ISSN:2583-004X
E-ISSN:2582-7154

INDIAN STUDIES REVIEW

(A UGC-Care Listed and Peer-Reviewed Journal)
Vol. 5, No.1 (January - June 2024)

A JOURNAL OF CENTRE FOR STUDY OF
POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE, DELHI

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Journal of Centre for Study of Politics and Governance

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STUDY OF DECLINING CHILD SEX RATIO AND GIRL CHILD DISCRIMINATION IN SELECT DISTRICTS OF UTTAR PRADESH AND HARYANA – KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Prof. Bijayalaxmi Nanda[1] *and Dr. Nupur Ray*[2]

ABSTRACT:

The paper presents an overview and a set of key findings from a research project undertaken by the authors, titled 'Declining Child Sex-Ratio and Violence against Women: Examining Girl Child discrimination in India', with the support of ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research). Based on the established literature and empirical studies on gender-based discrimination along with subsequent lack of equal opportunities to girl child amidst decreasing sex ratio at birth, the study aimed to link gender-based discrimination reflected in India's declining child sex ratio with increasing violence perpetrated on women. A critical examination of the educational, marital, and employment trends among women in select districts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, revealed several key findings. Based on these findings and critical observations, the paper has reiterated a set of recommendations from the study, premised on a framework of community and public health perspective.

Key words: *Child Sex Ratio, Violence, girl child discrimination, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, gender equality, community health, public health, government interventions*

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2023, World Population Day, marked annually on 11th July, addressed issues around population and its impact on society, nation, and environment. The day was thematically marked with 'Unleashing the Power

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of Gender Equality: Uplifting the Voices of Women and Girls to Unlock Our World's Infinite Possibilities'. This theme brought attention to demographic concerns, discrimination, and violence against women and girls. This is a theme that continues to engage the attention of policy-makers in India due to the deficit in women and girls in the country. [3]

In India, as informed by the census 2011, the child sex ratio (CSR) was 919 girls for every 1000 boys, a decline from 927 girls per 1000 boys in the 2001 Census. This declining sex ratio indicates a significant gender imbalance exposing a social norm of strong bias towards male child, in many parts of the country and the associated socio-cultural factors leading to discrimination against female children. The overall sex ratio (OSR) at the national level, measured as the number of females per 1,000 males, demonstrated an improvement in the 2011 Census, rising by seven points to 940, compared to 933 in the 2001 Census. This represents the highest national sex ratio recorded since the 1971 Census, although it remains slightly below the 1961 figure. Nevertheless, the increasingly skewed and masculinized child sex ratio remains to be a matter of reflection and unease for feminist researchers, demographers, and policy analysts. According to the 2011 Census data, the child sex ratio (ages 0 to 6) declined to 914 females per 1,000 males, down from 927 in 2001, reflecting a persistent societal menace of aversion towards girl child.

Son- preference represents one of the most prominent and enduring expressions of gender discrimination in India. The skewed child sex ratio underscores a pronounced gender disparity in the population of children aged 0 to 6 years, with a clear bias in favor of male children. This phenomenon is widely acknowledged to be a consequence of pervasive and deeply ingrained gender discrimination, which influences reproductive choices to prioritize the birth of sons over daughters. Such preferential practices reflect broader socio-cultural norms that glorify son preference embedded in patrilineal settings, thereby contributing to a sustained imbalance in the sex ratio within this demographic

3 This paper has been derived from a research study conducted in the year 2021 titled Declining Child Sex Ratio and Violence against Women: Examining Girl-Child Discrimination in India supported by Indian Council of Social Science Research.

cohort.

The state-wise data from the Census 2011 revealed a stark disparity in child sex ratios across India. For instance: Haryana had the lowest child sex ratio at 834 girls per 1000 boys. Punjab followed with a child sex ratio of 846 girls per 1000 boys. Rajasthan had a child sex ratio of 888 girls per 1000 boys. Maharashtra's child sex ratio stood at 894 girls per 1000 boys. Tamil Nadu had a relatively better ratio of 943 girls per 1000 boys. Kerala reported one of the highest child sex ratios at 964 girls per 1000 boys.

According to the 2021 evaluation report by NITI Aayog, the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (BBBP) scheme succeeded in fostering substantial mass mobilization aimed at eradicating gender discrimination and instilling the idea of equal dignity and opportunity for a girl child. The initiative has also led to the development of many pragmatic initiatives and community-based interventions. Furthermore, public knowledge of the scheme was observed as notably high. According to the report, this has impacted states like Haryana as it came up with improved figures. In 2015, the state's sex ratio at birth improved from 876 to 900 in 2016, and further to 914 in 2017, largely due to the successful interventions of the Government of India's BBBP campaign. While the ratio remained stable in 2018, it rose to 923 in 2019. However, this progress experienced a decline, with the ratio decreasing from 922 in 2020 to 914 in 2021.

These figures underscored the urgent need for policies and interventions to address gender-based discrimination and to promote gender equality from an early age. The declining sex ratio not only reflects deep-seated societal biases but also has long-term implications for the demographic structure and social fabric of the country.

BACKGROUND AND FOCUS OF PAPER

We undertook an exploratory research study, supported by ICSSR, to understand concerns related to gender discrimination and gender violence in the context of the girl child. This study explored the existing literature on gender discrimination and gender violence, building upon pre-existing scholarship on linking the child sex ratio (CSR) to broader issues of gender discrimination and gender-based violence. These works critically examine the intersections between demographic imbalances and systemic inequalities faced by women and girls. Researchers, activists, and scholars have utilized narratives from various domains—academic research, lived experiences, and grassroots activism—to analyse how skewed CSRs are both a consequence and a reinforcement of deeply rooted patriarchal notions. Key theoretical inputs and concerns regarding child sex ratio and violence against women in India were considered.

***Research Methodology*:** The methodology used was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. While building on existing literature, the study went beyond it to understand the nuances of socio-economic and cultural changes, as well as the impact of government programs and policies. The project involved a thorough analysis of data collected in selected states and districts in order to draw a comparative parallel between each and all were central to the observations of the study undertaken. The study conducted keeping the research domain of this project in mind covered the two states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh located in north India. For a better analysis and observation, within these states, a set of districts had been identified based on their current levels and intercensal change in 0-6 sex ratio. To envision the critical postulations of skewed sex ratios and gender biased violence, two districts have been selected in a manner that one portrays an improvement in 0-6 sex ratio between two intercensal periods (in this case between 2001 and 2011) and the other portrays a deterioration. Nevertheless, the districts chosen exhibited critically low child sex ratios given the state specific values. The districts thus selected were Mahendragarh (CSR: 775, intercensal point change: -44) and Sonipat (CSR:798, intercensal point change: +10) from Haryana. In Uttar Pradesh are Baghpat (CSR:841, intercensal point change: -10) and Kanpur Nagar (CSR:873, intercensal point change: +4).

The selected primary sites for data collection bore characteristics and similarities in terms of the overall value of the state's child sex ratios in line with the future policy implementation. From the districts, rural and urban sites formed the composition of the sample. The importance of conducting the research in both the locations bear relevance to the consistently low value of urban child sex ratio and far more declining points in rural areas in India. The sample units for rural areas are the villages while towns constituted the first selection unit in urban areas to control heterogeneity because wards from different towns may reflect the similar state value.

Primary data was collected using mixed methods to allow for the analysis to take comprehensive shape. Quantitative and qualitative modes of enquiry were carried on simultaneously when the researchers visited the field during the course of six months of field work. The nature of field data collection was operationalized through an observational study surveying woman in the reproductive age group with at least one child going to school. Even though the sampled households qualify cause-effect analysis, the behavioral dynamics of son preference has been adequately represented. To cater to the study's aims, women with different gender composition of children were sampled making the sampling method thus purposive. Qualitative research methods adopted for this study included purposive sampling, In-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire. To understand the nature of the role and responsibilities of stakeholders and implementing authorities, the researchers interviewed experts working on issues of violence against women such as police, doctors especially gynaecologists, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers among others. Each stakeholder had a separate questionnaire depending on his/her area of expertise and the team sought a prior appointment for the interview. In each of the rural field sites, in-depth interviews were conducted with women survivors of violence, survivors of child marriage, migrant brides, women with only daughter/s and male members of the house. Focus group discussions were conducted with a demographically diverse group of people in select sites across different districts to get more information in greater depth from the interviewers. In rural sites, the three groups were: unmarried girls and women in the reproductive age group; elderly women in the age group of

40-60 years and men in the age group of 20-45 years. In the urban sites, two groups were interviewed: unmarried women who belonged to the reproductive age group of 18-25 years and unmarried men in the reproductive age group of 21-29 years. A total of about 540 women were randomly sampled from all the sites.

It is important to mention as researchers that the study derives its conclusions from only on select districts of the region and may not be used to conclusively understand the entire states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana or to extrapolate findings for the entire country.

The study explored in detail the various characteristics of the female respondents, including demographic components like age distribution and marital status, as well as socio-economic dimensions such as education, marital profile, and employment status. It also focused on the interconnections between family structure and child development. The major emphasis was on delving into gender-based discriminatory attitudes in terms of education and health parameters and understanding the observed variations of attitudes in the context of large and small families. It highlighted gender relations within the family and at the societal level. Women's autonomy and agency in decision-making were examined in detail to delineate the gender norms impacting women's survival chances, viewed from a life cycle perspective. Marriage, a critical point in a woman's life, was studied in detail, highlighting the educational attainment of girls and women compared to their male siblings. The study also looked at the educational differences between married men and women, as well as women's workforce participation.

The study provided deep insights into violence against women and analyzed the linkages between gender discrimination, son preference, and violence against women. It took an in-depth and contemporaneous look at various forms of violence against women, the factors responsible for it, its location (public or private sphere), and the resistance and redressal-seeking behavior of women. It focused on how violence is exacerbated by son preference, highlighting the interconnection between the falling determinants in child sex ratio and violence against women.

In this paper, we provide a summary of the findings from the research study. The methodology, with its quantitative and qualitative inputs, have allowed us to extrapolate various dimensions. While building on existing literature, the study has sought to understand the nuances of the field through the lens of socio-economic and cultural bearings well as the ways in which Government programmes and policies have influenced the field. Based on these findings and critical observations, the paper reiterates the proposed a set of recommendations based on a theoretical framework of community and public health perspectives.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

- We noted a higher number of girls completing school education in both rural and urban regions of select districts of Uttar Pradesh. In the select districts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, there was increased awareness and higher aspirations among parents for girl-child education.

- The age at marriage in select districts of Uttar Pradesh was higher than in select districts of Haryana. However, in Haryana, the proportion of younger cohorts getting married early had decreased compared to older cohorts. Among younger cohorts of married women, there was a considerable age gap between spouses.

- Regarding employment, paid activity for women was very low in both states. However, due to the urban nature of some sites in Uttar Pradesh, relatively more women were engaged in white-collar jobs. In the National Capital Region (NCR) part of Haryana, women were also found to be employed in teaching. Most women in the select regions were involved in unpaid farm work and domestic work. Aspirations for employment were also present among women. Both districts reflected men and women engaged in part-time or temporary work. The nature of paid and unpaid work differed between men and women. In households where the male member was not engaged in paid work, the woman was the principal earner. Women's work included economic remuneration and contributions to household work, childcare, elderly care, animal tending, and other related activities. Among younger cohorts, women showed aspirations for gainful employment.

- The study delved into the various characteristics of female respondents, including demographic components like age distribution and marital status, and socio-economic dimensions such as education, marital profile, and employment status. The gender gap in educational attainment remained a challenge for enhancing women's awareness and empowerment. However, regions in Haryana, stereotypically considered gender imbalanced, showed nuanced forms of women's agency. Women engaged in everyday negotiations within their socio-cultural matrix, leading to significant disruptions in regional power structures. Women advocated girl-child education and future aspirations for employment for daughters, reflecting a positive impact of government policies and programs like BBBP campaign and interventions from traditional institutions like *Khap* panchayats. The study noted a reduction in child marriage and age of marriage for girls going high. Both regions showed more women engaged in domestic and household work.

- The select districts of Uttar Pradesh revealed larger family sizes compared to Haryana. There was an overwhelming desire for at least one son in all regions. In Haryana, the small family norm was adverse towards the birth of girls, whereas in Uttar Pradesh, the large family size based on natural birth order favoured the girl-child.

- There emerged a connection between land ownership and fertility choices. In the select districts of Uttar Pradesh, the choice for a larger family was more dominant than son preference alone. Whereas for the select sites of Haryana, there was a clear bias towards smaller family sizes to prevent land fragmentation.

- Fertility choices centered around son preference, with families stopping having children once a son was born. There was no positive correlation between sex composition in fertility choices and women's education. However, educated and gainfully employed women aspired to ensure security and better lives for their girls.

- One could not infer any difference in health-seeking behavior for boys and girls by families. Some variations in response time were noted, but these were due to rural and urban settings and access to health care facilities. In the select districts of Uttar Pradesh, routine health check-ups were less common, whereas for the select districts in Haryana, due to a large network of private health facilities, they were more common.

- On the issue of school enrolment, there was no prominent difference between the two genders. Positive trends in continuation of higher education for girls were noted. However, school dropout due to the burden of household work on girls was still prevalent. The increasing trend of marrying at relatively higher age and awareness about the value of education for girls led to improvements in their education. Access to and availability of neighbourhood schools was an enabling factor.

- Educational gaps existed between spouses in the sample population. In the select sites of Uttar Pradesh, the gap was considerably higher, with men attaining secondary education and women only primary education. In the select sites of Haryana, the gap was lower since both men and women attained similar levels of education.

- In both regions, boys had an advantage in completing secondary and higher education compared to girls. This disparity was lower in urban sites. Marriage often disrupted girls' education, but some women continued their education after marriage.

- In the select districts of Haryana, girls were married off soon after completing secondary education, while in Uttar Pradesh, there was a lag between dropping out of school and marriage due to family responsibilities. The erosion of joint family systems and the emergence of nuclear families adversely impacted the continuation of education for adolescent girls. However, young girls in Haryana refused to marry men without similar or higher educational qualifications. This led to a preference for local Haryana men to marry women from other regions, necessitating a distinction between voluntary migration for marriage and trafficking of women for marriage.

- A significant spousal age gap, especially among younger cohorts, led to greater violence against women by their husbands. Early and repeated pregnancies, lack of family planning awareness, and lack of access to contraceptives made women more vulnerable. The skewed sex ratio in select districts of Haryana resulted in an influx of migrant brides. Cross-regional marriages, emerging from declining child sex ratio and male marriage squeeze led to a demand for migrant brides. These brides faced isolation, limited access to resources, and a more exclusionary existence, making them vulnerable to discrimination and violence.

- Women in the select districts of Uttar Pradesh enjoyed greater mobility than those in Haryana. There was a growing trend of women expressing their choice in marriage in both regions. Interaction between prospective marriage partners was more common in Uttar Pradesh, possibly due to the urban bias in the sample population.

- Physical violence was the most prevailing form of violence against women. In the select district of Haryana, underreporting due to lack of local women's networks was noted. Violence continued from natal to marital families, as women internalized violence and had less ability to resist. Women experienced more violence in the public domain in the select districts of Haryana and faced consequences for resisting violence as compared to the select districts of UP,

- Local networks, including Sarpanches, women's groups, and neighbours, provided support to domestic violence survivors. Community support was noted in countering child marriage and enhancing the value of the girl child. Legal functionaries, although aware of protective laws, held biases against women regarding the misuse of dowry and domestic violence laws.

- Women with only daughters experienced more violence in marital families in both regions. This indicated sex-selective abortion in the select districts of Haryana, whereas in parts of Uttar Pradesh, larger family sizes linked to meta-son preference increased violence against women with daughters. Government interventions and initiatives led to positive attitudinal changes, reducing sex-selective abortions.

- Positive trends included an increase in age at marriage in younger cohorts and aspirations for daughters' education among parents. Enrolment and continuation of girls' education improved, but marriage remained a significant indicator of women's status. Parental support for domestic violence survivors and increased reporting of emotional violence were noted. Community leaders and civil society members participated in addressing these issues, though more needs to be done. Police and legal functionaries required greater sensitization. The implementations of the PCPNDT (Pre-Conception and pre-natal Diagnostics Technique Act (1994) which is the law to counter sex selective abortion and girl child discrimination faced many challenges, but the BBBP advocacy campaign created a positive image of girls in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS:

1. **Need for a Community and Public Health Approach** Addressing the issue of gender discrimination, especially in relation to sex-selective abortion, necessitates transcending the binary distinction between girl children and women. It calls for a participatory community health

approach that cultivates a broader societal understanding that valuing the freedom and rights of daughters extends beyond merely preventing sex determination and sex-selective abortions. This comprehensive approach also involves ensuring access to safe and legal abortion services, as well as implementing family planning methods to address unmet reproductive health needs. This approach should encompass the active participation of women in the community, particularly at the panchayat level, as well as the engagement of frontline health workers. These stakeholders can be empowered in two key aspects:

a) Evaluating the sexual and reproductive health needs of girls and women at the micro level and subsequently planning interventions that address these specific requirements.

b) Periodic monitoring of health indicators from most vulnerable section and upwards, is essential for fostering community engagement and accountability. Training and support should be provided to facilitate community mobilization around women's health and gender equality, while also raising awareness of specific components of the programme along with its rigorous implementation.

