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JOURNAL OF CENTRE FOR STUDY OF POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE DELHI

Dr. Vidhan Pathak

Dear Readers,

We inform this with heavy heart and profound grief that we lost one of the founding members of the center, and the key man behind the Journal, Dr. Vidhan Pathak due to Covid in April 2021. It is a huge loss to the academic community as a whole and a big blow to our endeavors as he was the key man behind steering of the Center activities including publication of the journal. The void that he has left behind is difficult to fill up. We pray to the Almighty to give him a place in His abode. This center and the Journal owe a lot to him and we promise to carry forward his legacies through timely and quality publication which was his long-cherished dream and make a valuable contribution to the knowledge creations.

Editor-in-Chief
Indian Studies Review

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India's Security Response to the Maoist Insurgency

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Abstract

A violent conflict by the Maoists that challenges the parliamentary form of governance and the legitimacy of the Indian state has been responded in multiple ways by the state. Among the several measures taken to contain the Maoists over more than five decades, the security-centric approach has been the dominant one and common thread among successive governments and political regimes. As a result of the security response, the state has been able to reduce the level of violence as the Maoists are seen to be in the terminal decline phase. However, despite the success in bringing down the Maoist related activities, the movement refuses to die down. To understand the role and rationale behind the security-centric response against the Maoists, this article tries for a critical engagement. In this process, the article investigates the rationale behind the security approach against the Maoists and interrogates other related policy frameworks of the Indian state in response to the Maoists. The article argues that while the use of force has reduced the level of violence, it has had limited success in protecting the local people and the development projects that continue to be targeted by the Maoists. The article suggests that the security response of the state needs to converge with development programmes which eventually would help ensure rights and entitlements of local communities in the Maoist affected areas.

Keywords: *Maoist Insurgency, Naxal, Left Wing Extremism, India, Security Approach,*

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Introduction

A violent political movement led by the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist), the Maoists in short, has been characterised as India's single largest internal security threat in the past. Spread over ten states covering 106 districts, the Maoists reject the parliamentary democratic form of governance terming it as a sham. The movement operates around its final objective of seizing political power through a protracted armed struggle to herald 'new democratic order'. Starting from a small village of Naxalbari in West Bengal in 1967, the Maoist movement in India has evolved through many forms and shades. Accordingly, the strategies and tactics of the Maoists have substantially changed in terms of fighting the Indian state. In the process of fighting the Indian state, the Maoists seek to legitimise the movement in general and the violence through a narrative of representing the under-privileged sections of society and the multiple grievances that they have. The issues of the weaker sections of the society, especially the tribal and other marginalised groups in and around Eastern and Central part of India, as the Maoists claim, range from: land alienation; feudalism; forest rights; tribal and women's rights. In the process of integrating the local issues with the violent movement, the Maoists have been able to garner some support from the people.

While the Maoists claim the legitimacy of their movement; the state rejects the violence calling the Maoists an 'armed band'. Thus, reducing the entire movement and the narratives associated with it to mere 'violent opportunism'. Despite the state's rejection of the Maoist movement, the later poses serious threats to the democratic ethos of India. Apart from inflaming politico-social and economic grievances against the state, the Maoists challenge the state's monopoly over coercion and thereby posing a threat to the state sovereignty. The mindless violence perpetrated by the Maoists over last close to six decades has claimed thousands of lives and created a scene of fear in the minds of the common people and caused massive internal

displacement, especially in the Scheduled Areas. Several responses against the Maoists by the successive governments over the years have been able to bring down the violence by the Maoist ultras. Of the many measures that the state has taken to deal with the Maoist movement; the security response has been claimed to have helped the most in terms of containing the later. The next section of the article critically analyses the state responses to the Maoist conflict in general and the security response.

Maoist Insurgency and the State Response

The Indian state has been rejective of the Maoists in terms not recognising the latter's movement as a legitimate one. Successive governments in their response to the Maoist movement believe that "some sections of the society, especially the younger generation, have romantic illusions about the Maoists, arising out of an incomplete understanding of their ideology" (MHA, 2019). Moreover the Maoists' use of violence, goes against the principles of parliamentary democracy, and is thus unacceptable.

The response of the Indian state regarding the Maoist movement has evolved over time. Starting from a security-dominated approach, to initiating of development measures, the state response to Maoist violence has been four pronged in the last six years. According to the former Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), "A National Policy and Action Plan to address Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) problem has been formulated by the MHA which consists of an integrated multi-pronged strategy comprising Security related measures, Development related measures, ensuring Rights and Entitlements related measures" (Lok Sabha, 2016). The minister went on to say that "For ensuring overall development of the Left Wing Extremism affected States, the Government of India supplements the efforts of the State Governments through various developmental/ flagship schemes being implemented by different Central Ministries/Departments …" (Ibid).

Notwithstanding the minister's statement, India has adopted the dual policy of combining security with development, for the longest time. The National Democratic Alliance-2 (NDA-2) government which assumed power in April 2014 has since made efforts to ensure the rights and entitlements of communities in Maoist affected areas and managing public opinion. The state acknowledges that the rights and entitlements of the local communities in the Maoist affected areas needs to be protected to wean them away from the Maoist insurgent groups. This will also serve to debunk the Maoists' claim that they are the sole representatives of the downtrodden and under privileged. The state is undertaking a public relations campaign to manage public opinion to re-assert its 'lost' legitimacy in the affected areas.

It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of these four approaches although the security approach is believed to have yielded the most tangible results. To understand the gravity of the threat that the Maoists pose, the following section reasons with India's Security centric approach in dealing with the Maoist violence.

Security Centric Approach

The Indian state has faced several armed conflicts in different parts of the country since independence. It is important to mention that The Indian state has been facing armed movements challenging the legitimacy of the state in different parts of the country. The armed insurgency in the Northeastern states of India dates to the 1950s. These armed uprisings are mostly motivated by issues ranging from ethnic identity, greater autonomy, and control over resources. Similarly, the armed conflict in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has a long history. Mostly supported by external forces like Pakistan the armed movement in J&K demands greater autonomy or Azadi and (or) special status. The Maoist insurgency also has a long history. The organised violence in the form of the Naxalbari movement was initiated under the leadership of Charu Majumdar in 1967. The state has responded to these conflicts in multiple ways. However, the

dominant and common feature of all these responses has been the use of force to contain the armed conflicts. Counter violence measures against the armed conflicts are often projected as legitimate actions as the state enjoys the monopoly over coercion. The use of force against the Maoists is, in the same logic, not an exception. The security centric approach reduces the Maoist movement to a 'law and order' issue. To understand the legitimacy of the security response one needs to reflect on the scale of violence perpetrated by the CPI-Maoists since 2004 as shown in the following table.

Table No 1 - Fatalities in Maoist Violence: 2004-August 16, 2021 (SATP: 2021)

Year	Civilians	SFs	Maoists	Not Specified	Total
2004	89	82	87	22	280
2005	259	147	282	24	712
2006	249	128	343	14	734
2007	218	234	195	25	672
2008	183	214	228	19	644
2009	368	334	299	12	1013
2010	628	267	264	20	1179
2011	259	137	210	0	606
2012	156	96	125	1	378
2013	164	103	151	0	418
2014	127	98	121	4	350
2015	90	56	110	0	256
2016	122	60	250	0	432
2017	109	76	150	0	335
2018	108	73	231	0	412
2019	99	49	154	0	302
2020	61	44	134	0	239
2021	36	46	73	0	155
Total	**3325**	**2244**	**3407**	**141**	**9117**

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)

The founding document of the CPI-Maoist, *Political Resolution,* lays down the philosophy of the organisation highlighting on bringing about a 'new democratic revolution' by means of an armed struggle (CPI-Maoist, 2004). The document supports waging a protracted people's war (PPW) to seize political power. In this process, the level and incidents of violence unleashed by the Maoists against the state, and against the common civilians, have been serious in nature. The Maoists use violence to expand their spheres of influence. Moreover, the violent acts by the Maoists are often legitimised through the narrative of 'revolutionary cause'. As early as 2003-2004, the Annual report of Ministry of Home Affairs stated that the Maoists had a presence in 55 districts across nine states (MHA, 2004). Within three years the Maoists had extended their reach to 182 districts in 16 states (Ramana, 2009). According to the government sources "since the year 2001, the LWE have killed 5801 civilians and 2081security personnel. The ratio of the security personnel and the Maoist cadres killed in 2010, 2011 and 2012 are 285:172, 142:99 and 114:74 respectively" (Lok Sabha, 2013). A recent government report reveals that in the last decade (2005-2015) the Naxals killed 2,757 civilians and 1,753 security personnel, while 2193 Naxals have been neutralised during the same period by the security forces. Thus, the Naxals have claimed about two lives for every one life lost by them" (Yadav, 2015).

The State Response

The three main aspects of security measures taken by the state against the Maoists are: counter-violence; providing security for the population; development activities in the affected areas; and managing public perception. Arguably, the state had been largely successful in combating the earlier avatars of the Naxal movement. *Operation Steeplechase* was undertaken against the Naxals in West Bengal as early as July-August 1971, by the

combined might of the army, the paramilitary, and police forces. Over the 45-day operation the state claimed to have eliminated the Naxal extremists and regained control over the affected areas. The success achieved by the state by use of force is believed to be the major driver of the current military approach taken against the Maoists (Pubby, 2009).

These counter-violence measures against the Maoists were first mentioned in 2006 in the *Status Paper on the Naxal Problem* (MHA, 2006) that was tabled on the floor of the Parliament. A 'Fourteen Point Policy Framework' in the report prescribed strong counter-violence measures for eliminating the armed Maoist guerrillas. The very first point of this policy framework lays down that 'the Government will deal sternly with the Naxalites indulging in violence'. The report also suggested measures for ensuring security preparedness of the state. These included: better co-ordination among the Naxal affected states; sustained police action against the Naxals; drying up of the resources of the Naxals; dealing effectively with local resistance, etc (Ibid). At the central level a separate Naxal Management Division was created to, 'monitor the Maoist situations and countermeasures being taken by the affected states (GoI, 2013). The broad measures undertaken by the Indian state to combat the Maoists are discussed below.

The deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA) and the raising of the India Reserve (IR) battalions were the main security measure taken by the state against the Maoists. The state has deployed more than 120 battalions of the CAPF, the CoBRA and the IR in the Maoist affected areas. These forces operate in active coordination with the state police, who have also specially trained personnel for fighting the Maoists. The role of elite police forces such as the Greyhounds of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana and the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Odisha in combating the

Maoists deserves special mention. The coordinated action by the CAPF and the state police forces successfully eliminated and arrested more than two thousand armed Maoist guerrillas, including most of their high-ranking leaders (SATP, 2016). Important leaders eliminated by the SFs include: Cherukuri Rajkumar alias Azad, a Politburo member; Mallojula Koteswara Rao alias Kishanji also a Politburo member; and Sande Rajamouli, a Central Committee member. At the same time the SFs also have arrested several high-profile Maoist leaders. They include: Malla Raji Reddy alias Sattenna, a CC member; Pramod Misra alias Madanji and Kobad Gandhi both Politburo members; Sadanala Ramakrishna alias RK, head of the Central Technical Committee, Varanasi Subramanyam, Pulendu Mukherjee and Vijaya Kumar Arya (members of Central Committee) among others. All these killings and arrests along with those of other armed cadres have largely succeeded in bringing down the levels of violence.

The setting up of Counter Insurgency and Anti-terrorism (CIAT) training schools and the modernisation of state police forces is another major component of the security-centric approach. It was envisaged that 20 CIAT schools in the states of Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha would be set up during the 11th Plan period, for imparting counter-terrorism training to 75000 police personnel (MHA, 2017). Currently, 16 CIAT schools are operating in Maoist affected areas where experts from the ministry of defence, central police organisations and the Bureau of Police Research and Development impart training to police personnel. The modernisation of state police forces involves construction of secure police stations; training centres; police housing; rapid mobility; modern weaponry; communication equipment and forensic capability etc (MHA, 2015). This will serve to reduce the dependence of affected states on the central government and CAPF. Apart from enhancing the capabilities of

the security forces it is important to ensure coordination among the security agencies, across the various states. Towards this end mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate intelligence sharing, assistance in community policing and civic action programmes etc.

These various security initiatives have been integrated with other projects under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme. Under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme, funds are provided for: meeting recurring expenditure relating to insurance; training and operational needs of the security forces; rehabilitation of Left-wing extremist cadres who surrender in accordance with the surrender and rehabilitation policy of the state government concerned; community policing; security related infrastructure for village defence committees; and publicity material. Across 106 Maoist affected districts, 1,63,537 projects were initiated of which 1,34,558 projects had been completed by the end of 2015 (PIB, 2015). The projects under SRE include school buildings/school furniture; Anganwadi centres; drinking water facilities; rural roads; community halls; public distribution shops; livelihood activities; skill development training centres, etc. The states have already built around 400 fortified police stations, designed to prevent Maoists attacks and consequently the looting of arms. Along with the above-mentioned security measures by the state, the state supported social-vigilante groups' counter to the Maoist violence has also played an import role in containing the movement. The following section reflects on the local resistance to the Maoists.

Local Resistance to the Maoists

A complete picture of the security response by the Indian state can't be offered without the mention of local resistances to the Maoists. While we are talking about the local resistance it is about the people's counter to the Maoist violence. Among others, a

prominent resistance to the Maoists came from *Salwa Judum*, the Peace March, in the state of Chhattisgarh in 2005. The organised tribal youth supported and militarily trained by the state police took up arms against the Maoists. Starting from 2005 until it was banned by the Supreme Court of India, the *Salwa Judum* received enormous support from the local communities in its fight against the Maoists. Arguably, the *Salwa Judum* neutralised large number of the Maoists and that posed a serious threat to the latter. Supported by the state governance mechanism, the contribution of the *Salwa Judum* in containing the Maoists can't be merely limited to eliminating the Maoists ultras. More than anything else the *Salwa Judum* offered a sense of empowerment to the tribal and other marginalised communities in terms of standing up to the threats posed by the Maoists. However, the counter-violence activities of the *Salwa Judum* came under severe criticism by the civil society organisations questioning the legality of such organisations. As mentioned before this has been out lawed by the Supreme Court of India. The spirit of local resistance has not gone diluted despite a ban by the Supreme Court of India. Since 2011, following the ban of *Salwa Judum,* the local resistances against the Maoists continue to operate under multiple banners such as Armed Auxiliary Forces, District Reserve Group, and other vigilante groups. Criticisms apart, one can safely argue that the role of local counter-violence movements have contributes substantially to containing the Maoists. These resistance movements have also contributed to safeguarding the state-led development measures in the Maoist-affected areas. The next section of the paper reflects on the security measures by the state in promoting development activities.

Securitising the Developmental Activities

An important objective of the security approach is to secure the development projects undertaken by the state in Maoist affected

areas. Development as mentioned above, is one of the major policy approaches adopted by the state for dealing with Maoists as under-development, poverty, and deprivation are often stated to be the major reasons for the Maoist presence. A Planning Commission report on *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas'* (Planning Commission, 2008) highlighted poor social economic and political indicators especially regarding tribals, scheduled castes and women. Other issues are related to: access to basic resources; forest rights; land alienation; unemployment; displacement and political marginalisation. Based on these recommendations the state has initiated several development measures to wean the local communities away from the Maoists and to create a positive perception of the state.

However, the Maoists view these development measures as fresh tools for the exploitation and domination of the poor and marginalised. The development projects are specially targeted by the Maoists, both because of their ideological compulsions and to sustain their movement. Thus, Maoists over the last one decade have attacked and destroyed school buildings, telephone towers, bridges, factories, etc. These activities not only cause damage to public property, but also create a fear psychosis among the common people and government officials.

The SFs have, to a great extent, succeeded in securing development projects and the number attacks on the public infrastructure have come down drastically. However, the Maoists continue to target and damage the development projects which exposes the limitations of the security centric approach.

Public Perception Management

As mentioned above, a major aspect of the fight against Maoists is public perception. Along with the other state apparatus, the SFs deployed in the Maoist affected areas are involved in the winning

of hearts and minds of the local people against the Maoists. The heavy presence of the SFs in and around Maoist affected areas has not been received well by the local communities, as they are mostly viewed with fear and anxiety. A dominant belief among a section of the intelligentsia and media is that the innocent tribal and other local communities are sandwiched between the atrocities of the state SFRs and the Maoists (Bhardwaj, 2016; Sekhar, 2016; Mohanty, 2016). Such a narrative place the SFs at par with the Maoists in terms of violence against the people. The SFs have undertaken several welfare activities among the local communities to change this narrative. The Civic Action Plan (CAP) initiated in the year 2010-2011 is important in this regard. Under this programme each company of the CAPF has been given a sum of INR 300,000 for promoting the welfare of local communities in their deployment areas. Through this programme the Indian state aims to reduce the gap between the SFs and the local communities. The state police forces are also involved in such activities. The Chhattisgarh police have been   participating in local festivals in Order Bridge the divide between the SFs and the people (Dabarshi, 2015). Similarly, the Odisha State Police has also initiated programmes like '*Nua Mana Nua Sapana',* (New mind and New Dreams) in the Maoist affected areas (NTI, 2012). These welfare activities have been a major game changer in terms of changing the perception of the local communities regarding the security forces. The local communities are seen to be regaining their faith in the police and other security agencies.

