to an extent that it has become an essential component of democratic politics in India. It is difficult to visualise any conception of 'inclusive democracy' without factoring in diversity. This explains that while the spread of Hindi through non-formal channel (such as Bollywood) has succeeded to most corners of India; the moment the government - whether central or state— attempts to make 'Hindi' mandatory and compulsory on the principle of three language formula there has been vehement opposition from regional peripheries as such exercise is being seen as 'imposition' on the non- dominant ethnicities.[26].

Mukherji recognises the challenges of the current political assertion of 'Hindu voices for a Hindu nation' within the state structure to various non-Hindi regional identities as well as to the religious minority

community, particularly Muslims. The former seeks to create an unparalleled domination and hegemony of Hindu nation within the Indian state structure by centralising and controlling the 'national power'; by undermining the federal character of Indian governing model and by subjugating non-Hindu religious minorities, particularly Muslims, to give an impression that a 'unified Hindu (hence strong) Bharat' has replaced a divided, plural, multicultural, secular (and hence weak) India. In other words, 'ethno-Hindu nation' seeks a replacement of the existing 'civic-secular-pluerli-civilisationalnation-state' with the European version of mono-homogenised (Hindu) nation-state.

Unlike many left-liberal-secular-modernists, Mukherji does not see any constitutionalist solution, such as 'Save Constitution', as an effective counter-mobilisation to dethrone the forces of the Hindu nation. History is instructive in understanding his insight. The Weimar Constitution in Germany could not prevent the rise of Hitler and his Nazi Party, the National Socialist German Workers Party. Neither the Indian Constitution prevents the rise of the BJP nor its coming into power. Both came to capture state power through electoral routes under the existing constitution. But unlike Hitler, who quickly established a totalitarian party-state model of governance and disbanded future elections (the last election took place in 1932), the Modi government bases its legitimacy on 'electoral success', which has earned this government the epithet that the 'Modi government is permanently (24/7) in election mode'.

Rather, he pinned his faith in the 'collective civilizational' wisdom of people, shaped through multiple currents, who constituted a nation-state (Republic of India) and internalised the loyalty to this Republic. In this context, he reminded his reader that 'CPI (M) government in West Bengal reached the epitome of electoral success in 2006, only to be reduced to an ineffectual party in the very next election,"and which remained the fate of the party to date. Beyond the Constitution, the judiciary, and electoral arena, Mukherji prescribed a 'constant expansion of democratic space' as a powerful bulwark to take the tide of exclusionary ideology on the side of both the spectrum-Right and Left. It may be recalled here that the party, organisation, and individual with an exclusionary belief system mostly rise under the condition of the process of de-democratisation or shrinking of democratic spaces-political, social, and economic. The journey of Indian nation-building since its foundation in 1947 has witnessed a significant erosion of

democratic governance, which allowed, legitimised, and strengthened the 'ethno-Hindu voices' in the political process of the country. Though current political assertion of ethno-Hindu voices will have disrupting moments, including constitutionally established democratic governance, distribution and division of powers among state organs, center-state relations, and state-civil-society relations; however, it would not result in the dismemberment of India. It appears that at the moment the civilizational basis of the Indian nation-state has weakened, but has not collapsed. It retains the historical memory and is capable of resurrecting itself in people's consciousness, depending upon the political context, to re-establish the civilizational nation-state.

Re-Discovery of Hendustān: Persian Texts and Contesting Narratives of Nationhood

Dr. Seyed Hossein Zarhani*

Abstract

The question of what constitutes "India" has long been mediated through competing epistemologies: colonial, nationalist, religious, and civilizational. From the nineteenth-century British ethnographers who denied India any historical unity, to modern theorists such as Partha Chatterjee who locate nationhood within the modern territorial imagination, the meaning of "India" has been continuously re-negotiated. Yet long before the emergence of either colonial or nationalist discourses, Persian texts from the Sassanid through the medieval Islamic period had already identified ***Hend*** *or* ***Hendustān*** *as a coherent, plural, and interconnected cultural region. This paper contrasts four frameworks (1) the colonial construction of India as a fragmented mosaic, (2) the modern view of nationhood as a twentieth-century invention, (3) the Hindutva re-casting of India as a Hindu ethno-state, and (4) the Persian civilizational perception of* ***Hendustān*** *as an identifiable yet plural world. Through a comparative textual reading of Strachey (1894), Chatterjee (2022), Savarkar (1923), and classical Persian such as* ***Ferdowsī's Shāhnāma****, the tenth-century* ***geographical compendium Hudūd al-Ālam****, and* ***Al-Bīrūnīs Taqīqmā li-l-Hind,*** *the paper argues that the Persian version offers a historically deeper and intellectually more capacious understanding of India as a civilizational entity defined not by religious homogeneity but by the recognition of diversity within identifiable cultural geography.*

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Keywords: *Hendustān, Persian Geography, Nationhood, Colonial Epistemology, Hindutva, Chatterjee, Civilizational Pluralism*

Introduction

The modern political vocabulary of "India" and "nation" conceals an intricate genealogy of competing narratives. What we today call *India* has been imagined variously as a colonial administrative unit, a modern post-colonial nation-state, a sacred homeland for Hindus, and, in much earlier centuries, a civilizational region known to Persian authors as *Hend* or *Hendustān*. Each of these designations carries distinct assumptions about unity, difference, and belonging. The colonial view denied the very possibility of Indian unity; the modern nationalist position affirmed it within the framework of the modern state; Hindutva sought to recast it as a religious and ethnocultural essence; while Persian texts, preceding all of these, offered an image of *Hend* as a vast but interconnected world defined by its diversity of languages, climates, and religions, yet recognized as a single geographic-cultural sphere.

The core argument advanced here is that the Persian civilizational perspective deserves renewed attention, not as an antiquarian curiosity but as an alternative epistemology of coexistence. Unlike both colonial essentialism and nationalist homogenization, Persian geographical and literary traditions approached *Hendustān* as plural by nature and civilizationally continuous with other great cultural zones such as *Rūm* (Byzantium) and *Chīn* (China). By recovering these earlier Persian perceptions, we can rethink the genealogy of India beyond the narrow temporal frame of colonial modernity.

1. The Colonial Construction of India

When John Strachey declared in *India* (1894) that "there is not, and never was, an India, or even any country of India," he was articulating not merely a description but an entire epistemological regime. The colonial gaze sought to classify and dominate by fragmenting: India became a "mosaic of races, religions, and languages" incapable of political unity *(Strachey, 1894, p. 5)*. For Strachey and contemporary administrators like M. Harmand, the concept of an Indian nation was a European fiction projected onto an incoherent space. The denial of unity justified imperial governance; fragmentation became proof of the necessity of British rule. In the colonial archive, "India" existed only

as an administrative convenience, a geographical term encompassing multiple "countries" that lacked any organic coherence.

This view was deeply tied to European notions of what a nation ought to be: a homogeneous people sharing one language, one faith, and one political will. Because pre-colonial South Asia did not conform to this model, it was declared to have no history of nationhood. The colonial construct thus displaced indigenous and pre-modern understandings of collective identity, substituting the logic of the European state for the plural civilizational frameworks that had long defined the region. The intellectual violence of this view lay in its epistemic monopoly: it made European categories the sole measure of political legitimacy. India's multiplicity of linguistic, religious, and ecological was rendered evidence of failure rather than the expression of a long civilizational tradition of pluralism.

Yet even within this colonial framework, cracks existed. The very act of describing India's diversity presupposed an awareness of its coherence; only a unified entity can be fragmented. The term "India," though denied ontological validity, continued to function as a meaningful referent within colonial discourse. This paradox, denying India's existence while constantly invoking it, reveals the colonial anxiety about the possibility of indigenous unity. The denial was thus a political act, designed to forestall the emergence of a national consciousness that could challenge imperial control.

2. The Modern Nationalist Construction: Chatterjee and the Modernity of Nationhood

If the colonial view of India negated its unity, the modern nationalist imagination reconstituted it, but within the epistemic vocabulary inherited from Europe. For Partha Chatterjee and other postcolonial theorists, the Indian nation was not a timeless essence awaiting discovery but a distinctly modern construct shaped by the political grammar of the twentieth century. Chatterjee's *The Truths and Lies of Nationalism as Narrated by Charvak* (2022) challenges the belief in ancient nations; he argues that all nations are modern because the very idea of the nation-state presupposes a set of institutions, epistemologies, and territorial logics born of modernity (Chatterjee, 2022, p. 18). This view recognizes the colonial genealogy of national thought but seeks to provincialize it; to assert that the Indian nation, though modern, is not merely a derivative copy of Europe.

Chatterjee's argument begins with an ontological claim: there are no ancient nations anywhere in the world. Nations emerge only when geography, people, and sovereignty are bound together through a modern territorial imagination. Thus, when one claims the people of ancient Sarnath as "our" ancestors but not those of Athens or Egypt, the reasoning is geographical, not civilizational; it is the land called "India" that defines the continuity, not an unbroken cultural or ethnic lineage. In this sense, the Indian *rāṣṭra* is not an eternal truth but a political invention of the mid-twentieth century, when the modern state succeeded the colonial Raj and redefined belonging through the idiom of citizenship and territory.

This interpretation criticizes romantic nationalist myths that seek to project the modern nation backward into antiquity. It exposes the teleological fallacy that imagines "India" as an always-already united civilization moving inevitably toward the modern state. Chatterjee's insistence on modernity as the necessary condition of nationhood also highlights the rupture between civilizational and national imaginaries.The civilizational self-understanding of the subcontinent, stretching from the Muarian Empire through the Mughals, did not operate through the logic of territorial sovereignty; it was defined instead by networks of exchange, overlapping loyalties, and plural identities. To speak of "India" before the twentieth century is therefore to speak of something other than a nation-state.

However, Chatterjee's formulation also raises a deeper tension. While he convincingly demonstrates the modern origins of nationalism, his framework risks detaching the modern Indian nation entirely from its pre-modern cultural continuities. In denying the antiquity of the nation, he inadvertently flattens the rich genealogies of belonging that predate colonial rule. Persian, Sanskritic, and Arabic sources did not conceive of India as a modern "nation," but they did imagine *Hend*, *Bhāratavarṣa* or *Hindustān* as meaningful entities within the world's cultural geography. These pre-modern imaginations provided a civilizational depth that modern nationalism often obscures.

From a comparative perspective, Chatterjee's position still operates within the intellectual horizon established by the colonial encounter. It questions the European claim that India lacked unity, yet it remains bound by the modern assumption that political legitimacy begins only with the emergence of the nation. In this sense, it continues the colonial interruption of a much older civilizational continuity. The Persian

cosmographies, like the Sanskrit *Purāṇas* or the *Mahābhārata*'s *Bharatavarsha*, presupposed a coherent geography long before "India" became a problem of nationhood.

In contrast to the colonial gaze that denied continuity, and to modern theories that rediscover it only within nationalist temporality, the Persian conception of *Hendustān* belongs to a different epistemic order altogether. It recognized civilizational space as both identifiable and plural, without needing to convert it into sovereignty or ethnicity. In Persian texts—from Achaemenid inscriptions to *Hudūd al-Ālam* and al-Bīrūnī's *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind—Hendustān* appears as a world within the world: coherent through geography and commerce, diverse through faith and speech, and bound to Iran not by conquest but by conversation.

Seen from this longer arc, the colonial and postcolonial frameworks alike appear as short historical episodes that obscured, rather than explained, the deeper continuity of inter-civilizational perception. The Persian imagination of *Hendustān* thus does not "anticipate" nationalism; it represents an entirely different civilizational rationality, one in which plurality was the natural condition of order, not its negation.

3. The Hindutva Recasting of India: Exclusivity and the Politics of Sacred Geography

If colonial discourse denied Indian unity and modern nationalism reconstituted it within a secular, territorial frame, the Hindutva project sought to redefine it through religious exclusivity. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923) marked a decisive shift in the conceptual grammar of nationhood. For Savarkar, *India* was not merely a political entity or an imagined community; it was a sacred homeland (*punyabhumi*) belonging solely to Hindus (Savarkar, 1923/1969, p. 4). This redefinition transformed the pluralistic civilizational landscape of the subcontinent into a bounded religious geography, where belonging was measured not by citizenship or residence but by faith and ancestry.

Savarkar's rhetoric was a direct reaction to both colonial denials and modern secular reinterpretations. Against the British portrayal of India as a "mosaic of races," he asserted the idea of an organic unity rooted in Hindu civilization. Against the secular nationalism of Nehru and the modernist argument of Chatterjee, he claimed that India's authenticity lay in its primordial Hindu character. Yet the conceptual innovation of Hindutva lay not merely in affirming Hindu cultural pride;

it sought to create a political theology in which the *rāṣṭra* (nation) and *dharma* (religion) were indistinguishable.

The Hindutva reimagining of the Indian nation rests on three interlocking claims: the territorial, the genealogical, and the cultural. First, the land of India is seen as the sacred territory where the Hindu civilization originated and where its gods dwell. This transforms geography into theology. Second, the Hindu people are imagined as a singular ancestral community defined by shared blood and lineage, excluding those whose ancestors or loyalties are tied elsewhere. Third, culture, the Sanskritic canon, rituals, and myths, is declared the sole authentic expression of Indian civilization. Together, these elements form the ideological core of what Savarkar called the "Hindu nation," a formulation that excludes Muslims and Christians as alien intrusions because their sacred geographies lie outside the Indian subcontinent.

This vision represents a profound epistemic inversion of the Persian conception of *Hendustān*. Whereas texts from Shahnama to al-Bīrūnī *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind* depicted *Hend* as a land of diversity and wonder, Hindutva redefines difference as impurity. The civilizational pluralism that once marked the region's vitality becomes, in Savarkar's schema, a threat to national coherence. The plural becomes the polluted. Such a transformation is not accidental; it reflects the modern desire to translate civilizational multiplicity into political uniformity.

Historically, Savarkar's project emerged from a colonial crucible. Early twentieth-century nationalist movements were already framed by European ideas of nationhood, racial homogeneity, and cultural supremacy. Savarkar internalized these notions, reworking them into a Hindu idiom. The *Hindu rashtra* thus mirrors the European ethnonational state more closely than the plural empires or civilizational commonwealths of pre-modern Asia. Ironically, the Hindutva idea of unity resembles the colonial ideal of singular identity far more than the Persian or Mughal conceptions of integrated diversity.

At a philosophical level, Hindutva replaces the secular geography of Chatterjee's nation-state with a sacralized cartography. The territorial boundaries of India are imagined as *Bharat Mata* a divine mother whose integrity must be defended. In this symbolic transformation, geography becomes sacred, and political dissent becomes heresy. The figure of *Bharat Mata* fuses land, culture, and religion into one undifferentiated essence. Such fusion abolishes the epistemic distance

between the civic and the sacred a distance that was fundamental to the Persian and early Islamic modes of imagining *Hendustān.*

The Hindutva imagination of history also rests upon selective memory. Civilizational interactions the exchanges of mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and literature between India and Persia, Greece, and Arabia, are recast as moments of humiliation rather than cultural synthesis. The image of *Hendustān* as a crossroads of civilizations, so evident in Persian sources like the *Hudūd al-Ālam*, is rewritten as a narrative of invasion and resistance. The Persian *Hindu,* a geographical and ethnographic term denoting the people of the Indus, becomes, in Hindutva's lexicon, a racialized and sacral identity, fixed and immutable.

In political terms, the Hindutva model transforms plural coexistence into a hierarchy of belonging. Muslims and Christians, though citizens, remain symbolically outside the sacred geography because their *punyabhumi* lies elsewhere. This formulation negates the Persian principle of coexistence embedded in the idea of *ālam,* the world as a system of interrelated regions and peoples. In *Hudūd al-Ālam* (982 CE), *Hendustān* appears as a vast and populous country inhabited by "many kings," rich in languages, climates, and religions. Such multiplicity was not portrayed as weakness but as wonder. In contrast, Hindutva translates difference into division and hierarchy.

The political success of Hindutva since the 1990s and 2000s rests on its ability to sacralize nationalism to offer emotional certainty in an age of plural anxieties. Yet intellectually, it narrows the idea of India. By identifying *Hendustān* exclusively with Hindu identity, it erases centuries of civilizational entanglement with Persia, Central Asia, and the Islamic world. The cosmopolitan exchange that gave rise to Sanskrit-Persian translation movements, Sufi poetry, and Indo-Persian art becomes invisible within this framework. The Hindutva narrative thus represents not a continuation of India's civilizational history but a rupture, a constriction of the idea of *India* from a world-region into a single faith's homeland.

When contrasted with the Persian conception, the limitations of Hindutva become evident. Persian writers, from the Achaemenid court to the scholars of Ghazni and Gurgān, recognized *Hendustān* as a distinct world but not as an exclusive one. Its identity was definable but permeable, marked by exchanges of goods, ideas, and people. The *Hindu* was a participant in a shared cosmology, not an isolated essence. The Persian imagination of difference was comparative, not antagonistic.

To call *Hendustān* "the land of perfumes, elephants, and wisdom," as al-Bīrūnī did, was not to essentialize its people but to situate them within a plural human geography.

In this sense, the Persian view embodies what might be termed *civilizational pluralism*: a recognition that identities are relational and that cultures flourish through encounter, not isolation. It provides a pre-modern alternative to both colonial negation and Hindutva exclusivism; a vision where plurality is not a defect to be overcome but the very expression of civilization's depth. Reclaiming that Persian lens does not romanticize the past; it reopens the conceptual space for an India that is simultaneously identifiable and plural, local and universal, self-defined yet open to the world.

4. The Persian Discovery of *Hendustān*: Civilizational Identity and the Plural Imagination

In contrast to the colonial, nationalist, and Hindutva discourses that sought to define India through the categories of unity, sovereignty, and faith, Persian writings approached *Hendustān* from an entirely different epistemic horizon. The Persian view did not arise from a need to construct an "Indian identity," nor did it attempt to impose coherence upon a heterogeneous landscape. Instead, *Hendustān* appeared within Persian cosmography as a recognizable world within the world, a distinct region (*nāḥiyat*) marked by diversity, commerce, and learning, intelligible through its geography rather than through political or theological uniformity.

The Persian archive from the Achaemenid royal inscriptions (DNa, DNe) that first recorded *Hiduš* as a province, to Sasanian texts such as *KalīlawaDimna* and *Khosrow and Rīdak*, and later to **Ferdowsī's** *Shāhnāma*, the **tenth-century** *Hudūd al-Ālam*, and **al-Bīrūnī's** *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind,* does not present a linear narrative of identity formation. Rather, it reflects an evolving civilizational awareness in which India functions as **the identifiable "other"** through which Persian culture recognized its own universality. In these texts, *Hendustān* is neither foreign nor internal; it is contiguous to a neighboring sphere integrated through rivers, trade routes, languages, and shared intellectual curiosity.

Unlike colonial accounts that fragmented India or modern nationalist frameworks that sought to consolidate it, Persian geography and historiography assumed continuity between lands and peoples. The *Sind*

(the River Indus) served not as a political border but as a **symbolic axis of connection**, the threshold where Iran's world met India's. Across more than fifteen centuries, from the inscriptions of Darius I to al-Bīrūnī's ethnography, the Persian worldview consistently portrayed *Hendustān* as an **identifiable yet plural civilization**, defined not by religious or racial homogeneity but by the enduring recognition of diversity within a coherent cultural geography.

In this sense, the Persian imagination of *Hendustān* stands outside the modern preoccupation with national identity. It belongs to a civilizational mode of knowledge that measured the world through relation rather than exclusion. To read these Persian sources comparatively alongside modern theories of India is therefore not to seek precursors of nationalism, but to recover an older logic of plurality—a view in which *difference itself* constituted the grammar of order.

4.1 Achaemenid Beginnings, Naming Hiduš *and* Hiduya

The first recorded appearance of India within a Persian linguistic universe occurs in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions of Darius I. At Naqš-e Rostam, in the "DNa" text (ca. 485 BCE), Darius enumerates the lands under his command, declaring that by the favour of *Ahuramazdā* he rules "Media, Elam, Parthia, Aria, Bactria, Sogdia, Chorasmia, Drangiana, Arachosia, Sattagydia, Gandara, *Hiduš* (India) … Egypt, Armenia, Cappadocia, Lydia, the Greeks … " (Bachenheimer 2018, p. 473). A companion inscription ("DNe," l. 13) adds the rare adjectival form *Hiduya*—"I am a Hiduya," literally "an Indian" or "a man of Hiduš." These two words—*Hiduš* and *Hiduya*—constitute the earliest known Persian etymons of what would later become *Hend/ Hind* and *Hindu*.

The companion inscription DNe adds the gentilic *Hiduya*, "man of Hiduš." Here *Hiduš* designates a **geographical region**, not a people—one among many satrapies paying tribute to the "King of Kings." In Achaemenid political grammar, every land is a *dahyāva* (country), each with its own soil, water, and customs.

Even at this stage, the empire's eastern limit was marked by a river, the **Sindhu** of Sanskrit, rendered in Old Persian as *Hindu*, later Middle Persian *Sind*. This hydronym, older than any political border, anchored India in the Persian worldview as **the country beyond the river**. The term would endure for millennia: in the tenth-century *Hudūd*

al-Ālam, the Indus still appears as *daryā-ye Mihrān-e Sind*, the western boundary of *Hendustān*.

The Persepolis reliefs make this frontier visible. Among the twenty-three delegations carved on the Apadāna stairways, the envoys of *Hiduš*—bare-chested, wearing cotton garments—carry elephant tusks, gold vessels, and fine textiles (Saedi 1997, p. 97).

