

THE CULTURAL CONNECT – GLIMPSES FROM INDIA AND LAOS

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ABSTRACT

Right from the ancient times there are no exceptions to the rule that cultural exchanges among nations, and disseminating and receiving new cultural values are unavoidable. The conversations and the communication that exists among the cultures – both within the nation and across nations - have created the existence and development of the general human culture as we learn not only from across geographical boundaries but also from our past experiences. The relationship between India and Southeast Asia is embedded in a strong historical traditions spanning over centuries. Available literature as well as folklore largely traces this relationship to maritime trade relations which later resulted in extensive cultural exchanges. Though India had trade relations with many countries around the world but the geographical proximity and the assimilative cultures of Southeast Asian neighbours streamlined the blending of Indian culture with the local culture in Southeast Asia to an extent that many facets of life of the people in Southeast Asia look similar to ours thus making the region lookalike 'Home' to Indians. Many facets of Indian history and culture and that of Southeast Asian countries can be better understood if we attempt to study the relevant materials from both sides. This article is an attempt to shed light on the ever ongoing process of cultural integration, between India and Laos, as an art of balancing between assimilating newer cultural values along with preserving one's own national identities.

Keywords: *Cultural, nation, traditions, folklore, history, India, South-east Asia.*

INTRODUCTION

Though the trajectories of Indian culture are unmistakably evident along the length and breadth of Southeast Asia – be it in Buddhism being practiced in Hindu temples in Cambodia, the similarities in wedding rituals

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and dress in Malaysia and India, the carvings of Naga and Kuber which are widespread in both Hindu and Buddhist cultures, the famous monument in Jakarta depicting Krishna and Arjun riding a chariot, shadow play in Indonesia depicting and narrating scenes from Ramayana, or the food and spices of India which are an important facet of southeast Asian cuisine and palate – yet there seems a need to revisit the cultural ties between India and Southeast Asia in the specific context of emphasizing the spaces and extents in which Indian culture is reflected in Southeast Asian cultural landscape.

For example, it is easy to discern the vivid impressions of Ramayana on the art, culture, archaeology, and literary works of Southeast Asia along with a prominent impression of ‘something distinctively their own’ - be it the narration, costume, figures, features, or the festivals associated with them thus making this epic more contextual and localised. The Ramakriti or Ramakien is the first known Siamese version of the Ramayana which is still read throughout Thailand but the story has many contributions from the localised Thai context. Manich Jumsai, an authority on the Ramakien, writes: “The Version of the Ramayana was adapted to Thai sentiments and portrays the customs, beliefs and politeness and gallantry of Thai ways of life. True, the story is Indian, but the clothes they now wear are Thai of former days. The story is so made and adapted to Thai character that no Thai think of it as a thing originated from foreign origin. It so depicts Thai ways of life and sentiments that it has become a true masterpiece of Thai literature”(Jumsai, 1967, p.2).

Such depictions not only bring two cultures or two nations closer to each other but pave way for eternal bonding within humanity at large. The Indian cultural influence has also been greatly acknowledged by Southeast Asian political leadership. Sukarno, Indonesia’s first President, himself acknowledged this: “In the veins of every one of my people flows the blood of Indian ancestors, and the culture that we possess is steeped through and through with Indian influences. Two thousand years ago, people from your country came to Jawadvipa and Suvarnadvipa in the spirit of brotherly love. They gave the initiatives to found powerful kingdoms such as those of Sri

Vijaya, Mataram, and Majapahit. We learnt to worship the Gods that you now worship still and we fashioned a culture that even today is largely identical with your own” (The Hindu, 1946). The deep traces of Indian influence in various regions, particularly through the Sanskrit language, are unmistakable and multifaceted. This influence is evident in the substantial incorporation of Sanskrit vocabulary into modern languages, where approximately 50% of Indo-Aryan languages and up to 70% of certain Dravidian languages contain Sanskrit-derived words. Additionally, the alphabets used for writing these languages have their roots in ancient scripts influenced by Sanskrit. Indian laws and administrative practices, grounded in ancient texts, have shaped governance in many areas, while Brahmanic traditions persist even in regions that have converted to Islam or Buddhism, reflecting the enduring legacy of Hindu culture. Furthermore, ancient monuments adorned with inscriptions in Sanskrit and architectural styles reminiscent of Indian designs serve as physical testaments to this rich historical exchange, highlighting the profound and lasting impact of Indian civilization across South and Southeast Asia. Sylvian Levi writes that India, often referred to as the “Mother of Wisdom,” has had a profound and lasting impact on its neighbouring regions and beyond. Her rich heritage in mythology and philosophy has been a cornerstone for many cultures, as she gave to three-quarters of Asia a god, a religion, a doctrine, and an art. India’s sacred languages, particularly Sanskrit, carried her literature and institutions into Indonesia, to the limits of the known world, and from there they spread back to Madagascar and perhaps to the coast of Africa. This cultural transmission was facilitated by historical migrations and trade routes, as Indian traders and monks traveled extensively, bringing with them not only goods but also religious beliefs and philosophical ideas. The flow of Indian immigrants to places like Madagascar and parts of Africa today reflects a historical continuity that links back to these early cultural exchanges, illustrating the enduring influence of India’s rich heritage on the world stage. India’s legacy as a “Mother of Wisdom” is evident in the way her cultural and philosophical contributions have shaped the spiritual and intellectual landscapes of neighboring regions, creating a rich tapestry of shared beliefs

and practices across Asia (Vella, 1968).

Needless to say, that in any endeavour to look into the cultural connect with any of the Asian neighbours, the reader should be apprehensive of two things – *First*, one should be cautioned about the subtle insidious tendency to overstress the part played by the ‘other’ culture and to undervalue the importance and significance of the indigenous cultures of that area. The use of such terms as ‘Farther India’, ‘Greater India’ or ‘little China’ should be disapproved of as being hegemonic. If we go by this watchfulness, then even the use of regional expressions like ‘Indo-China’ or for that matter ‘Indonesia’ may also be considered as inappropriate since they obscure the fact that the areas covered by these terminologies are not mere cultural appendages or adjuncts of India or China but have their own cultural identity as well as a strongly marked individuality. Visibly also, despite the traces of Indian influences, there are marked differences in the art and architecture of Angkor, Pagan, and central Java perceptible to only those who can visualise and investigate the indigenous cultures of the people who have produced these works of art. George Codes writes, “For the peoples who felt the stimulus of Indian Culture were not ‘wild men’ but communities with a relatively high civilization of their own. And even the Vietnamese, who were under Chinese rule from III B.C. to A.D. 939, and under the Han were subjected to intensive sinization, developed a culture which, while owing an immense amount to china, nevertheless preserved its own identity, with its roots going back to a pre-Chinese past” (Hall, 1961, p.4). He even lists the characteristics of Southeast Asian civilisation – the cultivation of irrigated rice fields; the domestication of the Ox and buffalo; skill in navigation; the importance of woman and of descent by the maternal line; animism; the worship of ancestors and of the god of the soil; the location of shrines on high places; a mythology imbued with a cosmological dualism of mountain versus sea, winged beings versus water beings, men of the mountain versus men of the sea coast, etc(Hall, 1961, pp.8-9).

Second, the reader need not be too anxious about searching and identifying the ‘right’ or the ‘best’ characterization of the word ‘culture’.

For convenience in the progression of this work and in order to avoid any misinterpretations, we will focus on the following description of the word culture:

1. Culture is an intricate whole of values that embody thought and behaviour;
2. It is a common way of life;
3. Culture is Learned;
4. Culture is not inherited.
5. Culture is usually accepted as a pattern and not just as an ‘individual trait’.

Hence, the idea of looking into the Indian ‘Cultural Connect’ with its South-east Asian neighbours has no hegemonic traces – either political or cultural. It is to understand those intricately woven cultural ties amongst India and Southeast Asia that has the potential of bringing us closer – politically, culturally, and if possible ideationally too.

LAOS

The French Indochina comprised of five territorial entities – the colony of Cochin china, the protectorates of Annam, Tonkin and Cambodia, and the smallest one being Laos. Till its independence in 1945, even during the French occupation, Laos was not only least developed amongst the other controlled colonies but had negligible importance in Indochina as far as France’s possessions in Indochina were concerned. The state of economic underdevelopment of Laos was such that despite profoundly taxing the small population the French were not able to generate enough revenue even for the day to day working of the administration (Mouhout, 1986). Developing the resources of Laos was one option but that too was for the purpose of balancing the colonial budget and not for the larger interest of Laos. During the entire period of French colonisation, Laos was not looked upon as a ‘separate political and geographical entity’ having a distinct cultural and historical individuality but only as a constituent of Indochina and there too economically and militarily it occupied a place of insignificance.

French interest in Laos during the nineteenth century was largely driven by strategic and economic motivations rather than a genuine interest in the territory itself. The French aimed to use Laos as a means to enhance their influence in Southeast Asia, particularly in relation to Vietnam and as a gateway for trade with China. The French perceived Laos as a crucial area for expanding their colonial ambitions. The region provided a strategic location from which to extend French influence westward to Siam (modern-day Thailand) and to secure trade routes to China. This was particularly relevant given the geopolitical dynamics of the time, where control over trade routes was essential for economic prosperity and regional dominance. Despite its strategic importance, Laos was often viewed as a secondary colony within the French Indochinese Federation. The French colonial government allocated limited resources for its development compared to other territories. Infrastructure projects were primarily aimed at integrating Laos into the broader economic framework of Indochina, facilitating trade with Vietnam and beyond. The annexation process was piecemeal and often overshadowed by broader geopolitical concerns, particularly as European events took precedence over colonial ambitions in Asia. The legacy of French colonial policies continues to shape Laos's economic and social landscape today (Stuart-fox, 1995, p.112). So, had it not been for its strategic geographical location, i.e., between Thailand and Vietnam and between China and Cambodia, Laos political existence might have been ignored and forgotten by the future generations.