Conclusion

The security approach of the Indian state in countering the Maoist violence has been substantially successful in bringing down the levels of violence, neutralising and arresting several high-profile Maoist leaders, and helping completion of many development projects. As the Maoists are losing their ground, the state keeps

on modifying its tactics in keeping with changing circumstances. Engaging in welfare activities to win the hearts and minds of the local communities is a good example in this regard. That said, the security approach of the state cannot be seen in isolation. The development activities in the Maoist affected areas have also contributed substantially towards containing the Maoists.

However, the Indian state has not been able to completely wipe out the movement. The persisting inequality, deprivation and exploitation in these areas continue to sustain the Maoist movement. It will not be entirely correct to say that the Maoists represent the local communities or that all in the affected areas support the Maoist movement. At the same time, it can be safely argued that the Maoists have been successful in manufacturing a narrative against the state by highlighting the above-mentioned issues. The 'absence of the state' in many parts of the Maoist affected areas gives Maoists the opportunity to their spread their ideology. The elimination of a few cadres by the state SFs may not be sufficient to overcome the ideology of the Maoist movement which is necessarily based on an anti-state narrative. The state will need to be more visible in terms of good governance and protecting the common people from all sorts of exploitation, including that by the Maoists. A military approach, along with initiatives to ensure the rights and entitlements for the local communities, can be the way to successfully address the issue of Maoist violence.

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Need for a New Definition of War in Indian University Curriculum: A Content Analysis of International Relations Syllabi of Higher Education Institutions

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Information Space like any other space, if not filled with the right information is likely to get filled with the wrong one.

(Army War College, Mhow, IW Division Quote)

Abstract

The nature of War has undergone a change with the development of Fifth Generation Warfare (5GW). This impacts not only citizens but also necessitates research and study of this new type of war. Curriculum needs to be updated keeping in mind changing nature of conflicts that citizens and states are facing. Air, land, sea, and space which are existing dimensions of wars are now accompanied by Information Warfare. This type of warfare is the manipulation of information trusted by a target without the target's awareness so that the target will make decisions against their interest but in the interest of the one conducting Information Warfare. The academic syllabus of International Relations needs to be updated to incorporate 5GW. This study provides data based insights into the rationale for curriculum revision by identifying a research gap and also opens the way for future research.

Key words: Information Warfare, International Relations, Fifth Generation Warfare.

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Introduction

What is War? This key question in International Relations was answered by Carl von Clausewitz and he called it 'nothing but a duel on a larger scale,'(Clausewitz,1989, pg 75). Why do states go to War? Clausewitz answered this question for eternity when he postulated that war was both a continuation of politics and policy by other means. The defining elements or rather an enduring idea of war was given by him as containing three core elements- primordial violence, the play of chance, and means to an end in policy (ibid). The study of war expanded with changing times and four generations of warfare were identified depending upon the way war was fought. (Lind, 2004). The study of war went ahead to Fifth-generation warfare (5GW) with the battle of perceptions creating a defining edge in the panorama of war. Information Warfare (IW) is a much talked about but little understood form of 5GW. It is associated with hybrid warfare, non-contact warfare, economic warfare; legal warfare can be found in most of the journals that talk about international relations and military concepts.

After air, land, sea, and space, the cognitive or information space is the fifth dimension of warfare. We came up with the IW doctrine as a result of the Kargil War. This doctrine has been revised and updated from time to time but we still have not fully understood the import of the subject - not only at the armed forces but also at the national level. On the other hand, our adversaries seem to have learned it quite well and they have used its various components including psychological warfare, propaganda, cyber warfare, and perception management tools to shape the information environment in their favour. Unlike conventional war where the action is primarily taken by governments and armies, the war of perceptions has to be fought by all citizens and everyone is thus a stakeholder. This

necessitates a study and revision of curriculum at undergraduate levels and upwards in all Higher Education Institutions (HEI's).

This study uses the content analysis method to analyse the undergraduate syllabi of five central universities to establish the presence/absence of 5GW and information warfare as essential components of any academic courses on International Relations and Global Politics in India. It can be expanded to a study of the same at post-graduate levels and research programs in HEI's in India.

Major Themes in Information Warfare

a. Defensive and Offensive Information Warfare

The reasons for the failure of the Northern Power Grid in India of January and July 2012, affected 7 States and approximately 630 Million (63 crores) are still unknown. Some do refer to the incidents as Chinese attacks but the truth will never be known. Arab Spring can be attributed to social media platform and closer home, the aftermath of Burhan Wani's death, that led to more than 150 people killed and the entire state of J&K being in a state of unrest for more than 6 months, all happened through Facebook. Terrorists all over the globe have used the power of social media to propagate their ideology, recruit people, raise funds and coordinate their actions. 9/11 will stay as one of the biggest intelligence failures wherein the US spy agencies could not decipher the communication tools being employed by Al Qaeda.

b. Forms of Information Warfare

Very little information is available about the two different forms of Information Warfare (IW). The general perception is that offensive capability holds the key to success in the information domain. However, it's just the reverse. In this form of war, the country with better defensive capability has better chances of winning. The notion of winning and losing too will have to be redefined. There is no

territory to be captured, no enemy soldiers required to be defeated, no physical assets to be destroyed. Thus, effectively countering the offensive measures by the adversary(ies) can be termed as a victory in the IW. This is a long-drawn battle and a continuous war that has no temporal or geographical boundaries, no timelines, no start or finish points, and certainly no clear winners. Even while you are reading this, the IW is on. It is the highest form of non-contact warfare wherein substantial damage can be caused in electronic, cyber, and cognitive domains.

80% of IW is Defensive. A nation, not only has to protect its Critical Information Infrastructure (CII), like the Communication Networks, Satellite Centres, Nuclear facilities, Stock Exchanges, Power Grids, and Air Traffic Systems, to name a few, but also guard the *Cognitive Space* (mind-space) of its entire population against adversaries offensive IW. The good news is that Defensive IW is simple and easy to implement. It starts with very routine processes as following the cybersecurity instructions and good social media practices. Awareness and adherence to simple Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) hold to key to Defensive IW. There are systems in place but one must understand that it's a 24x7x365 kind of warfare. Offensive IW can be termed as an *act of Commission* whereas Defensive IW is generally an *act of Omission*. The fact that the future wars will be completely asymmetric, bigger nations will tend to be easy targets of smaller entities. Thus, the larger the number of physical and human assets, the more attention is to be paid to Defensive Aspects.

Offensive information warfare is a highly specialized form wherein expertise and offensive capability will be a secret till the very end. In the Hollywood blockbuster Die Hard 4 (2007, Starring Bruce Willis, Justin Long) a small bunch of Cybercriminals brings down the entire nation to its knees by launching coordinated cyber-attacks on the critical information infrastructure. The attacks can

be launched by a very small group of people from remote locations and even from moving vehicles. The internet has connected the entire world and there are hardly any boundaries between physical and cyber domains. With the advancement of technology and proliferation of interconnectivity coupled with new emerging fields like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), the problem is only going to get further complicated. In the movie Matrix (1999), machines take over the world, and humans are used as bio source of energy.

c. Nature of Offensive Information Warfare

The inbuilt deniability in Offensive Information Warfare holds the key to success. We often hear of Cyberattacks being launched on countries and organizations, however, no conclusive proof has ever been produced. Americans too, despite being the world leaders in Information warfare, could only accuse Russians of manipulating the Presidential elections. This is non-contact warfare where the casualties in the physical domain are minimal, however economic and psychological effects are long-term and can be devastating.

d. Misinformation

Information warfare is based on two key concepts Mis and dis-information. Misinformation occurs when a subject is unaware of the real content of a message which could be a policy or governmental action. Misinformation could be seen in the Iraq War and the belief in the general American public about the existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq.

e. Disinformation

Disinformation is false information or the production and widespread distribution of fake news through troll armies on social media platforms. The Russian Internet Research Agency

that was in focus for manipulating the 2016 American presidential elections and other organized troll armies are said to have been involved in the creation of disinformation. Both misinformation and disinformation are tools of Information Warfare.

f. Whole Nation Approach

Defensive information Warfare requires the *whole nation approach,* which means that the entire nation's critical information infrastructure and population have to be protected. It's a cumbersome task and since the attacker's identity, strategy, tools, and modus operandi will always be hidden, one can never be sure. The defensive measures are as simple as protecting your devices with passwords, following the laid down instructions on cybersecurity, and maintaining good cyber hygiene. For a nation, the key lies in identifying the CII and taking measures to protect it. It needs a complete understanding of the subject by the political, academic, bureaucratic, and military fraternity. There are no physical, geographical, or temporal boundaries in Information Warfare. There is no start and finish point and certainly no timelines. IW is hybrid in nature and anything and everything is a potential target, including your mind. The good part is that defensive measures are cheap and can be implemented by just anyone. The bad part is that the enemy is always hidden, it's always on the prowl and the damage is not immediately visible.

g. Shaping the Space in Information Warfare

The current example of the Sars-Cov Virus not being allowed to be named Chinese Virus or Wuhan Virus is a result of shaping the information space. Similarly, Pakistan has been successful in playing the victim card despite being overtly and covertly involved with the production and export of various instruments of terror to the entire world. We are the direct victims of enemy-sponsored

violence but we have not been able to convince the global audiences about us being at the receiving end.

h. The War Over Mind- Space

The proliferation of the internet and social media has taken away the control over the narrative from the authorized (state) agencies and given it to anyone who understands its power. Terms like social media influencers, toolkits, issues going viral, etc have found a permanent place in urban lives. No one could imagine that major conflicts could be directed through mobile phones. Applications like Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Podcasts, and Youtube have become highly potent weapons of Information Warfare wherein small players and non-state actors can pose a direct threat to established state agencies. Information warfare aims to bring the entire narrative into the grey zone. If we do not respond adequately to the adversary's IW, there would be a possibility that our troops and population may lose confidence in their capabilities and we may end up responding to the narrative generated and propagated by the adversary.

The high speed of data transmission, the flexibility of format, inherent anonymity, deniability, and low cost with little or no legal barriers have made information warfare and its tools very popular amongst the inimical forces, terror groups, and even organized armies. We saw the full use of the media part of information warfare in both the Gulf Wars, Kargil Conflict, and the Middle East (Middle West for us) and is evident in the ongoing low-intensity conflict in J&K, North East, and in the (so-called) Red Corridor.

i. Changing Role of the State

The state will have to re-define the legal and bureaucratic boundaries to ensure that labyrinth of procedures does not become a hindrance in fully exploiting the potential of information warfare. For the success of any conflict, be it surgical strikes in Balakot (Pakistan) or the *not-so-old* violent action in

Galwan (Ladakh, J&K), the information space has to be managed well. We have all the necessary tools and know-how, but we need political and military will as also flexibility in our operational doctrine to adapt to this new form of warfare. All agencies need to be in sync to build a coherent and long-term narrative. Good examples of shaping the information environment can be seen when the *Ayodhya* issue was resolved without any major (violent) fallout. Removal of Article 370 from J&K and bifurcation of the state into Union Territories had an inbuilt information management plan. The ongoing management of the Covid pandemic is a result of the shaping of the information environment by the government.

Business houses and political parties have successfully used data analytics to steer the outcome of the campaigns in their favour. Cricket as a sport has a massive information dimension that has subsumed all other sports. The narrative built by the US in favour of its operations the world over is careful shaping of the information space. However, the master positions of this warfare can be safely awarded to the Russians and the Chinese.

Despite having the best scientific know-how and innovative brainpower, we lag in this domain. The situation is not likely to improve unless we shed our bureaucratic, intelligence, political and military silos and understand the nature of this ever-changing form of warfare.

We are moving in the right direction, but the speed is much below the minimum acceptable level and poor understanding of the subject coupled with lack of will to act will not only give an undue advantage to the adversary in the ongoing and future conflicts but also may lead to massive physical damage too. *Stuxnet* of 2007 was the first known use of a cyber-weapon to cause physical damage. The problem with the information warfare tools is that, unlike the conventional weapons, their deterrence value lies in maintaining secrecy till the very last.

We are fast moving towards high-speed information highways and interconnectivity to the stage of IoT (internet of things). Very soon, almost everything will be a potential weapon and everything will be a potential target. The future wars will primarily be fought in the information space and anyone who masters it will be the winner.

The Curriculum of Undergraduate Courses in International Relations in HEI's in India

a. The Role of Curriculum in the Purpose of Higher Education

The role of undergraduate programmes in Universities was laid out in the National Education Policy 2020. The HEI's in India are mandated with creating socially and nationally conscious citizens who are educated in a milieu of the knowledge economy. These individuals are expected to study and develop skills in cutting-edge ways in whichever field of study they choose. Not only is the mode of learning that compliant with twenty-first-century frameworks but the overall thrust of these courses is towards participative nation-building which is a key institutional goal. This is to be done in a multidisciplinary framework. Within HEI's the role of the curriculum is to enable a clear definition of institutional goals. (Bok .D, 1974). Multi-disciplinarity and research orientation, as well as quality, are keywords in the HEI curriculum in India. (Sharma SC,2020). These goals of university education can only be fulfilled through an updated and nationally oriented syllabus that exposes the students to key global issues from the national perspective. Additionally, research orientation demands preparation for research that is currently relevant. This study has utilized the following framework for the content analysis of the syllabus of five central universities through convenience sampling. These central universities offer an undergraduate course in International Relations as a part of the Bachelor's degree in Political Science. The framework includes - temporal relevance, research orientation, relevance to national security with relation to War which is the broader theme being examined in this study.

b. Content Analysis of International Relations Syllabi in five Central Universities in India

Five Central universities picked through a convenience sample were – Delhi University, Jamia Milia Islamia, Banaras Hindu University, the Central University of Andhra Pradesh, and Indira Gandhi National Open University. The analysis shows that the concept of War is not included in the curriculum at all. Where it is included the units are structured around the two world wars as well as the cold war and later developments after the disintegration of the USSR. Contemporary conflicts are not included in the curriculum either conceptually or empirically. 5GW is not mentioned or covered in any aspect of the curriculum. Table 1 represents the results.

Table 1: Content Map of some Central University Syllabi in International Relations w.r.t War

University → Concepts related to Information Warfare ↓	Delhi University	Jamia Milia Islamia	Banaras Hindu University	Central University of Andhra Pradesh	Indira Gandhi National Open University
Basic Structure	Two papers, one on Perspectives in International Relations and one on Global Politics	One paper on Basic concepts in International Relations and one on International Organisations	Two papers on International Relations	Optional Paper on International Relations	The course has a paper Perspectives on International Relations and World History with 4 blocks and fifteen units
War as a Theme	Cold war and post-cold war, first and second world wars	Not present even as Cold war	Not present as a broad theme but only concerning the Cold war	Only as Cold war and post cold war themes	War has themes on Cold War and the first and second world wars

University → Concepts related to Information Warfare ↓	Delhi University	Jamia Milia Islamia	Banaras Hindu University	Central University of Andhra Pradesh	Indira Gandhi National Open University
Generations of Warfare	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Fifth Generation Warfare	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Information Warfare	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent

Sources: Delhi University Syllabus for BA Hons Political Science from http://du.ac.in/uploads/ RevisedSyllabi1/080920_Political%20Science%20BA%20Hons%20Semester%20III%20July%202020. pdf

Jamia Milia Islamia Syllabus for BA Hons Political Science from https://www.jmi.ac.in/upload/ admission/cs_fss_ps_ba_hons_political_science_2019.pdf

Banaras Hindu University Syllabus for BA Hons Political Science from https://www.bhu.ac.in/social_ sciences/political_science/syllabus/BASemesterSyllabu.pdf

Central University of Andhra Pradesh Syllabus for BA Hons Political Science from https://cuap.ac.in/assets/docs/BA-Hons-Political-Science-syllabus.pdf

Indira Gandhi National Open University BA Hons Political Science Syllabus from http://www.ignou.ac.in /upload/programme/PROG% 20GUIDE%20POL%20SCIENCE%20HON.pdf

Conclusion

A small convenience sample was juxtaposed against a review of literature on Information Warfare which is a subset of 5GW. Content analysis of the syllabus was done on the broad themes that emerged from the review of the literature. The following conclusions could be derived:

a. The syllabi of the examined universities in the sample are oriented to the framework of syllabi provided by the University Grants Commission. Since this does not contain any mention of 5GW neither do the syllabi of the universities examined.

b. The Syllabi examined had no coverage of the generation of warfare being lived and experienced by the nation and globally.

c. Since undergraduate syllabi are now mandated to be oriented to community needs, global relevance, and research orientation as per the National Education Policy 2020, the gap identified in this study i.e. lack inclusion of War and 5GW needs to be in the cognitive space of educationists and policy-makers.

d. The National education policy 2020 is aimed at inclusivity and community orientation. IW in its various dimensions affects the most vulnerable sections of Indian society. Women, children are susceptible to fraud and subversion. Thus any future curriculum change may be aimed at integrating curriculum on IW from class eight upwards to university levels.

e. Specialists are required in IW and university curriculum should be redrafted and changed accordingly.

f. IW can be envisioned as a specialisation in Political Science curriculum and eventually be developed into a separate discipline.