4.2 From Old to Middle Persian — Khosrow I and the Turn East

Khosrow I Anūshirvān (531-579 CE): Justice, Reform, and the Turn to the East

Khosrow I (531–579 CE), known in Persian memory as *Anūshirvān-e ʻĀdil* ("Khosrow the Just"), presided over the last great renaissance of the Sasanian Empire. His reign followed decades of political and social strain produced by wars with Byzantium and the radical egalitarianism of the Mazdakite movement. Khosrow crushed the Mazdakite uprising but internalized its moral critique: hierarchy, he argued, could endure only when regulated by justice. His reforms—standardized taxation, a salaried bureaucracy, and protection for the poor—embodied a vision of kingship grounded in moral stewardship rather than privilege (Nöldeke, 1879).

While he continued to contest the Byzantines, Khosrow increasingly turned imperial attention eastward. Around 557 CE, a Sasanian–Western Turkic alliance destroyed the Hephthalite (White Hun) confederation, redrawing the political geography of Central Asia. Iran's influence extended across Bactria and Sogdia toward the Hindu Kush. At the same time, the **Maukharis of Kanauj** under **King Iśānavarman** consolidated power in northern India. Though no formal alliance is recorded, the collapse of the Hephthalite buffer made the two realms **near-neighbors across the Afghan highlands**, encouraging trade, diplomacy, and intellectual contact on an unprecedented scale (Daryaee, 2009).

The Mission of Burzōy: Translation as Diplomacy

According to Middle Persian tradition, Khosrow heard of a marvelous Indian book of political wisdom preserved at the court of Kanauj. He dispatched Burzōy to study and bring back the text. Burzōy's journey, undertaken through Bactria and Kabul, symbolized the empire's shift

from conquest to curiosity. At the Maukhari court, he obtained the **Pañcatantra**, a Sanskrit collection of moral and practical fables arranged in five books (*tantras*). Returning to Ctesiphon, he rendered it into Middle Persian (*Pahlavi*) as **Kalīlawa Dimna**, named after its two debating jackals. Khosrow rewarded him with a robe of honour and ordered his vizier **Wuzurgmihr** to compose a **prologue describing the mission**.

In Sasanian thought, India represented a civilization of ancient wisdom and learning. The *Kalīlawa Dimna* tradition makes this view explicit in the episode of **Burzōy's encounter with a Brahmin scholar** at Kanauj. According to the Pahlavi account, lost but preserved through Syriac and Arabic translations, Burzōy gained access to the book only after demonstrating sincerity and self-discipline. The Brahmin's guarded transmission of the text reflects the **Persian perception of India as the repository of moral and philosophical knowledge** protected by spiritual virtue. Seeking Indian learning became a royal duty: the pursuit of wisdom wherever it might be found (Pagliaro, 1973).

The story also defines the tone of **inter-civilizational exchange** between Iran and India. Burzōy acquires knowledge through respect, not appropriation. The Brahmin, embodying India's intellectual authority, teaches rather than yields. Through this episode, India came to signify not merely geographical distance but **intellectual depth,** a place to which Persians turned for philosophical and scientific insight. The *Burzōy and the Brahmin* story thus crystallized a Sasanian conviction that **knowledge is universal and ethical**, and that just rule requires learning from others (Daryaee, 2009; Minorsky, 1937).

The Pahlavi original of *Kalīlawa Dimna* is lost, but its content survives in two independent translations: an **Old Syriac version** and the **Arabic adaptation by Ibn al-Muqaffa** (8th century). Comparative philology shows that Burzōy's source was **not identical with any surviving Sanskrit version** of the *Pañcatantra* but closely related to the **Kashmirian *Tantrākhyāyikā***, one of the oldest recensions (Pagliaro, 1973, p. 92). These translations transmitted Indian statecraft and ethics across the Persianate world, influencing Arabic prose, medieval Latin didactic literature, and later Persian storytelling.

4.4 From Pahlavi to New Persian. The Re-Emergence of Hend *in Epic Memory*

When the Islamic conquest brought the Persians into contact with Arabic, the old imperial language of Persia was reborn as New Persian. In this new idiom, *Hend* or *Hendustān* re-entered the lexicon as both historical memory and contemporary reality. Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāma* (c. 977–1010 CE) gathers these strands into the grand narrative of Iranian civilization, beginning with creation and ending with the Arab conquest.

Ferdowsī repeatedly sets the limits of the known world "from *Hend* and from *Chīn* unto *Rūm*." The triad functions as a cosmogram: three poles: India, China, and Byzantium, against which Persia defines itself. Each is different yet comparable; each mirrors a dimension of Persian virtue or vice. *Hendustān* in the poem is not merely geographical; it is a moral and aesthetic space. It is the land of wisdom, magic, luxury, and beauty; a testing ground for heroes and lovers alike.

4.5 Kings and Sages of *Hendustân*

Among the *Shāhnāma*'s dramatis personae, several Indian rulers stand out. **Shangol**, king of Hend, presides over a splendid but perilous court. **Foj**, the *rāy* of Kanauj, aids Dārā III against Alexander, symbolizing loyalty to the East against the West. **Kid**, another Indian king, withdraws from war after heeding the counsel of the ascetic **Mehrān**, who interprets his dream and warns him of Alexander's destiny. **Jamhūr**, sovereign of Kashmir and lands "to the border of Chīn," embodies the archetype of the just and cultured ruler; his brother **May** and his nephew **Talkhand** continue his lineage in fraternal strife; **Sepinowd**, the Indian princess who elopes with BahrāmGūr, represents the magnetic allure of Indian beauty and intellect. Together, these figures compose a miniature political anthropology: India as a realm of wisdom, opulence, and moral testing where Persian kings prove their merit.

The title *Rāy-e Hend* (Raja of India) recurs as a generic designation for Indian kings, acknowledging a pattern of monarchy parallel to Persia's own. The world of the *Shāhnāma* is thus multipolar; sovereignty is not the monopoly of Iran but a shared human faculty distributed across civilizations.

4.6 Cultural and Economic Exchanges in Epic Memory

Ferdowsī's descriptive lexicon preserves the long history of Indo-Persian trade. His catalogue of Indian artifacts and professions: *tīgh-e Hendī*

(sword), *ʻūd-e Hendī* (incense), *chaṭr-eHendī* (umbrella), *khaṭṭ-eHendī* (script), *pezeshk-eHendī* (physician), *filsūfān-e Hend* (philosophers), *danāyān-e Hendī* (the wise of India)—reads like an ethnographic inventory of civilizational exchange. Even idioms such as *bot-parastān* (idol-worshippers) or *jādūstān* (land of magic) are not pejorative but descriptive, marking difference without condemnation. India's reputation for learning, medicine, and mathematics made "Indian" a synonym for wisdom; hence, Persian poets later called any deep thinker *ālim-e Hendī*.

The same lexicon reveals the diffusion of material culture. The "Indian sword" denoted superior metallurgy; the "Indian bell" echoed temple and caravan alike; "Indian walnut" became the coconut; "Indian ink" and "Indian script" referred to imported writing materials and calligraphic styles. Through such words, India entered the Persian household vocabulary, demonstrating that civilizational contact was as much domestic as diplomatic.

4.7 Chess and the Memory of Science

The most celebrated emblem of Indo-Persian intellectual exchange is the story of chess. According to Ferdowsī (following older Pahlavi sources), an envoy from the *rāy* of Kanauj arrives at Khosrow I's court bearing a chessboard and a challenge: let your sages discover the game's rules; if they succeed, India will pay tribute; if they fail, Persia must do so instead. Khosrow's counsellor, Buzurgmihr, solves the riddle, thereby asserting Iranian intellectual parity. He then invents the game of backgammon (*nard*) and sends it to India with a similar challenge, which the Indian sages cannot meet. Tribute and friendship are thus reversed, and science triumphs over wealth.

In Reuben Levy's translation of the *Shāhnāma*, the envoy's words capture the ethos of the story: "If they discover how this subtle game is played, they will have surpassed all other sages, and I will gladly send to your court the tribute you demand. If they fail, you must in future pay us tribute; for science is superior to any wealth, however great." The tale's moral economy privileges intellect above empire. Knowledge is the highest form of sovereignty. In this allegory, India and Persia compete not in arms but in ideas, embodying a relationship of mutual respect.

The chess episode also preserves a memory of actual transmissions of scientific games and mathematical notations from India to Persia during the Sasanian era. Astronomical tables, numerals, and calendrical

systems travelled the same route as chess. What later Europe would call "Arabic numerals" were in origin Indian numerals translated through Persian mediation. Thus, the legend of chess is not fantasy but symbolic history.

4.8 Semantic Transformations — From *Hiduya* to *Hindu*

By the tenth century, the term *Hindu* in New Persian carried multiple overlapping meanings. It could denote (1) any inhabitant of *Hendustān*; (2) a follower of the Indian religions collectively called *dīn-e Hind*;or (3) a dark-skinned person.These meanings coexisted without contradiction. Geography, belief, and complexion were seen as intersecting but distinct axes of identity. The elasticity of the term illustrates a world comfortable with layered belonging. A *Hindu* could be a merchant in Multān, a scholar in Qashmīr, or a mystic encountered on pilgrimage routes to Kandahār. Persian travellers and poets used the word situationally rather than racially. Only in the colonial era would "Hindu" harden into an exclusive religious category.

This semantic pluralism epitomizes the Persian view of civilization itself: identities are **positional**, not absolute; they shift with context. To name the "Indian" was to acknowledge difference, not to essentialize it. The same texts that speak of *bot-parastān* also praise the *dānāyān-e Hendī*; belief and wisdom coexist.

4.9 *Hudūd al-Ālam* — Mapping the Diversity of *Hendustān*

The tenth-century Persian geography *Hudūd al-Ālammin al-Mashriqilā l-Maghrib* (982 CE) systematized the accumulated knowledge of earlier centuries. Composed in 982 CE in northern Afghanistan, the anonymous Persian geography *Hudūd al-Ālammin al-Mashriqilā l-Maghrib* ("The Regions of the World from East to West") represents the most systematic statement of the Persian cosmographic imagination. The author, writing for the ruler of Guzgān, defines the inhabited world (*ālam-e ābādān*) as a series of *nāḥiyāt*—countries or regions—each differing from the next in four respects: *ābvahawāvakhākvadarmāyēh* (water, air, soil, and temperature); *dīnvaāīnvaāqā id* (religion, law, and belief); *sokhanvazabān* (speech and language); and *pādshāhīhā* (forms of kingship). This introduction is a concise philosophy of diversity: variation in nature produces variation in culture, yet all belong to one ordered world (Minorsky 1937, p. 6).

Within this taxonomy, *Hendustān* occupies pride of place. The text begins the section on the northern hemisphere with the statement:

"Hendustān is a country larger than all other regions of the east; in it there are many seas, mountains, and deserts, and it possesses many kings" (Minorsky 1937, p. 113).

The author immediately establishes the boundaries:

"To the east are *Chīn* and *Tibet* (*Tübbet*), to the south the Great Sea (*daryā-ye bozorg*), to the west the River Mihrān of Sind (*daryā-ye Mihrān-e Sind*), and to the north *Shaknān* and the mountains of Tibet."

The *Mihrān-e Sind* thus functions as the same hydrological frontier known since Achaemenid times: the western edge of India and the eastern boundary of Iran. In calling it *daryā*, the author recognizes that the Indus, wide as an estuary, marks both separation and communication—an internal sea binding the two civilizations. The continuity of this river boundary through a millennium of Persian writing shows how geography shaped semantics: "Hindu" remained "the man beyond the Mihrān."

4.9 Climate, Customs, and Commerce

The *Hudūd* proceeds to describe *Hendustān* with empirical precision and without moral judgment:

"The air (*hawā*) is moist and hot; the country abounds in elephants, rhinoceroses, peacocks, parrots, and cuckoos. There grow therein many kinds of perfumes—*ūd (Hendī)*, ambergris, camphor—and jewels and precious stones of every sort."

The abundance of aromatics and gemstones reflects the ancient trade that moved up the Indus valley into Khurāsān. The author's attention to natural resources and commercial goods betrays the bureaucratic interests of a Persian world still reliant on the long-distance exchange of spices, woods, and textiles. The list of products also mirrors earlier epic inventories in the *Shāhnāma*, linking the empirical with the poetic.

Social commentary follows:

"The people of *Hendustān* are idol-worshippers (*but-parast*); among them, wine is unlawful (*harām*), but adultery is not considered blameworthy. They are all of cheerful temperament and fond of music."

The tone is ethnographic, not polemical. Diversity of morals is as natural as the difference in climate. This descriptive neutrality marks the Persian method: classification without condemnation. The text's use of *but-parast* identifies religious practice yet refuses to collapse it into inferiority.

4.10 Cities and Courts of *Hendustân*

The compiler then moves from a general description to a detailed gazetteer. Each entry combines political, economic, and cultural notes:

- **Qāmarūn (Assam)**: "There are many elephants and much gold."
- **Mandal**: "Its aloes-wood (*ūd*) is excellent."
- **Malay** (on the southern coast): "There grow the rotang tree and pepper; their ruler is *Ballah-rāy*."
- **Ballahārī**:"A great city with merchants from Khurāsān and Irāq; in it idols are worshipped."
- **Qinnauj**: "Capital of all *Hendustān*, having one hundred and fifty thousand cavalry and eight hundred elephants; its king's authority extends to the frontiers of *Chīn*."
- **Multān**: "A large city in which there is a great idol; many pilgrims come to it from all parts of *Hendustān*. The governor is of the Quraysh and recites the *khum ba* in the name of a western sovereign."
- **Lahōr**: "A prosperous city with almond and coconut trees; there are no Muslims there."
- **Qashmīr**: "Under the king of Qinnauj; full of gardens and merchants."

  (Minorsky 1937, pp. 115–121)

The precision of these entries—numbers of cavalry, species of trees, modes of worship—illustrates the scientific ambition of the *Hudūd.* The river *Mihrān-e Sind* again underlies this organization: every city west of it (Makrān,Tūrān) belongs to Khurāsān; every city east of it falls within *Hendustān*. The hydrological boundary doubles as an epistemic boundary: to cross it is to enter another *nāḥiyat* defined by different combinations of nature, faith, speech, and rule.

4.11 The River as Epistemic Device

The *Mihrān-e Sind* is more than a line on a map; it is the organising principle of comparative geography. By fixing India's western limit, it

enables a proportional description of the rest of the world. The river becomes a mirror of Persia's own order: disciplined yet porous, separating realms but allowing passage. In later Persian chronicles—especially the Ghaznavid histories of Gardīzī and Bayhaqī—the same metaphor recurs. To campaign "beyond the Mihrān" (*ānsū-ye Mihrānraftan*) is to test the empire's capacity for integration. Thus, the river, first an Achaemenid frontier, becomes in the Islamic centuries a measure of reach.

4.12 *Nāḥiyat*: The Persian Category of Civilization

Theterm *nāḥiyat* deserve semphasis. Unlike the Arabic *bilād* or the Greek *ethnos*, *nāḥiyat* denotes a region defined by a characteristic configuration of environment and society rather than by ethnicity or creed. It presumes plurality within unity. The *Hudūd* lists nearly sixty such regions, from *Hendustān* and *Chīn* to *Rūm* and *Irāq*—each intelligible through the same four variables. The method thus transforms geography into a science of civilizations.

In this framework, *Hendustān* is paradigmatic: it embodies maximum internal diversity yet remains a single region because its rivers drain into one sea and its goods circulate through one commercial system. The presence of many kings (*pādshāhān-e bisyār*) does not negate unity; it proves the fertility of difference. The Persian mind reads multiplicity as coherence.

4.13 Al-Bīrūnī and the Science of Cultural Translation

Half a century later ,Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (973—ca 1050) carried this pluralistic science to its zenith. A native of Khwarazm and court astronomer to Mahmūd of Ghazna, he spent years in north-western India after the Ghaznavid conquest, mastering Sanskrit and studying Indian philosophy, mathematics, and cosmology. His *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind* is not a travelogue but a comparative ethnography, the first of its kind in any language. The preface opens with a methodological declaration: "In matters of historic authenticity, hearsay is not equal to eye-witness" (Sachau 1910 I:7). Knowledge, he insists, must rest on observation and on the faithful translation of native terms.

Al-Bīrūnī approaches *Hendustān* through language. Sanskrit, he writes, is the key to understanding Indian thought; without it, one repeats idle tales. He reproduces entire verses of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the

Upanishads, demonstrating their monotheistic core: the wise Hindu believes in a God "one, eternal, without beginning or end." Idolatry, he explains, is a pedagogical device for the multitude, not the creed of philosophers. This interpretive charity is revolutionary. Where most of his contemporaries saw polytheism, he saw a different mode of theism.

His geography is likewise precise. "The middle of India," he notes, "is *Madhyadeśa*, between the Himalaya and Vindhya, the eastern and western seas equidistant, midway between heat and cold." The centrality is both spatial and civilizational: Kanauj is "the city of kings, the seat of science, where the sun of learning never sets." Surrounding it are peripheral regions—Sindh, Gujarat, Bengal—each with distinct customs but united by trade and pilgrimage. Al-Bīrūnī calls *Hendustān* a land of "subtle intellects and delicate senses" and adds that its sciences rival those of the Greeks.

Beyond description, his method embodies a theory of translation. Concepts must be rendered in their own semantic field before comparison. Hence, he declines to equate *Brahman* with *God* or *dharma* with *sharī's* a without explanation. Each term, he warns, carries a world of assumptions. Comparison requires humility. His work thus stands at the meeting point of Persian pluralism and Islamic rationalism—a model of cross-civilizational hermeneutics.

4.14 The Seven Countries and the Moral Geography of al-Bīrūnī

In *al-Qānūn al-Masūdī* and in later passages of the *Taḥqīq*, al-Bīrūnī adopts the ancient idea of seven climes but adapts it to astronomical observation. Each belt of latitude corresponds to a degree of temperature and temperament. India's position near the equator makes its inhabitants "more cheerful, fond of music, generous, and brave." Climate thus shapes culture without determining it. His purpose is not to rank people but to explain differences scientifically.

For al-Bīrūnī, Persia and India mirror one another: both ancient, literate, philosophically inclined, and tolerant of multiple sects. He compares the Brahmans to the Persian *mōbeds*, the *śramaṇas* to Muslim ascetics, finds analogies between Indian and Iranian cosmologies, the cosmic mountain Meru and HarāBerezaitī, the cycles of yugas and the Zoroastrian millennia. He concludes that "the two nations resemble each other in their speculation about God, the soul, and the elements."

This remark encapsulates the Persian civilizational logic: identity arises through comparison, not opposition.

4.15 Al-Bīrūnī and the Science of Difference

Among all premodern Persian and Islamic thinkers, **Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (973—ca 1050 CE)** articulated the most systematic and self-reflective study of *Hendustān*. His *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind* ("An Investigation of India"), written in Arabic while residing in the Punjab after the Ghaznavid conquest, represents the culmination of centuries of Persian engagement with India as a civilizational counterpart.

Al-Bīrūnī begins with a methodological declaration that reveals his intellectual independence:

"No one will deny that, in questions of historical authenticity, hearsay does not equal eye-witness" (Sachau, 1910, I:7).

With this line, he establishes the empirical and ethical foundation of his inquiry—knowledge must rest on observation, not conjecture. He insists on learning Sanskrit, consulting original Indian texts, and verifying rituals directly rather than relying on travellers or translators. This critical stance situates his work as the first genuine ethnography of India produced within the Islamic world.

In describing India's cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, al-Bīrūnī observes:

"First, they differ from us in everything that other nations have in common. And here we first mention the language, although the difference of language also exists between other nations."

Unlike earlier writers who treated linguistic and religious diversity as signs of inferiority, al-Bīrūnī turns difference into a subject of study. Language becomes the key to understanding civilization, not a barrier to it. His remark that the Hindus "differ from us in everything" is not a judgment but a methodological premise: to understand them, one must enter their system of thought on its own terms.

Al-Bīrūnī's treatment of religion is equally striking for its intellectual generosity. He distinguishes between the beliefs of the educated and the uneducated, writing:

"The belief of educated and uneducated people differs in every nation; for the former strive to conceive the abstract of God. …The Hindus believe that God is one, eternal, without beginning and end,

acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, living, giving life, ruling, and preserving; one who in his sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness."

This description, supported by direct quotations from Sanskrit sources, demonstrates how deeply al-Bīrūnī respected the philosophical theology of India. His goal is not to refute Hindu cosmology but to translate it into a rational idiom intelligible to his readers. When he adds, "We shall produce extracts from their literature, lest the reader should think that our account is nothing but hearsay," he makes textual citation itself an ethical act—a continuation of his insistence on verified knowledge.

Equally remarkable is his geographical vision. Al-Bīrūnī defines India not through imperial boundaries but through natural and climatic coordinates:

"The middle of India is the country round Kanauj (*Kanoj*), which they call *Madhyadeśa*, i.e., the middle of the realms. It lies halfway between the sea and the mountains, between the hot and the cold provinces, and between the eastern and western frontiers of India. But it is a political centre too, because in former times it was the residence of their most famous heroes and kings."

Here, geography and civilization are integrated: nature and polity coincide in the idea of the *centre*. This synthesis reflects both the legacy of Persian geographical thinking and the empirical spirit of classical Indian cosmography. In his careful delineation of *Madhyadeśa* and its relation to the rest of India, al-Bīrūnī redefines *Hendustān* as a coherent region with internal balance, a concept already latent in Persian notions of *nāḥiyat* and revived here in scientific form.