LAOS: THE NAME

There is an array of explanations regarding the origin of the Country's name depending on the linguistic, cultural, historical, and geographical variants of the writers. Let us consider few of the many existing versions (Keomanichanh, 1981, pp.5-7):

- a) The view in *Pongsavadan-Thai* of Luangvichit-vadhakan is similar to that of R.C. Majumdar who believes that Lao is derived from the Lawas or the Luas.

- b) According to Khounborom legends, Lao was born in the two big Lavu and accordingly named Lao.
- c) The *Tamnanruongxat Thai* of Phya Anuman Rajadhon says that the name Lao was derived from the Kaolong (nine sons) who settled along the Mekong at the site of the mountain in Sesuan region of what is now called China, which later came to be known as Ailao.
- d) Sila Viravong suggested that Lao or Ailao was derived from the Long (Kaolong), the Li, the Lung, the Luang which later changed into Loa (the great nation).
- e) According to Oukham Phomavongsa, Lao was derived from the Dao (Star) in the heaven and later migrated from Antai Mountain in Mongol. They settled in Menam Luong or Huangho. The Chinese pronounced *Dao* as *Lao*, *D*, *changing into L*.

A very famous legend about the origin of the country goes like this – The king of heaven sent a sage, Khoun Borom, to rule on earth. Mounted on a white elephant and possessing all the accoutrements of royalty, accompanied by two wives, Khoun Borom arrived at Muong Theng (LeBar & Suddard, 1960, pp. 9-10). There he found a vine bearing two huge gourds which when pierced gave birth to men, women, seed, domestic animals and all type of useful materials thus populating the world. Khoun Borom had seven sons amongst whom he divided the land, the divisions hence corresponded to the various lands to which the Thai people migrated – Siam, Burma, Laos, and other adjoining regions like Sip Song Pan Na (Twelve thousand rice fields) and Sip Song Chao Tai (Twelve Tai principalities). The eldest son, Khoun Lo, was given the lands of Muong Swa, from which Lan Xang developed.

Laos Factsheet (Country Analysis Report, United Nations Partnership Framework: 2017-2021)

Area: The country has a total area of 236,800 square kilometres and borders with Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and China. It is 2100 km. from

Calcutta and 1000 km. from Bangkok. About 80 percent of the land area is hilly or mountainous terrain (“midland” or “upland”). This also includes areas that are remote and difficult to access. Lowland areas account for only 20 percent of the land area, but accommodate over half the country’s population (56 percent). Only one-quarter of the country’s land area is considered cultivable.

Population: 6.8 million.

The population is relatively young, with 58 percent of the population under the age of 25. Life expectancy at birth is estimated at 65.8 years for both sexes.

Ethnic Diversity: There are 49 officially recognised groups and upto hundreds of sub-groups. There are four main ethno-linguistic groups - Lao-Tai, MonKhmer, Hmong-Lu Mien and Chine-Tibetan.

Official Language: Sanskrit and Pali dominated the majority of Laotian inscriptions. The classical Laotian script, language and literature have been influenced by the then widespread use of Sanskrit. Lao script is said to be introduced by King Ram Kampheng of Sukhodaya in 1283 A.D. which marked the common origin of Thai and Lao alphabet. Greater influence of Pali was observed in the same year due to influence of Pali scriptures from Sri Lanka (Mishra,1995). It is however important to note that the Lao language does not come from Pali or Sanskrit and instead has heavily borrowed vocabulary from them. Pali particularly plays an important role in religion and religious studies in both Laos and Thailand. The language of both these nations uses scripts which are similar and are indirectly derived from Indic scripts. Modern Thai orthography on one hand includes the full range of Pali and Sanskrit characters while Lao on the other hand does not. Instead, Lao monasteries use the dharmic script, which those without religious education would not know (Enfield,1999).

The Mekong basin and the Khorat Plateau are home to a diverse array of ethnic groups, including the Lao and Phouan. Similarly, the Siamese, who inhabit the region around the Mae Nam Chao Phraya River, share historical

ties with the Shan and Khun of western Burma, the Yuan of Lan Na, the Lue and Tai Neua from southern China and northern Laos, and the Black Tai and White Tai of northern Vietnam. These groups have interacted over centuries, resulting in a rich cultural exchange that has influenced their languages, traditions, and writing systems. The interactions among these groups were facilitated by trade, migration, and the spread of religious beliefs, particularly Buddhism and Brahmanism. As these religions spread, they brought with them not only spiritual teachings but also cultural practices and scripts derived from Indian civilization. This exchange fostered a shared heritage, evident in the similarities seen in their languages and writing systems.

The Sukhodaya script, which emerged in the Sukhothai Kingdom around the late 13th century, is one of the earliest forms of writing used in Thailand. It was derived from the ancient Brahmi script of India, which was adapted to suit the phonetic needs of the Thai language. The script is characterized by its flowing, rounded letters and was instrumental in the development of the modern Thai script.

Louis Finot's observations about the Sukhodaya script highlight its significance in the broader context of Southeast Asian writing systems. He noted that while the Sukhodaya script and the Sipsong-panna script (used by the Shan people) share a common Indian origin, their paths diverged due to geographical and cultural differences. As the Sukhodaya script spread to Laos, it underwent simplification, losing several characters and tonal markers that were essential for accurately representing the Lao language. This process of adaptation reflects the dynamic nature of language and script, where external influences and local needs shape the written form. The spread of Buddhism and Brahmanism played a crucial role in the introduction of the Sanskrit script to the tribes of Laos and other Southeast Asian regions. As these religions expanded, they brought with them not only religious texts but also the written language that accompanied them. This introduction facilitated the development of local. The influence of Sanskrit is evident in the scripts developed by various ethnic groups. For example, the Lao script, which is based on the Brahmi script,

incorporates elements of Sanskrit while also reflecting the unique phonetic characteristics of the Lao language. This blending of influences highlights the importance of cultural exchange in shaping written traditions in Southeast Asia scripts that were influenced by Sanskrit but adapted to fit the phonetic structures of local languages (Lorrillard, 2009). In present day Laos Sanskrit words or words derived from it are commonly heard in everyday life, for example 'Achan' and 'Ahan' are the Lao word for teacher and food and are derived from the Sanskrit word Acharya and Ahara respectively. So are the names for the days of the week, Sunday is called Van Athita (spelling might differ) where Athita is phonetically changed from Aditya which means the Sun and Van comes from Var which means day. Similarly, the rest of the days are called Van Chan (Monday) coming from Chan being an abbreviated form of Chandra, Van Ankhan (Tuesday) where Ankhan is another word for Angar. The Indian parallel of Buddhavar (Wednesday) is Van Phut in Laos. Brihaspativar in Sanskrit for Thursday is Van Pahat in Lao, Friday and Saturday are called Van Suk and Van Sao (Sehgal, 1969).

The Mon-Khmer language family encompasses a variety of languages spoken primarily in Southeast Asia and parts of India. This family includes the Mon language, several dialects from Upper Laos and Burma, and the Khasi dialect from Assam, India. The Mon-Khmer languages are significant for their historical and cultural connections, particularly through the spread of Buddhism. Mon-Khmer languages are distributed across a wide geographical area, including Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and parts of India. During the reign of Emperor Ashoka (circa 268–232 BCE), various expeditions were sent to Southeast Asia to disseminate Buddhist teachings. These missions facilitated not only the spread of Buddhism but also the introduction of Indian languages and scripts. Monks who travelled as emissaries carried with them the linguistic and cultural influences of India, contributing to the development of local languages and scripts in the regions they visited. This relationship highlights the historical connections between the languages spoken in Southeast Asia and those in the Indian subcontinent. Needless to

say that Mon-Khmer language family represents a significant linguistic and cultural heritage in Southeast Asia, with deep historical roots connected to the spread of Buddhism and Indian influence.

LAOS AND INDIA: HISTORY AND TRACES OF CULTURAL CONNECT

In spite of recent researches, Chinese and Indian envoy's accounts, and information from the available texts, it is difficult to trace the exact date of the beginning of cultural contacts between India and South east Asia. We have been unable to ascertain the when, how, and where of this connectivity process. Though there are opinions like that of R.C. Majumdar that, it may be that sometimes a military adventurer seized political power and established a Hindu Kingdom (Majumdar, 1963). But based on various other sources, one can establish that though Laos, Siam and Vietnam were dominated by China for several centuries but none of the Indo-Chinese states were ever colonised or made a dependency by India. Indian presence or even influence was never for political purpose. About this also, in the absence of historical records bearing on the past history of Indo-China, it is almost impossible to find out the precise date of the beginning of Indian influence. No archaeological remains showing the period of Indian origin date earlier than the second century A.D., and this is evident from the discovery of the earliest Sanskrit inscription in Indo-China, the stele of Vo-Chanh, dated second century A.D.