Government policies and initiatives, such as the BBBP campaign, have made substantial strides in addressing son preference. However, framing son preference and violence against women as public health concerns presents a valuable opportunity for significant interventions aimed at achieving reproductive justice for women. This perspective can facilitate the integration of these issues as critical priorities within India's public health system, fostering a more inclusive approach to gender equality and women's health. Public health services, therefore, need to engage with:

- Providing counselling services to both women and men regarding fertility choices, including guidance on the optimal age for conception, is essential for promoting informed reproductive health decisions. spacing between children, and pre-natal and post-natal care.

- Providing access to contraceptive options, highlighting that the responsibility of preventing pregnancy is shared equally by both male and female populations.
- Engaging men and boys in the formulation of strategies to combat violence is crucial, as it acknowledges their dual roles as both perpetrators and victims. This inclusive approach fosters a deeper understanding of the dynamics of violence and encourages men to take responsibility for their actions while also addressing the vulnerabilities they may face.
- Employing gender-sensitization programmes and capacity building training for facilitators and public health practitioners.
- Raising awareness about sexual and reproductive rights among girls, women, boys, and including men through group discussions, campaigns, and community engagement.
- Introducing health insurance for senior citizens as a strategy to address the declining number of girl children in the population represents a multifaceted approach to combatting gender discrimination. Efforts aimed at curbing sex-selective abortion and bias against girls have primarily concentrated on restricting illegal medical practices and providing financial incentives to motivate parents to raise daughters. The economic burden associated with raising a girl child, coupled with concerns regarding the health and security of the elderly—particularly in states with an increasing aging population—underscores the need for such initiatives. By alleviating the financial pressures on families, health insurance for seniors could enhance the perceived value of girl children and contribute to a more equitable societal framework. The National Health Policy should acknowledge the importance of girl child and include more social security schemes for the elderly in its agenda (Nanda and Ray, 2020).

A community health perspective must be integrated within Higher Educational Institutions to empower male and female students who will make future choices around sexuality and fertility, fostering awareness of the value of the girl child and women. It is essential for these individuals to comprehend the significance of informed and empowered reproductive choices, as well as the necessity of creating an egalitarian society. The principles of community health should be woven into the discourse on gender equality and actively incorporated into government programs, such as the BBBP scheme. Emphasizing this integration at all levels is crucial for effectively addressing gender discrimination, as evident in imbalances in the sex ratio.

2. **Connecting Education, Employment, and Recognition of Work** While the Beti Padhao part of the BBBP scheme emphasizes educating daughters through school education, there is a pressing need for continuous strategy linkages between school and college education, encompassing a range of initiatives aimed at skill-building and enhancing employability. These initiatives should focus on dismantling stereotypes regarding women's obligations in society, promoting women's participation in the sciences, and integrating ethical considerations and gender equality into scientific disciplines. Furthermore, fostering multidisciplinary research and encouraging women to pursue leadership roles are essential components of this comprehensive approach

Education should be reoriented to highlight the significance of gender equality, which needs to be developed through community participation and nuanced understanding from community practices. For example, in the select areas of the study, local women's support groups provided a space for women and girls to express their problems or speak out about domestic violence. In Haryana, elderly women exhibited strength and power, reflecting their agency and decision-making capabilities within their context.

Community leaders, including men, practicing gender equality within their context can influence positive behavioral changes in other families. Celebrating local women and men leaders contributing to gender equality, as well as examples of movements and campaigns promoting gender equality, should be promoted in the educational curriculum. In Sonipat, Haryana, the

Bhagatphool Mahila Mahavidyalaya[4] was cited by some in the community as an innovative approach to augment women's education and empowerment in the region. Establishing neighbourhood schools and colleges with state support and scholarships for girls can provide an impetus for learning and education. Skill training should be developed by keeping local skills and indigenous markets and networks in mind.

State interventions in employment should emphasize recognizing women's contributions, rather than just remuneration. For example, some women who were paid for agricultural work before marriage did not receive payment for similar work in their marital homes since their marital families owned the land. Here, paid work is a misnomer since the woman's socio-economic status had improved, and sometimes it was her choice to work in her own fields. However, efforts should be made by the Government and other agencies to acknowledge and recognize their work and create a discourse for support and care, including their healthcare needs and leisure.

Village panchayats and *Khap* panchayats promoting girls' education, countering child marriage, and enhancing the value of the girl child should be incentivized through financial support and rewards. Women's and girls' aspirations for education should be recognized and celebrated through participatory discussions and community mobilizations. All stakeholders should be sensitized, rewarded, and recognized for their work in the field.

While the state should focus on employment avenues for women and girls, it should also recognize women's choice to contribute to domestic/household work. Their economic value should not be reduced to gainful employment, and state support should enhance their welfare, recognize their contribution, and increase their access to other assets. The state should encourage awareness programs so that men and boys equally share household/

4 Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, also referred to as Bhagat Phool Singh Women's University, is the first women-only state university in North India. Established by the Government of Haryana in August 2006, it is located in the village of Khanpur Kalan in the Gohana region of Sonipat district.

domestic work.

3. **Promoting Equality Discourse in Marriage** Although the age at marriage remains low, positive trends show women moving to higher education, leading to an increase in the age at marriage. Government programs focusing on awareness to counter child marriage, along with efforts by Protection Officers and panchayat raj institutions, have been significant interventions on the ground.

However, the pandemic of 2020, with the lockdown and loss of employment, rolled back some positive interventions. This setback reveals the need for more effective ways to counter child marriage. The Government should initiate awareness programs and bring about community ownership of these programs to achieve sustained attitudinal changes. Although there were provisions for counselling and protection officers, their numbers and workload made it difficult for them to deliver. They were also not trained in counselling and often reinforced patriarchal norms. Therefore, gender sensitization training programs for counsellors are needed. Emphasizing pre-marital counselling requires an enabling space that includes village leaders and elders. A generic top-down approach insensitive to community needs will not provide solutions. Recognizing the agency of women and girls within their context and valuing their voices is crucial. Strengthening and empowering them within their context is a more effective strategy.

The power nexus between police, legal functionaries, and influential families' needs to be questioned and held accountable to the law. This nexus increases the vulnerability to violence for women and girls. While redressal methods are sought through law enforcement agencies, lawyers and low-ranking police officers sometimes misguide women complainants to profit from such cases, leading to the image of women misusing the laws. Awareness around women-specific laws is necessary, emphasizing restorative justice: reforms, civil law interventions, behavioral change of men and boys, prevention of violence through awareness, creating enabling spaces, rather than just punitive justice.

Enhancing the pertinence of gender equality is essential to counter son-preference. This requires a multi-pronged approach, where fertility choices are mediated through informed and empowered decisions. Property rights should be enabled by the state, considering community perceptions. Encouraging community leaders, public officials, and government functionaries to take public stances may be more effective.

Civil Society Interventions The study revealed a need for mobilizing civil society agencies, including non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and self-help groups. These agencies should work with zeal and passion, undriven by state or other external funding. Community-based interventions or community ownership of Government programs have augmented the significance of recognizing gender equality. Such programs should be scaled up and used as best practices for others to adopt.

Civil society agencies should monitor and evaluate government programs, making them accessible and accountable to the local community. A synergistic and collaborative approach among civil society groups, local self-government agencies like the Panchayati Raj, and the government is necessary. These collaborative efforts need to be sustained over time to bring about change at the ground level. Cross-learning between states and civil society initiatives should be encouraged. For instance, in Mahendragarh (Haryana), BBBP initiative can be boosted through community engagements and collaborative associations, thereby amplifying its transformative effects on a gendered landscape of society. Conversely, in Baghpat (Uttar Pradesh), valuable insights can be gleaned from the Mahendragarh experience to inspire the initial steps in cultivating enthusiasm and commitment toward the implementation of the BBBP. This underscores the positive impact of policy discourses, such as the BBBP, that are grounded in community health and participation, incorporating gender-sensitive elements that can effectively challenge gender-based discrimination.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study aimed to investigate the declining child sex ratio and violence against women to understand the ways in which her status is disadvantaged and vulnerable in the Indian context. We also conducted a comparative analysis of select regions in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana based on their child sex ratio trends and the prevalence of violence targeted against girls and women. While variations existed across regions in terms of types of violence and the status of women and girls, we identified common features in both states.

We emphasized cross-learning from positive efforts and interventions implemented in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Addressing the challenge of countering discrimination against the girl child requires recognizing that there is no binary distinction between girls and women. Efforts and interventions for change must adopt a holistic approach. Failure to address forms of discrimination against the girl child will perpetuate visible and invisible forms of violence against both girls and women.

To foster an equal society, synergy between government and civil society agencies is essential. Effective community participation must be encouraged at all levels, enabling government agencies to respect and learn from communities while fostering a sense of ownership among community members and families regarding government programs. A proactive, positive, and empathetic approach rooted in mutual love, trust, and restorative justice can pave the way for equality for all, including women and girls in society.

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MGNREGS AND THE INTEGRATED PROCESS OF FINANCIAL INCLUSION: CAUSES BEHIND THE VARIANCE OF EXPANSION AMONG THE INDIAN STATES

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ABSTRACT:

Financial inclusion can be a major instrument in inclusive growth process, which was by far not realized to that extent. According to the World Bank, even a percentage change in financial inclusion can lead to a country's exponential growth. As financial inclusion implies offering of financial services to all in an affordable manner, special focus always lies with the unprivileged section. Therefore, employment opportunities integrated with institutional financial facilities can integrate the people with the financial system beside resource mobilization for them. Financial literacy among the poor will largely ensure financial stability of a country. When, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was adjoined with the bank and post office accounts to make the payments of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS) hassle free and corruption free in rural corners, it was a dignified step towards financial inclusion. The recent study shows that an employment generation scheme can be an effective tool of financial inclusion. Based on secondary data from different sources, the present study demonstrates internet accessibility and wage payment through registered accounts have essentially helped to expand the process of financial inclusion with the help of Principal Component Analysis and Ordinary Least Square Method.

Key Words: *Employment, Financial Inclusion, Marginalised, MGNREGS, Rural.*

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INTRODUCTION

Financial inclusion can be a major instrument in inclusive growth process, which was by far not realized to that extent. But in the recent era of digitalization and free trade of goods and services, inclusion in the financial system has been more emphasized as exclusion will be of a larger extent when a person is financially excluded. Financial inclusion not only upgrades the socio-economic situation at an individual level, but uplifts the economy as a whole at the aggregate level. Definition of Financial inclusion may be termed as delivering the service of all the financial facilities like savings, investment, transaction, credit and insurance to all the adult citizens in a nation by the institutional financial intermediaries in an affordable and sustainable manner. Again, financial inclusion has been one of the strong catalysts of monetary policy as the money and capital markets are getting complicated in the global scenario. Money markets become handicapped if a larger population remains excluded from the money market. As exclusion is greater in the developing nations, financial exclusion persists in a much larger degree in these nations. Financial inclusion not only depends on the policy orientation of the state, but also depends on the education level, financial literacy, physical infrastructure, communication system and on the digital access. World Bank in 2017 has estimated that the average population financially included in the less developed countries is 32.6 % and the proportion is 90.4 % in developed countries. According to World Bank even a percentage change in financial inclusion can lead to a country's exponential growth. Including the vulnerable people in the basic financial process of the nation helps them to escape the vicious circle of poverty. A minimum financial transaction through legitimate accounts can serve as a gateway for the marginalized section to enhance consumption level, to escape from the world of ignorance and participate in the overall growth process of the nation. India and China account for the quarter of the unbanked population of the world according to the Global Findex Record, 2017. Most of the unbanked population reside in the countries of Asia and Africa and South America. Here also gender plays the major gap. 56 % of the total unbanked population of the world are women (Kapur and Reddy, 2020). Large disparity also exists between rural and urban sector mostly in all developing nations in terms of financial inclusion. If we consider the case of India, only 38 % of the scheduled commercial banks function in the villages of India (Iqbal and Sami, 2017).

As financial inclusion implies offering of financial services to all in an affordable manner, special focus always lies with the unprivileged section. Availability, accessibility, affordability of all the financial services through all financial institutions to all corners of a nation and to all people is critical for financial inclusion. But as per the Global Findex database, 2017, it was stated that 22 % of the worlds inhabitants cannot get access to financial institutions as the distance of the financial institution matters. Again, the report also stated that two thirds of the worlds' populations didn't feel an urgency to get involved with financial institutions as they lack enough money. Moreover 30 % of the unbanked adults did not have any bank accounts as they do not feel any urgency of an account in their day-to-day life. Thus, financial illiteracy becomes a major problem as many of the people of the globe do not know the facilities of banking or any other financial services. Financial illiteracy is mostly linked with lack of education, resources and infrastructural facilities. Therefore, employment opportunities integrated with institutional facilities can eradicate the problem of resources among the impoverished and can integrate the people with the financial system. This will gradually spread financial literacy among the poor, which will largely ensure financial stability of a country.

From 2005 onwards, India has initiated and followed serious steps to broaden the base of financial inclusion. In 2005, Reserve Bank of India asked banks to focus on the unprivileged section and initiate steps for opening bank accounts for them. From 2006, banks were permitted to follow Bank correspondent model and involve NGOs, Micro Finance Institutions and Self-Help Groups as correspondents and business facilitator to incorporate the unbanked adults with the banking sector. From 2010, RBI advised all banks (public and private sector) to submit a FIP (a three-year Financial Inclusion Plan) based on branches, savings and deposits, and different sorts of cards (Kisan Credit Cards and General Credit Cards) issued (Bhaskar, 2014; Sujlana and Kiran, 2018). Since 2015, more emphasis was laid on bringing the entire population under one financial system, direct benefit transfer through banks, digital payments, digital payments and usage of cards. Recently during the third phase of financial inclusion, the Government is focusing more on bank branches, mobile bank correspondents, Automated Tailor Machines (ATM), White Labelled ATM (WLA) and digital payments to reduce the hassles of financial transactions and broaden the infrastructural services for financial inclusion (Kapur and Reddy, 2020).

It was a revolutionary step when the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was adjoined with bank and post office accounts to make the payments of National Rural Employment Scheme hassle free and to lessen corruption. It was made mandatory to clear the payments of the works done under the scheme within 15 days. And the states were entrusted with the responsibility to fill up the gap with Bank Correspondent (BC) model where there is deficiency of branches physically. Previously, Government gradually started with linking banks with the welfare schemes and it was guided by micro finance. Through MGNREGS, the Government started to link the banks and the post offices with employment generation scheme. As MGNREGS is a rural sector based self-targeted employment generation scheme, basically focused on the marginalised and unskilled labour, payment to them through bank or post office accounts was earnestly a mechanism leading towards universal financial inclusion. In the developing countries unbanked rural population broadly lags behind urban unbanked population as commercial banks shows an apathy in opening banks in geographically isolated places, where transport and communication system are poor and business is not so profitable as the urban centres. But as MGNREGS payment got linked with bank and post office accounts, the downtrodden mass got an account with the institutional financial intermediaries. Wherever there is deficiency in financial infrastructural facilities, State governments were advised to build up bank correspondent models from their administrative expenses to fill up the gaps and serve the unbanked population at their doorsteps with their due payments. Rural development ministry is continuously trying to pay 100% of wages through bank accounts of the labourers participating in MGNREGS to increase transparency in the wage payment process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study based on secondary data trying to show the relationship between development of India and financial inclusion has stated that accounts are getting opened in rural areas since 2005 but the deposit accumulated in the rural accounts are apathetic. Financial stability remains a questionable aspect as the banking habits of the impoverished are not matured enough and financial illiteracy mostly prevails among these section (Dwibedi and Mishra, 2022). Another study focussing on the association of growth with financial inclusion has concluded that no relationship exists between employment creation and financial inclusion (Dixit and Ghosh, 2013). In India, mostly women lack access to financial institutions as they cannot show ownership of any non-tangible assets. A cross-sectional study in Ghana has showed that financial inclusion has a tremendous possibility of reducing poverty and the probability of getting poor. It has been also observed that the women headed households can be helped largely by the financial inclusion for getting out of poverty and the government of Ghana is trying to pull its resources more for financially inclusion of the impoverished and for building up infrastructural facilities (Koomson et al, 2020). A study focussed on twenty major states of India trying to construct financial inclusion index for rural areas has considered number of rural outlets, total number of accounts, deposit and credit amount, per outlet per account as markers of financial inclusion (Karmakar, et al., 2011). Welfare level of the mass can be increased by financially including them (Cichiello et al., 2021; Billiah and Farid, 2020). It has been seen that financial inclusion has largely succeeded to reduce poverty and income inequality in Africa and research works are emphasized on policies and programmes to widen the scopes of financial inclusion of the excluded mass. Again, studies have also shown, disparity in financial inclusion adversely affects the machinery of financial inclusion process (Kara et.al., 2021). A research study based on 156 countries trying to show the relationship between financial inclusion and different poverty levels have shown that financial inclusion can be a major policy for reducing extreme poverty. The study has also shown that initiatives for gender equality eases the scopes of financial inclusion (Saha and Quin, 2022; Park and Mecardo, 2021).