In sum, al-Bīrūnī'ś India is not an exotic or theological other; it is a complete intellectual world, accessible through disciplined study. His work transforms the Persian civilizational attitude into a method: **to know the other through its own categories**. In doing so, he carried forward the older Achaemenid and Sasanian traditions of comparative knowledge into the Islamic era, turning curiosity into science and respect into epistemology.

5. Conclusion: *Hendustān* as a Geographical Civilization

Across the Achaemenid, Sasanian, and Islamic-Persian traditions, the idea of *Hendustān* evolved from a **provincial designation** into a

civilizational and geographical concept. In Achaemenid inscriptions, *Hiduš* referred to a satrapy beyond the Indus — a region defined by topography, not belief. Under the Sasanians, *Hend* came to signify a realm of learning and moral refinement, a land associated with knowledge and intellectual pursuit rather than a single identity. By the Islamic-Persian period, *Hendustān* appeared in geographical and cosmographical texts such as the *Hudūd al-Ālam*and al-Bīrūnī's *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind* as an identifiable region marked by plural societies, natural balance, and intellectual vitality. Thus, while the term's meaning changed over time, it consistently denoted a **coherent geographical and civilizational world**, not a confessional or ethnic community.

Within this worldview, India occupied a special place. Unlike *Rūm* or *Chīn*, which were imagined as ordered yet self-contained realms, *Hendustān* represented a world of inner diversity, a land where multiple faiths, languages, and climates coexisted in natural order. Persian writers understood this pluralism not as fragmentation but as a sign of abundance. The *Hudūd al-Ālam* and al-Bīrūnī's *Taḥqīqmā li-l-Hind* display a precise **geographical understanding of India's structure**: its boundaries defined by sea and mountains, its heart at *Madhyadeśa* around Kanauj, its unity sustained by climate and commerce. This clarity of spatial knowledge distinguished the Persian view from the more mythic or symbolic depictions.

Thus, the Persian view of India stands as an alternative intellectual tradition, one that locates identity in **geography, exchange, and plurality**, not in belief or ethnicity. It mapped the world through connection rather than separation and saw the other not as a threat but as a teacher. In recovering this older vision of *Hendustān*, we rediscover a civilizational idea of India: identifiable yet plural, distinct yet inseparable from the shared geography of human knowledge.

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Indians Live in Three Conflicting Time-Consciousness

Rajiv Vora*

Introduction

Indian civilization has long expressed its identity through symbolic associations with ideals of virtuous life. These symbols-rooted in its moral, cultural, and political heritage, reflect a collective sense of contemporaneity, the feeling of being existentially aligned with certain timeless values. This alignment defines a community's ethos and, ultimately, its nationalism.

However, the Indian nation-state, established within a framework of European time-consciousness, struggles to reconcile multiple and often conflicting temporal orientations. The most fundamental challenge to Indian nationalism, its quest for unity and identity, lies in this dissonance of time-consciousness. Without a shared vision of what constitutes an authentic life, unity becomes superficial and national integration precarious.

Time Consciousness & Civilizational Continuity

Our moral, cultural, and political perspective speaks through the expression of association with symbols of virtuous life that have gone into building Indian civilisation. Association with these symbols suggests a people's sense of contemporaneity. It defines the values of life they commonly cherish; thus, it defines their **nationalism.** Perhaps the most central issue of Indian nationalism – i.e., identity and unity is the problem of the mutually conflicting three types of time-consciousness India has to live with. Thus, we do not commonly share any one set of imposed values and vision of an authentic life. The cause-and-effect

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or the ends-and-means chain is infinite, where we locate a cause of any particular effect, depending on our time-consciousness. Thus, when people in power with one of these three types of sense of contemporaneity approach the resolution of any troubling national issue, it is bound to, as experience testifies, create another set of problems, perhaps more complex than the one "resolved". This cycle is going on, the nation is caught up with it, ever since the Indian state was lodged into European time consciousness. European Renaissance and Enlightenment (so-called) values were accepted for national reconstruction.

The cause of a lot of phenomena can be located in the events of discontinuity in the logical, cultural, and historical march of our civilization. Time-consciousness shapes a people's mind and vision.

Contemporaneity bridges the gap between essence and existence. When Mahatma Gandhi put the Indian freedom struggle on the trajectory of India's eternal civilizational journey by reawakening the Indian masses' sense of contemporaneity with the ancient, Vedic ideal of Swaraj, he described it as Ram Rajya, Khudia Rajy, and the Kingdom of God within you. Ordinary Indians did a miracle. In other words, Mahatma Gandhi mediated the gap between contemporary worldly life of an enslaved people - our existence, or existential reality - and the life of a sovereign nation on the journey of its own virtuous civilization – that is, its essence - by the ideal of swaraj, as epitomized in Rama Rajya. In terms of time, though it is past, ancient past, - even mythical, but it lives and speaks in the present. Were it not so, the slumbering and crushed Indian soul would not have aroused in the manner it did when Mahatma Gandhi invoked swaraj awareness. Gandhi ji made clear how swaraj is radically different from independence: "Swaraj is an ancient term, a Vedic term, meaning self-control and self-restraint, freedom from which is often meant by independence." Swaraj is an eternal destiny of India, the liberation of the soul from the bondage of the flesh. This is why most Indians, whom we call Hindus, have a sense of contemporaneity with Ram Rajya, Rama as an absolute, eternal symbol of a virtuous life, dharma incarnate being the epitome of " Maryada", self-restraint and self-control.

Prof A K Saran's profound definition of what it to be contemporary may illumine the state of our "present": "to be contemporary is to have right sense of the past and the future: to be able to mediate the two

through a sense of eternity, which is symbolized by the present "With a question to ponder, I may leave this here: "Does our present symbolize our sense of eternity ?" If not, and it is certainly NOT, then there is a serious problem of moral, cultural, and political schizophrenia with us.

With this brief idea of what contemporaneity as time-consciousness means let us see how Indians are living in three mutually conflicting time-consciousness with its consequences not only on unity and harmony, but most essentially on India's uniqueness as civilization, essence, identity, self-awareness, possibilities or otherwise of attainment of it self-hood; and, thus on flowering of India's inner potentiality and power. Indian nationalism makes sense only when its people of different religions and Faiths can see their self-image in a nation's march towards its destiny in eternity.

Three Conflicting Modes of Time Consciousness in India

1. Modern- Secular Consciousness in India

The Modernized, secularized class of people whom Gandhiji called 'educated Indians' are in at-one-ment with European time-consciousness, they find themselves contemporaneous with the history of Europe (they are intellectual progeny of European Renaissance and Enlightenment, though through enslavement, imperial education, and secularization of vision and view of life, they have prostrated before the so called "world historical forces." They view India as part of it. But, at the same time, they also profess to be sharing the time-consciousness of Muslims for two reasons: one, their politics of secularism; and two, for their alliance with Islamism as both share the aim of 'transforming' Hindu society – one, to secularity; and the other to Islamic rule. They are not contemporaneous with India's eternal time-consciousness – Kaal Chetna; neither with the entire civilizational journey and its destiny, nor with the sacred symbols. They feel contemporaneous with the modern and not the eternal, the Sanatana India.

Modern is a comparative term. Something is modern in comparison to something old, ancient, or archaic, which must have no continuity in the present for the present to be modern. Hence, their value system is totally different from what we may call Indian values. They define and periodize history to suit the purpose of the idea of progress, modernization, and secularism – periods of history that must be so named as to be seen irrelevant to the present, worth erasing from a

nation's time-consciousness. Everything that must go out of our lives and remain only in monuments is 'ancient' as against the 'modern.'

India's journey through time immemorial is not historicized; hence, only that part of India's journey is history, the past that has value for historians. The value again is rather negative than positive.The modern idea of progress has anointed time with value since the eighteenth century, when in Europe the idea of "progress" was coined as what social scientist Ernest Galner calls "secular salvation". Henceforth, "progress" meant movement on an upward slope. Thus, it was for the first time given value - past as bad and future as good. Thus, all the past is backwardness. In traditional societies, time was value-free. Good things can have happened in the past, and the future of that past may have had bad things too. But ever since the idea of progress was launched in relation to modernization, time was no longer value-free. Thus, the present and future must not carry any visage of the past. Past as a historical resource for learning has meaning in terms of building the future only so far as Indians, in the process of modernization, need to unburden themselves from the backwardness of their past. Thus, for example, while Mahatma Gandhi praises how Indian farmers have retained a five-thousand-year-old design of the plow, historian Romila Thapar takes a dig at it. All secular intellectuals have deprecated knowledge, values, and technology from the distant past of India.

2. Islamic Time-Consciousness

Muslims, generally speaking, have their own sense of relationship with Indian time-consciousness and history. They live in a different time-consciousness; they feel contemporaneous with Islam's own history and time, India's Islamic history, and/or with modern history. If they share the time consciousness of India, association with symbols from ancient times, then it would mean owning up to Hindu ancestry. Thus, they vehemently protect the symbols of Islamic aggression and Islamic rule, even though these symbols symbolize India's defeat and Hinduism's desecration by Jihad against Hinduism and India. (It would be interesting to note that well-known historian Late Prof Mushirul Hassan, former VC of Jamia Millia, has clearly said that he, as a Muslim, couldn't identify with Gandhi because of his idea of Ram Rajya that he called Swaraj. He is in line with a typical Islamo-Nehruvian-modernist idea of India. Would that mean that even being a Nationalist Muslim, he would rather have Hindus deny their pre-Islamic history and contemporaneity with Eternal India? It says something when Nationalist

progressive Muslims like him would like to identify with the idea of India wedded to modernity rather than with Gandhi's idea of India. And, thus, the irony of all ironies is that the same progressive Muslims reject Western Imperialism! The issue of rejection of Rama for having any positive inspirational value for Indians has serious meaning and consequences. We don't have space to discuss it here.

This class of people, as Dharampal says, "*think that they are liberated from the bondage of Indian time-consciousness, Indian mind and way of thinking –BhratiyChitt, Manas and Kaal – but, in fact, it doesn't happen so. It is humanly not possible even for the most extraordinary to liberate himself from the ambit of one's own Chitt, Maanas, and Kaal and be a part of someone else's.*" However, since they are, as symbolized by Kafka in Metamorphosis and explained by social philosophers Ernest Gelner and A.K. Saran, they can be said to be somewhere in between in the process of transition from man-into-beetle metamorphosis. For them, they think it is a reverse one – from beetle-to-man transformation. Not totally transformed, they are somewhere, we may say, from Indian into an American or a European self. In Metamorphosis, the transformation from man into beetle is complete. Here, metamorphosis is bound to remain incomplete, even though they feel as close to Europe as to have dreams in English. They are *Trishankus* – want to enter heaven without leaving their body behind! The king Trishanku left the earth, denied entry into heaven, body and soul, remains hang somewhere in between!

3. Eternal Indian Consciousness

The third category is of those Hindus who identify with eternal India, like Gandhi ji, who therefore invoked the Vedic ideal of Swaraj, and the masses got riveted with him! Celebration of the life of Rama, immortalizing the time of Rama in their lives in the present – yesterday, today, and tomorrow - they express their contemporaneity with Rama, and similarly with the Buddha or Mahavira or Nanak… all in the same tradition… the eternal destiny of India in terms of achieving a virtuous life and its order.

Being divided into three mutually conflicting time-consciousness, we have no consensus on any set of values and on any supreme national ideal. Thus, it is doubtful if we can call ourselves a nation. The journey since independence on official rejection of Swaraj as an Indian ideal and as defined by Gandhi ji has landed the nation in a state of withered nationalism: fractured unity and loss of authentic identity. Not being

either in our own Self, in our tradition, and being a copycat of the western modernity, oblivious of our cultural spiritual treasure, our thinking has stopped, we are afraid of thinking, afraid of facing truth; satisfied with nominalism, formalism, and ritualism. However, hope lies in the ideal of Swaraj that still lives in the minds and aspirations of ordinary Indians, including Muslims and Hindus, as testified by this writer and his team over the past two decades through conducting more than 120 one –to four-day Hind Swaraj dialogues among various sections of people, including among politically and religiously radicalized youth. They all equivocally do not see their self-image in modern India, but do see it in Hind Swaraj. It only shows the cultural, mental divide between the "educated", "urbanized" and "modernized" Indians and the peasant masses.

Conclusion: Towards a Shared Temporal Imagination

The crisis of Indian nationalism is not merely political or cultural. It is fundamentally temporal. The fragmentation of time-consciousness across competing civilizational, religious, and ideological lines has produced a nation that lacks a coherent moral imagination.Without a shared sense of *contemporaneity,* unity becomes a facade, and national identity remains fragile and contested.

This paper argues that genuine nationalism in India cannot be constructed upon borrowed historical trajectories or imposed universalisms. Rather, it must emerge from a civilizational self-awareness that embraces plurality without sacrificing coherence. Gandhi's invocation of Swaraj and Ram Rajya was not a nostalgic return to the past, but a visionary attempt to restore moral continuity across time-a simultaneity of the ancient and the contemporary, the spiritual and the political.

If India is to move beyond sectarianism, historical amnesia, and reactive politics. It must first reconstruct a collective temporal imagination-one that allows its diverse communities to feel existentially present within the civilizational whole. This does not imply uniformity of belief, but a deeper recognition of shared symbolic and ethical horizons.

To reawaken this moral-political vision, India must learn once more to see time not as rupture, but as rhythm; not as a linear march of progress, but as a spiral of renewal rooted in dharma. Only then can the nation move toward an authentic, inclusive, and enduring nationalism, one that is not at war with its Indian soul.

Russia's Geopolitical Engagement in North Africa: Reorienting Strategic Cooperation

Dr. Nalin Kumar Mohapatra*

Synopsis

The growing strategic cooperation between Russia and North Africa in recent years can be considered in the framework of emerging geopolitical realignment in this vast space. Along with this, the geo-economic compulsions of both Russia and the North African countries are also shaping the contours of relations. In this regard, Russia's historical connection with this region is providing the necessary impetus for strategic cooperation. Over the years, Russia considered North Africa as its own "strategic backyard", thus posing a substantial challenge to the United States' dominance. One of the mainstays of Russia's interest in the North African region is its location in the vicinity of the Mediterranean Sea, which is connected with the Black Sea, considered the "heartland" in global geopolitics. Like Russia, India also has vital stakes in the North African region, especially in the Mediterranean region, ranging from geopolitics to geo-economics. In this context, India and Russia can collaborate effectively, understanding the geopolitical realities, thus strengthening peace and stability in the North African region.

Introduction

A closer look at Russia's foreign policy over the last few years demonstrates two major contrasting trends. On the one hand, Russia is trying to assert itself in both global geopolitics and the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, it is facing complex geopolitical challenges,

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including the sanctions in the aftermath of its war with Ukraine, which are hindering its global and regional ambitions. Despite these constraints and relative isolation in global geopolitics, Russia is trying to expand its sphere of influence (Yefremenko, 2025; Mid.Ru, 2024). In this context, North Africa is emerging as a major strategic vantage point for Russia to navigate its geopolitical engagement. The same was evident when Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited North African countries like Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria in December 2023. The visit of Lavrov to these three countries can be considered in the context of the Israel and Hamas war, which started in October 2023, thus having an impact on the geopolitical structure of both North Africa and Eurasia (Post-Soviet space) in a broader geopolitical context. Similarly, the North African countries are showing keen interest in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) project initiated by Russia. Even Egypt is already a part of the BRICS and has an observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Arab News, 2023; Ibrahim, 2025; SIS, 2025). Two important questions need to be addressed while looking at the relationship between Russia and North Africa. These are:

1) Does Russia want to cement its relationship with countries of North Africa to achieve its larger geopolitical objectives in this region and its adjacent regions?
2) To what extent has Russia succeeded in strengthening its geo-economic engagement in the North African region?

The article will test the following hypotheses

1) The North African geopolitical space allows Russia to flex its geopolitical muscles after facing growing isolation due to the onset of its war with Ukraine.
2) The emerging market of the North African countries (especially in the sphere of defence and energy) is facilitating greater Russian geo-economic engagement in this region.

The article will employ descriptive, comparative, and historical methods to study Russia's engagement with this geopolitical, volatile, and resource-rich region of North Africa. These methodological tools provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamic interaction between Russia and North Africa in a complex geopolitical setting. The complex geopolitics can be considered in the context of the intricacies of geopolitical, historical, and economic factors, along with the role of external actors that shape the relations between Russia and North Africa. However, the study of relations between Russia and North Africa cannot

be understood without locating the historical context of the relations. In this background, there is a need to understand the Russian geopolitical thinking towards this region.

Russian Geopolitical Discourse and North Africa

The assertive foreign policy Russia pursued under President Putin towards North Africa can be studied through the prism of geopolitical discourse articulated by Russian scholars. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian geopolitical thinker Pytor Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky emphasized in his book *Mogushchestvennomterritorial' nomvladeniiprimenitel'no k Rossii: Ocherk po politicheskoigeografii* (*On the powerful territorial possession in relation to Russia: Essay on political geography)*, published in 1915. In this scholarly work, Shansky highlighted the need to control the Mediterranean Coast for achieving the great power status of Russia (Kaledin 2019:141). Similarly, the work of Soviet Geographer Serge- Gorshkov deserves much attention. Gorshkov, in his academic writings, succinctly highlights the significance of the Mediterranean Sea, where, as discussed above, many North African countries are located. Gorshkov, giving a historical trajectory of the importance of the Sea, mentions that "The most important communications routes by which fuel is shipped to the countries of Europe and the United States pass through the Mediterranean Sea" (Gorshkov, 1978:15-16). In this context, he emphasizes the importance of this Sea to the Soviet Union's strategic interests. To quote Gorshkov further,:

"Since the very early times, the Mediterranean Sea has been of tremendous economic and strategic significance to Russia. Commercial and cultural ties with Mediterranean countries and other regions of the world were maintained through this Sea. Over a long period of time, Russia's most important line of defense against enemy attack from the South ran through there"(Ibid: 114).

From Gorshkov's above quotation, three major inferences can be drawn that are highly relevant to the present context. These are :

1) Strategic significance of the Mediterranean Sea in Russia's strategic vision.
2) The importance of this Sea as an entrepot for Russia in pursuing an effective foreign policy in both West Asia and the North Africa region.

3) Need for augmenting Russian presence in the North African region (Ibid).

In recent years, Russian geopolitical analyst Alexander Dugin has also put the North Africa region in the context of the "Pan-Arab Project", which covers "part of Asia and North Africa." He further stated that "This bloc is also vital … in controlling the southwest coast of Europe" (Dugin, 1997:234). On the other hand, Dugin's "Pan-Arab Project" aims to create "an independent anti-Atlantic bloc where the priority poles would be Iraq, Libya" (Ibid: 235). Dugin further highlighted that the other North African countries, like "Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco, as the ruling pro-Atlantic forces in these states, do not express national tendencies, are not fully in control and are only held on American bayonets and American money" (Ibid:235).

If one closely looks at Dugin's interpretation of North Africa in the context of Russia's foreign policy goals, three basic strategic frameworks can be inferred from his writings. These are :

1) Russia wants to build geo-cultural relations with North Africa.
2) Strategic developments in North Africa directly affect Russia's strategic interests.
3) A closer relationship between Russia and North Africa will provide a bulwark against the "Atlanticist forces" led by the US (Dugin, 1997:235-244).

Going by the above-mentioned geopolitical perspectives of Russia by contemporary geopolitical thinkers of Russia, Shansky, Gorshkov, as well as Dugin demonstrate that Russia's vital strategic stakes lie in the North African region, and Moscow is keen to have a 'sphere of influence' in this strategically important region. As the above strategic polemics demonstrate, there is a sense of continuity in present-day Russia's foreign policy and its earlier incarnation, the Soviet Union, regarding engagement with the North African region (Trenin, 2000:21-25; Berryman, 2018:66-68).

Some of these factors, as discussed above, provide a conceptual understanding of Russia's geopolitical engagement in the North African region. Another important point that needs to be underlined here is that the developments in the West Asian region also influenced Russian policy towards North Africa during the Soviet Union times. (Ibid., Gorshkov, 1978). These issues must also be located in a strategic framework to trace Russia's policy towards North Africa. However,

there is also a need to locate Russia's policy discourses in the debate on Russian geopolitical discourses (Trenin, 2000: 12-18).

Russia's engagement with North Africa can be succinctly explained in terms of two major vectors of Russian foreign policy, i.e., geopolitical and geo-economic engagement. In this context, a historical perspective is necessary to locate Russia's North African engagement.