It is believed that Indian culture spread actively at the beginning of the Christian era and many theories, mainly by Dutch scholars, have been put forward to account for this cultural spread. Through the course of the history none of these theories were accepted in totality as being capable of explaining the mammoth of socio-cultural phenomena prevailing at that particular time, yet the theories contained some part of the truth depending upon time and spatial dimensions. One such set of scholars believed that Indian culture was spread by high-caste Indians who ventured forth to seek their fortune in the lands of Gold and spices (Berg, 1929). Another theory considers Indian literati

as the bearers of Indian culture who visited South East Asia and introduced manuals of rituals and technical treatises there; or, natives who returned to their land.

The earliest Indian settlements encompassed Cambodia, Cochin-China and Southern Siam and was called *Funan* by Chinese. According to local records the Brahmana Kaundinya went to Funan in the first century A.D. and had married a native princess, Nagani Soma and later became the lord of the country (Nag, 1969). This is in line with Coedes belief that Indian culture had spread during the second and first centuries B.C. Another theory is that Indians travelled to these territories to seek fortune. They settled in Malay Peninsula and married the native girls. From many such accounts, it can be further ascertained that Indian presence in Indo-China region was mainly commercial in origin.

From religious point of view it can be said that from the seventh to tenth century, though Brahmanism had begun to decline in Indo-China, the influence of Buddhism had spread over whole of this region. In Burma, the Mon and Pyu always followed Hinayana faith; similar was the case in Laos, Siam, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In Malay Peninsula, Brahmanism declined with the rise of the Kingdom of Srivijaya in Sumatra. Then in the seventh century A.D., under the Sailendra kings, the Mahayana Buddhism flourished till twelfth century A.D. Towards the end of the twelfth century, the Khmer domination extended from the Mekong to Wiang Chan. Henri Maspero opined that Wiangchan came under Siamese domination in the late thirteenth century, likely conquered by King Rama Khamhaeng of the Sukhothai Kingdom, who seized it from the Cambodians; however, the absence of detailed records from Vietnamese and Chinese sources during this period makes it difficult to establish precise facts. Despite losing Wiangchan, the Cambodians maintained control over territories downstream of the Mekong River bend well into the first half of the fourteenth century. It was only with the emergence of a powerful Laotian state, formed from the union of principalities like Muang Chawa (modern Luang Phrabang) and Wiangchan, that the Cambodians were gradually pushed

southward, confining them to areas primarily populated by Cambodians. This transition illustrates the complex interplay of regional powers in Southeast Asia, where local states rose and fell in response to shifting dynamics. (Maspero, 1968, p.3).

Because of this prolonged Cambodian rule, the influence of Cambodian religion on Laotians was natural. But it is difficult to trace the rise and growth of Brahmanism and Buddhism in Laos before fourteenth century because of lack of adequate authentic sources. However it seems that Brahmanism played an important role at home, in temples, and courts of the country. According to Peter and Sanda Simms observed that the influence of Brahmins in the Indochinese states, particularly in the context of their interactions with local rulers and the establishment of social structures, is significant. Historically, Brahmins were invited to these regions to impart their knowledge and religious practices, which contributed to the development of a new social hierarchy that emphasized divine kingship and ritual legitimacy. Their presence provided a connection to the ancient traditions of Indian civilization, which was seen as essential for a ruler to assert their divine right to govern. The arrival of Brahmins in Southeast Asia also brought with them a wealth of cultural and religious texts, including the Vedas, Puranas, and epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which enriched local cultures and introduced the pantheon of Hindu deities, influencing local religious practices and beliefs. Despite the rise of Buddhism as the dominant religion in many Indochinese nations, the Brahmins have maintained a significant role in society, continuing to be involved in important ceremonies and reflecting a unique blending of traditions that has persisted over centuries (Pete&Sanda Simms, 1999, pp.4-5).

The discovery of images of Buddha in Luang Prabang, being different from the style characterised by the Cambodian religious mission of 1365, demonstrates that though history brought this in light quite late but Buddhism was known and practised in Laos long before that. Moreover, it is an admitted fact that Buddhism reached its height in the Mekong valley in the 17th century (Abhay, 1959, p.239). All the Lao kings have patronised Buddhism and it is said that

King Satthathirath built some seventy temples in Vientiane. The kingdom of Lan Xang and Vientiane had received the influence of both Indo-Khmer civilization and the Buddhist religion. A Dutch voyager, who travelled to Laos during 1641 A.D., gives the following account of his journey: “Laos was a powerful and prosperous country, full of worshipped places and schools of Buddhist culture and art. The monks were respected and well looked after, their meals were of high standard, and they strictly followed the rules of the community to the glory of Buddha and of his teaching” (Khong Lao, 1981, p.64). Slowly and steadily the Laotians took in the Indian culture and religion as well as the various practices associated with it which were already thriving in their land and they still preserve the Indian culture, just like Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, through their language, literature, art and religion.

Phra Lak Phra Ram, the official national epic of Laos, called Ramayana in India is one example of how stories and text traveled from one place to another and were modified according to the audience. Names of the characters, places and plot are adjusted accordingly to fit in. According to Louis Finot, ‘the plot is almost always the same: a galloping on horseback, a rendezvous, kidnappings, separations, fights against yakshas or against enraged fathers, ladies lost and found, deaths and resurrections, a final meeting together again and a happy ending- this is more or less the entire content of these poems’ (Coedes, 1966, p.180). Some believe that the story of Ramayana was brought to Laos by the Indians who traveled and settled over time while many also believe that Laos might have adopted the story from its neighboring countries in a version best suited for herself because of the prolonged exposure to neighboring countries’ culture. Stories from the Panchatantra and Jatakas in Laos are an example of how stories travel borders and outlive the carrier. The story of the Smart fox is altered locally and is titled ‘Like a star’ while another story ‘Right-mind and Wrong-mind’ goes by the title of ‘The Golden Jar’ also titled ‘Subuddhi and Kubuddhi’. The story of the Clever Jackal is very famous among the kids in India the same way these stories are popular in Luang Prabang province of Laos. Even when the storylines are changed here and there, but the moral

behind them stays the same, like the Clever Jackal concludes on the note that you should use your brains to protect yourself from destruction or how you should avoid the company of the wicked or you will pay a heavy price for it is taught in Subuddhi and Kubuddhi (Sehgal,1969). Similar to this, many more stories and characters in Laotian cultural texts can be seen to have semblance with Indian texts.

The similarities or the confluence does not end here. Rituals related to birth and death in Laos share certain similarities with those practiced in Hinduism in India. In Laos the funeral procession is led by a Buddhist monk while in India a Hindu priest and/or the eldest son of the family leads the group chanting sacred mantras. The group in India usually consists of close family members and friends; on the other hand the procession led by a Buddhist monk in Laos is followed by nuns who wear white to honor the purity of the soul. The nuns are followed by family members and friends with the casket. It is common in both the cultures for male mourners to shave their heads and wear Buddhist monk robes in case of Laos and Dhoti in case of India. If we look at the textile of Bodo tribes of Northeast India and the hill tribes of Laos, they share a lot of similarities. The traditional attire and textile in both the cultures bear symbolic significance as both the tribes live amidst nature and their textile woven by them reflects their relationship with the natural environment, their beliefs and culture. The architect, festivals, rituals, dance forms – almost all aspects of Laotian life has a visible as well as a deep confluence with Indian culture which needs to be further identified and studied so that the centuries old cultural connect could be strengthened further.

CONCLUSION:

The recent launch of the commemorative postage-stamp set-in Laos, featuring Lord Buddha from Luang Prabang and the Ram Lalla statue from Ayodhya, serves as a testament to the deep cultural ties between India and Laos. This unique stamp set, which includes the world's first stamp depicting

the sacred image of Ram Lalla, not only highlights the shared heritage of Buddhism but also showcases the distinct individuality of Laos as an independent sovereign country with its own cultural identity. The strengthening of India-Laos ties, as evidenced by the discussions on Indian nationals being trafficked through cyber scam centres and the commendation of Laos' efforts in rescuing and assisting Indian citizens, further underscores the importance of studying Laos as a unique nation with rich cultural heritage that extends beyond its geographical neighbours. This event serves as a catalyst for future collaborations and cultural exchanges between the two nations, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of their shared history and values.

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INDIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS: A CRITICAL GEO- POLITICAL ANALYSIS

“Sense of Superiority over nature a fundamental mistake, harbinger of
all environmental woes for humanity.”

Prof. Manoj Sinha¹

ABSTRACT

This research article analyses India's changing involvement in global climate change negotiations, emphasising its geopolitical strategy, national interests, and developmental concerns. India is shifting towards a low-carbon economy while reconciling economic growth and sustainable development. India's position in climate change negotiations is influenced by the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), highlighting the necessity for developed nations to assume a greater portion of the responsibility in tackling climate change, owing to their historical emissions. The article examines India's negotiation position on significant international platforms, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and emphasises its promotion of climate justice and technological transfers. This paper is based on mixed research method which examines the geopolitical forces influencing India's climate policy, particularly its interactions with China, the U.S., and the European Union, highlighting the complexities and contradictions inherent in its approach. India's leadership in renewable energy, exemplified by projects such as the International Solar Alliance, Lifestyle for the Environment (LIFE) illustrates its commitment to actively participating in global climate governance. The nation's prudent strategy in establishing binding emission targets demonstrates its necessity to reconcile global environmental obligations with domestic economic development and Bhartiya culture.