The awareness of national interest and information warfare has to start from grass root level to the very top. It has to be simultaneous and not sequential. We are a big and self-reliant nation with a mind-boggling diversity in human resources. We have languages and cultures, religions and faith and ideologies more than the rest of the world combined. We have glaring vulnerabilities and a huge task ahead of us. Its time to include this important domain in the school and university syllabi based on further inputs and larger studies of the kind that this paper has tried to initiate.

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India's Foreign Policy through a Gender Lens: India and Afghanistan Relations

Rashmi Gopi [*]

Abstract

The framing of what is India's foreign policy has been a product of a particular political context, both at national and global levels. With changing contexts and leaderships, the conduct of foreign policy became essentially contested. It is debated whether the foreign policy is a normative tool or an empirical one; whether it is about the individuals, the state or the system; whether its aim can be achieved by military and economic efficiency or not. There are no evident solutions to these questions.

This work is arguing that the understanding of foreign policy in India has been a reflection of a hegemonic masculinity based understanding of power. This has happened not solely by the fact that men have dominated the sphere of foreign policy. But also by the systemic allegiance to supposed masculine values as normal and rational. This is evident in the ways the relevance of dialogue, empathy, inclusion and intersectionality have been ignored in formulating the meaning and purpose of foreign policy. However, commitment to different versions of masculinity is reflected in various bilateral relations. The withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan after almost two decades of presence has brought the attention to India's relations with Afghanistan to the centre stage. This paper is analysing India and Afghanistan relations through a gender lens. It is tracing historical events and contemporary challenges that shape this relationship today.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Gender, India's Foreign Policy

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The Changing Contexts of Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy

In the past two decades, foreign policy (FP) is understood as general principles that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states and Non-State Actors (NSAs). The primary goal of FP is to preserve, promote and protect national interests. This understanding of the foreign policy challenges traditional notions of foreign policy at two levels. Firstly, it questions the notion that only states and their agencies are primary actors in shaping foreign policy. Secondly, it problematizes the clear separation of domestic policies and politics from foreign policy and international politics.

S. Jaishankar (2020) in his book The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World has emphasised the fact that India needs to adopt a more realist vantage point in dealing with foreign policy. He argues that our readiness to go for offensive strategies when required will bring advantages to India. He cites Krishna's strategy in the Kurukshetra war that occurred between Kauravas and Pandavas. He says to bend the rules to one's advantage is a necessary skill in foreign policy. Secondly, he expresses the fact that disruptions in power dynamics at the global level should be seen as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. Thirdly, he emphasises that there is a need to engage the 'street', and not solely the 'Lutyens elite', in the framing of Indian foreign policy.

Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi (2009), Ian Hall (2014) and Harsh V. Pant (2016) analyse India's foreign policy over the years. Ganguly and Pardesi divide India's foreign policy into three main phases based on changing paradigms. They study India's foreign policy in the following phases - 1947 to 1962 as the era of Nehruvian idealism; 1962 to 1991 as the era of self-help and Nehruvian rhetoric and Post 1991 years as the era of pragmatism and realist approach. They argue that India's foreign policy has

been a product of systemic developments, national events and the personality of the Prime Minister. Ian Hall puts the perspective that India's foreign policy is an outcome of domestic factors and external factors. Hall counts the adoption of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) as an economic strategy in 1991 and Pokharan II in 1998 as domestic factors that have acted as turning points in India's foreign policy. Hall feels that the rise of China, the rise of Islamic terrorism, the global financial crisis of the West and Asian states and the increasing economic and military interests of the US in India are external factors shaping India's foreign policy in recent decades. Harsh V Pant states that when we study the past, it becomes clear, Indian policy-makers themselves are not clear as to what the status of a great power entails and there is no clarity in India's foreign policy. Pant highlights two issues that have emerged as significant in defining India's future foreign policy. He emphasises that India will have to exploit the current structure of the international system to its advantage. For this, Pant suggests that India has to do away with its discomfort with the very notion of power and in particular its wariness of the use of "hard power".

In analysing the work of the above-mentioned scholars it becomes evident that all of them are seeing a shift in India's foreign policy. They all are hinting at the benefits of a more pragmatic and realist approach in India's foreign policy. The question is how our gendered notions of power have influenced these studies. The subsequent sections discuss the historical aspects of India and Afghanistan relations. In this paper, the impact of the deal signed by the US and the Taliban in February 2020 is analysed. The later section is focusing on gender and foreign policy in general. The last section is examining India's foreign policy with Afghanistan through a gendered lens and its implications.

Historical Background of India and Afghanistan Relations

When we historically analyse India and Afghanistan relations, then it is clear that Afghanistan's strategic significance for India after 1947 has increased. By applying Kautilya's logic, the enemy's enemy is a friend, we can see a special significance of Afghanistan for India. Since the creation of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan are having differences of opinion regarding the Durand line. The tensions between India and Pakistan in political, economic, social and cultural aspects are multiple. In this case, according to I.P. Khosla, Afghanistan and India should be natural allies (Khosla 2018: 2). However, Afghanistan's tough topography (only 12% of land in Afghanistan is arable), tribal and ethnic tensions, especially between, Pashtuns (Ghilzai, Durrani) and Non-Pashtuns (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks) have made it a difficult country to understand.

According to I.P. Khosla (1997), in understanding India and Afghanistan relationship in the post-1947 era, different phases are recognised by scholars. Broadly these phases are recognised as Period of Cordial and Mutual Understanding (1947- 1970); Period of Confusion and Policy Absence (1971-1992); Period of Hostile and Nefarious activities (1993-2001); Period of Re-strengthening the Mutual Relations (2001 onwards). In the Period of Cordial and Mutual Understanding (1947- 1970), Afghanistan is believed to maintain a policy of 'neutrality in power politics, hence, pursued the policy of friendship with all states. This policy of neutrality has converged with India's policy of nonalignment in the context of the cold war. In this phase, India and Afghanistan have moved closer with the signing of the 'Treaty of Friendship' in 1950. The common enemy for both countries has been Pakistan. However, Afghanistan has remained reluctant in condemning China's aggression in 1962. Period of Confusion and Policy Absence (1971-1992) is embedded with lots of uncertainties on both sides. The deposition of King Mohammed Zahir Shah in 1973, the Saur

revolution in 1978 and the authoritarian behaviour of Hafizullah Amin led to an increase in the power of both leftist and Islamic forces in Afghanistan by end of the 1970s. In 1979, the Soviet Union annexed Afghanistan. During this period India also had its share of domestic problems to engage with. Indira Gandhi's declaration of national emergency in 1975, followed by a coalition government led by Morarji Desai and the second phase of Indira Gandhi's rule – all followed the principle of non-alignment and stayed away from the Soviet Union controlled Afghanistan. The years between 1993 and 2001 were the Period of Hostile and Nefarious activities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan witnessed a violent fight between different ethnic and tribal groups to capture power. The brief rule of religious extremist forces led by Burahnudin Rabbani supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE and the Taliban's coming to power in 1994 kept India out of action in Afghanistan. The Taliban's strained relations with India became evident in the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC 814 in 1999 and the destruction of the 'Bamiyan Buddha Monuments' in 2001. Therefore, India was more than happy to extend its support to the US-led coalition forces in the war against the Taliban in 2001 as a reaction to the 11 September 2001 terror attacks on the US. The last phase of this relationship is the Period of Re-strengthening the Mutual Relations (2001 to 2021). Under the US presence in Afghanistan, India re-established diplomatic links with this country. India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation program in Afghanistan since 2001. India's help in the infrastructure field is reflected in the building of Parliament, restoration of Stor Palace. India's imprint in irrigation and power projects can be seen in Salma Dam construction. India assisted in rebuilding healthcare-related activities like building of hospitals and training of doctors/nurses, medical tourism. In the field of education, the building of schools and teachers' training is

undertaken by India. India also helped in food supply and food safety (food safety agreement 2018, air freight corridor 2017, wheat supply through Chabahar Port 2017) and Armed forces training (Police training 2017). India signed with Afghanistan the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2011 and the Regional Technical Group in 2015.

The Deal and its Implications

After almost twenty years of US military engagements in Afghanistan, in early 2020 the tables are set for talks between the Taliban and the US. Both parties are ready to compromise. The US has shown interest in talk as it realised the limitation of its military presence in shaping Afghanistan politics. The US is realising the fact that even after twenty years of its presence in Afghanistan, it has failed in curtailing the existence of the Taliban and other terrorist groups in the area. It is also aware of the fact that any future political arrangement could not evade the participation of the Taliban as China, Russia and Pakistan are ready to assist and accommodate them for political engagements. The long military interference has set in fatigue amongst the US troops, has drained lots of US dollars on bottomless investments and has made the realisation about the futility of the war. It is clear to the US that to declare war is easy but to win peace is a challenge. On the other hand, the Taliban could see that in talks with the US it can strike an agreement for the release of its soldiers from Afghan jails and withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan. This will set the stage for the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan.

On 29 February 2020, the deal is finalised by Donald Trump and signed in Doha, Qatar. The deal is committed to the withdrawal of US and allied troops from Afghanistan by May 2021. The deal put obligations on the Taliban to take steps to stop terrorist groups, including itself, in Afghanistan from threatening the security of

the US and its allies. As soon as Joe Biden is elected as the next US President, he supports the withdrawal plan from Afghanistan and puts 31 August 2021 as the deadline to do so (Chaudhuri and Shende, 2020). From the time of the Doha deal, there is a sense of uneasiness in India. Narendra Modi government's insistence since 2014 on Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled political solutions in the state has been ignored in the deal. Neither plural representation of Afghanistan voices is represented in the deal nor does it count India as a significant player in charting the future course of action in Afghanistan. India's options in this scenario are to increase the pressure on the United Nations to lead the people-driven changes in Afghanistan, to align and balance its interests with that of the US, to widen its interactions with Russia, China and Iran to see that Pakistan is not unilaterally benefitting with rising of Taliban in Afghanistan.

Pakistan Factor in Afghanistan Crisis

India's aspirations in Afghanistan are tied with Pakistan. India aims to reduce Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. India wants to prevent Pakistan-backed militants from using Afghanistan as a ground for terrorism that could threaten the interests of India. In the past twenty years, all three main leaders of Afghanistan, namely, Hamid Karzai (Pashtun lineage), Ashraf Ghani (Pashtun lineage) and Abdullah Abdullah (mixed Pashtun-Tajik), have remained in contact with India. Hamid Karzai is tilted towards India as against Pakistan as Karzai has pleasant memories of his student life in India. Similarly, Abdullah Abdullah's family is settled in India and feels closer to India. However, Ashraf Ghani, especially in his initial days in power, is believed to prefer closer ties with Pakistan rather than with India (Constantino, 2020).

India has a bad experience with the Taliban regime of 1996-2001. During this Taliban regime, Pakistan sponsored militants used the soil of Afghanistan to train for guerrilla warfare to be used in

Indian administered Kashmir. At this time, Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), send many of its Kashmir-aimed militants into eastern Afghanistan to escape from US pressure on Pakistan to end militant infiltration. However, the worst memory of the Taliban regime for Indians is associated with the hijacking of an Indian commercial plane named IC-814 by the Pakistan-based outfit Harakat-ul-Mujahideen in 1999. The hijackers coordinated with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the plane was diverted to Kandahar province in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime mediated a criminal exchange that led to the release of extremist leader Masood Azhar. This one decision is regretted by India even today. Soon after his release, Masood Azhar founded another terrorist organisation called Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and attacked the Indian Parliament building in December 2001. Thereafter, JeM has conducted many terrorist attacks against India. JeM's close association and ideological unity with the Taliban remain the main point of concern for India. Over the years, another terrorist outfit called, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) has flourished in Afghanistan with the backing of the Pakistan military to work against the Indian interests. LeT cadres carried out a major terrorist attack in the commercial capital of India, Mumbai, in 2008. LeT is believed to be more lethal than JeM. LeT has carried out attacks against Indian diplomatic facilities, government employees and aid workers in Afghanistan. LeT prefers to keep its terrorist attacks unnamed so as to escape international pressure to give up terrorist acts in Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani in his first office took the help of Pakistan in mediating with the Taliban (Constantino, 2020). It is an open fact that the Taliban could survive and strengthen itself by 2021 only with the backing of Pakistan. It is with the collaboration of Pakistan that China, Russia and Iran, all started talking to the Taliban as a significant political player in Afghanistan. The resurrection of the Taliban is a creation of Pakistan. India will have

a limited role in Afghanistan till the time the Pakistan-Taliban nexus dictates the political contours of Afghanistan. India cannot station military troops in Afghanistan due to a lack of easy access to Afghanistan and a lack of intelligence precision to target and finish off terrorist camps in Afghanistan. Pakistan at any cost will try to prevent a bigger role for India in Afghanistan as it will threaten the internal stability of Pakistan as Pakistan believes collaboration between India and Afghanistan can promote separatist forces in Baloch and Pashtun areas in Pakistan. In the given circumstances, India has limited options in Afghanistan and the Indian government's wait and watch policy is a wise decision.

Russia factor in Afghanistan Crisis

In the late 1990s, the Taliban and Al Qaeda supported Islamist separatist movements in Chechnya. However, Vladimir V. Putin is considered a leader who successfully crushed these separatist movements. This also raised Putin's position as a leader both at national and global levels. With the 9/11 attacks on the US, the power dynamics changed. The US decided to attack Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. Putin supported and shared important maps of Afghanistan with the US and its allies to fight against Al Qaeda. With the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, Russia re-established its diplomatic relations with Afghanistan (Tarzi, 2021).

Russia helped the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to establish International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in 2015. Russia did not oppose ISAF's taking responsibility for the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan in 2006. Putin did not oppose NATO's participation in Afghanistan, in part to legitimise his own contentious activities in Chechnya.

Russia at this time expected that the US-led forces will defeat the Taliban and a stable government will be established in Afghanistan. Russia thought that cooperation with the US will help in fighting against international Islamist militancy. However, it soon became clear that the Taliban is neither vanishing from Afghanistan nor have Afghanistan witnessed a stable government of its own. The stay of the US and its allies got prolonged. In the meantime, the US and its allies supported "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine and this caused upset to Russia. Further, the increase in narcotics trafficking in the Afghanistan and Central Asia region also acted as a security threat to Afghanistan. Russia also sensed that oil and gas infrastructure in Afghanistan is benefitting the US and China. All these developments made Russia question the presence of the US and its allies in Afghanistan. In the situation where the US is withdrawing from Afghanistan and China is trying to increase its influence in Afghanistan, Russia is seeking friendship with Pakistan and the Taliban to play a larger role in the region.

The China factor in Afghanistan Crisis

With the announcement of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in February 2020, China has acted as one of the first nations to advance ambassadorial networks with the Taliban, which has arose to power once again in the tragedy-stricken country. It is an important point to note that China since the two decades of US-led governance of Afghanistan has maintained a low profile. China from a distance has been keenly observing the longest US war in Afghanistan taking its toll in terms of both natural/human resources and human lives.

China has an unsaid economic interest in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is rich in mineral deposits According to a Reuters report, the estimated worth of mineral deposits is up to $3 trillion. Afghanistan is perhaps the ground for the world's largest reserves

of lithium. Lithium is the key element of the large-capacity lithium-ion batteries which are widely used in electric vehicles and the renewable energy industry. The fact is that China dominates Lithium-Ion Battery Production worldwide and it plans to seek a long-term contract with the Taliban to improve Afghanistan's enormous unexploited lithium reserves in return for mining rights and ownership arrangements (Gupta, 2021). The Taliban which is facing a crunch for funds and friends will lap up the offer from China. Afghanistan is also endowed with many other natural resources such as bauxite, chromium, copper, coal, gold, gemstones, gypsum, iron ore, lead, marble, natural gas, oil, sulphur, talc, travertine, uranium and zinc. In the initial days of recapturing power in Afghanistan, the Taliban has taken control of these mineral deposits. In this scenario, China can offer the best deal of political impartiality and economic investment. China is seeing the best opportunity in Afghanistan to implement its expertise in infrastructure and industry building, along with undisputed access to mineral deposits. China's strategic Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) could get a renewed life with the inclusion of Afghanistan. China can plan a Peshawar-to-Kabul motorway. The extension of BRI beyond Pakistan to Afghanistan can open doors for easy access for China to Central Asia and the Middle East. The reluctance of India to join BRI can be counter-checked with Afghanistan's inclusion in the BRI project (Gupta, 2021). In this way, China's long-drawn dream of controlling South Asia by displacing India's predominance in the region can be fulfilled.