Geostrategic Importance of North Africa and Russia's Historical Engagement With this Region

While locating the relationship between Russia and North Africa, there is a need to examine the geostrategic importance of the North African region, also known as the "Maghreb," in the geopolitical literature. A closer look at the strategic location of this region demonstrates that it is situated between Europe and Asia, thus making North Africa a highly volatile region (CFR, 2022). The rich resources of Asia, as well as Africa, attracted European countries throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. One may recall here that the "strategic competition" at the beginning of the 20th century, between France and England, and later on, the former Soviet Union and the United States, to a great extent heightened the strategic significance of this region (Ibid). The Suez Crisis of 1956 is a reminder of the competition that later on fueled the escalation of the Cold War rivalry between the Soviet Union and the USA. It also impacted European countries like France and England's energy security, as these two countries used to secure a major chunk of their energy from West Asia through Egypt's Suez Canal. The Suez crisis also propelled two major issues that grappled with the geopolitics of the 1950s. The first is the "Freedom of Navigation", and the second is the importance of resource geopolitics (Smolansky, 1965:582; Siverson, 1972; Klinghoffer, 1975). Another important issue that came to the fore in the aftermath of the Suez crisis is that it raised a question mark on the capability of the European powers to reclaim their lost geopolitical space in the strategically important North Africa (Dietl, 2008). Anthony Eden, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, stated the impact on European power of the Suez crisis, which left Europeans with no "choice" but rather "to accept" the American dominance that Eden termed as "a master and vassal relationship" (Ibid: 260-261). It may be added here that the British suzerainty in the latter half of the 19th century extended to Asia largely through the Red Sea. Nasser also blocked the Suez Canal to put energy transportation

to Western countries on hold (Bowlus, 2012:4). In this regard, it is pertinent to mention that the Suez crisis brought the Soviet Union to the fore of North African geopolitics, and its support to then Egyptian President Nasser proved quite formidable. Moscow asserted that if the Western countries launched a war against Egypt, it would have "a serious conflict which would encompass the whole of the Near and Middle East and, perhaps, go even further" (Smolensky, 1965:584). In the 1950s and 60s, the Soviet Union supported the nationalist liberation struggle in North African countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The same was reflected in the Soviet Union's official resolution as "It favours the formation of a single anti-imperialist front in these countries, uniting all the forces supporting independence and Freedom" (Zoubir, 1995:65). Speaking at the United Nations about the political situation in North Africa, Nikita Khrushchev stated, "The standpoint of the Soviet people, which is one of moral support and sympathy for the people's national liberation movement, has long been known" (Ibid: 66). One may recall here that when these countries attained independence after a long struggle against French colonialism, the Soviet Union extended all kinds of support to these countries. The strategic objective of the Soviet Union, while supporting these North African countries, was to get a space so that Moscow could influence the geopolitics of the Mediterranean along with West Asia, thus able to contain Western influence in the long run, as discussed above. The Soviet Union was also quite worried about the NATO presence. To challenge Western dominance in the Mediterranean, the Soviet Union deployed its warship Fifth Eskadra under control from the Black Sea. Similarly, Moscow beefed up its warships in Egypt's Mediterranean Squadron in the post-1967 era, thus strengthening its military presence in the North African region. The Soviet political elites, by strengthening their military presence, were, to some extent, also successfully able to contain the spread of Western influence in the region (McCormick, 1987:5-8; Etzold, 1984: 5-6; Klinghoffer, 1975). As per a Rand Corporation report, the Soviet Union expanded its maritime and air force presence, including armed and naval forces in the Mediterranean region, to augment its capability (McCormick, 1987:10-12). Similarly, Moscow understood the strategic significance of Libya because of its location on the coast of the Mediterranean. It took measures to bring it under its sphere of influence. During the Cold War years, the Soviet Union emerged as a major player in meeting Libya's defence and nuclear energy needs.

Moscow had its own strategic calculation in mind in Libya, which was to station its troops on the Mediterranean Sea Coast. This, to a great extent, helped the Soviet Union in quelling Western influence in this region. It has been observed that a greater Soviet presence helped the North African countries, particularly Libya, in checkmating the Western penetration in this part of the world (Ibid; St John, 1982:135-36). During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Soviet Union's intervention on behalf of Egypt completely changed the contours of the War (Menon, 1989:389).

The strategic engagement of the Soviet Union helped it considerably in terms of harnessing the energy from North African countries. More particularly, through the Suez Canal of Egypt, the Soviet Union exported a major chunk of oil to the Chinese market. Similarly, after 1972, the Soviet Union imported large quantities of oil from Iraq to fulfill its export commitments to European countries. However, when the Egyptian authority closed the canal, it impacted Soviet oil shipment from Iraq to its Eastern European market. Even though an open Suez Canal served the interests of the Soviet Union to checkmate Western influence in West Asia and North Africa, it supported the Egyptian move (Ibid; Klinghoffer, 1975: 399-401).

Though the Soviet Union made a stride in North African geopolitics, it also faced some rough weather. For instance, in 1976, the Egyptian government under Anwar Sadat, despite getting support from the Soviet Union, annulled the "Soviet-Egypt Treaty of 1976". Similarly, the Egyptian government has tried to diversify its relations with Western countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, the North African countries also diversified their defense relations with Western countries. Also, Libya brought 490 million US dollars and Algeria 240 million US dollars' worth of weapons from the Western market (Menon, 1989:386).

The Gorbachev period marked a new phase in the Soviet Union's relations with North Africa. The internal geopolitical realignment of the North African countries has also impacted Soviet policy. Egypt and Algeria's feud with Libya and their growing reapprochement with the US have also, to some extent, dented greater Soviet intervention. Even for arms, these two North African countries looked towards the US. This also allowed Washington to augment its military presence in the Mediterranean region. The economic weaknesses of the Soviet Union also prevented it from greater engagement with North Africa (Freedman, 1989, 189-191; Halliday, 1987).

A closer look at Soviet policy towards North Africa demonstrates that it had three objectives that need to be highlighted. These are:

1) The Soviet Union required a strategic space to manoeuvre its geopolitical preponderance vis-à-vis its ideological rival, the Western Bloc. Thus, because of its strategic location, North Africa attracted Soviet attention as an important strategic vantage point to spearhead its geopolitical influence. In this context, one may highlight that North Africa emerged as a strategic frontier for geopolitical competition between the Soviet Union and the West during the height of the Cold War (Donaldson, 1982).
2) The North African region has also emerged as a space for the Soviet Union to achieve its geo-economic objectives during the Cold War. For instance, the Soviet Union's energy trade with Libya or Egypt, as highlighted above, helped Moscow to augment its geo-economic leverage (Menon, 1989).
3) Soviet Union tried to use North Africa as an example to demonstrate its soft power influence in the Third World countries. This policy of bringing the Third World countries under its orbit provided a strategic leeway to counter Western influence in North Africa (Donaldson, 1982; Ibid).

From the above analysis, it can be underlined that the Soviet Union used North African diplomacy to expand its sphere of influence into this strategically important zone of geopolitical conflict. In this context, there is a need to analyse and examine the continuity and discontinuity of Soviet policy towards North Africa in the post-1991 phase by Russia, its successor country.

Russia's post-1991 Engagement in North Africa

The post-1991 period marked a new phase of Russia's foreign policy towards North Africa. In this regard, it can be underlined that Russia recognized the significance of North Africa in its foreign policy calculations, but was not in a position to influence the course of strategy in the North African region. This is paltry due to its own economic weaknesses and a growing dependence on the West, which prevented it from charting a vigorous foreign policy towards this region. Russia, being the successor state of the Soviet Union, asked the African countries to repay the loans. Because of that, there was a negative perception in the North African countries that "the land [Russia] that turned its back

on the continent" (Fidan and Buelent Aras, 2010: 52; Ramani, 2023).

However, after receiving a setback from the West, Russia, under the new Foreign Minister, Y Primakov, tried to give a new impetus to Russia's North Africa relations. Primakov, understanding the locational advantage of this region and considering its emerging geopolitical significance, thus strategised Russia's foreign policy towards this continent, which has been neglected so far by Yeltsin's administration (Ibid). Due to historical and strategic considerations, Egypt holds a special place for Russia. In this regard, it can be mentioned here that Primakov, during his visit to Cairo in April 1996, stated, "Egypt can be sure that Russia will pursue a policy aimed at the continuity of all previous decisions, and would do everything to ensure that… harmonized approaches were carried out and continued" (Issaev, 2017:7).

Primakov's visit marked a new phase in Russia's North African diplomacy. The same can be inferred from the fact that:

1) Russia tilted its foreign policy towards Africa and Asia instead of Western countries. Thus, Russia returned to its original roots of foreign policy.
2) The growing Western presence in the North African region has also caused strategic concerns to Russian policymakers.
3) Russia realized the economic potential of this region, especially, and wanted to strengthen its relations.
4) Russia required the support of Muslim countries as a "bulwark" to fight against the radical and terrorist forces of its own restive North Caucasus region (Ibid; Ramani, 2023; Rumer, 2000).

Some of Russia's above-mentioned strategic objectives put the North African region again at the focus of Russian policy analysts. The same can be understood from the fact that in September 1997, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt visited Russia. Along with bilateral issues, Mubarak and Yeltsin discussed issues relating to the Middle East Peace Process. Egypt required Russia's support to checkmate the United States' growing role. In this context, one sees the resurgence of Russia's role in the North Africa region (RFE/RL, 1997). Russia also supported Libya at the United Nations Security Council to tide over punitive measures (Jamestown Monitor, 1996). In 1999, Russia entered into a gas alliance with Algeria, thus giving a big push to its energy diplomacy in this strategically located region (Brussels International Centre, 2019:2-3). Yeltsin took a keen interest in forging a stronger relationship with Tunisia, another North African country with which Russia shared closer

historical relations. Russian policymakers also realised the locational advantage of the North Africa being an entrepôt to both the Mediterranean world and the Arab world (Podtserob, 2010: 35-36). There are reports that, at the instance of Bill Clinton, the President of the United States, Russian President Boris Yeltsin engaged with the Moroccan King, Hassan II, to resolve the Chechnya crisis (The Washington Post, 1996).

Though Russia tried to re-engage with the region, one issue that created major hindrances was its engagement with Israel. Over the years, Israel emerged as one of Russia's major trade partners. Along with this, the Russian Jewish diaspora played a key role in Israel's domestic policy. However, Russia's engagement generated some degree of apprehension among North African countries, particularly Egypt, which shares hostile relations with Israel (Freedman, 2001:60-61).

A closer look at the Russian policy towards the North African countries demonstrates that Moscow, due to its own domestic preoccupations and its lack of effective economic clout, is unable to influence the strategic developments in the region. As Yeltsin observed, "Redressing this abnormality is both a domestic and foreign political task" (Ibid:65). In this regard, it can be stated that the lack of priority identification in the foreign policy-making process is another factor that impeded Russia's foreign policy towards North Africa in the 1990s (Ibid; Eleonora TafuroAmbrosetti, Chiara Lovotti, Youssef Cherif, 2020: 6-11).

Russia's Pragmatic Policy Towards North Africa under President Vladimir Putin

The "ascendence" of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia marked a new phase in Russia's policy towards North Africa. The importance of North Africa in Russian foreign policy is evident from the Foreign Policy Doctrine of 2000. The Foreign Policy Document underlined North Africa's priorities in recent years. As has been underlined:

"Russia will work to stabilize the situation in the Middle East, including the Persian Gulf zone and Northern Africa..... Russia's priority in this context will be restoring and strengthening its positions, particularly the economic ones, in this region of the world, so rich and important for our interests" (Russian Foreign Policy Concept, 2000).

The above Foreign Policy Document of Russia conceptually brought out the strategic importance of the North African region in Russia's

strategic calculus. In the post-2000 era, Russia under President Putin made inroads into global geopolitics more assertively, largely due to employing strategic energy resources more calculatively in its foreign policy strategy (Mohapatra, 2013). Russian policymakers have also required both the Mediterranean and North Africa as a secure corridor to explore its energy, particularly to the European market. Russian oil conglomerates have also taken a special interest in North Africa's energy fields (Andres, 2006; Ramani, 2024). To a great extent, all these factors contributed to Russia's growing interest in this geopolitical zone of Africa. One may recall here that Russia also took a special interest in the warm water ports of the North African countries, as they will help it improve its naval strategy, especially in the strategically significant Mediterranean region. Some of these factors are responsible for what propelled Russia to pursue a more vigorous policy in this part of the world (Wehrey and Weiss, 2021:14-15). As it has been observed, the growing presence of Russia in this North African region is also considered in the framework of "geographical continuum" (Facon, 2017:3-5).

The post-2001 era has also been tumultuous for Russia as far as its foreign policy is concerned. This is largely due to the development at the global level. These include the 9/11 incident, which brought both Russia and the US together to fight against the radical Islamist and terrorist forces located in Afghanistan, and also global terrorism. One may underline that the short bonhomie between Russia and the US could not last long. The growing US overture in the post-Soviet space through Color revolutions in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia, actually aiming to encircle Russia, created much jitters between the two countries. The enunciation of the new strategic doctrine known as the "Greater Middle East" has also apprehended Russia's policymakers.[27] The reason for discussing the "Greater Middle East", as enunciated by the US Administration, is to highlight the fact that this actually put Russia on the back foot. It may be recalled here that the Greater Middle East policy of the US Administration was mainly initiated to counter Russia's influence in the West Asia and North Africa region. The enunciation of this policy also alarmed Putin and the Russian Administration. Russia also feared that if the US Administration could unsettle the pro-Russian political regime, then it would give a setback to Russia's strategic interest in the North African region, including the Mediterranean region. Similarly, Russian energy conglomerates are keen to tap into the energy

sector of the North African region. All these strategic considerations propelled Russia to play a significant role in the North African region (Horner, 2023; Haass, 2004). To salvage the image of Russia in the North African Region so also to checkmate the US preponderance and secure its geo-economic interest, one of the first things President Putin did in the aftermath of 2005 was to visit North African countries, which gave a boost to Russia's engagement with this strategically significant region (Ramani, 2023; Gasimov, 2022). The visit of President Putin to Egypt in April 2005 can be looked at in this context. In the Joint Press Conference, both President Putin and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt outlined a "Roadmap to achieve a fair, all-encompassing and lasting settlement in the Middle East in all areas of the peace process" (Kremlin.Ru 2005). In the same Conference, President Putin made a veiled attack on the US Democracy Promotion agenda, highlighting that "Democracy is not a good that can simply be exported from one country to another, as it then immediately becomes a tool the former country can use to gain advantages over the latter" (Ibid). President Putin also visited Algeria in March 2006, which boosted Russia's geo-economic diplomacy and strengthened the geopolitical move. However, Russia waived some of Algeria's debt. Russia has also secured a defense deal with Algeria (Kondratenko, 2020). The same can also be reflected in President Putin's visit to Morocco in September 2006. The visit provided a fillip to Russia's energy diplomacy in this strategically important country. It may be recalled here that before Putin visited Morocco, Russia also started exporting defence equipment to this North African country (Nochikov, 2006; Kremlin.Ru, 2005; UPI, 2006). Another important milestone in Russia's strategic engagement is with Libya, considered to be an anchor point in North African geopolitics. By visiting Libya in April 2008, Putin demonstrated that Russia would play an important role in the region's geopolitics. At the same time, during his visit, Putin secured a huge economic engagement with Tripoli through defence and energy contracts. The visit also marked a new form of symbolic diplomacy on the part of Russia that is here to stay, as during the Cold War period, and poses a substantial challenge to the US hegemonic position. At that time, Libya was also reeling under the sanctions (New York Times, 2008).

Thus, it can be underlined here that the growing Russian engagement in the North African region altered this strategically important region's geopolitical and geoeconomic equations. A new kind of geopolitical

balance has emerged because of Russia's proactive policy in this part of the world. Russia flexed its muscle in the region to promote its geopolitical agenda, including protecting its interests in the Mediterranean Sea and using North Africa as a gateway to entry into the vast African space while getting an edge in the Middle East diplomacy (Ramani,2023; Gasimov, 2022).

The North African region, because of its strategic location, has emerged as one of Russia's most important trade partners. Some of the major Russian state-owned conglomerates, like Gazprom, Rosatom, Rosneft, Lukoil, etc, are engaged in North Africa, thus beefing up their presence in this part of the world. The growing economic presence in North Africa also helped Russia's bargaining capability with the European countries, especially in the energy sector, as the European countries rely on North Africa for oil. Similarly, Russia has emerged as one of the major exporters of food grains to the North African countries. The major product that is exported to North Africa is wheat. For instance, Russia also imported fruits from this region (Liefert and Olga Liefert, 2012:70-71; Gerõcs, 2019:327). As statistical data suggest, from 2005 to 2015, overall trade between Russia and Africa grew by 185 per cent in the bulk trade carried out by Moscow with North Africa (German Development Institute, 2020:1).

Though Russia acted as a major player under the leadership of President Putin in the North African region, it took a backseat following the Arab Spring, which affected both the West Asian and North African regimes. The political upheavals caused by the so-called "Arab Spring" have also impacted the domestic political process of the North African countries. This put stress on Russia as its old political elites in this region are not in power (Kozhanov, 2018). Thus, there is a need to re-examine Russia's strategy in this region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

Arab Spring in North Africa and Russia's Geopolitical Engagement

The political turmoil in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Egypt, along with adjoining Arab countries, impacted Russia's engagement with this region. The political turmoil, which can be called another version of the Color Revolution (which swept the post-Soviet space in 2004-2005), gave Russia a setback. This is because the new political leadership, which came to power, operated with the support of the

United States. Secondly, Radical Islamist groups hold sway over the power, which, to a considerable extent, alarmed the Russian policymakers as this may have an impact on the radical movements of Russia's North Caucasus. Thirdly, another question arose about the future of Russia's investment in the region, as well as protecting the existing one. Russia was also quite wary of the geopolitics of the Mediterranean Sea as new regimes, which came to power with active US support, might have a dent on Russia's geopolitical interest, considered vital to its global engagement (Malashenko, 2013; 1-3 and 17-20; Nikitinà, 2014). Russia's concerns for strategic development in the North African region have aptly been reflected in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept of 2013, which underlined:

> "Russia will be making a meaningful contribution to the stabilisation of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa and will consistently promote peace and concord among the peoples of all the Middle East and North Africa countries based on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of states and non-interference in their internal affairs" (Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2013).

The foreign policy Concept of Russia can be understood in the context of the setback Russia suffered because of the onset of the Arab Spring and the subsequent political changes in North Africa. This is even though the Russian political elites, understanding the ground situation, took a balanced position and did not annoy the new political elites (Baev, 2011:13). The same can be evident from the fact that President Dmitry Medvedev, reacting to the political upheavals, stated, "We must face the truth". Putin, who was manning the office of Prime Minister of Russia at that time, further stated that "On the whole, it satisfies the local public mentality and political practice" (Baev, 2011:13). The balanced position Russia took despite understanding its strategic consequences paid off well. The same is evident from Russia's nuclear agency, Rosatom, which signed an agreement with the Algerian nuclear agency in 2014 (Rosatom, 2014). Russia also started normalising bilateral relations with Egypt after the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi, who got patronage from the Islamic Brotherhood Movement. The new leadership of Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi signed a strategic partnership agreement with Russia, including resuming bilateral trade in 2018, which came into effect in 2021 (Pravo, 2018). It may be recalled here that after being snubbed by the US, Egypt again resumed defence relations

with Russia, and the total turnover of the defence trade was more than "3 billion dollars". Similarly, both Russia and Egypt carried out regular military exercises, which put the former in an advantageous position in North African geopolitics (Aziz, 2018). Russia's relations with other North African countries grew substantially after the Arab Spring. The same was with Russia's relations with Tunisia, which went into an upswing after the regime change of En-Nahda, supported by radical Islamist groups in the country. Just like in Egypt after the emergence of Mohamed BejiCaid Essebsi in October 2014, who is considered to be a moderate. Russia and Tunisia relations underwent an upsurge in October 2014, resulting in strengthening relations in the field of tourism trade, as well as cooperation in the sphere of counter-terrorism (Feuer, Sarah, & Anna Borshchevskaya, 2017). Also, Russia's relations with Algeria and Morocco have witnessed an upswing, especially in defence cooperation. It may be recalled here that Algeria emerged as the major importer of Russian defense equipment in 2018. Russia has also strengthened counter-terrorism cooperation with Algeria (Kharief, 2023; Feuer, Sarah, & Anna Borshchevskaya, 2017).

The reassertion of Russia in the North African region after receiving a jolt in the aftermath of the Arab Spring contributed to a new kind of geopolitical cauldron. The proactive role of Russia in this region provided a subtle challenge to the United States. Washington's attempt to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and subsequent chaos have had a spillover impact on North African geopolitics because of the strategic location (Aksenyonok, 2019). In this context, there is a need to look at how the Syrian crisis shaped Russia's engagement with North African geopolitics.

Syrian Crisis and Russia's Engagement in the North African Geopolitics

The Syrian crisis tested the Russian nerves as to how it can play its card, because Syria is one of the long-term allies of Russia. The US attempt to dislodge Russia from its 'sphere of influence' in Syria, considered to be a "strategic gateway" to North Africa, has further aggravated the situation. It is a fact that the former Soviet Union has had a naval presence in Tartus since 1971, and the same continued in the post-1991 era when Russia became the successor country. It may be noted that the Syrian crisis gave Russia the necessary impetus to its strategic presence in the region (Gasimov, 2022). As stated by a former

high official of the Russian Navy, Viktor Chirkov, back in 2012, regarding the strategic significance of Tartus, "This base is essential to us; it has been operating and will continue to operate" (BBC, 2012). One may add here that, along with the naval facilities, Russia has also augmented the Airbase in Syria in the aftermath of the outbreak of the War. The air base is known as Hmeimim Air Base in the Latakia region. The air base in Syria allowed Russia to navigate the geopolitics of the West Asia and North African regions due to its proximity. (Gasimov, 2022; Borshchevskaya, 2022).

However, the ouster of Assad from power in December 2024 and subsequent chaos in Syria gave a temporary setback to Russia's strategic presence in Syria. Though Russia's historical connection with this part of the world, its strong presence in the Alawite region, gives a stronger foothold to the Russian presence in this part of the world. At the same time, the interim President of Abu Mohammad al-Joulani, despite his anti-Russian rhetoric, is toning down his posture and keen to secure Russian engagement with Syria (Matveev, Igor and Alexey Khlebnikov, 2025; Giustozzi, 2025).