Key Words: *Anthropocene, Geopolitics, Climate justice, Climate diplomacy, Sustainable development, Energy Security.*

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INTRODUCTION

As We are living in the Anthropocene which is a proposed geological epoch defined by the significant and unprecedented influence of human activities on earth's geology and ecosystems (Davies, 2016, p. 15). India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has been actively supporting concrete measures on a global scale to address climate change. We firmly believe that people and the earth are inherently interconnected, and that the well-being of humans and the natural world are fundamentally intertwined. India is striving to separate economic development from greenhouse gas emissions. India has effectively decreased the amount of emissions produced per unit of GDP by 33 percent from 2005 to 2019, therefore accomplishing the original goal for 2030 outlined in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) 11 years ahead of schedule. India has made a substantial contribution to climate action not only through its domestic initiatives but also through its international efforts. These include the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS), International Big Cat Alliance, and the Green Credit initiative. These initiatives reflect India's commitment to the goal of "One Earth, One Family, and One Future". We are also prioritising the implementation of a development model that combines economic growth with environmental sustainability, sometimes referred to as "economy with ecology". This research paper is based on mixed research method i.e. qualitative and quantitative methods.

Various scientific studies and reports of international organizations and empirical observations are evidence that climate change is the reality of the 21st Century and is most likely occurring but with uncertain overall effects. Over the last three decades, climate change has graduated from an environmental concern to a matter of geopolitics in the twenty-first century. It has come to the center of global geo-political debate bringing together all

the countries and other stakeholders to discuss the strategies to tackle the effects of climate change worldwide. Climate change is a worldwide problem that disregards the boundaries of nations. Greenhouse gas emissions in any location have a global impact on human populations. Hence, this necessitates the implementation of solutions that must be synchronised on a global scale via international collaboration. Consequently, the growing political significance of climate change has elevated its priority in international politics and resulted in more sophisticated stances during international climate talks. The global effort to address global climate change began with the founding of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. Following then, the UNFCCC has assumed responsibility for coordinating other international climate conferences, mostly held during the yearly sessions of the UNFCCC's COP. Recently, the UNFCCC has successfully secured worldwide representation on this matter. At present, the United States Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has 195 member states, which include the European Union, along with other observer governments. This implies that it encompasses all countries that are members of the United Nations, as well as several countries that are not part of the UN. The goal is to keep greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent any detrimental impact caused by human activities on the climate. The 28th Conference of the Parties (COP 28) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) took place in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 30 November to 12 December 2023.

The government, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, hailed the final conclusion of COP 28. This decision demonstrates a successful balance between the need for increased ambition in addressing climate change and the requirements for sustainable development and poverty eradication in all nations. India expressed satisfaction with the implementation of the "Loss and Damages Fund" designed to assist poor nations affected by climate change. The introduction of the concept of "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly, and equitable manner" guarantees that the

choice is in line with scientific principles and is expressed using language that promotes climate justice and fairness. In addition, nations were urged to raise their level of ambition and strengthen their efforts in implementing adaptation measures and providing assistance, in accordance with the global target on adaptation. India now has dedicated missions as part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change. Thus, the decision is in line with India's attitude to adaptability.

India strongly advocates for the principle of equity and climate justice as the foundation for addressing climate change. This can only be achieved if developed nations take a leadership role in tackling the issue. During the COP 28 high-level segment, Mr. Bhupendra Yadav, India's Minister of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, emphasised India's efforts to limit temperature increase by reducing emission intensity well before the target year specified in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which is India's plan for addressing the effects of climate change. India has effectively lowered the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions in relation to its economic development by 33% between 2005 and 2019. This achievement has allowed India to reach its original goal for 2030, as outlined in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), 11 years earlier than planned. India has surpassed expectations in renewable energy by obtaining 40% of its installed electric capacity from non-fossil fuel sources, which is nine years ahead of the targeted goal for 2030.

The Kyoto Protocol officially established the first practical and legally binding implementation of the UNFCCC. The Kyoto Protocol was established in 1997 and became effective in 2005 after being accepted by 192 Parties (except the United States, which did not ratify it). The agreement required 37 industrialised nations to reduce their emissions by an average of 5% from 1990 levels (8% for the EU) between 2008 and 2012. The other nations did not make specific commitments in terms of numerical targets, but they participated in the process via the use of incentives. The Doha conference prolonged the Protocol for a further commitment

period, requiring developed countries to decrease their greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 18% from 2013 to 2020 in comparison to the levels recorded in 1990. However, in the end, the Protocol revealed its limitations when Russia, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada withdrew their support. Therefore, it was crucial to find a strong, enforceable, and practicable legal tool capable of accomplishing the goals outlined in the Protocol. From the COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 until the COP20 in Lima in 2014, the conferences sought to achieve an agreement on the adoption of a “protocol, another legal instrument, or an agreed outcome with legal force” that would replace the Kyoto Protocol. To achieve this goal, the Parties have affirmed their commitment to limiting global warming to a level that is lower than 2°C. They made progress in obtaining funds for the necessary steps and therefore established the foundation for the COP21 meeting in Paris in 2015. The Paris agreement is generally seen as a notable accomplishment in the field of international diplomacy and political leadership, especially in the context of worldwide efforts to tackle climate change. However, the recent decision taken by former US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris Agreement increases the uncertainties over the efficacy of global climate governance and climate cooperation.

Throughout the 25 years of UN climate change discussions, it has been recognised that the effective mitigation of global warming can only be achieved with the active involvement of all nations that contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions in a collaborative endeavour. However, before to the Paris Accord in 2015, all previous efforts in this regard had been insufficient. Although some progress has been made in recent COPs and several countries have initiated domestic and bilateral efforts, the overall evaluation of these negotiations since the 1992 UNFCCC shows that these summits have not successfully united all stakeholders to reach consensus on shared objectives and a comprehensive policy framework. Consequently, they have not fully achieved the desired goals of climate diplomacy.

This study aims to enhance comprehension of the ongoing

advancements and endeavours in climate change negotiations and diplomacy within the UNFCCC framework. Additionally, it seeks to offer insight into the factors that have resulted in the inability of different stakeholders to reach consensus on shared targets and policies. Although much study has been conducted on the causes and consequences of climate change, there has been less discourse about the methods used in international climate change diplomacy over the years. This research aims to fill this gap.

CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The emergence of climatic talks and concern for the change in climate can be traced back to the Stockholm conference in 1972 where the word environment was used the first time which shifted the focus from nature to the “environment”. The Stockholm Declaration on Human Environment (UN 1972) was the first attempt to put some norms regarding the protection of the environment and it was the major shift (a paradigm) in law-making towards the environment.

There was a trend in terms of setting norms and legal restrictions for the protection of environment after the 1972 conference and environment and its protection became the center point in all the policy frameworks and everything was seen through the frames of environment and its protection became the trend but it had its limitations as protection of the environment was antipode to the routes of modernization adopted after the industrial revolution. Several conventions and the discovery of new levels, particularly the depletion of the ozone layer, prompted the development of more stringent conventions to protect the environment. The most significant ones include the Washington Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (1973), the Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (1979), the 1985 Vienna Convention, and the 1987 Montreal Protocol on the Control of Gases that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The notion of sustainability was introduced for the first time in the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission, titled “Our Common Future.” This concept reached its peak with the approval of the UN

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, also known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro.

The adoption of the UNFCCC framework in 1992 led to the emergence of new ways of thinking regarding how the environmental problems would be tackled, the burden-sharing mechanism and which solution is feasible in the regional context in different parts of the world. This chapter mainly debates the routes of the development of climate change discussions under the UNFCCC and also in the pre- UNFCCC period, focusing on the key discourses, trends, and achievements in setting different norms and rules for the protection of the environment in last three decades. The progress in the emergence of different norms and obligations for the protection of the environment and retard the process of climate change can be categorized into the following sub-phases.

- I. Pre 1990s: Defining the Agenda z
- II. 1990-1995: Constitutional phase: adoption of UNFCCC
- III. 1995-2005: Regulatory Phase: Kyoto Protocol and Beyond
- IV. 2005-2015: Negotiating the Future Climate Regime
- V. Post-2015: Paris agreement and beyond

NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE IN CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

Environmental degradation because of global climate change has become a worldwide concern. There is no further possibility for arguments over the negative impacts of global climate change on human life in particular and the entire planet in general. Lately, a new argument has begun concerning setting principles and benchmarks for the protection of the environment amongst the developed states and the developing states, and also in recognizing the main perpetrator responsible for the degradation of the environment. The debate between the developed nations and the developing nations – over the issue of identification, limitation and reducing the growing risks and threat

of global climate change – is commonly known as the North- South divide in international environmental politics (Uddin, 2017, p. 106).

Anthropogenic activities, such as deforestation, extensive combustion of fossil fuels, industrialization, and vehicular emissions, are the primary causes of environmental degradation. These activities significantly contribute to the continuous release of greenhouse gases (GHGs), which in turn, intensify the pace of climate change. Compared to the industrialised rich nations in the Northern hemisphere, the less industrialised and economically disadvantaged developing countries in the Southern hemisphere have a little impact on the production of hazardous gases that contribute to environmental deterioration. However, the impacts of environmental deterioration are complex and have several dimensions. While climate change affects both wealthy and impoverished regions, emerging countries in the southern hemisphere are more vulnerable to its overall consequences (Agrawal and Narain, 2003, p. 32).