Financial inclusion of the portion who has remained involuntarily financially excluded will obviously get benefit from this sort of inclusion as access to formal financial institutions will increase their savings, digital transaction, insurance facilities and labour force participation. These will definitely reduce poverty (Demirgüç-Kunt at al., 2017). Financial inclusion in India through associating people with formal savings and lending accounts largely depends on gender, age, education. Therefore, policies to intensify financial inclusion in India must focus on income and education enhancing measures for females (Billiah and Ahmed, 2020). A study using panel data of 55 OIC countries has focused on branches of banks, automated teller machines, deposits, institutional borrowing and life insurance facilities to gauge relationship between economic growth and financial inclusion (Kim et al., 2018). A study through institutional variable analysis based on 91 countries states that there exists a wide gender gap regarding financial inclusion especially in the emerging countries. Therefore, financial inclusion of women through access to savings accounts and credit cards is largely effective in reducing gender gap, enabling further development. The study did not notice any positive impacts of bank loans on development (Cabeza- Garcia et al., 2019). A research study of Northern Nigeria using regression analysis has concluded that access to financial services through formal financial institutions and farmers' savings club has an inspiring positive impact on vulnerable farmers particularly women (Abraham, 2018). Different studies in Asia and Africa have concluded that the developing nations in the two continents have opted for different plans, programmes and policies to hike up financial inclusion as there exists tremendous positive influence of financial inclusion on reducing poverty holistic development of the nation (Chinoda & Kwenda, 2019; Gretta, 2017; Loukoianova et al., 2018). A study based on panel data analysis of the annual data collected from 42 countries of Africa and Asia to sort out the factors associated with financial exclusion has stated that there exists a two-fold relationship between financial inclusion and development. As financial inclusion enhances development of a nation, the development process also itself broadens the scope of financial inclusion. The study also detects that wide ranges of income, assets and gender inequality can result in vast level of financial exclusion. Policies and projects aiming at spreading literacy, guaranteeing pay among different races and females and spreading financial facilities in the rural sectors can escalate financial inclusion and awareness, which will ultimately lead towards development (Cicchiello et al., 2021).

A World Bank study on the newly banked population depicts that this sect of the population is served massively from services like institutional borrowings, savings, payments and insurance facilities as it comprises rural population, women and low-income earners (World Bank, 2014). Many studies trying to develop financial inclusion index captured different variables like accounts held with banks and microfinance institutions, geographical and demographic penetration, access diameters like numbers of borrowers and lenders, barrier dimensions like obstacles in getting access to financial institutions (Honohan, 2008; Amidžić et al., 2014; Sarma, 2012; Tuesta, 2014). A study sorting out the factors behind financial inclusion through OLS regression analysis in different countries has focussed on the variables like per capita GDP, network connectivity, access to electronic gadgets, access to information captured by internet accessibility, soundness of banks, rural population, adult literacy and income inequality (Sarma and Pais, 2011). A study in Sub-Saharan Africa assessing the factors playing prime role in financial inclusion has demonstrated that per capita income and population density are positive factors behind financial inclusion . The study also detects that natural resources play a negative role in financial inclusion process (Allen et al, 2014). Another study using crossed panel data of 116 developing countries has concluded that ratio of per capita income and access to internet stimulate financial inclusion whereas dependency ratio, inflation, age and income inequality inhibit the process of financial inclusion in developing countries (Omar et al, 2020).

An empirical study on the determinants of financial inclusion in Uganda has shown that social bonding or social capital can play a vital role in financially including the rural people, who are financially excluded. Financial education influences financial inclusion positively in a society where social bonding and social networks dominantly exists (Bongomin et al, 2018). A research work carried out in 36 African countries found out that wealth, income, age and education play a prime role in financial inclusion. Richer and aged people with higher education levels are largely financially included in all the studied countries of Africa (Zins and Weill, 2016). Another empirical study carried out in 2016 and 2020, focussed on Africa investigated the relationship between internet mobile phones usage and financial inclusion. The study concluded that access to internet and usage of mobile phones broadened the scopes of financial inclusion (Evans, 2018). Another study based on World Bank data of 20 Sub Saharan Countries in Africa tried to find out the factors playing prime role in financial inclusion and it found that education is the prime determinant of financial inclusion (Chikalipah, 2017). Again a quantitative analysis based on 43 countries computing the factors behind financial inclusion has sorted out that demographic, technological, economic and socio-political factors play vital role in the progress of financial inclusion in a country (Kabakova and Plaksenkov, 2018).

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:

In this era of cell phones, internet and extensive digitalisation, financial inclusion plays a major role in development of the capital markets of an economy and the overall growth. It has been perceived that without financial inclusion, a major section of the population can remain excluded from the benefits of development. Again, in our country, where 65% of the population resides in rural sector (as per the economic survey, 2022-23), it is very essential to include the rural mass within the financial system. Since 2005, India has marched forward towards massive financial inclusion. Simultaneously, people were rewarded with different rights like right to work, right to food and right to education from 2005 onwards. Again, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) focussed on providing 100 days of employment to the rural households at a predetermined wage rate, which voluntarily willed to go for unskilled labour employment. From 2010, when Reserve Bank of India went for universal financial inclusion through public, private banks and Non-Governmental organisations, the Central Government also took a bold step by declaring that the remunerations of MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme) will be disbursed through Banks and Postal accounts to the beneficiaries to stop corruption and fund fudging. Therefore, MGREGS being a wage employment scheme has eased the process of financial inclusion in the rural areas of India. The present study tries to gauge the aspect of financial inclusion through MGNREGS. The study has also tried to sort out the determinants, which play major role in the wage disbursement process of MGNREGS through bank and post office accounts.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

MGNREGS is the largest employment generation scheme in the world and from 2011, financial inclusion has also become default mechanism of this scheme. As from 2011, payments of the workers through bank and post office accounts were made mandatory to lessen corruption and money fudging. So here in this study, MGNREGS has been assessed in terms of financial inclusion on the basis of secondary data at the macro level for the year 2019-20. The vast literature survey has helped to sort out the variables which can play a major role in the process of financial inclusion. We have also tried to factor out the determinants of the level of financial inclusion under MGNREGS through simple regression. The variance of financial inclusion and financial literacy, internet usage among males and females are also portrayed in the paper to demonstrate the picture of difference among different states and union territories in respect of these attributes. Different states and union territories of India are considered for the empirical study. Some small union territories like Lakshadweep, Ladakh were ignored as data from all the sources were not available for all the variables.

OBJECTIVES

1. The main objective of the study is to assess the impacts of the essential determinants of financial inclusion through a public welfare scheme or a social security scheme like MGNREGS.
2. The study tries to assess what are the key factors which play the major role in achieving success of wage disbursement under MGNREGS through the accounts. It was tried to evaluate whether financial literacy, the education level of the adults, internet accessibility at the household plays any major role in availing the benefits of MGNREGS. Again, the study also tried to gauge the infrastructural initiatives like branches of Regional Rural Banks, branches of commercial banks and post office outlets play major roles in associating people with MGNREGS as MGNREGS.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Against the background of the study and considering the objectives of the study, the following hypothesises are assessed here.

1. Wage disbursement through MGNREGS accounts has broadened the scopes of financial inclusion in the rural corners of India.
2. Access to internet has served as positive catalyst in the way of financial inclusion of the rural people.
3. There has been a strong relationship with MGNREGS and financial literacy.

METHODOLOGY

The recent study is completely based on secondary data. Data from different sources like Census, 2011, National Family and Health Survey, 2019-20, data from MGREGA.nic.in for the year 2019-20, NCFE Financial Literacy and Inclusion Survey 2019-20, Annual Report of Post Offices 2018-19, Agricultural Wages in Indian States 2018-19, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of India were used for the completion of the study. Data are also used to estimate different focussed variables in the study through different econometric techniques. Variables like percentage of Households served by new accounts opened for MGNREGS , Percentage of Household served by total accounts opened through MGNREGS, growth of the accounts opened under MGNREGS are studied here and evaluated to gauge financial inclusion process of MGNREGS. As the adult members are incorporated in MGNRES on demand basis, education level of the adults was to be assessed, not the assessment was required for the total population. Therefore, parents with medium and higher education who are sending their children to Government schools was taken into account to gauge the education level of the adults at the household level. Education level of the parents was judged to assess whether uneducated people were only volunteered to do the unskilled work under MGNREGS. Numbers of Regional Rural Banks, commercial banks in different states, post offices in different states of India were considered to know about the ease of financial accessibility of the population at the geographical level. Internet accessibility, overall financial literacy and overall financial inclusion at the state level are considered as different variables to assess the financial inclusion process of the Indians in the rural corners through the demand driven self-targeted programme of MGNREGS. Financial literacy can be defined in short as individual financial management. This implies when an individual is self-equipped and well informed to manage his or her financial issues, can perform the financial budgeting process on her own, know all about the investment and savings avenues is call financial literate. Financial inclusion on the other hand describes one's ability to assess all the financial services like savings, credits, insurances, loans, equity, bonds and other affordable financial products. As there were large sets of explanatory variables in comparison to the states, Principal Component Analysis was undertaken to know the factor loadings, that is the importance of different variables in the analysis and to sort out the outliers. Outliers are those data points whose values are very high or low in comparison to the other average data points. Then the linear regression analysis has been performed to know the determining role of the factors behind financial inclusion through MGNREGS. Financial inclusion through MGNREGS is measured by the wage amounts disbursed through MGNREGS accounts, which is addressed as a dependent variable in the regression. Ordinary Least Square Regression Method is used to factor out the determinants in generating wages through MGNREGS accounts. To get the Best fit regressions on the basis of R2, Durbin Watson Criterion, Principal Component Analysis is considered to sort out the explanatory variables and to get a better regression estimation.

The regression equation is like the ordinary one,

$Y = \alpha + \beta 1x1 + \beta 2x2 + \beta 3x3 + \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots.. + \beta nxn$, where Y is the dependent variable signifying and xs are explanatory variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Table 1. Patterns of Accounts Growth, population coverage, financial literacy, internet usage in 2018-19 throughout the states

States	Percentage of registered HH served by new bank accounts under MGNREGS	Percentage of HH served by total accounts Under MGNREGS	Percentage of wages disbursed through accounts (MGNREGS)	Percentage of accounts used by HHs (MGNREGS)	Growth of accounts (MGNREGS)	Financial Literacy	Financial Inclusion	Internet Users Female	Internet Users Male
ANDHRA PRADESH	76.07	75.42	71.87	44.16	0.59	37.00	17.00	15.40	41.50
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	89.93	89.89	114.29	65.08	0.72	18.00	28.00	49.60	68.50
ASSAM	60.40	60.20	95.35	105.25	1.75	36.00	22.00	24.40	37.80
BIHAR	68.63	68.63	98.62	42.68	0.62	16.00	9.00	17.00	39.40
CHHATTIS-GARH	44.80	44.29	94.51	41.92	0.95	9.00	16.00	20.80	50.40
GOA	98.75	98.75	99.95	40.34	0.41	56.00	18.00	68.30	76.60
GUJARAT	60.10	59.98	92.75	33.13	0.55	34.00	21.00	17.50	48.00
HARYANA	56.06	54.47	113.66	28.79	0.53	24.00	13.00	42.80	68.80
HIMACHAL PRADESH	63.82	63.79	98.65	41.98	0.66	36.00	14.00	45.20	65.10

JAMMU AND KASHMIR	57.46	57.46	88.87	47.71	0.83	29.00	18.00	38.90	68.80
JHARKHAND	61.23	61.23	96.93	39.60	0.65	20.00	14.00	22.70	53.20
KARNATAKA	44.39	44.39	98.19	26.36	0.59	33.00	20.00	24.80	55.60
KERALA	77.98	77.78	99.46	48.56	0.62	39.00	24.00	57.50	74.20
LADAKH	73.79	73.79	95.39	67.76	0.92			54.00	64.30
MADHYA PRADESH	48.96	48.51	86.39	40.70	0.84	24.00	30.00	20.10	49.30
MAHARASH-TRA	54.83	54.11	97.57	29.09	0.54	38.00	16.00	23.70	47.20
MANIPUR	97.01	96.86	85.34	78.70	0.81	38.00	16.00	40.40	68.20
MEGHALAYA	100.51	100.42	70.64	81.22	0.81	27.00	12.00	28.00	38.50
MIZORAM	93.67	93.67	86.82	86.40	0.92	15.00	10.00	48.00	63.90
NAGALAND	235.22	234.96	42.34	197.88	0.84	16.00	17.00	40.30	55.20
ODISHA	48.29	47.83	100.03	41.03	0.86	11.00	11.00	21.30	47.20
PUNJAB	67.71	67.69	98.63	48.96	0.72	34.00	13.00	48.80	73.00
RAJASTHAN	53.12	53.12	97.51	40.73	0.77	28.00	12.00	30.80	59.40
SIKKIM	77.10	77.09	97.26	63.40	0.82	10.00	10.00	68.10	69.50
TAMIL NADU	76.95	76.95	99.05	63.99	0.83	17.00	10.00	39.20	64.90
TELANGANA	119.06	61.90	96.75	41.21	0.67	37.00	17.00	15.80	46.70
TRIPURA	62.85	62.85	97.78	52.23	0.83	24.00	12.00	17.70	45.20

UTTAR PRADESH	58.63	58.63	97.43	42.08	0.72	21.00	9.00	24.50	54.20
UTTARA-KHAND	62.82	62.25	97.37	48.19	0.77	42.00	29.00	39.40	71.20
WEST BENGAL	53.23	53.13	97.85	41.45	0.78	29.00	10.00	14.00	38.30
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR	95.29	95.28	102.41	39.89	0.42	15.00	10.00	27.90	41.10
DN HAVELI AND DD	0.00	#DIV/0!	0.00	0.00	0.00	28.00	25.00	23.80	61.30
LAKSHAD-WEEP	92.31	92.31	97.45	5.90	0.06			36.00	77.00
PUDUCHERRY	75.83	75.83	99.26	55.10	0.73	29.00	19.00	50.40	69.40
TOTAL	**59.81**	**58.48**	**93.93**	**42.80**	**0.73**	**27.00**	**15.00**	**24.60**	**48.70**

Sources: Census, 2011, National Family and Health Survey, 2019-20, data from MGREGA.nic.in for the year 2019-20, NCFE Financial Literacy and Inclusion Survey 2019-20, Annual Report of Post Offices 2018-19, Agricultural Wages in Indian States 2018-19, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, MGNREGA website for data of 2018-19

Table 1 shows the variation in terms of different parameters in the states and union territories of India. It can be seen for the depicted data that the southern states have done far better in terms of households served by the bank accounts registered under MGNREGS. Percentage of Households using the MGNREGS accounts for remuneration does not show any impressive scenario throughout the states, which itself implies lesser requirement of accounts for the scheme, irregular wage payments through the accounts and reduction of work generated under the scheme. Particularly the poorer states with higher tribal population shows a bleak scenario of accounts usage. Internet usage is stronger in the north eastern states (i.e., the border countries) and states like Kerala and Punjab (having higher labour migration to the gulf and western countries). Financial inclusion and financial literacy show bleak scenario in all the states.

We have taken the factors on the basis of loadings which have shown greater communalities with the components. That is, they have the greater weightage in the analysing the variances. Again, the factor loadings depicted by the rotated component matrix, which shows the estimated correlations between the explanatory factors and the components is considered to exclude some variables. Here the trial-and-error process is used to exclude the variables for a better result. The factors are taken into consideration, which have shown greater correlations with the components. The three components explain 66 % of the variation in the explanatory variables.