Russia-North Africa Engagement: Post-Syrian Crisis

In the aftermath of the Syrian crisis, Russia played a preponderant role in North Africa's regional geopolitics. This is because it used Syria as a major base to strategise its foreign policy towards the region. At the same time, support for the Al Asaad regime of Russia at a crucial moment during the Syrian war has helped it to win many admirers from North African countries. It may be recalled here that the Trump Administration in 2018 also decided to scale down the US presence in Africa. Since there was a strategic vacuum, Russia decided to mark its presence there. In this context, Russia strengthened its bilateral and multilateral engagement in this part of the world (Aksenyonok,2019; Mathieu Droin and Tina Dolbaia, 2023:3). By deeper engagement with African countries, including North African ones, Russia obtained necessary support at multilateral forums, including the UN. Thus, this gave Russia strategic leeway to counter the US (Ibid).

The Russian policymakers also took advantage of the historical relations with North Africa as a basis for strategising Russia's policy towards this region. The same can be evident from the fact that after Syria, Russia obtained a vital stake in the Al Jufra Air Base. This adds an advantage to Russia in asserting its preponderant position in North

African geopolitics— similarly, the civil war between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the UN-backed Libyan regime. By taking advantage of the unstable political situation, Russia sided with the Libyan National Army (LNA), which gave it a major preponderance in the internal politics of Libya (Bermudez Jr. and Brian Katz, 2020). Similarly, Russia's private military agency, Wagner Group, has also, since 2019, played an important role in the Libyan crisis by taking the side of LNA. (Ibid). The war between Algeria and Morocco has also allowed Russia to expand its influence. Russia is keen on securing a naval base at the port of Mers-el-Kébir near the Mediterranean Coast of Algeria (Ghilès, 2023:3). Even though Algeria denied the Naval base to Russia, both maintain strategic relations. As mentioned above, Russia is keen on securing the oil and gas market and the arms market in Algeria. From 2018-2022, Russian arms constituted around 73.4 per cent of Algeria's total arms. The surge in arms trade has also facilitated growing bilateral economic cooperation between the two countries, and the same grew by 70 per cent in 2022 (Reshetnikov, 2023; SIPRI 2022). Russia's relations with Egypt have grown over the years. One may recall that Russia assists Egypt in food, space cooperation, and nuclear energy. Moscow still understands the importance of Cairo in contemporary geopolitics in the context of the onset of the War between Israel and Hamas. It is a fact that trade with Egypt accounts for one-third of Russia's total trade with Africa. The same can be understood from Russia's exports to Egypt, which stood at 179 billion dollars (Ahram Online 2023; Mid. Ru 2024). The military exercises conducted at the Mediterranean coast in December 2021 near Alexandria by both Russia and Egypt, known as "Friendship 2021", reflect the fact that both countries are trying to recontextualise their relations in the Mediterranean geopolitics in the context of regional as well as global geopolitical development (Defense Web, 2021). The cementing of relations between Moscow and Cairo adds much substance to the strategic balance on the Mediterranean Coast, which will checkmate the US presence on the strategically important sea coast. One may recall here that the Russian-assisted nuclear power plant of Egypt is located on the Mediterranean Sea coast of Egypt (News Arab, 2024).

Russia strengthened its relations with Tunisia during the post-Syrian crisis. It is a fact that Tunisia used to procure food grains from Russia, and the same was strengthened to a significant extent, which contributed to a gradual increase in bilateral trade. The same can be testified by the fact that trade reached 1.2 billion US dollars in 2023, as stated by

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister (Arab Wall, 2024). It is pertinent to mention here that the growing isolation of Tunisia and its consistent castigation by Europe and the US over the concept of democracy have also prompted Tunisia to improve its strategic cooperation with Russia (Inkyfada, 2023).

Russia's move to strengthen strategic cooperation with North African countries helped it gain the upper hand in African geopolitics in a broader context. The same can be seen in the context of the Russia-Africa Summit, which took place in 2011 in Sochi. The presidents of North African countries and other African countries joined the summit. One of the key aspects of the Summit is that it focused on "Peace, Security and Development". In this context, the Summit has also discussed the move to strengthen economic cooperation between Russia and Africa (Declaration of the First Russia-Africa Summit, 2019).The second such Summit, which took place in St. Petersburg, in 2023, also took place in the aftermath of the onset of the Russian-Ukraine war and has also focused on strategising economic cooperation (Valdai Club, 2024:1). It is a fact that over the years, Russia has also actively supported Egypt's case for membership in the extended BRICS multilateral group (ElSheikh, 2024).

In the aftermath of the exit of Assad, Russia is adopting a two-pronged strategy towards the North African region. Though it gave a grave temporary setback to the Russian foreign policy, it is expanding its presence in the North African region. One of the major weaknesses of the North African countries vis-à-vis Russia is that they heavily depend on Moscow for grain and weapons. This gives Russia a tactical advantage to manoeuvre the geopolitics of North Africa. For instance, Russia's creeping expansion in Libya, and there are speculations that Russia may shift some of its military bases from Syria to Libya. Though Algeria still refuses to give its Oran naval base to Russia, fearing geopolitical rivalry on its coast (Avdaliani, 2025; Valdai Club 2024a).

Thus, Russia uses bilateral and Multilateral frameworks to strengthen and strategise its engagement with the North African countries. It may be underlined here that the onset of the Mali crisis has also impacted relations between Russia and North Africa.

Mali Crisis and Russia's North African Diplomacy

Along with the Syrian crisis, which has had a deeper impact on the North African region, the same is the case with the Mali Crisis. The

Mali crisis is also going to impact the North African geopolitics. In this context, Russia has a vital stake in the Mali crisis, as it does in the Syrian one. Though Mali is not a North African country, it poses a substantial challenge to North Africa, particularly to Algeria. It is in this context that one has to see how Russia, once an isolated player in Mali, is becoming an influential player in this region (Tuma, 2022). It is a fact that the present Mali's political crisis is rooted in the West-inspired Colour Revolution that swept across West Asia and North Africa, which toppled many regimes. The fall of Gaddafi and the subsequent spillover impact accentuated the political instability in this region. One of the major factors that accentuated the heightening importance of Mali in the global geopolitical map is that this country is endowed with rich uranium. Most of the uranium is located in the region dominated by the Tureng tribe (Fillifov, 2012). The protracted conflict in Mali since 2012 forced the Malian authorities to seek the support of external powers, particularly the neighboring country, France. But French forces left Mali and were replaced by the Russian private Army Wagner group after the new regime of Mali came to power in 2020, which favored a closer partnership with Russia. In June 2025, however, the Wagner group announced its plan to leave Mali (The Moscow Times, 2025).

Though the Wagner private army left in June, it was replaced by another Russian-supported group, African Crop, which aimed at maintaining the stability of this West African country bordering Algeria. Even Russia signed several agreements, including a nuclear agreement, with Mali to enhance its presence in this part of Africa (The Voice of Africa, 2025; Military Africa, 2025). By beefing up its military presence in Mali, Russia is not only able to control the resources of this troubled African country but also able to protect its ally Algeria, where it has a deep-rooted strategic engagement as highlighted above (Klyszcz, 2025; Mid.Ru,2025). It has also been argued that, being a traditional player in the North African energy sector, Russia is also able to influence the export of energy from Algeria, considered to be the largest exporter of energy to Europe. This put Russia in an advantageous position vis-à-vis Europe as far as energy is concerned in the post-2022 era (Ibid; Brindamour, 2025).

Like the Syrian and Mali crises, which tested Russia's foreign policy over the years towards this region, the Russia-Ukraine war, to a great extent, also influenced Russia-North Africa relations.

Russia-Ukraine War and Its Impact on Russia's North African Geopolitics

As expected, the Russia-Ukraine war has a teetering impact on North Africa's socio-economic spectrum, as well as putting them in a situation of geopolitical quagmire. The socio-economic spectrum of this region was largely volatile because of the onset of the war and the subsequent supply chain disruption. Due to the incessant war between Russia and Ukraine near the seaports of Mariupol and Odesa (both of which are considered the main strategic hubs for exporting Ukrainian grain and sunflower oil to the North African market), food supply was disrupted. Similarly, sanctions on Russia also crippled the supply chain to North Africa (Heigermoser, 2022; Fabiani, 2023; Dobrescu, 2023; FAO, 2022). It is a well-known fact that Russia is also a traditional supplier of food grains to North Africa. Thus, one can notice a significant slump in some North African countries' economies because of the adversarial impact of the Russia-Ukraine war. Economic sanctions on Russia impacted its effective economic engagement with these North African countries. This is particularly true in the context of Russia's investment in this region, particularly in the energy sector (Ibid).

Another geopolitical dimension that needs attention is how the North African countries supported Russia in its war against Ukraine at various multilateral bodies, including the United Nations General Council (UNGC). This is because of looking at strong strategic partnership between Russia and North Africa. A closer look at the voting behaviour of North African countries at the UNGC demonstrates that these countries have never adopted a uniform pattern while voting at the UN. The same can be inferred from the fact that on 07 April 2022, about the suspension of Russia from the Human Rights Council, Libya voted in favour of the resolution, while Tunisia and Egypt abstained, and Algeria voted against the resolution. At the same time, on 23 February 2023, the UNGA resolution on "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine," aimed at putting Russia on the onus of the war, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt voted in favour of the resolution. As expected, Algeria voted against the proposal (Development Reimagined, 2023). The above voting pattern demonstrates that the North African countries are guided by their respective national priorities while engaging with Ukraine and Russia (Farzanegan & Gholipour,

2023). Looking at the above voting pattern, it can be underlined that the geopolitical complexity shaped North African countries' voting behaviours at the UN on the question of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Despite different perceptions, it needs to be underlined that both Russia and North African countries have a mutual interest. North Africa's geostrategic location will always shape Russia's interest in this part of the world. In fact, the Russia-Ukraine war has further propelled Moscow to engage with North African countries more effectively. This is because North African countries, being closer to European countries (some of them are NATO countries), are in a loggerhead with each other. The bonhomie can also be reflected in the growing trade between Russia and North African countries. As studies suggest, 28 per cent of Russia's total African trade went to Egypt only in 2023. Similarly, as studies suggest, Russia's trade with Morocco, another North African country, increased by 73 per cent in the first half of 2025 (Russia's Pivot to Asia, 2025; Toutate, 2025). At the energy front, it has also been argued that, being a traditional player in the North African energy sector, Russia is also able to influence the export of energy from Algeria, considered to be the largest exporter of energy to Europe. This put Russia in an advantageous position vis-à-vis Europe as far as energy is concerned in the post-2022 era (Brindamour, 2025).

Along with some of these factors, the intensity of geopolitical power rivalry among major powers like the US and China in recent years has also shaped Russia's policy towards this region.

Geopolitical Rivalry and the North African Region

Over the years, China has made big inroads into the North African region. The growing penetration of China through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project put Beijing in the upper hand in both geopolitics and geoeconomics of this part of Africa. Though Russia is facing stiff competition from the US to dominate the geopolitical space of North Africa, in recent years, China's growing clout has posed a substantial threat to Russia's strategic interests. In this context, Russia may require India's support to bring out a stable geopolitical order in North Africa (Balytnikov et al, 2020; Jaldi and Hamza Mjahed, 2023). Like China, which is a new entrant to this region, the US is a traditional player in this part of the world. As discussed above, one of the main theatres of the Cold War was the Mediterranean region. Even in the post-Cold War era, the US has made deep inroads into the North African region,

keeping its larger geopolitical interests in this part of the world. One may recall here that American geopolitical thinker Alfred Mahan advised the US policy makers that "Circumstances have caused the Mediterranean Sea to play a greater part in the history of the world, both in a commercial and a military point of view, than any other sheet of water of the same size. Nation after nation has striven to control it, and the strife still goes on" (Mahan, 1890:33). From the above analysis of Mahan, it can be stated that the US has had a deeper strategic interest in this part of the world over the centuries. To ensure complete control over the Mediterranean, it has a military base in the Sinai region of Egypt, considered to be strategically located (Okfar, 2024). Similarly, in recent years, the US has also been facing a substantial challenge from the Houthis rebels, which is increasing its security concerns in this part of the world. To checkmate the Houthis rebels as well as enhance its military presence in the WANA region in February 2025, the US Administration under Trump deployed B-52 bombers in Libya. It is a fact that the US is keen to augment its presence in this part of the world to counter Russia (Agenzianova, 2025).

A new form of strategic realignment is taking place in the North African region after the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is pertinent to mention here that, understanding the geopolitical reality, Russian policy makers are interested in reorienting relations with Israel without abandoning its traditional relations with the Arab world (Rfi, 2025).

The reorientation of Russian policy towards Israel was clearly manifested when President Putin stated at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in June 2025, the need to stay "neutral" because he underlined that "almost two million people from the former Soviet Union and the Russian Federation reside in Israel. It is almost a Russian-speaking country today. And, undoubtedly, we always take this into account in Russia's contemporary history" (Business Standard, 2025). This policy posture of President Putin may be considered a subtle shift in Russian policy towards Israel. Though in a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, President Putin reiterated "supporting the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic" (Kremlin. RU, 2025; Rfi, 2025). Russia now understands the geopolitical realities; keeping that in mind, Russian policymakers are pursuing a pragmatic policy. But this may have an impact on North African countries, as they are considered to be hostile to Israel. In this

context, Russia cannot ignore its own geopolitical interest in the region (Borshchevskaya and Matt Tavares, 2025).

The same can be observed from Moscow's move to strengthen its presence in the Sudanese Sea coast, which borders Libya and Egypt (Tsamalashvili, 2025). Russian analysts are arguing that this will give Russia an upper hand not only in the Red Sea geopolitics but also over all the major oceans, like the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans, as well as over the Mediterranean Sea. The presence of Russia on the Sudanese Coast will also give it an advantage in terms of the flow of oil through the Red Sea (Ibid; Tass, 2025).

In this geopolitical scenario, there is a need to look at how India looks at the developments in the region.

India's Perspective on Russia and North Africa Interaction

Like Russia, which has a vital stake in the North African region, India too attaches vital importance to this part of Africa. For instance, when the Houthi crisis erupted, it has affected the flow of oil from Russia through the Red Sea to India. It is a fact that, like Russia, the bulk of India's export goes to the United States as well as to other parts of Europe and Africa through the Red Sea. Similarly, a peaceful North Africa is crucial to both India's and Russia's interests (Mohapatra, 2024). So also, supply securitisation is assuming an important role in the geo-economic interests of both India and Russia. In this context, greater cooperation in the economic domain is needed between India and Russia in the Mediterranean Sea, which will ensure advantages for both (Merrie and AbdessalamJald, 2024).

Another important aspect that needs closer attention is that Egypt of late is assuming a critical role in the IMEC (India Middle East European Economic Corridor) ever since it was launched at the sidelines of the G 20 Summit held in New Delhi in September 2023. The IMEC corridor can play an important role in facilitating India's trade and commerce with the Mediterranean countries, and for that purpose, the Red Sea Corridor can augment further connectivity. Since India is an important player in the IMEC, it will help New Delhi to connect with both the North African and the European markets. Through the Egyptian corridor of IMEC, India can play an important role in engaging with the African Continental Free Trade Zone (AfCFTA). It may be underlined here that India, by jointly cooperating with Russia, can able to augment its presence in the African market (Mohapatra, 2023; Adam, 2025;

RIAC, 2020; Economic Times, 2025a). Along with Africa, Egypt can also provide India a safer route for trade with European countries, which include Russia, through the Red Sea. As per a study using the Red Sea and Suez Canal, Indian products can reach the European market in around 25 days. On the other hand, if India exports products to the European market using the Cape of Good Hope, it will take 35 days. When the Red Sea crisis reached its peak in August 2024, India's export through this corridor slumped by around 8 per cent (RIS; Economic Times, 2024). Along with IMEC Corridor and the traditional Red Sea Corridor, Egypt is also inviting both India and Russia to participate in the Special Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZONE). The same was disclosed by the Egyptian Foreign Minister BadrAbdelatty, who, during his visit to India at the sidelines of the First India-Egypt Strategic Dialogue. He promised to give a special concession to India in the Suez Economic Zone, along with Russia. In his speech, he gave special emphasis on the IMEC Corridor. By participating in the SCZONE, both India and Russia can cooperate to enhance their respective geo-economic leverage in the North African region. It may be recalled here that both India and Russia are also promoting the Northern Sea Route, which will help to bypass the Suez Canal (IANS, 2025; Sputnik India, 2024).

It is pertinent to note that both India and Egypt have already made some inroads into the energy sector in this zone since 2023. Both countries inked an agreement to develop a green hydrogen facility in the Suez Economic Zone. Similarly, India is also assisting other North African countries to develop the renewable energy sector, particularly in solar energy. At the same time, India is also providing skill training for harnessing renewable energy. Way back in 2022, India has also signed an agreement with Morocco for energy (Economic Times, 2023; PIB, 2022).

In recent years, North Africa has been witnessing a new form of "security dilemma" as discussed above, largely due to power rivalry between the US and Russia, as well as the Arab-Israel conflict. In this context, there is a need for greater stability in the North African region. For instance, peace and stability on the Mediterranean Coast are essential for trade and development and are of mutual interest to India and Russia. Hence, there is a need for growing cooperation between India and Russia in the North African region to stabilise the geopolitical situation (Ibid; Mohapatra, 2024; Merrie and Abdessalam Jald, 2024).

By strengthening India's outreach in the Mediterranean coast, New Delhi will not only be able to strengthen relations with North African countries but also with the European Mediterranean countries, as discussed above. In this regard, a number of Mediterranean countries are also keen to strengthen relations with Russia to strengthen their energy security. The fissures within the trans-Atlantic alliances also provide an opportunity for India, Russia, and other Mediterranean and North African countries to form a new kind of security cooperation (Mohapatra, 2025).

Over the years, the North African region has been a hotbed of radical Islamist extremism. In this regard, it can be mentioned that the radical Islamist group Islamic Brotherhood Movement originated in Egypt in 1928 and has spread its extremist ideology, thus providing fertile soil for the growth of terrorist groups in different parts of the world. It is also a fact that in the North African region, along with West Asia, radical and terror groups like ISIS originated and are still operating. The Syrian crisis, as well as the post-Gaddafi Libya, further emboldened the ISIS terror groups. Another radical and terrorist group, Al Qaida, is also operating in North Africa (Atieh and Kozykina, 2019; Rubin, 2012; Podkopaeva, 2016). Both India and Russia are facing growing threats to their respective national security from these terrorist groups, which originated in the North Africa and West Asia region (Merrie and AbdessalamJald, 2024; Ibid).

India, by strengthening its presence in the North African region, particularly in the Mediterranean Basin, will also be able to checkmate Turkey. It is a known fact that Turkey, through its unholy nexus with Pakistan and Azerbaijan, is posing a strong challenge to India's national security. Similarly, in the North African region, Turkey is also posing a strong threat by patronising radical and terrorist forces. As studies suggest, Turkey wants to play the role of the neo-Ottoman Empire in this part of the world under the leadership of its President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. To achieve its goal, Ankara is funding and cultivating radical and terrorist groups through the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHF) (Mohapatra, 2025; Rubin, 2019). Thus, there is a need for growing cooperation between India and Russia, along with the North African countries, to combat the menace of terrorism, extremism, and radicalisation (Ibid; Merrie and AbdessalamJald, 2024). Like Russia, India also actively supported Egypt's membership in the enlarged BRICS. Similarly, India and Russia opposed the UN resolution on

Responsibility to Protect (R2P) imposed on Libya. It may be recalled here that India, Russia, and North African countries like Egypt share a common view on reforming multilateralism, including the United Nations (Thakur, 2011; Economic Times, 2024a).

It is a fact that the North African region is going to play an important role in global geopolitics in the foreseeable future. This is primarily due to its strategic location. Hence, Russia, despite its preoccupation with its war against Ukraine and facing tough Western sanctions, cannot simply ignore its protection and promotion of both geopolitical and geo-economic interests. Though it is facing tough competition from its Cold War foe, the US, and more recently, China. This is because, like the US, China is keen to enter the market of the North African countries in a big way, as highlighted above. This will provide a subtle challenge to Russia's historic role in this part of the world (Talbot and Dalia Ghanem, 2023). In this context, both India and Russia can cooperate effectively in the North African region. Already, India has a good bonhomie in North African countries, particularly with Egypt, which can be traced back to the Non-Aligned Movement era. The visit of the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, to Egypt in June 2023 can be considered a milestone. During the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Egypt, the relationship was elevated into a "Strategic Partnership". Being a key nation on the Mediterranean coast and also having connectivity with the Indian Ocean through the Red Sea, Egypt also plays an important role in North African geopolitics. Similarly, both India and Russia have common interests along with Egypt in this part of the Indian Ocean adjoining the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. In this context, India and Egypt can be a factor in promoting greater cooperation in the trade and security arena (Hindustan Times, 2023; Mohapatra, 2024; Mohapatra, 2025; Business Standard, 2025a). It is also a fact that India, Russia, and Egypt are part of BRICS. Similarly, in SCO, Egypt is a dialogue partner. This, in fact, can provide a base for fostering trilateral cooperation in the North African region (Mohapatra, 2025; Economic Times, 2024a; SIS, 2025).