China's only worry in moving closer to the Taliban regime is that Afghanistan could become a probable sanctuary for the Uyghur extremist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). ETIM could react against the "extensive suppression of Uyghurs" by Chinese troops in Xinjiang. In a July 2021 meeting between China's foreign minister Wang Yi and the deputy leader of the

Taliban Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Wang Yi said that he hoped the Taliban would give peace an important chance in Afghanistan. He further stated that China looks forward to the Taliban for ensuring that terrorism will not be promoted either within Afghanistan or in nearby countries. This shows China's wish to have stability in Afghanistan. China wants to ensure that terrorist insurgencies don't spread over into the Xinjiang province.

Iran Factor in Afghanistan Crisis

With the recapturing of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the priority of Iran is to prevent new refugee flows, weapons deals and drug smuggling. The economic costs of the Taliban seizure will be important for Iran. Economically, Iran and Afghanistan are interconnected in multiple and intense manners. In the background of the US sanctions and cutting off of Iran from the global geo-economic order, Iran unexpectedly found a trading partner with locals of Afghanistan. This trade relationship is based more on non-oil commodities from Iran. This trade was most often done in local currencies. With the shortage of hard currencies with the Taliban, this trade is sure to suffer. Another point is that with the end of dollar deliveries the inflationary tendencies will skyrocket in Afghanistan. With inflation, Afghan business houses and households will need to reduce demand, including demand for Iranian goods. With the double burden of higher inflation and lower incomes, hardships for ordinary Afghans will increase both in domestic and commercial aspects. This development in Afghanistan is bad for Iranian non-oil exports as the demand for both consumer and agricultural goods will fall. Afghanistan's political and economic instability and uncertainty is bad news for Iran. The recent efforts among governments in the region to endorse a common agenda for connectivity now seems in jeopardy. In the connectivity project, Iran's role is crucial as the development of the port of Chabahar is seen as an essential way

for India to a new trade channel connecting to central Asia and Afghanistan by evading Pakistan. With the coming back of the Taliban in Afghanistan, India-Afghanistan bilateral trade is sure to suffer. It will have a spillover effect on Iran and Afghanistan relations as the necessary upgrades to transport infrastructure necessary to fully realise the trade corridor, such as additional connections between the Afghan and Iranian railway systems, are doubtful to be completed. In December 2020 only a part of the railway track connecting Iran and Afghanistan was completed. There are general security concerns that will prevent the construction of new infrastructure. The funding by multilateral development banks for multiple transport and energy projects in Afghanistan will be suspended if the Taliban remain the dominant political force in Afghanistan. The regional connectivity project had an indirect and yet significant positive value for Iran as under the US sanctions it cannot directly reap the benefits of funding of infrastructural projects by multilateral development banks. Iran has lost its last chance to connect with the region. On one hand, some of the Iranian leaders may be happy with the withdrawal of the US and its ally's troops from Afghanistan as a symbol of the US's political failure to establish peace in Afghanistan. However, in economic terms, withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan is a piece of bad news for Iran. The international funding and presence of global powers in Afghanistan had benefitted Iran to reap economic benefits. With the better Afghan economy, Iran's economy also witnessed growth. Now everything seems unsettled and uncertain (Batmanghelidi, 2021).

Gender and Foreign Policy

Gender is invisible in foreign policy theorisation and practice. It is only in the past three decades that scholars have brought gender lenses to analyse foreign policy. Eric M. Blanchard (2003) discusses three ways in which foreign policy is aligned with gender

by feminists. The first school of feminists accept stereotypes about aggressiveness as natural to men and passiveness to women. They speak about utilising maternal thinking in shifting foreign policy narrative from militarism to peace. The second school of feminists rejects the idea that this natural binary opposition between men and women defines foreign policy. They emphasise the fact that women have the right to equal representation on issues of both war and peace. The third school of thought presents the view that war and military structures are embedded in patriarchy and it is supported by both men and women. This work agrees with the third school of feminists that men and women are influenced by patriarchal values and therefore their take on foreign policy has a continuum rather than opposition. However, this work stretches the argument to the third gender as well. It is not only men and women but also all persons who are identifying themselves between and beyond binary opposition of gender that is embedded in a patriarchal context. Therefore, we cannot completely agree with scholars like Ulf Bjereld (2001) and Sara Angevine (2017) who argue that just by adding/increasing women's representation as policymakers, the definition and performance of foreign policy will change. It is not biology but patriarchy that defines foreign policy.

Amy Kaplan (1994) stresses the fact that foreign policy is seen as a strategy to protect domestic core values from external threats. This perspective might appear gender-neutral for many but not for feminists. Although there is no outwardly expression of gender in this formulation, it indirectly feeds on the idea that men are protectors of the nation-state and women against foreign aggression. Here women are assumed to be passive and dependent on aggressive and independent men. Cornelius Adebahr and Barbara Mittelhammer (2020) emphasise that there is a need to problematize the concept of foreign policy wherein military

enforced security is seen as masculine and peace based security as feminine. In this chapter we can see when we use masculine/feminine prism to understand foreign policy then it makes foreign policy significant only for a few. It also views certain types of interests as natural. In the context of India, we can say that as upper caste, upper class heterosexual Hindu men embedded in patriarchal values (hegemonic masculinity of India) are predominantly represented in the policymaking process, their security perspectives are valued more. If this particular category of policymakers believe that national security can be ensured only by prioritising hard power over soft power, then that becomes the norm. In this scenario, the victory in war is equated with the success of the foreign policy. The issues of environment, health and social justice are either ignored or pushed to the periphery in formulating foreign policy. Victoria Scheyer and Marina Kumskova (2019) cites R.W. Connell's work in which she names the process of shaping institutions and organisations according to specific gender norms as 'the gender regime of an institution' which creates a supportive setting for exclusion. This is true, in most countries, the top positions of decision-making hierarchies are dominated by men and supposed masculine principles. Scheyer and Kumskova (2019) observe that this is often overlooked in a patriarchal society as gender is invisible when only the masculine is present.

Anita Gurumurthy, Nandini Chami and Sanjana Thomas (2016) highlight the fact that gender biases are not only in conventional ways of defining foreign policy through militarism but also in the contemporary method of a digital world driven national security discourses. They cite the fact that in the digital paradigm 'authoritarian neoliberalism' creates the myth of 'masculine entrepreneurialism' and 'misrecognition' of women. Digital technology is used both by the state and the market for surveillance of the poor and powerless, irrespective of gender.

The government and market in the name of connectivity and transparency compromise privacy and perspectives of the powerless. In this hegemonic exercise, omissions and silences are as significant as presence and assertions. What is not seen, heard and spoken by the framers of foreign policy is a gendered and political response to consolidate the male vote bank during the elections (Gurumurthy et al 2016). Deborah Stienstra (1994/1995) also highlights the fact that there is a silence maintained by foreign policymakers with regard to violence against women (both in war and peace times) as women are not part of these decision making processes. We can add to that it is not only the absence of women per se but also persons who are sensitive to gender questions. Even those who identify themselves as men can speak for women and the third gender if they have the inclination and intention to do so. The absences and silences are invisible to the framers of foreign policy as there is a lack of plurality in representatives' social, cultural and economic backgrounds (not only limited to gender identities). Gitta Shrestha, Deepa Joshi and Floriane Clement (2019) emphasise the fact that the performance of hegemonic masculinity makes the side-lining of ethics of care and distributive justice as basic organisational values. After looking into the contributions of the above-mentioned scholars, we can understand that what is significant in foreign policy is a constructed notion. Therefore, it can be changed. However, the realisation that something is wrong in the current hegemonic masculinity based formulations of foreign policy is the first step towards change. Countries like United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Australia, Costa Rica and Germany have already started the process to reframe and redefine foreign policy as a concept. But a country like India and its decision-makers have failed even to acknowledge the gaps and silences inherent in its hegemonic masculinity based foreign policy. India needs to reimagine its social and governmental structures and how they interact with

both global and local power hierarchies. These aspects are focused in the coming section wherein India and Afghanistan relationship is analysed through a gender lens.

India and Afghanistan Relations through aGgender Lens

As discussed in the above section, there is no outward expression of gender in the foreign policy formulation. However, it indirectly feeds on the idea that men are protectors of the nation-state and women against foreign aggression. The concept of humanitarian intervention and the idea of 'responsibility to protect' associated with it reflects the hegemonic masculinity embedded in the superpower nation-state and its allies. With respect to Afghanistan, India has supported this 'protective armour' of the superpowers both in 1979 Soviet Union's intervention and in 2001 US's intervention. India on the one hand, as we have seen already in the earlier sections of this paper, claims to have historically enriched social-cultural relations with Afghanistan. On the other hand, India uncritically sides with superpower interventions in establishing puppet governments from above in Afghanistan. In doing so, India fails to understand that in a non-western society like Afghanistan, the hegemonic masculinity of men is hurt when 'government from above' is established by foreign powers. As Lina Abirafeh (2007) highlights the fact that in a traditional and patriarchal Afghan society the basic social entity is the family – the private domain. The hegemonic masculinity of men believes in the protection of society as inherently connected to the protection of women. For Afghan men and women, women's paid work outside the home is a sign of their utter poverty and hardship. It is seen as an insult to men's dignity. It leads to questioning men's ability to provide. To provide and protect for one's family and nation is the basis of the honour of men. A man who fails to do so has no honour in the eyes of his family members and community members. Therefore, the campaigns for

women's rights to move out of the household for getting an education or employment is directly linked with the failure of Afghani men. The idea of women defying the family borders is seen as an imposition of foreign ideology emasculating the Afghani men at large (Abirafeh, 2007). Elizabeth Boulton (2020) has highlighted the importance of renegotiating gender perspectives in Afghanistan. She has cited the need for addressing not only the exploitation of women in Afghanistan but also of 'boy rape' (bacha bāzī) prevalent in Afghanistan. She equally speaks for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, Inter sexed + (LGBTQAI +) communities in Afghanistan. Boulton states the fact that gender issues are not limited to women but to other genders and sexualities. Even boys and men have violent experiences in Afghan society (Boulton, 2020). The revival of the Taliban could take place as a means to undo the harm done to the 'honour' of Afghan men and nation-state by the US and its allies since 2001. In post-2001 Afghanistan when India has sided with the US in empowering Afghani women through US-led Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), India is seen as pursuing a foreign policy that simultaneously has a submissive admission to the vision of the superpower US and an aggressive imposing attitude towards people of Afghanistan. Here, this behaviour can be seen as an 'Arthnarishwar' masculinity of India's foreign policy where the supposed feminine quality of submissiveness and absolute obedience to the US reflects the submissiveness of a wife to her husband. This femininity with the US is counterbalanced with aggressive masculine behaviour with Afghani people. In this process, India in its foreign policy has moved away from the 'strategic autonomy'. India has a side-lined political dialogue with local communities in Afghanistan to know people's perspectives on coming out of foreign occupation. India's foreign policy in the post-second coming of the Taliban to power has to adopt empathy for Afghan communities. India also has to

show sensitiveness to the different ethnic compositions of the Afghani society. India has to engage beyond Pashtun leaders. India has to emphasise faith in Afghan leaders to stand for a version of Islamic traditions where men and women are seen as partners in building their homes and the nation-state. The whole concept of 'honour' has to be expanded in a new Islamic light where violence attached with honour has to be replaced with love. It is a huge task as changes in social norms is tougher than political and economic changes. India has to develop a foreign policy that moves beyond the individualistic concept of security to a community-driven security paradigm. India can bring in its historical cultural relations to an advantage to situate intersectional identities playing political games in Afghanistan. The real issue in Afghanistan is not their political or economic well-being but that of social well-being. With the years of foreign occupation and revival of regressive interpretation of Islam, the toxic masculinity based on honour, violence and revenge is permeating Afghan society (both in private and public spheres). The only way to change this is more dialogue with different stakeholders in Afghan society.

The beginning of India's foreign policy in this changed scenario after the withdrawal of the US troops is to acknowledge that everything was not perfect under the US intervention. India has to accept the failures of the US military troops as well as NGOs to connect with the people's sentiments, security and safety, especially that of Afghani men. As Muntazir Ali (2009) and Aarya Nijat and Jennifer Murtazashvili (2015) state that most of the local NGOs in Afghanistan are dependent on foreign aid. This Ali calls as a 'rentier civil society'. Predominantly, NGOs and their operations supported by foreign aid are concentrated in urban centres of Afghanistan. In this case, civil society is seen as an extension of occupying force. One of the most important limitations of the NGOs supported by the US and its allies

in Afghanistan is the lack of efforts to promote peace and harmony among different communities (Ali, 2009; Nijat and Murtazashvili, 2015). Anastasiya Hozyainova (2014) and Farhana Rahman (2017) emphasise the fact that rather than using the liberal democratic legal framework for addressing gender questions in Afghanistan, one should rely on an Islamic legal framework. Afghan society is better receptive to the narrative that Islam is not against gender justice but a particular interpretation of Islam by mullahs and extremist leaders are leading to gender injustices (Hozyainova, 2014; Rahman, 2017). Even this task is a difficult one in the given situation but is better than outright rejection of the Islamic arrangement of social life. India in its foreign policy can reflect an acceptance of an alternative Islamic way of arranging life based on cooperation and empathy.

Torunn Wimpelmann (2017) cites the fact that the Afghani leaders who formed government in Afghanistan after 2001 are equally to be blamed for the revival of the Taliban in the country. They were highly corrupt and opportunists. These tendencies get magnified in the absence of a clear legal paradigm. The official legal structure in post-2001 Afghanistan is a collage of codified laws taken from sharia, secular laws and un-codified Islamic jurisprudence. The civil servants also have allegiance to different bodies of law. The civil servants committed to the Taliban era co-existed with new government civil servants. At large, all of them believe in a traditional society like Afghanistan informal justice reached through reconciliation between conflicting parties is better than standardised laws. Hamid Karzai's presidency is witness to his appeasement of both traditional power bases and foreign donors in a highly personalized and impulsive way (Wimpelmann, 2017). India, in an honest re-evaluation of its foreign policy with Afghanistan, has to begin with understanding the prevalence of high levels of corruption and mistrust among politicians and people at large. India has to admit the violence perpetrated by the US and its allies in Afghanistan in supposed peace

times since 2001. India has to choose its mediators and negotiators very carefully in Afghanistan, especially without being carried away with the US interests in the region. India has to develop a pragmatic and autonomous foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

Rebecca Winthrop (2003) highlights the fact that Afghani society firmly believes in gender segregation. When the US and its allies started using girls educated in the western model of education in Pakistan to teach men and women in Afghanistan, Afghani men were uncomfortable interacting with better qualified Pakistani women trainers. Afghani men desire to achieve professional skills like typing, computer skills, English language and professional writing. However, they want to learn it in a gender-segregated atmosphere. Winthrop affirms the fact that social change takes a longer time than political change. To be successful in development efforts in Afghanistan, any player must work with (and not work for) the people for whom they are envisioned (Winthrop, 2003). This is the area where India's foreign policy can establish closer links with Afghanistan. For this, firstly, India has to shed its 'big brother' syndrome in South Asia. Then India has to re-orient its foreign policy from 'power over' to 'power to' approach. The hegemonic masculinity based on 'power over' has dominated India's foreign policy in South Asia for a long. This is evident from the Nehru era when India has unilaterally interfered in the internal matters of Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Now, India has to restrain itself from doing so in Afghanistan. The wait and watch approach by the current government is a pragmatic decision in the given situation. Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy (2014) emphasises the fact that India's 'no-boots-on-the-ground' policy and minimum interference in the internal issues of Afghanistan and a development-driven presence, have been fruitful. However, better ideas are also needed in India's foreign policy (Krishnamurthy, 2014). Today we

realise its significance more than ever. To bargain with Taliban dominated political arrangement in Afghanistan has to be a cautious step. India has to simultaneously show firmness and flexibility in dealing with the Taliban. India has to express its willingness to work with the people of Afghanistan. India can utilise its economic and cultural power in doing this. India can offer to Taliban continuance of funding of infrastructural facilities. Another significant contribution which India can make is to train Taliban administrators with professional skills such as computer skills and English speaking required for integrating the Afghan economy with the global neoliberal economic order. Infrastructure and informed personnel are the foundations of any administration. India can chip in this sphere as it has an upper hand in the skilled labour force as compared to Pakistan. India can bargain with the Taliban to have a higher role in gender-segregated administration and empowerment projects. India can bring development efforts to rural areas of Afghanistan and also to the homeschooling of girls. Simultaneously, India has to be firm with the Taliban when it comes to its commitment to arresting terrorist activities against India from Afghan soil.