Therefore, the more important issues and challenges in global climate change politics are: who is meant to come forward to take the responsibility for global climate change, who will be the lead actor for setting the benchmarks for monitoring the ever-increasing emissions of GHGs, and how can the essential activities be applied to prevent the further degradation of the environment? For instance, because of the high per capita income and a luxurious lifestyle, the more industrialized countries of the developed world have a very high level of energy consumption (Ramaswamy, 2017, p. 8). A developed country like the US accounts for four times more carbon emission as compared to developing countries such as China and India, and approximately 30 times more emissions than Kenya. With increasing awareness and increased urgency and criticality of the problem, several countries have decided to step forward to minimize their carbon emissions and thus regulate and monitor the increasing risks associated with the process of global climate change. It is at this stage that the role and contribution of less industrialized, poor developing nations of the south become indispensable (Uddin, 2017, p. 108).

Most of the developing nations believe that that the developed countries of the North are highly industrialized and rich and therefore it is their principal liability to take initiatives for the GHG emissions reductions as they have previously contributed highly in emission amounts of GHGs. Moreover, the poor developing countries of the south should be provided more flexibility in terms of resource usage as it is their right to develop their nation and also their emission rate is relatively low as compared to the developed countries (Parks and Roberts, 2008, p. 18). Nevertheless, the developed nations of North continue to deny this, emphasizing the argument that dynamics, which distinguish the positions of developing states with the developed states of North, are not similar rather different. For instance, according to the developed states, the key features that distinguish the global North and South are the low levels of development, poverty, unemployment, lack of environmental education, lack of awareness and development in the South, and that these are largely accountable for pollution and environmental degradation (Gogus, 2014, p. 4). Hence, developed nations contend that the developing countries in the global South have an equal share of responsibility for global climate change and should be held equally accountable and liable for the issue. This article evaluates the ongoing conflict between the North and South in the field of international environmental politics. By including relevant literature and expertise, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this apparently intractable issue.

UNDERSTANDING NORTH-SOUTH DEBATE

Climate change negotiations are indivisible from the discussions over the North-South divide, including issues regarding the inequity and unfairness to restructure climate change responsibility (Archer, 2010, p. 62). The concept of the “North-South” divide, which refers to the differences between highly developed and industrialised nations in the global “North” and less developed and developing countries in the global “South”, remains a significant aspect of global climate change diplomacy. The global North often includes North America (the United States and Canada), Western Europe, developed regions

of Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. The global South encompasses emerging areas in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

The former category mostly includes the western part of the globe and the developed countries whereas the latter group mainly resembles the poor, less industrialized and developing regions. In terms of geographical location, developed states are mainly situated in temperate and arctic regions of the globe, whereas developing countries i.e. global south – are principally located in tropical and sub-tropical parts of the world. The distinctions between the North and the South based on their economic strength, political stability, level of technological advancement and scientific research and other factors are very intractable (Brunner and Streck, 1994, pp. 589-607).

Global climate change negotiation occurs within the context of disparate economic growth between the global north and global south. The terms and criteria included in multinational and bilateral climate change accords strongly prohibit developing nations from adopting and using the technology that was previously applied by industrialised countries during their first stage of industrialization and growth (Calvin, 2008, p. 6). Consequently, countries of the global south—who are still in their initial stages of industrialization and development—fear that committing to the binding emission reduction requirements will hamper the rate of economic development of their respective countries. The more industrialized and politically powerful countries of the Global North hitherto disagree to cut their excess of carbon emissions, except the developing nations of South agree to binding emission reduction requirements on par with developed countries. It implies that global climate change action often tends to compromise the economic development in developing and underdeveloped countries, while several developed countries, accounting for the maximum contribution to global warming and climate change do not necessarily have to go through the complex necessities of initial stages of industrialization (Chakrabarty, 2018, p. 42). Such climate actions make negotiations terms ambiguous and contradictory. Thus, the reason for

the late development of the Global South can be attributed to the system of the international division of labour created by the uneven flow of capital within the core and periphery of the world system (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 7).

THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE NORTH OVER THE SOUTH IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

A brief glimpse at contemporary global climate change cooperation uncovers the fact that the developing and underdeveloped countries are nevertheless far from achieving parity with developed countries in terms of the level of industrialization. Several global environmental agreements at the beginning excluded developing countries of the Global South from participating in the negotiation talks as well as from membership (Ghosh, 2016, p. 22). Amongst those are predominantly several treaties that have been formulated by major European countries within the framework of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). In the era preceding the Stockholm Convention, worldwide environmental treaties, specifically agreements formulated in the arena of environment protection, indicate clear traces of colonial legacy and still show the European genesis of international environmental law (Hansen, 2014, p. 32). This knowledge also applies also to treaties and agreements in the field of nature conservation (during the 1970s), which still follow the ideal of strict environmentalism, thus extensively overlooking the self-interests and welfare of the indigenous communities of developing countries residing in the natural habitats. As far as present-day international climate change agreements are concerned, the circumstances are quite different. The developing countries of the Global South are participating in the climate change dialogues and negotiation process in even larger numbers as compared to the developed countries. Nevertheless, the Global South, though it may be at par and considered equal to the Global North in an official sense, still awaits to earn the respect of developed states of Global North as an equal partner in the negotiation process (Uddin, 2017, p. 113).

The much-debated concepts of justice and fairness in climate talks,

which can also be discussed in fields such as global economics and trade dynamics, have increased and redefined the significance of the North-South divide in the field of climate diplomacy. The distinction between the Global North and the Global South has been created and shaped by positions about who should bear the costs and expenses of adaptation and mitigation measures of climate change. On the one hand, the Global North claims to pursue a progressive idea of justice and equity, upholding that present generations should not be penalized for the deeds they did not commit (Latour, 2018, p. 21). Besides, the developed states also argue that it would be unjust and prejudiced for present as well as future generations to bear these costs and at the same time unfair, too, that obligatory reductions in carbon emissions would be mandatory for developed states only under the Kyoto Protocol and not for large emitters in the Global South, such as Brazil, China, and India. However, developed states, on the other hand, debate that emission reduction obligations should be applicable to all the member states, irrespective of the past emissions, particularly as several developing nations have increasingly contributed in the huge carbon emissions and consequently should implement considerable mitigation targets at domestic level (Lovell, 2010, p. 42).

The Global South, in contrast, adheres to a conservative and traditional concept of justice and fairness. This concept posits that current generations in developed countries have benefited from the decisions and actions of their ancestors and should consequently be accountable for bearing the associated expenses of global climate change (Malm, 2016, p. 174). Moreover, as the Global North is indebted to the Global South for polluting the global atmosphere, there should also be a well- formulated mechanism of compensation for the developing states. As Stern states, past data reveals that industrialized states of the Global North have exploited more than half of the planet's fossil fuels throughout the past 120 years. Several developing states find it undesirable that their conventional agricultural practices are held responsible for the increased rate of emissions (Stern, 2007, p. 25). As these traditional indigenous practices sustain the livelihood of billions of people, they should be viewed

as different from energy-intensive agricultural practices, animal husbandry, and fossil fuel-based industries in the developed countries, which reveal “luxurious requirements” and also contribute extensively to the emission of GHGs. Moreover, the transfer of technology and other developmental projects undertaken by developed states should not be viewed as a goodwill gesture towards the developing nations, but rather perceived as compensation to be paid by developed countries to the developing countries for the payable by the North to the South for the irreversible damage caused to the global environment (Horn and Bergthaller, 2020, p. 5). The developing countries now also argue that the issue of climate change should not be compared with the traditional development support provided by more industrialized states, especially to the underdeveloped countries, as this will cause inequitable distribution. However, it is essential to define the boundaries of such mandatory commitments to circumvent a “blank check” condition. The notions of justice and fairness in the dissemination of burdens of global warming have been often labelled as “a tricky one practically, philosophically, and politically” (Grubb et. al, 1992, p. 306). Justice and fairness generally refer to distribution and sharing of the costs of adaptation, mitigation, and compensation, which is controversial in both Global North and Global South.

Therefore, in the last two decades, the developed countries of the Global North have dictated several multilateral climate change negotiations. India led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi one among them which will be discussed further. These developed countries predominantly put themselves in a leadership role in these negotiation processes. Thus, most of the least developed and developing countries, being exceedingly dependent on the developed states for the capital requirements and technology transfer, find themselves in the position of having negligible decision making and bargaining power as compared to the Global North. However, in recent years, with the appearance of small coalitions of states having common interests cutting across the conventional boundary of the North-South divide, it has become increasingly challenging for Global North to dominate and control the

proceedings and terms of the negotiations. Such flexible alliances and groups provide even poorer nations with a platform to become an active participant in the negotiation processes (Brunner and Streck, 2013, p. 23).

K. Mickelson has argued that the generally recognised international environmental legislation has been unsuccessful in adequately addressing the concerns and interests of the Third World. According to her perspective, the global South is portrayed as reluctantly involved in environmental systems, rather than being seen as an engaged collaborator in a continuous dialogue about the underlying nature of environmental issues and the required actions to address them. In addition, she has advocated for an integrationist strategy that incorporates the interests of the least developed and developing nations into the mainstream of global climate geopolitics. According to her perspective, it is crucial for researchers, activists, and practitioners in the field to pose the specific inquiries that the Southern approach to international environmental law requires.