First the table is represented to give the description of the dependent variable and the explanatory variables which are used in the analysis. Data are based on 2019-20.

Table 2. Introduction with the variables studied

Short form of the variables	Explanation
VWD	Percentage of Wages of MGNREGS wages disbursed through MGNREGS accounts
VAC	Percentage of registered Households served by total accounts

VACHH	Percentage of accounts used by registered Households
VACGr	Growth of accounts
VFL	Financial Literacy at the state level
VIFM	Percentage of internet usage by the adults at the state level
VPHE	Percentage of parents at least studied from class 6 to class 9whose children are going to Government schools (Gauging the adult level of education at the state level)
VCBRB	Offices of scheduled commercial banks and the Regional Rural Banks at the state level in 2018
VPOAC	Post Office Outlets at the state level in 2018
VAvAglW	Average Agricultural Wage rate at the state level in 2018-19

Table 3. Communalities

	Initial	**Extraction**
VAC	1.000	.743
VACHH	1.000	.811
VACGr	1.000	.843
VFI	1.000	.170
VIFM	1.000	.758
VPHE	1.000	.578
VCBRB	1.000	.618
VAvAglW	1.000	.716
VPOAc	1.000	.750

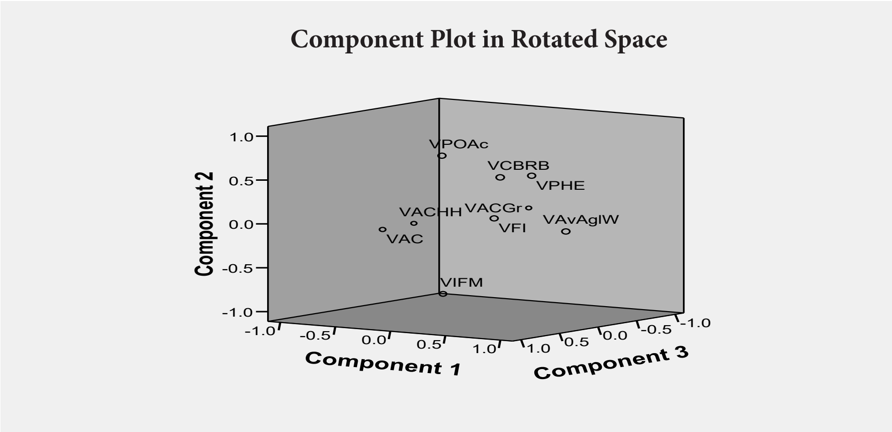
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix(a)

	Component		
	1	**2**	**3**
VAC	-.840	-.195	.012
VACHH	-.810	-.175	-.353
VACGr	-.153	-.013	-.905
VFI	.330	.082	.233
VIFM	-.082	-.810	.308

VPHE	.519	.556	.016
VCBRB	.440	.572	.312
VAvAglW	.844	-.044	.037
VPOAc	-.045	.778	.376

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.



Here in the recent study, it has been tried to deal with linear regression considering the explanatory variables like VIFM (average internet usage of male and female adults), VACGr (the growth of the accounts opened under MGNREGS calculated by the ratio of the new accounts opened by the total accounts multiplies by 100), VAC (new accounts registered under MGNREGS), VPOAc (Post office branches at the state level).

Table 4. Correlation and the covariances between the explanatory variables

Model			VIFM	VACGr	VAC	VPOAc
1	Correlations	VIFM	1.000	.200	-.160	.370
		VACGr	.200	1.000	-.058	.240
		VAC	-.160	-.058	1.000	.135
		VPOAc	.370	.240	.135	1.000
	Covariances	VIFM	.018	.188	-.001	7.91E-006
		VACGr	.188	49.591	-.018	.000
		VAC	-.001	-.018	.002	9.72E-007
		VPOAc	7.91E-006	.000	9.72E-007	2.59E-008

a Dependent Variable: VWD

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.844(a)	.712	.662	7.89280	2.106

a Predictors: (Constant), VIFM, VACGr, VAC, VPOAc

b Dependent Variable: VWD

Table 6. Results of the Linear Regression done through SPSS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	97.555	9.551		10.214	.000***
	VAC	-.318	.045	-.830	-7.140	.000***
	VACGr	-.665	7.042	-.011	-.094	.926
	VPOAc	1.00E-004	.000	.078	.621	.540
	VIFM	.413	.133	.387	3.110	.005***

a) Predictors: (Constant), VIFM, VACGr, VAC, VPOAc

b) Dependent Variable: VWD

c) *** implies significance level 5 % or less

FINDINGS

These explanatory variables have least correlation between them. The constant term, percentage of newly opened accounts with the registered households, growth of accounts of the MGNREGS, average internet accessibility of the male and female adult population plays significant roles in wage disbursement of the MGNREGS workers through registered bank and post office accounts. The constant portion plays major role which conveys there are more external factors like distances of the bank and post offices, road connectivity, average cost of assessing the accounts, behaviour and cooperation of the officials at the branches and post offices, awareness and mobility of the villagers, bonding of the villagers etc. which may play roles in wage disbursement through accounts of the MGNREGS workers. But it is important here to note that opening of accounts under MGNREGS plays a vital role in wage disbursement. As VAC is the percentage of new accounts opened under MGNREGS per household, it has a negative relationship with wage disbursement per account. As per household, accounts opened will be more, wage disbursement per account will get lower. Again, internet accessibility plays a vital role in assessing accounts for wages. This also implies as people are getting more access to internet and are getting opportunities for online or cashless transaction, assessing accounts for more wages are getting higher.

SUGGESTIONS

It has been found that growth of accounts does not have any significant relationship with the wage disbursement process of MGNREGS. It implies indirectly that the growth of accounts opened under MGNREGS is not prominent in these times. As the man days generation under MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme) is showing a downwards trend, growth of accounts under the scheme is also losing its prominence. But for the analysis, it can be summarised that a well-planned social security programme linked with financial institutions can leave a prominent impact on welfare generation as well as on financial inclusion and financial literacy. Especially, a demand driven programme executed at the local level with the help of the local institutions can go a long ahead in building social bonding among the fellow participants and in enhancing awareness about the rights. These attributes serve positively in broadening the scopes of financial literacy and that will lead towards financial stability in the long run. Beside this, it can be suggested that internet access and digital awareness have become one of the major infrastructural components in recent world to widen the scopes of financial inclusion. More recent data on financial literacy, digital transactions are required for further analysis.

CONCLUSION

The present study is a secondary data-based study, and, therefore it misses the opportunity to assess the perceptions and the conditions of the villagers at the micro level. But the study itself is an important one as it tries to evaluate the financial inclusion process of MGNREGS. MGNREGA is not only a wage employment programme, its variant features try to empower the marginalised in various ways. Employment generation for the women and the back ward castes have received lots of appreciation from many researchers and academics. The job cards, social audit process, equal wage for all genders, and demand driven nature have broadened the scopes of empowerment of women and the downtrodden. Beside this, payment of the employment generation through bank accounts of the wage earners to lessen corruption and wage fudging has massively broadened the scopes of financial inclusion. From the study, it can be well noted that internet connectivity of the villages and opening branches of Banks (both commercial and regional rural banks, and Post Offices) aiming at opening more accounts for the wage earners should be emphasized to attain the goal of financial inclusion for everyone. Again, financial inclusion through schemes like MGNREGS and NRLM will gradually enhance financial literacy which is required for financial stability. Because working under these schemes enhances the scopes of social mobility, awareness and bonding, which obviously broaden the rooms for financial literacy. As the external factors, outside the study play eminent roles in wage disbursement of the MGNREGS workers, micro level researches are very important to assess the determinants of financial inclusion of the villagers in countries like India. India is a vast county with many hindrances like economic, social, infrastructural, financial and political disturbances. Micro level studies always are very important to intensively study the problems and the opportunities of a scheme or a policy.

LIMITATIONS

As the research is based on secondary data, it has some sorts of limitations. The study does not have the scopes of having the ideas of financial literacy at the grass root level. The present study has considered the internet accessibility at the state level. But internet accessibility at the rural sector level may lead to a better understanding of the relationship. Again, many small states and the union territories lack date, for which the study has to ignore those states and union territories. Secondary data on the new attributes like financial literacy, digital transaction, distances of the banks from the NREGS sites can be considered for better results. Researches based on primary data have the scopes to study the perception of the local mass, which may lead to better understanding of further policy analysis and policy framing.

Scope of Further Research: Financial inclusion is a new concept in the context of Indian economy. Regarding rural economy, as the distance of the financial institutions increases from the villages and rate of education and illiteracy decreases, there are ample scopes of research to gauge financial inclusion of the rural people in our country. Little research has been undertaken to assess the influence of the social security programmes in broadening the scopes of financial inclusion and financial literacy. Again, in vast cases, commoners are mostly financially included without any sort of financial literacy. Therefore, researches particularly micro level studies can be undertaken to assess financial literacy of the rural mass of India. Further researches can be undertaken to evaluate the efficiency of the policies in implementing financial stability of the country in respect of financial inclusion and financial stability.

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The assistance provided by Shri M. Sreeramulu, AGM, DNBS, RBI, CO is heartily acknowledged https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Bulletin/PDFs/04FS090114SF.pdf.

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FARMERS' INCOME AND INDEBTEDNESS IN INDIA: AN INTER-STATE ANALYSIS

Sheetal[1] and Dr Subhash[2]

ABSTRACT

On 28th of February 2016, the government of India (GOI) announced the target of doubling the income of Indian farmers by the year 2022. To realize this target, the Ashok Dalwai committee was constituted so that timely steps may be taken. Despite this, GOI has launched many schemes including Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), and Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISHAN) , setting up of E-National Agriculture Market (E-NAM), distribution of soil health cards, establishment of micro-irrigation funds, and promotion of Farmer producer organizations (FPO) was also done. Using National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reports the current study analyze the growth in the income of the farmers from FY2013 to FY 2019. To estimate if the income of farmers has doubled or not till the year 2019, the ratio of the real income of year 2013 to the real income of year 2019 has been computed. To examine the relationship between farmers' income and the percentage of farmers who are selling their crops at Minimum Support Price (MSP) in the years 2013 and 2019 also compared. Results reveal that, in 2019, instead of doubling farmers' income declined in the year 2019 than year 2013 at all India level. The main factor behind this decline in income is the inadequate income from crop production as a consequence of this farmers' indebtedness also increased in many states (Haryana, Punjab, Assam etc.). Evidences make it clear that only a small proportion of farmers are aware of MSP and a small proportion of total output is sold by the farmers at MSP.

Key Words: *Income, Farmers, MSP, Indebtedness, NSSO, Agricultural Households*

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the gamble of nature income of Indian farmers not only depends on the inputs available to them but also depends on many other factors such as the productivity of the crop, technology used in the production, physiography of the region, availability of warehousing facilities, subsidies provided by the government, prices of the crops etc. In the era of the green revolution, the main emphasis was given to the escalation of the production and productivity of the crops via using modern technology since it was believed that rising production would lead to the higher income of the farmers but this concept did not work. As a consequence of this in the era of economic reforms of the 1990s, much stress was given to the prices of agricultural products as an instrument of the high level of output and income of the farmers. In the era of the Green Revolution, the government established APC (Agricultural Price Commission) renamed as CACP (Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) in 1985. This commission was established to ensure food security for the population of India. Accordingly, lower prices of the commodities were fixed up in the 1990s. In the post-reform era, MSPs are determined by considering both objectives, i.e., targeting food security and high-income level for Indian farmers. There are 23 crops in the basket of CACP for which MSPs are determined. These crops consist of seven cereals, five pulses, four commercial crops, and seven oilseeds. CACP determined MSP by taking into account producers' and consumers' interests, but it also considers market forces (demand and supply of the crop), cost bears by the farmers in the process of crop production, prices prevailing in domestic as well as in the international market, inter-crop price parity and at least fifty percent margin on the cost of producing crop. Before preparing reports commission seeks the suggestions of state governments, national organizations such as National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED), Food Corporation of India (FCI), Jute Corporation of India Limited (JCI), and Cotton Corporation of India Ltd. (CCI), traders and processing organizations, central ministers and it may interact with the farmers for this purpose. After this interaction, it finalizes the reports and sends them to the government in the form of five price policy reports namely Kharif crops, Raw Jute, Copra, Rabi crops, and a report on sugarcane. For Years 2023-24, the highest MSP fixed for sesamum and moong i.e., Rs. 8635 and Rs. 8558 while the lower is fixed for Maize and paddy i.e., Rs. 2090 and 2183 respectively. Nowadays government also using MSP as a tool of crop diversification. For example, as United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) declared the year 2023 as “The International Year of Millet” to induce farmers to more production of millet, the government of India fixed the MSP of millet Rs. 2500 per quintal for the year 2023-24 which was just Rs. 1175 in the year 2013-14.

Although it is clear to us that the policy of price fixation also failed in the mitigation of the risk of uncertain returns, it can pave the way for Doubling Farmers’ Income (DFI) when we combine it with the proper infrastructural facilities and make the extent of awareness about MSP to the farmers via various channels. From 2003 to 2013 average monthly income of the farmers increased from Rs. 2115 to Rs. 6426 in nominal terms but this gap diminishes when the real income is taken into account. Regional imbalance is also reflected in the growth of real income. For instance, in the mentioned period real income of Odisha doubled while it declined in West Bengal and Bihar (Chandrasekhar,S. and Mehrotra,N,2016).

DFI committee constituted in 2016, recommended the synthesis of effective MSP policy with other incentives such as the promotion of FPO, cluster-based cultivation, organic farming, and irrigation development projects.

The Government of India launched PMFBY in the year 2016 to mitigate the risk of crop failure due to natural calamities. Under this scheme, farmers got financial assistance when their crop fails. Beside this, direct income support is provided to the farmers via the PM-KISAN scheme. Under this scheme, an amount of Rs. 6000 is paid to the farmers irrespective of the size of their landholdings. A new scheme was also launched in the year 2020 to promote FPO (Farmer Producer Organizations). Besides these schemes, many existing active schemes were extended. Kisan Credit Card (KCC) benefits extended to animal husbandry and fisheries farmers, The government promotes organic farming via three schemes i.e., Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East (MOVCDNER), and Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP), in corporation with National Bank For Agriculture and Rural Development

(NABARD) Micro Irrigation Fund was created and from the Years 2014-15 to March 2022, 1388314 machines and equipment were also provided to the farmers so that the mechanization in the agriculture sector can be promoted.

Hence, in this study we compare the rate of increase in income of the farmers in the pre and post-period of the Year 2016 (when the objective of doubling farmers' income was announced) by analyzing the data of the 70th round (Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural households 2013) and 77th round (Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural households 2019) of NSSO. We also check if with the rise in the farmers' income ' indebtedness reducing or not. Further, we also compare the level of farmers' awareness regarding MSP during these surveys because it helps to know whether are farmers taking the benefit of MSP that is fixed by the government one and a half over the cost of production right now. After all, the government uses it as a major tool in achieving the targeted level of income.

This study is undertaken with the main objective of estimation Change in the awareness of farmers regarding MSP policy and real income of the farmers in year 2013 and 2019. The Supplementary objective of this study is to analyze whether with the increase in income farmers' indebtedness is reducing or not.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses "Estimation of changes in awareness." data from the Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households -2013(70th round) and Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural households-2019(77th round). The first round was done in 2013 and the second one was in 2019. Thus, we estimate the changes in income after the set-up of the target of government, DFI by comparing the data of these two surveys. To estimate the difference more accurately we measured the growth of real income (at 2018-19 prices). To Calculate the ratio of the real income of the year 2019 to the real income of the year 2013 firstly we calculated the combined Consumer Price Index by using the following formula:

$$\text{CCPI} = \frac{\text{CPI of the Year 2013}}{\text{CPI of the Year 2019}} \times 100$$

Here CCPI = Combined Consumer Price Index

After calculating this CCPI, real income for the years 2013 and 2019 has been calculated by using the formula given as follows:

$$\text{Real Income} = \frac{\text{Money Income}}{\text{CCPI}} \times 100$$

To compare the rise in income from the year 2013 to the year 2019 ratio of the real income of the year 2019 to the real income of the year 2013 has been calculated.