Here again, the Ardhnarishwar masculinity, that of softness (supposed feminine quality) and stiffness (supposed masculine quality), is the future for India's foreign policy with Afghanistan. Too much firmness in dealing with the Taliban will close the channels of communication with Afghanistan which India can ill afford to do. Too much flexibility will liquidate India's national security concerns. A middle path based on Arthnarishwar masculinity is the need of the hour.

Looking forward

The present situation in Afghanistan is that of turmoil. There is instability in the political, economic, social and cultural structures of the country. Establish a meaningful relationship with

Afghanistan is a challenge for India's foreign policy. Yet, it is an opportunity for India to relook its foreign policy at large. One of the significant learnings from this experience is that India has to maintain the 'strategic autonomy' in its foreign policy. India cannot afford to blindly follow the US interests. India's image as a nuclear power enabled state and also a knowledge centre has to be used with utmost care in formulating its relationship with Afghanistan. As the discussions above have shown, gender is not explicitly mentioned in foreign policy. However, gendered notions affect the decisions we make as foreign policy. The hegemonic masculinity based on notions of militaristic, aggressive and competitive vigour in foreign policy is outdated. At least, it is clear from the Afghanistan experience. We need a new foreign policy paradigm that combines the best of supposed masculine and feminine qualities to best serve India's national interest through foreign policy. The Ardhnarishwar masculinity is the future gender lens to formulate India's foreign policy.

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India's Northeast: 'Gateway' to Southeast Asia?

Alik Naha[*]

Abstract

The purpose of the Act East Policy is to promote economic partnership, cultural ties, and strategic cooperation with the countries of Southeast and Far East Asia. In this respect, Northeast India is perceived as the gateway to Southeast Asia. In this emerging relationship, the role of the North-east is inevitable. It shares cultural, historic, and ethnoreligious similarities with the Southeast. For India, connectivity and development of the Northeast are central to the success of the AEP. It will bring about peace and prosperity in the region and contribute to broader regional cooperation. In this context, the paper seeks to study the significance of the Northeast in India's Act East Policy.

Keywords: Act East Policy, Northeast, Southeast, connectivity, development, regional cooperation.

Introduction

The Northeast is considered as the fulcrum of India's Act East Policy (AEP). History has in records; the region shares extensive socio-economic contact and cultural similarity with the countries of South and Southeast Asia. The region of Northeast covers an area of 255.000 sq. km., connected with the mainland by the narrow Siliguri Corridor, and shares boundaries with countries like China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar. Apart from its scenic ecstasy and rich biodiversity, the region is culturally vibrant, strategically important, has a vast reserve of natural gas, and is

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inhabited by 145 tribal communities. But despite its strategic importance and availability of rich resources, the region was exposed to development inequality and has largely remained isolated from the mainland. This lack of development has been a major cause of discontent among the inhabitants of the region, giving rise to separatist movements. Moreover, the tough geographic landscape of the region is another major constraint for large-scale industrialization. In such a situation, India's (Look) Act East Policy provides the window of opportunity for the development of the Northeast by engaging commercially with the countries of South-east and Far East Asia.

Under the aegis of AEP, India is making renewed efforts by inviting investment for the development of the Northeastern Region (NER). For this purpose, it has adopted a 3 C's policy (Culture, Connectivity, and Commerce) for expanding its engagement with Southeast Asia. This, India believes, will provide a greater scope of development for the NER. Countries like Japan, South Korea, member states of ASEAN, and BIMSTEC are showing signs of interest in investment in the NER. This can make a significant improvement to the livelihood of the NER. Japan is providing development assistance loans for the development of the NER. The India-Japan Act East Forum (AEF) is involved in the economic advancement of the NER. Like the ASEAN, engaging with the BIMSTEC members can contribute positively to the peace and prosperity of the NER. Furthermore, in the post-COVID period, greater engagement with the sub region can prove to be beneficial for limiting the impact of the virus, promoting greater regional cooperation, the development of the Northeast, and the overall development of India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the centrality of the Northeast in India's Act East Policy.

2. To focus on the role of the Northeastern region in India's engagement with ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and Japan.

Methodology & Data

To write this article, I have used content analysis and observation methods. In this study, data have been collected primarily from secondary sources like different published books, journals, internet sources, published research papers and articles, newspapers, etc.

The Centrality of Northeast in India's (Look) Act East Policy

The Government of Narasimha Rao (1991-1996) introduced the Look East policy intending to comprehensively engage with the emerging economies of Southeast and Far East Asia (Japan and South Korea). The primary objective of the policy is to promote economic, strategic, developmental, cultural, and scientific cooperation with the Southeast and the Far East Asian nations, to consolidate India's position in the region as well as to ward off Chinese aggression. Experts opined that establishing commercial links with developing economies of the Southeast under the aegis of the Look East policy will bring about a renaissance in the development of the Northeast. Under this policy, India actively propagated and participated in different arrangements like the ASEAN, BIMSTEC, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM), etc. There are two major aspects associated with India's pursuance of the Look East policy – *firstly*, to promote trade, investment, tourism, science, and culture; and, *secondly*, promoting defense and strategic cooperation (Kalita, 2018). The Look East policy was a silver lining in the development hope of Northeast India. However, the former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her visit to India in 2011, arguing for India's greater involvement in the Asia-Pacific region (now, Indo-Pacific) favored the term 'Act East' instead of 'Look East'.

Subsequently, in 2014, the Modi government renamed the Look East Policy with the 'Act East Policy' to establish itself as a security balancer along with boosting economic cooperation with Southeast Asia (Brahma, 2018).

Central to India's AEP is India's North-Eastern Region (NER) due to its geographic location and proximity. The Northeast is connected to the mainland through the narrow strategically important "Chicken's Neck' or the Siliguri Corridor. Among the policy-makers, the Northeast is the necessary land link between India and Myanmar, a member-state of ASEAN, and is thus regarded as India's 'gateway' to the Southeast Asian region. Thus, in 1996, realizing the benefits of continental connectivity, India inaugurated the 'Friendship Road' to Myanmar. The NER has a vast reserve of energy resources like coal, natural gas, etc. as well as an extensive presence of diverse flora and fauna. The NER is also a great place for tourist attraction due to its culture, scenic beauty, availability of medicinal plants, art, and handicraft. The region constitutes a 3.8 percent population of India having diverse tribal groups (Nandy, 2020). But lack of employment and socio-economic development has kept the region backward and vulnerable. The 'North Eastern region Vision 2020' emphasized "*to break the fetters of the geopolitical isolation*." (Choudhury, 2017). It stressed people empowerment, promoting investment, capacity building among others.

As a part of the AEP, the Central government has adopted a 3 C's policy to enhance its cooperation with the ASEAN through the Northeast. These 3 C's include – *Culture, Commerce, and Connectivity*. This along with initiatives like Smart city development, Skill India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Make-in-India, etc. may be regarded as a deliberate effort to do away with domestic development inequality. The Prime Minister observed that the fundamental aspects of AEP are culture, connectivity, and

commerce (Pulipaka, Singh, & Sircar, 2017). Former Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj also held them as important markers in expanding India's strategic engagement with Southeast Asia (Das & Joshua, 2016). Therefore, economic cooperation, cultural contact, and strategic connectivity at both bilateral and multilateral levels will allow the greater scope of development for the NER.

Culture contributes to greater people-to-people contact; it promotes a sense of 'Oneness' (Brahma A. , 2018). There exists a strong socio-cultural homogeneity between the inhabitants of the NER and the Southeast Asian region (Kalita, 2018). Festivals like the Rongali Bihu (Assam), Sanken (Arunachal Pradesh), Pi Mai (Lao PDR), and Songkran (Thailand) are identical in culture and practices. Buddhism is another major link between the two regions. The NER is the home to major Buddhist monasteries and attracts a large number of Asian pilgrims. Similarities in terms of food, dance, language, etc. are also present between the two regions. This sense of oneness in terms of religious practice, history of colonialization, etc. is articulated through the AEP. The ethnoreligious and cultural homogeneity can act as a catalyst in India's engagement with Southeast Asia. Therefore, India was encouraged to use regional culture as a soft power to engage with Southeast Asia.

Connectivity is another precondition for strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations. Since one of the major objectives of AEP is to enhance trade relations, the NER provides the perfect locational advantage as the economic corridor to Southeast and Far East Asia. This connectivity aspect provides a great opportunity for the people of the Seven Sister States to get benefitted through people-to-people contact, trade, investment, pilgrimage, and exchange of culture. India has adopted the 3 R's + 1A (Road, Railway, River, and Air) formula for developing

connectivity in the NER (Thomas J., 2020). This is associated with India's objective to attract investment for the NER. India has already developed the Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo highway. There is also a sense of urgency in the construction of the trilateral highway between India-Myanmar-Thailand. This trilateral highway once operationalize will connect Moreh on the India-Myanmar border with Mae Sot on the Myanmar-Thailand border via Bagan (Kalita B. , 2020). This will allow India to promote connectivity with other ASEAN nations by road (Bhaumik, 2014). India has also proposed an extension of this highway to Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Vietnam or the 'Mekong-India Economic Corridor', part of which between Thailand to Cambodia and Vietnam has become operational in 2015. These initiatives will reduce the isolation of NER and contribute to the overall economic development of the region in particular and India in general. The development of connectivity in the NER will also allow India to engage with South West China through the Stillwell or Ledo Road, constructed during Second World War. Apart from the road highway projects, India is also considering establishing a railway network for further boosting connectivity in the region. The Indian states of Meghalaya and Tripura are now well connected through the railway. A Delhi-Hanoi railway network connecting Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia is also under Indian consideration. The Government is planning to set up an air connectivity link between the L. G. Bordoloi International Airport (Guwahati) and the countries of South-East Asia. A new airport was built in Sikkim. This will also be a major development boost for the resource-rich Northeast (Brahma A., 2018). Also, to promote intra-regional connectivity, port cities are to be built along the river Brahmaputra and Barak. The Kaladan multi-modal project will offer access to Sittwe port in Myanmar. The Mongla and Chittagong ports in Bangladesh will also allow India easy access to the Southeast Asian market. Under the Sagarmala

initiative, the Indian government is redeveloping old ports and building new ones to strengthen maritime logistic infrastructure.

Commerce and trade are also key to the economic development of a region. India's increased involvement with ASEAN, BIMSTEC, BCIM-EC are crucial for the development of NER. As former Indian President Pranab Mukherjee argued that India's cross-border trade with Southeast Asia will help to elevate people of the NER from poverty while promoting '*entrepreneurial freedoms and skills*' (Ahmed, 2019). Also, investment from Southeast Asia will create employment opportunities for the tribal youths. As the region is industrially and infrastructurally backward, FDI from these neighboring countries will be beneficial for the development of the NER. Inward-Outward trade and business can be enhanced through the successful implementation of the AEP. Underdevelopment and isolation have given birth to many separatist movements in the Northeast, the pursuance of AEP is, therefore, a necessary step towards curbing those movements and, promoting a sense of inclusion through development and economic prosperity. Though there have been initiatives and investments by some Southeast and Far East Asian nations, still border trade is yet to gain momentum.

In recent times, the Central government is undertaking initiatives for "*fast pace development of the North East*" to make it an economic corridor and a trading hub with the countries of the Southeast and the Far East (The Times of India, 2016). Apart from connectivity development, sensing the strategic vulnerability of the region, India is also stressing the development of telecommunication, power, and infrastructure in the NER (MEA, 2016). The shared cultural and historical links among the people can further contribute to India's close ties with the ASEAN members. To put it in a nutshell "*Southeast Asia begins where*

North East India ends" (Choudhury, 2017) and is thus an essential component of India's AEP.

India-Japan Partnership for the Development of Northeast

As discussed in the preceding section, central to India's AEP is the development of the NER. The NDA regime under PM Modi has shown great interest in the infrastructural and connectivity development of the region. On the other hand, the strong historical linkage between Japan and the NER has contributed to building consensus between India and Japan to collaborate for the development of the region. In recent years, several new developments in the bilateral relationship between India and Japan highlight the growing tendency of convergence for partnering in the NER. In 2014, when Prime Minister Modi was hosted in Tokyo by the then Japanese Prime Minister Abe, the importance of the NER was stressed upon. The Tokyo Declaration accentuated Japan's commitment to the development of the NER and also emphasized the need to connect the region with a broader South Asian economic network (MEA, 2014). In 2015, when Abe visited India for the India-Japan summit, he conveyed his desire to provide Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) loans for connectivity development of the NER. The Japanese extension of ODA for the development of the NER began in 2010. It became much more enthralling under the Modi regime.

In 2017, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) extended a loan of $ 610 million for the 1st phase of the Northeast Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project, stressing development projects in Mizoram and Meghalaya (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2017). Also, in the same year, a major push towards India-Japan collaboration in the NER was achieved with the establishment of the AEF. The AEF is a collaboration under the aegis of India's "Act East Policy" and Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy". The AEF was

tasked with the responsibility to identify projects for the economic advancement of the NER with a major focus on "*connectivity, developmental infrastructure, industrial linkages as well as people-to-people contacts through tourism, culture and sports-related activities*." (MEA, 2017). The AEF stressed the speedy implementation of connectivity projects in Meghalaya and Mizoram and biodiversity and environment protection projects in Sikkim and Nagaland. Several new projects like the Dhubri-Phulbari bridge project and forest management projects were also looked upon by the forum. Apart from government-to-government collaboration, Japan has also engaged with NGOs operating in the NER to fund projects related to primary health centers and vocational training centers. As per a media report published by PIB in 2019, Japan has decided to invest 205.784 billion Yen in projects for the development of the NER. Some of the notable projects among them include "*Guwahati Water Supply Project and Guwahati Sewage Project in Assam, North East Network Connectivity Improvement Project in Meghalaya, Bio-diversity Conservation and Forest Management Project in Sikkim, Sustainable Forest Management Project in Tripura, etc.*" (PIB, 2019). The 5th round of AEF discussion held in January 2021 reviewed the ongoing projects in the areas of hydro energy, sustainable development, skill development, etc. while emphasizing the need to cooperate in other areas like healthcare, development of value chain for bamboo production, tourism, agro-industry, etc. (MEA, 2021). The Indo-Japan connectivity projects in the NER will greatly contribute to national economic growth and are expected to further integrate the subregion into a broader economic corridor.

Apart from development cooperation, India and Japan are also making cooperation to use culture and history as tools of soft power to build the bridge of friendship to promote people-to-

people contact. A large number of Japanese tourists throng the NER for its ecstatic natural beauty, exotic flora and fauna, and the Japanese remaining from the days of World War II. An increase in the number of tourists also provides an opportunity to the local youths to make a profit through tourism business as well as resort and hotel business. Meghalaya can emerge as a bridge of cultural contact between India's Northeast and Japan. Of late cherry blossom trees are grown in Meghalaya which symbolizes "*a charming catalyst to enhance people-to-people and cultural linkages between Japan and the North East*." (Ambassador Hiramatsu, 2018).

This Indo-Japan cooperation in the NER is also significant from a strategic perspective. This collaboration with Japan for the development of the NER perhaps provides the opportunity to open new avenues for balancing the growing Chinese influence along India's Eastern and Northeastern boundaries (Bhatia, 2019).

Significance of Northeast in India's Relationship with the ASEAN & BIMSTEC

Among the Indian policymakers, the NER is the gateway of intercontinental trade and commerce with the ASEAN and BIMSTEC. Also, with Southeast and Far East Asia, it constitutes the 'physical and cultural' bridge (Thomas, 2017). The Government of India has taken several initiatives over the year to consolidate and enhance India-ASEAN ties. The development of the NER has been one of the crucial aspects of India's AEP. The policy also promotes the cultural and historic confluence of the NER with the countries of the ASEAN. But despite India's efforts to bring investment from the ASEAN for the development of the NER, the growth rate remains below the national average. However, the region is full of potential to evolve as a major economic corridor and source of hydro-energy and natural gas.