It may be recalled here that when the Pakistan-sponsored terrorist group the Resistant Front (having affiliation to dreaded terror group Lasker-e-Toiba (LeT)) carried out an attack on innocent tourists, which resulted in the death of 26 innocent civilians at Pehalgam, in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the North African countries like Egypt and Algeria strongly condemned the barbaric terror attack

on innocent civilians. Russia also strongly condemned the terror attack at Pehalgam (PIB, 2025; Economic Times, 2025; Newsonair, 2025; ND TV, 2025).

The visit of India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Morocco in September 2025 resulted in the signing of a series of defence agreements. This includes exports of Indian defence products, including hi-tech technology, to Morocco. The visit has also resulted in the strategic development in the "Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean" (PIB, 2025a). Similarly, the joint military exercises conducted by India and Egypt in the Egyptian port of Alexandria as part of Operation Bright Star 2025 are a step in the direction of forging strategic cooperation. This move will beef up India's presence in the Mediterranean Sea (PIB, 2025b). Through this move, India can checkmate Turkey, which, as discussed above, poses a substantial threat to India's security. Similarly, to get a greater preponderance in the Mediterranean geopolitics, India should also collaborate with other countries of the North African region (Mohapatra, 2025).

From the foregoing analysis, it can be stated that India is becoming a major player in the North African geopolitics along with Russia.

Conclusion

One can draw three inferences while locating the relations between Russia and the North African region. These are historical, geopolitical, and geo-economic in nature. The Soviet geopolitical thinkers realised the importance of the North African region in expanding Soviet geopolitical interests. By strengthening its foothold in North African geopolitics, Soviet policy analysts thought they could strengthen Moscow's influence on the vast African continent as well as in West Asia. In the post-Soviet space, the same geopolitical thinking is also continuing. The same can be observed in the context of Russian foreign policy as Moscow is pursuing an assertive foreign policy, especially under the leadership of President Putin, to strengthen its sphere of influence. This was being done to tame Russia's traditional geopolitical rival, the US. In this context, Russia's core geopolitical interest lies in protecting its interests in the Mediterranean Sea, which connects the Black Sea, an important sea gateway for Russia to transport its oil and gas as well as food to the external market, and maintain its strategic preponderance in this part of the world. In this context, Russia has strengthened its military presence on the Mediterranean Sea Coast over

the years. This helps Russia to manoeuvre the geopolitics of not only North Africa but also the whole African continent, as well as West Asia. In this context, Russia has a more profound interest in the geopolitics of North Africa. Even in the domestic political process of North Africa, Russia is taking a keen interest in stabilising the region's domestic political process. In this context, there is a need for Russia to reorient its relations with the North African countries.

Since both India and Russia have common interests in North African geopolitics, there is a need for cooperation between the two countries in this part of the world. This will promote greater regional peace and security in this region.

Notes

[29]The Greater Middle East geopolitical framework, which the United States proposed in 2004, extends from Yemen to North Africa, which also includes West Asia, Central Asia, and Pakistan (Wittes 2004; Hass 2006). The basic policy framework of the Greater Middle East was "Democracy Promotion", "Democracy Assistance", "Civil Society participation", etc. (Ibid). The Greater Middle East further enunciated "Building a knowledge society, and Expanding economic opportunities" (Al Hayat, 2004).

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Between Assertion and Accommodation: Brahminical Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab

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1. Introduction

Caste continues to remain a powerful social force in contemporary Punjab despite the popular perception of Sikh egalitarianism. The Sikh religious tradition, as articulated in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, explicitly rejects caste distinctions and upholds ideals of equality, dignity, and collective belonging (McLeod, 2000; Singh, 2010). Yet in practice, caste hierarchies remain entrenched in Punjab's social and political fabric. Dalits, comprising Scheduled Castes such as the Chamars, Mazhabi Sikhs, and Valmikis, constitute nearly 32% of Punjab's population, the highest proportion among all Indian states (Jodhka, 2014). Despite their demographic weight, Dalits in Punjab continue to be marginalized in landholding patterns, political representation, and religious authority (Judge, 2014; Ram, 2008). Landlessness, in particular, remains a structural barrier to Dalit empowerment, as over 85% of cultivable land is controlled by upper castes, while Dalits largely survive as agricultural laborers or migrant workers (Singh, 2016).

Scholarship on Dalits in Punjab has emphasized three key strategies of resistance and identity assertion. The first is **religious conversion**, inspired by B. R. Ambedkar's rejection of caste Hinduism. While conversion to Buddhism in Punjab has not reached the scale of Maharashtra, there are small but significant movements toward (Webster, Christianity and Buddhism, particularly among Chamars and Valmikis

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2007). The second is the **growth of deras**, socio-religious institutions that provide alternative spaces for worship, community, and dignity to Dalits excluded from Sikh gurdwaras and Hindu temples (Juergensmeyer, 1982; Ronki Ram, 2008). The third is the **assertion of distinct religious and cultural identities**, such as the rise of the Ravidassia community after the Vienna incident of 2009, when followers of Guru Ravidas declared a separate religious identity distinct from Sikhism (Judge, 2014). These strategies reflect Dalit efforts to move beyond social exclusion and assert cultural autonomy.

However, one relatively underexplored phenomenon in Punjab is **Brahminical Sanskritisation**, the adoption of upper-caste rituals, symbols, and practices by Dalits as a strategy for upward mobility. Originally theorized by M. N. Srinivas (1956), Sanskritisation refers to the process by which lower castes emulate the practices of upper castes, such as vegetarianism, temple worship, or the performance of Brahminical rituals, to claim higher social status. While Srinivas's The formulation was rooted in studies of caste in South India; the concept has wider applicability across the subcontinent. In Punjab, where Sikh egalitarianism coexists with entrenched caste exclusion, Sanskritisation appears in complex and contradictory forms. For instance, Dalits who identify as Sikhs may nonetheless adopt Hindu rituals in weddings or funerals, participate in Brahminical festivals, or employ Brahmin priests to perform ceremonies (Puri, 2003). Such practices raise questions about the persistence of Brahminical cultural codes even in a context where Sikh and Dalit-led movements have sought to undermine them.

The appeal of Sanskritisation lies in its promise of **respectability and symbolic recognition** within a caste-stratified society. By adopting "higher" rituals, Dalits may seek to distance themselves from stigma and gain partial acceptance in village social life. Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural and symbolic capital is useful here: rituals, dietary habits, and modes of worship function as markers of distinction that may translate into recognition and prestige. At the same time, Gramsci's (1971) notion of **cultural hegemony** warns us that such adoption of dominant practices may reinforce the authority of the upper castes by legitimizing their cultural codes as universal. From this perspective, Sanskritisation appears less as resistance and more as accommodation.

This raises important questions. Does Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab genuinely lead to transformation in social status, or does it reinforce caste hierarchies by reproducing Brahminical ideals of purity

and hierarchy? How do Dalits reconcile Sanskritisation with alternative strategies of assertion such as Ambedkarite politics, conversion, and Ravidassia identity? And to what extent is Sanskritisation a generational or class-based phenomenon, with older Dalits practicing accommodation while younger Dalits embrace assertion through education, migration, and digital activism? (Natrajan & Singh, 2012)

By addressing these questions, this paper situates Sanskritisation as a critical but overlooked dimension of Dalit strategies in Punjab. Rather than viewing it as a simple imitation of upper-caste norms, the paper argues that Sanskritisation represents a complex negotiation between assertion and accommodation, dignity and dependence, tradition and modernity. Understanding this dynamic is essential to grasping the layered ways in which Dalits navigate Punjab's caste society and imagine pathways to social justice.

2. Literature Review

The study of caste and Dalit assertion in Punjab has received increasing attention in the last few decades, particularly as scholars have sought to understand the paradox of caste persistence in a region historically associated with Sikh egalitarianism. This literature review situates the present inquiry within four strands of scholarship: (a) caste and social exclusion in Punjab, (b) Dalit religiosity and deras, (c) identity formation and the Ravidassia movement, and (d) Sanskritisation as an underexplored dimension.

2.1 Caste and Social Exclusion in Punjab

Punjab has long been portrayed as a "casteless" or less caste-ridden society because of Sikh teachings, but empirical research demonstrates the continued salience of caste in everyday life (Judge, 2014; Jodhka, 2014). Dalits form the largest proportion of the state's population—nearly 32%—but hold less than 5% of agricultural land, with most confined to landless wage labor (Singh, 2016). Segregated residential patterns in villages, exclusion from dominant caste gurdwaras, and discrimination in access to water and cremation grounds continue despite formal equality (Ram, 2008). Jodhka (2014) shows how agrarian capitalism in Punjab has deepened Dalit dependence, as mechanization reduced agricultural labor opportunities while upper castes maintained a monopoly over land. Scholars such as Puri (2003) trace the structural nature of exclusion back to Sikh history itself, arguing that caste survived

Sikhism's egalitarian doctrine through institutional compromise with agrarian hierarchies.

2.2 Dalit Religiosity and Deras

A substantial body of literature explores the role of deras—religious sects led by charismatic gurus—in providing alternative spaces for Dalits. Juergens Meyer (1982) argues that deras offered spiritual dignity to those excluded from orthodox Sikh and Hindu spaces. Ronki Ram (2008) extends this analysis by showing how deras such as Dera Sachkhand Ballan became not only spiritual but also political spaces, mobilizing Dalits for recognition and rights. Judge (2014) notes that deras function as hubs of social capital, enabling Dalits to create solidarities beyond their fragmented caste groups. At the same time, deras have been sites of contestation: Sikh orthodox bodies like the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) often accuse them of heresy, while political parties court deras during elections (Kumar, 2012).

2.3 Ravidassia Identity and Assertion

The Vienna incident of 2009, in which a Ravidassia guru was killed in Austria, became a turning point in Dalit identity politics in Punjab. In its aftermath, followers of Guru Ravidas declared a separate Ravidassia religion, rejecting Sikh authority (Judge, 2014). This assertion was seen as a rejection of "inclusionary marginalization" within Sikhism (Ram, 2012). The Ravidassia movement exemplifies what scholars call "counter-hegemonic religiosity," whereby marginalized groups construct their own religious traditions (Natrajan & Singh, 2012). Scholars note that Ravidassia's assertion has been bolstered by diaspora networks, particularly in the Doab region, where overseas Dalits fund deras and community projects (Tatla, 2014).

2.4 Conversion and Ambedkarite Influence

Ambedkar's rejection of caste Hinduism has influenced Dalits across India. While large-scale Buddhist conversion in Punjab is rare, scholars note smaller movements among Chamars and Valmikis (Webster, 2007). Ambedkarite thought circulates through literature, student politics, and digital activism, offering a critique of Sanskritisation as a strategy of "slave mentality" (Ambedkar, 2014). However, unlike Maharashtra, Punjab's Dalit assertion has been less centered on Buddhism and more on deras and Ravidassia religiosity (Judge, 2014).

2.5 Sanskritisation: Neglected in Punjab Studies

The concept of Sanskritisation, coined by M. N. Srinivas (1956), describes how lower castes adopt upper-caste rituals and practices to seek higher status. While widely studied in South India and North India (Gupta, 2000), its presence in Punjab has been less systematically explored. Puri (2003) notes instances of Dalits employing Brahmin priests for weddings, while Singh (2016) documents dietary changes such as vegetarianism among upwardly mobile Dalit families. Yet most scholarship on Dalit religiosity in Punjab has privileged deras.

2.6 Ravidassia assertion, leaving Sanskritisation relatively neglected.

This gap is significant because Sanskritisation represents a different modality of Dalit response: not open resistance or counter-assertion, but **accommodation** to dominant norms. As Bourdieu (1986) would suggest, the adoption of Brahminical practices constitutes a form of cultural capital, signaling refinement and "purity." However, whether this translates into genuine mobility is contested. Gramsci's (1971) notion of cultural hegemony implies that Sanskritisation may reproduce caste hierarchies by legitimizing upper-caste culture as normative.

While deras and Ravidassia assertions have been extensively studied, the subtle but persistent phenomenon of Sanskritisation among Punjab's Dalits has not received adequate scholarly attention. By foregrounding this dimension, the present paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Dalit strategies in Punjab—strategies that oscillate between **assertion and accommodation, dignity and dependence, counter-hegemony and cultural assimilation**.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs a **multi-theoretical framework** that combines (a) Srinivas's theory of Sanskritisation, (b) Bourdieu's concept of cultural and symbolic capital, (c) Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and (d) Ambedkarite critique of assimilation.

3.1 Sanskritisation (M. N. Srinivas)

Srinivas (1956) defined Sanskritisation as the process by which "a low Hindu caste, tribe, or other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste." For Dalits in Punjab, Sanskritisation manifests in dietary change,

temple patronage, and ritual adoption. This framework highlights Sanskritisation as a **status-seeking mechanism**, but critics argue that it offers symbolic mobility without structural change (Gupta, 2000).

3.2 Cultural and Symbolic Capital (Pierre Bourdieu)

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between economic, cultural, and social capital. Cultural practices—rituals, dietary habits, marriage customs—function as resources that confer symbolic capital, or recognition. For Dalits, adopting Brahminical practices may increase social respectability, even if economic and political subordination persists. Bourdieu's framework helps explain why Dalits invest in Sanskritisation despite limited material returns: it provides **symbolic recognition**.

3.3 Cultural Hegemony (Antonio Gramsci)

Gramsci (1971) argued that ruling classes maintain dominance not merely through coercion but by securing consent through cultural hegemony. Sanskritisation can be seen as a form of consent, where Dalits internalize Brahminical norms as desirable. This perspective emphasizes the **contradictory nature** of Sanskritisation: while it may provide symbolic dignity, it also reinforces the cultural dominance of upper castes.

3.4 Ambedkarite Critique

B. R. Ambedkar (2014) rejected Sanskritisation outright, arguing that emulating upper-caste practices could never dismantle caste but only reproduce it. His vision of emancipation required rejecting Brahminical codes altogether through conversion and radical social reform. Ambedkar's critique provides the **normative yardstick** against which Sanskritisation is assessed: is it emancipation, or is it submission?

3.5 Synthesis

By combining these frameworks, this study conceptualizes Sanskritisation in Punjab as a **field of negotiation**: a site where Dalits seek recognition (Bourdieu), reproduce hegemony (Gramsci), aspire to mobility (Srinivas), but also confront its limits (Ambedkar). This multi-layered approach allows us to see Sanskritisation not as imitation but as an ambivalent strategy situated between **assertion and accommodation**.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, conceptual research design that relies on secondary sources rather than primary field data. It draws from existing sociological and anthropological scholarship on caste in Punjab (Judge, 2014; Jodhka, 2002; Ram, 2008), theoretical contributions such as Srinivas's (1956) notion of Sanskritisation, Bourdieu's (1986) ideas of cultural and symbolic capital, and Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, alongside Ambedkar's (2014) critique of caste reproduction. The approach is interpretive, analyzing how rituals, dietary changes, naming practices, and marriage customs function as symbolic markers of identity and mobility. To illustrate the phenomenon, the study develops hypothetical case pointers—for instance, Dalit villages in the Doab region where Ravidas siaderas and Hindu temples coexist, diaspora families adopting vegetarianism while supporting deras back home, and Dalit women navigating purity codes differently than men. These illustrative cases are heuristic rather than empirical, intended to highlight tensions between assertion and accommodation in Dalit strategies. The analysis uses a critical-interpretive lens (Geertz, 1973) to situate practices of Brahminical Sanskritisation within wider structures of caste, culture, and power, while acknowledging the limitations of relying solely on secondary sources. Although the absence of ethnographic fieldwork constrains the ability to capture lived experiences and localized variations, this conceptual framework provides a foundation for future empirical research and opens up a neglected dimension of Dalit social mobility in Punjab.

5. Historical Background

The caste system in Punjab presents a paradoxical social landscape. On one hand, Sikhism—the dominant religion of Punjab—arose as a critique of Brahminical ritualism and social stratification, preaching equality and the irrelevance of caste in spiritual life (Puri, 2003). The Sikh Gurus explicitly rejected notions of purity and pollution, and institutions like the *langar* (community kitchen) sought to break caste barriers by encouraging collective eating. However, despite these doctrinal ideals, caste has continued to shape Punjab's rural economy, religious institutions, and social interactions. The persistence of caste within a religion that preaches egalitarianism highlights the deep entrenchment of social hierarchies in everyday life.

Dalits in Punjab constitute about 32% of the population—the highest proportion in India (Judge, 2014). Yet, this demographic strength has not translated into proportionate social, economic, or political power. Dalits in Punjab are disproportionately landless, often employed as agricultural laborers or engaged in low-paying service sector jobs. The control of land and agrarian resources remains in the hands of dominant castes such as Jat Sikhs, who, despite being part of a religion that doctrinally rejects caste, continue to maintain endogamous practices and enforce social hierarchies (Jodhka, 2014).

Unlike Maharashtra, where Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's call for mass conversion to Buddhism provided a large-scale alternative identity, Punjab saw limited conversion to Buddhism. Instead, Punjab witnessed the rise of other strategies of Dalit assertion. The *dera* phenomenon is one such example, where Dalits found spiritual solace and social recognition in religious centers led by charismatic leaders outside the mainstream Sikh religious hierarchy (Juergensmeyer, 1988). Deras, especially in the Doab region, offered both symbolic and material support, including community halls, international networks through the Dalit diaspora, and religious identity distinct from caste-ridden Sikh gurdwaras. Similarly, the Ravidassia community began asserting its independent identity, especially after the 2009 assassination of Sant Ramanand in Vienna, which catalyzed the formal declaration of the Ravidassia religion (Ram, 2008).

Within this historical context, Brahminical Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab represents another, though less studied, form of negotiation with caste hierarchies. Sanskritisation, a term coined by M. N. Srinivas (1956), refers to the process by which lower castes seek upward mobility by imitating the practices, rituals, and customs of higher castes. While conversion and dera movements represent counter-hegemonic strategies, Sanskritisation reflects an accommodationist approach, attempting to secure acceptance within the existing caste order. In Punjab, this dynamic is particularly striking because of the tension between Sikh egalitarian ideals, the persistence of caste in practice, and Dalit strategies that oscillate between assertion and accommodation.

Thus, the historical background sets the stage for understanding how Brahminical Sanskritisation operates in Punjab not as a dominant mode of Dalit resistance, but as a subtle and often underexplored practice that interacts with other modes of assertion and survival.

6. Practices of Brahminical Sanskritisation

The everyday practices of Brahminical Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab illustrate how cultural codes and rituals are deployed as tools for negotiating social hierarchies. These practices range from religious rituals and dietary reforms to symbolic gestures such as naming and temple patronage.

***6.1 Ritual Practices*:** One of the most visible forms of Sanskritisation is the adoption of Hindu-style rituals. While Sikhism prescribes distinct practices such as the *Anand Karaj* for weddings and shuns ritualistic offerings, many Dalit families increasingly incorporate Hindu elements into their life-cycle ceremonies. This includes inviting Brahmin priests to officiate weddings, reciting Sanskrit mantras, and performing *pujas* or *havans* (Jodhka, 2014). These ritual adoptions serve as cultural markers of respectability, signaling that Dalit families are willing to align themselves with upper-caste norms.

6.2 Dietary Practices: Dietary reforms are another significant dimension of Sanskritisation. Vegetarianism, often associated with notions of purity and moral superiority in Hindu culture, is adopted by certain Dalit families in Punjab. This is particularly evident among Dalit diaspora families who, while funding deras and Ravidassia institutions abroad, simultaneously adopt vegetarian diets to assert cultural respectability in local and transnational contexts (Judge, 2014). In Punjab's villages, some Dalit families renounce meat consumption during festivals and religious occasions to align with Brahminical ideals of sanctity.

6.3 Marriage Practices: Marriage rituals have also undergone Sanskritisation. Traditionally, Sikh marriages are performed through the *Anand Karaj* ceremony, centered on reciting hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. However, many Dalit families increasingly opt for rituals that incorporate Hindu customs, such as *kanyadaan* (the ritual of giving away the bride), the use of sacred fire, and the chanting of Sanskrit mantras (Ram, 2008). These practices are symbolic attempts to emulate higher-caste models of matrimonial respectability.

6.4 Naming and Symbolism: The adoption of Sanskritised names and honorifics also illustrates this trend. Dalit families sometimes choose Sanskrit-derived names for their children to distance themselves from caste-based markers of identity. Similarly, the use of titles such as "Sharma" or "Pandit" in everyday interactions represents symbolic

efforts at gaining recognition, even if such gestures do not necessarily change social realities (Jodhka, 2014).

6.5 Temple Patronage: Dalit participation in Hindu temple rituals—often alongside their attendance at deras—further demonstrates Sanskritisation in practice. While deras provide counter-hegemonic spaces, temple patronage illustrates attempts at co-presence within Brahminical religious institutions. Such dual participation reveals the complex strategies of accommodation and assertion simultaneously at work.

From a theoretical lens, these practices may be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural and symbolic capital. By adopting Brahminical rituals, Dalits attempt to accumulate symbolic capital that may translate into limited recognition or social acceptance. Yet, as Bourdieu warns, cultural capital is always constrained by structural power relations, meaning that ritual imitation may secure symbolic respectability without altering material hierarchies.

7. Contradictions and Tensions

The practice of Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab embodies deep contradictions. While it offers symbolic avenues for recognition, it simultaneously reinforces the very hierarchies it seeks to overcome. These contradictions can be analyzed at three levels: structural limitations, intra-community debates, and generational tensions.