In addition to this, Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation is used to test the existence of relationship between the ratio of real income of farmers and growth in indebted agricultural households during the studied period. The following formula is used to calculate Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation:

$$r = \frac{\sum(X - X)(Y - Y)}{\sqrt{\sum(X - X)^2}\ \sqrt{\sum(Y - Y)^2}}$$

Here, X = Mean of Variable X

Y = Mean of variable Y

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The agriculture sector is one of the prominent sectors of the Indian economy. More than half of the rural population lies in this sector for livelihood, it ensures food security for the population and the development of a country depends on its development because a country cannot develop until it's all sectors viz. Agriculture, Industries and service sectors developed. However, due to the dependence of this sector on natural factors, farmers' income is uncertain. To induce them to engage in agricultural activities It is a prerequisite to maintain their income at a certain level. This can be done in many ways the more satisfied way is assuring them of better crop prices. This is done by the government of India via the Minimum Support Price Policy. As per the National Statistical Office (earlier known as the Central Statistical Organization), as a result of the increase in the price of agricultural produce by one percent, the farmers' income increased by more than one and a half times. To achieve the target of raising farmers' income government must intervene in the agricultural market directly (by assuring farmers support prices) as well as indirectly i.e., by providing them institutional support and implementing regulations for efficient working of the agricultural market (Chand, MSP and Farmers Income, 2019). Based on empirical evidence many studies show that over the period farmers' income is very low. Although during the decade of 2003 to 2013, farmers' nominal income has been increased it decreased in real terms (Chandrasekhar & Nirupam, 2016). The following sections analyzed whether real income of farmers increased, stagnated, or decreased and which farming occupations generate the highest level of income for the farmers.

1. Changes in the Average Monthly Income of the Farmers from the year 2013 to the year 2019

It is evident that in nominal terms (without deducting the effect of price level), farmers' income increased over the studied period. It was 6426 at the time of the 70th round (2013) while it is 10218 in the 77th round (2019). However, our ultimate objective is to estimate that is the real income doubled in 2019 as compared to 2013 or not. To compute real income Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labor (CCPI-AL) is used. In table 1. The ratio of the real income of the year 2019 to the real income of the year 2013 has been calculated and the obtained factor will show the growth in real income of farmers. In other words, the obtained factor shows are the real income has doubled or not during the studied year.

TABLE 1. State Wise Ratio of Average Monthly Income (Rs.) in year 2019 to Average Monthly Income (Rs.) in year 2013(classified based on the source of income)

	Wages	Crop Production	Farming Of Animals	Non-Farm Business Activities	Total Income
Haryana	1.7	0.9	1.2	0.3	1.2
Punjab	1.0	0.9	**2.1**	0.6	1.1
Rajasthan	1.6	0.9	1.9	0.5	1.3
Himachal Pradesh	1.2	0.7	1.3	0.5	1.1
Jammu And Kashmir	1.3	0.5	**2.2**	0.5	1.2
Arunachal Pradesh	1.1	0.7	**2.8**	0.1	1.4
Bihar	1.5	1.2	**4.8**	0.4	1.6
Assam	**3.0**	0.6	1.1	0.3	1.2
Andhra Pradesh	1.5	1.0	1.5	0.5	1.4
Chhattisgarh	1.9	1.0	**-21.3**	0.0	1.4
Jharkhand	1.2	0.6	0.5	1.2	0.8
Gujarat	1.3	1.1	1.4	0.8	1.2
Madhya Pradesh	1.4	0.8	1.4	0.5	1.0
Karnataka	1.3	1.1	**2.1**	1.8	1.2
Kerala	1.5	0.8	1.4	0.7	1.2
Manipur	0.8	0.9	1.3	0.3	1.0
Maharashtra	1.5	1.0	**2.2**	0.8	1.2
Nagaland	0.6	0.5	**2.1**	0.5	0.8
Mizoram	1.4	1.5	1.6	0.0	1.5
Meghalaya	1.4	**2.5**	1.0	1.7	**1.9**
Odisha	1.2	0.9	0.2	0.9	0.8
Tripura	1.8	0.8	**2.4**	0.1	1.4
Sikkim	1.6	**1.9**	1.1	1.5	1.4
Tamil Nadu	1.7	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.3
West Bengal	1.4	1.2	1.6	**3.3**	1.3

Uttar Pradesh	**1.9**	0.9	**1.9**	**9.8**	1.3
Uttarakhand	**2.7**	1.6	**3.0**	**3.4**	**2.2**
Telangana	1.6	0.9	1.4	**6.5**	1.2
All India	**1.5**	**1.0**	**5.7**	**1.6**	**0.9**

Source: Computed by Author from 70th and 77th round of NSSO

From the table 1. It is evident that at all India levels, the ratio of real income of year 2019 to real income of year 2013 is .9 which shows instead of increasing real income of farmers decreased in the post period of year 2016. It is doubled only in one state i.e., Uttarakhand. In Meghalaya growth in real income (1.9) is also near to targeted income. But in Jharkhand, Nagaland, and Odisha this ratio is .8 which shows that real income declined in these states in the year 2019.

At all Indian levels highest growth is registered in real income from farming of animals (5.7) while the zero-growth registered in the real income from cultivation (1.0) since in most of the states including Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan ratio of real income from the crop production declined and doubled in Meghalaya only and near to double (1.9) in Sikkim. In contrast to this ratio of real income from farming of the animals doubled in most of the states and less than one is in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha. The growth of real income from wages is thrice in Assam, more than double but less than thrice is in Uttarakhand and near to double is in Uttar Pradesh while negative growth registered in Manipur and Nagaland. The value of the ratio of Real income from non-farm business activities is 1.0 at all India level which reflects the same level of real income in both years that are being comparison. Value of ratio for this source is 3.3, 9.8, 3.4 and 6.5 in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Telangana Respectively and for other states its either between 1 to 2 or less than 1.

Further, we can Compare the growth in real income of different categories of farmers as presents in Table1a. Table 1a showing the Ratio of Real Average Monthly Income (Rs.) in year 2019 to Real Average Monthly Income (Rs.) in year 2013 for the farmers possessing different sizes of landholdings.

TABLE 1a. The ratio of Average Monthly Income (Rs.) in year 2019 to Average Monthly Income (Rs.) in year 2013(classified based on possession of size of landholdings)

Size Class of Land Possessed (ha)	Ratio of Income from Wages/ Salary (Rs.) (2019) to 2013	Ratio of Net Receipt From Cultivation (Rs.) (2019)/to 2013	Net Receipt From Farming of Animals (Rs.) (2019) to 2013	Net Receipt From Nonfarm Business (Rs) (2019) to 2013	Total Income (Rs.) (2019) to 2013
< 0.01	**2.2**	**47.8**	0.9	1.7	**2.2**
0.01 - 0.40	**1.9**	1.0	0.6	1.5	1.5
0.41 - 1.00	**1.9**	1.0	0.6	1.2	1.3
1.01 - 2.00	**2.1**	1.0	0.7	1.0	1.3
2.01 - 4.00	**2.1**	1.1	0.5	1.4	1.2
4.01 -10.00	**2.1**	1.1	0.2	0.5	1.1
10.00 +	**3.0**	1.1	**2.7**	0.7	1.2
all sizes	**2.0**	**1.0**	**0.6**	**1.3**	**1.3**

Source: Computed by Author from 70^{th} and 77^{th} round of NSSO

Table 1a reflects that the ratio of the average monthly income (real income) of the year 2019 to the average monthly income (real income) for all sizes in the year 2013 is 1.3 which reflects that the average monthly income (real income) of the year 2019 is not doubled as compared to the average monthly income (real income) of the year 2013. When we compare the value of the ratio obtained in different components of total income it is evident that the income earned from wages/ salary is doubled. It is the only source which yields double growth and the positive growth of real income is also registered in net receipt from nonfarm business. Income from cultivation for all sizes is the same in both years and income generated from farming of animals is declined. Additionally, when we make a comparative analysis, it is clear that the income from cultivation of crop of those farmers who possess land of less than .01 hectare increased multiple times (47.8, this may be an outlier). It is only the real income of the farmers possessing more than 10 hectares of net receipts from farming the animals which is doubled, for all other groups it declined. The ratio of net receipts from nonfarm business is negative for the farmers possessing more than 4.0 hectares of land.

2. The changes in the Indebtedness situation of the Farmers from the year 2013 to the year 2019

Table 2 represents the percentage of indebted agricultural households in the year 2013 and year 2019. The growth in the percentage of indebted agricultural households was also calculated. It can be seen at all India levels percentage of indebted agricultural households has declined by .03%. In the year 2013 highest indebted agricultural households were in Andhra Pradesh (93%) followed by Telangana (89 %) and Tamil Nadu (82%). In the year 2019, These states were in the same order but the difference was that in the year 2019 in Andhra Pradesh percentage of indebted agricultural households increased, the percentage of indebted households was significantly accelerated in Telangana and a significant decline was recorded in Tamil Nadu. In Assam highest growth in the percentage of indebted agricultural households was recorded while the lowest growth was recorded in Tamil Nadu.

TABLE 2. Change in the Percentage of Indebted Agricultural Households from 2013 to 2019 (State Wise)

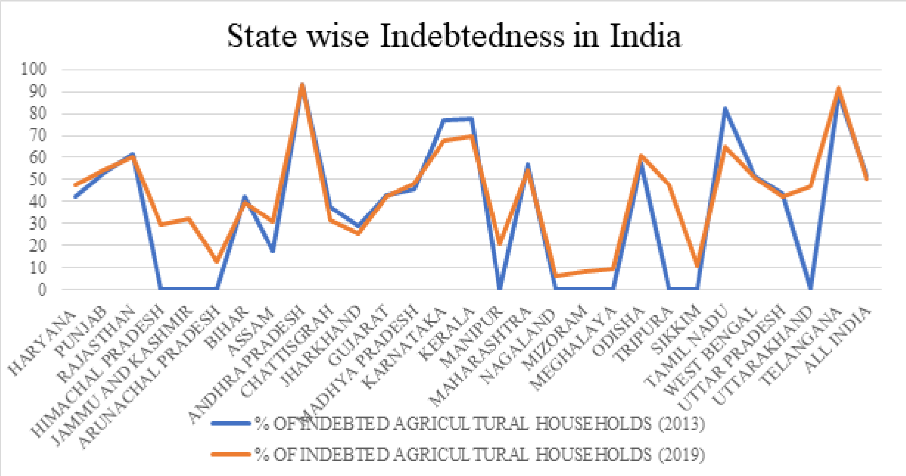
States	% Of Indebted Agricultural Households In The Year 2013	% Of Indebted Agricultural Households In The Year 2019	Growth In Indebted Agricultural Households (%)
Haryana	42.30	47.50	0.12
Punjab	53.20	54.40	0.02
Rajasthan	61.80	60.30	-0.02
Himachal Pradesh	…**	29.20	…**
Jammu And Kashmir	…**	31.90	…**
Arunachal Pradesh	…**	12.50	…**
Bihar	42.50	39.70	-0.07

Assam	17.50	31.00	0.77
Andhra Pradesh	92.90	93.20	0.00
Chhattisgarh	37.20	31.20	-0.16
Jharkhand	28.90	25.30	-0.12
Gujarat	42.60	42.50	0.00
Madhya Pradesh	45.70	48.40	0.06
Karnataka	77.30	67.60	-0.13
Kerala	77.70	69.90	-0.10
Manipur	…**	20.60	…**
Maharashtra	57.30	54.00	-0.06
Nagaland	…**	6.00	…**
Mizoram	…**	8.00	…**
Meghalaya	…**	9.10	…**
Odisha	57.50	61.20	0.06
Tripura	…**	47.70	…**
Sikkim	…**	10.60	…**
Tamil Nadu	82.50	65.10	-0.21
West Bengal	51.50	50.80	-0.01
Uttar Pradesh	43.80	41.90	-0.04
Uttarakhand	…**	46.60	…**
Telangana	89.10	91.70	0.03
All India	**51.90**	**50.20**	**-0.03**

Source: Computed by Author from 70th and 77th round of NSSO

Note: "...***" denoting the unavailability of data for northeastern states in 2013.

FIGURE1. Change in the Percentage of Indebted Agricultural Households from 2013 to 2019 (State wise)



Source: Computed by Author from 70th and 77th round of NSSO

In Figure 1 the data of Table 2 is presented by graph to make inter-state comparison more visible. This figure shows that in some states the percentage of indebted agricultural households has declined i.e., Karnataka, Bihar, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and UP while increased in Haryana, Punjab, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Telangana in year 2019 than year 2013.

In addition to inter-state comparison loans taken by farmers possessing different sizes of landholdings can also be compared to make the comparison more effective. In Table 2a average amount of outstanding loans per agricultural household has been shown corresponding to the possession of different sizes of land. Data shows a -.1% decline in outstanding loans per agricultural household in 2019 compared to 2013. Table 2a also shows the existence of positive relationship between the size of landholding and the percentage of indebted agricultural households.

The value of Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation is -.063 at a .798 level of significance which reflects the non-existence of any relationship between the ratio of real income of the year 2019 to the year 2013 and growth in Indebted Agricultural Households during the same period in different states.

TABLE 2a. Change in the average amount of outstanding loans per Agricultural Household in year 2013 to year 2019 (Based on the possession of size of landholding)

size class of land possessed (ha.)	average amount (Rs.) of outstanding loans per agricultural household (2019)	average amount (Rs.) of outstanding loans per agricultural household (2013)	growth in the amount of outstanding loan (Rs)	percentage of indebted agricultural households (2019)
< 0.01	26883	54219	1.0	38.50
0.01 - 0.40	33220	36880	0.1	40.80
0.40 - 1.00	51933	55365	0.1	48.40
1.01 - 2.00	94498	74162	-0.2	57.40
2.01 - 4.00	175009	114550	-0.3	69.70
4.01 - 10.00	326766	160751	-0.5	79.30
10.00 +	791132	223531	-0.7	81.40
all sizes	**74121**	**64781**	**-0.1**	**50.20**

Source: Source: Computed by Author from 70th and 77th round of NSSO

3. The Changes in the rate of return on expenses (Rs.) in the year 2013 to in the year 2019

Table 3. and Figure 2 shows the rate of return on expenses. Table 3 indicates the inter-state variations in the rate of returns on expenses.

TABLE 3. Change in the rate of return on expenses (Rs.) from the year 2013 to the year 2019 (State-wise)

States	average total receipts (Rs) (2013)	average total expenses (Rs) (2013)	Receipts /expenses (2013)	average total receipts (Rs) (2019)	average total expenses (Rs) (2019)	receipts/ expenses (2019)
Haryana	17144	6228	2.75	23209	11190	2.07
Punjab	28117	11768	2.39	28340	11277	2.51
Rajasthan	5192	1730	3.00	6290	2361	2.66
Himachal Pradesh	3993	1030	3.88	3800	1244	3.05
Jammu And Kashmir	3826	583	6.56	2986	998	2.99
Arunachal Pradesh	9510	1790	5.31	6973	1090	6.40
Bihar	3358	1454	2.31	5125	2305	2.22
Assam	5197	788	6.60	4523	1202	3.76
Andhra Pradesh	8482	6191	1.37	12036	8847	1.36
Chhattisgarh	4551	1128	4.03	6335	1996	3.17
Jharkhand	2049	571	3.59	1865	753	2.48
Gujarat	5773	2250	2.57	7143	2417	2.96
Madhya Pradesh	6538	2284	2.86	7506	3038	2.47
Karnataka	7908	2779	2.85	10276	3219	3.19
Kerala	5872	2270	2.59	6227	2508	2.48
Manipur	4057	1029	3.94	4685	1221	3.84
Maharashtra	6675	2654	2.52	8483	3500	2.42
Nagaland	3643	430	8.47	2182	172	12.69
Mizoram	5110	491	10.41	9144	320	28.58
Meghalaya	7412	937	7.91	23353	2293	10.18
Odisha	2438	1001	2.44	3162	1587	1.99
Tripura	3733	935	3.99	4494	1441	3.12

Sikkim	1882	184	10.23	4533	363	12.49
Tamil Nadu	5012	2538	1.97	6312	2826	2.23
West Bengal	2836	1819	1.56	4026	2457	1.64
Uttar Pradesh	4912	1790	2.74	5801	2367	2.45
Uttarakhand	3255	646	5.04	7783	2319	3.36
Telangana	8666	4267	2.03	11551	6543	1.77

Source: Computed by Author from 70th and 77th round of NSSO

Note: In expenses, only paid-out expenses are included (When imputed expenses are included receipts-expenses ratio will fall).

In the year 2013, the highest returns on cost are estimated in Mizoram, followed by Sikkim and Nagaland. In the year 2019, the highest returns on cost are estimated in Mizoram, followed by Nagaland and Tripura. The important thing to notice here is that in both years (2013 and 2019), the receipts-expenses ratio is low in Haryana and Punjab which are known as leading states of green revolution. In the year 2013 receipts-return ratio was 2.75 and 2.39 in Haryana and Punjab respectively while this ratio was 2.07 and 2.51 in the year 2019.