To address this potential, fresh initiatives have been undertaken by both the Central and Provincial governments to improve road and rail connectivity, infrastructure development, creating an environment for investment, emphasis on border trade, etc. Major projects like Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, Rih Tedim Project in Myanmar, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (from Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar), connectivity to Bhutan and Bangladesh are being operationalized. Cultural tourism like Sangai Festival (Manipur), Hornbill Festival (Nagaland), Pangsu-Pass festival (Arunachal Pradesh), Assam International Trade and Industrial Fair, and Manipur Polo International are also being promoted to encourage greater people-to-people contact. The similarities between the people of the NER and Southeast Asia in terms of religion, food habits, and culture are also an advantage. States like Manipur and Assam are pursuing their own AEP to realize development. Assam has a dedicated ministry (Act East Policy Affairs Department) to expand cooperation with the ASEAN member states. The Government of Manipur and Sikkim is urging the Central government to consider providing visas on arrival to people coming from Myanmar, as part of medical tourism. In the words of N. Biren Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur, "*We have taken up the challenge to develop the state. And to reap maximum benefits from the Act East Policy, Manipur has its own policy to materialise this dream*." (Siddiqui, 2017). As Buddhism is a major religion among the ASEAN members, Sikkim provides an opportunity for enhancing Pilgrim tourism. The 5th edition of the Northeast connectivity summit organized by FICCI was held in 2018. The focus of the summit was on rail, road, and air connectivity with the operationalization of landing grounds at Tezu and Ziro, inland waterway transport development, river tourism, eco-tourism, and investment for harnessing power. Based on its cultural affinity and economic potentiality, the NER

can emerge as the fulcrum in the India-ASEAN relationship (IANS, 2017).

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was formed in 1997 to promote rapid economic development and social progress of the sub-region (BIMSTEC, 2016). From an Indian perspective, the AEP lays a major focus on engaging with BIMSTEC apart from the ASEAN. Since its inception, BIMSTEC was considered a platform capable of promoting economic prosperity and connecting people of South and Southeast Asia. It was believed to help transform the land-locked region into a land-linked region for developmental gains (Thomas J. , 2020). Greater contact between the NER and BIMSTEC can contribute to opening new avenues of cooperation based on shared culture and history. Various kinds of tourism like eco-tourism, pilgrimage or religious tourism, medical tourism, wildlife tourism, etc. can help to establish the Northeast as a tourism hub. This will push the North-East towards economic prosperity. Along with tourism, Festival diplomacy can be a turning point in promoting the shared cultural bond among the people of the sub-region. At the 4th Summit of BIMSTEC (2018), Modi remarked, "*India is committed to working with the BIMSTEC member states to enhance regional connectivity. I believe that there is a big opportunity for connectivity – trade connectivity, economic connectivity, transport connectivity, digital connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity.*" (PTI, 2018).

The trade routes between India's North East and Bangladesh like Goalpara- Mankachar-Bengunbari-Dhaka, Karimgunj-Sutarkandi-Sylhet, Ghasuapara-Koraitalai-Hahiaghat, Borsora-Cherragaon-Sherpur, Aizwal-Marpara-Mamit-Rangamati-Chittagong, etc. provide a huge opportunity for the development of the NER. The Bengal-Bangkok connectivity under the BIMSTEC can become a landmark for creating a new regional developmental discourse.

The southern corridor of the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR), a project of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), passing through Mandalay-Imphal-Jiribam-Silchar-Agartala-Dhaka may contribute to economic development by exporting local handicrafts and goods from the NER to Bangladesh and the rest of Southeast Asia. Many Bangladeshi companies are also interested in investing in the Northeast. Malaysia is also considered a potential investor in the NER. For Malaysia, the NER can emerge as a "food basket", as varieties of food items are imported from the region by it. An MoU was signed in 2011 with the Malaysia-India Business Council (MBIC) to explore future possibilities of trade and investment, education, tourism, etc.

In recent times, energy security has become an emerging issue in Indian foreign policy. The Government of India is intending to make India an environment-friendly 'gas-based economy' by increasing the share of natural gas consumption by 2030 (PIB, 2018). Domestically, the gas pipeline network has been expanded to different states and an additional 14,239 km of the gas pipeline is under development (Press Information Bureau, 2019). The states of the Northeast are believed to have a vast reserve of natural gas. Electricity from the gas-powered Palatana plant in Tripura is exported to Bangladesh (Kulkarni & Pimpalkhare, 2019). The Government of India has taken the initiative to connect the NER with the National Gas Grid. In this respect, the Indian Oil Corporation Limited and GAIL have entered into an MoU with Dhamra LNG Terminal Private Limited for receiving and storing 5 MMTPA of LNG at Dharma port in Odisha (Press Information Bureau, 2016). This will also allow India the opportunity to import natural gas from Myanmar in the future. Here too, the North-Eastern states can play a crucial role in a possible natural gas pipeline between India and Myanmar, as they share a land

boundary with Myanmar. This would make India's import of natural gas cost-effective. Such a gas network will also enhance broader regional cooperation. The states of the NER can emerge as a potential market for Myanmar gas.

Conclusion

Until the beginning of the pandemic COVID-19, the countries in South and South-East Asia were making efforts to promote greater regional cooperation. The increasing people-to-people contact of different communities residing along the Bay of Bengal based on a shared or different culture, history, cuisine, and ethnoreligious practices have been instrumental in enhancing cooperation and promoting benevolence. But the beginning of the pandemic has changed this practice. Lockdowns, the closing of borders, and non-allowance to the grounding of international flights have significantly affected the economy of most of these developing nations. The growth rates have slowed down. In the face of shrinking western economies, the development assistance received is expected to get reduced, pushing those countries at the bottom of the development pyramid towards a serious economic challenge. In the first two quarters of the 2020-2021 financial year, India's revenue collection fell by 27 percent. Regional tourism is at an all-time low. The pandemic has revealed the shortcomings of over-dependence and global supply chains. In this situation, with India being the 'pharmacy of the world', capable of producing a large volume of vaccines annually can be of much relief for the countries of this subregion. India providing medical assistance and equipment to Southeast Asia highlights India's commitment towards the region. With India helping all its neighbors by providing medical assistance and the Covishield vaccine doses under the "Vaccine Maitri" initiative, it can utilize the Northeast to further support the sub-region through medical diplomacy. Since the NER is crucial to India both strategically and

for the economic prosperity of the East, greater efforts must be made to transform it as a development corridor in engagement with multilateral frameworks like the ASEAN and BIMSTEC.

In this post-COVID situation, there are numerous opportunities to work upon the already undertaken initiatives to boost regional connectivity. Minister of DONER Jitendra P. Singh observed, "*New paradigms would emerge post COVID-19 crisis, with a potential for new breakthroughs in economy, trade, scientific research and several other diverse areas, catapulting the Northeast as the economic hub of the country and a preferred destination for startups.*" (PIB, 2020). This reaffirms the centrality of the Northeast in India's AEP. Early implementation of the 3R's+1A formula is necessary to diversify regional connectivity. In recent times, Bangladesh is allowing India to transport goods from the Northeast through its borders. A consignment of cement was sent to Tripura via a river in Bangladesh. The early completion of the trilateral highway and the Kaladan multimodal transport project is significant for the NER. The border haats between Bangladesh and India's North-Eastern states of Tripura and Meghalaya are under operation. This has reduced the cost of transport of goods. This model of economic connectivity can be replicated in the post-pandemic period between India and Southeast Asia through the India-Myanmar border (Price, 2020). The Prime Minister's call for 'Vocal for Local' can greatly benefit the SMEs of the NER. In the post-pandemic period, the resource-rich NER is expected to be a connecting point in the success of the AEP.

Furthermore, as China continues to flex its muscles in the post-pandemic period in the South China Sea and its expansionist design towards the neighboring countries to divert global attention over its role in the outbreak of the pandemic, it is a blessing in disguise for India. The recent military coup in Myanmar is a matter of concern for India, given the fact that Myanmar is

the only continental link between India and the ASEAN. An unstable Myanmar is a threat to the security of India's NER (Wahlang, 2021).

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COVID-19 Crisis and Reverse Migration in India

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Abstract

The COVID -19 pandemic has brought the entire world at standstill. This global health crisis has not only triggered a massive economic predicament but has also generated serious social ramifications. The effect of this humanitarian catastrophe has been deep and intense especially in respect to the problem of workers and growing magnitude of reverse migration. With the situation of lock down and mandated social distancing, the problem of workers has aggravated phenomenally. Sudden job loss and incurring huge expenses in the host cities has compelled workers to migrate back to their home states. This has not only made workers vulnerable to the risk of contagion but can also exacerbate chances of greater discrimination and socio-economic insecurity. Our attempt in this paper would be to make a micro analysis of the reasons for reverse migration in India amidst COVID crisis and to scrutinize the socio-economic impact of this pandemic on migrant workers. The study would also try to explore the State intervention taken so far in this regard. A holistic approach to the issue would include probable remedial measures which need to be taken to address this critical problem.

Key Words*:* COVID-19, migrant workers, internal migration, reverse migration, 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system, Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, MGNREGA, Cash transfer or coupon system, draft National Urban Rental Housing Policy, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979.

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Introduction

Human civilization has so far witnessed several pandemics notable being, SARS (2003), Spanish flu (1918), Plague, Cholera etc. But none of these manifested that much catastrophe as COVID 19 pandemic did. Infecting almost 21.3 crore population worldwide, the deadly virus spread like wildfire, thereby making it a worldwide humanitarian crisis. Unlike the earlier pandemics, which were localised in nature, COVID 19 pandemic assumed a global character due to forces of globalization which made its proliferation extremely rapid. With its epicentre in China, the pandemic knocked Indian doorsteps in early 2020 and since then it has affected almost every section of Indian population. One such defining affect has been on migrant workers. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent nationwide lockdown has severely dislocated the country's migrant population. The site of hundreds of workers, hungry and starved, rendered unemployed and stranded around streets, cris-crossing the State boundaries to return to their villages has been common in many parts of the country. Migrants and their families suffering accidents and death turned out to be the worse turn of events amidst this crisis. These events have made migrants and their issue, a centre of deliberation.

The issue of migrant workers and their multitude problems has always been an area of study and should be a subject of concern, but COVID-19 crisis has forced the country to finally acknowledge this question. At the same time, since the pandemic is still an ongoing catastrophe, there are several limitations to the studies concerning COVID 19 effect on migrant population. Lack of reliable and accurate data collection in this regard is one such impediment. The present study is a humble attempt to give an overview regarding the migration crisis amidst COVID 19 pandemic and thus add to the existing literature.

An Overview of Migration in India

Migration is the movement of people away from their usual place of residence, across either internal (within country) or international (across countries) borders (PRS, 2020, June 10). As per 2011 Census, "India had 45.6 crore migrants in 2011 (38 percent of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31 percent of the population)" (PRS, 2020, June 10). According to the PRS, "Between 2001 and 2011, while population grew by 18 percent, the number of migrants increased by 45 percent. In 2011, 99 percent of total migration was internal and immigrants (international migrants) comprised only around one percent" (PRS, 2020, June 10).

Our topic of concern in this study is internal migration. On the basis of origin, internal migration could be categorised into four types - rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural and urban-urban (PRS, 2020, June 10). As per 2011 census, "The classifiable rural-rural internal migration was estimated around 21 crore, which constitutes 54 percent of the total migration. Rural-urban and urban-urban migration was estimated around 8 crore migrants for both categories. In case of urban-rural migrants, it is estimated approximately 3 crore or 7 percent of total internal migration (PRS, 2020, June 10).

Majority of these migrant workers, working in informal sector or in the manufacturing and construction industries, are deprived of even basic healthcare, nutrition, housing, and sanitation facility, necessary for a dignified life. These workers also have no fixed savings or housing facilities. At the same time, there is no mechanism for centralized documentation of such workers, despite of the existence of the Inter-State Migration Workmen Act, 1979, which off course emerges as an object of concern. Keeping into mind, this situation of social and economic insecurity, migrant workers become the prime susceptible targets

in case of any exigencies like the present Corona pandemic. In such situations, these workers are left with no option other than migrating back to their hometowns. This phenomenon of migrating back is called reverse migration which is our area of concern in present study.

As per official sources, the lockdown last year triggered a reverse migration that resulted in the second-largest mass movement after Partition. While the latter saw 14 million people displaced, last year's lockdown had some 6.7 million migrants returning to 116 districts in six states, according to the skill development ministry database. Independent estimates place the number much higher, at 60 million, or nine times the official count (Deka 2021).

Reasons for Reverse Migration during COVID-19 Pandemic

Amidst this COVID-19 pandemic, a trend of reverse migration is manifested in the country wherein thousands of workers are returning to their home places, in wake of future uncertainty and precarious environment. The reasons for this sudden mass exodus are worth examining:

(i) **Sudden Job Loss:** With the rapid spread of the pandemic, there was government directed lockdown, which brought the entire economy at a pause. Due to mandated social distancing, factories, industries, construction sites, which catered majority of migrant workers got closed. These left millions of migrant workers jobless all around the country. This pandemic forced lockdown, which was quite uncertain, has caused huge financial distress to migrant workers. This situation not only rendered them unemployed but also deprived them of their current and future livelihood.

(ii) **High Rental Payment:** Majority of workers and labourers working in different sectors, generally reside in

unauthorised colonies and city villages in rented accommodation. They are thus under obligation to pay regular rent and other expanses despite of their minimal wages. In some cases, landlords try to seek interest on non-payment of regular rent. It appeared even more obnoxious that within this COVID-19 crisis, many landowners started pressurising such workers to pay the house rent, leaving no other option but to go back to their native place.

As reported in a national daily, "The pressure to pay rent is such that migrant workers are slipping out of villages in the dead of the night to evade their landlords, some have shifted to their relatives' houses and others have locked the rooms and simply left without their luggage" (Hindustan Times. 2020, May 7). The same daily further reported the plight of a migrant worker, Lakshmi Devi who is from Uttar Pradesh shared that "I am a widow and am raising two children by myself. I do not have a source of income since the lockdown has begun. I was not able to pay the rent of ₹2,200 to my landlord in Vishnu Garden and so was forced to shift with my sister" (Hindustan Times. 2020, May 7).

Another bunch of workers in Kasan, near Manesar industrial township, Haryana, argued, "We are still not sure whether the company would pay us for the lockdown period. It will not be possible for us to pay rent and survive if the lockdown is extended. It is better if the government sends us to our native villages" (Baruah 2020).

(iii) **Food shortage:** The COVID-19 induced lockdown has created condition of food shortage among migrant workers. Although according to government reports, FCI godowns are stocked with enough food grains to sustain the poor populace for a minimum of one and a half year, still the problem of food shortage and

starvation death has occurred. At one side, government has come up with schemes to provide additional ration to poor and needy, on the other side, distribution system has proved ineffective owing to twin systemic lacunas. One drawback is the area specific nature of ration cards and other is that fair price shops are often beyond reach of concerned beneficiaries. At the same time, the nationwide implementation of 'One Nation, One Ration Card' system has still not been achieved. At the same time, migrant workers are less aware of this scheme. Apart from this, the biometric authentication needed for the above scheme was discontinued owing to the fear of spread of virus. Reports further highlighted that many migrant workers could not have access to food due to lack of Aadhaar Card, for instance, in Telangana (Vadlamudi 2020).

(iv) **Risk of Contagion in Large Cities:** Since big cities are densely populated, there always remains a risk of contagion. As per Live Mint, "The top 15 most populated cities in the country have about 60% of confirmed corona virus cases" (Devulapalli 2020). Keeping into mind such threat, coupled with lack of any health insurance, workers preferred to migrate back to their native places.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Migrant Workers

COVID-19 crisis had adverse effect on migrant workers, which can be categorised into following heads:

(i) Social Impact

- **Sexual and Gender-based Violence:** COVID-19 crisis has made women migrants more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based exploitation. Probable reasons are, conditions of forced coexistence with potential perpetrator, constricted living, travel restrictions, coupled with economic pressure and fear of contagion. At the same time, they generally avoid reporting

violence due to discrimination or fear of arrest or deportation.

- **Health Risk:** Many migrants share accommodation or dormitories which are crowded and suffocative. In such accommodations maintaining social distance is next to impossible. Additionally, these workers have less resources and therefore have little access to personal hygiene and protective equipment including mask etc. Majority of them even lack adequate water and soap to clean them properly. All this have made them vulnerable to increased risk of contracting the disease. Apart from this there are reports that there is shortage of beds and other facilitates in government hospitals in big cities due to sudden surge of cases. On the contrary, private hospitals, though well equipped, demand exorbitant prices which these sections of population cannot afford. In such situation, migrant workers stand exposed to major health risk.

- **Fear of Discrimination in Host and Native Cities:** Reports have claimed that many migrant workers who refused to return to their native cities, are accused of being infected with the deadly virus and are thus discriminated in the host cities. They not only struggle to acquire basic commodities, but many times also witness police brutality while going out of their dwellings. The irony is that even when they return to their native places or hometowns, they are considered suspicious of carrying Corona virus from the urban areas where they had been employed. Images of them being drenched down with soap solution or sanitizers speaks a lot about their helpless condition in these cases.