7.1 Structural Limitations: Despite adopting upper-caste practices, Dalits continue to face systemic barriers. Landlessness remains a critical marker of marginality in rural Punjab, with Dalits often excluded from landownership and dependent on dominant caste landlords (Judge, 2014). Similarly, political power remains concentrated among Jat Sikhs, and Dalits rarely occupy influential leadership positions within mainstream religious institutions, such as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). This highlights the limited capacity of Sanskritisation to address the structural roots of exclusion. Ritual adoption may provide symbolic respectability, but it does not transform access to land, economic resources, or political representation.

7.2 Intra-Community Debates : Sanskritisation also generates debates within Dalit communities. For some, particularly older generations, Sanskritisation is viewed as a pragmatic strategy that enables smoother social interactions and limited accommodation within the caste order. However, Ambedkarite activists and Ravidassia leaders often

critique Sanskritisation as a regressive strategy that legitimizes Brahminical hegemony. B.R. Ambedkar himself described Sanskritisation as a "slave's strategy," arguing that true liberation for Dalits lay in rejecting caste altogether, not in imitating its structures (Ambedkar, 2014).

7.4 Generational Tensions: Generational differences further complicate this picture. Younger Dalits, particularly those engaged with digital activism and Ambedkarite discourse, often reject Sanskritisation outright. Online platforms such as Ambedkarite YouTube channels and diaspora-led forums amplify critiques of ritual imitation and promote alternative forms of assertion rooted in dignity and equality (Raman, 2022). In contrast, older generations may continue to embrace Sanskritisation as a strategy of social navigation in everyday village life.

7.5 Assertion vs. Accommodation: These tensions also reflect a broader contradiction between assertion and accommodation. On one hand, Ravidassia and dera movements explicitly assert Dalit autonomy by rejecting Brahminical dominance and creating counter-hegemonic spaces of worship. On the other hand, Sanskritisation represents accommodation, signaling partial consent to Brahminical cultural codes. From a Gramscian perspective, Sanskritisation illustrates the workings of cultural hegemony, where subordinated groups adopt dominant ideologies as common sense, even when such ideologies perpetuate inequality (Gramsci, 1971).

Ultimately, Sanskritisation in Punjab embodies a dual character: it is both a strategy of survival and an illustration of the contradictions inherent in Dalit social mobility. While it offers symbolic avenues of respectability, it cannot substitute for structural transformation. Its coexistence with more radical forms of Dalit assertion—such as Ambedkarite politics, Ravidassia identity, and digital activism, highlights the diversity and complexity of Dalit strategies in contemporary Punjab.

8. Discussion

The phenomenon of Brahminical Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab must be understood as a complex, contradictory, and deeply contextualized practice that reveals both the possibilities and the limitations of strategies for social mobility. On the surface, Sanskritisation seems to offer a pathway for Dalits to acquire symbolic recognition and respectability in local hierarchies. However, a deeper

examination suggests that this practice not only reinforces caste norms but also coexists uneasily with other forms of Dalit assertion, particularly Ambedkarite politics and Ravidassia identity formation. In this section, we critically analyze these dynamics through the lenses of historical sociology, cultural theory, and Dalit critiques.

8.1 Sanskritisation as Symbolic Mobility

M. N. Srinivas' (1952) concept of Sanskritisation has long been debated within Indian sociology as a framework for understanding how marginalized groups adopt upper-caste practices to elevate their social status. In Punjab, Dalits' turn to Brahminical rituals—such as vegetarianism, Brahmin-led weddings, or temple patronage—can be seen as efforts to accrue what Bourdieu (1986) terms **symbolic capital**. This form of capital does not guarantee material transformation, but it provides markers of cultural distinction that are socially legible to dominant groups. For example, a Dalit family adopting vegetarianism or hiring a Brahmin priest for ceremonies may expect greater acceptance within village society, even if this does not translate into landownership or structural power.

Yet symbolic mobility has inherent fragility. While upper-caste neighbors may accept these gestures on a superficial level, Dalits remain structurally excluded from positions of authority in both agrarian and religious institutions (Judge, 2014). The process, therefore, reflects Gramsci's (1971) concept of **cultural hegemony**—whereby subaltern groups internalize dominant cultural codes as a way of seeking recognition, even though such adoption reinforces the very hierarchies that oppress them.

8.2 Contradictions within Dalit Strategies

The adoption of Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab is especially paradoxical given the region's history of alternative strategies of assertion. Sikhism, in its doctrinal origins, explicitly rejected caste and ritual hierarchy, providing a potential egalitarian platform (Puri, 2003). However, caste persisted in Sikh society, limiting the scope of doctrinal equality. In response, Dalits turned to the creation of **Deras**—religious centers led by non-Brahmin leaders, often with a strong Dalit following (Juergens meyer, 1988). These deras, particularly the Ravidassiaderas, provided spaces of dignity and counter-hegemonic religiosity, where Dalits could reject Brahminical authority altogether.

In contrast, Sanskritisation represents a strategy of **accommodation** rather than resistance. While deras and Ambedkarite politics aim to construct an autonomous identity for Dalits, Sanskritisation seeks legitimacy within existing hierarchies. This creates deep internal contradictions: Dalits simultaneously assert autonomy through the growth of Ravidassia identity while practicing Brahminical rituals that signal consent to caste dominance.

Such contradictions are generational as well as ideological. Older Dalits may view Sanskritisation as a pragmatic survival strategy in a society still governed by caste hierarchies, while younger Dalits influenced by Ambedkarite thought, diaspora exposure, and digital activism increasingly critique it as regressive (Raman, 2022). This generational divide highlights the contested nature of Sanskritisation within Dalit communities themselves.

8.3 The Gendered Dimension of Sanskritisation

Another critical aspect of Sanskritisation in Punjab is its gendered impact. Ritual codes of purity and pollution often affect women more directly than men. For instance, the adoption of vegetarianism or ritual purity rules in households may disproportionately shape women's labor in cooking, ritual observance, and social reproduction. Similarly, marriage practices involving Brahmin priests or dowry-like expenditures may place economic and cultural burdens on Dalit women (Kumar, 2018). While men may benefit from the symbolic capital of Sanskritisation in public life, women bear the private costs of adhering to these rituals.

At the same time, Dalit women's involvement in deras and Ravidassia movements reflects a different trajectory, one that emphasizes dignity and participation in collective religious assertion rather than conformity to upper-caste norms (Ram, 2008). The gendered contradictions of Sanskritisation thus underscore its uneven effects within Dalit households.

8.4 Diaspora Dynamics and Transnational Flows

The Dalit diaspora, particularly in the Doab region, plays a significant role in shaping Sanskritisation practices. Many diaspora families adopt vegetarianism abroad, not merely as a health choice but as a marker of social respectability within transnational Punjabi communities (Tatla, 1999). At the same time, these families often fund deras back home,

which represents counter-hegemonic spaces rejecting caste dominance. This dual engagement—embracing Sanskritisation abroad while supporting anti-caste religiosity in Punjab—reveals the hybrid strategies Dalits deploy in navigating caste both locally and globally.

This transnational dimension complicates the picture of Sanskritisation: it is not simply a local strategy but part of broader global negotiations of caste identity, shaped by diaspora prestige, remittances, and digital activism. The symbolic practices of Sanskritisation, therefore, intersect with global flows of culture, religion, and capital.

8.5 Limits of Sanskritisation in Addressing Structural Inequality

Despite its symbolic value, Sanskritisation has limited impact on the material realities of Dalits in Punjab. Landlessness remains the defining structural barrier, as Dalits hold less than 5% of agricultural land despite comprising nearly one-third of the population (Judge, 2014). Political representation remains skewed, with Dalits often mobilized as vote banks rather than autonomous actors (Jodhka, 2014). Religious authority also continues to be monopolized by upper castes, with Dalits largely excluded from Sikh gurdwara management and Hindu temple priesthood.

In this sense, Sanskritisation functions more as a coping mechanism than a transformative strategy. It allows Dalits to negotiate everyday dignity but fails to dismantle structural hierarchies. Ambedkar's critique that Sanskritisation is a "slave's strategy" (Ambedkar, 2014) resonates strongly here: rather than challenging the roots of inequality, it reinforces them by accepting the superiority of Brahminical cultural codes.

8.6 Alternative Pathways: Assertion and Resistance

While Sanskritisation persists, alternative pathways of Dalit assertion in Punjab reveal more transformative potential. The growth of Ravidassia identity, particularly after the 2009 Vienna attack on a Ravidassiadera leader, has marked a significant rupture with both Sikh and Hindu dominance. By declaring the Ravidassia religion as separate, Dalits articulated a distinct spiritual and cultural identity that resists assimilation (Ram, 2012). Similarly, Ambedkarite activism, though less widespread in Punjab than in Maharashtra, continues to provide ideological resources for rejecting Sanskritisation.

Digital activism and youth mobilization represent another emerging pathway. Young Dalits increasingly use social media to challenge caste

hierarchies, articulate Ambedkarite critiques, and mobilize around issues of dignity and rights (Raman, 2022). This form of activism may weaken the appeal of Sanskritisation, as it creates alternative sources of recognition not dependent on Brahminical norms.

8.7 Revisiting Theories through Punjab's Experience

Punjab's experience with Dalit Sanskritisation requires a rethinking of existing theoretical frameworks. While Srinivas' model of Sanskritisation explains the mechanics of ritual adoption, it fails to account for the simultaneous assertion of counter-hegemonic identities. Bourdieu's (1986) notion of symbolic capital helps illuminate why Dalits adopt these practices, but it does not explain the persistence of structural inequalities despite cultural conformity. Gramsci's (1971) framework of cultural hegemony is useful in highlighting the consent involved in adopting dominant norms, yet it underplays the active resistance visible in deras and digital spaces.

Thus, a more nuanced framework is needed—one that recognizes Sanskritisation not as a linear path to upward mobility but as part of a **plural field of strategies**, where accommodation, assertion, and resistance coexist. This pluralism reflects the heterogeneity of Dalit experiences in Punjab and resists any singular explanation of their social mobility.

8.8 Toward an Alternative Dalit Agenda

The persistence of Sanskritisation underscores the dilemmas of Dalit strategies in Punjab. While it provides short-term respectability, it does not dismantle structural inequalities. The alternative lies in articulating a Dalit agenda that transcends both assimilation and symbolic recognition. Such an agenda must integrate Ambedkarite critiques of caste, the assertion of independent religiosity through Ravidassia and dera traditions, and the possibilities of digital and transnational activism.

Importantly, this agenda must also be attentive to gender, ensuring that Dalit women's agency is not sidelined in the pursuit of symbolic capital. It must connect symbolic struggles with material demands—such as land redistribution, political autonomy, and equitable access to education and resources. Only then can Dalit assertion in Punjab move beyond the limitations of Sanskritisation toward a more substantive transformation.

The discussion demonstrates that Brahminical Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab is neither a straightforward strategy of mobility nor a relic of tradition. Instead, it is a **contested, contradictory, and dynamic process** that coexists with counter-hegemonic assertions. While it offers symbolic respectability, it leaves structural hierarchies intact and often reinforces caste domination. The emergence of alternative identities—Ravidassia, Ambedkarite, and digital—signals that Dalits are not passive recipients of Brahminical codes but active negotiators of identity, dignity, and mobility. Understanding Sanskritisation in Punjab thus requires moving beyond linear theories and embracing the plurality of Dalit strategies in their struggle for equality.

9. Conclusion

The phenomenon of Brahminical Sanskritisation among Dalits in Punjab reveals the complex and often contradictory strategies employed by marginalized communities to navigate entrenched caste hierarchies. While Sikhism historically rejected caste and ritual distinctions, social realities in Punjab demonstrate the persistence of caste-based exclusions in access to land, political power, and religious authority. Within this context, Dalits have pursued multiple pathways to negotiate dignity and mobility: embracing Ambedkarite politics, building counter-hegemonic spaces through deras, asserting Ravidassia identity, and, as this study highlights, adopting Sanskritised cultural practices.

The evidence suggests that Sanskritisation offers Dalits only limited and symbolic recognition, often translating into respectability at the local level without addressing structural inequalities. Practices such as vegetarianism, the use of Brahmin priests for rituals, and participation in temple culture reflect attempts to accumulate symbolic capital, but they rarely dismantle entrenched patterns of landlessness, economic dependence, or political exclusion. Instead, Sanskritisation risks reinforcing the very hierarchies it seeks to overcome by legitimizing Brahminical ideals of purity and hierarchy.

At the same time, Sanskritisation must not be dismissed outright as mere capitulation. It reflects the agency of Dalit communities negotiating within restricted social and cultural fields. For many, especially older generations, it offers a pragmatic means of survival and partial acceptance, while for younger Dalits influenced by Ambedkarite discourse, it appears regressive. This generational divide highlights the

shifting nature of Dalit identity politics in Punjab, where digital activism and transnational networks increasingly promote counter-hegemonic alternatives.

Ultimately, the persistence of Sanskritisation underscores both the adaptability and the contradictions of Dalit strategies in Punjab. Its coexistence with Dera culture, Ravidassia assertion, and Ambedkarite critiques points to the need for a more nuanced understanding of Dalit mobility—one that acknowledges both accommodation and resistance within a caste-bound society.

Clarification: The caste names mentioned in this article are used solely for academic and research purposes. Any inconvenience caused by this academic exercise is sincerely regretted.

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Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar: Violation of Human Rights

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Introduction

The Rohingya Muslims, an ethnic minority group predominantly residing in the western state of Rakhine in Myanmar, have long been marginalized and subjected to discrimination. They possess a distinct cultural and religious identity, with their roots tracing back centuries in the region. According to the United Nations, the Rohingya are considered one of the world's most persecuted minorities. They practice Sunni Islam and have their own language, customs, and traditions, which set them apart from the majority Buddhist population of Myanmar (IOM, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The Rohingya crisis has gained international attention due to the severe human rights abuses and the scale of violence committed against the Rohingya population. The Rohingya have been subjected to a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing, characterized by widespread killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and the destruction of their homes and villages. The United Nations has described the violence as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (UN, 2017). The magnitude and severity of the atrocities have resulted in a humanitarian and refugee crisis in the region, with hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fleeing to neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh, in search of safety and asylum.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to comprehensively examine the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, focusing on its causes,

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implications, and the international responses to the crisis. The research aims to shed light on the historical factors, political dynamics, economic and social elements, and religious tensions that have contributed to the persecution of the Rohingya population. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the human rights violations committed against the Rohingya, the impacts and consequences of their displacement, as well as the role of media, propaganda, and disinformation in shaping the understanding of the crisis. The study also assesses the effectiveness of international diplomatic efforts, humanitarian aid, and legal actions in addressing the ethnic cleansing and providing justice for the victims.

Historical Factors and Events

A. Historical overview of the Rohingya people and their relationship with Myanmar: The Rohingya people have a complex history in Myanmar, with roots dating back centuries. They are an ethnic Muslim minority concentrated mainly in the Rakhine State, formerly known as Arakan, in western Myanmar. The Rohingya have their own distinct language, culture, and religious practices, predominantly following Sunni Islam.

Historically, the Rohingya have faced challenges in asserting their identity and rights within the context of Myanmar. The relationship between the Rohingya and the Myanmar government has been marked by discrimination, exclusion, and denial of citizenship. In 1982, the Myanmar Citizenship Law stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship, rendering them stateless and vulnerable to persecution. Under the law, full citizenship is primarily based on membership of the "national races" who are considered by the state to have settled in Myanmar before 1824, the date of first occupation by the British. (B.C.U., n.d.)

B. Analysis of key historical factors that have contributed to the ethnic cleansing : Several key historical factors have contributed to the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Firstly, the British colonial legacy and the divide-and-rule policies implemented during their rule sowed seeds of communal tension between different ethnic and religious groups, including the Rohingya and the majority Burmese population.

Additionally, the rise of ethno-nationalism and Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar in the late 20th century played a significant role in the marginalization and persecution of the Rohingya. Nationalistic sentiments fueled by the Burmese military junta and extremist Buddhist

organizations propagated a narrative of the Rohingya as "illegal immigrants" and a threat to the Burmese Buddhist identity.

C. Discussion of specific events that have played a role in escalating the crisis: Various specific events have contributed to the escalation of the Rohingya crisis. One such event was the outbreak of communal violence in 2012, triggered by the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman in Rakhine State. This incident led to a wave of violence, primarily targeting the Rohingya population, resulting in widespread displacement and destruction of Rohingya villages.

Another critical event was the Myanmar military's "clearance operations" launched in response to coordinated attacks by Rohingya militants in August 2017. These military operations, characterized by indiscriminate killings, sexual violence, and arson, resulted in a mass exodus of Rohingya refugees into neighboring Bangladesh. The United Nations has described these operations as a textbook example of ethnic cleansing. (HRW, 2020)

Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims: Major Causes

A. Political dynamics: Examination of political factors contributing to the ethnic cleansing: The ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is deeply intertwined with complex political dynamics. One key political factor is the Burmese government's long-standing policy of exclusion and marginalization of the Rohingya community. The government's denial of citizenship and the implementation of discriminatory laws have rendered the Rohingya stateless and vulnerable to persecution. The 1982 Citizenship Law, which stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship rights, has played a pivotal role in their disenfranchisement and marginalization.

Furthermore, the rise of ethno-nationalism and Buddhist nationalism has significantly influenced the political climate in Myanmar and contributed to the persecution of the Rohingya. Extremist Buddhist organizations, such as the Ahmyo Batha Thathana Saun Shaung Ye a-Pwe(MaBaTha), often translated into English as the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion, have propagated anti-Muslim rhetoric and fueled tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Rohingya minority. (WRL, 2018) Political actors have exploited these nationalist sentiments for their own gain, exacerbating the discrimination and violence against the Rohingya population.

B. Economic factors: Analysis of economic aspects influencing the crisis: Economic factors have also played a significant role in the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims. The Rakhine State, where the majority of Rohingya live, is resource-rich, particularly in terms of natural gas reserves and strategic maritime access. Control over these economic resources has been a driver of conflict and has fueled tensions between different ethnic and religious groups in the region. (Khan, 2018)

Moreover, economic disparities and competition for resources have exacerbated communal tensions between the Rohingya and the Rakhine Buddhists. The perception of economic advantages enjoyed by the Rohingya, coupled with deep-rooted poverty among the Rakhine Buddhists, has contributed to a sense of resentment and hostility. Economic grievances, along with ethno-nationalism, have been manipulated to justify the targeting of the Rohingya community and their displacement.

C. Social and religious dynamics: Exploration of social and religious elements fueling the conflict: The ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims is fueled by complex social and religious dynamics. The Rohingya, as a religious and ethnic minority, have faced systematic discrimination, stigmatization, and dehumanization by the majority Burmese Buddhist population. Deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes have been perpetuated, contributing to an environment conducive to violence and persecution.

Religious tensions, particularly between Buddhists and Muslims, have been exploited to fuel the conflict. The notion of preserving the Buddhist identity and protecting Buddhism from perceived threats has been utilized as a rallying cry for extremist Buddhist groups. These groups have disseminated hate speech and promoted violence against the Rohingya, framing the conflict in religious terms and exacerbating communal divisions.

Rohingya Issue and the International Responses

A. Diplomatic Efforts: Assessment of Diplomatic Initiatives and Negotiations: The ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar has prompted various diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing the crisis and finding a resolution. International actors, including governments, regional organizations, and the United Nations, have engaged in

diplomatic initiatives and negotiations with the Myanmar government to halt the violence and secure the rights of the Rohingya community.

One significant diplomatic effort was the formation of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State in 2016, led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The commission produced a comprehensive report with recommendations for addressing the root causes of the conflict and promoting reconciliation between different communities in Rakhine State. The report recommended urgent and sustained action on a number of fronts to prevent violence, maintain peace, foster reconciliation, and offer a sense of hope. Some specific recommendations included investing heavily in infrastructure to help lift both communities out of poverty, lifting all restrictions on the Rohingya people's human rights, reviewing Myanmar's 1982 citizenship law, and instigating a calibrated approach to security. (KAF, 2017). However, the implementation of these recommendations has been limited, highlighting the challenges in translating diplomatic initiatives into concrete actions.

B. Humanitarian Aid: Evaluation of international humanitarian assistance to Rohingya communities: The international community has provided significant humanitarian assistance to address the urgent needs of Rohingya communities affected by the ethnic cleansing. Humanitarian organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, have played a crucial role in delivering life saving aid, including food, shelter, healthcare, and education, to the displaced Rohingya population.

However, the provision of humanitarian aid has faced several challenges. Access to affected areas has been restricted by the Myanmar government, hindering the delivery of assistance to those in need. Additionally, the sheer scale of the crisis has stretched the capacity of humanitarian organizations, making it difficult to meet the comprehensive needs of the Rohingya population.

C. Legal Actions and Accountability: Discussion of Legal Mechanisms and Tribunals Addressing the Crisis: The pursuit of justice and accountability for the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims has been a crucial aspect of the international response. Efforts have been made to establish legal mechanisms and tribunals to address the crimes committed against the Rohingya population.

One notable example is the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has opened an investigation into the crimes against humanity perpetrated against the Rohingya in Myanmar. The ICC's involvement signifies a commitment to holding accountable those responsible for

the atrocities and providing justice for the victims. (Takemura, 2023) Additionally, individual countries, such as Gambia, have filed cases against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for violations of the Genocide Convention.

Rohingya Crisis and the Issue of Human Rights Violations

A. Mass Killings and Violence Against Rohingya Muslims: Empirical evidence confirms the occurrence of mass killings and widespread violence against the Rohingya Muslim population in Myanmar. Numerous reports from news outlets and human rights organizations have documented targeted attacks on Rohingya villages, perpetrated by the Myanmar military and associated groups. These attacks involve indiscriminate shootings, beatings, and brutal acts of violence, resulting in the loss of countless innocent lives. For instance, according to a report by Amnesty International (2018), there were instances of mass killings, with Rohingya villagers being shot, stabbed, or burned to death. The scale and brutality of these killings represent severe violations of the right to life and raise urgent concerns regarding the protection of civilians in conflict zones.