Figure 2 is drawn to show the variation in the rate of return in the year 2013 and the rate of return in the year 2019. In most of the states, there is a declining tendency of the ratio of receipts to expenses including Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Telangana, etc. Among these states, Jammu and Kashmir recorded the highest contraction. There were also some states where the receipts-expenses ratio improved in the year 2019 than the year 2013.These states are Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram,

FIGURE 2. Rate of Return on expenses in the year 2013 and in the year 2019

Source: Computed by Author from 70th and 77th round of NSSO

Meghalaya, Sikkim, Karnataka, Gujrat, Tamil Nadu, etc. Among these states, Mizoram has recorded the highest rise in return-expenses ratio. The return-expenses ratio for Mizoram was 10.41 in 2013 which rose to a level of 29.58 in 2019.

4. Change in the awareness of farmers regarding MSP and the sale of the crop at MSP in the year 2013 and year 2019

CROP	JAN 2013 TO JUNE 2013		JAN 2019 TO JUNE 2019	
	AWARE TO MSP (%)	SALE AT MSP (%)	AWARE TO MSP (%)	SALE AT MSP (%)
PADDY	31.5	14	52.8	24.7
JOWAR	21.3	36	14.3	0.5
MAIZE	11.8	4	22.7	4
WHEAT	39.2	35	37.1	20.8
BARLEY	11	1	…**	…**
GRAM	12.6	5	29	8.2
ARHAR	14.2	1	41.2	0.8
MOONG	9.1	2	27.2	14.6
MASSEUR	18.1	0	24.2	2.6
SUGARCANE	45.4	33	56.9	40.2
POTATO	12.1	2	…**	…**
ONION	15.3	1	…**	…**
GROUNDNUT	8.9	1	…**	…**
RAPESEED/ MUSTARD	15.5	14	39.2	8.3
COCONUT	21.5	0	12	0.1
COTTON	22.6	3	35.8	17.8

Source: Computed by Author from 70^{th} and 77^{th} round of NSSO

Note: Sale at MSP (%) represents the percentage of total output sales at MSP.

Table 4 shows the percentage of farmers who are aware of MSP and the percentage of total output sold by them at MSP in year 2013 and in year 2019. In the year 2013, more percentage of farmers were aware of the MSP of sugarcane, wheat, paddy, cotton, jowar, and coconut while a percentage of farmers comparatively low were aware of the MSP of pulses such as arhar, moong, and mass. The percentage of output sold at MSP in the year 2013 was highest in Jowar (36), followed by wheat (35), sugarcane (33), paddy (14) and mustard (14). The percentage of output sold at MSP reflects that although a significant proportion of farmers were aware of the MSP of Coconut and cotton, only 3 % of the total output of cotton sold at MSP, and farmers of coconut did not sell their output at MSP.

In 2019, more farmers became aware of the MSP of Pulses while as compared to 2013 the proportion of farmers' aware of the MSP of Jowar and Coconut significantly declined. In 2019, the percentage of the output of sugarcane, cotton, and paddy sold at MSP increased than 2013 while the percentage of the output of wheat, jowar, and rapeseeds/ mustard sold at MSP declined in 2019 than 2013.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing, it is very clear that although the government of India implementing many programs and also taking other measures to escalate farmers' income, there is no evidence of increment in the real income of the farmers at all India level. As shown in Table 1. The ratio of real income of the year 2019 to the real income of the year 2013 is .9 which shows that instead of doubling farmers' income declined in the year 2019 than year 2013 at all India level. It is doubled only in one state i.e., Uttarakhand. In Meghalaya growth in real income (1.9) is also near to targeted income. But in Jharkhand, Nagaland, and Odisha this ratio is .8 which shows that real income declined in these states in the year 2019. At all Indian levels highest growth is registered in real income from farming of animals (5.7) while the zero growth is registered in the real income from cultivation (1.0) since in most of the states including Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan ratio of real income from the crop production declined and doubled in Meghalaya only and near to double (1.9) in Sikkim. Further, we can Compare the growth in real income of the farmers possessing different sizes of landholdings. Table 1a. shows that the ratio of the average monthly income (real income) of the year 2019 to the average monthly income (real income) for all sizes in the year 2013 is 1.3 which reflects that the average monthly income (real income) of the year 2019 is not doubled as compared to the average monthly income (real income) of the year 2013. When we compare the value of the ratio obtained in different components of total income it is evident that the income earned from wages/ salary is doubled.

It is the only source which yields double growth and the positive growth of real income is also registered in net receipt from non-farm business. Income from cultivation for all sizes is the same in both years and income generated from farming of animals is declined. The growth in the percentage of indebted agricultural households was also calculated. When we analyze the state-wise data of indebtedness of farmers, it can be seen from table 2. at all India levels percentage of indebted agricultural households has declined by .03%. In the year 2013 highest indebted agricultural households were in Andhra Pradesh (93%) followed by Telangana (89%) and Tamil Nadu (82%). In the year 2019, these states were in the same order but the difference was that in the year 2019 in Andhra Pradesh percentage of indebted agricultural households increased, the percentage of indebted households was significantly accelerated in Telangana and a significant decline was recorded in Tamil Nadu. In Assam highest growth in the percentage of indebted agricultural households was recorded while the lowest growth was recorded in Tamil Nadu. The Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation is used to measure the degree of relationship between two variables i.e. ratio of real income of year 2019 to the year 2013 and growth in Indebted Agricultural Households. The value of Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation is -.063 at a .798 level of significance which reflects the non-existence of any relationship between the ratio of real income of the year 2019 to the year 2013 and growth in Indebted Agricultural Households during the same period in different states. MSP is also used by the government as an important instrument to mitigate the uncertainty in farmers' income as a result of natural calamities. Evidences make it clear that only a small proportion of farmers are aware of MSP and very small proportion of total output is sold by the farmers at MSP (shown in table 4). Finally, it can be concluded that the government must emphasize the diversification of sources of farmers' income because income from crop production is inadequate and uncertain. The main source of income in both years (2013 and 2019) was income from farming of the animals. The government can implement schemes that can help farmers increase income from farming animals. In addition to this for effective implementation of the MSP policy awareness about this policy must be spread at local levels via various channels and more storage houses must be built.

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HALAL ECONOMY AND ASSERTIVE ISLAM: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The term Halal has religious roots but Halal Economy has emerged as a powerful political and identity question in political discourse. With the rise in identity consciousness and its global manifestations due to fast and intense communication networks, the term has acquired a significant political lexicon for mobilization and assertion of Islamic identity across the world. The people of Islamic faith have started looking for Halal products not only in Islamic countries but in non-Islamic countries too. This has given birth to a new kind of de-secularization of the market which so far was bereft of such tendencies. The quest, demands and emphasis for Halal products have forced the market to make such products available for the customers. This has helped in Islamization of the market and consolidation of the Islamic identity. But at the same time, it also has generated counter-reactions amongst the non-Islamic populace which has gradually started not just opposing it but also looking for similar symbols in their religion and culture which could emerge as counter to the Islamization of the market. The demand for the Swastik symbols in India is aimed at and attuned to the same. This paper examines its historical evolution and analyses how and why there has been rising demand for Halal products and how it has given rise to opposition of such intervention in the market.

Key Words: *Halal, economy, identity, mobilization, Islamization.*

Introduction

The terms 'Halal' and 'Jhataka' were not of common parlance for common people in India until a few years ago. Among the non-vegetarians

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it was known, but even they did not know much about it except the fact that it informed the Muslim and Hindu ways of slaughtering animals for meat consumption respectively. It seldom invited civil or political contestations. At least Hindus had no problem with Halal meat buying from a Muslim shop and that too in front of their eyes, though Muslims had always emphasised on Halal. This segregation did not become an issue at all in a common gathering in public places. In Hotels or restaurants in India, even Muslims did not inquire about the nature of slaughtering of animals before ordering chicken or mutton.

Now, all of a sudden, Halal has entered into the thick of controversy, contestation and national discourse. Some of the Hindu organizations and their activists (such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Dharma Jagran Manch, and Bajrang Dal) took it to the public domain to oppose the sale of Halal products by some companies and organizations. Recently, when the UP government issued an order for all the shops to declare the name of the owner on the way to the Kavad Yatra in the month of Savan, it was considered as attempt to socially boycott them. The matter reached the Supreme Court which passed a stay order on it. Hindus in general resented and again passed sarcasm that the court is sensitive on Muslims and approves of Halal which is aimed at Islamization of the Indian market but it has problem with the faith of Hindus. The order which was localised became a subject of national discourse in no time.

Actually, the discontent among Hindus was simmering for quite a long time, at least from the date when the news broke that the Indian Railways served Halal-certified tea during the month of Ramzan to its passengers. A Hindu passenger on the Vande Bharat train refused to take the tea on the pretext that it hurt his religious sentiments (Athrady, 2023). He used his smartphone to record his protests and uploaded the video on social media where it soon became viral. When the newspapers and news portals reported it, information started coming in that the Halal market in India is not restricted just to chicken and mutton but has reached households through medicines and cosmetics, clothes and shoes, moisturizers to lipsticks to hospitals and apartments[1] (Giri, 2018). Now halal mortgages, halal ports, halal refrigerators, halal blockchain, and shariah-compliant other products are fast coming up in the market. Ryan Calder calls it 'halalization' by which he means religious product certification in the secular market (Calder, 2020; Masood & Rahim, 2019). Kaliszewska (2020) argues that it is not just limited to the market but seeks to introduce Shariah or elements of Islam in the everyday life of Muslims through 'Halal Landscape' which means that it does not impact only the economic domains but all aspects of human life.

All of a sudden, the questions that came up for discussion were: whether a sinister design was going on silently in India to Islamise the market and its products? Has there been a planned design at work to run a parallel Islamic economy in India? Has there been a huge systemic rise in demand for Halal-certified products in India? Is there any attempt of Islamic countries to impact the Indian market through their products and then coercing Indian companies to follow the certification in order to survive in the market? Does the rise in demand for Halal has any link with the rise in Pan-Islamic consciousness over all? Have there been forces which are at work to further polarise and consolidate the Islamic identity in India? What happened that the term which was almost unknown and did not attract any public spat has invited so much intense discourse over the last decade?

Decades back, Islamic banking in India had raised similar questions and concerns. That also was subject of controversy. The introduction of Islamic banking was depicted as an attempt to create a financial management system parallel to the national banking and finance management system. Islamic banking system 'restricted from investing in 'haram' industries such as pornography, pork, alcohol, gambling, or anything that might be considered un-Islamic'. Islamic financing works on the principle of 'Profit & Loss Sharing" (PLS) basis, prohibiting interest charging, besides many other premises which are said to be in consonance with the principles of Islam (Roy, 1991). In 2008, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan had tossed the idea of interest-free banking (PTI, 2017). Whether it was driven by purely economic considerations or it was on dictates from the political masters of the time is difficult to suggest but this was certainly construed as a step towards Shariah banking only[2] (Roy, 1991). During the Modi regime also, in 2018, the Reserve Bank of India allowed Public Sector Banking to open a separate window for Islamic banking which was taken back in view of the protests[3].

The debate, however, occupied the centre stage of political controversy a few months back after the Uttar Pradesh government banned the production, distribution, storage and sale of Halal-certified products in the state. It seized nearly 2300 kg of Halal products after raiding malls, grocery shops, wholesale markets and restaurants in the state under the aegis of Food Safety and Drug Authority (TNN, 2023). The agency raided the famous Sahara Mall in Lucknow and registered cases against eight companies for selling Halal-certified products (Business Today Desk, 2023). It also raided the companies which issued the Halal certificates by charging heavy money. The rates charged by these companies became the discussion points on national television. Earlier in 2022, before the Karnataka Assembly elections, the BJP had raised this issue in the state. N. Ravikumar, an MLC of the party had sought to introduce a bill in the winter session of the Council in 2022 to ban the certification of food by any agency other than the Food Safety and Security Authority of India (FSSAI). Hindus had also protested against the sale of Halal meat during the Ugadi festival in Karnataka (Shankar, 2022). The BJP opposed it on the ground that it aimed at running an Islamic economy parallel to the national economy purely driven by religious considerations.

The news of raids on Halal-certifying companies and stores selling such products in Uttar Pradesh created a huge political controversy. The BJP and its state government defended the raids and the ban on Halal economy on the grounds that Muslims were campaigning to ‘discourage the use of products lacking a halal certificate’ in the state (PTI, 2023). The leaders of the party depicted such campaign as malicious that aimed at sowing hatred and divisions in the society, thereby weakening the country in the end (Business Today Desk, 2023). The parties opposed to the BJP reacted on expected lines. They charged the BJP of acting against the Muslims. Muslim leaders in general criticized the ban. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board member Mr. Mohammad Suleman said that the ban was wrong (Bhaskar, 2023). The Congress Party which had opposed the proposal of banning Halal products in Karnataka in 2022, reaffirmed its stand. The party Chief in UP, Ajay Rai, criticized the government for invoking anti-Muslim sentiments in the state. The anti-BJP regional parties also came out to oppose this decision. Needless to say, the issue became a point of contest dividing pro- and anti-Halal certification.

While the critics argue that the propagation of Halal is intended to Islamise and de-secularise the Indian market, the supporters depict the ban and resistance to it as a sign of increasing Islamophobia in India.

HALAL MARKET AND INDIA

The Halal certification in India started in 1974. Initially, it was limited only to meat. Now it includes almost all kinds of goods and products. The traditional Jhataka vs Halal binary which was restricted to ways of slaughtering animals for meat now has extended to nearly all kinds of goods and products ranging from clothes to medicines and beauty products as discussed above. Statistics show how the demand for the Halal products has increased in India. The Halal food market in India has picked up slowly with 7.4 percent compared to the Western countries including UK and USA where their annual growth is 10.2 and 13.4 percent respectively. However, this is a handsome jump given the purchasing capacity of Muslim consumers because packed food with certified marks can be purchased only by high- or middle-income groups (FMI, 2023). United States Department of Agriculture Report 2022 on India finds a huge potential for the expansion of the Halal economy given the size of the Muslim population which stands at 14.6 percent which roughly stands at 200 million approximately according to the 2011 census (GAIN, 2022). In India, Halal certification is not mandatory. What is permissible or non-permissible is governed by the Food Security and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI). Yet the growth of the Halal market in food and other sectors of the economy is worth researching. It means that the demands are on the rise though not as vocal as one finds in the Western countries. Now it is no longer limited to food products but everything and anything governing the life of Muslims. One never had heard of Halal tourism or Halal apartments or Halal hospitals. But they are the reality today. In Kerala, realtors experimented with high-end Halal apartments and it was sold out soon. So is the case with Halal medicine and hospitals. What and how a medicine has to do with Islam and non-Islam? But the Global Health City hospital, a chain of Global Health group, proudly announced that it has become the first Halal-certified hospital in India. The chairman of the hospital accepted that there is a huge potential for such hospitals as international travellers come from Islamic nations to India to avail of world-class hospital services at comparatively cheaper rates. In brief, what has remarkably changed is that a halal landscape is fast emerging in non-Islamic countries. Three reasons can be attributed to this. First, globalization has expanded the landscape of pan-Islamism. It is no longer restricted just to religious rituals but also other domains of Muslim lives like dressing, food habits, fashion and so on. Muslims are far more aware of what is happening in the Islamic countries which are always their reference points. Second, Muslim customers are far more vocal than earlier in demand for Halal products. Third, both Patanjali and Global Health Group and other corporates producing Halal products treated Halal as ‘a business’ with global potential. They are just responding to the marketing value which comes from Halal certification (Fischer, 2016).

The Muslim community in non-Islamic countries are insisting on Halal and forcing companies to issue such certificates if they wish to sell their products to the Muslims or Islamic countries. No wonder, companies like Patanjali which is deeply rooted in Indian spirituality and talk of Swadeshi economy had to take Halal Certificates for their products in order to reach out to the markets of Islamic countries. Patanjali is not alone and this is not the phenomenon which is restricted to India only. It has forced the business and trading giants of Europe and America or China to follow suit.

In India, the Halal market has surged exponentially. According to Volza’s India Export data, during 2023-24, Halal meat export shipments from India stood at 223,620 exported by 426 India Exporters to 7,471 Buyers. This was followed by 1163 and 629 shipments by Pakistan and Brazil. India exports Halal meat mostly to Vietnam, Malaysia and United Arab Emirates (Volza 2024). As per the data in 2021, India was second as exporter of Halal food next after Brazil and followed by the USA and China. Both import and export of India in the field of Halal products have gone up over the years. This is primarily because of the growing Muslim demography and their assertion of religious and cultural identity.