- **Mass Exodus and Deaths:** With lockdown restrictions and closure of factories/ manufacturing units; workers, left with

no job and work, found it more reasonable to go back to their native places. This resulted in mass exodus of migrants, since they felt that death by virus in their home place is better than death by starvation or hunger in host cities.

With public transport coming to a halt, these workers were forced to travel thousands of kilometres either walking or bicycling along with their families. Some travelled long even without food or water. According to the Hindustan Times, "Many even got arrested for violating the lockdown, after being caught at inter-state borders, forests between states" Hindustan Times, 2020, May 9). There are instances when some migrants even died of exhaustion while travelling back home. For example, "Jamalo Madkam, a 12-year-old along with 12 other migrant workers decided to return home on foot, but died due to electrolyte imbalance and exhaustion, barely 11 km from home" (World Asia, April 21, 2020).

Another example is of Aurangabad, where 16 migrants were killed on 8 May 2020. As per report, "The accident took place after a freight train ran over them while they were sleeping on the tracks, exhausted from walking" (The Hindu May 8, 2020). According to the Hindu, in another incident, "26 migrants were killed and many more were injured when a trailer carrying migrants rammed into a stationary truck, also carrying migrants, in Auraiya, Uttar Pradesh on 16th May 2020" (The Hindu May 17, 2020).

(ii) Economic Impact

- **Unemployment:** The closure of construction sites/factories has rendered large number of workers unemployed and directionless, leaving the economy in shambles. As per The Hindu, "According to the Azim Premji University COVID-19 Livelihoods Survey, about 80% of urban workers lost their jobs during the lockdown. The average weekly earnings of those

who were still employed fell by 61%" (The Hindu May 13, 2020). Many of these urban workers were migrant workers who had left their hometown in search of better livelihood but are now experiencing a financial distress due to the lockdown.

● **Economic Loss in terms of Loss of Salary/Delayed Salary:** The nationwide lockdown in India which started on March 24, 2020, to curb the spread of corona virus has impacted nearly 40 million internal migrants, according to World Bank (The Hindu. May 23, 2020).

The Economic Times reveals that, "according to a survey by Azim Premji University, eight out of ten workers in urban areas have lost their jobs during the lockdown and almost 6 in 10 people in rural India saw job losses," (The Economic Times, May 12, 2020). This job loss has led to loss of continuous source of income. Also due to lockdown and mandated social distancing, the economic loss of factory owners got transmitted to workers in terms of delayed salary or at times no salary.

(iii) Psychological Impact

The above social and economic effect of pandemic has created a deeper psychological impact on migrants. It cannot be denied that the situation created due to this pandemic has led to the feeling of fear, anxiety, and depression among them. The sudden and colossal influx of these migrants might lead to psychological insecurity among native population and more intense struggle for livelihood among natives and migrants. This might lead to second migration crisis.

Government Intervention

(i) Relief Measures

Keeping into mind the financial distress faced by migrant workers, the Home Ministry, on 27th March 2020, issued an order

to the State governments permitting them to avail the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) for furnishing food and shelter to the migrants so that they might not resort to distress migration during lockdown.

On 29th March 2020, the government issued certain pertinent orders viz. directing landlords not to demand rent during the period of the lockdown and employers to pay wages without deduction. This came as a big relief to crisis ridden migrant workers. Many State governments, including Odisha and Delhi and others, have issued specific orders to waive off rents in the wake of the covid pandemic.

As per reports, "the centre also directed the State governments to set up immediate relief camps for the migrant workers returning to their native states" (The Hindu, March 29, 2020).

Another major government intervention was the launch of National Migrant Information System (NMIS) by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). This is an online database aimed at streamlining the movement of migrant workers. This database will also help states in identifying the current number and location of stranded migrant workers so that relief measures could be targeted properly. To keep themselves updated with worker's condition; the authorities also created mechanism to feed the contact numbers of migrants in the system.

Thousands of relief camps were made to house stranded migrants and stop the mass exodus. According to Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary (Ministry of Home Affairs), "…a total of 27,661 migrant relief camps have been set up in states and UTs, with government funded 23,924 relief camps and 3,737 camps by NGOs. At least 12.5 lakh migrant workers have been provided shelter in these camps" (The Tribune, August 20, 2020). She further pointed that, "Besides this, 19,460 food camps had been

set up in various states/UTs (9,951 by the government and 9,509 by NGOs), where over 75 lakh people were being provided food across the country. Besides this, the MHA has been continuously monitoring the enforcement of lockdown measures across all states and UTs" (The Tribune, August 20, 2020).

At the same time, with the aim to simplify and modernise the labour regulation, central government has proposed to replace 29 existing labour laws with four codes (PRS, 2021).

(ii) Food Distribution

To provide food, sanitation, and medical services to stranded migrants, on 1st April 2020, the Ministry of Health and Family Affairs, directed state governments to operate relief camps.

On May 14, 2020, the second tranche of the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan (ANBA), was launched which included free food grains for two months to be provided to migrant workers who do not have a ration card. The measure is expected to benefit eight crore migrant workers and their families (PRS, 2020, June 10). The finance minister also announced that, "One Nation One Ration card will be implemented by March 2021, to provide portable benefits under the PDS. This will allow migrant workers to access ration from any fair price shop in India" (PRS, 2020, June 10).

PM Modi in his address to nation on 30th June 2020, announced the extension of PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana till November 2020 thereby providing free ration to 80 crore people. During second wave of COVID pandemic in 2021, The PMGKAY was reintroduced for two months till June, which is further extended by five more months till November-end this year (PTI, 2021).

(iii) Transport Arrangements

Between May 1 and June 3, 2020, more than 58 lakh migrants were transported through specially operated trains and 41 lakhs were transported by road (PRS, 2020, June 10). On May 1,

2020, Shramik Special train were launched by central government for making commutation easy for stranded migrant workers. Between May 1 and June 3, Indian Railways operated 4,197 Shramik trains transporting more than 58 lakh migrants (PRS, 2020, June 10). These trains were allowed to use 50% of the coaches which were converted into COVID-19 care centres.

In this regard, Government of Uttar Pradesh took a major and appreciable step by arranging free bus services at Anand Vihar bus station (Delhi) to help migrants go back to their native places.

(iv) Financial Assistance

Soon after the announcement of lockdown, the government announced relief package of 1.70 lakh crore under PMGKY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana) for the poor, mostly migrant workers, daily labourers etc. to help them come out of financial distress. The plan included both cash transfer as well as measures to maintain food availability and security.

With the aim to provide proper food and shelter arrangements, the central government released a corpus of ₹ 11,092 crore to states and UTs under the NDRF (PRS, 2021, February 13).

From 1st April 2020, it was further announced that, the average daily wages under the MGNREGA were to be increased to ₹ 202 (US$2.80) from the earlier ₹ 182 (US$2.60), so that migrant workers could earn their livelihood once they return to their native places. The budget allocation for the scheme was increased by Rs 40,000 crore in 2020- 21 (under the Atmanirbhar Bharat package) to address the need for more work during the Covid19 pandemic especially for returning migrant workers during the lockdown (PRS, 2021, February 13).

On 13th May 2020, an amount of ₹ 1,000 crore was allotted for support and welfare of migrant workers from the corpus of PM CARES Fund.

(v) Union Budget 2021 and Migrant Workers

It was announced that a portal will be launched to collect information for gig or construction workers. This portal would help in framing schemes on health, housing, insurance etc for migrants working in unorganised sectors. It was also declared that the Apprenticeship Act will be amended to enhance apprenticeship opportunities among these workers (PRS, 2021, March).

According to the Times Now, "It is also declared that Labour Bureau, an attached office under this Ministry, will work on four new surveys for Migrant workers, Domestic workers, Employment generated by Professionals and Transport Sector. It will also prepare 'All India Establishment based Employment Survey (AIEES)'. Results of all these surveys are likely to come within 8-9 months from the start of actual field surveys" (Times Now, 2021, February 8).

Although, the overall measures of Central and State government in this hour of crisis are highly commendable but still these were kept under scrutiny from some quarters.

Much was said about the transport arrangements/measures. As per reports of the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), there was serious confusion among workers regarding exact procedures of registering themselves for travel. One probable reason was the linguistic barriers among workers as far as state registration portals were concerned. These portals were at times unintelligible by them since most of these portals were either in local language or in English. Apart from this, in some cases, due to lack of information, migrants were compelled to pay large amount of money for their own registration.

Reports have also claimed that norm of social distancing were hardly followed in the buses due to overcrowding. Stranded

workers have also complained about over charges and mismanagement like lack of food, water, and proper sanitation.

Even at quarantine centres, the conduct towards migrant workers came under strict criticism. Upon their return they were treated with discrimination; being treated with fear or as 'carrier of infection'. In some cases, they even met inhuman or embarrassing treatment like sprayed or wash down with spirit, sanitizers, or detergent solution.

The changes in the labour laws, especially by Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh governments were also put under critical lens. Labour unions criticised the provision of disseminating greater authority to employers, for relaxing the rules of hiring and firing of labours and their service conditions. However, in defence, it could be argued that these changes were motivated with the spirit of propelling growth.

Recent Direction by Supreme Court on Migrant Crisis

Keeping into mind the plight of migrant workers, the Supreme Court took *Suo motu* cognisance regarding this issue and passed a historic order on 29th June 2021, involving following major directions (The Supreme Court of India, 2021):

Firstly, it directed the Central Government to develop a portal in consultation with National Informatics Centre (NIC) for registration of the unorganized labourers/migrant workers (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 80 (i), pp.76-77). It further directed that, "the Central Government, respective States and the UTs to complete the process of portal for registration under National Data Base for Unorganized Workers (NDUW Project) as well as implement the same not later than 31st July 2021…The process of registration must be completed not later than 31st December 2021" (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 80 (i), pp.76-77).

Second, to redress the problem of food security among the migrant workers, the Supreme Court directed the Central government, "to allocate and distribute food grains as per the demand of additional food grains from states for the distribution to migrant labour" (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 80 (ii)(iii), pp.78-79). As per statistics, 204 lakh tonnes of additional food grains have already been allocated by the centre for the period from July to November 2021.

Third, the Supreme Court further directed the State governments, "to draw appropriate scheme for distribution of dry ration to migrant labourers, which may be implemented on or before 31st July 2021. Such scheme may be continued till the current pandemic (Covid-19) continues" (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 80 (iii), pp.78-79). Also, Union government can provide additional allocation to the State for such special scheme.

Fourth, the Supreme Court emphasised upon implementation of the 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONOR) scheme by all state governments and said that "we direct the States who have not implemented the 'One Nation One Ration Card' scheme to implement the scheme by not later than 31st July 2021" (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 38, p.32; PARA 80 (iv), pp.79). The court also directed regarding community kitchens and stated that, "The States have been running community kitchens during the pandemic. (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 78, p.74-75). State should run the community kitchens at prominent places where large number of migrant labourers are found...these community kitchens should be continued at-least till pandemic (Covid-19) continues" (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 80 (vii), p.79-80).

Fifth, the Supreme Court has directed that, "the Central government may undertake an exercise under Section 9 of the

National Food Security Act, 2013 to re-establish the total number of beneficiaries eligible for securing subsidised food grains in urban and rural areas." (The Supreme Court of India, 2021, PARA 80 (v), p.79).

Suggestions and Way Forward

The migrant population contributes significantly to national and especially urban economy. As per the 'Report of the working group on migration, 2017', "In manufacturing in urban areas, 38% of the male workforce is composed of migrant workers, with a similar share in modern services" (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2017, January). However, ironically their contribution is not well recognised. This has opened the pandora box regarding the migration issue, especially during COVID crisis. The issues regarding migrants are complex and thus the remedies need to be a combination of both short term and long-term measures.

(i) Immediate/Short term Remedial Measures

- The first immediate measure on the part of authorities should be that as soon as migrant workers reach their native place, provision should be made to provide them relevant jobs, based on their skill and talents under existing rural employment scheme. States/UTs should be advised in this regard. The government of India has also allocated an additional Rs 40,000 crore for MGNREGA under Atma Nirbhar Bharat package to provide work to these workers (Ministry of Rural Development, GOI. September 2020). Also, if required minimum wages to workers under MGNREGA should be increased as done by many States like Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, and UT like Puducherry.

- Another suggestion in this regard could be to create a database at local level distinguishing skilled and unskilled

workers so that they can get access to employment opportunities as per their unique skills or talents. This would help in regularizing employment of migrant workers.

- Also, till the time migrant workers are not getting employment, a provision of minimum compulsory monetary assistance should be provided by the government. Union government, in this regard has forwarded a proposal of providing a minimum daily wage of more than Rs 200 to all inter-state migrants.

- Monetary assistance through Aadhaar linked bank account could be a unique measure to provide them financial assurance.

- Cash transfer or coupon system could be an alternative wherever Aadhaar linked bank account facility are not available, though this is not beyond scrutiny.

(ii) Long Term Remedial Measures

Firstly, there is a need of a just and effective labour migration governance system for our workers. This would require following measures to be taken:

- There is a need to create a centralised database of migrant workers. This composite database would include both the educational and health data of all migrant workers and their families. Educational database would include complete information of all inter State migrants along with their educational qualification, skill information etc. This would help these workers get access to relevant jobs in destination States as per their unique skills and talents. Apart from this, the health database should also include the complete health information of these workers and their families, for instance, their blood group, ailments, allergies, chronic health problems etc. This will help in providing authorities to get immediate

health information of migrants in case of some misfortune or accident. Though creating such a comprehensive database would be a herculean task.

- Back at home, there is a need for a robust support system at local level for providing employment related information and counselling to potential migrants. This information should then be effectively coordinated between different states to ensure a smooth integration of migrant workers into national economy.

- Government which is currently running parallel social programmes like PM-Kisan, Ayushman Bharat, MUDRA, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, should try to converge the data of these schemes and create a detail database for future schemes and programmes.

- The restrictions based upon domicile provisions required for working in different states must be altered by states so that workers movement could be smooth and without any bias.

Secondly, apart from an effective labour migration governance system, government should ensure portability of benefits to the migrants. Migrants who are registered entities at their home places, lose access to their legal entitlements and benefits once they migrate to another place. The reason could be lack of portability of benefits and dearth of digitalization. 'One Nation One Ration Card scheme', initiated by Modi government could be a welcome step in this regard. This would help in availing the facilities under National Food Security Act (NFSA). With the help of a common ration card, beneficiaries would be empowered to avail food grains from PDS shop of any part of the country. Presently, thirty-two States and Union territories have already completed the formalities of the scheme.

Thirdly, portability of food security should be followed by portability of healthcare and education benefits to migrants. A provision like

this would help migrant children get absorbed under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan at different states. This would not only ensure continuous education to these migrant children but would also evade the problem of low enrolment and dropout rate. This would require a centralized self-registration portal, where registrations could even be authenticated by a simple text message. Similarly, SMART cards could be provided to these migrants so that they might avail health services across the country.

Fourthly, there is a need for a complete overhaul of the Construction Workers Welfare Board (CWWB) in each state, which aims to provide social security to migrant workers. However, it is alarming to find that the fund utilisation by this board across states is low. Amidst this pandemic, Maharashtra is one of few States which has provided one-time payment to such interstate workers. The 'Report of the working group on migration, 2017' also recommended that Ministry of labour and employment should actively engage the states to improve utilisation of CWWB cess revenues by expanding coverage to workers in related sectors of construction and by providing social services and housing facilities. (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2017, January).

Fifthly, there is also a need to grant reasonable residential and basic amenities to migrant workers in urban areas. The problem of migrant accommodation has brought forth the deplorable situation of housing and basic amenities in urban areas. Though migrant population constitutes a major portion out of the total population in urban area, yet there is deficient supply of low-income ownership and rental housing options for this section of population. A rapid burgeoning of migrant population has led to mushrooming of informal settlements and slums in urban areas. In this regard, Modi regime has come up with Prime Minister Awaas Yojana (PMAY) to help the economically weaker population and

low-income group obtain residential facilities thereby shortening the housing gap in the country. But since housing is a state subject, approach of States towards affordable housing exhibits stark variations (PRS, 2020, June 10). This flagship scheme is also lacking on the element of social rental housing. It is a system where rent is made affordable for the poor by adjusting it below market rates. A mechanism of social rental housing (SRH) could be accommodated in national and State level housing regime.

In 2015, the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs released the National Urban Rental Housing Policy (NURHP) draft to resolve the said problem. Apart from need based and market driven rental housing, this draft policy included the element of social rental housing for poor and shelter less living in urban areas including migrant workers.

The recently launched Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, encompasses a scheme for Affordable Rental Housing Complexes for Migrant Workers and Urban Poor with an objective to furnish reasonable rental residential units under PM Aawas Yojana (PRS, 2020, June 10). This could prove to be a welcome step, but its implementation effects are still to be seen.