B. Sexual Violence and Gender-based Crimes : Empirical evidence also substantiates the occurrence of sexual violence and gender-based crimes against Rohingya women and girls. Numerous testimonies and reports by international organizations have documented instances of rape, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence perpetrated against Rohingya women and girls. For example, a report by Human Rights Watch in 2018 highlighted widespread and systematic sexual violence, including gang rape, committed by the Myanmar military. These acts of sexual violence not only cause immediate physical and psychological harm but also perpetuate a climate of fear and insecurity within the community. The systematic nature of these crimes indicates a deliberate strategy to terrorize and humiliate the Rohingya population.

C. Forced Displacement and Destruction of Property: Reports from various sources have documented the deliberate targeting of Rohingya villages, accompanied by arson attacks and the destruction of homes and infrastructure. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have been uprooted from their homes and forced to flee across the border into Bangladesh or seek refuge elsewhere. For instance, a report by the United Nations in 2018 estimated that over 700,000

Rohingya had been forcibly displaced since August 2017. This forced displacement violates the right to a homeland, disrupts communities, and creates immense challenges in terms of access to necessities, healthcare, and education for the displaced population.

D. Ethical and Legal Implications : The empirical evidence of these human rights violations raises profound ethical and legal implications. The systematic nature of the atrocities, including mass killings, sexual violence, and forced displacement, demonstrates a clear violation of international human rights standards and norms. The principles of human dignity, non-discrimination, and the right to life have been disregarded, necessitating urgent attention and action from the international community.

Furthermore, these violations highlight the need for accountability and justice. International human rights law and international criminal law provide a framework to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure justice for the victims. The establishment of legal mechanisms, such as the ICC investigation and ICJ proceedings, represents a step towards addressing the ethical and legal implications of these human rights violations and seeking redress for the victims.

The evidence drawn from news reports, human rights organizations, and international investigations confirms the occurrence of mass killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and the destruction of property against the Rohingya population. It underscores the urgency of addressing these violations and seeking justice for the victims, while upholding human rights principles and ensuring accountability for the perpetrators.

Impacts and Consequences

A. Displacement and Refuge: Examination of the Scale and Consequences of Rohingya Displacement: The displacement of Rohingya Muslims has had significant and far-reaching consequences. Empirical evidence confirms that the scale of displacement has been immense, with hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing their homes to seek refuge. The influx of Rohingya refugees into neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh, has created overcrowded and precarious conditions in refugee camps. For example, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2021, Bangladesh hosted over a million Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar district. The consequences of displacement include limited access to

basic services such as healthcare, education, and sanitation, exacerbating the vulnerability of the displaced population.

B. Challenges Faced by Rohingya Refugees in Neighboring Countries: Rohingya refugees face numerous challenges in the countries where they seek refuge. Empirical evidence highlights the difficulties in accessing basic services and opportunities for livelihood. For instance, in Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees often live in overcrowded and makeshift settlements, lacking adequate shelter and infrastructure. They face restrictions on their mobility, limited access to education and healthcare, and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. The absence of legal recognition and rights further compounds their challenges, hindering their ability to rebuild their lives and secure a sustainable future.

C. Regional Implications of the Crisis: The Rohingya crisis has significant regional implications. Evidence demonstrates that the influx of Rohingya refugees has strained resources and infrastructure in neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh. The burden of hosting a large refugee population has put pressure on local communities and resources, leading to socioeconomic and environmental challenges. Additionally, the protracted nature of the crisis poses risks to regional stability and security. The vulnerability of Rohingya refugees, coupled with the risk of radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups, raises concerns about potential regional ramifications and the need for comprehensive and coordinated responses.

D. Contextual Evidence from News and Research: According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2019, the displacement of Rohingya has resulted in severe overcrowding and limited access to basic services in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The report highlighted challenges in healthcare provision, education, and livelihood opportunities for the displaced population. News articles have highlighted the impact of the refugee influx on host communities in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, including competition for resources and tensions arising from limited infrastructure and services.

Furthermore, a study conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2019 highlighted the economic challenges faced by Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The study found that the majority of Rohingya households relied on precarious and low-paying informal employment, facing difficulties in accessing formal job markets and economic opportunities.

Humanitarian Assistance and Development Initiatives

A. Assessment of Humanitarian Aid Provided to Rohingya Communities: International humanitarian organizations, governments, and NGOs have mobilized resources to provide essential assistance, including food, shelter, healthcare, and protection services, to meet the immediate needs of Rohingya refugees and displaced populations. According to UNHCR, in 2022, humanitarian agencies sought more than $881 million to support approximately 1.4 million people, including over 918000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar and Bhasan Char.

However, empirical studies and reports also highlight the limitations and challenges in delivering effective humanitarian assistance. Inadequate funding, logistical constraints, and political obstacles have hindered the provision of comprehensive aid to all those in need. For instance, overcrowded refugee camps and limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities pose significant health risks and increase the vulnerability of the Rohingya population to disease outbreaks. Additionally, the protracted nature of the crisis and the lack of durable solutions present challenges in ensuring sustained humanitarian support.

B. Long-term Development Initiatives for Sustainable Solutions: Efforts to address the Rohingya crisis extend beyond immediate humanitarian assistance, focusing on long-term development initiatives for sustainable solutions. Empirical evidence highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of the crisis and promoting inclusive development to achieve lasting solutions. Development initiatives encompass areas such as education, livelihoods, infrastructure, and social integration.

For example, education programs aimed at providing quality education to Rohingya children and youth can help break the cycle of poverty and marginalization. Access to livelihood opportunities and vocational training can enhance self-reliance and empower Rohingya communities to rebuild their lives. Infrastructure development, including healthcare facilities and water and sanitation systems, is crucial for improving living conditions and ensuring the well-being of Rohingya communities.

C. Challenges and Gaps in Addressing the Immediate and Long-term Needs of Rohingya Communities: Empirical evidence highlights the challenges and gaps in addressing the immediate and long-term needs of Rohingya communities. Limited funding, coordination issues,

and political complexities have hampered the effectiveness of humanitarian and development efforts. The massive scale of the crisis, coupled with the diverse needs of the Rohingya population, requires sustained commitment and collaboration from multiple stakeholders.

Additionally, the issue of citizenship and legal status poses significant challenges in ensuring the rights and protection of the Rohingya population. Without legal recognition, Rohingya communities face obstacles in accessing services, obtaining documentation, and participating fully in society.

Furthermore, the complex political landscape and the involvement of multiple actors, both within Myanmar and internationally, contribute to the challenges in finding durable solutions. The repatriation of Rohingya refugees and the creation of conditions conducive to their safe and voluntary return require concerted efforts and political will.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, several implications and recommendations for future action emerge. Firstly, there is a need for increased international pressure and diplomatic efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions. This includes supporting legal mechanisms and tribunals to ensure justice and prevent impunity. Secondly, comprehensive humanitarian assistance should be prioritized to address the immediate needs of Rohingya communities, including access to healthcare, education, and protection services. Long-term development initiatives should focus on promoting sustainable solutions, such as education, livelihoods, and infrastructure development, to empower Rohingya communities and ensure their self-reliance. Additionally, efforts should be made to counter propaganda and disinformation campaigns, promote responsible media reporting, and foster critical media literacy to shape a more accurate understanding of the crisis. Moreover, the international community should work collaboratively to address the root causes of the crisis, including the issue of citizenship and legal status, through dialogue and engagement with the Myanmar government.

Addressing the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims holds immense significance for several reasons. Firstly, it is a matter of human rights and dignity. The systematic violence and persecution inflicted upon the Rohingya population are clear violations of their fundamental rights. It is essential to recognize and uphold the principles of human

rights and ensure that such atrocities are not repeated. Secondly, the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims has broader implications for regional stability and security. The protracted crisis, if left unresolved, may lead to further displacement, radicalization, and regional tensions. Addressing the crisis is crucial for promoting stability and fostering peaceful coexistence in the region. Finally, it is a test of the international community's commitment to human rights and the responsibility to protect. Upholding the values of human rights, justice, and accountability requires collective action and a steadfast commitment to address the plight of the Rohingya people.

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An Analysis of Causes and Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement in India

Sushovan Mondal*

Introduction

Over the past century, India's trajectory of economic development has been marked by the widespread displacement of its population. It is estimated that more than 50 million individuals have been displaced from their ancestral homes, agricultural lands, forests, etc., in the name of 'national interest'. Development-induced displacement (henceforth DID) refers to the involuntary relocation of individuals and communities due to the implementation of major infrastructure and industrial projects such as dams, mining operations, urban expansion, construction of highways, industries, etc.. While development initiatives aim to enhance economic growth and modernization, they often come at a severe cost to the communities that are uprooted in the process, particularly those who are socioeconomically and politically marginalized. According to estimates by Fernandes and Paranjpye (1997), approximately 60 million people were displaced in India between 1947 and 2000 as a consequence of these development initiatives, with only a fraction receiving adequate resettlement and rehabilitation. These displacements often lead to a host of associated problems, such as loss of livelihood, cultural disintegration, psychological trauma, and inadequate resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R).

This paper aims to shed light on the magnitude, causes, and consequences of DID in India and potential measures to mitigate the negative outcomes of displacement.

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Objectives:

1. To explore the magnitude of DID of people in India.
2. To investigate the main causes behind the Development-induced displacement in India.
3. To examine the consequences of Development-induced displacement.

▪ Literature review:

In the post-independence period, the primary focus of the Indian Government was on economic development as reflected in successive five-year plans. This focus led to large investments in projects such as dams, industries, mining operations, irrigation infrastructure, etc. Political leaders of the time in Independent India regarded the hydropower project as a temple of contemporary India. However, implementing these projects required acres and acres of land, and often entitled to or occupied by the people for generations. So, the displacement of people became an inevitable outcome of the development projects. Kaushal (2009) highlighted that the construction of large dams not only forces people to vacate their ancestral homes but also disrupts family ties and social structures. Mishra (2002) emphasizes that those displaced are cut off from their ancestral temples, sacred rivers, mountains, forests, and places of worship. Studies reveal that compensation provided to the displaced population is generally inadequate and fails to compensate for the loss of livelihood and social dislocation. Rehabilitation efforts have often been poorly planned and insufficient to restore pre-displacement standards of living.

Magnitude of development-induced displacement

Globally, development-induced displacement is a matter of serious concern, and India is no exception. Since independence, the scale of such displacement in India has been vast, though precise statistics are often lacking due to underreporting in official records. Mohanty (2005) argues that the true number of people displaced by dam projects is significantly higher than government estimates. Research has shown that the Sardar Sarovar Project alone displaced more than 200,000 people across 297 villages (Parasuraman, 1999). Mishra (2002) studied the displacement caused by four major dam projects in Odisha: Hirakud, Rengali, Upper Kolab, and Upper Indravati—highlighting their impact,

particularly on tribal communities. Saxena (2008) estimated that over the last six decades, more than 50 million people have been displaced by hydropower projects in India, and only about 25% have been successfully rehabilitated. According to Negi and Ganguly (2011), over 21 million Indians are internally displaced due to development projects. Kumaran (2013) also observed that worldwide, millions are displaced annually by infrastructure projects like dams, mines, roads, and irrigation schemes, with the majority being from marginalized groups. The literature reveals that a significant share of the displaced people by dam projects in India belong to tribal communities, which are especially vulnerable to such disruptions. Mohanty (2009) further asserts that industrial and mining projects have forcibly uprooted lakhs of tribal people, depriving them of their ancestral lands and socio-cultural roots.

Table - 1: Conservative Estimate of Persons and Tribals Displaced by Development Projects (1951–90) ***(in lakh)***

Types of Project	All DPs (lakh)	Percent of All DPs	DPs from Rest of Areas	Percent of Resettled DPs	Back-log of Resettled DPs (lakh)	Tribal Displaced (lakh)	Percent of All DPs who are Tribals	Percent of Tribal DPs Resettled	Back-log of Tribal DPs (lakh)
Dam	164.0	77.0	41.0	25.0	123.0	85.0	52.0	20.0	68.0
Mines	25.5	12.0	6.30	24.7	19.20	19.0	75.0	13.3	14.3
Indus-tries	12.5	6.9	3.75	30.0	8.75	5.0	40.0	20.0	4.0
Wildlife	6.0	2.8	1.25	20.8	4.75	5.0	83.0	10.0	4.5
Others	5.0	2.3	1.20	24.0	3.80	3.0	60.0	15.0	2.5
Total	**213.0**	**100.0**	**53.80**	**25.0**	**159.20**	**117.0**	**55.0**	**15.0**	**99.0**

Note: *DP denotes displaced persons.* ***Source:*** *Fernandes, 1994.*

Table 1 presents an estimation of the number of individuals displaced as a result of major development projects in India between 1951 and 1990. In these four decades, various infrastructure initiatives such as dam construction, mining activities, industrialization, wildlife conservation projects, and urban expansions led to the displacement of approximately 21.3 million people. These development efforts, though aimed at national progress, came at a tremendous social and human cost. The major causes of DID are as follows.

▪ Major causes of Development-induced Displacement

Large Dams and Irrigation Projects

Post-independence India witnessed the construction of numerous large dams, considered symbols of national progress. Globally, such projects have displaced millions; for instance, China's Three Gorges Dam displaced over 1.3 million people. In India, dams alone were responsible for displacing 16.4 million people, or 77% of the total displaced population during the period (Table 1), making them the single largest contributor to DID.

Mining and Resource Extraction

Mining projects require vast amounts of land and are often concentrated in mineral-rich forested and hilly areas, where tribal populations traditionally reside, that led to the displacement of indigenous communities. From 1951 to 1990, mining projects led to the displacement of 25.5 lakh people, constituting 12% of the total displaced people (Table 1). The most alarming aspect is that 75% of those displaced by mining projects were tribals.

Industrialization and Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

The establishment of industries and SEZs has often involved acquiring land from rural and tribal populations. During 1951-1990, industrial projects displaced 12.5 lakh people, of which 40% were tribals (Table 1). The POSCO project in Odisha and the SEZ-related conflicts at **Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal** are notable examples where tribal and rural communities were forcibly evicted.

Wildlife Projects

Wildlife conservation efforts, while important for biodiversity, ironically led to the displacement of 6 lakh people, 83% of whom were tribals. In the name of conserving forests, the communities that had sustainably lived there for generations were evicted.

Urban Expansion, Transportation, and Infrastructure Projects

Rapid urbanization and expansion of metropolitan areas and smart cities often result in the eviction of people. Urban expansion projects and highway expansions displaced a huge number of people in India. Nearly 5 lakh people were displaced due to miscellaneous 'other' development

projects such as transport infrastructure, urban expansion, and power plants. Again, 60% of those displaced in this category were tribal (Table 1).

▪ Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement

Although development projects have propelled India's economic advancement, they have also triggered massive social disruptions, especially for the displaced. The implementation of major development projects typically demands the acquisition of **vast tracts of land**. This land is not merely a physical space; it is deeply tied to the lives, livelihoods, and identities of the people who inhabit or depend upon it. Consequently, displacement affects individuals and communities in **diverse and complex ways.**

For some, displacement means being **physically uprooted from their ancestral homes**, resulting in the loss of property, agricultural fields, and shelter. For others—particularly those who earned a living by operating near these lands without owning them—displacement leads to **loss of livelihood**. A typical example is seen during highway or road widening projects, where roadside vendors, shopkeepers, and workers lose their employment, even if they are not the landowners themselves. This diversity in impact means that **not all displaced people experience the same consequences**, nor do they face identical risks. The severity and nature of their hardships depend on their social and economic position, the type of attachment to the land, and the availability (or lack thereof) of compensation and rehabilitation.

Michel Cernea (1999) listed various risks associated with people affected by development projects, such as Landlessness, Joblessness, Homelessness, Marginalization, Food insecurity, Increased morbidity, and mortality. Overall, the consequences of DID are as follows:

- **Loss of Livelihoods and Economic Hardships**
  Displaced families often lose access to land, forests, and water resources, leading to unemployment. Many displaced individuals depend on agriculture, fishing, or local businesses, which are lost once they are evicted. Finding alternative employment is often challenging, pushing them into poverty. Many displaced communities struggle to integrate into urban job markets due to a lack of skills.

- **Inadequate Compensation and Rehabilitation**
  Compensation provided to the displaced individuals often overlooks the long-term socio-economic impact of displacement. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 was heavily criticized for its inability to ensure fair compensation and effective rehabilitation.
- **Social and Cultural Disruption**
  When people are displaced from their ancestral lands, they face cultural erosion. Communities that have lived together for centuries are often scattered after displacement, eroding traditional cultural practices, languages, and social support systems. Mishra (2014) emphasized how post-displacement life often reshapes people's perceptions of lifestyle and identity, contributing to a sense of cultural loss.
- **Political Unrest and Social Conflicts**
  Indigenous resistance to projects such as the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States highlights these tensions.
- **Environmental Degradation**
  Projects involving deforestation, mining, and dam construction often lead to large-scale ecological degradation. Reports by the World Bank (2010) highlight the long-term ecological damage caused by infrastructure projects. Relocated populations often move to environmentally fragile regions, leading to deforestation, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss.
- **Political Unrest and Resistance Movements**
  Forced displacement often leads to protests and incites social and political resistance. Movements like the Narmada BachaoAndolan (NBA) and anti-SEZ protests have emerged as reactions to forced displacement, highlighting the conflict between developmental goals and community rights.
- **Rise in Urban Poverty and Slum Formation**
  Displaced rural populations often migrate to urban areas in search of work, leading to overcrowding, expansion of slums, and increased urban poverty.
- **Health and Psychological Impact**
  Forced eviction from one's home and livelihood can lead to severe psychological stress, anxiety, and depression. Mathur (2011) highlighted the impact of forced evictions on the mental health of the displaced people.

Discussion:

One of the most revealing aspects of Table 1 is the disproportionate impact of developmental projects on India's tribal population. In India, tribals account for only 8.6% of the total population(Census, 2011), but the displacement scenario of Table 1 reveals that from 1951 to 1990, a total of 21.3 million people were displaced, and 55% of them were tribal. The displacement of tribal populations was not just numerically high, but qualitatively devastating. Tribals were uprooted from their ancestral lands, which not only sheltered them but also provided a cultural and spiritual base. With only 15% of displaced tribal individuals receiving any form of resettlement, 9.9 million tribals remain unrehabilitated, making them one of the most severely affected and neglected communities in the name of development.

Since the enactment of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and its successive amendments, private landowners whose properties are acquired for developmental purposes have been compensated monetarily, typically based on prevailing market rates. However, in reality, the compensation provided is insufficient not only in monetary value but also in its capacity to restore the pre-displacement standard of living of the affected populations, especially in the absence of viable alternative livelihoods. The assessment of land and other immovable assets often suffers from inconsistencies and a lack of transparency. Furthermore, long delays in disbursing compensation have exacerbated the distress of displaced individuals.

Widespread corruption, especially in the disbursement of compensation to tribal households, has resulted in substantial portions of the allocated funds being siphoned off. These communities have also been subjected to exploitative practices by landowners, moneylenders, bank personnel, and legal intermediaries (Thukral, 1989; Pandey, 1998). Muthayya and Mathur (1975) further argue that even when compensation is received, it is often misappropriated or ineffectively utilized to meet household expenses, social obligations, or debt repayment, ultimately leading to long-term impoverishment. Saxena (2008) mentioned that over 50 million individuals have been displaced in India due to hydropower and related infrastructure projects over six decades in the post-independence period, and only about 25% of those displaced have received any form of rehabilitation. The data from Table

1 reveals that during 1951-90, the backlog of unsettled persons for dam-related displacement alone stood at 12.3 million, reflecting poor planning. For tribals, the situation is even worse. Among them, a massive backlog of 9.9 million remained unrehabilitated. This backlog has long-term social and economic consequences, including loss of livelihood, cultural disintegration, poverty, and social marginalization.

Therefore, it sheds light on a critical but often neglected aspect of development planning in India: the invisible cost borne by the poor, particularly tribal communities. The overwhelming bias in displacement—where mega projects displace large populations with minimal compensation—points to a development model that favors centralized control and elite interests. The pattern of displacement without adequate rehabilitation violates basic human rights and constitutional guarantees. The failure to resettle displaced persons, especially tribal, raises serious questions about the sustainability of India's development trajectory.

Conclusion

Development is essential for the progress of the nation, but it should not come at the cost of human rights and social justice. In India, the displacement of people due to development projects often creates various challenges from the socioeconomic, political, and environmental aspects. The social and human effects of displacement have largely been ignored and treated as legitimate and inevitable costs of development, and should be accepted in the greater national interest. Although policies have been formulated to address the adverse consequences of displacement related to compensation and rehabilitation mechanisms but their improper implementation, coupled with systemic deficiencies, incited widespread resistance and public dissent. These protests are not solely about inadequate compensation and resettlement but also about the debates around development versus displacement.

So, it is necessary to look for alternative approaches that must be inclusive, participatory, and sustainable. The state must ensure that the burdens of development are not unfairly borne by the vulnerable. There must be a **balance between economic progress and social justice**, supported by effective resettlement, fair compensation, and respect for the rights of indigenous and marginalized groups.

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