THE GROWING INVOLVEMENT OF THE SOUTH IN THE CLIMATE TALKS

The complex and ambiguous nature of issues related to climate change has led to the acknowledgment of the significance of developing states in the process of climate change negotiations. Ignoring the role and participation of developing countries in climate change negotiation talks is no longer a choice for Global North. The absence of binding obligations agreed on climate mitigation and adaptation at COP15 in Copenhagen, Denmark has been rather counteracted for by developing states becoming significantly more participative in the climate mitigation and adaptation negotiations than they had been involved at earlier COP meetings. This progress in climate talks may help in the adoption and signing of a more inclusive mitigation agreement soon. Developing states have established new means to empower themselves and dynamically participate in climate change dialogues, assist in articulating the prime agenda of climate negotiations, and also affect the terms and conditions

of the negotiations. The empowerment of developing states has been attributed to the organizational and structural settings available within the international system. In 1964, the formation of a negotiation vehicle known as the Group of 77 (G 77, presently comprising 133 member countries) has played a significant role in the improved competence of developing states in the negotiation process. In 1972, the UN Conference on the Human Environment held at Stockholm recommended the formulation of climate policies that would not impede the development process (Maslin, 2004, p. 16).

APPROACHES TO BRIDGE THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE AND CONCEPTS FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

J. Macdonald asserts that solidarity is not just a basic basis of international law, but also a one that is essentially correct. When discussing the concept of solidarity in international law, the author highlights the discussions that took place at the UN General Assembly in 1974, which focused on the New International Economic Order (NIEO). These discussions showed a shared determination to establish a new global economic system based on the principle of solidarity. The Charter on Economic Rights and Duties of States and Declaration on the New International Economic Order (NIEO), both ratified by the General Assembly in 1994, impose an obligation on wealthier nations to actively support the least developed countries (LDCs). Thus, according to the NIEO charter, solidarity is seen as a principle that obligates rich nations to provide support and assistance to the LDCs. Macdonald, however, has challenged this meaning of solidarity. He firmly asserts that it is not possible to impose one-sided commitments based on the idea of solidarity. According to him, the years after the NIEO have shown the basic mistake and unreliability of this approach.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

Justice as fairness and equity and distributive justice is more holistic

than justice where it is based on the concept of equality along with fairness. E. Brown Weiss talks about justice among generations and fairness to future generations and this led to the concept of inter-generational equity and it is this sense of justice which enlighten the negotiators to save the environment and resources for the future generation and if that is not done urgently then it will be a huge injustice to the coming generation. According to Franck not only fairness in terms of making laws and negotiations but fairness in terms of its developmental process and terms of outcomes as outcomes are considered are the indicators of fairness. This same concept and forms of justice are found in the studies of Anand where she talked about procedural justice i.e equality and inequality of bargaining power and distributive justice i.e the outcome or inequality in terms of socio-economic and political burden in different societies with different level of development.

This concept of international solidarity and international justice with an emphasis on procedural and substantive equality can be very helpful in bridging the gap between north and south and can lead to the development of some more egalitarian concepts which will lead to a more focused effort on environmental protection.

CONCEPTS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Rio declaration of 1992 with its principle 5 and 6 emphasized the poverty reduction along with the goal of equality of standard of living among different states and this special priority given to the south block emanates the sustainable development vision, which can lead to narrowing the north-south gap. In its essence sustainable development is a way of achieving progress along with preserving and protecting the environment without compromising the needs of poor countries. Although A. Geisinger considered the concept of sustainable development as a way of imposing a western ideology on the people of the south or developing the world. A balance was sought between

the development requirement and protection of the environment and condition of sustainability became a prerequisite before any development project and environmental protection became an essential part of all socio-economic projects and vice versa. The importance of both protection and development was met with a fine balance as a slight inclination towards development disturbs the balance which will have its repercussions on the development itself as if a free hand to socio-economic development will lead to generating environmental problems which will have further impact on the resources making the process of complicated in further stages and hence by protecting the environment we are protecting the continuation of socio-economic development of a society or in other words making the development sustainable (Muller, 2002, p. 3). The intragenerational equality in development process in which poor states are given preference in development and a compromise was sought where development of poor states would be assisted by the advanced nations and through which intragenerational sustainability could be sought and this was further expanded when intergenerational sustainability was sought where present development should not be carried out compromising the future generation developmental prospects. This intra generation and inter generation equality is the core of any developmental process and hence making the developmental process sustainable spatially and temporally within the threshold of earth's capacity of resource regeneration and pollution dissipation where earth act as a sink of generated environmental waste and this natural process would be assisted by technological growth production. The sustainability concept is both anthropocentric and eco-centric. There is a tinge of deep ecology concept in this expanded form of sustainable development where every life has some intrinsic value and cannot be exploited arbitrarily for the sake of human good (Mann and Wainwright, 1999, p. 13).

COMMON BUT DIFFERENTIATED RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESPECTIVE CAPABILITIES (CBDR-RC)

The principle of common but differentiated responsibility had its roots

from the beginning of the climatic talks and annexure 2 countries in the Kyoto protocol argued over this concept as it allows them to be out of the legal binding circle by giving them the breathing space. At the same time, differentiated responsibility enforces the developed world countries to act as the leaders by initiating the reduction of GHGs as stipulated in the Kyoto protocol. The principle 7 of Rio earth's summit focuses on the cooperative action by the global leaders to protect and restore the health of the living planet. Developed countries accepted the norms of differentiated responsibility as they were considered as the historical polluters and now it's time for them to act as leaders in the environmental fight (UNFCCC 1997). The idea behind CBDR-RC is the equality among unequal and sometimes differential treatment is required to establish the concept of equality whenever individuals are not equally placed. Hence unequal treatment of unequal individuals leads to equality. As countries in developed and developing parts are placed unequally and have different role in the historical degradation of the environment, so placing these countries at the same level will be a huge injustice to the developing part of the world as they were not the frontrunner in creating problems but asked to clear the mess created by the developed part of the world (Michell, 2011, p. 16).

The principle of CBDR-RC helps in bridging the gap of north-south as it put the responsibility of taking actions differentially although the responsibility is common to all the nations but it is also differentiated where different states have different responsibilities and idea of equal treatment under unequal circumstances defeat the idea of justice and equality in certain situations and hence this CBDR saves the world from the huge injustice which would have occurred to the developing part of the world if this principle would not have evolved (Hurell and Sengupta, 2012, p. 482).

Therefore, the developed countries should take responsibility on their shoulders to clear the mess created by them in the process of development. They should act as leaders in the global environmental movements and should be the frontrunners in taking stringent actions, which retard the climate change

phenomena. Along with acting as leaders in taking responsibility for the reduction of GHGs another way of differential treatment is giving long time span and deadline for the parties which are not able to meet the deadline in the stipulated time and this is where it is required to give different time spans to different states as they have different technology to achieve those targets and differing local circumstances. But such a time frame should not be too long where it defeats the ultimate purpose of the protocol (Morrison, 1999, p. 42).

The CBDR-RC favour the developing world by giving differential treatment and this positive discrimination of the developing world is bridging the north-south divide and paving the path of combating the climate change with different responsibility although having common goals of both the developed and developing world (Soroos, 2001, pp. 7-8).

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION

Along with benign discrimination, equitable participation is required to bridge the gap of north-south where all the parties have equal say in decision making irrespective of their socio-economic conditions and this is what is termed as democratic law-making where the leaders are chosen to bridge the gap of north-south. Equitable participation means that all the parties have just and fair share in all the environmental negotiations and decision-making processes (Bondansky, 1994, p. 43). So how to achieve this just and fair participation and one way is to give one state one vote logic irrespective of population, size, and economic and social condition. This following of democratic principle applies to even those countries who are against the democratic ideals at their national levels such as authoritarian states and one-party communist states. There are differences in states in terms of population size, power and wealth and thus according to D. Bodansky's view, there is neither an intrinsic nor an equitable reason to treat states as equal. He questioned the idea of the unequal population but equal votes sometimes the difference is 1000 times between the two states say for example India and some island state and he questioned the logic behind treating these states equally with an equal share in voting.

There are arguments like benign discrimination where the vulnerability of island states due to environmental degradation is more and hence they should have equal say in policymaking and law formulation. The voting should be designed in such a way that both groups have equal say, which depicts just and fair procedure (Pearson, 2011, p. 23).

INDIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

India has generally been at the forefront in the Climate Change negotiations like the Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). India has also taken several initiatives and pledges over the years for ensuring Climate Justice. However, with a long development path ahead, India has adopted a cautious approach in the recent climate change negotiations at the COP 28 to protect its own national interest recently held in Dubai, UAE.

LEADERSHIP ROLE OF INDIA

1. **Innovative Policy Initiatives-** The International Solar Alliance (ISA), Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA), Green Credit Initiative (GCI) showcase India's proactive role in fostering international cooperation for sustainable energy solutions.
2. **Renewable Energy Leadership-** India has enhanced its renewable energy targets to 500 GW by 2030. This has inspired the "Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge" at COP 28.
3. **Ambitious INDC Targets-** The ambitious Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) targets adopted by India has nudged developed nations to take up more ambitious targets. e.g. Mission Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) of India. It has been estimated that 2 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions can be reduced through adoption of LiFE-aligned measures worldwide.

4. **Commitment to the Principles of Climate Justice-** India has consistently advocated for the principles of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, polluters pay principle, compensation for loss and damage” to be the guiding light in all climate change negotiations. India’s stance has aimed for equity in sharing the burden of climate action.

WHAT ARE INDIA’S INITIATIVES TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Panchamrit- India has presented the following five nectar elements (Panchamrit) of India’s climate Action under the leadership of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi:

1. Reach 500 GW Non-fossil energy capacity by 2030.
2. 50 % of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030.
3. Reduction of total projected carbon emissions by 1 billion tonnes from now to 2030.
4. Reduction of the carbon intensity of the economy by 45 % by 2030, over 2005 levels.
5. Achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2070.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The objective is to raise awareness among public representatives, government agencies, scientists, industry, and communities about the dangers of climate change and strategies to mitigate them.