Sixthly, there is a need to completely revamp the outmoded legislations regulating migrant workers in India. In this regard, there exists an Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 (ISMW Act), which envisages certain safeguards for inter-state migrant workers. However, a report by the Standing Committee on Labour observed that there is not only low registration of workers under ISMW Act but also inadequate implementation of safeguards under the said Act. (PRS, 2020, June 10). This has resulted in non-penetration of benefits to migrant workers.

Seventhly, another long-term measure could be to provide skill and vocational education to youth by local authorities so that they

might become self-reliant. This could be aided with meaningful government intervention in direction of promotion of Swadeshi, monetary assistance for creation of start-ups or for becoming entrepreneur. More strength must be given to missions like 'Make in India', 'Made in India', 'Vocal for local' and 'make local global', in future. This could generate newer employment opportunities in rural areas and help in making the dream of an 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' come true.

Last but not the least, there is a need of change of heart as far as the behaviour of civil society towards these vulnerable sections is concerned. It becomes imperative to consider these people as one among us though caught in rather difficult situation. This distress time reminds us about the relevance of Gandhian concept of trusteeship, wherein, big industrialists, factory owners are obliged to consider themselves as trustees of wealth at their dispersal, which they must spend at times of crisis like the present one. An element of 'Seva Bhav' present in Sanatan dharma needs to be instilled in the heart and mind of people, towards the society.

Until we, the members of civil society do not imbibe within us, a sense of love, compassion, and empathy towards these migrant workers, they would find it difficult to resettle again in big cities without any apprehension, after this pandemic gets over.

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that migrants are those invisible group in the country's population who have neither been entailed into urban planning nor incorporated into city's population and ironically not even counted within villages. In such a situation, it become very difficult to get an actual picture regarding their conditions and this is the reason there is no such unified database or legislation concerning them. Government intervention in terms of monetary assistance under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, food

security and portability of benefits under schemes like 'one nation one ration card', cheap housing rental scheme under Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan etc are appreciable. But still a lot needs to be done in this regard. As per the International Labour Organization (ILO) new report 'Road map for Developing a Policy Framework for the Inclusion of Internal Migrant Workers in India (2020), "a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is needed for amelioration of migrant population" (ILO, 2020, December 7). We need to understand that this COVID-19 pandemic has provided us the chance to convert adversary into opportunity. This crisis should be seen as a prospect to revamp our labour migration governance system and implement measures of enhancing skill development, self-employment, and entrepreneurship. This would surely help in transforming India into a self-reliant and Atama Nirbhar Rashtra in which even this section of population will get their due share and recognition.

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Book Review

Raja Sekhar Vundru's, 'Ambedkar, Gandhi and Patel The Making of India's Electoral System'. Bloomsbury. 2017 .200pp.Rs.499.

In the present scenario there is a global debate prevalent regarding Electoral system reform in different democracies following the different kind of electoral system. Irrespective of the fact that whatever form of electoral system is under practice, the democracies and political scientists are engaged in analyzing the pros and cons of these different forms of electoral systems on the basis that how much they are serving the very purpose of representation. In our country too where we are following First Past the Post (FPTP) system which we inherited from British regime wherein the candidate with largest number of valid votes are declared as winner from a particular parliamentary or legislative constituency irrespective of the fact that he or she secured the majority votes (that is fifty percent plus one vote) from that constituency or not, there is serious debate these days over the representative character of FPTP system. This makes the work of Raja Sekhar Vundru, 'Ambedkar, Gandhi and Patel The Making of India's Electoral System'(Bloomsbury,2017), a important book to read.

The book mainly gives an insight on evolution of India's electoral system tracing back its roots from 1937 till now. In this process writer mainly highlights Ambedkar's tryst for separate electorate for Dalits and his contestation with other two tall leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabh bhai Patel and reflection of these all over the current electoral system which we have.

The writer has adopted comparative historical method of research as he has attempted to analyse the historical events like Poona Pact between Ambedkar and Gandhi, discussions of constituent assemblies and role played by leaders like Sardar Patel, Sardar

Nagappa over the evolution of India's electoral system. It also seems that the writer used archival methods as he is referring to the different texts written by Ambedkar like '*What Congress and Gandhi have done to untouchables*',diary of Mahadev Desai who was the personal assistant to Mahatma Gandhi and various others.

The book begins with describing the prime purpose of electoral system to translate the will of the voters into number of legislative body and then classify the different kind of electoral system practiced in various countries broadly into three categories viz : Plurality system which is single member constituencies where representative is elected through First Past the Post like in democracies like India and USA; Majoritarian system is where majority refers to more than fifty percent vote that is fifty percent plus one vote like French presidential election and third is Proportional Representation system under which legislative seats are won by parties in proportion to percentage of votes gained by them. Author also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of all three types of electoral system briefly.

Vundru mentions about the discriminatory social history of the country as a ground for unfolding Ambedkar's demand for a separate electorate of the oppressed class. For outlining the trajectory of India's electoral system he starts from the election of 1937 in British ruled India in which very few people were enfranchised to vote on the basis of their land revenue paying and taxpaying capacities. Vundru captures the process of rise of two towering leaders Ambedkar and Gandhi in Indian politics. And how Ambedkar gradually championed for untouchables civil and political rights since his appearance before Southborough commission where he submitted plea for untouchable representation with a staunch view that dalits do not any other

community or any non-dalit to represent their problems hence Dalit should be allowed to represent their issues themselves.

The book tries to capture the entire episode of Simon commission, round table conferences, its outcome and the open confrontation of Ambedkar with Congress and Gandhi over the issue of separate electorate for dalits. Simon commission appointed by Britishers for Electoral reforms, Congress opposed the simon commission whereas Ambedkar represented on behalf of Dalits and sought for separate electorates for Dalits. The Simon Commission report which came in 1930, recommended continuation of separate electorate for minorities on one hand and for the first time recognized dalits as a distinct political group but no separate electorate was granted for dalits and were allotted reserved seats with Hindus with a special provision that is any dalit can contest election only if he is declared to be fit to do so by the Governor. This clause highly disgruntled Ambedkar. However during this time Congress which was opposing the Simon Commission appointed a committee under Moti Lal Nehru to draft a new Constitution in May 1928, after which the Nehru report came. Nehru report denounced the demand of separate electorate for minorities as well as dalits however it talked about extending the rights to dalits equally.

Actually the major part of the book revolves around the Ambedkar's demand of separate electorate for Dalits which turned the key contention between him congress and Mahatma Gandhi and comprise of the following events: Ambedkar's pursuance for separate electorate in Round Table Conferences, the outcome of round table conference, Gandhi's disapproval to it and going for fast unto death, reconciliation between Ambedkar and Gandhi in Poona Pact and aftermath of it Ambedkar's efforts to compensate what he lost in Poona Pact. Vundru mentions that first round table was quite successful for Ambedkar as he managed convincing there that dalit should be given

representation in seats. However in the Second Round Table Conference where Mahatma Gandhi too participated, confrontation between Gandhi and Ambedkar arise within the conference where Gandhi denounce any further special representation except for muslims and Sikhs. However the British Government on 17 August 1932 announced the award for minorities and dalits . The British accepted the Ambedkar' suggestion for two votes, one in a separate electorate for dalits and other in a general constituency on a common electoral roll along with hindus. This entire episode irked Gandhi and he went for fast unto death against this communal award. As he saw it as a disintegrating force and especially since he considered schedule castes as an integral part of Hindu religion so he apprehended that it will be a disintegrating factor within Hindus.

Author broadly narrates the discussion between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the issue of separate electorate which finally concluded in the form Poona Pact which brought change into the electoral method of separate electorate and consensus was made on a two stage election process. First, separate primary elections to be held for reserved seats aout of which a panel of first four candidates would go for secondary election.The election of 1937 and 1946 used this Poona Pact method for dalit representation.However Ambedkar saw the outcome and again started pushing to compensate what he has lost in Poona Pact. He proposed to Gandhi again that instead of a two stage election there should be a one time election and schedule caste would poll in two ballot boxes and winning candidate amongst the schedule caste should receive at least 25 percent vote of the community to be declared validly elected. In constituent assembly too Ambedkar advocated for this qualified joint electorate. In the analysis of 1937 election Ambedkar showed that only 18 percent of the votes polled by untouchables were in favor of congress and 82 percent have been against the congress which attacked congress claim of sole representative of untouchables.

Vundru in his book mentions that Ambedkar's idea of qualified joint electorate was thwarted by Sardar Patel who himself was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Firstly Sardar Patel reacted positively by convincing Gandhi to winning over Ambedkar by granting him a 20 percent valid vote formula(however Ambedkar asked for 25 percent). But later on Patel backed out from it in the letter written by him to Ambedkar on 1st September 1946. After that Ambedkar move to bring in electoral method of 20 percent qualified votes for dalit in reserved constituencies were thwarted every time by Patel. Later in constituent assembly Ambedkar along with one other Congressman Sardar Nagappa moved a resolution proposing that a minimum of 35 percent of votes of his or her own community were to be secured by a schedule caste for his or her valid election. But this resolution introduced by Sardar Nagappa too were withdrawn on the insistence of Sardar patel.

The new constitution of India , Under Article 325 states that there shall be no separate electoral rolls on the ground of religion,caste, race or sex and Article 326 ensures adult suffrage. And as per Article 330 the constitution have provision for reserved seats for schedule castes and schedule tribes in legislative bodies.

So we can see the trajectory of India's electoral methods and its changes broadly in following : (1.) Two stage election with separate electoral rolls for schedule caste voters with a primary election and secondary election to (2) a two member constituency under joint electorate and then ultimately (3) to a single member reserved constituency. From 1961 onwards single electoral rolls with a joint electorate of both schedule caste and non schedule caste voters under a single member reserved seat became prevalent.

Vundru at the end also try to correlate the present context and support Ambedkar's idea by saying that it is noticed that the representative of reserved constituency are not performing well for enhancement of their communities and their wellbeing, behind

which Vundru sees the pressure of joint electorate and hence concludes that for what Ambedkar feared is actually turning true.

Undoubtedly the author has successfully attempted to describe the different phases of evolution of Indian electoral system in the light of three eminent personalities Ambedkar, Gandhi and Patel. But at the same time it is important to mention that the book gives an impression that he has overemphasized Ambedkar, may be because of similarity of ideas. Also at some stage while reading the book it appears that instead of discussing growth trajectory of the Indian electoral system focus shifted on personality comparison of the three leaders. The book discus about Ambedkar's backing for separate electorate and Gandhi's and Patel's opposition for it but it almost lacks, however book carries the excerpt of Gandhi-Ambedkar Discussion in Poona Pact which gives some idea about why Gandhi was against it but it was required to be dealt more. As far as Patel is concerned there is very little in the book about the thoughts and ideas of Patel that why he was against separate electorate except just arguing that Patel was a follower of Gandhi. The book also could have in a more debating way to make reader better understand, which should have contain the disadvantage of a separate electorate too along with its advantages.

So at the end it must be said that although author has made an honest attempt to justify the title of the book but at same time it is not the whole picture of the making of India's electoral system but just one dimension of broader canvas of evolution of India's Electoral system.

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Malini Sur: *Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border.* **Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania. 2021. 248 pp. Rs. 2,252.**

Illegal migration, people at margins, and politics over national boundaries became more evident in the twenty first century. The adverse outcomes of migration whether legal or illegal on host state and home state came to represent dilemma at multiple levels for post-colonial countries. Critical political changes in the last century attributed to altercations in the material conditions of the people concerned, with that, inhabitants living in the peripheral regions became susceptible to various security challenges and in some cases were forced to migrate.

The intellectual tradition associated with migration is strikingly divided into two blocs' namely pessimistic and optimistic one. Optimistic approach derives human security concerns and pessimistic approach pursues national security objectives. Setting in this light is the recent book by Malini Sur, whose work has encapsulated the plight of borderland communities through her ethnographic research undertaken from the year 2007 to 2015. As claimed by scholar, the pitiable livelihood patterns in the peripheries of India–Bangladesh led to formation of dubious identities and transnational economic activities conducted under the rubric of 'jungle passport'.

To begin with, this book persuades the readers to eschew state perceptions on border making and signals deep skepticism on the state's role in surveillance. Man versus state is the principal focus where former's volition is formulated through deontological reason. As far as the structure of the book is concerned, it is divided into six chapters and has employed four components namely, the ecosystem of India-Bangladesh borders along North – East India, infrastructures like fences, critical exchanges between

borders where manipulation takes place and finally the mobility. Each component corresponds to develop a network of interconnected links that define everyday life of borderland communities. For further examination, critical analyses of each chapter are required.

The introductory chapter has precisely explained the subject matter of the book and one could situate the normative aspects involved in developing a theoretical base. In the first chapter, author has selected Rowmari-Tura road for the study that once formed a single unit for mobility, now stands separated by international borders termed as national fault lines. Historically, as claimed by author, in both colonial and post-colonial phase, Rowmari-Tura road has fallen prey to Cartographic anxieties and inhabitants experienced geographical transformations as constructed by states. Second chapter investigates the ascension of agrarian politics that has disrupted the traditional rural practices of rice farming. With the division of borders, peasants and traders were locked in an uncertain situation as the securitization norms came to dominate their lives and has used the metaphor 'rice wars' to delineate evolving distress. At one level state's imposition of limits of sovereignty and alienated situation of the borderland inhabitants is presented as juxtaposing positions.

Semantics of the term 'Fang Fung' is analyzed in Chapter three. The Fang Fung lacks any literal meaning, although it depicts the local culture of power and authority involved in the illicit business of cattle smuggling. The overlapping communal identities along India and Bangladesh borders have firmly established the manipulation of state controls. Without state sanction, entry and exit points along the borders are operated through kinship based passages as known as 'Jungle passports'. Through chapter four author aims to split open the gender and communal stereotype in

the infiltration narrative. As she explored the journeys of *Garo* women who have traversed the international borders through local networking known as 'jungle passport'. The lingering point before the state actors is to shun the linear projection of everyday lives of border inhabitants through communal lens.

Politics and muscle flexing on the project on fencing received attention in chapter five. The condition that prevails in borderlands is dubbed as 'infrastructures of fear'. The escalation of violence and hardships of the people taunts their right to normalization. In this chapter and in previous chapters, author categorically imposes Indian troops as 'Hindu troops' against the Muslim masses that live along borders. At the same time author asserts to break the pre-conceived notions on the communal identity of those who have crossed the borders for livelihood. The fencing project surfaced in Indian policy decisions right from 1980s and intensified in the first decade of the twenty first century. Author has categorically ignored the instances of safe havens of Indian insurgent groups on the Bangladesh side of borders. Human security and state security perspectives looms contradictory, yet one cannot clearly dispose any of the two as both manifest the material and ideational conditions of human lives developed along modern state system.

Sixth chapter revolves around the question of citizenship that has dominated the politics of Assam state of India since 1980s. The question of legality in the matters concerning citizenship has a history associated with Radcliffe line, as millions were forced to flee for survival from communal persecution. Settlements along borders became the zones of bustle as the newly constructed peripheries acted as the melting pot of state and nation making. In this chapter, author has traced the personal accounts of the concerned population in the backdrop of National Register for Citizens that led the drive to detect illegal migrants residing in

Assam that kick started in 2015. As per author, the fears of deportation became evident with BJP's over enthusiasm to implement NRC, and to the other extreme, the communal and ethnic cleavages that have set social boundaries became more detrimental. She also unraveled the fact that rampant corruption derailed the judicious process involved in the detection of illegal residents.

Critical insight to this work could be commenced from the fact that author has provided meagre attention towards the transnational threats that have moved across borders through routes of illegal migration. Secondly, in terms of border politics, there is a general tendency among the scholarly community to discuss only BJP's position and to the least that of AASU and AGP, whereas there is a categorical absence of debate on other stakeholders. Thirdly, Bangladesh's poor border management coupled with BDR's (later BGB) human rights violations remained untapped field of enquiry.

This book is a compilation of author's personal observations meted out during field work and it has enhanced the intellectual grip on the plight of people at margins. The borders became a site for contestation ever since partition was announced by the colonial administration in 1947, hundreds of books were written on the theme of woes of refugees. Only recently scholars have paid attention to the nuances of border making on the inhabitants at peripheral regions. Willem van schendel, Hosna Shewly, Jaosn Cons, Reece Jones etc., have stretched their academic knowledge to unearth the shades of border politics and Malini Sur's work in this review is a novel addition to the existing list. Each essay is designed for enhancing reader's thought process and to engage seamlessly to understand the illustrative anecdotes. For career scholars and academicians working in the field of border politics,

this work will help to widen the vistas of knowledge and open new avenues for critical enquiry.

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