Indeed, secular liberal markets provide ideal conditions for halalization and religious meaning-making through consumption (Calder, 2020). Muslim customers use liberal secular arguments to make a case for this. They say that the Halal Certification is mandatory for the products so that Muslims could make an informed choice on products whether they are in accordance with the Shariah or Islamic tenets or not. This is also, they argue, in consonance with the religious liberty which allows them to practice their faith in domains of food and clothes, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. Globalization has strengthened community identities in terms of their identification, segmentation, polarization and consolidation. As community connectivity has become easier and so is the case with defining and categorising identity into 'we' and 'they'. Its speed and intensity can be seen much higher in the case of religious identity. This has helped in accelerating the demand for Halal products throughout the world. It is estimated to grow at the rate of 15% annually and is forecasted to reach USD 30 trillion by 2050 (Masood & Rahim, 2019).

UNDERSTANDING HALAL AND HALAL CERTIFICATION

What is Halal? What is a Halal certificate? Who issues such a certificate? When did this certification start and become so important? What were and are the factors and forces behind it? is there really a rise in Halal products all over the world including India? Is it true that even non-Muslims have developed now craze for Halal products? Why have the companies of the non-Islamic world started using Halal certificates for their products? Does the rise of Halal in non-Islamic countries have the potential to communalize the so far secular space of the market (Calder, 2020)? Does it have the potential to polarise the communities against the Halal in the non-Islamic world? Does the rise in demand for Halal products have anything to do with the ideology of Pan-International political Islam? How much the Halal economy is likely to communalise the political space and impact democratic politics in India? Does it carry the potential of aggressive resistance from the majority Hindu community a glimpse of which have been seen in recent years? These are some of the important questions which deserve answers. This article has sought to explore the literature and on-ground situation to understand and assess the expanding horizons of Halal Certification and the politics on it.

Halal is a Quranic term coming from Arabic word. the term Halal is taken from the word Halalam which has appeared 51 times in Quran. The term Halal has appeared 6 times (Salaad, 2023). Halal means 'permitted, allowed, righteous lawful or legal' according to Islamic principles. On the contrary, what is not permitted or prohibited or illegal and unlawful as per tenets of Islam is Haram (Bejarano, 2017). In other words, Haram means something which is physically and spiritually impure and sinful and therefore prohibited according to tenets of Islam. Conversely, Halal refers to the goods, products, services and processes which are permissible as per the Quranic injunctions. The Qur'anic injunction reads as follows: 'O People, eat what is lawful and good what is found on earth, and do not follow the steps of Satan'. Haram, according to Surah Al-Baqarah, is not permissible. The lawful is what Islam permits. And unlawful here means what the Quran does not permit (Mustaqim, et al. 2023; Salaad, 2023).

As Islam seeks to govern all aspects of human life and does not separate clearly between spiritual and profane, a Muslim is expected to follow the principles and tenets in entirety in all aspects of his activities. They are not just to follow the dietary guidelines but also what to wear and what to drink, what to take and what to reject. Therefore, the Halal economy transcends now the dietary practice of chicken and mutton. It covers now coffee, nuts, soybeans and many more eatable products. Similarly, Halal cosmetics ensure that products are free from alcohol, animal-derived ingredients and synthetic fragrances. Halal pharmaceuticals ensure that they don't contain the elements or substances which are forbidden according to Quran or Shariah.

As the chemicals and cosmetics, medicines and beverages or chemical compounds were not in practice when Islam was born, what Halal and Haram are have come partly from explicit mentioning of items in Quaran and other Islamic scriptures, and partly from the interpretation of Quranic injunctions by religious Ulemas from time to time. Therefore, sometimes it is also argued that Halal means something that is right, good and ethical governing all aspects of life. It is influenced by local and trans-local ones; regimes of knowledge, ideology, political and religious institutions (Kaliszewska, 2020). The Quran makes a distinction between permissible and non-permissible. For example, any product which has elements of Zilletin, Alcohol, pork, lecithin, carrion, enzymes, etc. is Haram. Muslims should not use them. Consequently, the products which don't carry the above items are prima facie not prohibited, i.e., Halal. If they carry such elements, they are Haram, i.e., prohibited for use by the Muslims. Further, Halal does not involve only the ingredients or substance but also the procedure. A Halal certificate thus ensures that the product is permissible in terms of the process also, i.e., it has been processed as per the Islamic injunctions which includes the practice of recitation of verses of Quran while processing them. For example, there is a specific procedure of slaughtering the animal called Zabiha in which a swift and deep cut is made across the throat, windpipe and blood vessels in the neck so that every drop of the blood drains out of the animal. But that is not enough. It should be slaughtered in the name of Allah reciting 'Bismillah Allahu-Akbar'.

As it is difficult for a common Muslim customer to know what is usable and what is not usable as per the Qur'anic injunctions', Halal certification of the product by an authentic agency becomes a need. It enables the individual Muslim to make an informed and rational choice which is in tune with his or her faith. In other words, Halal certification enables a Muslim to practice his faith and empowers him or her to exercise the right to choose. The way one is entitled to know the composition of ingredients of the medicine or beverages, an individual is entitled to be informed what he is eating or drinking. Thus, the way vegetarian and non-vegetarian distinction is globally accepted and symbols universally accepted are used for the purpose of differentiation of products, the inscription of Halal certificate on the product makes it easier for the people of faith to choose in consonance with the religious dictates. Many a times the Muslim countries have tried to solve it but have not succeeded.

From the perspective of individual rights, it seems reasonable and rational. But is that so simple and linear? Choice often conflates with and informs the identity both as an individual and as a member of the community. And the individual identity gets entangled with and immersed in the community identity. Is this community identity shaped by religion that has triggered the rise in Halal certification? Is the individual choice less individual and more driven by community identity? This question needs to be thoroughly and carefully looked into. Because religion enforces a community identity and consumer behaviour is largely influenced by the same. Islam was there in India as in Europe but the urge for Halal was not then as much as one finds today. One can argue that the Muslim population was not so large in the European countries those days but the same cannot be said about India. The liberal democratic societies which cherish the principles of religious freedom enable the secular market to be communalised or ethnicised. This is what has happened all over the world. Secondly, the religious identities have been exported to non-Muslim dominated societies for construction, projection and then the assertion of Islamic identity. Islamic world used its numerical strength and religious consolidation to mend the European and non-Islamic manufacturers to attune to their religious identity. This started gradually and at a slow place but today has captured a significant portion of the world market.

GLOBAL PRACTICES OF HALAL CERTIFICATION

It needs to be reiterated that the consumption of Halal meat was a normal practice in the Islamic societies but Halal certification started when the large-scale production of packed meat and packed food began to be exported to the Muslim countries by America, Europe and Australia. It first started in 1974 in Australia after a delegation from Saudi Arabia wanted to know from The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils whether the meat processed in Australia followed the Islamic rites in slaughtering the animals. Australia had just started exporting processed meat to Islamic countries. Similar questions were there in Europe and America where companies came across this new kind of challenge and adjusted themselves to meet them. In 1975, Islamic Services of America (ISA), was established with the objective to collaborate 'with local colleges and universities to facilitate and encourage successful studies of foreign Muslim students from Asia and Africa' (Islamic Services of America, 2024). But soon it turned into a Halal certification body in the USA. Thus, it emerged in response to the needs of the market which was not limited to processed meat but also the canned agricultural products. The people in the Islamic countries were wary of the fact whether the products imported from these foreign countries met the conditions of Halal as required or not.

This resulted in pressure on the people in the business to get Halal certification. William "Bill" Aossey who was the founding member of the Islamic Services of America (ISA) in the US invested a considerable length of time to learn about Halal and the process of Kosher certification and converted the ISA into a Halal Certification Centre in the US. It created competition among the companies in the business of exporting meat and agricultural products to Islamic countries. Once it came to the US, one after the other countries of Europe started establishing Halal Certification Centres in their countries. The Islamic countries also started establishing Halal Certification Monitoring agencies to ensure that the products imported followed the procedures and elements of Islamic dietary principles. The items which needed to be certified as Halal started from the meat and agricultural products and soon entered other areas of the economy. In the 1990s, the Muslim countries further stressed such certification because of the news that the sugar imported from the Western countries used pig bones in the process of refining them and the ice-cream in the market used pig emulsifiers (Bhattacharya, 2023). This had huge potential to create a social rift and dent the American and European countries in the field of exporting meat and other edible goods to Muslim countries. In order to reach out to the market of Islamic countries and Muslim consumers spread over different parts of the world, companies started using the halal certificate which by the end of the 1990s had engulfed cosmetic items to the pharmaceuticals. Australia started using Halal certification in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals in 1997.

Today there is hardly any country which does not have an agency to monitor and issue Halal certificates. In the UK, there is a 'The Halal Authority Board' which claims to issue the Halal certificate based entirely on the Quran and Sunnah. In order to avoid any kind of confusion, the people in the business of Halal products brought in the 'British Halal Charter' which enlists, besides many other things, about how to slaughter animals. According to this charter, such slaughtering has to be done by the Muslims only and that too by hand, not by machine. Further, the animals must be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter. They should further be "slaughtered with a swift incision to the throat with a sharp blade by a Muslim mentioning the Tasmiyah (In the name of God, God is great)" (HFIC, 2022). It entails that the people involved in slaughtering should be well-trained and skilled. It also demanded that there should be a proper Halal policy and an accredited Halal Certification Body. The story of other countries in Europe is by and large the same. There is no exception to it. These countries are responding to the growing demands from Muslim consumers in their domestic consumption and for exports. Interestingly, in Spain, where Halal is opposed by the Christian denominations, Muslims hosted Halal tourism and now it is very popular among Muslims there. Halal

Tour Packages are now popular in many parts of the world (Masood & Rahim, 2019).

ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHY AND THE RISE OF HALAL ECONOMY

Religious and ethnic demographics are not just a sum total of individuals. They inform the relative cultural and political strength of communities in a plural society which often compete and occasionally confront each other for relative gains. Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist identities are not homogenous and monoliths from within. They carry a lot of contradictions and conflicts internally but they compete somewhere against each other in international domains. Why does an attack on Churches or Christian population in one part of the world become an issue of concern for the Christians in other parts of the world? Similarly, how does an Israeli attack on Gaza in Palestine bring together the Islamic world relatively on one page? Further, an attack on Hindu temples in Canada and Britain invites echoes of protests from Hindus settled the world over. This reality cannot be ignored that ethnic and religious communities all over the world are far more connected today than ever before. They share a world of their own and walk together on many issues despite belonging to different territorial denominations. This becomes far more complex when the issue is linked to the identity. This looks, at least, a plausible case in the matter of Islam which has thrown ideas like Halal economy and Islamic banking which have no similar examples in Christian or Hindu diasporas.

Currently, Muslims constitute the second-largest population in the world. Their population in 2010 was 1.6 billion and is likely to rise to 2.8 billion by 2050, according to the estimates of the Pew Research Centre. The growth is largely due to the high fertility rate. The institute arrived at this number keeping in mind that the growth rate of the Muslim population in coming decades would fall from the present 1.8% to 1% by 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015). The report further says that the Muslim populations are going to rise in absolute terms in all regions; be it Asia-Pacific (1.5 billion in 2050 from present 1 billion), or Middle-East, North Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa or Europe where it is likely to be more than double from what it is today (5.9% in 2010 to 10.2% in 2050) (Masood & Rahim, 2019). Latin American and Caribbean countries are the only exceptions to this growth phenomenon. It is also expected that though Christianity will remain the largest religion in the world, Islam will be closely catching up with it by 2050. The Christian dominance would largely be because of the rise of its population in Sub-Saharan Africa though its relative number will go down both in Europe and America. Hinduism will continue to be the third largest religion followed by Buddhism at 7% of the World population. India is most likely to emerge as the largest Muslim population in the world (Masood & Rahim, 2019).

These statistics undoubtedly explain the rise of the numerical strength of different religions in relative terms. But they also inform the cultural and religious market that emerges from religious denominations at the global level. The religious demography impacts the policies of nation-states the moment it is combined with the question of preservation and promotion of community identity. The phenomenon of globalization as a consequence of high-velocity communication networks and transportation has not only enabled the transnational expanse of products but also of identity. It has trans-nationalized the religious identities. The Hindu diaspora which often is castigated for being unresponsive to the question of Hindu identity found a resounding echo when the consecration ceremony of Ram Temple took place at Ayodhya in January 2024 (The Hindu Bureau, 2024). The event was celebrated by the Hindu diaspora all over the world. Within a fraction of a second, the Jewish identity swings into action after attacks on Israeli citizens, and the Israeli response to the terror attacks all of a sudden becomes the Muslim question for the Islamic world.

The globalization of identity is a reality. But this is not to suggest that countries and communities with the same religious and ethnic identity are not at clash with each other. This is only to suggest that religious identity now is far more active at the global level than it was a few decades back. Secondly, for each religious ethic community, there is a reference community which primarily is the territory or land of the origin of the religion or where it flourished the most. For example, for the Christian community in India, European Churches and their activities become the reference point. So is Jerusalem for the Jewish population or India for the Hindus and Saudi Arabia and other West Asian Islamic countries for followers of Islam. What happens in the home of the origin of religion also has impacts elsewhere in the cultural complex including dress, eating behaviour, celebration of festivals etc. Thus, what happens in these countries becomes the ideal for others to follow. Hindus all over the world try to copy the ways of worshipping God or celebrating Hindu festivals in the most traditional ways it is celebrated in India. The elements of identity thus travel with migration of people. It goes with the ethnic and religious diasporas and thus creates a market for the products which centuries back were limited to few countries.

Also, the companies have gone global on a large scale. They are always in search of ideas and elements which could find markets across the countries. The companies are driven by the sole motive of creating and harnessing the market for their products and earning money. They look up to the market and the nature of products that are in demand. The issue of identity is political in nature whereas the market is guided by economic reasons. When China looked up to the Indian market, it saw a handsome business in Indian Hindu festivals. It just assessed the market by assessing the nature and kind of products in demand. The result is before all to see. It flooded the Indian market with statues of Hindu gods and Goddesses made out of ceramic ashes at cheaper prices. Gradually it out-shadowed the Indian products including the statues made of brass and clays. Soon it captured the market deep into the remote villages. Chinese brought in almost all the items ranging from candles to incense sticks (Dhupbatti) to sandal woods for Hawans after pooja to decoration items, lights and crackers on Deepawali to colours and water Guns for Holi. In a brief time, they captured the Indian market.

Food, clothes, and festivals form the cultural capital and it always has an appeal. Globalization has enhanced the charm of the indigeneity and ingredients associated with it. Religion which was depicted as a primordial identity which would evaporate in the whirlpool of modernity and scientism has proved wrong. In post-colonial societies, the charm for the return to the cultural roots has multiplied rather than declining. This has emerged from the failure of the West to project its material and scientific wisdom universal in relevance and utility. Colonial knowledge, which remained the dominant discourse and was accepted by the post-colonial societies without challenge, is being challenged now through the assertion of local experiential knowledge.

In matter of religion also, the expansionist waves of Christianity projected as a superior religion are no more acceptable without protest. The diasporas which earlier fell victim to the superiority claims of the home societies have started reasserting their old identity because they are far more communicative and connected with their native countries and their cultural complex. No wonder, the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya evoked similar emotions in Hindu diasporas all over the world and in the televised world they found at home and far more connected to their cultural and religious roots. There is also a tendency for revival and renewal of traditional roots in opposition to and as an alternative to the West. This is being largely seen in the Muslim world after 9/11 in 2001 (Fischer, 2016).

The same is reflected in the rise of the Halal market. It is a marker of the fact that Muslim societies are no more prisoners of the Western narrative and they are gravitating towards their religious and cultural identity. This identity creates boundaries between the cultural and religious communities and seeks to assert its identity in contrast with what it defines and depicts as ‘other’. The growing Halal market is indicative of the fact the way the rise of Burka is a marker of the assertion of Islamic identity in the countries where they have effective population. The volume of the Halal food market was ‘approximately 1.4 trillion dollars in 2017 which was predicted to reach 2.6 trillion US dollars by 2023’ (Shahbandeh, 2023). About 20% of the world’s food supply comprises Halal cuisine. This segment of the economy is likely to witness a 70% increase from its current valuation by 2050. The Global Islamic Economic Report 2017-18 maintained that global Muslim spending on Halal food and beverages accounted for 1.24 trillion USD. Further, as discussed earlier, it was largely associated with meat and Chicken. But now it has come to cover almost everything and anything on the planet. Halal banking was started in 1963 by Ahmad El Najjar, close to a decade after the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) following the spirit started the Islamic Development Bank for internal banking. The World Bank Report 2015 figured its expansion rate to 10-12 percent. it is likely to touch 2 trillion dollars globally soon. The population, added with community consciousness and solidarity, has impacted the Halal landscape.