WHAT MORE CAN INDIA DO TO COMBAT THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

1. **Enhancing Carbon Sequestration-** India may increase its capacity for carbon sequestration by extending its forest and tree coverage, rehabilitating degraded areas, encouraging agroforestry, and implementing low-carbon

agricultural techniques.

2. Driving India's Green Transportation Revolution- It is necessary to encourage the use of electric cars (EVs) by creating a strong network of charging stations and providing incentives to promote the adoption of EVs.
3. Climate Smart Agriculture- By using technology-driven solutions like remote sensing, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, and AI-based analytics, we can effectively optimise resource utilisation, decrease water usage, and improve crop output.

CONCLUSION

We are fortunate to belong to a culture that places great importance on living in perfect harmony with the environment as a core aspect of our beliefs. Let us make sure that every modest action we do in our everyday lives contributes to the preservation of environment and natural resources. When we only discuss climate change, it creates the impression that we are motivated by a desire to protect the conveniences of our way of life. However, when we discuss climate justice, we are expressing our awareness and determination to safeguard the future of impoverished individuals from the dangers posed by natural calamities. We consider the preservation of the environment to be a fundamental belief. The presence of natural resources may be attributed to the diligent conservation efforts of our ancestors. We must ensure that our future generations are treated in the same manner. As the current generation, it is our duty to serve as custodians of the abundant natural resources for future generations. Climate change is an urgent and significant worldwide problem. It necessitates a unified effort from all humans and a thorough and inclusive reaction. In India, there has been a profound connection between spirituality and environment since ancient times. The matter at hand is not just focused on climate change; it encompasses the concept of climate justice. Addressing climate change requires ingenuity, teamwork, and determination to enact the necessary changes for the betterment of the globe. Contemporary society acknowledges that lifestyle has a significant part in climate change. India has suggested a unifying initiative consisting just a single word. The phrase

“LiFE” stands for Lifestyle for Environment. Today, it is imperative that we unite and advance LiFE as a collective endeavour.

It can be summed up by one of the most impactful quotes on climate change comes from the former secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon: “Climate change does not respect border; it does not respect who you are - rich and poor, small and big. Therefore, this is what we call ‘global challenges,’ which require global solidarity.”

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Book Review

GEOPOLITICS AND DEMOCRACY: THE WESTERN LIBERAL ORDER FROM FOUNDATION TO FRACTURE

Trubowitz, P., & Burgoon, B. (2023). 265 pages. Geopolitics and Democracy: The Western Liberal Order from Foundation to Fracture. New York: Oxford University Press.

Geopolitics and Democracy: The Western Liberal Order from Foundation to Fracture is co-authored by Peter Trubowitz and Brian Burgoon, both esteemed scholars in their fields. Peter Trubowitz is a Professor of International Relations, Director of the Phelan US Centre at the London School of Economics (LSE), and an Associate Fellow at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. His extensive work on international relations and US foreign policy adds considerable depth to the book's analysis. Brian Burgoon is a Professor of Political Economy in the Department of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). His expertise in political economy and European politics provides a robust framework for understanding the economic dimensions of the Western liberal order's evolution and challenges. Together, Trubowitz and Burgoon offer a comprehensive and insightful examination of the geopolitical and democratic transformations shaping the Western world today. This book offers a persuasive and rigorously reasoned examination of the transition in foreign policy of Western democracies, moving from liberal internationalism to globalism, and the resulting political consequences. The first chapter "*The Solvency Gap*" of *Geopolitics and Democracy* delves into the pervasive international engagement of Western governments, scrutinizing the intricate motivations and consequences of this involvement. The text argues for a recalibration of the balance between global aspirations and domestic imperatives, a discussion that holds particular resonance amid the resurgence of great power competition, the establishment of spheres of influence, and the rise of reactionary nationalism.

Burgoon and Trubowits articulate a tripartite framework encompassing the retreat of Western states from the foreign policies and social agreements that once upheld liberal internationalism during the protracted East-West power rivalry. This retreat signifies a notable shift from the proactive stance that characterized Western diplomacy throughout the Cold War. Additionally, the text highlights a growing disaffection among Western publics toward international openness and multilateralism in the post-Cold War era. This disaffection has gradually eroded the societal foundations that supported the liberal order, as evidenced by the fragmentation of Western political systems. Each of these phenomena is intricately linked to the overarching narrative of Western endeavours to propagate the postwar liberal order after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This ambitious expansion, the author posits, has precipitated a condition of strategic overextension, presenting formidable challenges for contemporary Western democracies.

The analysis presented is compelling in its historical scope and contemporary relevance. However, it warrants a more critical examination of the underlying assumptions. For instance, the assertion that Western retreat from liberal internationalism is a recent phenomenon might overlook earlier precedents of fluctuating commitment. Moreover, the critique of public disillusionment with internationalism could benefit from a deeper exploration of the socio-economic factors driving this sentiment, such as inequality and the impacts of globalization. The disintegration of domestic political cohesion is a salient point, yet it raises questions about the internal contradictions within liberal democracies that might have been brewing long before the end of the Cold War. Starting with Chapter 2, "*A Widening Gyre*," the authors delineate how Western governments, notably from the 1990s onwards, progressively adopted a policy that placed more emphasis on international collaborations rather than exerting force. This transition is thoroughly examined using a two-dimensional model that compares the Cold War era's equilibrium between collaboration and dominance with the more recent inclinations towards globalism. The book emphasises the United States' subtle dedication to international collaboration, which, although important, was not as prominent as that of Europe, Japan, and other OECD countries. The writers adeptly establish a connection between the strengthening of globalist obligations in the 2000s and significant occurrences

like the war on terrorism and the 2008 financial crisis. They propose that the international policies of Western governments steadily deviated from the desires of their voting populations. The increasing divergence between official actions and popular support is seen as a pivotal cause in the proliferation of anti-globalist sentiment in Western democracies. Chapter 3 “*Roots of Insolvency*” explores the roots of Western overextension and the subsequent opposition to globalisation, suggesting that the shift towards globalism lacked the social assurances and safeguards that are typical of liberal internationalism. The chapter highlights that domestic support for liberal internationalism in Western democracies depends in part on the level of social protection they guarantee their citizens. The authors convincingly assert that the lack of urgent foreign dangers and decreasing government backing for economic security intensified popular dissatisfaction, leading to an almost unavoidable reaction against globalism. Moreover, the book analyses the reasons behind the failure of Western leaders to adapt their policies in light of increasing anti-globalist tendencies. The data indicates that there was a failure to either moderate globalist aspirations or strengthen social compensation, which may have reduced the negative reaction. The authors show that geopolitical imperatives reinforced Western governments’ and mainstream parties’ commitment to liberal internationalism during the Cold War. The corollary to this argument is that, in the absence of Cold War pressures, Western domestic support for liberal internationalism weakened. In the third section, Trubowitz and Burgoon consider why Western governments and leaders did not do more to close the resulting gap with their publics over foreign policy. They explore whether this was simply a case of hubris and triumphalism, as some have charged, or if it owes more to changes in the political economies of the advanced industrial nations. They consider several explanations, providing a nuanced view of the political and economic dynamics at play. Chapter 4, “*Reaping the Whirlwind*” delves into the wider ramifications of this reaction for Western democracies and the liberal system. It demonstrates that while major parties still endorse liberal internationalism, their ability to attract voters has diminished, leading to political fragmentation. This section offers a comprehensive analysis of how mainstream political parties’ advocacy for economic integration and international governance during the 1990s has resulted in the fragmentation of party systems and the rise of support for anti-globalist platforms, notably on

the extreme right. The authors assert that the fragmentation of political power in Western democracies has weakened their ability to function effectively and eroded their credibility as models of government. As a result, this has hindered the advancement of international initiatives aimed at strengthening the liberal order. In a nutshell this chapter makes a substantial contribution to the main argument of the book, which states that the continuation of the liberal system relies on effectively dealing with internal political divisions. The text convincingly asserts that until Western democracies refocus on the social and economic pillars, their attempts to maintain the liberal international order will continue to be filled with difficulties. This comprehensive analysis of the deterioration of the central core of Western societies serves as a powerful reminder of the need of harmonising domestic and foreign policy in order to construct a more unified and durable liberal system. The last chapter of the book "*Bridging the Gap*," consolidates the data and provides a detailed comparison with other theories on Western overextension and anti-globalism. The authors also outline three prevailing tactics that are expected to influence future discussions on foreign policy in Western capitals: retrenchment, reestablishing unity via confrontations with rivals like as China and Russia, and prioritising domestic economic revitalization. Every technique is carefully evaluated within the framework of the book's comprehensive examination.

The book assert that the survival of Western democracies relies on a return to the ideas of embedded liberalism that were fundamental to their success in the postwar period. This domestic revitalization is not only a sentimental yearning for the past, but a practical approach to address the growing disparity between the goals of the international liberal order and the resources available domestically. The authors analyse the important function of political parties as intermediates and show how changes in party politics have affected international cooperation and domestic stability. Peter and Brian emphasise that the shift towards neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s, which placed more importance on market liberalisation rather than social fairness, caused a breakdown in the agreement between businesses and workers. This transition worsened economic uncertainties and inequities, weakening the credibility of the liberal system and intensifying the present anti-globalist reaction. The authors compellingly assert that in order to regain the credibility of the liberal

system, Western leaders must directly confront these home concerns. The demand to reconsider the connection between foreign and domestic policy is especially opportune. The authors stress the need of strong political backing for effective policy implementation. They argue that this support can only be attained by implementing inventive domestic development plans that prioritise strategic localization, investment in human capital, enhancements in quality of life, and environmental sustainability. These activities inside the OECD are seen as early signs of the essential change towards progressive internationalism.

Overall, the book offers a comprehensive and perceptive examination of the difficulties that Western democracies now confront. This highlights the need for a revitalised dedication to social democracy and equitable economic expansion in order to restore home support for international collaboration. By adopting this approach, Western democracies may enhance their geopolitical standing and guarantee that their global objectives are in harmony with their home resources. This proactive strategy provides a promising solution for dealing with the intricate relationship between domestic and foreign policy in a world that is becoming more and more disputed.

To conclude, while *Geopolitics and Democracy* provides a robust framework for understanding the challenges of Western strategic overreach, it could further engage with the complexities and nuances of these developments. This would offer a more nuanced critique of the historical and current dynamics at play, enriching the discourse on the future of liberal internationalism in an increasingly multipolar world.

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“HOMELAND INSECURITIES: AUTONOMY, CONFLICT AND MIGRATION IN ASSAM” BY SANJAY BARBORA, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022, ISBN: 978-0-19-285532-9

Assam, despite being home to many distinctive tribes there has always been struggle to determine who is ‘indigenous’ to the land. Sanjay Barbora in his book *Homeland Insecurities: Autonomy, Conflict, and Migration in Assam*, has focused upon the subjects such as:- autonomy movements, migration, wildlife conservation, and reconciliation, by applying long duration ethnographical study as well as his perspectives as a human right activists for over two decades. The Government of Assam has released the draft of National Register of Citizens (NRC) on 30th July 2018, which excluded the names of four million people, that would further raise the phantom of impending violence and the possibility of many being declared stateless in the process. The author has resemblance the NRC process with its proponents and critics as a Hegelian moment i.e. paradoxically universal, particular and individual- where the politics of autonomy, indigenous rights and homologize of radical ideas are put to rest for a moment. The book presents basically two different arguments that run through its chapters, such as:-first questions the causalities that are inferred in the study of all the mentioned subjects that has been overdetermined by militarization of crucial spaces of debate and dialogue within civil society; second argues that a dense reading of the subjects provide an elucidate, unfiltered description of what is happening in Assam and also diverge attention to a larger universal changes taking place across the globe. Each chapter in the book includes orthodox observations of organizations involved in the movements and also focuses upon primarily on people who settle in the heart and margins of the movements for autonomy, migration, and militarization. The author finds the inter-connectedness of these issues as self-evident, because they all came from and ended in the desire for enhancing social justice and equity.

This book explains a set of contrasting issues that continue to impact the political situation in Assam, such as:- in Brahmaputra Valley people look more into securing some form of autonomy for indigenous communities

compared to the idea of Indian Nationalism; the last quarter of 20th century noticed some form of solidarity among radical political advocacy groups and human rights organizations, where dialogues between people were encouraged to find common ground between indigenous communities of the Northeastern region. In the first chapter titled 'From Autonomy to Accommodation' the author has discussed in detail about two events i.e. the first NRC in Assam and the Naga plebiscite happened in 1951, starting from its historical background and its aftermath impact in the political-socio change in Assam. The commentators who defended NRC, at least in public domain thought it was a solution to the constant tensions arising out of the immigration issue in Assam and therefore 1951 is considered as an intriguing political moment for the region, where a number of major political leaders affiliated with Muslim League, Congress, and Communist Party of India, had sought a merger with the Indian Union and refrained from joining Pakistan after its partition. Sanjay Barbora has interviewed one of the signatories for Naga plebiscite, named Uncle Megometho, and claimed that plebiscite papers were sent around to the different villages in Naga territory and the leaders were busy in campaigning for people to vote for independence of the Naga Homeland. According to the author, the Naga plebiscite in 1951 provides a philosophical foundation for an analysis on demands for autonomy and also derive their legitimacy and appeal because the need for the Naga independence has been communicated with clarity and purpose in each constituency. Together the three processes in 1951, such as:- Naga plebiscite, First census and First NRC in Assam, indicate two different kind of pulls in the political movements of the region, they are:- autonomy and social justice. In Assam, the NRC has an effect on political mobilization since the mid 20th century and has been viewed as the legal and political way to address the issue of autonomy and social justice. Compared to 1951, the 2015 edition of the NRC was more robust, as the government sought to minimize the shortcomings in two ways:- by involving the entire state machinery, including all departments of Government of Assam, the Registrar General of India, the Supreme Court into the process; using technology to clear up unresolved deals that are attributed to the everyday workings of the State in developing countries. The NRC process brought together different strands of anxieties among different groups in the state. On one end, observers applauded the exercise as the inevitable culmination of a historically constituted process

of establishing a directory of citizens in a divisive location after the partitioning of the British empire. On another end of the spectrum, NRC was evidence of the state's civil society and government apparatuses' sectarian biases which further seems to be an effort to persecute minorities (religious and linguistic) in Assam, especially those in the Barak Valley. In Assam, these issues are intertwined with three factors: - colonial history, ethnic identity and resource management; which have been instrumental in defining the political discourse, fears and actions around the NRC process. Thus, demands for social justice are in line with the desire for territorial sovereignty over land, while demand for autonomy seeks to equality and citizenship under constitutional legislation.

In Assam, borders resort as an integral part of citizenship discourse emanating around the issue of undocumented immigration in Assam. Sanjay Barbora has quoted the anthropologist Ghassan Hage who considers modern border making as the re-establishment of older colonial projects and points towards the concept of settler-colonial mentality. In 1990s and 2000s conflicts took place in Assam, that led to widespread displacement among the communities like:- Adivasi-Bodo, karbi-kuki, Bodo-Muslim, Garo-Rabha etc. The Legal equality between states and determining national borders are the two principles that allow continuation of violence between citizen of different communities in Assam, each claims the right to evict the other from the spaces they inhabit. This creates conditions for communities to exercise power against one another and the state. In the later part of the chapter, author described in 20th century the category of peasant and the identity of 'Assamese'/(Oxomiya) have been challenged by the complicated history of colonial revenue collection, nationalist literature and political mobilization.

In the second chapter titled 'Autonomy or Death', Sanjay Barbora has focused on the history of autonomous movements and current challenges to political discourse on the ground. He argues that the military social milieu prevents the resolution of many of the nuanced consequences of conflicts that arise in the process of political mobilization and government's conflict management strategies. Two distinct but related issues have contributed to increased violence in Assam's autonomous territorial districts in recent times. One relates to the enduring idea of territorial arrangements (constitutional provisions or renegotiation of administrative powers) that suggest a closure

of debates around such issues. The other relates to the government's decision to categorize people and their entitled land to prove that they are not illegal migrant to the state. To the idea of closed ethnic communities, author relates the thoughtful metaphor of 'border-as-skin' given by the anthropologist Franck Bille, which argued that borders are not only linear, uncontested territories, but are rough and palimpsestic, similar to skin. Barbora further explains that contests and conflicts for autonomy emerge from a sense of belonging to the land, for example:- borderland in western Assam. He has also discussed in detail the conflicts and formation of Bodoland territorial autonomous district (BTAD) in 2003, which had three immediate consequences, such as:- first, being forced to leave their villages and can no longer cultivate or harvest; second, being reduced to a life without any security, individuals and their families are left out at the mercy of government's relief agencies (relief camps as permanent fixtures of life); third, polarization among people and narratives about the violence.

In the third chapter titled 'Migration Matters', Sanjay Barbora argues that the perception of peasant and worker's migration to Assam have changed since the early 21st century, affecting the political rhetoric around settler-indigenous disputes. This raises important questions regarding the alteration of Assam's stable, enclave economy framework which had been key to political and social analysis in the 20th century. In this chapter, the author looks beyond the statistical aggregates of migration and remittances and draws inspiration from Michael Jackson's work on illustrating the migrant's experience as a collective human condition and also focuses upon ethics as a crucial lens for understanding the elementary conditions that arise in new debates around migration. The political violence during the 1990s and early 2000s has subsided, resulting in a disruptive shift towards societal calm. It uses a concept popularized by sociologist and scholar of peacebuilding John Paul Lederach, 'both circular and linear', in which the objects that cause conflict seem to move in circles while taking on different forms. Migrants from the region are an emerging significant social fact and therefore their anger, dejection, and demoralization upon return serve an important aspect of research.

In the fourth chapter titled 'Elephants (and Rhinos) in the Room', Sanjay Barbora extended the story of land and livelihoods to human-

animal relationships. He mentions about the pressures and paradoxes of the conservation story in Assam. The interactions between humans and animals in Assam are often viewed through the prism of militarism (poaching of animals, as well as killing of the poachers) and development (as both a reality and a chance of coexistence). He chooses rhinos and elephants after seeing eviction of subsistence farmers, extra-judicial killing of the rhino poachers, and increased conflicts between humans and elephants in Kaziranga and Manas National parks. In the fifth chapter titled ‘Commune and Relief Camp’, the author examines the unstable world created by conflicts and the rising frequency of natural disasters induced by climate change. This chapter also raises questions about the changing ways in which communities, individuals, organizations are being driven to reconsider how and why they live, work and cultivate human interactions and associations.

The author has signified in this book about balancing old questions with fresh perspective that can provide insight into the path of diverse species (human and non-human) over the past two decades in Assam. Hence, the concept of homeland serves as a powerful symbol that can both heal and hurt.

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