Interestingly, the largest producers and exporters of Halal-certified food products are manufactured in non-Muslim countries like India, the US, Brazil, Argentina, Australia and China. 90% of Halal market is controlled by multinational companies of these countries. India, Australia and New Zealand account for 60% of their Halal meat import. The production of Halal meat is located also in non-Muslim countries. Malaysia, UAE, Indonesia, and Pakistan have emerged as leading hubs of Halal market. Among the non-Muslim countries, Australia tops the list. Australia is the major exporter of Halal meats, particularly beef and lamb. It follows the stringent Islamic guidelines to penetrate into the market of Islamic countries. Despite the protests within the country, the government could not stop Halal production because many Muslim countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and UAE largely imported their wheat and other agro-products. Australia is highly dependent on its Halal exports (Bejarano,2017).

Among the Islamic countries, Malaysia has emerged as the global leader in the Halal economy in recent years. Malaysia earned this distinction through careful planning and strategy in this regard. The state is an active agent towards de-secularization of the marketplace as it seeks to be the global hub of Halal activity (Fischer, 2016). Malaysia's Halal products are recognized worldwide. It exports Halal items worth RM 35.4 billion which is 5.1% of the total export. Malaysian Airlines serves Halal food on its flights to ensure meals for its Muslim customers.

It needs to be noted that Islam entered this country through trade as it did in the case of other East Asian countries. When the moderate Islam was at work there were no such demands for Halal. But it all has changed with the rise of radical Islam in the country. Among the South East Asian countries, Indonesia is another country which, though does not follow radical Islam, has emerged as a new hub of the Halal market. In order to promote tourism, UAE promises to provide experiences of Halal tourism in the country. It seeks to provide halal options in hotels and restaurants, beverages and other entertainment options.

HALAL AND THE ISLAMIC IDENTITY

Does the growth and rise of the Halal market signify the rise in the consolidation of Islamic identity? Though the Islamic world is highly divided economically, culturally and politically and many powerful of them are at war with each other but rise in consumption of Halal products is somehow seen as consolidating the Islamic identity, the way rise in practice of wearing Burqa or Hijab or Niqab and skull cap has been read as a marker to express and assert Islamic identity. Wearing of these items was not as much in practice in Europe, America or other non-Muslim countries as it has been seen in the last two decades. The second-generation young women in the United States of America are willingly coming out to wear Muslim veil even though their older generations did not (Ali 2005). Most of them are those whose parents had migrated to the US and they were reluctant to express their religious identity in public either due to lack of confidence, insecurity or inferiority complex. This does not hold true for the new generations which seek to challenge the Whiteman cultural and religious narrative and express their 'self 'by holding to their parental religion. After 9/11, when the US entered Afghanistan, it sought to liberate the women by encouraging them not to wear the burqa which was interpreted as religious patriarchy devised by men in the American society but American Muslim girls used it as the symbol of consolidation and resistance against the American dominance and cultural narrative. The same has been seen in the entire Europe.

Over the years, choosing halal has become an expression of faith and faith-driven cultural and religious identity. One can cite scores of examples from Indian experiences where Halal was restricted to the way meat was slaughtered but now it has entered even the semi-urban market of India in food and cosmetics. Halal symbolizes both religious and cultural identity. It generates a sense of belongingness based on religion and thus shapes the community identity. There are many for whom it is ethical and spiritual to consume Halal-certified products. Therefore, Halal products for them are more ethical and spiritual than cultural and political products. Halal for them is integral to practicing Islam and Islamic identity (Kaliszewska, 2020). The Halal symbol becomes the essence of Islam for them. Therefore, for an earnest or devout Muslim, Halal market facilitates leading a life as per the principles of the Quran. For others, identity becomes an overriding priority over the spiritual element. For them, it symbolizes the community identity. Halal economy, for them, means consolidation and strengthening of Islam as well as the people in

Islam. They are guided by the premise that following Halal products means propagating Islam and its collective identity. Consumption of such items is assumed to strengthen the Islamic brotherhood, doing service to the Din on the one hand and weakening the strength of the non-Islamic communities and countries on the other.

Halal symbol informs and fosters a community identity, a sense of belongingness on the one hand and 'otherness' on the other. It creates the boundary of 'we' and 'they' which transcends the territorial and national boundary and aligns the community identity at the global level. By buying the Halal products they appropriate the credit that they are serving the fellow Muslims and the cause of Islam (Ali, 2005). Many of them do it under the impression or understanding that they are helping someone who belongs to their community. The common man's understanding is that these products are manufactured and sold by Muslim entrepreneurs or businessmen and labourers. Their purchase of Halal products is essentially going to help them (Ali, 2005; Fischer, 2016). This is not true but this guides them in their actions.

Thus, there is an element of religious and community consolidation in it. They also appropriate the feeling that by purchasing Halal products 'they are saving the culture, cuisine, clothes and crafts of the Islamic community'. There is a political language involved in it. A case of Malaysia is worth noting. In 2022, The Malaysian Muslim Consumer Association asked the companies to issue logos whether the manufacturer is Muslim or not. Thus, the green logo was 100 percent Muslim manufacturers, Orange for Muslim manufacturers and Red for non-Muslim manufacturers. This was understood as creating an industry which was for Muslims, of Muslims and by Muslims. Clearly, it intended to divide Malaysian society and market on the basis of Muslims and non-Muslims (Fong, 2022).

CONFLICTS AND PROTESTS AGAINST HALAL ECONOMY

And this is where the conflict arises. There is growing concern that Halal economy has the potential to communalize the market and break its secular space at least in non-Islamic countries. The focus and overemphasis on Halal products by the Muslim community may lead to counter-polarization of other communities against Halal. In a predominantly Hindu India Islamic banking and appeal to the Muslims for Halal products and services unleashes reactions from the Hindu community (Hanzala, et al. 2021). Halal industry has the potential of community polarization. If the Muslims insist on Halal symbol on the products and numerically coerce the companies for the same through demands, there is a great possibility of the Hindu majority reacting to it. In a plural society, social and cultural identities not just compete but contest against each other. Consolidation of community identity of one leads others to compete and confront. If McDonald's in India is forced by Muslims to declare whether the meat used in Chicken Tikki Burger is Jhataka or Halal, it is more likely that Hindus will start asking for a boycott of such companies.

Identities compete and confront each other in a plural society. If one community insists on its identity it is bound to have reactions in the other community. This is truer where a minority seeks to have a separate niche for itself. A series of examples are before us where the dominant community in many non-Muslim countries have launched programmes to counter Halal economy as they understand it as an attempt to Islamize and subsequently radicalize their societies. It is treated as an assertion of minority culture against the majority. In many countries of the West like the UK, France, Canada, the US, Australia, etc. 'Boycott Halal' became a dominant theme on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Bejarano, 2017). Boycott Halal in UK and Boycott Halal in Europe has become popular among the people. They argue that this intends to contain over-production of Halal and strengthen the native economy (Bejarano, 2017). The Facebook page 'Boycott Halal in Australia' called the consumers to boycott Halal-certified foods (Locke, 2014). There are three sets of logic that they advance against it. First, that they are forcing non-Islamic consumers to consume Islamic products. Halal certification is a kind of religious tax imposition on non-Muslims for Muslims (Bejarano, 2017). Second, it is the Islamization of market. Thirdly, since most of the Halal business are controlled by Muslims who pay Jakat are also used for terror funding (Bejarano, 2017). Thus, in Spain, a campaign was launched that 'with Euro, you spend in the Halal restaurants of Muslim invaders, you contribute to the ruin of Spain' (Bejarano, 2017). The charges are levelled that investigations have shown that 'the Halal industry is increasingly controlled by organizations by Muslim brotherhood. When the consumers buy Halal products, a part of the payment goes to the Islamists in the form of Zakat tax' (Bejarano, 2017). Fourthly, they depict the Halal as unhygienic and sometimes project it as so dangerous that it causes death. This matter had become a major issue in France where it was claimed that children died because of the consumption of Halal meat.

The business arguments are that why the industry should produce only for the domestic markets. Why should it manufacture for the market outside? These arguments were raised by people in Australia. A petition filed with the House of Representatives in the Australian Parliament on 19 June 2017 illustrates four arguments. First, Muslims constitute only 2.2 percent of the Australian population. Therefore, the domestic market of Australia does not need Halal certification. Second, such certification is needed only in case of exports to the international market, especially to Muslim countries. Third, why the non-Muslims in Australia should be forced to pay 'Islamic tax'? Fourth, on the contrary, the 2.2 percent Muslims that migrated and settled in Australia must assimilate themselves into the culture of the country. Therefore, Halal certification must be withdrawn (Parliament of Australia, 2017). One of the Australian Senators Pauline Hanson argued that Australians should stop buying Halal-certified products as it amounted to 'financially supporting Islamization of the country' (The Independent, 2017). The campaign worked to an extent as companies like Kellogg's and Sanatorium discontinued their Halal certification in 2016.

In France also, social media campaign came up for boycotting Halal products in the country. The rise of Halal products in supermarkets and other stores led to reactions in non-Muslim sections of society who asked for its rejection by the French people. The matter got so polarizing that both the President and the Prime Minister of France asked that certain religions should rethink their ancestral traditions of slaughtering the animal. It was in March 2012 (France 24, 2012). Both Francois Fillon and Nicholas Sarkozy made it an election issue on 13 April 2024 (Willsher, 2012). The Muslims were furious and they held that it was all about targeting the Muslims in French society despite the fact that they were born French and entitled to no discrimination (France 24, 2012). French society is highly polarized on the business of Halal and the matter keeps hogging the national headlines. A major controversy emerged in 2021 when a technical instruction issued by the Agriculture and Food Ministry was misread by mosques and Maulanas concluded that it was a step towards banning Halal Chicken in the country (Pistorius, 2021). They reacted sharply to it. A joint statement was issued by Paris Mosque director Chemseddine Hafez, Lyon Mosque director Kamel Kaptane and Evry Mosque director Khalil Maroun who said that Muslims were being prevented from practicing their faith (OIC, 2021). Finally, the government had to clarify that it did not propose to move towards banning Halal. France has not banned Halal meat and its export but the Christian population in the country are largely up against it.

Many European countries carry the same kind of reservations against Halal-certified products in their domestic markets. In 2012, French media published news of deaths of children due to consumption of Halal meat. A French weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo published a comic on the Prophet's biography and depicted it as 'Halal' which led to protests all over the world as it was satirical in intent. Scientifically there is no such evidence of Halal being poisonous leading to death but the social campaign led to the submission of this question on 24 March 2012 before the European Commission which was to examine whether there was a direct link between the deaths of children and Halal meat consumption (European Parliament, 2012). The ground is made that the kind of slaughtering does not align with the European standard of hygiene because it 'allows pathogens to enter the blood easily and spread through the body of the animal whilst it is in its death throes' (European Parliament, 2012). It recommended for proper stoning to make the animal unconscious before they are killed.

The far-right community in Europe launched a Facebook campaign to boycott Toblerone Chocolate once they came to know that it was Halal certified. It started in Germany but soon reached France, England and the Netherlands. The AFD spokesman Jörg Meuthen posted a very satirical post on Facebook which signified the Islamization of Germany (Meyer, 2018). However, the governments of none of these countries dared to ban Halal. On the contrary, the Halal economy has grown exponentially across the countries of Europe.

As Halal has turned out to be a polarizing issue both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries, Ulemas in predominantly Islamic countries have used it also to arm-twist the corporates by defaming them. They have been found working against one brand and favouring the other. In Indonesia, Ulemas Council set up by the Indonesian government in 1975 accused a Japanese company of using pork byproducts (Monosodium Glutamate) for enhancing flavour. On examination, it was found untrue. The company had used 'a Bactosoytone as a medium to cultivate bacteria to produce necessary enzymes to make monosodium glutamate' (Fischer, 2016). However, the company not only extended a public apology but also conducted enquiries against its employees to satiate the egos of Ulemas. Earlier, Cadbury products came under scrutiny by the Malaysian Muslim Consumer Council. It gave a call to boycott the company's product on the grounds that it contained elements of pork. Later on, the Department of Islamic Development in Malaysia, which is a state agency, found it untrue in tests (Fischer, 2016). Over the past decades, Malaysia has emerged as the global leader among Muslim countries for the production, promotion and regulation of Halal. The state and government have 'taken on the role of Halal certifying authority'. The state's Halal-certified products in the world market carry a special logo in the global market (Fischer, 2016).

There is no doubt that there are scores of cases in which companies have been found using Halal-certificate without really following the Islamic principles in slaughtering or preparing pharmaceuticals, cosmetics etc. Therefore, authentic Halal certification agencies have been created everywhere in the world. The fear of deceiving the customer for selling the products and entering the market is more in non-Islamic countries compared to the Islamic ones. Therefore, in many countries there are strict laws to ensure that Halal products hit the market only after following the guidelines of Halal; be it food items or beverages, cosmetics or medicines. In the United States, certain organizations such as the Muslim Consumer Group and the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America certify whether food is Halal or not. In the US, there was a law to punish those who dared to sell foods in the name of Kosher foods despite they were not. Therefore, demand also came to have similar laws concerning Halal Food. Finally, many state legislatures in the US brought in such legislation to prohibit such fraudulent food items in the name of Halal.

Recently, a News channel in India published a detailed list of the rates charged by the certificate issuing agencies. This became a serious political issue in India. There are broadly two charges against the Halal Certificate issuing agencies. First, many of them are unauthorized and they earn a huge amount from it. Secondly, there are radical elements involved in it and money earned is spent on something fishy or dicey. The rising heat of controversy forced the Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind Halal Trust to issue a clarification that “our certification process aligns with manufacturers’ requirements for both export and domestic distribution in India”. The global demand for halal-certified products is robust, and it is imperative for Indian companies to obtain such certification, a fact endorsed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Government of India, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The intensity may vary from country to country, region to region but one fact which is visible to all is that the Halal economy has witnessed unprecedented growth in recent years across the continents. What was a practice in the core Islamic countries of Asia and Africa have now reached the shores of Australia, America and Europe on a large scale. There is hardly any country which hosts Muslim population and there is no demand for Halal products. Halal food products, especially meat items, are “increasingly available in non-ethnic stores, particularly supermarket chains and fast-food restaurants in these countries”. In other words, the demand for Halal has a direct link with the swelling population of Muslims and their coming together as a cultural-religious community. Halal does not represent food or cloth, pharmaceuticals or cosmetics. It has more to do with Islamic identity and leading life as per the principles of Islam. A new trend has been found of Muslims in non-Islamic countries consistently demanding for Halal products which their forefathers who had migrated to Europe or America had seldom spoken about. They adjusted Islam with the norms of the host countries. But this does not apply to third or fourth generations of Muslims whose forefathers had migrated to these places. They are more inclined towards their cultural and religious roots and emphasis on Halal is a marker to that.

This could be possible because the cultural and ideological narratives of the West have weakened in post-colonial societies that are gradually on the path of decolonizing their mind. Westernization as the marker of modernity, development, scientism and rationality no longer holds true. The post-colonial societies are challenging the West as a reference model though in a limited manner. There is a rise in the consciousness in these societies to look into the indigenous knowledge system and cultural capitals. They no longer accept everything that is coming from the West whether it is food or styles, fashion or music. Second, over the decades the idea has sipped deep into these societies that the West's narratives are intended for cultural, political and economic dominance. Therefore, there is a tendency towards resistance. The economic rise, technological development and exploration into native texts and scriptures have helped in dismantling the inferiority complex that these societies were subjected to due to centuries of colonial rule. And the diasporas are responding to the cultural calls. The rise in the demand for Halal products can be attributed to this call; though it carries the concerns of competing cultural calls from carriers of other identities and conflict of religion unfolding in the marketplace which hitherto was relatively free from this malaise.

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Endnotes

1 Vishwa Samvad Kendra of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in India on its website reported on 9 February 2022 that massive Sharia-compliant township exclusively for Muslims are coming up in Kerala. But this did not attract much attention. Before that, the Kochi edition of The Times of India reported that a builder in Kerala is coming out with a Shariah complaint high end apartments in the city which will have flats facing Mecca and prayer and washrooms as prescribed by Shariah and so on.

2 Though most of the Islamic Financial Institutions avoid Riba i.e. charging interests but other than that they hardly apply the Islamic principles in true sense according to Shariah.

3 It must be noted that the current Banking Regulation Act does not permit Islamic banking.

THE CULTURAL CONNECT – GLIMPSES FROM INDIA AND LAOS

Prof. Vandana Mishra[1]

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 Kingdomof 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 iangchahan 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 Wiangchahan, 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 Sinha[1]

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 (Brunne 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 (Brunne 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 20^{th} 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 Jackon'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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ISSN:2583-004X
E-ISSN:2582-7154

A JOURNAL OF CENTRE FOR STUDY OF
POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE, DELHI

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